

Part 30: Look Before You Love

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Toddlers shouldn't be given firearms. This should be a given.

But each February, our culture often decorates itself with Cupid, the pagan god of love and desire. He's often depicted with a bow and arrow but one thing we seem to leave out is that traditionally, Cupid is blindfolded.

When desire hits, when we feel we've been pierced by love or passion—we often feel driven by that passion. Whether it's a new job opportunity, a new product, or a new co-worker, we won't rest until our heart has the peace and love it desires.

There's a romantic idea behind a blind love, but there's an obvious danger to a small god in a diaper launching arrows blindly into the world. When something that changes everything comes out of nowhere—is it wise to give it everything?

The great writer William Shakespeare didn't think so. He warned us this way: "Love is blind, and lovers cannot see the pretty follies that they themselves commit. For if they could, Cupid himself would blush."

It took Old Bill two dozen words to express the danger of unchecked desire. But it takes the author of Genesis only five Hebrew words to make the same point: Jacob's whole life flashed before his eyes when the shepherds said, "Behold, Rachel," but it seemed everything was over when he woke up and "Behold, it's Leah."

Everyone loves stories about falling in love. But it's only because it's not the fall that hurts. It's the landing. The title of our sermon this morning is: "Look Before You Love."

We've seen some love stories so far in the book of Genesis, but this one has got to be the worst. Behind the mask of affection and honesty is the dangerous and devastating desires of man. Everyone is striving for what they love, and despite their best attempts—they aren't much better for it.

Our passage today not only tracks the future of God's promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but it helps us understand how we might avoid love's failures and instead find true love according to God's promise.

Our main point is this: **Love looks best through the lens of God's promise.** And we will see this in three ways, **Love's First Sight, Love's Second Look, and Love's Happily Ever After.**

If you're just joining us in the book of Genesis we have been tracking one family to whom God had given a particular promise. The hope any of us would have in Jesus Christ is advancing through Abraham's family tree. That promise has gone from Abraham, to his son Isaac, and now to Isaac and his son Jacob.

Our passage today picks up on some key problems. Problem #1: Jacob just deceived his brother Esau in an attempt to steal the birthright. Esau now wants to murder him. Problem #2: Jacob is forced to flee from his homeland and his mother and father send him back to the family ranch in hopes that he might find a wife and so continue God's promise to his offspring and therefore the whole world.

Wifeless, childless, and penniless, Jacob takes up the long journey to Haran. But on the way, he's reminded of his hope. God appeared to Jacob at Bethel and gave him this promise: **Genesis 28:15,**

“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.”

God doesn't need anything from us to keep his promise. God's promise will use Jacob's marriage, and Jacob's son, but God's promise is not bound to them. God is bound to his promise. Wherever Jacob goes, God will keep his word.

In Genesis 29:1, he finally comes to the people in the east. But just as it seems God's faithfulness has fixed everything, Jacob's faithlessness gets in the way.

Here's our first point this morning: **Love's First Sight.**

After a cinematic montage of him crossing the desert alone and on the run we find this in **Genesis 29:2-8**. Jacob happens upon three groups of shepherds around a well, but none of them are watering their flocks because there's a huge stone covering it. But the tall glass of water Jacob wants isn't one drawn from a well.

He cuts to the chase, “Any of you know Laban?” “Aye,” they say gruffly. “Is he well?” They respond, “Yeah, he's well. Behold, Rachel his daughter is coming with his sheep.”

Jacob turns and he sees the silhouette of a gorgeous woman coming in from the field. Not wanting to miss his opportunity, he asks the shepherds for some alone time, “Why don't you all grab a drink and get out of here.” “Can't,” they say, “the stone's too big.”

But Jacob has never met a problem he couldn't solve: **Genesis 29:9-12**, “While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. Now as soon as Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, Jacob came near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. Then Jacob kissed Rachel and wept aloud. And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's kinsman, and that he was Rebekah's son, and she ran and told her father. “

You've got to love his zeal. He moves the stone that normally took four or more shepherds to move. Then he waters the flocks of Laban. And then without saying a word, he grabs Rachel and kisses her. Things couldn't be more clear. He came to the right place, he's found a beautiful woman, she's got a lot of sheep, and it just so happens she's one of Laban's daughters. What more could God do? Cupid's dart might be blind, but it flies straight.

He saw the babe, he moved the stone, he watered the flock, he'll win over her father, he'll even work seven years for her hand in marriage. But Moses tells us (vs. 20) he's so love-struck that those years seemed but a few days to him because of the love he had for her.

“Love is blind, and lovers cannot see the pretty follies they commit.” What's Jacob's problem? What's his folly? He's caught sight of his precious, but he's lost sight of God's promise.

If you remember, this isn't the first time someone has visited Laban looking for a wife. Abraham needed a wife for Isaac and he sent his own servant to go to Laban's household. The servant was on his way and he prayed to the Lord and said, **Genesis 24:12-14**, “O LORD, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. Let the young woman to whom I shall say, ‘Please let down your jar that I may drink,’ and who shall say, ‘Drink, and I will water your camels’—let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master.” And then he finds a well, perhaps this same well. And out comes a woman, an extremely attractive woman. And the woman offers to water his camels.

And she does. But then we read this: **Genesis 24:21**, “The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether the LORD had prospered his journey or not.”

He saw her beauty, he saw her ability, but he was going to wait on the Lord. He had to be sure this was the one. He shared with her his mission and the promise of God’s steadfast love. She brought the servant to Laban where he shared his mission and the promise of God’s steadfast love and after recounting the whole of it to Laban having found out that she was indeed of his house he said this:

Genesis 24:48-50, “Then I bowed my head and worshiped the LORD and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to take the daughter of my master’s kinsman for his son. Now then, if you are going to show steadfast love and faithfulness to my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, that I may turn to the right hand or to the left.” Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, “The thing has come from the LORD; we cannot speak to you bad or good.”

Would it help you understand the difference between these two narratives if we did a little word study. What if I told you that in Genesis 24 the “Lord” and “God” were brought up 24 times? What if I told you that in our passage today those words show up zero times? What if I told you that in Genesis 24, the servant established the basis of his errand as God’s “steadfast love,” his *hesed*, three times? And what if I told you that God’s *hesed* doesn’t show up once in this passage, but instead twice we learn of Jacob’s superficial attractive love for Rachel.

All the drama and pain that will follow is a picture of what happens when we lose sight of God’s promise. It’s all too easy to let our love shape our view of God’s promise. But, Christians are to let God’s promise shape what they love. To Jacob’s eye, this was obvious, she was beautiful, and therefore there’s no reason to assume this isn’t how God was going to bless him.

We’ve all had moments like Jacob, pressed, panting, and panicked. We find the first offer of hope and we say: “Finally, this must be it.”

But when we push off God’s promise in our decision making we are making a statement about where we think peace and love are truly found. Rachel, not God’s promise, was the solution to his problems.

The question isn’t: How does this align with my passion, but how does this align with God’s promise? It’s really easy to not ask questions we don’t want answers to. How does this job, spouse, purchase help me enjoy and glorify God? That’s something we can think about later.

We’ve been tired, and finally the ability to watch whatever I want without a roommate around: “Behold, Rachel.” We’ve been praying for God to bring a special someone our way, and without us expecting it we stumble upon the person we can’t keep our eyes off of, “Behold, Rachel.” We have been frustrated with our siblings and finally they really messed up and you can let them have it, “Behold, Rachel.”

But, look before you love. If we don’t, we might find what we think we want. But, having cut God out of the picture, you’re going to have to get it on your own. If it’s not dependent upon God, it’s going to be dependent upon you.

If our greatest hope and satisfaction is dependent upon us, we will do whatever we feel needs to be done to get it. Not only is this sometimes foolish, but love unregulated by God’s promise is often a dangerous thing. We see this in the following arrangement as Jacob puts his money where his heart is.

Genesis 29:15-20, “Then Laban said to Jacob, “Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?” 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.” Laban said, “It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to

any other man; stay with me.” So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.”

Jacob was going to do what it took. If he was to get what he loved, it was going to be on his terms and his effort. But if our ability to find the love, promise, and peace we want is dependent upon our work to get it, and man’s word to give it. We’re in trouble.

Laban’s been struck by something too. You might have missed it. I did at first as well. If you look back at verses 11-14, you’ll notice that Jacob kissed Rachel and wept. Jacob was the cartoon character whose eyes were bulging with hearts. But Laban is the cartoon character whose eyes are bulging with dollar signs.

Grammatically the Hebrew makes the point that whatever joy and expectation Jacob had for Rachel, Laban had more for Jacob. He ran, he embraced him, he kissed him, and he brought him into his house. One of Abraham’s heirs had escaped Laban’s grasp once before. But now he’s got a chance to keep a little bit of God’s promise for himself.

These two men share more in common than just a family line. They both are schemers who know how to get what they want. This leads us to our second point: **Love’s Second Glance.**

Jacob is so in love with Rachel, that he’s willing to do anything for her. Now, the narrator lets us in on a little secret here. Rachel isn’t the only daughter. There’s another one. An older one. Her name is Leah and she’s described as having, “weak eyes.” Commentators are torn as to whether this means she had a youthful and tender look when compared to Rachel, or if she was physically limited or even unattractive. Either way, her weak eyes are set up in opposition to Rachel and her “easy on the eyes” look.

Regardless of what is meant by Leah, this is introduced to show Jacob’s blindness and Laban’s opportunity. Laban knows Rachel is the easier of his two daughters to marry off. She would demand a higher bride price as a dowry. Laban sees Jacob’s hastiness and schemes a way to double Rachel’s price.

Jacob saw something he couldn’t pass up. But what he didn’t see is that he was being duped. Every sinful temptation seems wise and true to us at the moment. But while sin appeals to our heart, it never has our best in heart. All sin promises to pay us what we want, but in the end, it always asks for more.

This shows up seven years later when **Genesis 29:21-27**, “Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed.” So Laban gathered together all the people of the place and made a feast. But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and he went in to her. (Laban gave his female servant Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her servant.) And in the morning, behold, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, “What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?” Laban said, “It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years.”

Geoffrey Chaucer was another poet who understood the danger of love. After a character fell for another who looked so perfect at night, in the morning he saw clearly he had made a bad decision. Chaucer said it this way “For when he had concluded thus, egad, he thought other men had wits so bad.”

In other words: 'Egad, I’m the dummy this time.'

“Egad, behold it was Leah.” What we think we can gain by our own power in the evening always presents itself as a bad decision in the morning. If you trust anyone else with your heart besides the God who promised himself to you in Jesus, don’t be surprised when you’ve been duped.

Look at the superficiality of love outside God's promise. Love that stops at the eye, rarely engages the heart. After seven years in Laban's home the wedding night comes and all it takes is a veil over the face for Jacob to be unable to recognize that the woman he's holding isn't Rachel?

Men, there's a lot of bad excuses. This is the worst. What kind of love is this? How many of us run into the arms of hope, peace, comfort, and joy saying, "I've found the one I love...I hope...I'll let you know in the morning?"

This is not love for others, but love for one's self. This is not love by the promise, but love by our own pleasure. And it's dangerously blinding. **Plato**, writing all those years ago, noted this about man's unchecked love: "And thus he loves, but he knows not what; he does not understand and cannot explain his own state; he appears to have caught the infection of blindness from another; the lover is his mirror in whom he is beholding himself, but he is not aware of this."

What is he aware of then? What are we aware of when we give ourselves with such ardent passion to our hobbies, our health, or our sweethearts? If love's second glance leaves us disappointed, what did we see at first glance? Ourselves. We saw the ability to please ourselves.

The author of Proverbs tells us **Proverbs 20:5**, "The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding draws it out." It's hard to draw it out of our own hearts sometimes isn't it?

But let's take a second look. Look back up at **Genesis 29:10**, "Now as soon as Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, Jacob came near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother." Subtle, isn't it?

While Jacob didn't know it, it wasn't just Rachel he saw. It was her father's flocks. He didn't start by kissing Rachel, he started by watering the flock. Behind his love for Rachel he placed the entirety of God's promise. She's his total security, total provision, total future. She had to bear the weight of the entirety of God's promise. But the only thing, the only single source of love in which all our needs are met is in the God who has given himself to us in his promise.

If you don't trust God to give it, you'll probably cheat your brother to get it. If you don't trust God to give it, you'll probably get worked over by your uncle. Either way—there's always another first born in the way. If we have to deceive our way into God's promise, we have been deceiving ourselves about the promise. The deceiver was deceived. And so too will you be if you follow his logic.

So he failed. He's been duped. So have you. The question is what do we do now that we've realized we've been tricked? Do we turn to the Lord? Do we trust in his promise?

Jacob doubles down. He was tricked, but he'll make it right. He's sinfully going to take a second wife. He's stupidly going to bind himself to Laban for another seven years. It's important to note that God would have been faithful, and Jacob would have been happily satisfied to love Leah in line with God's promise. God doesn't need sin to keep his word. God's promise wasn't threatened, and neither was Jacob's joy—but he refused to trust it.

In the name of love, he failed to love. And the end is tragic. He worked. And Rachel was given. Jacob got what he wanted, but he's still got to work it off. And on top of that we read this: **Genesis 29:30**, "So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years."

Laban has twice the reward. Jacob has twice the problems he came with. And Leah has none of the affection she deserved. The house always wins. Sin never helps you. Sin doesn't fertilize love, it kills it.

But here's our final point this morning: **Love's Happily Ever After**. How can you ever find the promise of love? The Bible has good news for you. Love finds you.

Jacob should have let the promise guide him in, lead him out, and get him on his way. But he lingered for his own pleasure. He left his home because of his own foolish sins, and came to a land where he sought his own comfort. But he wasn't called to build an empire in Haran. He was called to God's promise back in the land of Abraham.

Well, it's no surprise that one of those great grandchildren of this broken family will have a similar journey. And one who would come not from Rachel, but from Leah. Jesus Christ, the greater Jacob, the true Israel, he was sent once to find a wife as well. He didn't leave his home because of his sin. He left his home because of ours.

If you remember, Laban tried to keep the servant of Abraham when he came back in chapter 24. That servant didn't stay with Laban's riches. He said, we've got a promise to keep and a marriage to make. I've got to bring this bride home.

So too Jesus came for his bride. Not to the land of plenty, but of problems. And there the Devil tried to hold him up: "Stay here, stop looking, turn these stones into bread and you'll be well loved. Throw yourself off the temple and you'll find the embrace of God, bow down and worship me and I'll give you all the love of all the world." But Jesus was single-minded on the promise. He said, "Listen here, I've got a bride to gain and you're not keeping me from her."

He turned down all the pleasures of the world in order to gain the promise—that love led him ultimately to the cross.

Jesus' bride wasn't the most beautiful. Jesus' bride is any sinner who would come to him. It's the church. He loved us when we were yet unlovely. He died for us when we were weak in sin. He went to the cross for us to open our eyes to the true promise of God which satisfies in every situation. Every false lover calls us to work in endless slavery, but Jesus worked for us. He paid off our debt. A debt he owed to no one but the Father. He purchased whom the world never would.

And he's beckoning you right now to come to him. This is the love you're looking for. It's no surprise that the end of the story of the Bible is a wedding feast where Jesus stands beckoning to his bride, "come." Come away from all that, come to me.

Come away from all your false hopes. Come away from thinking you've found what can only be found in me. It is as we will sing in a moment: "The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord; she is his new creation by water and the word; From heaven he came and sought her to be his holy bride; with his own blood he bought her, and for her life he died."

It is scandalous to think that the eyes of Jesus see his church with all the love and passion of God himself. But it is more scandalous to diminish his love as if our own idea of love is better or more satisfying. He sees our good. He labors for our good. He is our good. Trust in him. And you'll never wake up unhappy.

So when you find yourself at the well of the world, look before you love. Let us take the hope of Paul when he says, "Set your minds on the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

Look to Christ, and look before you love and may he be the lens by which we love and enjoy all things according to his promise and our good.