

Last Sunday we walked through the beautiful story of love and faithfulness found in Genesis 24. It is the story of Abraham's faithful servant, Eliezer, who journeys to a distant land on a quest to find God's chosen woman, a young lady named Rebekah, who will become the wife of Abraham's only son, Isaac. If you were here last Sunday, you will remember that we read the entire story together aloud, all 67 verses, which took some time and tested our backs! So, this morning, I think we will not read through the whole story again. If you have your Bibles with you, please turn to Genesis 24. If not, you might wish to simply Google Genesis 24 on your phone in the ESV version which is what I will be working from this morning. I'm not a big fan of people looking at their phones during a church service, but this is a long story and it would be great if you had it in front of you. This morning we will walk through the story a second time, but this time we will be looking at the remarkable, almost allegorical significance of this story which points beyond itself to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I also think there are some very practical lessons that apply to our lives as those commissioned to share the Gospel with a hurting culture.

My message will fall under four subheadings: 1) The Quest for a Bride; 2) The Commissioned Servant; and 3) Methods for the Mission; 4) The Response of the Bride.

I. The Quest for a Bride

Before I get started, I feel the need to make a disclaimer. As many of you have likely noticed, I have regularly suggested that the stories in Genesis point beyond themselves to Jesus and the truth of the Gospel. I suspect that some listening to this series would take issue with that practice, asserting that I am forcing the text to say something it doesn't, or perhaps you think it disrespectful to read the "Jewish" scriptures through a "Christian" lens. I am sympathetic to both of those concerns, so let me speak to those objections for just a minute.

First of all, Jesus was Jewish, and so it is a false dichotomy to state that the Old Testament is "Jewish" and the New Testament is "Christian." Jesus clearly saw Himself to be the long-awaited Jewish Messiah, the rightful King of the Jews, and the fulfillment of the Jewish Law. So, let us resist the objection that we are reading the "Jewish Scripture" here in Genesis through a "Christian" lens. Are we reading Genesis through the lens of Christ? Yes, unapologetically so, but only because we believe Christ to be the Jewish Messiah and the fulfillment of Jewish law, promises, covenants, and prophecies as found in the Old Testament. Jesus was not "Christian." We are only called "Christian" because of our devotion to Christ, who we believe is the Jewish Messiah, the rightful King of the Jews, and the final fulfillment of the Jewish laws, promises, covenants, and prophecies. I hope that makes sense!

Now, I will acknowledge that Christian pastors sometimes force the text to say something it doesn't, and I am certainly not above making that mistake. My *intent* as an expository preacher is to always allow the text to first say only what it says within the historical context of when

those events took place and within the larger context of the scriptures themselves. I do not always accomplish my intent, and if I have ever forced the text to say something it doesn't, I would be in the wrong and I'm certainly willing to own that.

That said, we are not wrong to look for Jesus in the Old Testament. Why? Well, from as early as Genesis 3, we are looking for a descendant of Adam and Eve to crush the head of the Ancient Serpent. The scriptures of the Old Testament will consistently point towards the future when "one like Moses" (Deut. 18) will come, when a suffering servant will "bear the transgression of us all" (Isaiah 53), when a "son will be born unto us" (Isaiah 9) in the city of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), and when a "Son of David" (2 Samuel 7) will take the throne whose kingdom will never end (Isaiah 9).

To read the Old Testament is to acknowledge a prophetic perspective that anticipates "the Day of the Lord" (Joel 2) and a time when One will come who will make the wrongs right (Jer. 23).

So, did Jesus think that all those prophetic scriptures were pointing to Him? Yes, He did. Jesus said that He came to fulfill the Law (Matthew 5). He said before Abraham was, "I am," (John 8). In Luke 24, on the day of His resurrection, the risen Christ came alongside two disciples on the road to Emmaus and "opened their minds" to the truth about Himself in all the scriptures. We read in vs. 27, "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27).

So, as Christians, it is not only appropriate but inevitable that, beginning with the first five books of the Bible (the books attributed to Moses), the Holy Spirit will lead us to interpret all the Scriptures by showing us the things concerning Jesus Christ, our Lord. OK, that's my disclaimer. Email me if you would like to discuss that further, but let us now turn our attention to Genesis.

Recently we observed the uncanny foreshadowing of substitutionary atonement in Genesis 22 when Abraham demonstrates his faithfulness through his willingness to sacrifice his only son, only to be spared that horror by God Himself who supplies a substitute to die in Isaac's place on the very same mountain where Jesus will die in our place 2000 years later. Very few honest readers of the Old and New Testaments could miss the prophetic nature of that story and the implications for the Gospel.

Here again in Genesis 24, it seems to me there is a "type" of the Gospel or at least some implicit foreshadowing that points beyond the story itself to the bigger, true love story that is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Let me show you what I'm talking about, and then you can decide what you think about that.

First of all, we cannot help but note the parallel nature of Isaac and Jesus. Isaac and Jesus are both promised well in advance of their births with a significant period of waiting required.

Both Isaac and Jesus have miraculous birth stories. Both Isaac and Jesus are referred to as “only sons.” Both Isaac and Jesus carried the wood of their own sacrificial death up Mt. Moriah, and both were bound for sacrifice on Mt. Moriah. Though Abraham demonstrated his faithfulness in his willingness to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, God demonstrated His unfailing love and unmerited grace by actually sacrificing His only son, Jesus, that all sons of men might be forgiven and spared the justice that is deserved.

In light of the parallels between Isaac and Jesus, let us now consider this story about the quest for a bride as commissioned by a loving father. As the story begins, the Father/Master, Abraham, commissions his faithful servant to seek out a bride for his only son. The commission will require the servant to “go out,” and to trust God’s leadership to discern and identify the person of God’s choosing. Once the person is identified, she has a choice to make. If she agrees to leave her former life and accompany the servant back to the Father and His beloved son, the servant is released of his vow and the mission is accomplished. If the woman refuses to come with the servant and be united with the beloved son, the servant is also released of his vow and the commission from his master, though the son remains without a bride.

Is there any way this points to Jesus and the Gospel? Well, yes! In various places throughout the New Testament, Jesus refers to Himself as the Bridegroom, and the Church is referred to as “the Bride of Christ.” The Father, who is God, summons His servants (people like me and you) to go out into all the world and “make disciples”, but what are we actually doing? One could argue that our assignment is to go into all the world, inviting those whom God has called to be united with Christ (the Bridegroom). We are, then, in some sense, on a quest for “the Bride.” Can you see that?

Note also the initiative of the Father. The Father commissions the servant to a particular place and a particular people, at a particular time to identify the woman of God’s choosing that will become the bride of his only son. Rebekah is not identified as the bride due to her initiative, performance, or merit. She is only identified and united with her husband-to-be because the loving Father initiated an action according to his will and purpose for his beloved son, and God moved in a way to make that clear both to the servant and to Rebekah. In the same way, we understand our salvation as matter of God’s election. In His sovereignty, God takes all the initiative to save His people. In other words, God chooses us—we could never choose God.

Consider also the invitation to the prospective bride. The invitation is to a new life, with a new lover, a man who is a veritable Prince, a man she has never met but One whom she will get to know through the servant who knows Him well. She must be willing to travel to a place she has never been, which means she must choose to leave her former life behind if that relationship is to be consummated. Convicted by the unmistakable intervention of God through the sign, Rebekah will set out on a long and difficult journey, a journey based on faith in the One who

summoned her and the Bridegroom who awaits her. The invitation is almost verbatim to the invitation of the Holy Spirit for those God calls to Himself through Christ. And, as many of you know, there is always a leaving and a cleaving that is required should we respond to the invitation of the Holy Spirit to surrender our lives to Jesus.

Now, are we forcing the text to say something it does not? No...I'm not forcing the text to say anything at all. I'm simply pointing out how remarkably this beautiful love story reminds me of the one, true, ultimate love story that we find in the Gospel. A story that features a Father, a Beloved Son, commissioned servants, a Bride, an invitation, and a decision. Let us now zoom into the role of the commissioned servant.

II. The Commissioned Servant

Last week we determined that the servant called upon by Abraham here in Genesis 24 is Eliezer of Damascus. Eliezer was identified back in Genesis 15 as the likely heir to Abraham's estate because, at the time, Abraham and Sarah had no children.

Eliezer's role as the commissioned servant of Abraham resonates with our roles as commissioned servants of Jesus. For example, Eliezer is a servant, but he is also considered the "senior member" of Abraham's household. In other words, Abraham "owns" Eliezer and is his rightful master, but Abraham has essentially adopted Eliezer into his household and treats him like family, so much so that Eliezer would have qualified as an heir to Abraham's estate. Even now that Abraham has a son, we read in 24:2 that Abraham entrusted Eliezer with everything he had.

This is very much the relationship that Jesus chooses to have with His disciples. We call Jesus Lord and Master because He has purchased us with His atoning blood on the cross, and yet Jesus chooses to call us His friends (John 15:15). More than that, we learn from the Apostle John (John 1:12) and the Apostle Paul (Romans 8:16) that we have been adopted as children of God, and we are co-heirs (Romans 8:17) with Christ! Do you see how remarkably this relationship between Abraham and Eliezer foreshadows the relationship of Christ and His disciples?

Note the solemnity of the commissioning. Abraham insists on a vow that Eliezer will not choose a wife for Isaac from amongst the Canaanites nor take his beloved son back to the region of Mesopotamia. Instead, he sends Eliezer out to a distant land to seek out a bride for Isaac.

In the same way, there was great solemnity when Jesus commissioned His disciples in Matthew 28, stating, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Abraham's commission to his servant Eliezer is to discern through the preemptive work of God that woman of God's choosing and then extend the invitation to her to become the bride of his only son. If the woman chose not to return with him—if she refused the invitation—then Eliezer would be released of his vow. In other words, Eliezer was responsible for obediently going where he was commissioned to go, seeking God's guidance through a sign to discern the woman of God's choosing, and extending the invitation—Eliezer was NOT responsible for the response of the woman. He was not to take her by force against her will. She could choose to respond to the invitation or deny the invitation.

In the same way, when Jesus sent out the 72 disciples in Luke 10, He commissioned them to proclaim the Kingdom of God, to cast out demons and to heal the sick. He instructed them to seek out the person of peace. However, if the village rejected their message, they were released from any responsibility for those people. They were to shake the dust off of their feet and move on.

Finally, let us observe the humility of the servant in his relationship to his master. Eliezer's first and last thought is always that of his master. When Eliezer prays, he prays to the God of "my master, Abraham." He prays that God will show His steadfast love to Abraham. When he asks for a sign to discern God's designated bride for Isaac, he prays that the sign will help Eliezer know that God has shown steadfast love to Abraham. When God answers the prayer and reveals Rebekah through the sign Eliezer requested, Eliezer prays again saying, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His steadfast love and His faithfulness toward my master."

When Eliezer stands to address Bethuel and his household, he says nothing about himself, but instead declares, "The LORD has greatly blessed my master, and he has become great." When Eliezer finally gets to the end, he calls the question, and again—it's all about his master. He states in vs. 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 or to the left."

Church, Eliezer so beautifully demonstrates what it means to call somebody LORD. If Jesus is your Lord, He is your first and your last thought all day every day. You exist to do His bidding; you delight in boasting about His greatness; and you celebrate God's steadfast love for your Master. Servants do not promote themselves; they promote their Master. Let me ask you a question: When was the last time anyone heard you promote the One you claim to be your Lord? When was the last time you prayed to God to show His steadfast love to Jesus in helping you accomplish your mission? How often do you steal the glory that belongs only to your Lord, and not to His servant?

Most of the conversations I have with people feature me listening to their self-promotion, their self-absorption, and their self-adoration. It is a rare treat to meet a servant of King Jesus whose speech and conduct reveal his utter loyalty and devotion to the Master of his soul. And yet that is what Eliezer models for us in this story. Eliezer delights in serving Abraham. Do you delight in serving your Lord?

Church, if you are offended by being called a servant of the Master, of the Lord Jesus Christ, I would remind you of His own words to His disciples in Luke 17:7-10: ⁷“Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and recline at table’? ⁸Will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, and dress properly and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink’? ⁹Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? ¹⁰So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’”

Eliezer understood his role, he accepted his role, and he was grateful for his role as a servant. Too many of us think ourselves to be masters, owners, and those deserving to be served. We are consumers of products and services, always looking for ways to be entertained or to make ourselves comfortable. So, let me ask you a Dr. Phil question: How’s that working out for you? Does strutting about like a little lord fill you with joy and contentment? Has all that money and entertainment satisfied your heart? Of course not. You think these words of Jesus are insulting; but He just gave you the secret to a satisfied life: Embrace your identity as a servant of the One, True King—the True Master—your Lord and Sovereign—and learn what it means to find joy in performing your duties for His sake, His Kingdom and His glory.

Christian, you are a commissioned servant. You can accept that identity and live accordingly, or you can choose otherwise. I would warn you, however, that Masters and Lords do not take kindly to servants who claim allegiance to them and then refuse to obey their direction. If we are determined to ignore the duties set before us, we should stop telling ourselves and others that Jesus is our Lord—He’s not. If we care nothing about the Master and His commission upon our lives, we clearly serve a different lord. I know that’s tough to hear, but Eliezer’s example shines a light on what it means to be a faithful servant. Let that light reveal what is true in each of our hearts. Now, if you are interested in what it might look like to embrace your identity and your duties as a servant of Christ, Eliezer will show us what that looks like as well.

III. Methods of the Mission

In his book entitled, *The Life of Abraham*, F.B. Meyer makes three observations about the methods Eliezer employs on his mission to find a bride for the Father’s son. First, says Meyer, a good servant saturates his work in prayer. Eliezer thrust the full weight of his assignment on the providence and power of God. He was fully willing to do what he had been assigned by his master, but he dared not venture on without entrusting both the process and the outcome to the sovereign hand of God. Meyer writes: Christian worker, never start any mission for God,

whether to an individual soul or to a congregation, without first praying for God's [help to prosper]."

Secondly, we must wait upon God for direction. Meyer observes: Very often God's servants make great mistakes because they force themselves on people, not living in the will of God, not seeking the indication of His bidding, not waiting until He opens the door of circumstance into some new life...we are wise to wait expectantly and trustfully for Him to open up the way to access into the citadel of the heart. (183-184) We talk a lot about living in the B.L.E.S.S. rhythms as our means of reaching people for Christ. You will remember that the B stands for "Begin with prayer." The L means "Listen". When we pray, we must not only seek the Lord for direction, but we must also listen. Listen to God; listen to those we are seeking to reach. As we listen, we are waiting on God for the sign and conviction to take the next step. Eliezer did a beautiful job of praying and waiting on God—these are tools we must employ as servants of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Finally, Meyer writes: Let us say much in praise of our Master. We touched on this point earlier, but it bears repeating. The faithful servant of Abraham says nothing about himself. His words constantly reflect his devotion to his master. Paul would write many years later in 2 Corinthians 4:5: "For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

The Apostle Paul, the greatest evangelist the world has ever seen, knew himself to be a servant of his Lord, and throughout his writings and his ministry, he said much in praise of his Master—Jesus, who is Christ our Lord. So may our words and our conduct speak much praise of our Lord and Savior as we perform our duties as servants in the Kingdom of God, amen?

IV. The Response of the Bride

One of the most beautiful things I read this week was Meyer's final words on this chapter:

The summons was to a simple girl to ally herself in marriage to one of the wealthiest and noblest of earth's aristocracy. It was sent not because of her worth or wealth or beauty but because it was so willed in the heart and counsel of Abraham. Such a call is sent to every soul that hears the gospel. In the heavenly azure depths lives the great Father God. He has one Son. His only begotten and well beloved. He has resolved to choose from among men those who as one Church shall constitute His bride forever. He sends this call to you not because you are worthy or wealthy or beautiful, but because He has so willed it in the counsels of His own heart. He longs that you shall be willing to detach yourself from all that you hold dear. And if that call is obeyed, you shall lose your own name in His name; you shall be arrayed in His fair jewels; you shall share His wealth; you shall sit down with Him on His throne; all things shall be yours. Will you go with this Man? Will you leave all to be Christ's? Will you give your unseen Lover your heart to be his forever? Come and put yourself under the escort of the blessed Holy Spirit, who pleads the cause of Jesus, as did Abraham's servant that of Isaac, and let Him conduct you where Jesus is.

There are many here today to whom the Spirit is whispering an invitation to come. If you ever hear the whisper of God's Spirit beckoning you to leave behind the former things to be

united with Christ, know that you have been called by God and chosen to be the Bride of the Bridegroom. But you must respond.

Like Rebekah, we must make room for Christ in our heart or welcome Him in to make a room for Himself by changing our hearts to accommodate His presence.

Then, like Rebekah, we must bear witness. As the chosen girl ran home to tell her family of everything she had seen and heard, so must we be bold in sharing the good news of Christ with those who need to know.

Finally, we must not delay or confer with flesh and blood. People and circumstances would eagerly delay our starting the pilgrimage of faith to a new country with Christ. Instead, our response must be that of Rebekah who said with no hesitation, “I will go.” The journey of faith is long and, at times, arduous. Even so, as we journey toward that distant land and the great wedding feast of the Lamb, our affection for the Bridegroom will increase, until that day when we see Him face to face, and we are finally with the One we love--the One who so loved us that He laid down His life for us.

This is the Gospel, and the invitation is now extended to you, dear friend—will you come?

Will you pray with me?