

GENESIS 30

Introduction

Rachel had Jacob's love, but she was not content; she desired something else. She said, "Give me children, or else I die!"

Leah had Jacob's children, but she was not content; she desired something else. She said, "Now my husband will love me."

Rachel desired what Leah had; Leah desired what Rachel had. When you desire what someone else has it is covetousness.

Covetousness is sin. In Hebrews 13:5 you read, "*Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have...*"

Commenting on this verse, Charles Spurgeon said,

"Is it not deeply humiliating, beloved friends, that the best of Christians should need to be cautioned against the worst of sins? May the consecrated become covetous?...There is no superfluous text in the Bible; had there been no peril, there would have been no precept; but, alas, the best of saints may be betrayed into the basest of sins..." (Spurgeons Expository Encyclopedia, Volume 5, p. 339).

You and I are repeatedly warned against covetousness on the pages of Scripture. It is so serious a sin that the Apostle Paul lists it along with sexual immorality, idolatry, reviling, drunkenness, and extortion - and he warns you to not even fellowship with believers who are manifesting covetousness:

1 Corinthians 5:11 But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; not even to eat with such a person.

In Colossians 3:5 Paul goes so far as to say that "covetousness...is idolatry." Covetousness puts what you desire in the place that God should occupy in your life.

Notice how this is illustrated in our text in Genesis. Rachel was not content with Jacob's love and was envious of Leah's ability to bear children. When she said, "Give me children, or else I die," Jacob replied, "Am I in the place of God?" By this he meant that he could not overrule God's decision to withhold children from Rachel. There is a second meaning as well: Rachel was putting her desire for children in the place of God - it was "covetousness, which is idolatry."

Covetousness and contentment are mutually exclusive; they cancel each other out. If you are covetous, you won't be content in your circumstances. If you are content in your circumstances, you won't be covetous.

You and I are to "conduct ourselves without covetousness," learning to be content in our circumstances. Since covetousness is not always as obvious as sexual immorality, drunkenness, revilings, and extortion - how can we recognize its operation in our lives?

Rachel and Leah never really learned how to conduct themselves without covetousness and be content. *We* can learn from them when we are manifesting covetousness in our circumstances, rather than maintaining contentment.

#1 Covetousness Manifests Itself When
You *Misinterpret* Circumstances
(29:31-35)

The narrative begins with Leah. Jacob loved Rachel and Leah knew that before she ever went along with her father's conspiracy to deceive Jacob into marrying her first. There was never any guarantee that Jacob would come to love her. Yet she coveted his love above all else.

God had compassion on her; He blessed her with children. She wasn't content, though; she continued to covet Jacob's love. Her covetousness caused her to *misinterpret* her circumstances. You see it in the naming of her first three children. Rather than being content with God's blessing of children, she thought God was working in her circumstances to cause Jacob to love her!

Genesis 29:31 When the LORD saw that Leah *was* unloved, He opened her womb; but Rachel *was* barren.

The King James describes Leah as "hated." It should be clear that Jacob didn't literally hate Leah. He preferred Rachel over Leah, but still fulfilled his marital role towards Leah.

Jesus said we, as His disciples, were to "hate" father and mother, wife and children, and bothers and sisters.¹ It should be clear

¹Luke 14:26

that we are not literally to hate them. We are to prefer Jesus over them. By loving them less than we love Jesus, we are loving them more than we ever have!

The Lord saw the pain in Leah's heart. She was reaping what she had sown...Yet the Lord, in His tender mercy, blessed her in another way.

Genesis 29:32 So Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben; for she said, "The LORD has surely looked on my affliction. Now therefore, my husband will love me."

Genesis 29:33 Then she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Because the LORD has heard that I *am* unloved, He has therefore given me this *son* also." And she called his name Simeon.

Genesis 29:34 She conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Now this time my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." Therefore his name was called Levi.

The names she chose for her sons reflected her understanding of her circumstances. "My husband will love me"; "I am unloved"; "Now...my husband will become attached to me." She is coveting Jacob's love and is misinterpreting God's mercy as His agreement with and blessing upon her desires.

Genesis 29:35 And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Now I will praise the LORD." Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she stopped bearing.

Leah seemed to come to a place of contentment. "Now I will praise the Lord." This doesn't last long, however; as the chapter continues you see covetousness controlling her.

= Covetousness often colors the understanding of your circumstances. When your heart is set upon a thing, you can easily misinterpret God's mercy as His agreement with and blessing upon your desires.

Circumstances alone are therefore not a good guide. You need counsel and confirmation...

^ Counsel comes from God's Word, either directly or indirectly...

%o Confirmation comes as you wait upon God for it...

#2 Covetousness Manifests Itself *When*
You *Manipulate* Circumstances
(30:1-8)

As the story turns to Rachel you see her step in to *manipulate* her circumstances in order to get what she covets.

Genesis 30:1 Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister, and said to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die!"

Obviously the fault was not with Jacob - at least physically. He was fertile. This is a spiritual commentary by Rachel. When Jacob's mother, Rebekah, was barren Isaac pleaded with the Lord and the Scripture says that the Lord granted his request! Rachel was strongly suggesting that Jacob was deficient spiritually.

Jacob did have serious spiritual faults but we can't say that he wasn't pleading to God on Rachel's behalf. Most likely he was - making Rachel's criticism all the more critical and condemning. Just because God answered Isaac for Rebekah doesn't mean He must do the same for Jacob and Rachel. It is dangerous to compare yourself to others in what seem to be similar situations. There can be many significant differences.

Genesis 30:2 And Jacob's anger was aroused against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?"

Jacob's counsel was correct - but his countenance was carnal...

Genesis 30:3 So she said, "Here is my maid Bilhah; go in to her, and she will bear *a child* on my knees, that I also may have children by her."

Genesis 30:4 Then she gave him Bilhah her maid as wife, and Jacob went in to her.

Genesis 30:5 And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son.

Genesis 30:6 Then Rachel said, "God has judged my case; and He has also heard my voice and given me a son." Therefore she called his name Dan.

Genesis 30:7 And Rachel's maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son.

Genesis 30:8 Then Rachel said, "With great wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, *and* indeed I have prevailed." So she called his name Naphtali.

"Bear a child on my knees" might refer to the actual position of the maid during childbirth - in the lap of the wife, symbolizing that the child, although physically coming from the womb of the maid, was legally coming from the lap of the wife.

No one seems willing to learn from Sarah's bad example in giving her maid, Hagar, to Abraham. Because God permits a thing doesn't mean He prefers it... We mistake God's mercy for His leading...

Not content, and coveting what Leah had, Rachel *manipulated* her circumstances to satisfy her desires. The names she chose for Bilhah's boys is enough to convince you that she was driven by covetousness.

= When God withholds some desired blessing from your life, it can be to give you a greater understanding of the place He ought to hold in your life. Jacob's countenance was bad, but his question was good. Think of the thing that you desire, then ask yourself, "Is it in the place of God, Who is withholding this from me?"

#3 Covetousness Manifests Itself When
You *Mimic* Circumstances
(30:9-13)

It was lawful to have multiple wives and to take concubines for the purpose of producing children. It no longer is! God never changed; He was simply condescending to human weakness.

Leah *mimicked* her sister's choice, giving her maid, Zilpah, to Jacob as Rachel had given her maid, Bilhah, to him.

Genesis 30:9 When Leah saw that she had stopped bearing, she took Zilpah her maid and gave her to Jacob as wife.

Genesis 30:10 And Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son.

Genesis 30:11 Then Leah said, "A troop comes!" So she called his name Gad.

Genesis 30:12 And Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son.

Genesis 30:13 Then Leah said, "I am happy, for the daughters will call me blessed." So she called his name Asher.

You might say that Leah was content based on her statement, "I am happy."
Notice two things:

^ For her happiness depended on happenings; it was not a joy in the Lord and, as you see in a moment, did not bring her lasting contentment.

%o Leah was concerned about the opinions of others rather than that of her Lord. "The daughters will call me blessed," she said. People are fickle; you'll find no lasting, spiritual contentment as long as you look to others for satisfaction.

= *Mimicking* others is perhaps the most common way we manifest covetousness. It's hard to remain satisfied when your friends, family, and fellow workers are pursuing material gain. You begin to imitate them, keeping pace with their purchases and recreations.

The people you are told to imitate are Jesus Christ, the Apostle Paul, and other faithful saints:

v 1 Corinthians 11:1, Imitate me, just as I also *imitate* Christ.
v Hebrews 6:12 ... imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

In each case you are to imitate those who proved or are proving content in their circumstances, whose goals, motives, and values are spiritual, and whose methods are biblical.

#4 Covetousness Manifests Itself When
You *Meddle* With Circumstances
(30:14-21)

Mandrakes were believed to be an aid to reproductive fertility. Rachel coveted them, obviously not content with Jacob's love or with the proxy children of her maid Bilhah. Since she had not discovered them, she had to *meddle* in Leah's affairs and bargain with her in order to secure them for herself.

Genesis 30:14 Now Reuben went in the days of wheat harvest and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me *some* of your son's mandrakes."

Many wonderfully healing and invigorating substances are derived from God's bounty in nature. Mandrakes are apparently not among them! Rachel had no success with them.

There are spiritual "mandrakes" today - found in the "field" of the world and desired by believers for some purpose or another. Psychology is such a mandrake: It is found in the world, and believed to be a source of spiritual help and healing. So many, like Rachel, are being left barren by it...

Genesis 30:15 But she said to her, "*Is it* a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you take away my son's mandrakes also?" And Rachel said, "Therefore he will lie with you tonight for your son's mandrakes."

Leah needed a reality check! It was she who had taken away Rachel's husband - deceiving him on his wedding night by pretending to be Rachel.

Covetousness can affect the way that we remember things...

This incident with the mandrakes is the clearest single expression of the covetousness of these two sisters. Rachel coveted what Leah had, and Leah coveted what Rachel had. Each was willing to sacrifice for what they coveted.

Genesis 30:16 When Jacob came out of the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, "You must come in to me, for I have surely hired you with my son's mandrakes." And he lay with her that night.

Jacob was successful as a husbandman, but not as a husband... "Walk circumspectly..."

Genesis 30:17 And God listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son.

Genesis 30:18 Leah said, "God has given me my wages, because I have given my maid to my husband." So she called his name Issachar.

Genesis 30:19 Then Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son.

Genesis 30:20 And Leah said, "God has endowed me *with* a good endowment; now my husband will dwell with me, because I have borne him six sons." So she called his name Zebulun.

Genesis 30:21 Afterward she bore a daughter, and called her name Dinah.

God didn't condone Leah's methods, but He had compassion on her misery. Her methods were carnal. His compassion, though, is marvelous. God can continue to bless you even when you sin. This always confuses us when we observe it in others; we're happy for it, though, in our own lives!

= In 1 Thessalonians 4:11 you read, "...aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you..." You are not to *meddle* in the lives of others, especially to gain what you desire.

I have a real problem with the carnal methods men use in the Church to meddle in the lives of others for their own financial or spiritual gain.

#5 Covetousness Manifests Itself When
You Miss Out On Contentment In Your Circumstances
(30:23-24)

Genesis 30:23 And she conceived and bore a son, and said, "God has taken away my reproach."

Genesis 30:24 So she called his name Joseph, and said, "The LORD shall add to me another son."

Finally Rachel received the desire of her heart - her own son from her own womb. What does she name him? Joseph - "the Lord shall add *another* to me." She wasn't content with a son; she wanted *sons*. Even as far back as verse one she said, "Give me children" - plural. She missed out on being content even when possessing the thing she desired.

= Covetousness does that; it causes you to *miss out* on contentment even when the thing you've coveted is yours. It has so filled your heart and mind that, once achieved, it seems not to satisfy - so you desire more of it.

To be content with what you have ought to be easy for us, since we have so much. Charles Spurgeon said,

"This world is ours, and worlds to come. Earth is our lodge, and heaven our home. It ought to be easy for us to be contented [knowing that] all things are ordered for our good. Arranged by our own dear Father's hand, His appointments ought not to be difficult for a loving child to approve. The trial of our faith will soon be over; a long life of affliction is but a pin's point of time. Be it ever so painful, we ought to be willing to bear the light affliction, which is but for a moment. We know that God loves us, for we feel His love shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost. Should not contentment be easy under such circumstances?" (Spurgeons Expository Encyclopedia, Volume 5, p. 346).

Conclusion

We earlier quoted Hebrews 13:5, but not the full verse. "*Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have...*" Now here's the rest: "For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

In the original language in which that verse was written there are *five* negatives. The Amplified Bible translates it, "God Himself has said, I will not in any way fail you nor give you up nor leave you without support. I will not, I will not, I will not in any degree leave you helpless, nor forsake nor let you down - Assuredly not!"

It is this confidence that allows us to conduct ourselves without covetousness, and to be content in our circumstances.

fCoveting is setting your affections on what you don't have...

fContentment is setting your affections on what you do have...

= If you are a believer, the sum of all the things you don't have cannot begin to compare with even the least of the spiritual blessings you do have!

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