A Tale of Two Sisters: Rachel and Leah

A messy family, two sisters looking for love, and the God who kept his promise anyway

SPEAKER	Lisette Espinosa
DATE	Sunday, October 17, 2021
PASSAGES	Genesis 29:1-30:8; Genesis 25:21-23; Genesis 28:10-21; Habakkuk 2:3; Matthew 1:2-3; Revelation 3:14-20; Psalm 139:13-16
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:01:28 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Jacob's family is a soap opera of favoritism, deception and rivalry, and two sisters fight over what neither of them can win. But God keeps his promise through it anyway, and the Messiah comes through the unloved sister on the day she says, "This time I will praise the Lord." Our longing for love is right; it is only misplaced until we turn it toward the God who stands at the door and knocks.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The Bible is not boring. It tells a crazy, sad, honest, redemptive story, and every note of it is underlined with God's plan to redeem.
- Rebekah had God's word about her sons and still tried to control the outcome. God often gives the vision without the itinerary, and trusting him means waiting without the details.
- Jacob's first response to God's promise was "if God … then." God was inviting him to be his God, not just Grandpa's and Dad's.
- Leah named three sons after her husband's love. With the fourth she said, "This time I will praise the Lord" — and Judah's line leads to Jesus.
- Rachel had her husband's love, and it was not enough. Both sisters were looking for love in all the wrong places.
- Polygamy was never God's plan, and the Bible never shows good coming from it.

- Christ's knock at the door of Laodicea is addressed to the church. Where are we not letting him in?

▶ 1:01:28

With many of Hope's men away at their retreat, Lisette began by having the men in the room stand while the women prayed over them — for wisdom, open and closed doors, and that the women around them would be "a breath of fresh air to them and not a leaky faucet." Then she turned to the series on Old Testament figures, which she loves "because there's so many little goodies the Lord has in there."

A rough sketch of the family tree

▶ 1:04:49

"A tale of two sisters — really it's not a tale, it's a real story about two real sisters who just so happen to point us to God." First, the background. God promised Abraham offspring like the stars (Genesis 15:5). Sarah, who could not conceive, bore Isaac in her very old age. Isaac married Rebekah, who also could not conceive until God opened her womb to twins (Genesis 25:19–34).

▶ 1:07:22

Esau was the hairy hunter, and Isaac loved him. Jacob — *Yaakov*, a name Lisette loves — was "a mama's boy, let's not sugarcoat it," who made lentil soup good enough to buy his brother's birthright. If you like dramatic shows, she said, go read these chapters: "a very crazy, sad, honest, redemptive story that just so happens to also point us to God."

A mother trying to control the story

▶ 1:08:45

After much family drama Jacob flees toward Haran. Rebekah has told Isaac, "I loathe my life because of the Hittite women" (Genesis 27:46) — "she's kind of dramatic, but I love her because I'm dramatic too" — and Isaac blesses Jacob and sends him to her brother Laban. The pattern echoes Abraham's servant, but this time a father sends his son, at the mother's plea.

▶ 1:10:31

Rebekah was right to want her sons to marry women who followed the one true God; Esau had married to spite his parents (Genesis 28:6–9). But Lisette saw a mother and father "trying to work it out on their own." Jacob had been his father's least favorite, taught deception by his mother, at odds with his twin,

running for his life. And Rebekah was desperate, "trying to control things instead of trusting the words spoken to her by God."

▶ 1:11:47

> "And the LORD said to her, 'Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger.'"
>
> GENESIS 25:21–23 ↗

Trust the author of the vision

▶ 1:12:58

Isaac and Rebekah were not ignorant of God's plan; he had simply left out some details. "God does that sometimes, doesn't he? He says go here, but he doesn't tell us what's going to happen. He doesn't give us an itinerary all the time." A friend had told her: trust the author of the vision. "Trusting and waiting on God means — get ready for this — you actually trust him, and you wait, even when you don't know the details."

▶ 1:13:40

> "For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end — it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay."
>
> HABAKKUK 2:3 ↗

▶ 1:14:17

She read Oswald Chambers: we cannot bring the vision to fulfillment by our own efforts but must live under its inspiration until it fulfills itself; waiting for a vision that tarries is a true test of our faithfulness. In this broken family we see what happens when people lose sight of God's promise and fixate on the in-between. "But God is merciful, and in the end his plan to redeem always unfolds."

"If God … then"

▶ 1:16:14

At Bethel Jacob dreams of a ladder reaching heaven, with angels ascending and descending, and the LORD repeats the covenant to him:

▶ 1:17:51

> "Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."
>
> GENESIS 28:10–15 ↗

▶ 1:18:32

> "Then Jacob made a vow, saying, 'If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father's household, then the LORD will be my God.'"
>
> GENESIS 28:20–21 ↗

"Wait a minute — did you hear that?" God had just promised to be with him, and Jacob answers with an *if*. In that moment God is not yet Jacob's God. "Yahweh wants to be his God, not just Grandpa's and Dad's God. God is inviting Jacob to be part of his story."

Two sisters take the stage

▶ 1:20:02

At a well in the east, Jacob meets the shepherds of Haran, and Rachel arrives with her father's sheep. Jacob rolls the stone away, waters Laban's flock, kisses Rachel and weeps aloud (Genesis 29:1–12). After a probably emotional journey — running for his life, sent by his mother, blessed by his father — "he is like, I found my family. Here she is."

▶ 1:22:52

> "Now Laban had two daughters. The name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance. Jacob loved Rachel. And he said, 'I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.'"
>
> GENESIS 29:16–20 ↗

▶ 1:24:04

The seven years "seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her." Rachel takes after her aunt Rebekah. Leah has "tired eyes" — "ladies, men, don't ever tell a lady she has tired eyes. It's not a compliment." The text is being descriptive, and Jacob follows his eyes.

▶ 1:25:24

Lisette summarized the rest of chapters 29 and 30 and urged everyone to go home and read them. Laban sends Leah into the wedding chamber; when Jacob protests, Laban explains it isn't customary to marry off the younger first — "maybe you could have mentioned that seven years ago." Jacob "does the noble thing and marries both sisters — I'm being sarcastic." Then the contest begins: Leah bears children for her husband's affection, and Rachel, who cannot, gives Jacob her servant Bilhah. Back and forth, "these sisters, misrepresented and not cherished by their father, battle it out."

▶ 1:27:06

"Can I just say the Bible is not boring? It might disturb our upbringing and our customs, but it's not boring." And it gets better, not because of the drama but because God has a plan — and the generations he blessed through Abraham include us. "Even when humans make stupid decisions, we can see what God does." Jacob loved Rachel, but the promise ran through Leah.

"This time I will praise the Lord"

▶ 1:28:28

> "When the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben, for she said, 'Because the LORD has looked upon my affliction; for now my husband will love me.' … And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, 'This time I will praise the LORD.' Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she ceased bearing."
>
> GENESIS 29:31–35 ↗

▶ 1:29:51

Listen to the names, Lisette said. First: God sees me, now my husband will love me. Second: God heard I am hated. Third: God isn't even mentioned — now my husband will be attached to me. "Do you hear that heartache?" Then the shift: this time I will praise the LORD. Jacob isn't mentioned at all. "She's still hated, she's still in love, but — God, I'm going to praise you."

▶ 1:31:14

And Matthew's genealogy runs straight through that son: "Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar" (Matthew 1:2–3). Leah — unloved by her husband,

mistreated by her father, "mistakenly putting all her longing towards her husband's love instead of the true lover of her soul" — was part of God's story. The child she named in praise is in the line of Jesus.

> *"She didn't know the details. All she knew was she longed for something she could not seem to gain no matter how hard she tried. Perhaps this longing was simply misplaced — but the longing itself was right."*

Rachel, and looking for love

▶ 1:32:33

"And let's not forget Rachel," who did not ask to be beautiful. "Give me children, or I shall die!" she tells Jacob, who answers, "Am I in the place of God?" She gives him Bilhah, names Dan, and then names Naphtali: "With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister and have prevailed" (Genesis 30:1–8). Rachel had her husband's love, and it was not enough.

▶ 1:35:27

"This is like one of those Lifetime movies." Lisette paused for a side note she was passionate about: polygamy was never part of God's plan. Every time a wife gives her servant to her husband in the Bible, no good comes of it, only pain and heartache. "God made one man for one woman, as well as one woman for one man."

▶ 1:36:07

Rachel reminded her of Leah: the same desperation, envying each other, battling for what neither could obtain. She sang a little of the old country song — "looking for love in all the wrong places, looking for love in too many faces."

▶ 1:37:26

In a time when a woman's worth was wrapped up in bearing children, God had a plan for both wombs. Leah bore Judah, the line of the Messiah. And God did not forget Rachel; he opened her womb and she bore Joseph, "a man who loved God in the midst of great injustice," who still teaches us how true forgiveness works.

A family that reminds me of me

▶ 1:38:33

Two parents searching for details and favoring one child; two brothers and two sisters from broken places, at odds and searching for love — all known and formed by God before birth (Psalm 139:13–16), and all looking to others "for what only God could give," instead of looking to God for who he is.

▶ 1:39:10

> *"This really messed up, broken family reminds me of someone else: me."*

"I'm so thankful that you put this messed-up soap opera in the Bible, because it just reminds me that this promise is for me too" — for all her own bad decisions — and it calls her to stop striving for the details and take hold of his promises.

▶ 1:39:58

"I can tell you with a lot of confidence, friends, that God has a plan." You may not know the details, things may be rough, you may have made some really shady mistakes, "but Christ is inviting you to be a part of his story." Don't look to others, even someone more spiritual than you, for what only he can give. "Seek the face of the Lord." The country song ends with the search over: "You came a-knocking at my heart's door, you're everything I've been looking for."

He is knocking

▶ 1:41:09

Lisette turned to the church in Laodicea, neither cold nor hot, saying "I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing," not realizing it is "wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked" (Revelation 3:14–19). Then:

▶ 1:42:26

> "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me."
>
> REVELATION 3:20 ↗

It is often used in altar calls, she said, "but God is talking to the church here. He's talking to us, his bride." He wants to dine with us, clothe us, provide for us. "What spaces of our heart are we not letting him into?"

▶ 1:43:01

He knocks because he loves us; “he is in hot pursuit of his bride, and he will be until the day he returns.” So she called the church to help one another: when she is busy chasing details instead of looking to the Lord, a good friend should gently say, “No — look up.” Christ is coming, day and hour unknown, “and I want to be ready. I want my lamp to be filled.”

▶ 1:44:28

“Take these stories of old … and see how the Lord has redeemed. He has redeemed, and he will indeed continue to redeem us.” She prayed that everyone hiding parts of themselves from God would open the door of their heart to Jesus and stop looking to others for what only he can provide: “You are that well of life. May we drink from that.”

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Genesis 15:5
- Genesis 25:19–34
- Genesis 27:46
- Genesis 28:6–9
- Genesis 25:21–23
- Habakkuk 2:3
- Genesis 28:10–15
- Genesis 28:20–21 (NIV)
- Genesis 29:1–12
- Genesis 29:16–20
- Genesis 29:31–35
- Matthew 1:2–3
- Genesis 30:1–8
- Psalm 139:13–16
- Revelation 3:14–19
- Revelation 3:20

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Rebekah had God's word about her sons and still tried to control the outcome. Where are you trying to make God's promise happen in your own effort?
2. What makes it so hard to trust the author of the vision when he hasn't given you the itinerary?
3. Jacob answered God's promise with "if God … then." What conditions have you placed on God being your God?
4. Leah's longing was right but misplaced until she said, "This time I will praise the Lord." Where is your own longing for love aimed right now?
5. Jesus knocks at the door of his church. What room of your heart would you open to him this week, and who could help you "look up"?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Lisette Espinosa is the women's director at Hope Chapel. She opened this message by having the women pray over the men of the church while many were away at the men's retreat, then took her turn in the series on Old Testament figures with Leah and Rachel. She calls herself dramatic, and told the congregation she is grateful the Bible includes a family as messy as Jacob's, because it reminds her the promise is for her too.

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9uKYVHz1xTw&t=3688s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.