

The Genesis of Joseph

Ash Wednesday – 03/02/22 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Genesis 30:22-24 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 22, “**Then God remembered Rachel...**”

Introduction

- ⊗ Just ten weeks ago, we celebrated the birth of a baby – a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Angels sang about His birth. Shepherds scampered to His manger. Wise Men sought out and found Him.
 - ➔ Conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, Jesus came to save His people from their sins. And in response, we all sang, “Joy to the world!” That’s what things are supposed to be like whenever a baby is born. The gift of new life; a happy, joy-filled occasion – a cause for celebration.

I. Do you remember Rachel?

- ⊗ Now tonight we begin a journey that will last six weeks; each leg as we gather here for our Midweek services will advance us on “*A Lenten journey with Joseph*”.
 - ➔ And the beginning of this journey is also about babies and birth. But this time things are utterly joyless. Joseph’s mother, Rachel, is not yet a mother. And it appears that she might never be a mother. Sucking the joy out of Rachel’s existence babies are being born left and right, but not for Rachel.
- ⊗ You remember Rachel, don’t you? It was love at first sight when Jacob first spied the beautiful young shepherdess watering her father’s flock. Jacob worked seven long years for Rachel, only to be tricked by his father-in-law, Laban, into marrying Rachel’s sister, Leah instead. Finally though, Jacob brokered a deal with Laban that allowed him to marry Rachel too. But it came at the cost of another seven years of labor.
 - ➔ Jacob and Rachel both believed it was worth it. They were finally together as husband and wife. First came love. Then, eventually, came marriage. But there were no babies born to Rachel.
 - ➔ Her sister, Leah; she had babies - lots of them; six sons and one daughter. Additionally, Rachel’s maidservant and Leah’s maidservant each gave birth to two more sons for Jacob. Now eleven babies had been born to Jacob through three separate women. Yet Rachel appeared to be barren. But then we’re told that “God remembered Rachel, and...listened to her and opened her womb” (v. 22). Rachel now conceived and was blessed with a baby.
- ⊗ Needless to say, all of those earlier births brought no joy to Rachel. They were a source of strife and jealousy for her. Each time a newborn would wail its first cry of life, a toxic mixture of anger and sorrow would well up in Rachel. With each new baby Rachel was bitterly reminded of her inability to have a baby – a terrible token that she didn’t have – that she couldn’t have a baby of her own to have and hold and care for and nurture.
 - ➔ But you see, Rachel’s childlessness was more than just a procreation problem; it was a spiritual problem; a faith problem. Scripture declares that children are a gift from the Lord, and Rachel had not received that gift. For her, it was a source of shame and emotional distress.
 - ➔ She had to wonder, did this mean the LORD was displeased with her? Was He testing her faith? Why, oh why did her frequent heartfelt prayers seem to go unanswered? Why did it seem as though she was forsaken by the LORD?

- ✘ So Rachel decided to try and take matters into her own hands. She gave her maid, Bilhah to Jacob, thinking that Bilhah could have children whom Rachel could then count as her own.
 - ➔ This is where our lives today intersect with Rachel's life. Perhaps there are some among us, or others whom we may know, that have struggled with infertility; who know the heartbreak that this can bring. Often it becomes a struggle with faith.
 - ➔ But then, we all struggle with faith, don't we? You don't have to be in the business of childbirth to share in the sin of Rachel and Jacob. Whatever our difficulty might be, we've all experienced painful times when it seems as if our heartfelt prayers have gone unanswered. It can seem like an endless wait as we struggle day after day waiting for the Lord. Perhaps it's the hoped-for healing that just doesn't come, or the tragic progression from sadness to bitterness, and from bitterness to anger, then from anger to despair. Finally when desperation comes, we get to the point that we too might take matters into our own hands. Like Rachel and Jacob we stitch together our own sinful solutions, setting God's Word and will aside just so that we can secure some bit of the relief that we crave.
 - ➔ These are the times that we get to the point that we'd rather ignore the Lord's will than wait for Him, or consider His alternative plan. And in the end, we find that we are left with a sin-filled situation like Rachel's – a dysfunctional debacle fueled by our own faithless desperation.

II. God remembered Rachel

- ✘ But three words from tonight's text changed everything: "God remembered Rachel" (v. 22). After all hope had dried up and faith was nothing but a dim flicker, God remembered. It's not that He technically forgot Rachel and Jacob, nor is it correct to say that He was incapable of hearing her prayers.
 - ➔ It's just that the outward evidence looked that way to our limited, human way of seeing things. That's why the text says that "God listened to her and opened her womb." Finally, she conceived and bore a son – and not just any son. That birth was the genesis of Joseph – the beginning of a journey that would ultimately deliver God's people and point all the way to Jesus.
- ✘ Whenever the Bible says that God "remembers", it is quickly followed by God's mighty action. He breaks in and intervenes in the lives of His people. What we're talking about here is all about God's grace. Tonight we see how God acts and works not just for the well-behaved people who wait patiently in faith. In this instance He remembered Rachel, even in the midst of her shameful, self-centered striving. Yes, God remembered Rachel in her sin; in her desperation.
 - ➔ He remembers those who feel forgotten and forsaken too. Why? Because as Joel 2:13 says, "He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love".
- ✘ The LORD remembered Rachel and she gave birth to a son. In great joy she named the boy Joseph. That son signaled the end of Rachel's shame and desperation – both within herself and among those around her. Now every time she looked into Joseph's face, she was reminded of God's remembrance ... and her deliverance.
 - ➔ In Hebrew, the name "Joseph" means "may he add". By choosing that name, Rachel made both a confession of faith and expression of a prayer of hope. In joyful expectation, Rachel exclaimed, "May the Lord add to me another son!" (v. 24).

III. God has remembered you in Jesus.

- ✘ And what do you know, it's because of "Another son" that you and I have come here today. God remembered Rachel with Joseph; but God has remembered you with another Son – His only

beloved Son, Jesus. When God remembers, He takes action. And God has acted definitively for you in the person of His Son.

→ It's in that Son that your shame and desperation comes to an end. That Son is the source of your deliverance from sin and death. In that Son, God remembers all who feel that they've been forgotten. That Son, Jesus, was forsaken on the cross so that now God will never forsake you.

→ Yes friends, God has remembered you; God has acted on your behalf; for your eternal good, in His Son, Jesus.

✘ This season of Lent, that begins today, is forty-days of remembering. We remember our sins and we confess them – recounting all the ways that we have wandered from God's will; all the ways that we have rejected His commandments; all the ways we have refused to wait on Him in faith.

→ We also remember the people and places of our Lord's Passion: Judas' betrayal, Peter's denial, and Pilate's pandering. We remember Rachel's son Joseph: how his brothers betrayed him; how his faith was challenged; and the many ways that he foreshadows God's own Son, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

✘ But the true heart of this season is not our remembering, but God's. God remembered Rachel. God remembered Joseph. And in His Son, God remembers you and He acts on your behalf. He remembers you here, in the preaching of His promises; in the water and Word of your Baptism; in the bread that is His body and the wine that is His blood, given and shed ... and fed to you for the forgiveness of sins. Here God remembers you in the power of His Son's Passion as He applies it to you personally: remembering your sins no more for the sake of His Son, your Savior.

✘ So tonight, you and I begin a Lenten journey with Joseph. And our journey, like Joseph's journey begins with God's remembering. He remembers you; delivers you; rescues you; and saves you in His holy Son. Amen.