

TRANSITION:

PAUSE FOR TECH LEADER... Amen! There is nothing better than Jesus. Happy Easter Church! You might know, there was a tradition in the early Christian church that, on this day, if Christ-followers encountered each other in the marketplace or passing in the street, one would say, *“Christ is risen.”* And the other, *“He is risen indeed.”*...I know we’re across screens right now, but if you’re able, go ahead and turn on your video if you haven’t.....and when I say, *“Christ is risen;”* you look straight into that camera AND with yourself OFF mute and as excitedly as you can, say *“He is risen indeed!”*...You ready?... *“Christ is Risen.”*

Amen!...Hey, if you have a Bible or Bible App with you and I hope you do, make sure you’re looking at ***Genesis chapter 29 verses 16-35. Genesis 29:16-35.*** Not your typical Easter passage, but that’s for 2 reasons: **One**, we’re continuing our *“True Myth”* series today, and one of the things I hope you’re beginning to see in this series, is that in some respects EVERY passage of the Bible is an Easter passage, BECAUSE, as we’ve been saying, the Bible is not a compilation of little morals, parables and proverbs. It’s one unified story about the person and work of Jesus Christ; namely, His work on the Cross and in the Easter Resurrection! **But Two**, I’ll tell ya, I have a kind of philosophy of teaching on Easter. And that is: Don’t get cute. The reason you’re here/the reason MANY attend a worship service on Easter even if they don’t really believe in Jesus is because we know/rightly so, that at the very least, this is the one day a year when you should be able to get some truly good news in church! And so that’s what I wanna do! I wanna give you some good news: specifically, ***show you that at the heart of Easter is an invitation to live like someone who’s held by a love that won’t let you go!***

PASSAGE READING > CONTEXT:

So...let’s hear the reading of God’s Word together: ***Jennie Intro’s Self > Genesis 29:16-35... Thanks Jennie***...If you remember, last time we gathered, we ended in ***Genesis 15*** with God making a promise to bring the Messiah through the lineage of a man named Abraham...When you get to ***Genesis 29*** here, what’s happened is, God has begun making good on that promise and multiplied Abe’s family, through a group of men known as the Patriarchs...ONE of which is the guy in our passage - Jacob. The grandson of Abraham, son of Isaac and Rebekah, and twin brother to Esau. And just so you can locate yourself in history: It’s Jacob, to whom God gave twelve sons who ended up being the founders of the twelve tribes of Israel, that ultimately became the NATION of Israel. So needless to say, Jacob is an exceedingly important dude. BUT, as you perhaps already picked up, a pretty messed up one too...Especially, when you consider the fact that in the chapter RIGHT BEFORE ours today, Jacob had just met God in a really tangible way. So you’d think his life here would be cleaned up. And yet clearly, he’s still a mess/ in his understanding of love, sex, women, just to name a few...Cuz here’s the deal off the top here: Just because you meet God/give your allegiance to Christ, doesn’t mean your life immediately gets cleaned up. Like Jacob, most of us/including yours truly, even after meeting God, are still a mess...And that’s because the Gospel/relationship with God isn’t a “magic wand” that makes everything perfect. No! According to the Bible, relationship with God through faith in Christ, is like a seed that starts out small, grows, and then requires constant pruning for additional growth. It takes time and is messy. I’ve had more conversations than I can count at

this point, where sadly someone says to me something like, *“I could never be a Christian. Christians are so messed up.”* Or worse, a CHRISTIAN says to me, *“I don’t feel like I can be a part of this church. It’s too messy/full of messy people”*...And really, all I can say is, *“Yeah...And you shoulda seen us BEFORE we met God”*...Like us, Jacob is still a mess/has this kind of inner emptiness that causes him to turn to things other than God, like love and romance, for happiness.

EXPLANATION OF TEXT:

Cuz look in **v.16** it begins saying, *“Laban had two daughters: Rachel and Leah.”* Now, Laban is Jacob’s uncle, which means Rachel and Leah are...yup...1st cousins...which you’d think would quell any romantic interest. But not in the OT baby! In OT times being cousins was a turn-on, cuz it meant preserving the family!¹ Additionally, you see in **v.17** that *“Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance,”* which is the Hebrew way of saying, she’s got a pretty face and a hot body. No joke/that’s why the redundancy’s there...But her sister Leah...not so much! Leah it says, *“had weak eyes.”* And numerous commentators have pointed out: that didn’t mean *“she couldn’t see well.”* If that were it, it’d say, *“Leah had weak eyes, but RACHEL could see like hawk.”* No! It’s a way of saying that Leah’s eyes fouled up her face in some capacity...She wasn’t pretty/CERTAINLY not like her sister! So here’s Jacob, who naturally falls in love with the pretty sister and at some point is working for Uncle Laban and Laban asks him, *“How can I pay you?”* to which Jacob says, *“How’s about letting me marry Rachel?”*

Now pay attention here, cuz in **v.19** you see how shady of a dude Laban is. Cuz notice what he DOESN’T say in response to Jacob. He doesn’t say *“Yes”* does he? He simply says, *“It’s better that I give her to you than any other man.”* He never actually says *“Yes!”* But because Jacob is so head-over-heels for Rachel, he HEARS *“Yes.”* He’s blinded!...***You ever been there? You want something so badly that you begin justifying, rationalizing, and or just failing to account for certain very important details?*** Jacob’s blinded and in his blindness agrees to work 7 years to marry Rachel. Now, let me put that in perspective: The going rate in those days was 30 to 40 shekels for a bride, meaning about \$60K for an arranged marriage. The average monthly wage though was about 1.5 shekels. So do the math: In offering to work 7 years for Rachel, Jacob is offering 130 shekels OR 4x the going rate for her!² The guy is obsessed! Not to mention **v.20** says that those 7 years, *“seemed like just a day because of his love for her.”* And you say, *“Oh, how romantic! It’s the Bachelor on steroids.”* But nooo. It’s more than that: Jacob, like so many of us, is loading an enormous amount of spiritual freight into romance and love here, because here’s a guy who’s searching. Even though He’s met God, he doesn’t yet understand that what he’s REALLY looking for is IN God. And so he turns to all the usual suspects: love, sex, romance, etc³...In other words, he’s pursuing an idol! You know what an idol is? It’s, as Tim Keller says, *“anything more important to you than God.”*...It’s anything that allows you to say, *“If I have THAT, THEN I’ll have meaning, security, significance, control, etc.”*⁴ It could be

¹ Joke adapted from “Looking for Love: Message #3, Genesis 29” - J.D. Greear

² Conversion insight from “Looking for Love: Message #3, Genesis 29” - J.D. Greear

³ “THE STRUGGLE FOR LOVE: The Gospel According to Jacob—November 11, 2001 - Genesis 29:15–35” - Tim Keller

⁴ *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters* - Tim Keller: Penguin Random House, 2011, p. xviii

money, a relationship, your health, the freedom to travel, but just anything that acts as a kind of LIFE-preserver for you - thing you grab onto in order to preserve your life... That's Jacob with Rachel here... to the point that as **vv.20-24** say, 7 years pass. And every day Jacob's thinking about Rachel until the wedding comes. And it's time for the ceremony and everybody's ready, and in comes Jacob's veiled bride. And in those days, brides were HEAVILY veiled ALL day long/almost akin to burkas you see in orthodox Muslim communities. That was the custom. PLUS, this was probably an evening wedding without the benefits of modern-day electricity, AND like at most weddings; lots of alcohol. So you put those things together and you can see how the "true identity" of the bride might go a bit undetected.

So they go through the ceremony, then the reception at which Jacob proly drinks too much, when later Jacob takes his veiled wife back to his tent, in the dark, and makes love to her... And not to be too graphic here, but you see Jacob's state of mind in **v.21**, when he says to Laban, *"Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed."* Two things there: **One:** As a dad of three daughters, if a man EVER says anything close to that to me about one of them, EVEN if it is on their wedding night, I will unfortunately cease being your Pastor, BECAUSE I'll be in jail for murder!... But **Two:** Robert Alter, who's a Jewish scholar and probably the leading expert in Hebrew narrative, in his commentary on Genesis, says that Jacob's words here have long confused scholars, because they're just so crass that people've said, *"this can't be in the Bible."* But it is, because what these words are showing you is that Jacob is a man who's emotionally and sexually overwhelmed with Rachel,⁵ so that when he thinks he's finally got her, he's almost like an animal - nothing else matters!

BUT as **v.25** says, *"Behold it was Leah"*... And commentator Derek Kidner says, *"(those words) are the very embodiment of (our) disappointment with life - a snapshot of the disillusionment (you and I've) experienced (ever since the Garden of) Eden."* This frustration, right, that we all feel with the fact that all the blessings in the world, no matter how good, never seem to fully satisfy. *"Everything we think is 'Rachel,' always ends up being 'Leah' in the morning."*⁶

So... Jacob goes back to Laban and according to **vv.25-28** basically says, *"Bro! What's the deal?"* To which Laban says *"Oh...yeah, sorry, but it's not our custom to marry the younger daughter before the older."* Now, what would you say. I think a reasonable person would say something like, *"Yeah, um, I don't care what your custom is. I worked 7 years and you committed fraud."* But what does Jacob say? Nothing! Doesn't argue a bit AND agrees to work ANOTHER 7 years. Why? Again, he's blinded by this idol of romantic love... Listen to these words from **Psalm 135** about idols: *"The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak...eyes, but do not see...ears, but do not hear... Those who make them become like them, so do all who trust in them."* You hear that? It's saying, idols/of any kind/even good ones like *"silver, gold,"* or love, romance, success, etc, aren't alive enough to really give you life. Only God can do that. But **Too**, the more you pursue em, the more

⁵ Insight from Robert Alter cited in "THE STRUGGLE FOR LOVE: The Gospel According to Jacob—November 11, 2001 - Genesis 29:15–35" - Tim Keller

⁶ Quote slightly tweaked for context - "Looking for Love: Message #3, Genesis 29" - J.D. Greear

they actually dehumanize you! The pursuit of money for example, will make you greedy; control make you an oppressive person; beauty make you vain and arrogant; the list goes on-and-on, because listen: ***You will become like what you believe in!***...Jacob is becoming more-and-more blind the more he believes that love, sex, romance is a what's gonna ultimately satisfy him.

And so in his blindness, he works another 7 years, marries Rachel, and within one week/get this, is married to two girls...who are sisters!...Now, before I get to Leah's part of the story and then pull it all together with some Easter applications for us, let me address something I know you're thinking or AT LEAST have heard from others: And that is: Why should we take seriously a book in which you got things like polygamy, bride purchase, the over-sexualizing of women, and in other places slavery. Why should we take this thing seriously?...And I think Robert Alter sums it up really well when he says, "*if you think the Genesis narrator/or any Biblical narrator is supporting these (things), then you just haven't figured out how to read.*"⁷ Because at every place where you have these sorts of things mentioned, the Bible is EXCEEDINGLY clear that all they do is bring devastation...That's certainly the case with Jacob and Rachel...And also Leah.

Cuz you see in **vv.32-34**, Leah starts having kids. But not just cuz she loves being a mom. Oh no! She's trying to gain the affection of her husband! You see it in the naming of her kids. Every time she has a son, she chooses a Hebrew word for the name that expresses her longing for Jacob.⁸ See that? - Just like Jacob, she has an idol. It just takes a different form! Cuz no-doubt, this is a woman who's likely gone through her whole life being told, "*you're ugly. You're not like your sister. And now...you're old and no one's gonna marry you apart from being suckered into it.*" This is a woman who feels COMPLETELY unworthy...BUT, she thinks, "*I can do one thing: I can have sons. And if I have sons, my husband'll love me and THAT will make me worthy!*" An idol...But let me ask you: ***Does it work? Does her idol deliver on it's promise?*** No! Cuz 3 times she has sons and each time thinks, "*Now, I'll be SEEN by my husband; HEARD by my husband; ATTACHED to my husband!*" And each time, it fails to work...See, idols are sneaky. As one person says, "*they tip toe past our brains, set up shop in a corner of our heart, and begin to grow. (And) most of the time we don't even notice because we've fallen in love with the idol - it's become part of what drives us and makes us (momentarily) happy. But in driving us, it perpetuates itself,*" so that it now becomes the thing: You worry about. Or fear losing. Or use to comfort yourself with. Or look to to give you a sense of worth. It's what you pray about, even to the point that if God didn't answer your prayer, you'd seriously consider turning away from Him.⁹ That's an idol. ***What's yours?***

Cuz until you're able to, not only identify BUT surrender your idols, you'll just keep "birthing" new ones unto more-and-more devastation! You have to surrender. ***And you know what I mean by surrender?*** I mean, like Leah, you come to realize that even as you've searched for happiness, fulfillment, purpose, security, love...ALL ALONG ***you've actually been held by a love that***

⁷ Insight from Robert Alter cited in "THE STRUGGLE FOR LOVE: The Gospel According to Jacob—November 11, 2001 - Genesis 29:15–35" - Tim Keller

⁸ Insight from "THE STRUGGLE FOR LOVE: The Gospel According to Jacob—November 11, 2001 - Genesis 29:15–35" - Tim Keller

⁹ Diagnostics adapted from David Powlison in a blog by Jared Wilson

won't let you go... That's surrender. And it's what Leah comes to, you see in **v.35**, when she gives birth to a fourth son, but this time says, *"I will praise the LORD."* And names him *"Judah,"* meaning *"let God be praised"*... What's happening here, to where Leah can finally say, *"I'm done bearing children in hopes of earning love."* And you say, *"well obviously it's cuz she's fed up. Jacob's toxic and she's gotta get away from his negativity? Cuz this is the year of me baby?"* Maybe. But I think it's deeper than that, cuz all of us know, when you've wanted something/needed something for so long, especially something as fundamental as the love of a spouse, you can't just say, *"I don't want that anymore."* Turning your desires off like that only leads to more devastation. No! You have to take that desire and replace it with a greater one/a better one... THAT'S what Leah's doing. *"She's taking the deepest desires of her heart (and not stuffing em, but relocating em) away from her husband and onto the Lord."*¹⁰ That's why it doesn't just say, *"she ceased bearing kids,"* No! She ceased bearing kids AFTER she *"praised the Lord."* AFTER she realized that as great as the love of a spouse...or money, family, success, health, beauty, any idol might be, it's never enough, because you're always chasing and earning...But the love of God? That's worthy to be praised, because it doesn't come to those who earn it, but to those who simply believe. In a sense, she realizes that, all along God's been saying, *"Leah, I know you're without a spouse; let ME be your true spouse, so that you can be free from endlessly searching. Leah, I know you're unloved BY your spouse, let ME love you, so that you can be free from endlessly earning. Leah, see that my love will never let you go...and be free!"* You see?

So 3 Easter Truths from the Passage: First, Jesus Christ Came To Earth To Expose Our Idols: Idolatry, you understand, is a sin that kills; not only because, I think if you're honest, you KNOW that what you really want is something that can't be had in this world, but even more because GOD Himself is, in the best senses of the term, *"a jealous God."* He desires YOU/relationship with YOU! It's like in my marriage. Abby is the #1 girl in my life...And there's no #2's. If I went to her and said, *"Sweetie, I love you so much. You are by-far...top-5 favorite girls"*...other than being weird, you know what we'd call that? Adultery! There's no #2's...AND YET, that's how we treat God: *"God I love you so much, you're definitely top 5 along with this relationship, career, standard of living, pleasure...what-have-you."* And God says, *"There's no #2's. I created you/designed your spirit to run on my love for you."* To have any #2's is not only destructive to the engine of your heart; it's a kind of spiritual adultery that deserves punishment. And that goes all the way back to Adam and Eve, when they decided they needed something other than God to be happy. THIS is what leads to all your problems/like Smeagle with the ring in *Lord of the Rings*, where you can't live without it and ya have to have it, such that you begin doing whatever you need to get it OR are just enslaved to fear and worry when you don't have it...Look it's not wrong to wanna be loved, or successful, or beautiful, or what-have-you. Those are good things. BUT when they become "God-Things"/idols you have to have, that's when they destroy. Jesus Christ came to earth and said, in **Mark 1**, *"The kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe."* Translation? *"The kingdom is here, because I the King am here. And if the King is here, then you can renounce your idols, cuz you don't need anything, but me."* **He Came To Expose Our Idols.**

¹⁰ Quoted adapted for context from "THE STRUGGLE FOR LOVE: The Gospel According to Jacob—November 11, 2001 - Genesis 29:15–35" - Tim Keller

But **Second, He Died to Free You From Your Idols**: A lot of people wonder why Christianity has to have something so heinous as a crucifixion within it. But what you gotta understand is that the reason the cross is so heinous - and it was in every conceivable way/it's where we get our word "*excruciating*" literally meaning, "*from the cross.*" - the reason it's so heinous is precisely because your spiritual adultery and mine is even more heinous to God...Imagine a single mom, who pours out her life to see her son have a chance at a better one: Works two jobs. Saves every last penny. Occasionally goes without food herself to keep him fed. Teaches him good values. Even scrapes together a meager savings to puts him through college...Now imagine, that son graduates, gets a great job...and not only never talks to his mom again, but the one time he does talk to her, says, "*I wish I had better mom!*" Wouldn't we say, "*that's terrible?*" To spurn a relationship with the ONE person to whom you owe everything?...That's what we've done with God.¹¹ As Creator, we owe Him everything, and yet we spurn Him by looking for things OTHER than Him to make us happy. We cheat on Him as it were, and it's heinous; it deserves punishment. And because God is a holy God, He can't let injustice like that slide...BUT because He's a LOVING God/a God who like with Leah is always trying to show you that His love and ultimately salvation doesn't come by you earning; HE took your punishment upon Himself. Stepped onto the Cross/as your substitute in order to **free** you from the punishment of your sin and idolatry. As **1 Peter 3:18** says, "*Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring (you) to God...*" **He Died to Free You From Your Idols.**

But **Finally, Jesus Christ Rose To Give You A Life That No Idol Can**: Scholars point out that when Leah says in **v.35**, "*I will praise the LORD,*" she's not using the generic Hebrew name for God there, which was "*Elohim.*" She's using the covenantal/personal name of God - "*Yahweh*" - a name that communicated God's sovereign...grace. It was a name reserved exclusively for those like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses, with whom God entered into a personal relationship. So the question is begged, how does Leah know this name, so as to be able to finally say, "*I'm gonna praise the Lord and be free of this idol.*"¹² What's happening?...Well it's the same thing that happened to the two Marys at the tomb when they realized that Jesus'd risen...The same thing that happened to the Disciples when the risen Jesus appeared to them...Same thing that even happened to the Disciple Thomas, who was full of doubts about Jesus, until He touched His wounds with his own hands...It's the same thing that's caused countless skeptics to have to come to terms with things like: Jesus' tomb being empty, when simply presenting His body would've immediately quelled any talk of resurrection; Or how so many claimed to have seen the Jesus at different times and in different places; Or the transformed lives of those who believed in the resurrection even to the point of being willing to die for their belief, understanding that no one willingly dies for a lie...It's the same thing that happens to every man, woman and child who looks on Christ and is saved...What's happening? Leah, like so many is realizing, "*this isn't just a God of grace who's WILLING to love me; this is truly the LORD who's ABLE to love me!*"

¹¹ Illustration adapted from <https://jdgreear.com/the-one-thing/>

¹² "THE STRUGGLE FOR LOVE: The Gospel According to Jacob—November 11, 2001 - Genesis 29:15–35" - Tim Keller

See Friends, at the end of the day, the Resurrection is THE proof that Jesus Christ...is...Lord. Leah had teachings and the hearsay of family. We have the resurrection to prove that Jesus Christ is Lord. And if He is, then YOU, have in Him, a kind of life that no idol could ever give you! Because what idol is not only WILLING to die for you, but ABLE to then beat death in order to make you whole again! What idol is so gracious as to love you when you don't deserve it, but at the very same time holy and sovereign enough to handle the deepest desires of your heart. Only Jesus crucified and resurrected!...Let yourself be moved by the fact that in Jesus, there's a love, that's holding you, and will never let you go. ***What would you do if you knew, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that you were held by a love that won't...let...you...go?...*** Take a moment to consider that, after which we'll move into our breakout rooms.

APPLICATION:

At this time we're gonna move into breakout rooms for just a few minutes, so that you have an opportunity to not only think about that question, but BEGIN applying it together with others in your Missional Family...If you're not connected to a Missional Family, no worries - we invite ya to remain here and enjoy just some low-key time to connect and ask any questions if you have em...But after a few minutes discussing that question which'll be onscreen NOW...we'll re-gather back here for a short time of celebration and sending, before then heading down to Marine Park to enjoy hanging out with each other...Ok? Ok!...

- ***This Sunday's Application Questions: What would you do if you knew you were held by a love that won't let you go?***
- ***CHARLIE BREAKOUT: Welcome > How Connected > Q&A/Abridged Covenant Card Share***

CELEBRATION:

Welcome back. I know 10 minutes is not long enough to unpack a question like that. BUT our hope is that you'd take this question, along with what we discussed today and continue the conversation during your respective Missional Family Meetings, as that's REALLY where we have opportunity to apply the Scriptures together.

But in the meantime, before I send you out with an Easter blessing, would anybody be willing to come off mute and just BRIEFLY share any Aha's today, or things you feel like are evidence of God working in your life or the lives of those around you, so that we can celebrate with you, especially here on Easter? Anyone?

SENDING:

Church as you are SENT into your week, receive this blessing from the ever-famous ***John 3:16-17***, "For God so loved the world/YOU, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that YOU might be saved through him." Go in peace believing and rejoicing that, in Christ, you're held by a love that'll never let you go! You are Sent Together! - See you at the park in about 30min.