

Choosing a Marriage Partner (2)

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[0 : 00] Well you'll find our passage for this morning's study in Genesis 24, as read together Genesis 24 from verse 15 right through to the end of the chapter. It's a long passage so we're just going to pick out some of the main points there as we follow through with the life of Abraham. We're coming really to the end stage of Abraham's story in Genesis and we're just approaching the next chapter where we find the account of Abraham's death.

But here we're still continuing with the account that we have of searching or looking for or providing for Isaac, a wife, in accordance with Abraham's own instructions.

Now last study, you remember we saw the preparation, the careful preparation that the servant made following the instruction that was given by Abraham. And he had reached the point where he had come to where Abraham's family, Abraham's relatives, where they lived, quite a few hundred miles away from where Abraham himself had settled.

And here he was at the well, he had prayed to God and he had set out these specifications to God. And as we saw last time, the way that he mentioned what the young woman would be like and what she would do and that if this happened, then that he would know this was the woman for Isaac.

We noticed that these things would actually reveal the caliber of the woman, that it would be a means by which the servant would know that this was a very suitable and a very fitting companion for Isaac, but also somebody who would be very suitable to take over from Sarah, that wonderful woman, as she headed up the family along with Abraham.

[1 : 45] And now that that had come to an end, someone else of equal caliber needed to be placed alongside Isaac as Abraham and Sarah's successor. So that's where we went at. Now we come to the next part of the servant's successful mission, where he comes to this crucial conversation.

Rebekah appeared in verse 15, before he had finished speaking, Behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel, the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, came out with her water jar on her shoulder.

And she proceeded to do exactly as the servant had hoped and specified before the Lord. But you notice what it says there, before he had finished speaking, behold, Rebekah came out with her water jar.

And that's really itself a significant point. It's something that really tells us about God. And one of the things we'll see from this passage all the way through, indeed, especially in the servant's speech that he made to Rebekah's family, is how concerned he was to show that the Lord was controlling this, that the Lord was behind this, that it was the Lord who had really arranged all of these things, that this was the Lord's doing, that it wasn't his invention, it wasn't something that he had concocted, it wasn't something even that Abraham had come up with.

This was, in fact, the Lord who was going before him, who was making these preparations, who was demonstrating that he was in charge of these proceedings.

[3 : 15] So what is this saying to us? Well, it means that the servant was still in the process of speaking to God prayerfully, specifying these things before God, before he had finished speaking.

Rebekah came to the well where the servant was busy praying. It's really telling us that God's answer reached him before he finished praying.

God's provision had actually come to stand beside him before he had finished all that he intended to say to God.

In other words, God was demonstrating to this faithful servant that he had been there ahead of him, was going to be ahead of him, was always going to be the one supplying everything that he required in order to actually provide a wife on Isaac.

What could be clearer than that the very first person he set eyes on, and when he opened his eyes, if his eyes were shut when he was praying to God, there is Rebekah, she immediately proceeds to do the things that he had specified before God.

[4 : 23] God's answer has actually rushed towards him while he's still praying. That's sometimes how God is. He doesn't always answer as quickly as that, does he? But sometimes it is the case that God shows us clearly that he is taking care of our lives.

And if today you or I have anxieties and wonder how things are going to work for us in the next few days or in our future life, if we have problems in our own selves that we're contending with, if daily we're facing the challenges that perhaps not many other people know about, if we bring them to the Lord as we do, the Lord is going to assure us, and this is a verse that assures you, even before you finish speaking, God knows what you need.

God actually comes to supply your need. And even sometimes when it's not made especially clear to us, that doesn't mean that God hasn't heard, it doesn't mean God hasn't gone ahead of you, it doesn't mean God is not going to care for you and to look after you.

Right here, there and then, before he finished speaking, God's answer, God's provision, God's control, God's sovereignty, God's complete handling of the situation was made clear to the servant. That's what you want in life, isn't it? That's really what you want your life to be like, not something that's uncertain, not something that's left within your own ability, not something that is perhaps looking to some other source of encouragement or of strengthening.

[6 : 00] You want it to be clear to you that God is everything you need, that he assures you whatever things will be in your experience. I'm here for you. It was almost as if nobody else in the world existed at this time but this servant.

It's as if nobody else was praying to God at this time but this servant, though many others were. As far as this servant is concerned, God has so completely focused his attention on him, it feels like he's just the only person God is interested in.

What a wonderful situation to have, that God would assure you that he is your God to that extent. And then, of course, we find a description of Rebekah.

The young woman was very attractive in appearance, a maiden whom no man had known. And then you go to verse 43 and you find another part of the description as he's recounting to a family what he said to the Lord, Behold, I'm standing by the spring of water.

Let the virgin who comes out to draw water to whom I shall say. That's the description he has out there. The young maiden and virgin, a woman who was very beautiful to look at. And all of that together means two things.

[7 : 14] She was old enough to be married. She was of marriageable age. That's what the word maiden means in Hebrew in the first reference there in verse 16.

And the word virgin, along with what's in verse 15, means that she had not known the man. She had not been sexually active. She was a virgin. She was a pure, untouched maiden.

And that's important. We said at the beginning that this chapter actually throws at us things which are of ethical and moral importance, especially when we are surrounded, as indeed would have been the case for Abraham and his family, surrounded with very different views of life, surrounded with very different views of what's right and wrong on a personal basis, in ethical and moral issues. But this is the teaching that you and I want to keep to. This is, in fact, what runs right through the Bible, that sexual activity outwith marriage as long in the eyes of God.

Now you and I live in a generation that encourages sexual activity, outwith marriage and before marriage.

[8 : 27] And in different ways to be within a marriage relationship, which is where it is to be confined to. And the Bible is not embarrassed about telling us these things, because we realize that God is actually saying to us, this is important for your moral and spiritual well-being.

And you have to live differently to the way that the world lives, in the way that it sees what is important and isn't in human life, what is acceptable and isn't in human life. Because what the world of today, especially, by and large, and most agencies and most sources of teaching, will actually tell our young people, it's not wrong for you to do this, but be careful.

Take precautions. And what's the end result of that? Family traumas. Unwanted pregnancies. Children brought into the world that aren't wanted.

Sexual diseases. Transmitted diseases. There's been an increase in all of that over the past generation, I'm sure, at least, certainly in more recent times.

Why is that the case? Because people are departing from what God has set out as the way by which we come to enjoy blessedness in human life and in human relationships.

[9 : 53] It's not fashionable at all to think that the Bible says, don't do it. Don't do it is just something that people don't want to hear about.

And the teaching that's given them is not, don't do it. But do it, it's okay. But do it with certain conditions.

Well, God is saying, don't do it. Keep to my rules. Keep to my specifications.

And in all of these moral and ethical situations, resist temptation. Exercise restraint. Use what the New Testament so often calls, refers to, in referring to a Christian life.

It's a word that Paul uses frequently. Self-control. Self-control. And you see, that's why, we say this very often, but it's important to keep saying it, and especially hope of benefit to our young people especially.

[11 : 03] The gospel is the only cure for human ills, for the ills of our society. And the sad thing is, the more you find people going away from the gospel, and not being interested in the gospel, the more you're going to find these deviations in human behavior, and the consequent problems that follow them.

That's why we need to reach out with the gospel. That's why we need to be involved in gospel evangelism. That's why we need to really appeal to people, to come to consider the values that are set out in the Bible, the principles of conduct and behavior that are set out in the Bible, the benefits of having sexual relations confined to marriage, the benefits of a proper married life and family life in itself.

None of that's going to be perfect, we know, in this life. But God tells us what it is to live a pure life, and to follow what He Himself sets out for our good and for our benefit.

That's how it was with Rebecca. She was a young woman of manageable age who had known no man. She was a virgin. She was, in God's eyes, what a young woman of her age should have been. We have to transmit that teaching to the world of our day as well. And you can see then how the man actually came to look at her after she had given him a drink, and the camels as well.

[12 : 38] He took out these gifts for her. He gazed at her in silence. In verse 21 there, perhaps he was just there wanting just final confirmation, waiting for the Lord to speak to him that this was in fact undoubtedly the one that had been chosen for Isaac.

But you see, when he actually realized this, he actually then prayed once again to God in verse 27. Verse 26, The man bowed his head and worshipped the Lord and said, Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forgotten his steadfast love and faithfulness to my master. As for me, the Lord has led me in the way to the house of my master's kinsmen. Now we saw last time that this was a man of God, that this was a man of humility.

And it's interesting that as the chapter goes on and as the more the Lord answers his prayers, the more the Lord speaks to him and confirms to him that he is in fact in the right way, the more of an effect it has on him to humble him further.

[13 : 52] Because for a worldly man, success, which is really what he is confessing there, he has been successful in his mission. He has been successful on his journey.

The Lord has brought him this success, but he does not attribute the success to anyone other than the Lord. It does not actually inflate him with a sense of self-achievement, which is what it would have done for a worldly man who was looking to his own abilities.

The more this man knows success from the Lord, the further down he goes in his humility and in his dependence upon the Lord. And you see that from his prayers and there's a lesson for that for ourselves as well.

And it's interesting how there in verses 27, 28 or 26, 27 when he bows his head and worships the Lord, he's not afraid to do that just instantly there and then.

Rebekah's there. There are plenty others there I'm sure as well at the well. This was the time of day when people commonly came out to draw water from the well and take it back to their homes.

[14 : 59] He's not embarrassed by just instantly bowing his head and worshipping the Lord.

Neither should we be. You don't find Muslims embarrassed in their place of work or whatever it is at a particular time of day to bring out their prayer mat, to go on their knees, to engage in what they

regard as prayer.

Are we as Christians embarrassed publicly to pray to God, to stand in the street and to pray to God? How often would we do that? Well, that's what this man did.

He bowed his head and worshipped the Lord and said, Blessed be the Lord. And you see, the order within his thanksgiving is important. He begins with God. The most important thing for him is that God has actually been honoured in the whole thing.

Blessed be the Lord. And the second thing for him is his master Abraham who has blessed my master Abraham who has not forsaken his steadfast love and faithfulness towards my master.

He begins with God. That's what he puts first. He is delighted that God has been honoured.

Secondly, he's delighted that he's remembered Abraham that God has not forsaken him, that he's shown him steadfast love.

[16:15] And out of all of that, thirdly, but not in a small way, thirdly, he speaks of his own delight. As for me, the Lord has led me in the way to the house of my master's kin.

That's the order and the pattern for yourself and for myself as when. That's how we get the most joy and delight out of our Christian walk with God and with our fellow Christians when we actually have the priority of God first, others second, then ourselves.

And you get more for yourself that way, far more than if you had put yourself first. That's what the servant is teaching us. There's the crucial conversation that took place leading to this prayer.

Then, we come to the considered negotiation. Rebekah came to her household. She ran back to the house, told them about this and her brother Laban.

Now, it's interesting that Laban is the spokesman. Bethuel is still living. Her father is still living. But it's probably because he's maybe old or infirm or not able to go about.

[17:27] Whatever the reason is, it's Laban who's actually heading up the family and does the speaking. And when Rebekah told the household about what had happened at the well, you notice how Laban instantly made his way to where the servant was still standing by the well.

Now, there's a significant point actually just in passing, really, it's just a mention of it in passing. And it's the fact that the Lord had his people in this part of the world, even though you might not expect it.

Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees along with his father Terah and his wife Sarah and all their household. And you might say, that's taking out of Ur of the Chaldees these believers who have come to know the Lord and is just leaving Ur of the Chaldees and that area to the darkness of paganism which is what God brought them out of.

But that's not the case. The Lord has been at work in this family. Though Abraham is now hundreds of miles away, yet the family of his brother Nahor are God-fearing people.

Nahor, Laban is a believer, Rebekah is a believer, the family is a family of believers. Let that be a lesson to ourselves. You just don't know where you're going to come across a family of believers.

[18:56] Maybe it's the place you least expected. And whoever it is in the district of Point today that you and I might think as the least likely next elder knock-free church, that may be quite different to the Lord's plan.

Don't ever discount anyone or any family, because that's just maybe where the Lord is presently at work by his spirit.

That's how it was. He met this family and instantly he recognized they're people of God. They're people who know the Lord. And so Laban ran out to meet him.

Now, as the story goes on, it's really put as you read through it, I would recommend you read through it once again when you get home or when you get time, and just take it as a wonderfully put together story, because the sense of build-up and the sense of excitement is really there as the story progresses.

And you get this with Laban, as he comes here, he runs towards this man. He doesn't just take his time and reflect upon things as if he was doubting it, he just rushes out to where this man is, and as he's still standing there by the camels, with the camels, come in, he says, O blessed of the Lord, why are you standing outside?

[20:15] There's a motto for a Christian if ever there was one. When you come across a fellow, Christian, somebody you've ever met before, somebody who's come hundreds of miles, somebody who's from a very different background, when you recognize the Lord in them, well, your soul unites with theirs.

You actually bring them into your fellowship. That's what it's there for. And here's this man who's still standing there by himself with the camels, wondering what the response to Rebecca's story, her account, has been, and all of a sudden he sees this man rushing towards him, can't wait to reach him, and the first thing he says to him is, come out, come in, why are you standing outside, you blessed of the Lord?

He recognizes he's a fellow believer. So it's concerns to show grace and hospitality and kindness to him. and then you find this long speech on the part of the servant that you read all the way down through there until you reach verse 49.

It's not a rambling, incoherent speech. And you might ask yourself, why does Genesis give us this? Why does the chapter give us all of this again?

Could it not just have said the servant told them all that had happened at the well? And then come to summarize the story. Why does it go through the process of giving us all of these details again in the servant speech?

[21 : 50] Well, like we said at the beginning, it was so that the servant would present to this household one thing and one thing very clearly. That the Lord had sent him, that the Lord was in this matter, that he was not trying to take Rebecca from them for any other reason than that she was the Lord's choice for his master.

Now that really, again, brings a great challenge to ourselves. Because when we're in conversion and when we're in fellowship with each other, when we're recounting the experiences of our lives, are we as careful as we should be to really make sure that it's the Lord that comes to the fore, that it's the Lord that has the primary place in our words, that the way that we put things brings the honour to God and not to ourselves.

That's what this man is doing, and all the way through, as you read again through what he says, it's about the Lord, the Lord, God of my master Abraham has sent me.

And now if you're going to show steadfast love, covenant words, the Lord blessed, the God of my master Abraham blessed me in the right way. All the way through, the Lord comes to the fore.

Let's make today a day for the Lord for ourselves, a day when the Lord will be at the forefront of what we're doing, even if it's just standing at the cooker, doing the potatoes or whatever, let's think of the Lord, and the Lord's kindness, and the Lord's steadfast love, and the Lord's faithfulness, and the Lord's arranging of our lives, and the Lord's wisdom.

[23 : 30] That's what it was for this man. And you see, again, he worships. When they said, this thing is from the Lord, we cannot speak to you bad or good, behold, Rebecca's before you.

Then he bowed himself to the earth, isn't it interesting, he bowed his head before, and now he bows himself to the earth, you see, the more this man comes to know the Lord, and to know the Lord's provision for him, and the Lord's care for him, the deeper down he goes into this frustration, this humility, this sense of dependence, this confession of faith, and dependence upon God.

He bows himself to the earth, right there and then, the presence of this family, on his knees he goes and he gives God the thanks. man's I remember some years ago, picking up a group of Koreans who were with us, I remember a few years ago we had Koreans, and this group was staying in the manse with us, met them at the airport, and then took them out to the manse, and showed them into the lounge, put their cases just at the bottom of the stairs, meantime showed them into the lounge, there was a nice fire on, and I went to do something, came in, and was about to speak to them, to welcome them formally, there they were all together, sitting on the couch, praying to God.

That's the first thing on their minds, that was the first thing they did. They actually gave thanks to God for their safe journey, for the welcome they'd received, for the privilege of knowing other Christians.

They told me afterwards that's what they were doing. I felt that small in thinking, would I have made that my priority, if I'd gone into somebody's house that I'd never been in before, would I have sat myself down or stood and bowed my head and visibly prayed to the Lord, before saying anything else, or even hearing anything else, from whoever was in the house.

[25 : 39] That's what this man's like. That's the dimension of his life, that's the thrust of his life. That's the way that his life is geared to thinking about God first in all situations, or that you and I would learn more from this about how our own life is to be arranged as well, and how in all the circumstances of life, we put God before us and put God at the top of the list.

Well, we then come to the way that the seventh returns home, from verse 54, and I'm just really going to summarize that in the time available. So, they spent the night there, and then he said in the

morning, send me away to my master.

Now, the way in which that's put is, you notice that there's an attempt there really to delay things. Her mother leave on her brother, first of the family, say, leave her for at least ten days, just give us another ten days of her news. That's a test for the servant, isn't it?

The servant has had it made clear to him, this is definitely the woman that must go back with you to be Isaac's wife. And now there's an attempt to delay things, to just drag things back a wee bit, and not just go immediately.

[26 : 59] And life is like that, and your decisions sometimes are like that, and that's where you find temptation, attempting to just drag you back from doing what you know you should be doing in obedience to the Lord.

Tonight we're going to look at the essential of obedience, and how, why and how obedience is another essential in our lives. Well here is a man who wants to be obedient to God, he knows the situation, he knows he must go back as soon as possible to his master, and get things in order there so that his master can have this woman as his wife, and things can move on in the household, but he's being tempted to remain.

Now there are things that you and I must do for the Lord, and things today that you know you should be doing for the Lord, and things about yourself that you know that you want to progress in your life spiritually, and you know it's the right thing for you to do.

But then you hear this voice, don't do it yet. Give yourself a bit more time. Just hand on a moment. Don't commit yourself quite yet.

Don't come out openly yet on the Lord's side, even though you know that you're a Christian, and you know that that's what you really should be and want to do deep down. Well, you know, for you and for me, when an action is clearly shown to us to be something that is right for us to do, something that you have a desire to do, don't delay doing it.

[28 : 35] Don't let any temptation come in the way of what you know is right for you to do in your life, for the Lord, in your relationship to the Lord, or to his people, or to his church, or to communion, whatever it is.

Because this man would have none of that. The attempt really failed. They wanted understandably to keep, but another while at least ten days. No, he said, don't delay me. Since the Lord has prospered my way, send me a way that I may go to my master.

Since the Lord has made it clear to me, there is no reason why it should be delayed. I have to do it now. That is what he is saying to us. Don't delay.

What is your duty? In response to God and what he wants you to do for him. And then there is the great question. A letter that she is called in, will you go with this man?

And she said, I will go. Now many famous sermons have been preached on that verse. Will you go with this man? Really putting this man as a kind of representation of Jesus.

[29 : 40] And the question put evangelistically, will you go with this man? And she said, yes, I will go. It is not right, I do not think, to make this man a representative of the Lord.

But the question is relevant to our situation and to our relationship with God. Because this is really putting this woman back where Sarah was when she left Ur of the Kaldes. She had to leave her native land, she had to cut off her ties with her native land, in order to go to a new location, with a new set of circumstances all together.

And what Rebecca is being asked is basically the same thing as Sarah. Are you prepared to cut your ties with where you are and go and settle where you are going to be married to Isaac in a new setting, in a new environment?

And the Lord is saying to us constantly, will you cut your ties with the world? Will you cut your ties with what you are naturally? Will you cut your ties with sin? Will you cut your ties with sin and with death?

Something else. We will see it, we said this evening, in the way that Paul says in Romans 6 there, you have to cut your tie to Adam in order to be joined on to Christ. In order that your life will then be firmly based on the proper root, that is Christ, so that his life will flow into yours.

[31 : 03] Will you go? Will you cut your ties? Will you take up this new life with Jesus Christ, in that relationship with him, that will bring you everything you need for this life and for the life to come?

God's words to send her away and the blessing that they have, this family blessing in verse 60, it's really just an echo isn't it, of God's words to Abraham in the previous chapter 16.

And then you come to Isaac, coming to Mary. Isaac, had returned from Bir Lahai Roy. Go back to chapter 16, it's an interesting place, it's associated with God's provision, God's looking after Hagar when she had to leave Abraham's home.

And Bir Lahai Roy means the well of the living one. And she gave God a name there, thou Lord seest me, you are the one who sees. And we saw at the time that it really effectively means God will see to it.

That's basically what this is reminding us of. God will see to things. God will look after things for us. And when he saw Rebecca, Isaac had returned from there, he was meditating, probably thinking about this servant and what had become of him and when was he coming back.

[32 : 36] And there, as he looks towards the horizon, he sees the camels coming. And there's his answer. There's the answer to his prayer and to his meditation and to his need. And you notice how it ends there.

We're going through this quite fast. You can look at your notes afterwards, but there's a sense of great excitement there as the story reaches its climax there. The servant told Isaac all the things that he had done.

And Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah, his mother. And he took Rebecca and she became his wife and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death. That shows us that she took over the role of Sarah, the head of the family.

It was into Sarah's tent that had been vacant since she died that he took his new wife. And we read there that he loved her.

He'd never seen her before this. But the marriage was not based on convenience. It wasn't a forced marriage. It wasn't against her will or against his.

[33 : 44] It was a marriage based on the only thing that true marriage can be based upon. It was based on love. He loved her.

And on the basis of that love they lived their lives together from this moment onwards. So much to cram into one study but it's all there as you go back over it.

Think of those important issues and principles that come to apply to our own life as we live it out for the Lord. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for the abundance that we have in your word.

For the way that it brings to us so much that is relevant for us to apply today. We pray that you would give us grace to do so. For Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.