

Male & Female Isaac And Rebekah

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Date: 23 July 1989

Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] Our God, as we have prayed that you would speak to us, we know that you have spoken, and we know that in the past we haven't heard.

Grant that this morning, by the work of your Holy Spirit, the thing which you have to say to each one of us, you will give us grace to hear. We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Coming back from holidays, it feels a little like going out to start your car after it's been standing in the cold for a month, and whether the engine will turn over or not is the question I have in my mind, the preaching engine.

Anyway, here we go. From time to time it happens that a young couple come along and say, we would like to get married in your church.

I assure them that it's not my church. I just work here. And I say to them, well, now, why would you choose this church?

[1 : 14] Well, it's a very pretty church. It's a nice place to get married. And that generally is the signal that at that point you have to take drastic action and push them in the deep end and see if they can swim.

And so I give them a few pointers about what Christian marriage is and what's involved in being married in this pretty church. I say, you recognize that marriage is meant for life.

Oh. And fidelity before and after marriage is the standard that we would like you to maintain. Thud. You recognize that it is your decision that you are confirming before God that the one whom you're marrying is the one whom he has chosen for you to marry.

And you're standing up before your friends and making that declaration to them. I see. And that it is a covenant taken when you're 20 years old that is still to be a working covenant when you're 70 years old.

[2 : 33] Well, then I go on and say it is God's chief instrument of teaching you about the kind of relationship that he wants with you.

That is, not a relationship which for the period of 10 or 20 or 30 years you can hide your imperfections, but that you will be, as it were, open to one another and utterly dependent upon the grace of repentance and forgiveness and renewal as a work of God in the relationship.

And then to sum it all up, I tell them that marriage really isn't that important in itself. It's something that tells us of something far greater.

It's meant to be for you a glimpse of something infinitely more God has in his mind and heart for you.

And that you won't find all the fulfillment that you want in marriage. You will only find the promise of a fulfillment that God will one day give to you.

[3 : 48] Well, they survive that generally. Mostly because I think they don't hear it anyway. But I... And I'm not sure that many of us want to hear it.

But that's the basis of it. And that's why in this summer series, we're working at the relationship between a man and a woman and recognizing that it is the most powerful generator of human creativity that there is.

That it is the most significant reality in the life of human beings. And that the whole course of history is shaped by the decisions that are made when one man says to one young woman, I take you to be my wedded wife.

And she to him, I take you to be my wedded husband. And that's the... That particular mystery, which is at the center of the whole of our humanity and the whole of our history, is the mystery we're looking into by examining, as you did last week, Adam and Eve.

And this week, Isaac and Rebecca. And next week and the following weeks, other famous couples in Scripture. Now the story.

[5 : 13] So you can settle back and listen to the story. In the land of Mesopotamia, which is the middle of the rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, was an ancient city called Ur of the Chaldeans.

And a man who lived there in ancient times, long before Mercedes and potato chips, I might point out, the man that lived there, his name was Terah.

And he had three sons. The three sons were Haran, Nahor, and Abraham. And his family was called to leave Ur of the Chaldeans and to go to the land of Canaan on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean.

And that there he would become a great nation. So he and his family started out for the land of Canaan. But they never made it.

They got further up the river, as it were, to a city called Haran. And there they stayed. And from that family, only one son went on to the promised land.

[6 : 34] And when he left, they waved goodbye, and they never expected to see him again. And in fact, they never did see him again.

The family had been given a promise, and they had only gone part way towards that promise, which is profound, isn't it?

Most of us at some point in our relationship to God are given a promise, and we only go part way. Well, they settled there.

The one son who took his barren wife and his nephew and went to claim the promise, the land and the destiny to which God had called him.

And he became a very famous man of whom it was said that he believed God. And this was counted to him for faith. And that one reality in that one man's life is the whole basis of our meeting together this morning.

[7 : 45] that we might affirm our belief in God and entrust our lives to him. Well, off he went and disappeared across the horizon to the west.

Back in Haran, meanwhile, generations succeeded generation. Haran, one of the sons, died. Nahor became the chief man in a city which was named after his deceased brother, Haran.

He had a son whose name was Bethuel. Bethuel had a daughter whose name was Rebecca. And so two generations later, a girl is born and brought up in that family who is aware of the promise that was given to her family two generations before her.

And as a young woman, she meditated upon that promise that had been given and perhaps secretly longed that somehow she might find fulfillment in her life for the promise that had been given to her grandparents.

And so she, we're told, was ministered to by angels, like an angel who came and announced to the Virgin Mary that she should be the mother of the Christ child.

[9 : 19] So angels came to this girl and prepared her in a particular way for a destiny which she had no idea of and no understanding of.

the girl was, as I suppose, most young people dreamed of marriage, dreamed of children, dreamed of a home in which she would be the mother and wife in the home.

But her duties were very practical and that was she belonged to a family that had sheep and cattle and she was responsible for looking after them.

and each day at evening she went out to the spring of water carrying the water pot on her shoulder to draw water for the family's youth.

And as she went, she went with the other girls in the community. They all went out together and they all took home water in a pot on their shoulder. Well, one night when she went out there, there had arrived at the spring of water just before a caravan from the west.

[10 : 32] A caravan of richly ornamented camels, ten in all, the men who drove them and the servants who worked with them. And the master of the caravan was a man who in his appearance and in his spiritual stature must have been a splendid man indeed.

And this man came up to her and said, May I drink of the water from your pot? And she let down the water from her shoulder into her hand and gave him to drink.

And as he drank, she said to him, And I will draw water for your camels also. And you can imagine what drawing water for ten travel-weary camels might involve.

It would be a staggering job to undertake and I'm not sure how many would be prepared to. Whether she was conscious of making this reply, it was the willingness of her heart that was expressed in this lovely deed.

And the man stood and watched her and thought about the strange way that the Lord God had led him.

[11 : 54] And when she had finished drawing the water, he said to her, Whose daughter are you? And she said, I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Nahor, the chief man of the city.

And he gave her a gold ring for her nose and lovely gold bracelets for her arms and said, Have you got accommodation for me and all these men and all these camels that you're...

We have rooms, we have hay, we have straw, we have everything you need. Come. But he didn't come, he stayed there until she had gone home and shown the bracelets to her family and the ring in her nose and they were very impressed.

And her brother Laban, who had something of a heart for gold, as you find out later in the scriptures, he ran out to the well and he saw the man and said, Come.

come. And took him to their home and there he ungirded the camels and laid out the straw and gave them food, gave the men water to wash themselves with and rooms to stay in and then he asked them to come that they might join together in supper.

[13 : 22] And so they went through all these and they came together for supper and then the servant of Abraham, who was the leader of the caravan, said, First, I want to tell you what my business is.

And so he told them his business. He said, my master, Abraham. And that, as far as we know, is the first time they knew who he was.

The first realization they had that the long-lost brother and uncle had again made contact through this his servant.

And the servant described his cattle, his flocks, his herds, his servants, men servants, maid servants, his gold and his silver and the wonderful way that God had prospered them.

And they knew from seeing the caravan that it came from a very rich man indeed. And then he said, You will remember that Sarah, his wife, was barren.

[14 : 31] But God gave him a son by Sarah in their old age. And this son is now grown and ready for marriage. marriage. And Abraham made me make a promise, an oath, that I would not let his son come back, nor would I let him marry one of the Canaanite women, but that I would come and find a wife for him of his own people.

He said, I was required to put my hand in his thigh. A very intimate action, which I suppose indicated a very intimate promise.

A promise not only to Abraham, but symbolically to his heirs as well. And I made that promise. And I said, What if I travel all that distance?

What if? The girl won't come. And he said, If you get there and the girl won't come, then you are released of your oath.

Well, he said, I traveled with this company and we came to the spring of water this evening. And as the girls came out to draw water for the city, I prayed, Let the one to whom I say give me to drink.

[15 : 57] And she lets down her water pot and gives me to drink. And then says to me, And I will water your camels also. Let her be the one.

And so I approached this girl and I said to her, Give me to drink. And she let down the water pot and gave me to drink and said, and I will water your camels also.

And they took that to be a sign of God's ordering the whole circumstance of this occasion. And the servant said to them, Will you allow Rebecca, your daughter, to return with me and to marry Isaac, Abraham's son?

son. And both Bethuel and Laban, her brother and her sister, having been asked in a sense, who giveth this woman to be married to this man, said, what can we do?

it is of the Lord. And so the banquet began, as it were, the sufferer began, and they all shared in the food, and the servant brought out wonderful gifts and gave them to the mother and to the brother and to the family of Rebecca, and they had a wonderful evening together, and the next morning the servant said, then now I must return.

[17 : 27] And the brother and the mother said, oh no, you must stay at least ten days while we prepare, because they knew that their daughter would walk out of their life and in all probability

never return.

And they couldn't let her go. And the servant said, but I must go, the Lord has prospered my journey thus far, I can't disobey him by staying here when it is my business to return.

And so they said, we will ask the girl. And they asked Rebecca and said, will you this day go with this man to your betrothed, who is the son of Abraham in the promised land?

And you see, in a wonderful way, Rebecca had been prepared to answer that question, and she said, I will go. And so the caravan set off that day, and she said farewell to all her family.

They prayed that she might be the mother of thousands and of tens of thousands. And she returned, and one evening as the caravan drew near to their destination, they came across a tent in the Negev desert, and a young man wandering out in the desert alone and meditating.

[18:54] And young men of that age spend a lot of time wandering in the desert alone and meditating, how God might meet the deep, felt, unarticulated needs that crowd in upon them.

In a wonderful way, when the girl said, who is that man? And the servant said, he is my master's daughter, and she veiled herself and was brought to Isaac, and Isaac received her, and the marriage was consummated.

And that is the story of one of the patriarchs. And it's a wonderful and beautiful story coming from way back in time, centuries and centuries ago.

The old man, who despite the aging of his body, his faith was burning, and he knew that God's purpose was to be fulfilled through the son of promise, Isaac.

And then there was the amazing servant, who did perfectly the will of his master, though it is suspected that that very servant would have been the one to have inherited all that belonged to his master, if his master had not had the son.

[20:15] It was given to him. But his own purposes were forgotten as he sought obedience to his master, the perfect picture of a disciple who acknowledges Christ as his master and forsakes everything in order to be obedient.

It was the girl who submitted to God's purpose, the purpose of the Lord God for her. It's interesting to note in the light of the modern sort of feminist debate that in terms of women's submission, the submission of Rebecca at the dawn of history was to the Lord's purpose first.

That was the thing that motivated her. mother. And then there was the young man to whom she went back and who was indeed a peculiar young man, being the son of his father in his old age and having scored on his memory the time when his father was prepared to sacrifice him in obedience to God.

A recognition of what his life was about, that his life was to be subject to the purposes of God. Well, let me ask you, I want you to say, ask me this question.

What is the take home from this story? What do you take home with you? Well, I recognize that a lot of you, I mean, I can contemplate the possibility that there may be angry feminists in this congregation.

[22:06] There may be people whose most profound hurt in life has come out of a marriage which they thought was going to work but didn't. I know that there will be people in this congregation who have sought perhaps for many years to find the partner for their lives which has never been granted to them.

and I know there are those who have been widow and I know there are those who as who finding in themselves a lesbian or homosexual orientation wouldn't know what to make of this story perhaps. But what I would suggest to you is that this story is typical of the whole scripture scripture scripture doesn't affirm you scripture always confronts you and challenges you at the most profound areas in your life and the function of what to do when you are confronted by scripture is not in a sense to hivel off and to dismiss this ancient myth of the Old Testament but to say why am I angry why am I hurt why is my life so different than what is spoken of here and I suspect that if you will take that point at which this story perhaps runs confronts you in a way that you don't find pleasant that that may be the very point at which this story can have the most healing and rewarding and renewing effect on you and on your faith in Jesus

Christ the point at which the story turns you off could be by God's grace the point at which the story turns you on to God's plan and purpose in your life in spite of the fact that your life may be strewn with the wreckage of failure in this area there is a wonderful verse in the epistle to the Hebrews from chapter 11 which describes this whole time in the history of the people of God and it says this of

Isaac and of Rebecca and of those who followed on in response to the commission and promise of God it says this if they had been thinking of the land from which they had gone out they would have had opportunity to return to return to return to return to return you can go back go back on the promises of God you can be in a sense like this family that never went forward on the promises of God but the people of

God are described here as those who if they had been thinking of the land from which they had gone out they would have had opportunity to return but as it is they desire a better country that is a heavenly one they move towards the fulfillment of all God's promises to us in Christ that's who Abraham was and that's who these people are and that's who we are called to be Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as faith and righteousness and that's what happens to us in the midst of our world we are those who by God's grace desire a better country that is a heavenly one and that's the direction in which by faith we move as we are called by

[26 : 42] God and confronted by God's promise so may God very much bless your lives through this story from Genesis 24 of Isaac and Rebecca Amen Matthew .

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