

No Other Gods (5): The Gods of Love

(Genesis 29:16-30)

I. Introduction

- A. As we continue “*No Other Gods*,” we begin with another dodgy character from the OT
1. This time it’s Jacob. Sure, he was a patriarchs, son of Isaac and grandson of Abraham
 - a. His name means “*Dodgy*.” OK, it means “*He Who Supplants* or “*He Who Deceives*”
 - b. And in the first part of his story, Jacob does his level best to live up to his name!
 - 1) He deceived his brother Esau out of his birthright with the old porridge trick
 - 2) Even worse, he deceived his blind father out of the paternal blessing
 2. Our dodgy story happens while Jacob is on the from the wrath of Esau in **Genesis 28**
 - a. Jacob camps for the night on the way to relatives and he uses a rock for a pillow
 - 1) You don’t sleep well with a rock pillow (hotel pillows); he has strange dream
 - 2) He sees a stairway to heaven (*before Led Zeppelin*) and angels ascend/descend
 - b. God speaks from top to affirm the covenant given Abraham and Isaac (**28:13-15**)
 3. So he names the place “*Bethel*,” house of God. “*Surely the presence of the Lord...*”
- B. I said the story gets dodgy; here’s it starts sounding like Jacob (**Read: Genesis 28:18-22**)
1. Jacob experiences God’s presence at a place that he names Bethel— “*House of God*”
 - a. He sees angels coming and going on the stairway that leads from God Himself
 - 1) OK, we know when we sing of “*brush of angels wings*,” that’s metaphor, right?
 - 2) Not for Jacob! Saw angels. He heard God repeat the covenant of Abraham!
 - b. And his response? “*Give me food, clothes, get me home safe—I’ll cut you in 10%*”
 2. The art of the deal! Up to this point, everything in his life has been all about Jacob
 - a. He has used trickery and deceit to get his way, and he’s suffering consequences
 - b. But even when he experienced God, he’s working the angles, not seeing the angels
 - c. Point to notice before we move on—God never answers Jacob’s offer of a deal
 - 1) God doesn’t make deals! He simply is! *I am that I am!* We either bow or don’t
 - 2) We can take God on His terms or reject Him out of pocket; *He doesn’t deal!*
 3. As it turns out, God has this wrestling match scheduled for Jacob at the River Jabbok
 - a. Before Jacob can know and serve God, he must wrestle with God and with himself
 - b. Must stop being Jacob (“*deceiver*”) and become Israel (“*he who struggles with God*”)
 - c. **Point:** I think this story helps us to appreciate the next story— *of Jacob and Rachel*

II. The Gods of Love: Jacob and Rachel

- A. Now we're ready for our story. Joshua reaches the house of his uncle Laban ([Gen 29](#))
1. He makes a new life there. As it turns out, Laban had two daughters ([Gen 29:16-17](#))
 - a. No idea about Leah's weak eyes. Astigmatism? So ugly, gotta squint to look at her?
 - b. On the other hand, "*Rachel was beautiful. She had a nice figure.*" (NIRV)
 - 1) Same expression used of Queen Esther, winner of international beauty pageant
 - 2) Which daughter do you think Jacob is going to fall in love with? ([Gen 29:18](#))
 2. Jacob presents an unusual case; most men married to improve their social status
 - a. Many arranged marriages never saw bride until wedding night (*hold thought!*)
 - b. Jacob was marrying for love— but he was also getting status and money as well
- B. We took the time to read [Gen 28](#) because that might shades how we read [Gen 29](#) here
1. It's good to ask a few questions before you take this story at face value
 - a. Is this really a Hallmark Hall of Fame love-at-first-sight love story?
 - b. Is Jacob smitten with Rachel or is he at same time also smitten with himself?
 - c. Is Jacob seeking in Rachel something more than just Rachel? Are there clues here?
 2. It's traditional in most cultures to ask for daughter's hand, right? How's this? ([29:21](#))
 - a. Jacob's been working 7 years, and Jews didn't have as many hang-ups as westerners
 - b. But it's not good form to say, "*Give me your daughter; I'm really ready to bed her!*"
 - 1) That's just too graphic for the situation, even in this ancient cultural context!
 - 2) Jacob isn't just in love; he's overwhelmed by emotional and sexual neediness
 3. In fact, Jacob is so blinded by neediness, he is set up for the old "*bait and switch*"
 - a. You know the story, right? Jacob wakes up married, but not to Rachel ([29:25](#))
 - b. How? Enough wedding veils, wine and his blind need—the trickster was tricked!
 - 1) Maybe this is Laban's only chance to marry off Leah and her "weak eyes"
 - 2) Or he just get 7 years of slave labor. But he uses Jacobs neediness against him

III. The Gods of Love: Today

- A. Tim Keller suggests "*god of love*" is a way that people cope with a loss of belief in God
1. Quoting from Ernest Becker, he calls this pursuit "*the apocalyptic romance*"
 - a. Once upon a time, most people searched for transcendence and meaning in God
 - b. You looked at the stars and see "*his eternal power and divine nature*" ([Rom 1:20](#))
 - c. If you wanted part of that transcendence, you searched for connection with God

2. Modern man outgrew the very idea of God, so how will we find that transcendence?
 - a. Becker suggests that one way is through the search for transcendent romance or love
 - b. Without God, what is there that's larger, grander than me? *Maybe a spectacular we?*
 - c. If I find love in an "apocalyptic romance," there's meaning beyond myself (Becker)
The self-glorification that he needed in his innermost nature he now looked for in the lover partner. The love partner becomes the divine ideal within which to fulfill one's life. All spiritual and moral needs now become focused in one individual.
 - d. Is this why marriages implode? We're designed to be partners, friends and lovers
 - 1) We just can't hold up under the strain of being one another's "all in all!"
 - 2) Many go from relationship to relationship looking for "apocalyptic romance"
- B. God gave us love and marriage to bless us, not to become central focus of our life
 1. Look at it another way. Ever noticed how love songs can sound like praise songs?
 - a. There are likely many examples, but notice Josh Groban's "You Raise Me Up"
*You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains, you raise me up to walk on stormy seas
I am strong when I am on your shoulders, you raise me up to more than I can be*
 - 1) That's not a praise song; it was written by a secular group named *Secret Garden*
 - a) The "official" video for the song has Groban sing for a ballet company rehearsal
 - b) He sings, "when I am on your shoulder" as the ballerina is lifted on guy's shoulder
 - 2) It could easily be a praise song; in fact, it's song 4,434,612 on the CCLI license
 - b. It is a worship song; we worship love or the idea of love— "apocalyptic romance"
 2. World has moved on from "apocalyptic romance" to Tinder and "hook-up culture"
 - a. Dean Martin "Nobody til somebody loves" to Tina Turner "What's love got to do w/ it?"
 - b. In 2017 study, 91% of college women said "hook-up culture" defines their campus
 - 1) "Hook-up" is an arranged get together for a physical encounter (*kissing-to-sex*)
 - 2) There's no expectation of **before** (*dinner-n-movie*) or **after** (*further relationship*)
 - 3) It's interesting is to contrast the experience and expectations of some of women
 - a) 40% of the women had experienced a hook-up; 10% of them more than 6 times
 - b) 63% wanted to meet husband while in college; 83% said marriage was life goal
 - 4) Do you see where they just might be setting themselves up for disappointment?
 - c. Dr. Drew Pinsky made this comment on the hook-up culture on ABC news—
"For the men, this is a very comfortable situation. I tour the country and speak to colleges all across the land, and I'll tell you that women are at best ambivalent about that and very commonly disillusioned"
 3. Well, for both men and women, it's a poor substitute for romance... and a false god!

- C. But even the real thing can become a false god that can come to take the place of God
1. Most of us don't get an "*apocalyptic romance*." If we do, the fireworks won't last
 - a. Sooner or later, someone must take out the garbage; real life is—well, real life
 - b. Romance comes flickering back in fleeting moments to be treasured and fed
 - c. But then baby makes three, and it's "so long, farewell" to "*apocalyptic romance*"
 - 1) Your life and your love is enriched and enhanced in all kinds of other ways
 - 2) Then family really starts to be the very center of life, right? Wrong!
 2. "*Family Love*" can itself be a false god to compete with love of God (**Luke 14:26**)
 - a. This is the first line of several dealing with cost of discipleship—*it's a humdinger!*
 - 1) He'll clarify in the next verse by saying that we must be willing to carry cross
 - 2) That's not bearing-burdens; in that culture, when you carried a cross, you died
 - b. Lynn has prayed that—thanking God but asking I not be her center (*little off-putting*)
 - 1) What happens if we love husband, wife or children more than we love God?
 - 2) Ultimately, we put a burden on them they just can't bear— they can't be God
 - 3) Can't hold up under the expectation and strain; they can only let us down
 - c. Only God is God. As important as family really is, only God can really be God
 - 1) Day is coming when Lynn-n-Tuck will be just Lynn or Tuck. Only God is God
 - 2) He must be God alone today. Now. Not family. Not love. Not sex. God alone.
 3. What if Jacob would have seen God as God and not have just HAD to have Rachel?
 - a. What if he hadn't been so blinded Laban could have pulled the old switcheroo?
 - b. What if he hadn't married the two sisters and lit the fire of rivalry between them?
 - c. What if there that rivalry had not led to such deadly sibling rivalry between his sons?
 - d. Imagine the pain he would have missed? What if God had been God alone?

IV. Conclusion

- A. We're much too sophisticated to build little statues of gold, stone or wood to bow before
1. Many idols today are made of romance, sex and love, but they're idols nonetheless
 2. Command of the wild-eyed OT prophets still applies today, "Tear down those idols"
 3. Way that we do that with the gods of love is to love God more than we love anything
- B. Jesus says we must come to love God so much, compared to Him, we hate everything else
1. If we love God enough, the gods of love and sex will be kept in the place as blessing
 2. How much do you love God today? That's something we spend our lives answering