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BLESSINGS: Eyeing the Blessing

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Genesis 29:16 – 35

I know as Christians we believe God blesses. But can you imagine being Leah?

Genesis 29: 16 Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. 17 Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel was lovely in form, and beautiful. 18 Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, "I'll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel." 19 Laban said, "It's better that I give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me." 20 So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her. 21 Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife. My time is completed, and I want to lie with her." 22 So Laban brought together all the people of the place and gave a feast. 23 But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and gave her to Jacob, and Jacob lay with her. 24 And Laban gave his servant girl Zilpah to his daughter as her maidservant. 25 When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn't I? Why have you deceived me?" 26 Laban replied, "It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one. 27 Finish this daughter's bridal week; then we will give you the younger one also, in return for another seven years of work." 28 And Jacob did so. He finished the week with Leah, and then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. 29 Laban gave his servant girl Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her maidservant. 30 Jacob lay with Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. And he worked for Laban another seven years. 31 When the LORD saw that Leah was not loved, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. 32 Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, "It is because the LORD has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now." 33 She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Because the LORD heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too." So she named him Simeon. 34 Again she conceived, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." So he was named Levi. 35 Leah conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "This time I will praise the LORD." So she named him Judah. Then she stopped having children."

[My friend, Rev. Grace Imathiu opened my eyes to this powerful angle on the blessing:]

Verse 31: "When the Lord saw that Leah was unloved..."

"When the Lord saw..." **God is a seeing God.**

To see is to engage the other... To see means you can't ignore the other.

This convoluted story is a theological story.

Even in creation, God saw, ending every day with a benediction:

"God saw that it was good." God saw everything he had made, and said "It is good."

God, who watches over Israel never sleeps or slumbers. (Psalm 121:3-4).

And it's right there in Jesus' mission statement which he read in the synagogue when he began his ministry: "recovery of sight to the blind." (Luke 4:18). Jesus keeps healing over and over. Mark 8:23 "He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When Jesus had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" 24 The man looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." 25 Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened,

his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.” Jesus heals a man twice: he heals the man, and people look like trees. (Most of us only see trees. We don’t see people for who they are.) Then He touches him again, and he is blessed to see fully.

In Revelation, Jesus writes the church of Laodicea. *“15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16 So, because you are lukewarm-- neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17 You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and don't need a thing.' But you don't realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. 18 I counsel you to buy...salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.”*

Leah has weak eyes. (Some translators describe her eyes as tender, or clouded, or soft). But whatever the case, Leah’s eyes were weak. And Jacob only had eyes for Rachel. He worked 7 years for Rachel. He married. In that culture, the bride was dressed ceremonially head to toe. And the morning after the huge celebration, Jacob the trickster had been tricked! Under all those veils was Leah, Rachael’s older sister. What’s Jacob supposed to do? He’s stuck. Sorry about the damaged goods, Dude. Jacob, this is your problem, theologically, culturally, and economically. Laban told Jacob “We respect the rights of the firstborn.” (29:26). This has a double meaning if you know Jacob’s story, and how he treated his older brother Esau. It’s poetic justice, and a huge slap in the face for Jacob. She’s yours now! BUT, I’ll let you do this: after a week, you can have Rachael, for 7 more years work.

Can you imagine being Leah? Talk about the curse. How far from God’s blessing she must be feeling, knowing she was married to someone who would rather be loved by someone else. Leah was unloved... There are people here who know way too much about what that feels like. Like you’re hiding, and no one’s seeking. Like you’re missing, and no one in the group misses you. Leah was dispensable. Many people groups in the world today feel dispensable. But know this: God is a seeing God. God sees the rejected ones.

And when God sees, God acts. Look what God does: God opened Leah’s *womb*. When I read this, I want to ask God, “Why don’t you just change Jacob’s heart? Why don’t you make Leah a great businesswoman, so she can go sell camels and not even WANT to be loved?!” And here it gets *really* complicated.

And Leah gets pregnant and has her baby: “Go get Jacob—it’s a boy!” *“32 She named him Reuben, for she said, 'It is because the LORD has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now.'*” But it must not have happened...

33 She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, 'Because the LORD heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too.' So she named him Simeon. But we can tell nothing changed...

34 Again she conceived, and when she gave birth to a son she said, 'Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons.' So he was named Levi. The names Leah gives her sons betray her.

“35 She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, 'This time I will praise the LORD.' So she named him Judah. Then she stopped having children.” THIS time, she names him Judah, and she ceased bearing. She *knew*. She knew! She knew where to get her worth, She knew where to get her value. She knew where to get her praise! **Not from Jacob, not anymore!** She stopped eyeing the blessing she wanted in Jacob. And it goes for us today, no matter what your circumstance. You *can* find blessing, once you know where to get your praise. Remember, there is a serious lack of praise in the world. This time, praise the Lord, the source of your blessing! With the first, second, and third son Leah misses the point. It’s not *about* Jacob. But something happened to Leah, and she said “This time I know where to turn! *This time I will praise the Lord.*”

How many times will it take *you*? How many times will it take *me*? How many times, till *your eyes shift* to your life being about praising the Lord? THIS TIME I WILL PRAISE. C.S. Lewis wrote “Praise is inner health made audible.” And a powerful blessing is there. And centuries later Matthew takes us on the Father’s Day parade, tracing the lineage of Jesus, and there is Judah. In the *final* book of the Bible, John the Revelator

looks for the one who will break the seal. Revelation 5:4 *"I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. 5 Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."* Who is it? It's the one who will come from the "Tender Eyes" – The Lion of Judah.

Who is *your* Jacob? I don't know what your Jacob is. **I've had a Jacob or two.** Something I've looked to for my identity, my purpose, my blessing. *This* time, from now on, shift your attention to God. This time...this time... **THIS** time, shift your praise to the Lord.

Prayer: God you know the people and things that have power in our lives. We commit them to you today, and we don't want them back. O Gift Giver, *this* time, from this time on, our life will be about praising you, and seeking your blessing. Those of us who are on the fence open our eyes to you. Help us see. We need you, that we may praise You. May we look no further than You. May we look only to You for our blessing, and leave our trust there. In the name of Your Son, the Lion of Judah, we pray. Amen.