

Genesis 24: 1-67 (1-9) A Good God 4/8/18

Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years. And the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. ² And Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he had, “Put your hand under my thigh, ³ that I may make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell, ⁴ but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac.”⁵ The servant said to him, “Perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land. Must I then take your son back to the land from which you came?” ⁶ Abraham said to him, “See to it that you do not take my son back there. ⁷ The LORD, the God of heaven, 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.”⁸ But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you must not take my son back there.” ⁹ So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter.

¹⁰ Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and departed, taking all sorts of choice gifts from his master; and he arose and went to Mesopotamia to the city of Nahor. ¹¹ And he made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at the time of evening, the time when women go out to draw water. ¹² And he said, “O LORD, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. ¹³ Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. ¹⁴ Let the young woman to whom I shall say, ‘Please let down your jar that I may drink,’ and who shall say, ‘Drink, and I will water your camels’—let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master.”

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. ¹⁶ The young woman was very attractive in appearance, a maiden whom no man had known. She went down to the spring and filled her jar and came up. ¹⁷ Then the servant ran to meet her and said, “Please give me a little water to drink from your jar.” ¹⁸ She said, “Drink, my lord.” And she quickly let down her jar upon her hand and gave him a drink. ¹⁹ When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, “I will draw water for your camels also, until they have finished drinking.” ²⁰ So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw water, and she drew

for all his camels. ²¹ The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether the LORD had prospered his journey or not.

²² When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold ring weighing a half shekel, and two bracelets for her arms weighing ten gold shekels, ²³ and said, "Please tell me whose daughter you are. Is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?" ²⁴ She said to him, "I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor." ²⁵ She added, "We have plenty of both straw and fodder, and room to spend the night." ²⁶ The man bowed his head and worshiped the LORD ²⁷ and said, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the LORD has led me in the way to the house of my master's kinsmen." ²⁸ Then the young woman ran and told her mother's household about these things.

²⁹ Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban. Laban ran out toward the man, to the spring. ³⁰ As soon as he saw the ring and the bracelets on his sister's arms, and heard the words of Rebekah his sister, "Thus the man spoke to me," he went to the man. And behold, he was standing by the camels at the spring. ³¹ He said, "Come in, O blessed of the LORD. Why do you stand outside? For I have prepared the house and a place for the camels." ³² So the man came to the house and unharnessed the camels, and gave straw and fodder to the camels, and there was water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him. ³³ Then food was set before him to eat. But he said, "I will not eat until I have said what I have to say." He said, "Speak on."

³⁴ So he said, "I am Abraham's servant. ³⁵ The LORD has greatly blessed my master, and he has become great. He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male servants and female servants, camels and donkeys. ³⁶ And Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my master when she was old, and to him he has given all that he has. ³⁷ My master made me swear, saying, 'You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell, ³⁸ but you shall go to my father's house and to my clan and take a wife for my son.' ³⁹ I said to my master, 'Perhaps the woman will not follow me.' ⁴⁰ But he said to me, 'The LORD, before whom I have walked, will send his angel with you and prosper your way. You shall take a wife for my son from my clan and from my father's house. ⁴¹ Then you will be free from my oath, when you come to my clan. And if they will not give her to you, you will be free from my oath.'

⁴² "I came today to the spring and said, 'O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, if now you are prospering the way that I go, ⁴³ behold, I am standing by the spring of water. Let the virgin who comes out to draw water, to whom I shall say, "Please give

me a little water from your jar to drink,” 44 and who will say to me, “Drink, and I will draw for your camels also,” let her be the woman whom the LORD has appointed for my master's son.’

45 “Before I had finished speaking in my heart, behold, Rebekah came out with her water jar on her shoulder, and she went down to the spring and drew water. I said to her, ‘Please let me drink.’ 46 She quickly let down her jar from her shoulder and said, ‘Drink, and I will give your camels drink also.’ So I drank, and she gave the camels drink also. 47 Then I asked her, ‘Whose daughter are you?’ She said, ‘The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore to him.’ So I put the ring on her nose and the bracelets on her arms. 48 Then I bowed my head and worshiped the LORD and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way^[e] to take the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son. 49 Now then, if you are going to show steadfast love and faithfulness to my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, that I may turn to the right hand or to the left.”

50 Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, “The thing has come from the LORD; we cannot speak to you bad or good. 51 Behold, Rebekah is before you; take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the LORD has spoken.”

52 When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the earth before the LORD. 53 And the servant brought out jewelry of silver and of gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah. He also gave to her brother and to her mother costly ornaments. 54 And he and the men who were with him ate and drank, and they spent the night there. When they arose in the morning, he said, “Send me away to my master.” 55 Her brother and her mother said, “Let the young woman remain with us a while, at least ten days; after that she may go.” 56 But he said to them, “Do not delay me, since the LORD has prospered my way. Send me away that I may go to my master.” 57 They said, “Let us call the young woman and ask her.” 58 And they called Rebekah and said to her, “Will you go with this man?” She said, “I will go.” 59 So they sent away Rebekah their sister and her nurse, and Abraham's servant and his men. 60 And they blessed Rebekah and said to her,

“Our sister, may you become
thousands of ten thousands,
and may your offspring possess
the gate of those who hate him!”

61 Then Rebekah and her young women arose and rode on the camels and followed the man. Thus the servant took Rebekah and went his way.

62 Now Isaac had returned from Beer-lahai-roi and was dwelling in the Negeb. 63 And Isaac went out to meditate in the field toward evening. And he lifted up his eyes and saw, and behold, there were camels coming. 64 And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she dismounted from the camel 65 and said to the servant, "Who is that man, walking in the field to meet us?" The servant said, "It is my master." So she took her veil and covered herself. 66 And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. 67 Then Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother and took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

(Pastor prays)

Almost everyone enjoys a good love story, especially in a Christian context when God in His goodness brings two believers together in order to live their lives together as an earthly picture of a heavenly gospel. Before us this morning is one of the great love stories of the Bible. And it's a long one. Besides the story of the flood, it's the longest story in Genesis. It is Chapter 24 and contains 67 verses. And with a story like this, you've got to approach it differently than you would something like Ephesians. With Ephesians, you get out your microscope to see the meaning and nuance and intricacies of words and thoughts. But with a story like this that's so long, you get out the telescope so you can see the whole giant beauty of God's handwork, so you can see the touch of His hand and the move of His grace.

This story is so much more than a love story. This narrative is a reflection of God's grace, a picture of His unseen hand and a reminder of God's goodness to us in Christ. Let's set the context for this massive story.

Sarah is dead, and Abraham's life is coming to a close. God has done what He said He would do by giving Abraham a son in his old age. That son's name is Isaac, but Isaac is not married in Chapter 24, and for the promise of God to be fulfilled and for the torch to be passed, Isaac needs a wife. And not just any wife will do.

Rebekah's faithfulness is just as important as Isaac's and this story is not just about Isaac and Rebekah getting together or how to find a good wife. I think that misses the point. This story is about how God works in the ordinary events of our everyday lives to show us goodness and grace and ultimately to bring us to Christ. Above all things you see today, I hope you will see, through good times and bad:

The Story of Life Is the Story of God's Grace

Today I want to move you through the story and hang this story on 4 words and use those words as markers along the way. The first word is...

Trust

Trust because the story opens with the aging Abraham *entrusting* his servant to go and find Isaac a wife – making him swear by putting his hand under his thigh. This is a little stronger than a “pinky promise” but I certainly wouldn’t suggest (doing) it! In the command, Abraham gives his servant, we learn some things we need to trust.

Trust the Providence of God

Look what Abraham tells the servant starting at the end of verse 2 and going into verse 3: *Put your hand under my thigh, 3 that I may make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell,*

The word LORD is the covenant name YAHWEH that God has revealed (as) Himself in Jesus. The Gospel. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus that, through faith and repentance, you are saved...Not on the good things you do but on the finished work of Jesus on the cross.

Not only that, in verse 3, Abraham calls him the God of Heaven and Earth. That means there is not one drop of rain or ray of sunshine that can rebel against God; that God is in control and is actively controlling this world for His ultimate glory, our sanctification and our growing in Christ-likeness. But not only that, you need to:

Trust His Principles

In verse 3, Abraham says, “Don’t take a wife from the Canaanites among whom I dwell.” This is not about race. The Gospel transcends race in marriage. This is Abraham saying don’t bring (back) a woman who is not a believer. (It’s) The New Testament concept of not being unequally yoked. Why? Because in Ephesians 5, marriage is given as a display of the Gospel. Husbands love your wives as Christ does the church – dying for her. Wives, submit to your husbands as the church does to Christ. This story is a

reminder to live our lives in singleness or marriage with a radical trust in the God of Heaven and Earth and that He is in absolute control. That's what providence is.

Ten days ago, Jacob Prince (our high-school pastor) and Will Crabtree, who works with our students, were hit by a speeding car in a parking lot. In the providence of God, Jacob walked away, banged up badly but okay. Will suffered a brain injury that took him to the edge of death.

How do we fit that into Providence? I would just like to suggest a couple of things. Maybe under the providence of God, He allowed Jacob to experience what he did so he would be there to call 911, to show his coolness and Christian manhood under pressure. So we thank God for His mercy. What about Will? Maybe to collapse us to our knees in prayer, to move the church into action and to wake us to the fragility of life, the closeness of eternity and the goodness of God. I'm telling you, that in Christ, you can trust God always. On to the next word.

Prayer

To see this, you have to move to the next scene. It starts in verse 10 and goes down to verse 14. Let's read verses 10-14 and I'll come back and talk about it some.

Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and departed, taking all sorts of choice gifts from his master; and he arose and went to Mesopotamia to the city of Nahor. ¹¹ And he made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at the time of evening, the time when women go out to draw water. ¹² And he said, "O LORD, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. ¹³ Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. ¹⁴ Let the young woman to whom I shall say, 'Please let down your jar that I may drink,' and who shall say, 'Drink, and I will water your camels'—let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master."

This is the first time in the Bible that someone is praying for guidance. Let's see what that looks like. What are we to pray for?

Success

Not like the American dream kind of success or winning the lotto kind of success or even the winning of ballgames kind of success. Pray for the success according to the revealed

will of God, what we know He wants for us by way of faithfulness, godliness, Gospel work and worship. If you are thinking about money, you are missing the whole point. Jesus said it's hard for a rich man to get into Heaven. If God makes you successful financially, it's for you to give Him glory and for you to give generously to the Gospel work. What else do we pray for?

Steadfast Love

In verse 12: *And he said, "O LORD, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham.* Pray for steadfast love or lovingkindness. Pray that you will know the full extent and riches of God's grace in Christ: to heal the wounds and forgive the sin and unlock the bitterness. Pray for rejoicing in your heart and washing away jealousy and filling you with the love of God found at the cross of Jesus.

Discernment

This word is from verse 13. *Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water.*

This is when you are in a situation and need to make sure you are headed in the right direction. You want to make the most God-honoring decision you possibly can. So we pray for discernment, and how does God answer that prayer? God uses His word, His church, through worship, through Godly counsel. Not just discernment – clarity.

Clarity

In verse 14 he puts a finer point on it: *Let the young woman to whom I shall say, 'Please let down your jar that I may drink,' and who shall say, 'Drink, and I will water your camels'—let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master."*

Sometimes you are presented with two good options. What do you do then? Trust fully. Cover in prayer. And then move into action. Why do I say that? The answer is in verse 15.

Before he had finished speaking – behold Rebekah! As you pray, God is already *there*. Isn't that what Jesus taught us about prayer? Remember what he said in Matthew 6:7-8: *And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.* Trust. Prayer. For the next word, let's shift away from Abraham and his servant and pay attention to Rebekah.

Serve

Our lives are lives of service to a good and saving God. When you look at Rebekah, you learn a truth: to serve God in big ways, you've got to be faithful in small ways.

Let's look at her with four statements – 2 negative and 2 positive. First,

Don't be a slave to appearance.

She's a pretty girl but it is said as a passing comment and not dwelt upon. I would advise you to do the same. It can be a detrimental thing to your Christian growth both going and coming. If you are pretty, you run the risk of being vain and prideful. If you are homely, you run the risk of being bitter and withdrawn. Instead, find your beauty and identity in Christ. The Bible says that charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Don't be a slave to appearance. Also,

Don't be a victim to culture.

"A maiden whom no man had known." The world has never prized casual sex like it does now. The University of Tennessee is to have "sex week" and most Christians are desensitized to Biblical morality because of the constant stench. They live in it and are used to it. I challenge you single men and women to hold sex sacred to God and intended for marriage as an act of Christian faithfulness. If you lived unfaithfully before today, confess it before the Lord, repent of your sin and rejoice in Him who makes all things new. Don't be a slave to appearance and don't be a victim to culture.

Now a couple of positives.

Be hospitable and hard-working.

Watch the interactions between the servant and Rebekah: *The young woman was very attractive in appearance, a maiden whom no man had known. She went down to the spring and filled her jar and came up. ¹⁷ Then the servant ran to meet her and said, "Please give me a little water to drink from your jar." ¹⁸ She said, "Drink, my lord." And she quickly let down her jar upon her hand and gave him a drink. ¹⁹ When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, "I will draw water for your camels also, until they have finished drinking." ²⁰ So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw water, and she drew for all his camels.*

In verse 18 she offers the servant a drink and in verse 19 she offers to give the camels a drink. Think about that. 10 camels and they each can drink 20 gallons of water: that's 200 gallons. You figure about a two-gallon jar and that makes 100 trips to the well. This could take several hours, but she did it willingly and intentionally.

Be joyful.

Rebekah has no idea that this is the tryout of her life. She is just joyfully serving. Isn't that what we learn from the Bible? Even about work that might be drudgery? Isn't that what Paul says in Colossians 3:23-24: *Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.*

Trust. Prayer. Serve.

Worship

It is a right response to God's goodness. It's what we do because of what He has done. Let's look at it in the text. Watch the servant's response to Rebekah's serving and God's providing. Let's read verse 22-26:

²² When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold ring weighing a half shekel, and two bracelets for her arms weighing ten gold shekels, ²³ and said, "Please tell me whose daughter you are. Is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?" ²⁴ She said to him, "I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor." ²⁵ She added, "We have plenty of both straw and fodder, and room to spend the night." ²⁶ The man bowed his head and worshiped the LORD.

After all God brought him through – all His provision and goodness and grace, it's the only right response – worship. And the only real way for us to worship is to know the one true and living God revealed to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

This story goes on for another 40 verses and ends with Isaac receiving Rebekah as his bride. And although a historical, factual story, this story points to a true and better Isaac, Jesus Christ, who not only receives us as Isaac did Rebekah; Jesus does so much more because men and women are not able to live without sin, but Jesus did. Jesus was not only *born* without sin, He earned righteousness by *living* without sin.

He went to the cross to die visibly and actually in the place of sinners, taking all the punishment for all the sins of those He will save. And now by His spirit, He is calling you to repent of your sin, believe in Jesus – His life, death and resurrection – and confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord. Believe God raised Him from the dead and you will be saved.

(Pastor prays)