**GOD ESTABLISHES ISAAC’S FAMILY**

February 11, 2018

Genesis 24:1-67

Key Verse 24:58 “So they called Rebekah and asked her, ‘Will you go with this man?’ ‘I will go,’ she said.”

In chapter 22 God tested Abraham’s faith and Abraham passed God’s final test by offering his son Isaac to God as a burnt offering. God knew how Abraham loved him more than his own son through his obedience. Then God swore by himself to bless all nations through the seed of Abraham, Jesus. Today’s passage shows the passing of one generation to another. Through the death of Sarah the curtain of Abraham’s times was drawing to a close and the new age of Isaac dawned. Abraham’s last act of faith was to establish Isaac’s family. Isaac was a quiet and shy young man, and he needed a strong woman of faith to be his wife. He needed a wife who believed God’s promises as he did, a woman who could help him to be a steward of God’s blessings. The main actors in chapter 24 are Abraham’s servant and Rebekah, a woman of faith. But it was God who used their faith. Let’s learn how Abraham’s servant made “mission impossible” become “mission possible” and how Rebekah made a decision of faith to marry Isaac. May God raise up many faithful servants to advance the gospel of Jesus. I pray that God may raise up many families like Isaac to inherit the covenant promise.

Look at verse 1. “Abraham was now very old, and the Lord had blessed him in every way.” Abraham’s wife Sarah lived to be 127 years old. That means that Isaac was 37 years old. Abraham and Sarah were so possessive of their son that they would not let him marry. Now after the death of Sarah, Abraham began to pray about a wife for Isaac. What was the number one criteria Abraham placed in finding Isaac’s wife? Was he looking for a winner of the Miss Canaan beauty contest? Was he looking for a career woman to be Isaac’s wife? No. His number one priority to be Isaac’s wife was faith. Let’s learn several spiritual lessons from Abraham and his servant about marriage in God.

**First**, Abraham’s faith that God will provide a wife for his son (1-9). Look at verses 2-4. Abraham called his senior servant, the man in charge of all that he had, and commissioned him to find a wife for Isaac. What was the main point in his charge for finding Isaac’s wife? He emphasized not to consider the daughters of the Canaanites to be a wife for Isaac. It makes more sense to find Isaac’s wife among local women because Abraham could choose the best qualified woman to be Isaac’s wife. Seeing is believing. He must have seen many attractive and wealthy women who might make good marriage candidates for Isaac. Even though Isaac was quiet and obedient, he must have thought about these girls, too. But Abraham excluded the daughters of the Canaanites. Why? The Canaanites did not know God and they could not inherit the covenant of God. If Isaac married the Canaanite woman, he might lose his identity as the covenant son. In Noah’s time the sons of God married the daughters of men due to their outward beauty. Then God’s people corrupted their ways and invited God’s judgment through the flood. Deuteronomy 7:3 says, “Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons.” 2 Corinthians 6:14 says, “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers....” That’s the reason why Abraham refused to take the Canaanite woman to be Isaac’s wife. To God’s people marriage standard cannot be compromised. It is natural for sinful man not to think about a girl’s inner beauty which comes from faith, but to only look at her outward physical appearance when choosing a girl to marry. Some men, in their ignorance and pride, think that if they find a beautiful unbeliever, they can marry her, and then later on, make her into a woman of faith. Will it work? Paul said in 1 Corinthians 7:16, “How do you, husband, whether you will save your wife?” We cannot convert unbelieving woman after marriage. It does not work. If a man marries a worldly woman, in most cases he will become a worldly man because man mostly listens to his wife after marriage. Marriage is the measure of a man; it is the barometer of faith.

Abraham’s decision to send his servant back to his far-distant home country to find a wife for Isaac, instead of introducing him to one of the nearby Canaanite girls seemed complicated and difficult and unrealistic. Abraham’s servant was a thoughtful man who knew how to get things done. He immediately put his finger on the hardest part of Abraham’s commission. “What if the woman is unwilling to come back with me to this land? Shall I then take your son back to the country you came from?” There were no pictures or Web pages at that time. The woman may say, “I would like to see Isaac first. Or she may say, “Bring Isaac here to live here.” Abraham’s answer was a clear “No.” The woman must have enough faith to come. This was the test. Besides, Abraham believed that Canaan was the promised land and Isaac should live there. How could such a woman be found? It seemed like “mission impossible.” If the woman refused to come, then the servant would be released from his promise. He was not to take Isaac to that land. Abraham promised, “The Lord, the God of heaven, who brought me out of my father's household and my native land and who spoke to me and promised to me on oath, saying, ‘To your offspring I will give this land--he will send his angel before you so that you can get a wife for my son from there.” Abraham experienced God’s provision in everything. Why exclude this one? Abraham promised his servant that he would not be alone. God’s angel would accompany him and give him success.

**Second**, Abraham’s servant, a faithful and prayerful man of mission (9-56). Abraham’s servant accepted the mission Abraham gave him. He took ten camels and loaded them with all kinds of good things and went to Padan Aram, to the town of Nahor. He went to the place where he would most likely meet the right girl—the village well. He had made the necessary human and material preparations with great thoroughness. But he did not depend on his human preparation nor did he depend on his wisdom and experience. He depended on God. He prayed. He asked the God of Abraham to grant him success in his journey. He did not pray abstractly but prayed specifically. He set a very improbable condition which the woman God had chosen for Isaac must meet. She must willingly volunteer to water his 10 thirsty camels! What kind of woman was he looking for? He was looking for a caring woman with love and compassion. He was looking for a diligent and hardworking woman willing to fetch enough water for ten camels. Before he had finished praying, a beautiful young girl balancing a jar on her shoulder came to the well. When he asked her for a drink of water, she did not say, “Who are you old man? I am busy and you draw yourself with your own hands. Then get out of here.” Rather, she said with a big smile, “Drink, my lord.” She graciously drew water for him. Then she said, “I’ll draw water for your camels too, until they have finished drinking.” Wow! Watering not one or two but ten camels were not an easy task at all. (A typical camel can drink 200 liters (53 gallons) of water in 3 minutes.) More than anything else, she volunteered to do so. Where can we find a woman such as Rebekah today? Abraham’s servant was speechless. He just stood there, carefully watching her (21). Perhaps he was transfixed by her graciousness and beauty. Even more than this, he was overcome by the fact that God is alive and God had heard and blessed his prayer.

Abraham’s servant was not impulsive. He waited on God. He had to make sure that this was really God’s leading and not just his own wishful thinking. Remember that Abraham asked for a woman from his family, not the woman who would feed 10 camels. After Rebekah had finished watering the camels, he gave her a gift to show his appreciation and asked her about her family. When he learned that she was Abraham’s great niece, he bowed his head and worshiped God. He said, “Praise be to the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his kindness and faithfulness to my master. As for me, the Lord has led me on the journey to the house of my master’s relatives.” When he obeyed by faith and prayed by faith, God blessed his prayer. His prayer also reveals his faithfulness to Abraham. Abraham loved and feared God. So he planted in his servant the same awesome respect for God. Abraham’s servant believed the God of Abraham. He served Abraham as though he were serving God. He realized that, for Abraham’s sake, God was leading his mission step by step and worshiped and thanked God each step of the way.

What was his attitude when his mission seemed to be a great success? Look at verse 33. “Then food was set before him, but he said, ‘I will not eat until I have told you what I have to say.” Abraham’s servant must have been tired and hungry after his long journey. When I am hungry, I only think about food. Everything looks like food. But he regarded his mission more important than his hungry stomach. He decided not to eat until he got their answer. Laban could not but let him speak. The old servant began to share a mini life testimony and told everything that had happened. He focused on how God had answered his prayers and led him each step of the way. As he told his long story, the food got cold, but he didn’t care. This servant was an old man, but he was so intent on carrying out his mission that he forgot about being tired and hungry. Even a young man, if he has no sense of mission, cannot overcome his own physical desires. We can learn from Abraham’s servant that mission must be regarded as more precious than eating. Paul said in Acts 20:24, “I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me.” Originally, God created man for mission. He entrusted the stewardship of the earth to mankind (Ge 1:28). He created each of us for a purpose and has a mission for each of us (Eph 2:10). If a man is not faithful to the mission God has given him, he is only a cursed lump of clay, and he can never be happy. The only real way of happiness is to know God, and receive from him the mission he had prepared for us, and be faithful to that mission to the point of death.

Abraham’s servant did not regard his mission as complete until he had actually escorted Rebekah back to Isaac in Canaan. He knew human nature well. People who make decisions of faith when they are thinking only about God and his will can have second thoughts when they began to calculate humanly. So the next morning Abraham’s servant said, “Send me on my way to my master.” But Rebekah’s family wanted to keep their lovely daughter for just a few days longer. But he answered, “Do not detain me, now that the Lord has granted success to my journey. Send me on my way so that I may go to my master.” He only thought about delivering this good news to Abraham. Nothing else was in his mind. He could have stayed, taking a short vacation in the sun, but he didn’t. He only wanted to return quickly and finish his mission. Then he discovered that the final and most important matter had not been settled at all. No one had asked Rebekah. She was the one who had to make the final decision.

Rebekah was qualified in many ways to be the wife of the covenant son, Isaac. She was pure and very beautiful; she was generous and broad minded and not afraid of hard work (How ugly are the women who paint their long fingernails, and lie around lazily, yawning in boredom). But her most important qualification was her faith. She had listened to the old man’s long account of how God had led him to find a wife for Isaac. She realized that this was God’s will. She had eyes to see how God was working and leading, and she had the courage to make a decision of faith to participate in God’s great work of world salvation. Look at verse 58. “So they called Rebekah and asked her, ‘Will you go with this man?’ ‘I will go,’ she said.” She entrusted her life to God’s hand. She did not know how Isaac looked like. Did he look like the hunchback of Notre Dame? Did he look like Brad Pitt? She did not know Isaac. But she believed the promise of God. She was like Abraham who left his country and his father’s household and went to the promised land. She trusted God and left her home right away. She was willing to give her marriage to God. Surely a woman’s marriage is most precious and personal to her. It is the content of her secret dreams. Most women will give everything else to God, but they reserve their marriage and their choice of a husband for themselves. Rebekah made a decision of faith to please God, not please herself in her marriage. People misunderstand marriage by faith these days, thinking that it an arranged marriage. It simply means that our marriage standard must be based on faith in God. It means “marriage with man or woman of God.” These days many people use eharmony.com or matchmaker.com for finding their marriage candidates. How can we trust computer programs for finding a marriage candidate? We should trust God for our marriage not computer programs. Her family sent her off with this blessing: “Our sister, may you increase to thousands upon thousands; may your offspring possess the cities of their enemies.” (60) So God blessed her and used her to establish God’s covenant family with Isaac.

Isaac’s mother had died. He was her only son, and he had received much love from her. He grieved for his mother. He needed a wife who could also give him a mother’s love. A man must grow spiritually and humanly after his marriage. His wife must make a home that is full of God’s love and laughter, a home that is full of prayer and faith and deep respect, so that her husband can grow up to be a useful servant of God. Women who only seek love from their tired and world-weary husbands, who say sharp and painful things that hurt their husbands’ pride and pierce their vulnerable spots cannot please God or help their husbands. The servant told Isaac all he had done. Isaac brought Rebekah into the tent of his mother Sarah, and she became his wife. He loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death. When she married by faith, romance followed her.

In conclusion, God should be the master of our marriage. Man and woman of faith must seek the will of God in finding their marriage partners with much prayer. I pray that we may learn faithfulness in our mission life from Abraham’s servant and regard our mission more important than food and rest. May God bless us to be faithful servant of God for Jesus. May God raise many women of faith like Rebekah.