

Identity Part 2

Genesis 29-30

CONTEXT: Last week we Began this series on Identity. We said that Identity is your truest self. It is the:

- Hub of the Wheel
- The Sun in the Solar System
- We said it was also like a deck of cards, no one card makes up the deck, but one card also rises to the top, it has the priority.
 - When a person gets saved - Christ enters the deck, reshuffles the deck, moves certain aspects of our identity up, he redeems other aspects, but he doesn't efface the card.
 - **NOW - how does God do this? What is God's part in shaping our identity? Next time we are together we are going to see our part in this.**

There are two basic approaches to Identity historically:

- Traditional
- Modern

1. The Traditional View of Identity: Believed in moral absolutes. Believed they were outside of the person. Believed that these moral absolutes could be discovered. Believed that the highest good was honor was sacrificing your interest for the good of the tribe, clan or family.

- **Male** - did this by being willing to die in battle
- **Female** - did this by being willing to have lots of kids

The **Decisive Validator** was the community or family.

2. The Modern View of Identity - Believes that Morals are Relative. Believes that one's own moral compass must be discovered from within. Good isn't something to be discovered without but rather created within.

The individual themselves is the **Decisive Validator**.

3. The Christian View of Identity - God is the source of truth. Truth must be discovered via a relationship with Christ. And God himself is the Decisive Validator.

ILLUSTRATION: Consider the story of the prodigal son. The younger brother seemed to have a Modern approach to identity. He wanted to separate from family and "find" himself. The Older brother had a traditional approach, he sacrificed for the sake of the family. But BOTH ended up in ditches. One in a ditch of sinful licentiousness, and

another in a ditch of selfish legalism. But the Father offers a third Gospel way - redemption, forgiveness, and salvation.

CONTEXT: Remember last week we saw Jacob fleeing from Esau when he had an encounter with God at a place with no name. In a dream Jacob saw God atop a grand Ziggurat with angels ascending and descending on the stairways. We said in the NT Jesus identified himself as the one on whom the angels ascend and descend. From that encounter Jacob's identity begins to be shaped and modified.

This week we see Jacob arriving in Haran. As he enters the city he meets a group of Shepherd who came down to water their sheep. He asks the shepherds...

Genesis 29:1–30:24 (ESV)

⁵ He said to them, "Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?" They said, "We know him." ⁶ He said to them, "Is it well with him?" They said, "It is well; and see, Rachel his daughter is coming with the sheep!"

Now, if this were a movie... the camera would focus and zoom in on this shepherdess named Rachel. Rachel would be played by Gal Gadot. Her hair would be blowing in the wind and really awesome music would start playing in the background.

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.

Now, think of what we know of Jacob at this point. He's not a manly sort of guy. As a matter of fact a couple of weeks ago he was playing dress up with his mom in an attempt to fool his dad. But now, he's rolling stones away from wells.

There is something about love that can bring stuff out of a man that nobody knew was there.

¹¹ Then Jacob kissed Rachel and wept aloud. ¹² 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. ¹³ As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he ran to meet him and embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his house. Jacob told Laban all these things, ¹⁴ and Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh!" And he stayed with him a month. ¹⁵ Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" ¹⁶ Now Laban had two daughters. The name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel.

Now the story shifts from focusing on the lovely Rachael to the less than lovely Leah.

Now keep in mind that beauty is different in every culture.

- For example, some cultures tan skin is considered beautiful, people will risk cancer to have it. In other cultures tan skin is considered the curse of the laborer.
- In some cultures being overweight is considered attractive, it is a sign that you are able to afford an excess of food. In others it's a sign you can't afford a gym membership.

So we are told here in verse 17 that...

17 Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance.

Theologians don't really know what is meant by that phrase, "Weak eyes" but whatever it means, Leah did not fit the cultural norms of what is considered beautiful.

Now this was a problem not only for Leah, but also for Laban her dad. Because in this traditional culture - the highest form of good is to sacrifice your own desires for the sake of your family and community.

- Leah would do that by bearing children.
- Laban would do that by ensuring that his daughters were properly married. That's why dad's would save up a large dowry and gift lavish gifts to the man who married their daughter.

But Laban isn't interested in Leah - his heart is set on Rachel.

18 Jacob loved Rachel. And he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." 19 Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me." 20 So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

Now the time came for Jacob and Rachel to be married. The wedding feast would have lasted many days and would conclude by the consummation of the relationship in the marriage tent. But the next day when the sun had risen... we are told that Jacob awakes and looks beside him....

25 And in the morning, behold, it was Leah!

Now that's a funny verse... I don't care who you are, that's funny. I imagine Fred Sanford waking up next to Aunt Ester.

JOKE: Several years ago I heard about a very wealthy man who was staying in a hotel in Vegas. He went downstairs and heard this beautiful voice coming from a woman singing in the lounge. He sat and listened... and said, "oh my, what a voice.... I must have this woman for my wife". He approached her after the show and said, "Mam, I will give you 10 million dollars if you will only marry me". She accepted... then on their honeymoon they came to their hotel suite and she took off her wig, she took out her teeth, she removed her glass eye... washed off a ton of makeup... the wealthy man said, "sing woman sing!".

Jacob goes to Laban and they have an old fashion come to Jesus moment...

25b. 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?"

Note the irony of this passage. What had Jacob been known for? Deception! And now he is reaping what he has sown.

Laban has a story ready...

²⁶ Laban said, "It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn.

²⁷ Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years." ²⁸ Jacob did so, and completed her week. Then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. ²⁹ (Laban gave his female servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her servant.)

So in a span of a week Jacob takes two wives, sister the Beautiful Rachel and the Less than Beautiful Leah.

³⁰ So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and **he loved Rachel more than Leah**, and served Laban for another seven years.

Now remember we saw in the story of Jacob and Esau that scripture uses the words "love and hate" to show preference and favor. So Isaac loved (or favored) Esau, Rebecca loved (or favored) Isaac. We are told in the NT that God loved (or favored) Isaac but hated (or didn't favor) Esau.

Now here we are told that Isaac LOVES (or favors) Rachel. Then notice in verse 31...

³¹ When the Lord saw that Leah was hated,

In other words, she wasn't preferred she wasn't favored.

31b. he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren.

In this culture the ability to bear children was a great advantage. Your children were your social security, they were your retirement plan. To have no children was a very hopeless situation.

³² 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."

Reuben means - I am seen. The ability to bear children made Leah feel like she was finally going to be seen. Now, at last, I have the advantage... now I will experience what Rachel has experienced all her life... the loving admiration of my husband. But the text gives no indication of that...

33 She conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Because the Lord has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also." And she called his name Simeon.

Simeon means - I am Heard. She gave Jacob a second child, surely now her voice will be more precious than Rachel's in the ears of her husband. But the text gives us no indication that it happened that way...

34 Again she conceived and bore a son, and said, "Now this time my husband will be attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." Therefore his name was called Levi.

Levi means I'm attached. Surely this would secure her place in the heart and mind of her husband... three children. There is no way Rachel could compete. But the text gives us no indication that Jacob's heart changed toward Leah.

35 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.

Something about this forth child brought Leah to a place where she stopped looking for her identity and security from the eyes of her husband and now turned her attention to her Lord.

By the way, the name there she uses for God is interesting. Most of the time in the OT we have seen the name Elohim. Elohim is the generic form of "God". It was used by various religions to refer to the most high God. But then there was the name Yaweh, this was the name God gave to Abraham when he made a covenant with him. This was the name used by those who had a unique relationship with God, his covenant people.

Leah came to the place in her life where God became more than a concept - Elohim, now he was a friend, Yaweh.

Now what can we learn from this story about how God forms a person's identity?

1. God Works through Difficult Circumstances - For Leah it was her looks. She did not and could not, no matter how hard she tried meet the cultural standards of beauty.

What is it that you consider less than optimal about yourself? It is it your looks? Your talent? Your IQ? Perhaps all of the above?

Well I have good news for you - God is attracted to people in difficult situations.

Twice in the NT (In James and in 1 Peter) we are told, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble".

If life has painted you with circumstances that humble you - congratulations! that's like a sweet perfume to God. He draws close to you if you let Him!

As a matter of fact, if there are some among us who have everything going for them - they are attractive, intelligent, wealthy... we ought to have an invitation just for them and pray that they'd get more ugly, less smart, and loose their money.. why? It's difficult for them to get close to God... they don't "feel" the need.

Leah - the unwanted becomes the great, great, great, grandmother of Jesus. Jesus was the Lion of the tribe of Judah.... It was when she turned her focus from worldly things to God that God shaped her identity into something amazing.

That brings us to our second point...

2. **God shows the impotence of Idols -**

For Leah it was being a mother. Motherhood in itself is a good thing, it's a calling, a gift from God... but when it becomes an idol it can crush you. Three kids, but none of them could meet the deep need of her soul they way God could.

What good thing are you tempted to turn into an idol? Friend do you realize that if God loves you (and He does) He must wage war on anything you'd turn into an idol? That's the worse thing you can do.

C.S. Lewis said it this way, "There are all sorts of things in this world that offer to give you (fulfillment), but they never quite keep their promise. The longings which arise in us when we first fall in love, or first think of some foreign country, or first take up some subject that excites us, are longings which no marriage, no travel, no learning, can really satisfy.

I am **not** now speaking of what would be ordinarily called unsuccessful marriages, or holidays, or learned careers. I am speaking of the best possible ones. There was something we have grasped at, in that first moment of longing, which just fades away in the reality. I think everyone knows what I mean. The wife may be a good wife, and the hotels and scenery may have been excellent, and chemistry may be a very interesting job: but something has evaded us."

Derek Kidner wrote in his commentary - this story of Jacob marrying Rachel and waking next to Leah is a miniature of our disappointment from Eden onward. No matter what you have hopes in, in the morning it will always be Leah."

It was only when Leah recognized that and turned her focus to God that she found herself woven into the story of Jesus.

CONCLUSION: In the last chapter of John there is a story that most people have overlooked. Jesus is having a conversation with Peter. It's just after Jesus asks, "three times if Peter loves him" Then Jesus says...

John 21:18–23 (ESV)

¹⁸ Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go. ¹⁹ (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me."

Peter, things are going to be very difficult for you in the days ahead... but I want you to accept it and follow me nonetheless... Peter did what so many of us do... he begins looking around the room and finds John... and says, "what about him?" Will life be hard for him as well?

²² Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!"

I think that's what Jesus is saying to us today - we are a room filled with Leah's some of us know it and some don't. But if you knew yourself the way God knows you, there would be no room for pride.

We are like those of Revelation 3:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

We are Leah - God calls us to look to him, follow him, then and only then will we be folded into a story better than we can ever imagine.