

MATCHMAKER
Genesis 24

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Sometimes finding a good wife can be the most difficult of all tasks. And a whole lot is riding on Isaac, the only heir of the covenant and promises to Abraham, finding just the right wife to be the mother of a new nation.

God had told Abraham, when Abraham was 75, that he and his elderly wife, Sarah, would be blessed with an heir from whom a nation as innumerable as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore would emerge. They waited 25 years before the child of laughter, Isaac, was born. Sarah named him “laughter” because she said, “Everybody will laugh with me that I, an old woman, have borne this boy.” By the time we get to our text this morning, Isaac is a wealthy bachelor. He is forty years of age, and it’s high time that he get married. Sarah is already dead, and Abraham is worried. He, himself, is an elderly man and he just wants to get the boy married off before he dies, to make sure that he is going along with the plan of God.

But I warn you, sometimes a good wife is a hard thing to find.

In fact, so hard that men have resorted to desperate measures to find Ms. Right – or Ms. Just Right For Me.

Take Harold. He’s just about Isaac’s age – 45. Single. Never married. No kids. 5’8” and 153 pounds. Brown hair and blue eyes. He’s a long haul trucker who has a web page entitled willworkforawife.org. Being a truck driver, Harold has a hard time meeting women, so Harold leased a billboard in Omaha, Nebraska. Had a picture of himself plastered above the street – probably about a 12 foot tall version of the 5’8” Harold. It was at the corner of 72nd and Dodge Streets in Omaha.

In fact, he had a picket sign and he marched up and down the street handing out cards, business cards, that refer to his task to find a bride. Harold says this was his summer project – to find the right woman. His goal was to be married by Christmas. Harold said he was willing to spend up to \$10,000 on this nuptial campaign. Hey ladies, Harold does his own laundry. He’s a good cook. He irons his own shirts. He mows his own lawn. And he tries to keep the house clean. (“Tired of Online Dating? Try A Billboard Instead,” www.buzzle.com/editorials/6-17-2005-71733.asp)

Women, these guys are desperate to find you.

Tom Feltenstein spent \$6,000 to put up a billboard on I-95 near the Palm Beach airport. It reads, “Have Maid...Have Money, Would Love a Honey!” Too bad ladies, don’t try to call in on that

one. Tom has already found a wife. (www.hbcmiami.com/news/local-beat/Blushing-Bride-for-Billboard-Millionaire-80198777.html)

But if you are willing to spend more than the \$6,000 to \$10,000 it takes to buy space on a big billboard, you might want to contact Janis Spindel. She has her office on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, and she will help you find just the right girl. She starts out at \$20,000. But if you get married – which most of her clients do – she expects a \$75,000 to \$250,000 bonus. She has a databank of 6,800 women and is always taking in more. That’s the harem from which you can choose your bride-to-be. One man, who was described as a “very handsome” man, was asked why on earth he would have to hire somebody like Janis and pay the price of a small automobile just to find a bride. He said, “I’d have to meet 100 girls to find one who clicks. I think Janis has already met those 100. She’s going to do the sorting out for me. She’s my screener.” Don’t think it works? Janis is responsible for 715 marriages in the last ten years. She averages about 1.5 weddings a week for 10 years. (“The New Arranged Marriage,” www.nytimes.com/2005/02/13)

What about letting Janis pick your bride? What about arranged marriages?

When it was time for Sabiha Ansari to get married, her parents flew her to India. She met her husband-to-be for less than 20 minutes, with family, then was asked whether she liked him. “That was really hard for me,” she says. “I kind of wanted to have some time alone with him to talk to him, or even on the phone.” But she said yes, she would marry him, and they were married five days later.

Arranged marriages are most common among families in India, the Middle East, and Japan. Sabiha, who is 37, says, “Your parents know you very well, and they will not do anything to you that will be detrimental.” Another young lady, by the name of Huma, said her parents were screening all of her suitors. She said, “I’m in graduate school. I don’t have time to find anyone. I’ll take all the help I can get. Let my mama pick.” (“Arranged marriage gets high-tech twist,” www.cnn.com/2008/LIVING/personal/04/23/web.arranged.marriages/index.html)

These are folks, going to medical school, allowing their parents to pick their spouse.

The arranged marriage goes way, way back – thousands and thousands of years.

Tomoko Chibana has been happily married for 14 years, thanks to her parents’ pick. “I knew my mom and dad would find me a lovely gentleman,” she said. “I was able to concentrate on my professional studies while at university.” She was born in Japan and now lives in New York City with her husband and three children. “I didn’t have to waste time looking for love. I graduated, got married to the man they picked, and now I have a family.” (“Because Mom Said So: Are Arranged Marriages the Next Big Trend? www.foxnews.com)

In fact, I found an advertisement casting a game show which read this way: We are looking for four people who will ask their closest loved ones – whether family or friends – to team up and choose a spouse for them; they know you, they love you, they want what’s best for you; they may even have better judgment about who would make a good lifetime partner for you. You must be ready to commit to marriage. Your loved ones will match you with someone based on shared

goals, values, experiences and the commitment to making it work.”
(www.arrangedmarriagetv.com)

Or then there is the tried and true way, the biblical way. Always marry the woman who offers to water your camels.

What???

I said always marry the woman who offers to water the camels.

Well, it's a long story. Let's begin in Genesis 24.

Verses 1-9

Now Abraham was old, advanced in age; and the Lord had blessed Abraham in every way. And Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he owned, “Please place your hand under my thigh, and I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live, but you shall go to my country and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son Isaac.”

And the servant said to him, “Suppose the woman will not be willing to follow me to this land; should I take your son back to the land from where you came?”

And Abraham said to him, “Beware lest you take my son back there! The Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth, and who spoke to me, and who swore to me, saying, ‘To your descendants I will give this land,’ He will send His angel before you, and you will take a wife for my son from there. But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this my oath; only do not take my son back there.”

So the servant placed his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning this matter.

I. Believers have the responsibility of ensuring that God's program continues to the next generation.

It has often been said that it takes two to make a marriage: a single daughter and an anxious mother. We might say in this case a single son and an anxious father.

Abraham is an intensely determined and utterly believing old man. God has promised to multiply his descendants, to bless all the nations of the earth in his seed. And now that Abraham finally has a boy, the boy needs a wife for the promise to be passed on to the next generation.

So he calls his servant. The servant is unnamed. We could suppose that he might be Eliezer, back in Genesis 15:2, who would have even been the heir should Isaac have never been born. The servant makes the oath with Abraham.

Abraham gives him two stipulations. First of all, “Do not take a wife from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live.” This wasn’t ethnic discrimination. This was choosing a wife within the faith. The Canaanites didn’t worship Yahweh. Abraham did. “Don’t choose a wife who worships a foreign god.” Good advice then. Good advice today.

Secondly, Isaac cannot move to Mesopotamia; his wife must dwell with him in the Promised Land.

We have that same responsibility today that Abraham had to Isaac. We need to make sure that we pass on the promises of God to the next generation. You remember what Paul said to Timothy? “Your faith is multi-generational. I know the faith of your grandmother Lois, and I know your mother Eunice. And I am sure the faith is in you as well.” (2 Tim.1:5)

You realize that the followership of Christ Jesus is never more than one generation from total failure. If we follow Jesus but our children do not, Christianity will come to a halt. The next generation must understand followership. The next generation must understand stewardship and supporting the church. The next generation must understand missions and trying to reach the whole world. The next generation must understand commitment to Christ and to His bride, the church. We have failed utterly, no matter how fervently we keep our own faith, if we fail to give that faith to our sons and daughters, to our grandsons and our granddaughters.

II. We can be confident of the leading of the Lord.

The servant heads out on the journey, looking for a bride for Isaac. You notice what Abraham tells him in 24:7b, “God will send His angel before you, and you will take a wife for my son from there. The messenger will go ahead and do the work for you.”

And then in verse 12, the servant prays. “O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today, and show lovingkindness (that is, show *hesed*) to my master Abraham.

He asked for a sign. He was standing at the spring – that’s where you met women in those days, because they were always fetching water. “Now, I’m going to ask the girls to give me something to drink. But the one who says, ‘Not only will you have a drink, but I’ll water your camels,’ – may she be the one whom Thou hast appointed for Thy servant Isaac; and by this I shall know that Thou hast shown *hesed* to my master.”

Have you ever noticed verse 15. “And it came about before he had finished speaking, that behold, Rebekah who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Abraham’s brother Nahor, came out with her jar on her shoulder.” He had no more finished saying Amen to his prayer before God was already sending Rebekah. She was not only a worshiper of Yahweh, she was from Abraham’s clan, a descendant of his brother.

Do you know how much camels drink? A camel can drink about twenty gallons of water – so watering ten camels is to draw two hundred gallons of water (8 lbs. per gallon). It’s an hour or more of hard work. This was no small gift. But God was sending her on her way before the close of the prayer.

Isaiah proclaims of God, “Before they call, I will answer” (Isaiah 65:24). Before he finished the prayer, Rebekah was on the way to the well.

And isn't Rebekah a whirlwind of activity? We have four verses here and Rebekah has eleven verbs of action. Verses 16, 18, 19, 20. She *went* down. She *filled* her jar. She *came* up. She *lowered* her jar. She *gave* him a drink. She was *giving* him a drink. She *drew* also for the camels. She *emptied* her jar. She *ran* back to the well *to draw*. And she *drew* for all of his camels. And in the midst of all that, she gave a speech.

I've never seen anything like it - busy as a bee - God has led the servant to Rebekah. God leads Rebekah to the well.

God leads his people. We find that in the Old Testament, don't we? The psalmist declares, “He leads me beside the still waters, He restoreth my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake” (Psalm 23:2-3). This is the economy of God's management.

Look at verse 14.

The one that offers to water the camels – may she be the one whom Thou hast *appointed*....

Look at verse 44. It's repeated so you won't miss it. “She will say to me, ‘You drink, and I will draw for your camels also’; let her be the woman whom the Lord has *appointed* for my master's son.”

Yes, he leadeth Rebekah down by the waters that she might become the mother of the holy nation.

As much as the text emphasizes the leadership of God, it also emphasizes the followership of God's people.

III. We must give priority to completing God's work.

She draws the water for the camels. The servant gives her a gold nose ring, weighing half a shekel, and two bracelets for her wrist, weighing ten shekels of gold (v. 22). Then he asks the question. He had to know if God was at work. “Whose daughter are you? Please tell me, is there room for us to lodge in your father's house?” And she said to him, “I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor” (v. 23-24). (That's Abraham's brother.)

And she said to him, “We have plenty of both straw and feed, and room to lodge in.” Then the man bowed low and worshiped the Lord.

Then the servant says, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His lovingkindness and His truth toward my master; as for me, the Lord has *guided* me in the way to the house of my master's brothers” (v. 27).

The Lord leads. The Lord guides. And we must complete the work of the Lord before all else.

The girl runs and tells her mother's household about these things. Now she has a brother named Laban. Laban runs out. He sees the gold. He knows there is a rich man visiting. He invites the man in. "Come on in. We've got a place for the camels." The camels are fed – they've already been watered – and the servant is given a banquet of food. But he replies, verse 33, "I will not eat until I have told my business." And Laban said, "Speak on."

We must give priority to completing God's work. God's work doesn't come second to anything in my life or anything in your life. It comes as a first priority.

Eliezer, weary from traveling the long journey – remember, this is a month's journey on travel provisions, must have been absolutely exhausted and starving. But he refuses to even sit down and eat until he has told the wishes of God, the will of Abraham his master. When he has told all about God's plan and how the watering of the camels was a sign, Laban, her brother, and Bethuel, her father, answer, "The matter comes from the Lord; so we cannot speak to you bad or good" (v. 50).

This is the plan of God. It doesn't matter if we're for it; doesn't matter if we're against it. It's just the plan of God. So Rebekah can go with you and "be the wife of your master's son, as the Lord has spoken."

Though she never meets Isaac before she marries him, never has a single conversation, though her family – her mother and brother – want her to stay ten days before she goes to be the wife of Isaac, Rebekah says, "I'll go now." Look at verse 58. "Will you go with this man?" And she said, "I will go." Marries a man she had never even met.

IV. The Lord will always complete the work that He begins.

He'd made the promise that Abraham would be the father of a great nation. It looked along the way as if it might not ever happen, but God always finishes His work.

Isaac goes out into the field (v. 63) to meditate. He looks up, and here come the camels of the servant coming home with his bride. Rebekah looks up and sees Isaac. Now remember, Rebekah is beautiful. She has never been touched by a man. And she's from the right clan. Rebekah sees him. She jumps off her camel and asks, "Who is that man walking to meet us?" "He's my master." Now that's interesting because Abraham, before, had been the only one called his master. But now things are moving on to Isaac. And, in fact, when he marries her, he is going to take her into Sarah's tent. She is the new mother of the nation, and he is the new master.

"And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done" (verse 66).

She covers her face with her veil (v. 65). "And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and he took Rebekah, and she became his wife." Look at the end of verse 67. "And he loved her; thus Isaac was comforted after his mother's death."

The choice of the bride was God's choice. The sign confirmed it. Laban recognized it. Rebekah complied with it. Likewise, in other situations, those who do the will of God prayerfully and

obediently may be confident that they are led by God. But they may not perceive how they were led until after they act by faith. (Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, p. 423)

God leads.

We obey.

God's will is done in every aspect of life.

Sources:

Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*

Michael E. Williams, ed., *The Storyteller's Companion to the Bible*

Walter Brueggemann, *Interpretation Commentary: Genesis*

Victor P. Hamilton, *NICT: The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18-50*