

# Our Scheming, God's Power

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[0:00] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone and I'm one of the pastors here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church and it's my joy to bring God's word to you today.

We're continuing our series in the book of Genesis, which is the first book in the Bible. It tells the origin story of God's people Israel. This summer we're in the story of Isaac and Jacob, mostly Jacob in chapters 25 through 36. And last week Leah had this breakthrough.

She was trying to use her children to gain love from Jacob. And finally with her fourth child, she says, this time I will praise the Lord.

So you'll remember we saw that as Leah's hope for love from her husband fades, her contentment in God grows. She sets her eyes in the right place.

This week, unfortunately, Leah goes back into her old habits. Both her and Rachel are going to work using kids to get love, which reminds us that the Christian life is full of ups and downs.

[1:05] Victories and failures as we follow God, it is not always linear. This week we're going to be talking about relying on ourselves versus relying on God. You'll see our sermon title on page 8 of your worship guide, Our Scheming God's Power.

And so it's with that I invite you to turn with me to Genesis chapter 30, which you'll find on page 7 of your worship guide. As we come to it, remember that this is God's word. Jeremiah chapter 23 tells us that God's word is like a hammer that breaks a rock into pieces, which is a way of saying that there is no power so great that God's word is not more powerful still.

And so that's why we read now Genesis chapter 30, starting at verse 1. When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister.

She said to Jacob, Give me children or I shall die. Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel and he said, Am I in the place of God who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?

Then she said, Here is my servant Bilhah. Go into her so that she may give birth on my behalf, that even I may have children through her.

[2:30] So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a wife and Jacob went into her. And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. Then Jacob said, God has judged me and has also heard my voice and given me a son.

Therefore she called his name Dan. Rachel's servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. Then Rachel said, With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister and I have prevailed.

So she called his name Naphtali. Verse 9. When Leah saw that she had ceased bearing children, she took her servant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife.

Then Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son. And Leah said, Good fortune has come. So she called his name Gad. Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son.

And Leah said, Happy am I, for women have called me happy. So she called his name Asher. Verse 14.

[3:42] In the days of wheat harvest, Reuben went 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.

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? Rachel said, Then he may lie with you tonight in exchange for your son's mandrakes.

When Jacob came from the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, You must come into me, for I have hired you with my son's mandrakes.

So he lay with her that night. And God listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. Leah said, God has given me my wages because I gave my servant to my husband. So she called his name Issachar. Verse 19. And Leah conceived again, and she bore Jacob a sixth son. Then Leah said, God has endowed me with a good endowment.

[4:50] Now my husband will honor me because I have borne him six sons. So she called his name Zebulun. Afterward, she bore a daughter and called her name Dinah.

Verse 22. Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son and said, God has taken away my reproach.

And she called his name Joseph, saying, May the Lord add to me another son. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word.

Our Father in heaven, we do thank you again this morning for calling us together as your church, for giving the sun and the rain to provide life to the earth, for giving us your word, which you tell us brings dead things to life.

And so we ask that you would do that this morning, that you would use your word in a powerful way in our lives. That you would break through our hardness of heart. You'd soften us. Father, you'd break through the fog in our minds, that we would have clarity.

[5:59] That you would help us to see and hear and understand everything that's written about you and your word. And most of all, we would see Jesus. That he would be more beautiful to us than ever before.

And we ask all of these things in his mighty name. Amen. I want you to remember where we are at in the story.

We've got a big problem. And the big problem is this. There is one man and two women. Of those two women, one is loved, one is unloved.

In fact, the author of Genesis goes so far as to say she's not just unloved, she's actually hated. And so you don't have to be a genius to know that we have trouble on our hands. And that trouble last week got even worse because Leah has four children.

Rachel, zero children. We were told, verse 31 of chapter 29, Rachel was barren. And so we have this odd situation where Leah has children but no love.

[7:06] Rachel has love but no children. And neither one is happy. Which takes us to the very first scene of this passage where we find out Rachel is livid.

That's verse 1. When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister. She said to Jacob, give me children or I shall die.

So once again, we see the idolatry that's just right here on the surface. She's looking to children to make her life whole, to make it worth living. Very similar to Leah last week.

And we're told, again, this is verse 1, she envied her sister. Jacob, in his own bumbling way, gets to the heart of the issue.

Verse 2, am I in the place of God who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb? Now, Jacob is insensitive, but he's also correct.

[8:06] He's insensitive. He does not handle it the way that Isaac handled it back in Genesis chapter 25. In chapter 25, when Rebecca is unable to have children, Isaac doesn't scold her.

He prays for her. And we're told explicitly at that point that Rebecca gives birth when and because of Isaac's prayers.

So Jacob doesn't pray for Rachel. He just scolds her. He handles things poorly. But he's also not wrong. He's saying, your anger isn't at me.

Your anger actually is at God, which is exactly what envy is. If you look on page 8 of your worship guide, you'll see this quote from Jerry Bridges defining envy.

We must recognize that the envious or jealous of someone is either eliminating God from the picture or else accusing him of being unfair.

[9:06] So Jerry Bridges is saying envy is one of two things. It's either saying God is not in control or it's saying God is not good. If you say God is not in control, that's what he means by eliminating God from the picture.

If you say God is not good, that's what he means by accusing him of being unfair. Envy, in other words, is accusing God of wrongdoing.

God, you should have given to me what you gave to them. You have not run this world correctly. Envy rejects God's goodness and care and kindness.

Envy fails to recognize that God is in control of all things.

And so Rachel decides it is time for her to be in control of all things. That explains for us what happens next in verses 3 through 8.

[10:12] Verses 3 through 8, Rachel gives her servant Bilhah as a surrogate to Jacob, which is the same play that Sarah ran back in Genesis chapter 16 with Hagar.

The result here is that Bilhah has two kids. And as the old saying goes, two can play that game. So Leah sees what Rachel's done.

She thought, well, that seems like a good idea. I'll do the same thing. So in verses 9 through 13, Leah goes to work. She gives her servant Zilpah. So then she has two kids.

So in total, we have four more kids, two from Bilhah, two from Zilpah. The women are fighting. And Jacob is passive. And God is quietly working to keep his promise to Abraham.

His promise to Abraham that Abraham would be the father of many nations. God is always at work keeping his promise.

[11:29] Despite in the midst of our failures, our mistakes, our sin, God's purposes always prevail.

That takes us to the next part of the story, which is the war over the mandrakes.

In fact, this is actually the war between Leah and Rachel. You'll remember Reuben from last week was Leah's first son. Verse 14, he finds some mandrakes, brings them to his mom, Leah.

And you might be wondering who cares about mandrakes. Well, apparently Rachel cares a lot because she says, verse 14, give me some of your son's mandrakes.

This is the good stuff. And the reason for this is that there's this superstition at that time that mandrakes were an aphrodisiac. So if you had the vitamin shop or GNC back in the ancient Near East and you had walked in, they would have had mandrake supplement right at the front of the store for you.

[12:39] If this was 2026, we would expect that Rachel is on YouTube, she's on Facebook, and she's seeing these ads, and the person in the ad is saying, you know, my husband, he lacked energy and interest in life, and then he took the mandrake supplement.

And you too, if you get the promo code right now, 20% off, your relationship will be better than ever. It'll be like your husband's in his 20s again. And remember, Rachel hasn't had a child, only her servant Bilhah.

She needs, she wants Jacob as interested as possible, and if the old wives' tale is true, which it isn't, it's really going to help if mandrakes are part of Jacob's diet.

So Rachel's request, Leah's mandrakes, which she has from her son Reuben, triggers this particular battle in this larger war, and that brings Leah and us to verse 15 where she says this, is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband?

In other words, I married him first, he's mine. So Rachel says to Leah, okay, you can have him tonight. It can be your turn if you give me the mandrakes.

[14:02] So they make a deal. Leah then, in verse 16, goes to Jacob and says, you know what, you have to sleep with me tonight. I hired you. And in case you've missed it, this is absolutely bonkers.

Jacob has totally lost control of his family. He's not in charge. He's just doing what Rachel tells him to do. One commentator says that Jacob is just being treated like a stud.

He is a horse that is kept for one purpose and one purpose only. So Jacob is humiliated. He is being traded like a commodity by these two women.

Verse 17. And God listened to Leah and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son.

What was God listening to? He was listening to Leah's prayers. That's what she's been up to.

[15:11] And what does Leah not have when she meets up with Jacob? She has no mandrakes. And she still gets a son.

The point is this. Children come from the Lord, not from mandrakes. It is God who is in control, not the schemes of men or women.

It's the same thing that happens with Rachel. Verse 22. God remembered Rachel and God listened to her and opened her womb. God listened to her.

God listened to her what? God listened to Rachel's prayers. The mandrakes. They are all for nothing.

It is prayer that makes the difference because it is God who is in control. There is a tragedy and an irony at this point.

[16:24] These two women have been running around. They have been scheming. They have been plotting. They have been trading. And all they had to do was ask.

James chapter 4. You have not because you ask not. Remember chapter 25.

Rebecca gives birth when and because Isaac prays. Remember, Jacob refuses to pray here. He just scolds. Takes Rachel's and Leah's prayers. And it's those prayers. Not the mandrake gummies. That God uses to bring these children into the world.

So all this drama. All the plotting. It's unnecessary. It's silly. Because God and only God rules the world.

[17:35] The question is this.

Do you run first to prayer? Or do you run to your plans and your schemes?

I know that I'm quick to plan and scheme and strategize. Often slow. To go to God in prayer.

Do you believe. That God hears your prayers. And do you trust. God's providence in your life.

Do you really believe. That God is at work. For his glory. And your good. Do you. Do you really.

[18:36] Do you really believe. That God controls this world. And everything in it. When I was growing up. In my Presbyterian church. In southern Maryland.

We would have this time with the kids. Where we would just sing our kids songs. And we would sing this song. He's got the whole world in his hands. Do you believe.

That God has the whole world in his hands. Or do you think you have to hold it. All together. Do you believe it's all up to you. That you're this orphan. In a merciless universe.

That you have to say the right words. Pull the right levers. And do the right things. For it all to work. If you do. Like Leah and Rachel.

You will make a mess. Psalm 127. Unless the Lord builds the house.

[19:36] Those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city. The watchmen stay awake in vain. It is in vain.

That you rise up early. And go late. To rest. Eating the bread. Of anxious toil. For he gives. To his beloved.

Sleep. Do you believe. That God gives. His beloved sleep.

Do you live like it. Or do you eat the bread. Of anxious toil. Because you believe. In this world.

You're tossed. Around.

By fate. All the plotting. All the pain. And all they had to do.

[20:34] Was ask. What a waste. What a waste. There are things.

And situations. In my life. Right now. That I am watching. And they are slow. Motion. Train. Wrecks. And I actually.

Believe it or not. Cannot control. Or change. Other people. And in that sense. I cannot do anything. About it. And there are things. About the future.

That I simply. Cannot know. And the only thing. I can do. Is go to the Lord. And say.

Lord. It is all. Yours. I cannot scheme. Or strategize. My way. Into this. Or out of it. Now don't hear.

[21:30] What I'm not saying. Right. There are situations. In this life. Where we have to act. But if we act. We're acting. In obedience. To God. Trusting him. Not going outside.

Of his will. In the way. Rachel and Leah do. By the way. Commentators point out. Rachel and Leah. Like to say. When Bilhah and Zilpah. Give birth. They say. Oh the Lord. Has blessed me. They say it.

The narrator. Doesn't say it. The narrator. Only speaks. About God's blessing. When it's actually. Their children. In other words. They think they're doing. This great thing.

And they're taking life. Into their own hands. Problem is not. That they act. But that they act. In unbelief. I pray often.

That God would give me. A childlike faith. That I would have this. Unshakable. Confidence in God. And trust in him. That leads to peace. And joy. And boldness. And courage. And confidence. And humility.

[22:29] Which is a really bad thing to pray. Because building trust. Requires. Tests. And there are many things.

In my life. And in this world. That have not. Gone the way. I wanted them to go. And I have to trust. God.

God. Is at work. God. Is in control. God. God is working out. His purposes. There is nothing too small. Or too difficult. Or too wonderful.

For the Lord. It is God. Not mandrakes. That bring his purposes. To bear. In this world. Lord. It is all. Yours. Yours. You hold the world. The whole world. In your hands.

[23 : 29] You can go to him. You can pray. It's prayer. Not mandrakes. That move the ball forward.

For Rachel. And Leah. Do you believe. That God.

Holds. The whole world. In his hands. Or do you think. That it's up to you. To change yourself. That you can win. In the battle.

Over sin. Without community. Without the Holy Spirit. If you can just knuckle. White knuckle. Enough. Do you think. That you. Can raise.

Godly children. Who love. And follow God. By yourself. Because you're just so smart. So disciplined. Do you think. That you are.

[24 : 23] Powerful. Enough. To fix. Your family. I hope not. I hope.

That you instead. Embrace. Proverbs. Chapter 3. Trust in the Lord. With all your heart. And do not lean. On your own understanding. In all your ways.

Acknowledge him. And he will make. Your paths. Straight. Do you want. Straight paths.

Doesn't come from. Mandrakes. Trust in the Lord. With all your heart. And lean not. On your own. On your own. Understanding.

Our Lord Jesus. Tells us the same thing. In Matthew. Chapter 6. To those who think. That they control. All things. He says this. Therefore I tell you. Do not be anxious. About your life.

[25 : 23] What you will eat. Or what you will drink. Nor about your body. What you will put on. Is not life. More than food. And the body. More than clothing. Look at the birds.

Of the air. They neither sow. Nor reap. Nor gather into barns. And yet your heavenly father. Feeds them. Are you not. Of more value. Than they. And which of you. By being anxious. Can add a single hour.

To his span. Of life. God uses.

The sin. And the unbelief. Of Rachel. And Leah. To honor his promise. That Abraham's offspring. Will be.

[26 : 20] Like the dust. Of the earth. Last week. Leah's. Final son. Some number four. Was Judah. You know.

Who comes from. The tribe. Of Judah. Jesus. This week. Rachel. Gives birth. To Joseph. What is Joseph.

Going to do. He's going to show up. Later in Genesis. He's going to rescue. His people. You'll see this.

On page seven. Of your worship. Guide. This quote. From Les Mis. By Victor Hugo. God has his instruments. He uses whatever tool.

He chooses. Is this the first time. The dung heap. Has helped spring. To produce. The rose. That's what's going on.

[27 : 16] In Genesis chapter 30. God is using the dung heap. Of Rachel. And Leah. And Jacob. To produce a rose. The rose of Joseph.

Who will rescue his people. In a small sense. The rose of Jesus. Who will rescue his people. In his big. The biggest sense. Church.

That's what he's doing with us. He's using the dung heap. Of our failure. And mistakes. And unbelief. To produce. A great. Rose.

He holds the whole world. In his hands. So we don't have to. All our scheming. And plotting. Is for nothing. Because it's God.

Who is in control. Don't take matters. Into your own hands. Don't go outside. Of God's will. Trust him.

[28 : 15] And follow him. Because just like he sees. Rachel. He sees us. He sees. You. Let's pray.

Our father in heaven. We do praise you. And thank you. For your overabundant. Mercy and love. Even greater than we can understand. We confess. We often forget it. And refuse to believe it. And try to rule the world. By ourselves. Rather than having. Childlike faith in you. We ask that you would change us. And shape us. And form us. We would have the joy. That comes from knowing. That you are in control. Of all things. And we ask these things. In the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.