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Sermon Notes

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God Provides a Wife for Isaac, Part II

Genesis 24

Introduction: Amazing Providence in Answer to Prayer

Hudson Taylor's request for wind: sailing en route to China to begin his ministry there, the ship was dangerously near some sunken reefs off the coast of New Guinea. There had been no wind for some time and the ocean's natural current was carrying the ship at a four-knot clip straight for the reefs so directly that it seemed impossible for the ship to survive the afternoon. The captain was extremely worried and did everything he could to turn the direction of the ship, but without wind, the ship was in the hands of the ocean's current. The captain confided his fear to Hudson Taylor, saying "We've done everything that can be done. We have only to await the result." Hudson Taylor replied, "No, there is one thing we have not done yet." "What is that?" asked the captain. "Four of us on board are Christians," said Taylor. "Let us each retire to our rooms and in agreed prayer ask the Lord to give us immediately a breeze." After Taylor had prayed briefly and fervently, he was absolutely assured that God would grant his request and went up on deck to speak with the first officer, a godless man, who was sailing the vessel at that moment. He told him to let down the corners of the mainsail in preparation for a wind. The officer said "What would be the good of that?" Taylor told him that God was about to send a wind and they needed to be ready for it. The sailor swore at Taylor and said "I'd rather see a wind than hear of it." But right at that moment, the sailor looked up and saw the corner of the topmost sail begin flapping gently in a new breeze. Taylor exclaimed, "Don't you see a wind is coming? Look at the topsail!" The sailor said, "It's only a puff of wind... it won't last!" But even he didn't believe that... he hurried and put down the main sail, and within one or two more minutes, the strong breeze had indeed come and the ship was plowing along at six or seven knots, able to steer away from the hidden reefs.

"Thus did God encourage me before landing on China's shores to bring every variety of need to him in prayer, and to expect that he would honor the name of Jesus Christ and give me the help each emergency required."

Hudson Taylor: Volume I: The Growth of a Soul, p. 197-198

I. What God Joined Together: Abraham Marries Rebekah

Last week: We described this account in some detail

- A. Abraham Charges and Commissions His Servant (vs. 1-9)
- B. Abraham's Servant: Journey and Model Prayer (vs. 10-14)
- C. God's Providential Answer: Rebekah Waters the Camels (vs. 15-27)

- D. Rebekah's Family Learns of God's Providence (vs. 28-49)
- E. Rebekah and Her Family Submit to God's Providence (vs. 50-60)
- F. Isaac Marries Rebekah (vs. 61-67)

This week:

- 1) We are going to view the overall account in three different lights... as a moral example of how godly marriages are formed; as a key step in the Redemptive Historical Plan of God for the salvation of the world; as a type or picture of Christ and His church
- 2) We are going to look at five theological topics connected with this account
- 3) We are going to look at some specific applications for our life today

II. Three Distinct Points of View

A. Examples of Godliness: Imitation in Daily Life

1. Abraham: example of trusting/acting on God's promises as a godly father caring for son
2. The servant: humble, faith-filled, trusting, obedient, man of prayer and action
3. Rebekah: humble, hospitable, beautiful, faith-filled, courageous, chaste and sexually pure
4. Isaac: submissive to his father, meditating, faithful to his wife
5. Examples of Forming a Marriage...AS WE SHALL SEE

B. Redemptive History: Fulfilling the Promise to Abraham

1. Abraham wasn't just any man... he was the man to whom the promises had been given

“Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.”

2. Therefore, Isaac wasn't just any man... he HAD to have a wife (no chance he would die a bachelor) and she had to be a godly woman whose training of their children would help ensure the covenant
3. Isaac and Rebekah would have a son who would carry on God's purposes: his name would be Jacob
4. Thus this story is essential to God's redemptive plan for the earth

from this couple would come the Jewish nation

from this couple would also come the Savior of the World... JESUS CHRIST

C. Spiritual Typology: Christ and His Bride

1. The story also has a spiritual side... a picture of the worldwide work of the gospel
2. Spiritual analogy:

Abraham represents God the Father

Isaac represents God the Son

The Servant represents God the Holy Spirit

Rebekah represents the Church, the people of God

As Abraham sent his servant to get a bride for his son, so God the Father sent for His Spirit to draw together the church, the bride for His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

All marriages are a picture of Christ and the Church... but this one especially so!!

Ephesians 5:31-32 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." ³² This is a profound mystery-- but I am talking about Christ and the church.

III. Five Theological Topics

A. Covenant Faithfulness

1. Major theme in this account: God's covenant faithfulness to Abraham

Hebrew word = hesed... **ds,x**, "kindness", "steadfast love"

vs. 12 And he said, "O LORD, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham.

vs. 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."

vs. 26-27 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."

2. Vital Hebrew word = God's kindness to His people based upon His covenant promises to them
3. This account is vital in the unfolding redemptive plan of God as we shall see
4. The key is God's covenant faithfulness to Abraham... God had made a promise to him saying "**Your descendants shall be as numerous as the stars in the sky**"... only if Isaac had a wife could this be fulfilled
5. Every step of the servant's journey was guided and blessed by God's covenant faithfulness and kindness to Abraham

Lesson: our salvation is based on God's unswerving devotion to keep His promises to us in Christ

John 6:39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.

B. God's Accurate Guidance

vs. 26-27 Then the man bowed down and worshiped the LORD, saying, "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."

Strong testimony of a sense of God's direct guidance

1. The servant set out on a voyage of faith in obedience to his master, Abraham's, command
2. The servant had many questions and could have had many doubts
3. But the Lord guided the servant accurately to precisely the right well at precisely the right time

Illus. In one year alone Americans spent \$200 million in consultations with fortune tellers and astrologers. Americans are desperate for daily guidance. Some people use a Magic 8-Ball to divine the answer to their questions... others navigate by reading advice columnists like "Dear Abby", or reading horoscopes or watch Dr. Phil for guidance. There are many call-in shows in which people bare their souls and ask for guidance... there are self-help books galore and the whole psychological and psychiatric industry exists in part to give lost souls guidance for tough decisions

Christians learn to rely on the guidance of the Lord through His Spirit and His Word

4. Life is terrifying without accurate navigation... guidance from the Lord

The Lord has undertaken to navigate your life in Christ... to guide you to which person to marry, where to live, where to get your education, what career to follow, what house to buy, how to spend your money and your time

Just as He guided the servant to a precise well in Aram-Naharaim at the precisely correct time, so will He guide you

5. God has promised to navigate your life... to give you guidance as you seek His will

Isaiah 30:21 Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the LORD with all your heart; and lean not on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths.

C. God's Sovereign Providence

1. What is the doctrine of providence?

1678: John Flavel published *The Mystery of Providence...* asserting that God's sovereign rule extends to the smallest of details and the largest of earth-shattering events. Yet it is a mystery.

Supporting scriptures:

Proverbs 16:33 The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.

Matthew 10:29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father.

Ephesians 1:11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will

Grudem's definition: *God is continually involved with all created things in such a way that He 1) Keeps them existing and maintaining the properties with which He created them; 2) cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do; 3) directs them to fulfill His purposes.*

It is the third that interests us here... how does God navigate daily events with rational human beings to get them to fulfill His purposes?

2. Applicable here: God makes marriages... he orchestrates circumstances whereby Isaac and Rebekah are brought together
3. Henry Blackaby: *Experiencing God...* look for signposts, markers of God's providential dealings

basic idea: God is constantly at work around you... He always at work accomplishing His sovereign plan

God gives indicators of what His plan is so you can see what He wants you to do... markers along the way that line up and point the direction for the future

God did that for Abraham's servant... He had watched God's amazing dealings with his master for many years; he had learned to trust God; he was willing to do a difficult task and put his finger immediately on the difficulty: How will I find a girl who would be willing to come here sight unseen and marry a man she's never met?

The servant trusted God to give her a sign... the watering of the camels... and she did

Danger: God's actions in history are more difficult to trace out than His statements in Scripture.

Illus. William Cowper, a brilliant poet who lived at the beginning of the 19th century, often struggled with depression and doubt. One night he decided to commit suicide by drowning himself. He called a cab and told the driver to take him to the Thames River. However, thick fog came down and prevented them from finding the river. After driving around lost for a while, the cabby finally stopped and let Cowper out. To Cowper's surprise, he found himself on his own doorstep: God had sent the fog to keep him from killing himself. Even in our blackest moments, God watches over us.

Reflecting on that amazing providence, Cowper wrote his most famous hymn: "God Moves in a Mysterious Way"

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His work in vain;
**God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.**

Learn to look for remarkable providences of God and to trust Him to guide you

Delight in the amazing coincidences that come when you are walking in the power of God

D. Godly Marriage

Four basic insights into Godly marriage

1) God makes marriages

Key texts:

Genesis 2:22 Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

Matthew 19:6 So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

Lesson from Genesis 24: God is active still in the process whereby a specific man and a specific woman get together, and especially so when Godly people actively seeking to honor God by following His precepts and obeying His covenant seek His guidance in prayer.

Therefore:

single people who are sorely tempted to be anxious about marriage, entrust the matter to God in prayer... let Him sovereignly bring you your spouse as He brought Isaac's to him;

parents who are tempted to be anxious about the marriage of their children, let God do His work and entrust the matter to Him... this issue is so important that people frequently give themselves over to anxiety and fear

1 Peter 5:7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

BUT... key question: DOES GOD MAKE ALL MARRIAGES OR ONLY SOME???

Some of you are wrestling with the question of divorce. Perhaps you know someone whose marriage is falling apart; perhaps you've been divorced yourself; perhaps your children or your parents or your friend has experienced divorce

The question before us is, when Jesus said

what God has joined together, let man not separate."

Does He have every single marriage on earth in mind? Or are there only some marriages that God joined together and others that He had nothing to do with?

Pointedly for me as a pastor, If God only joined SOME marriages and not all, then how can we tell which ones Jesus meant when He said

what God has joined together, let man not separate."

If Jesus only had SOME marriages in mind, how can the statement have any weight or force at all? Wouldn't a struggling couple tempted to get a divorce assume that God did NOT join them together, therefore they can separate?

Well, then, if God DOES join together all marriages, how do you reconcile this with times when, say, Christians violate God's clear principles against spiritually mixed marriages?

2 Corinthians 6:14-15 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. ... What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?

Suppose a Christian decides he loves a non-Christian girl and, against the advice of his parents, his pastor, his Christian friends, and the Scriptures, he marries the girl. Did God join them together in direct contradiction of His own principles?

THIS IS A VERY DIFFICULT QUESTION, but it seems to me this much is the case: God upholds your covenant vow, which you made in His sight before witnesses, even though you violated His laws to do it.

Thus he "joined you together" in His mind, and before witnesses in culture, and now calls you no longer two but one flesh. This is precisely what you must not separate.

A WORD OF GRACE:

One of the great challenges of the pastoral ministry is to warn people ahead of time about the grief caused by sin, putting the fear of God in folks before they commit sin **SO THAT THEY WILL BE PROTECTED FROM ITS DEVASTATION... WHILE AT THE SAME TIME**, speaking a word of grace to people after the fact who have sinned, can't go back in time, and want to know if God can forgive you and still love you. **YES HE CAN...** God loves sinners in Christ and lavishes His mercy and grace and forgiveness daily. But that doesn't mean we have permission to change His clear guidelines. In other words, before sin people need warning and fear and trembling; after sin, when they repent and renounce the sin, people need mercy and tenderness and forgiveness. The challenge in the pastoral ministry is that in one sermon you try to do both

Bottom line: God makes marriages!!!

2) God makes marriages in the flow of everyday life and in a cultural context

It was as Rebekah was going out to the well for her daily water fetching chore that her life was changed forever

It was as Isaac was going out in the field to meditate that his life was changed forever.

Marriages are part of God's daily providence... not separate from it

Ask married couples how they met, and the answers will be as varied as they are!! Some met while at school; some met serving in some ministries in church; Some were introduced by friends; some

were total strangers and had a “chance” (providential) meeting in an airport or bus terminal; some met on the job, some while on vacation

God has amazingly varied ways of bringing people together

In other cultures, God uses the culturally accepted ways to do it... in Japan and in the Muslim world and in India, there are still arranged marriages like Isaac and Rebekah; God can use that as well

Genesis 24 displays a strong role for parents in the formation of the children’s marriages...

Christians in the West have a very different view, and I think sometimes we suffer from leaving our parents out of such an important decision. The “Proverbs 31 Woman” is actually advice given by Lemuel’s mother concerning what kind of woman he should marry

Proverbs 31:2-12 "O my son, O son of my womb, O son of my vows, 3 do not spend your strength on women, your vigor on those who ruin kings. ... ¹⁰ A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. ¹¹ Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. ¹² She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life.

A new culture of family is developing in many churches, and a higher parental involvement is sought by their godly children. Like Japan, many of these grown Christian children actively desire their parents to help them find their mate, and like Japan, they make the final decision about the choice... yes or no. This idea finds a strong affirmation in Genesis 24, the role of Abraham in Isaac’s life

A word about dating and courtship: modern “Western” system of the “love marriage” has serious problems, as many have discerned

Joshua Harris wrote a book well-known now called *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* in which he advocates courtship (intentionally avoiding close male-female relationships unless there is the intention of pursuing toward marriage)

Dating can be an open temptation to sexual sin, if it involves periods of time in which the two are alone in seclusion

But even if there is no sexual sin, dating can involve the giving over of one’s heart to someone emotionally, thus leading to a pattern of serial heartbreaks

Elizabeth Elliot wrote about maintaining emotional purity

Proverbs 4:23 Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

C.S. Lewis in *The Four Loves* speaks of the inherent instability of male-female friendships... one person may just see it as a friendship, but the other person sees it as far more... heartbreak is inevitable

3) Special effort and preparation is required by people

Marriage is not automatic; if you go live in a desert cave somewhere and eat locusts and wild honey, marriage is looking like a scant possibility

MAKE YOURSELF AVAILABLE!

Marriage comes as the fruition of a work of maturity in a person's life

Isaac was forty years old when he married, and had reached the point where he was clearly able to support and spiritually lead a young woman, his wife

Social training goes in to removing rough spots so that a couple can get together

Spiritual development is essential

Ultimately, someone once said: **“Marriage is not so much a matter of finding the right person as of being the right person.”**

Concentrate on growing in Christ, loving Him with all your heart

BUT also, learn what is involved in a godly marriage; single people should read good Christian books on marriage; Christian parents should study how best to prepare their children for marriage

MOST OF ALL, make active specific prayer for marriage a part of your daily life

4) This special effort is part of God's plan and should not be a cause of anxiety

Just because you have a role to play, don't let that make you anxious

God already knows how He will bring the man and woman together

Your development and preparation and prayers and availability are all part of what God is doing to bring people together

E. Faith-Filled Prayer

Psalm 57:2 I will cry to God Most High, To God who accomplishes all things for me.

William Temple used to say, “When I pray coincidences happen; when I cease to pray coincidences cease.”

1. One of the greatest mysteries of the Christian life is prayer

if God is going to act anyway, why should we pray about it?

2. Abraham's servant displays remarkable faith in his prayer

Genesis 24:12-15 See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. ¹⁴ May it be that when I say to a girl, 'Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too'-- let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master."

3. God displays a remarkable kindness in answering his prayer immediately

Before he had finished praying, Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder.

4. Elements of prayer

God-honoring: "O Lord, God of my master..."

Centered in the revealed will of God... trusting in His promises to accomplish His

Coming from the desire of the heart: "**Grant me success today**"

Specific and measurable:

May it be that when I say to a girl, 'Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too'-- let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master."

Returning to give thanks: several times the servant falls on his face and thanks God

IV. Application

1. Understanding God's Role in Marriage

I want to acknowledge that not every single person is going to get married... Jesus Christ Himself was never married, and there are some, Jesus said, who specifically choose not to marry so they can do the Lord's work in advancing the Kingdom of Heaven

Four Basic Insights

- 1) God makes marriages
- 2) God makes marriages in the flow of everyday life and in a cultural context
- 3) Special effort and preparation is required by people
- 4) This special effort is part of God's plan and should not be a cause of anxiety

Single people: **TRUST IN THE LORD** to accomplish this for you!!!

2. Value marriage

Hebrews 13:4 Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

- Value marriage by honoring it in your hearts: "Marriage is an honorable estate"

- Value marriage by resisting society's attacks on marriage itself... just because your parents' marriage fell apart doesn't mean marriage itself is faulty
- Value marriage by resisting sexual sin, both before and after marriage
- Value marriage by working on your marriage and making it everything God wants it to be

3. Husbands: Value your precious wives!!!

Rebekah was ESSENTIAL to the salvation plan of God; so your wives are essential to God's salvation plan for you personally and for your children and for the church and for the world

vs. 67 Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

CHERISH YOUR WIVES!!!! Tell her often how valuable she is to you, how indispensable in your life, how you couldn't be the man God wants you to be without her

Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her

Note the Biblical order: she became his wife, and he loved her

I am convinced that the true husband love of Christ for the church only develops over time after you've been married... the Christlike cherishing is a gift of grace through many trials

Cherish her, value her, loved her, live for her blessing

Final Application: Ultimately the most important relationship in the world is between you and Christ... do you know Him? Do you trust in Him?