

I will go

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[0 : 00] as we look to God to help us turn back with me in Genesis chapter 24 to the words of verse 58. Genesis chapter 24, we read again verse 58.

And they called Rebekah and said to her, Will you go with this man? She said, I will go. So, we come this evening to the longest chapter in the whole of Genesis. And there are some people who will come to this chapter and they will say, Well, why is so much detail? Why are so many verses spent telling the story that is merely a love story? The story of a girl being brought to meet a boy.

Why is so much detail spent? Why is the story almost repeated in the middle part over a narrative that doesn't really seem to tell us all that much?

[1 : 04] But I want us to see this evening that that is not the approach we should take to this chapter at all. This chapter is so much more than just the story of a girl meeting a boy.

It's the story of the son of promise meeting his wife. His wife who would be the mother of the children of Israel. And I want us to see that as we look at this story and as we look at the characters in it, it points us to the story of the whole Bible.

As I'm sure we know, the Bible has many books, but it's one book. The Bible tells many stories, but it's one great story from beginning to end.

The story of how God, in the fullness of time, would send his son into the world to die for sinners, so that by believing on him, these sinners might have everlasting life, as John summarized in his third chapter at verse 16.

And as we come to this chapter, I want us to see that as we look at the characters, it tells us something of the characters in the big story of the Bible from beginning to end.

[2 : 17] What I don't want us to do is what's sometimes called allegory. And what that means is you look at a story like this and you look for the hidden meanings.

And you say, well, this story might tell us something about Abraham and Isaac and Rebecca, but it's nothing to do with them at all. There's a hidden meaning in this story.

That is not what we're doing at all this evening. But what I do want us to see is that sometimes stories in the Bible give us what we call types.

And I'm sure we're familiar with that. We look at the life of Joseph from time to time and we call him a type of Christ. We look at Daniel and we say he's a type of Christ and so on.

I want us to look at this story this evening and see that the true message of this story is Abraham's looking for a wife for his son. That is the true meaning.

[3 : 12] The Bible always has a true and plain meaning in every chapter. And yet I want us to see that as we do look at these characters, namely the characters of Abraham, this servant, and Rebecca, I want us to see how woven into this story, they point us to that big meta-narrative, the big narrative, the big story of the Bible, of God sending his son into the world.

So then this evening, just to look and to do a character study, to look at three characters this evening. The character of Abraham as Genesis 24 presents him to us.

The character of the servant, this nameless servant that we find in these verses before finally coming to the character of Rebecca. Firstly then, Abraham.

We're told in verse 1 that by this point in the story of Abraham's life, he is an old man. Most likely he is around 140 years of age.

His wife has passed away. Genesis 23 tells us the story of that. And Abraham, although now living without his wife, he is a rich man.

[4 : 28] He has been blessed over many years by God, living to around about the age of 140. And he's been blessed materially. He's been blessed spiritually.

But when you come to this chapter, chapter 24, the final chapter before we are told in Genesis, chapter 25 of Abraham's death, what is on Abraham's mind is the promise that God gave him. And when we do any study in the life of Abraham, it's always important to go back to that very beginning point where God gave him that promise at the very outset of his call that really encapsulates everything that we understand in the life of Abraham.

We find it. Genesis chapter 12. It may well be worth turning back to it in your Bibles. Genesis chapter 12. At the beginning, The Lord said to Abraham, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

And I will make of you a great nation. And I will bless you and make your name great. That was God's promise. That was what God said to Abraham would happen.

[5 : 39] And now, towards the end of Abraham's life, he's looking to the next generation. And he's saying, Well, God has promised to make me a great nation. He's given me a son.

But my son has no wife. And so, in order for this promise to come true, my son must have a wife for this couple to become the father and mother of a great nation, as God has promised.

And so, as we reach the end, or certainly the beginning of the conclusion of Abraham's life, we see that this promise is on his mind again.

It's never been far from his mind. It's never been far from the episodes of his life. This promise demanded faith. It demanded faith at the very outset when God said to Abraham, I want you to leave your family and your homeland, and I want you to travel to this land that I'm giving you.

This promise demanded sacrifice. You remember when God finally gave Abraham a son in his old age. Then in Genesis chapter 22, that story of when God asked Abraham to sacrifice his own son.

[6 : 54] And that this promise that God had given to him demanded such faith and sacrifice on the part of Abraham to the point where he was willing to take his only son, the son of this promise, to Mount Moriah and offer him up to the Lord as a sacrifice until the point when God intervened.

And now in Genesis 24, it's that promise that's on Abraham's mind. And so he takes his servant and he says to him, I want you to go, and I want you to go back to my own land and find a wife for my son.

And the servant who will come to study in a moment, he comes with a very understandable problem. So he says in verse 5, the servant said to him, perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land.

It's an understandable problem. What happens, Abraham? If I get to this land and she says she's not going to come, do I then come all the way back and bring Isaac with me?

And Abraham is firm. Isaac is going nowhere. Isaac is not to go with you to that land. What's the problem?

[8 : 14] Why can Isaac not leave? You see, Abraham has the promise in his mind. Isaac is the son of this promise. And in that promise, God said to Abraham, this is the land that I will give to you.

Not your own land. Not the land that you came from. But this land. And so this is where Isaac must stay. And Abraham, with this promise in his mind, says to his servant, my son Isaac cannot go back there.

Because what happens if he goes back there? And for one reason or another, the marriage means that he has to stay there. No, Isaac cannot leave.

He must stay in this land. The son of promise must not leave the promised land. And so there again, Abraham shows his faith.

But the servant says, well, what if she doesn't come? And Abraham says something remarkable. If he doesn't come, what essentially he's saying is, the Lord will provide.

[9 : 20] You know, he learned some amazing lessons in Genesis chapter 22. And perhaps the greatest lesson of all that Abraham learned was that lesson itself.

God will provide. And that's what he says to this servant. The Lord, the God of heaven, verse 7, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my kindred and who spoke to me and swore to me, to your offspring I will give this land.

He will send his angel before you. And you shall take a wife for my son from there. And you see, Abraham's faith in this moment.

God will provide. If she's not willing to come, God will provide some other way. And you know, it reminds me of something that did happen in Genesis chapter 22.

You remember that chapter where we mentioned Abraham taking his son to offer him. And in verse 5 of Genesis 22, Abraham says to the young men, stay here with the donkey and I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.

[10:27] And the word that he uses there for come again to you is in the plural. And so essentially what Abraham is saying is, myself and the boy Isaac, we will go to Mount Moriah and everything that God has asked of us there, we will do.

And then the two of us will come back again. And you say, well, Abraham, surely you know what God is asking you. And Abraham fully understands that God expects his son to be offered. But Abraham's faith in the promise is such that God said, I will give you a son. And even if it means offering him up, God can provide him back.

That's what the writer to the Hebrews, when he alludes to the life of Abraham, he suggests as much. That Abraham had faith that God could even raise Isaac up from the dead.

And that was the faith of Abraham. God will provide. And that's what he says to his servant. You go to this land. God will go before you. And he will provide a wife for my son.

[11:36] And you know, when we look, as I said at the beginning, at these stories, sometimes, although never looking for that hidden meaning, sometimes we see in the actions of the characters something that points us to other characters in the Bible.

And as we look at Isaac in Genesis 22, the obvious place to go to is God's own son himself. Genesis 22 points us to Calvary, where God himself had to deliver up his son.

The difference being no one stepped in then. But if that is the case, if Isaac is linked to Christ, then surely it follows that Abraham in some way is to be a type of God, the father.

And if that is the case, we can follow that link here into Genesis 24. As Abraham here sends his servant and says, go and find a wife for my son.

What is the message of the Bible? Why is the Bible given to us? It is the message of God the father to find a wife for his son.

[12:40] This Bible, this gospel story is God's message to his people so that they, by believing in Christ, will become what Paul and other New Testament writers will call the bride of Christ.

The church is God's bride. It is Jesus' wife. And so when we understand it in these ways, we say that Abraham's actions here point us to the actions of God.

God made a promise. He made a promise in Genesis chapter 3 that in the fullness of time he would send his son to bruise the head of the serpent.

That promise was costly. That promise demanded sacrifice just like Abraham's did. But that promise meant that on Calvary's cross he would give his son.

Nobody stepping in to intervene. He would give his son for sinners. But the story doesn't end there. You see the message of this Bible is going out to lost sinners still today.

[13:54] Asking them, will you become the wife of Jesus? Will you accept this and become part of this church who is the bride of Christ?

And so just like Abraham sent out his servant of old, to find a wife for his son. So the message of this Bible is God sending out his servants to find a wife for his son.

We see Abraham. Secondly, I want us to see the servant. We see that this man who is trusted by Abraham, who is his oldest servant, perhaps most likely his most reliable servant, he is taken by Abraham and he is made to swear an oath.

And essentially he is given what we can only deem mission impossible from human terms. He is essentially told by Abraham, I want you to go to this land that is far, far away.

And I want you to go and search for a woman that I don't know who she is, you don't know who she is, Isaac doesn't know who she is. I want you to go to this land and find someone who is willing to come back with you, to come back to a land that she might not know, to leave everything behind that she believes and trusts in, to leave her own family behind, and to come and to marry a man that she's never met before and perhaps may never have heard of before.

[15:27] That's your mission, my servant, on you go. And you know the man only has one problem with it. And it's a problem we highlighted. What if she doesn't come?

And Abraham addresses that problem and he says, I want you to go and this man goes hundreds of miles off on a journey that he has no idea about, no idea how to fulfill.

But off he goes. We know very little about this man. We don't even know his name. But I want us to place ourselves in his shoes this evening. And I'll say in a moment why I want us to do that.

This man, although we don't know his name, we know a fair bit about what he was like. He was first of all a man of prayer. Notice what he does as he leaves.

He heads off from Abraham and in verse 12, the very first thing that he does, he said, O Lord, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham and so on.

[16:35] What's the first thing he does? He prays. He's a man of prayer. He comes out on this mission that his master Abraham has given him.

And before he even begins the search, before he makes any attempt to carry out this mission, he stops and he prays. And he says, praise God if I am to be successful, it is only by you showing your steadfast love to my master Abraham will you answer my prayer.

And you know the minute he concludes his prayer, his prayer is answered. Verse 15, before he had finished speaking.

It's remarkable. Just pause at these words. This man is making this prayer. This prayer about what physically seems mission impossible. And the writer of Genesis says before he's finished speaking, behold.

And whenever you see that word behold, you sit up and you take note. And essentially what the writer is telling us is behold, here's the answer. Here's the answer to the prayer that he made.

[17:50] Rebecca comes before him. And this woman is to be the answer to his prayer. This woman is to be the wife for Isaac. And you know what it teaches us?

Is that God answers prayer. Isaiah chapter 65 verse 24, before they call, I will answer. While they are yet speaking, I will hear.

Do you know tonight our world tries to convince us that prayer is void? Prayer changes nothing. Well, if you hear such things, you direct them to perhaps experiences in your own life and the life of others.

But you can take them to the evidence of Genesis 24 and say, here's a man who was faced with an incredibly difficult task and he made his prayer.

prayer. And before he had even finished uttering his prayer, God had given the answer. What an encouragement to us this evening.

[18:58] To keep on praying. To come before a throne of grace with our huge requests. Because this God answers. But you see too what this man does.

In verse 27, he said, blessed be the Lord, the God of my master, Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness towards my master.

What's he doing there? He's returning thanks. You see, this man, he didn't just get the answer to his prayer and then say, well, that's me done.

I can carry on. No, this man receives the answer to his prayer and he goes back to the Lord and he says, you are the one who's done this. I recognize you're the one who's answered my prayer and I'm going to praise and magnify your name.

I wonder this evening how many of us, our masters are praying when our life is difficult and we face the troublous times.

[20:06] I wonder how many of us, myself included, are as good at returning praise and thanks to God when he has answered the prayer.

And you see in the life of this man, he is an example of doing both. He is someone who goes to the Lord with the difficulty, but when the prayer has been answered, he returns to the Lord and he gives him thanks and praise and honor and glory and so should we.

We should be like that leper who returned and who gives thanks to the Savior for the difference that he makes in lives. Not only are we to be a prayerful people, but we are to be a thankful people, people who are grateful for everything that God has done.

Not only is this man a man of prayer, he is a man of purpose. There is one word in this chapter that is used 22 times and it is the word master. And you see if you follow through this chapter and I would encourage you to read it again when you go home.

You read through this chapter and time and time again you hear this word on this man's lips, my master. My master Abraham, my master Abraham, my master Abraham. This man knows why he is here and he is here on his master's business.

[21:28] He is here to carry out his master's work and nothing will distract him from that. Even, we didn't read it but in verse 33 when he is offered food by his hosts, listen to what he says, I will not

eat until I have said what I have to say.

This man is remarkable. He is come on this journey and his hosts say here is some food to refresh yourself and he says I am not even going to eat until I have finished my work.

Why? Because my master has given me work to do and there will be no distractions until I finish that work. And then when the family in verse 56 try to delay him, you see how he responds to that too.

There's no delays here. I cannot have any delays. I'm on my master's business and I need to get back to it. This man is a man of purpose and nothing will get in his way.

What does that remind you and I of this evening? What does that teach us of this evening? It's that you and I are to be men and women of purpose. We too are servants of our master.

[22 : 41] This nameless servant I said a few moments ago that we are to place ourselves in his shoes. Why? Because just like him we are to be servants of the living God as our master.

The reason that he's not given a name I believe is so that we will not be distracted by names but that we can place ourselves in his shoes and say we are to follow his example.

We are to be those who are praying, pleading with the Lord, thanking the Lord for answered prayer but people too who are noticing that we are placed here on our master's business.

What is our business? What is our master's business? Well our master is in the business of saving souls. And what's remarkable? What is absolutely mystifying is that he should use sinners such as you and me to carry out his work for him.

He gives us the opportunity and the responsibility and the privilege to share a word in season. To tell others of who he is and what he's done.

[23 : 52] And you know sometimes we come to that and we say well this is where the application ends for me. Because I'm not someone who stands in a pulpit. I'm not someone who is ordained into ministry.

I'm not someone who works full time for the church. I don't see any of that in this passage. I see a man who loved his master and who realized that he was in the service of his master.

And if you're a Christian here this evening that's you and that's me. We ought to love our master.

We ought to serve our master and we must realize that we are to be men and women of purpose.

Seeing the opportunities that God has given whether that is in school, whether that is in college, university, whether that is in the workplace, whether that's in our home, whether that's on the school run, whether that's going to the shop, wherever it is, God can give us opportunities.

Do we pray for such opportunities? Do we ask that God would give us the opportunity to share a word? Do we pray that God would give us the words when he gives us the opportunity?

[25 : 09] Do we ask that we could be useful in our master's service? Are we focused on serving him? Do you see in your own congregation here an opportunity to serve?

Are you seeing something where you can say, I can do that? Perhaps I don't have the greatest of gifts of all, but perhaps I can offer my services. Perhaps I can do my bit to serve my master.

And you see, as Christians, we are all called to that. We are all called to serve our master, to be men and women of prayer, and to be men and women of purpose.

We've seen Abraham, we've seen the servant. Finally, I want us to look at Rebecca. Although she comes into the narrative really halfway through, she really comes to the climax of the narrative, and it's at the climax of the narrative that she comes under the spotlight.

As we saw in the reading, this servant, he went to the land of Abraham's homeland, and there he met with this woman whom God had put in his path, and he found out about her family, and he went with her to her family homeland, there he met with her brother and her father, and the bit of the narrative we didn't read, he explains everything that Abraham had said to him, everything that he had carried out, everything that had happened, and then he essentially says, now it's time, Rebecca is to come with us, and at first the family are more than happy, yes, the thing is of the Lord, she must go, but the next morning, perhaps after sleeping on it, her brother and her mother start to be a wee bit hesitant, oh let's delay things for ten days, let's give the girl ten days to think about it, and then we'll send her on, the man of purpose says, no, no, no, it has to be now, and so they say, well, as the narrative really reaches that climax point, the words of verse 57, let us call the young woman and ask her, and it's at this point where the whole narrative hangs in the balance, what will Rebecca say, and she's called out and she's asked one very simple question,

[27 : 31] Rebecca, will you go with this man? What challenges did she face when she was asked that question?

Well, I want to point out three this evening, just very briefly and very simply. The first one was that she had to believe that someone called Isaac actually existed. Think about it.

She perhaps didn't even know anything about this man. She perhaps had never even heard about Abraham, although she was related in some sense, she might not have heard anything about Abraham's son Isaac.

And so she has to actually believe that this man called Isaac exists and that he is going to be her husband. It's a mind-blowing possibility, but that's what is laid before her.

Will you go with this man? The first difficulty, I have to believe that he actually exists. The second difficulty is an obvious one too. She has to leave behind everything that she once called home, everything that she once relied on, and go with this relative stranger to a land that she might know nothing about.

[28 : 39] And the third difficulty is that she has to give an answer to the question here and now. No time for delays. What do you say, Rebecca?

Well, in light of that question, Rebecca's answer is one word in the Hebrew, and it's what we have translated, I will go.

And you know it's amazing. The same word that is used here of Rebecca's response is the word that is used when Abraham himself was called from Mesopotamia all of these years back in Genesis chapter 12, when God called him as we read these verses.

Our translation tells us, Abraham went, and the word that is used there for went is the same word used here in the original for I will go. Rebecca is the perfect wife for the son of promise, and she gives her consent, and off she goes.

Who does Rebecca remind us? Well, perhaps you don't even need me to make the similarity this evening. Because Rebecca, as I read this narrative, although it's all about the story of finding a wife for Isaac, it reminds me of the gospel message going out week by week by week.

[30 : 04] And men and women, boys and girls are asked the question, will you go with this man, not Isaac, but God's son, Jesus Christ?

Will you go with him? Will you trust in him? Will you believe in him? Will you follow him? What difficulties do you face in answering that question?

Well, perhaps we all have our own personal difficulties, but if I could highlight three. First of all, you have to believe that someone called Jesus actually exists.

You have to believe in God and you have to believe in his one and only son. Then secondly, you have to be willing to give up everything in life.

When Jesus called his disciples, he said, follow me. And following Jesus meant giving up everything else and making Jesus to be number one priority, making their life to be about following him, making Jesus to be the one that they're living for.

[31 : 12] And the third problem is the urgency of the response. This question needs a response now. Will you go? Will you follow Jesus?

Oh, I know. It's not the first time you've heard that question. Perhaps you've been sitting here for many's an occasion when you've heard that question asked.

but you have always responded. Either you've said no and you've got up and you've left from your pew or at one point in some place somewhere you responded like Rebecca and said, I will go.

And I know that if you did do that, although the path may have been difficult, although providence may have been hard, there's never been a day when you said, I wish I didn't go.

I love how this story ends. We come to the end and we see Isaac meeting with his bride and Rebecca, as she comes afar off, she comes off from the camel and she asks, who is that man?

[32 : 27] Walking in the field to meet us, verse 65, the servant said, it is my master. And here in this beautiful passage at the end of this chapter, you see the son of promise meeting his bride, meeting the one who will be the mother of the children of Israel.

And so the promise to Abraham rolls on and sees another generation. But you know what's interesting? The last time that we met with Isaac on the pages of the Bible was in Genesis chapter 22, when he was to be offered as a sacrifice to God.

We don't see him again until Genesis 24, when he meets with his bride. And I cannot help but think about the much bigger picture, the much bigger story, the day when God's son, who was offered not

on Mount Moriah, but Mount Calvary, and he was sacrificed there, one day he will meet with his bride.

He will meet with his wife, the church of Christ. And we're told in Revelation chapter 19 and verse 7, let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.

I believe with all my heart that Rebecca loved Isaac at that very first meeting. How can I say that? [34 : 05] Well, because as Christians, we love our Savior, even if we've never seen him physically. You see, the world speaks about love at first sight.

The Bible speaks about love without sight. 1 Peter 1 verse 8, though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him, and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.

My friend, let me ask you one final question this evening. It's a very simple one. will you go with this man, not Isaac, but God's son, and by believing in him, he will take you to that marriage feast of the Lamb, and there you will be filled with rejoicing and joy and glory inexpressible.

May God grant that each and every one of us might reply as Rebecca did. I will go. May God bless these sons. Let us bow our heads.