

A Marriage Made In Heaven

Genesis 24:1-67

Statistics were a bit difficult to come by, but according to an article appearing in Forbes magazine in 2013 at that time there were 2,500 online dating sites in the US alone and some 8,000 globally. The article indicated that approximately 1,000 new dating sites are added annually.

With the onset of the internet, finding Mr. or Mrs. Right has expanded to a much larger haystack. It used to be that your search for someone to marry was limited to your school, whether it be High school or college. Or the town where you lived or your church if you attended. A number of couples met at camp. Back when I was in college there were always rumors about some girls who were attending solely to get their MRS degree. But the internet has expanded the search beyond the local school, town, church or college campus. It has not only become global in scope it is reaping sizeable profits from those looking for the right person.

YouTube is always a source for both the romantic and hilarious, so I scanned a few videos of various proposals. We've heard of proposals being made underwater or in a hot air balloon, on a baseball diamond or football field amidst thousands of roaring onlookers.

One guy proposed climbing, illegally I might add, a particular mountain in California and got stuck and had to be rescued.

Another guy chose a beautiful spot to be filmed on some rocks next to a river only to have the ring fall out of his hand into the rushing river while trying to put it on her finger. All his dreams were washed away in a moment.

Another guy decided to propose on the corner of a busy city street. He got down on one knee while a crowd formed and a friend filmed. He opened the jewelry box to pop the all-important question only to have some guy in the crowd run up and snatch the ring right out of his hand and run off. It truly was a moment stolen in time.

Robyn and I were sitting on the couch. I was reading from **Proverbs 31**. When I finished, I pulled out the ring and asked her that all important question. The rest, as they say, is herstory.

In our culture two people meet. As things progress, they fall in love and at some point the "M" word comes into the conversation. Sometimes the proposal is expected, other times it's totally out of the blue. Sometimes the father is asked, sometimes the father isn't. Sometimes the father is asked before the proposal, sometimes it's after.

Some cultures have arranged marriages where the couple doesn't choose, the choice has been made for you. They grow up knowing who their marriage partner will be.

In most cases, at least in our culture, it is the guy asking permission and proposing. I have yet to meet with a couple in pre-marital counseling where it was the butler who proposed on behalf of his master's son or a friend going on behalf of the guy.

Let's face it ladies, how would you like some guy whom you have never met before show up at your doorstep and speak on behalf of someone else whom you have never met and tell you he was sent on an errand to fetch you as a bride for his master's son or for a friend?

Well, that's the situation in our passage today in **Genesis 24**. So hold on to your little bottle of bubbles or lacy pouch of bird seed because the "I Do's" will come at the end of the chapter.

What I want you to see throughout this chapter that is clearly evident, though not explicitly stated, is the sovereign grace of God in all this. The orchestration of His hand is seen from **verse 1** to **verse 67**. It is more than just a love story; it is the will of God maneuvering people to accomplish the promise made to Abraham that through him would come a mighty nation. But once again, it is all according to His timetable, His ways, His will.

In **chapter 23** we learned that Sarah had died. In **chapter 24** we learn that Isaac is 40 years old. That

means it's been three years since his mother's death. We read in **verse 1** that Abraham is old. He's 140 years old by this time.

In **verses 1-9** there is a vow with purposeful foresight.

I. A VOW WITH PURPOSEFUL FORESIGHT – vs. 1-9

This chapter isn't about Abraham although he has a role in what unfolds. It's not even about this unnamed servant although some commentaries suggest that it is Eliezer, who by this time, would also be old. This chapter is about Isaac and sets the stage for the ensuing several chapters in God's unfolding plan of redemption.

In **verses 1-4** there is a clear request.

A. A Clear Request – vs. 1-4

The paternal clock is ticking for Abraham. He doesn't know it, but he will live for another 35 years. None of us know how long we'll live, and for Abraham the twilight of his life is coming to a close as each day passes on. He understands that for the promise of God to be passed on, his son needs to get married. The text notes that Abraham has been blessed in every way. He was extremely wealthy. Yet one thing remained. He didn't have a grandson to whom the promises of God would be passed on, so he set about to make that happen. His most trusted servant is called to take on a very important errand. It was so important that Abraham asked the servant to take an oath. Putting the hand under the thigh was a sign of submission to authority. It's like raising your right hand while putting your left hand on the Bible, or putting your hand over your heart as a sign of allegiance to our country's flag.

Putting his hand under the thigh was a symbolic gesture indicating that he would obey the request of his master. That it was also near the place of procreation was an indication of the promise of God that his seed would continue through Isaac and Isaac's offspring. In our culture we swear on the Bible. In Abraham's culture they swore on circumcision which was the covenantal sign

between God and Abraham of the promise that had been made of making him into a great nation.

Joseph would do the same with his father Jacob as an oath that when he died, he would not be buried in Egypt, but taken back to Canaan and buried there.

Abraham's request was for the servant to travel back to his homeland to seek a wife among his relatives rather than getting a wife from the people in Canaan where they were living. What he said to King Abimelech still held true these many years later that there was no fear of God in that land. This people had no desire to obey God and it showed in their lifestyle. They were spiritually corrupt and Abraham didn't want his descendants to be mixed with such ungodliness.

Some scholars suggest that the reason he was not to take a bride for Isaac from Canaan goes back to the curse Noah placed on his grandson Canaan, some of whose descendants lived in the area where Abraham was living. They believe that Abraham didn't want his offspring being mixed with a cursed people.

Others will point to the importance of not marrying a non-Christian as Paul taught in **I Corinthians 7** that a Christian should not be unequally yoked with a non-Christian in marriage.

Abraham wanted his servant to return to Mesopotamia to get a wife for Isaac. The clear request though is met with a concerned response.

B. A Concerned Response – v. 5

Here's the picture. Abraham has sent his most trusted servant on an errand of epic proportions. Go back to my homeland, find my relatives, find a wife among my relatives and ask her to come back and be my son's wife. That seems clear, but what if... Hey master, I may be able to do all that, but in the end if I am able to find her, what if she says no? What if she refuses?

You have to feel sorry for proposals that have gone horribly wrong. The guy has planned the perfect setting, gotten his closest friends for that magical moment, taken a knee, pulled out the ring while

beginning his often rehearsed speech only to get humiliated with a big fat NO.

I watched a short video on YouTube of one unfortunate guy who spent a lot of money purchasing 99 iPhones, why I don't know. He stacked them three high into a heart shape with his girlfriend standing in the middle while he proposed only to have her turn him down.

Then there was poor Jerome who proposed to his girlfriend of a year and a half before hundreds of people at a Jesus Jam concert only to hear the words "I'm sorry" and watch her walk off the stage.

Abraham: "Go find a bride among my relatives."
 Servant: "What if she says no?" Should I take him back there with me to show her what a good looking man he is to convince her?" If she just takes one look at him I'm sure she would say yes.
 Abraham gives a careful response in **verses 6-8**.

C. A Careful Response – vs. 6-8

You might be wondering what harm there would be in sending his son on this little journey to fetch a wife. After all, she was going to be his bride. Shouldn't he have a little say in the matter?

I think the reason is clear from what Abraham says in order to understand the rationale for his insistence that Isaac not go to Mesopotamia on this all important matrimonial errand. Abraham restated the promise of God about the land becoming an inheritance for his descendants and he feared that if Isaac went to his home country he might decide he liked it and not want to return. What would come of God's promise then?

He then added that if the woman was not willing to return with him then the servant was free of the oath.

Notice, if you will, the tremendous faith Abraham had in God. He had every confidence in God based on the past promises God made to him. That same trust reassured him of the future that God would do what He said. Look at **verse 7**. It's an important lesson for us to remember.

"He [God] will send His angel before you so that you can get a wife for my son from there."

God will lead the way.

Dear friends, God's promises made yesterday are just as reliable tomorrow.

We started the service with an important reminder.

God will make a way
 where there seems to be no way.

He works in ways we cannot see;

He will make a way for me.

He will be my guide,

Hold me closely to His side.

With love and strength for each new day;

He will make a way,

He will make a way.

CCLI 1292471

Many of you know that this has been an incredibly challenging several months for Robyn. Beginning back in June she was managing three dialysis centers traveling between Mt. Morris, Bridgeport and St. Clair. They finally hired a manager for St. Clair who assumed the role in mid-September. About two weeks after that she found out that another facility in Bridgeport was closing and she could "inherit" upwards of 40 patients in the transition. That meant her quiet little facility of 11 patients open three days a week would swell. In the end they got about 30 patients requiring the center to be open 6 days.

She had two needs. She needed immediate temporary staffing for the influx of patients they would receive in about two weeks' time from the notice requiring a lot of data entry for Dr.'s orders, patient history, and so on. Filling gaps in staffing schedules has been a logistical nightmare requiring nurses and techs from other facilities to fill in on their off days.

The second need was for long-term staffing meaning scheduling interviews. She was already in a critical need for staffing to fill holes when the situation became more dire. Her nurse at Mt. Morris needed surgery and was off for a week while at the same time her nurse at Bridgeport injured herself

and has been off for two weeks and will be out at least another week before being assessed as to whether she can return anytime soon. Consequently she has had to staff the floor as the nurse getting up at 2:30 to be at work by 4 and then working until about 7 at night, working between 70-80 hours.

Her schedule then required me to pick up carpool responsibilities, which has meant having to leave the office around 2:30 to pick David up at 3, then turn around and get him to driver's ed. class each night at 6, sometimes to turn around and pick him up at 8. On a few occasions I have had to then drive back down for Prayer meeting or a Board meeting and then on Saturdays get him to and from play practice. There have been lunches to pack, meals to fix (or drive through), laundry and dogs to take care of along with sermons to finish on Saturdays. I've hardly seen her during the week.

Through it all Robyn has exhibited tremendous poise and grace, but I want to tell you that on more than one occasion I have thrown myself a pity party and no, I did not send out invitations to anyone.

More than for me, this has been an extremely difficult time for Robyn with an uncertain end in sight, but the promises of God are just as relevant today for us both as they were a month or a year or a decade or a century ago or when they were written and they will be just as true for us tomorrow. *God will make a way where there seems to be no way. He works in ways we cannot see, He will make a way for me. He will be my guide, hold me closely to His side. With love and strength for each new day, He will make a way.* It is made possible by His grace, which He said is sufficient for all our needs, He is helping us through this season of testing.

Abraham understood that. Why or how did Abraham understand that? Because through his years of walking and growing to trust God, he came to see that in everything God does God is faithful. What He said He would do and He will make a way to get it done.

God promised the land to his descendants.

God promised a great nation.

God would go before his servant. He would make a

way.

It is all a matter of faith, a faith that has grown exponentially over time.

It was John Calvin who said "we have simple reliance on the promise of God." That's faith. And Abraham's faith in God fueled a committed resolution in his servant. We see that in **verse 9**.

D. A Committed Resolution – v. 9

The oath Abraham asked him to make in **verse 2** he then made in **verse 9**. He obediently committed himself to Abraham's request and would walk in the same faith as his master, Abraham, trusted in God who made a promise, trusted that He would go before him and make a way for him. All he had to do was walk in faith with a committed resolution.

The question for us may be, will we, out of faith, commit to the task God is asking of us to do when we aren't sure of the outcome?

Faith believe God will make a way.

It is a vow with purposeful foresight that trusts in God.

It then becomes a journey with prayerful faith.

II. A JOURNEY WITH PRAYERFUL FAITH – vs. 10-27

Understand that this isn't a simple journey. It's not like he was traveling to the next town over. We aren't even really sure which route he took. Some suggest he went directly east through the desert. Most commentators I read believe he traveled the caravan routes that went north to Haran and then south to Ur in the Mesopotamian region. It was a thousand miles and took around four months to travel. There were no trains, no plains, no motor cars, just camels loaded with lots of presents for the would-be bride and her family and the necessary provisions for their two-way trip. So in **verses 10-14** we see there is prayerful obedience.

A. There Is Prayerful Obedience – vs. 10-14

Abraham knew where his brother had been living and sent the servant there. He finally reached his

destination, but finding the family and locating this bride could prove to be challenging. His plan began with prayer. That's a good place to start isn't it? When you're faced with decisions and outcomes and direction follow the advice of the hymnist and take it to the Lord in prayer. Paul says there's no need to be anxious about anything. Instead take all your petitions to the Lord with thanksgiving (**Philippians 4:6-7**). Jesus said to watch and pray (**Matthew 26:41**). **James 5:16** says that the prayer of a righteous person is both powerful and effective.

When the path seems uncertain – pray. Let our first inclination be to pray when we are facing some unknown in our life. Take the advice of Paul to the Thessalonians (**I Thessalonians 5:17**) and pray without ceasing. Have an attitude of prayer about you throughout the day.

The servant arrived at his destination and prayed in faith for further direction. Understand that this was not a fleece tossed to God as in Gideon's prayer. He was asking God to suspend natural events as a determining factor that God was in the thing Gideon was being asked to do.
God make the fleece wet and the ground dry.
God make the ground wet and the fleece dry.

In his prayer the servant asked for a simple test to know God's leading.
“God, I'll ask a maiden if she could get me some water. If she says yes, and then offers to water the camels, let this be the one I've have been sent to get.”

Kent Hughes writes “The lesson is certainly not that we are to lay out criteria that God must fulfill as a way to determine His will, but rather that the Lord will guide as we are faithful to His Word.”

That's the guiding principle of **Proverbs 3:5-6**.
“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths.”
NIV **“He will make your paths straight.”**

It's also seen in the New Testament in **Romans**

8:28 “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.”

For prayer to be powerful and effective, the qualifying word in **James 5:16** is that the person must be “righteous”, needs to be following God.

When my Uncle was 14 he was hitchhiking somewhere in upstate New York on a bitterly cold winter day and prayed something to the effect that if God would get him a ride, he would follow him. That ride never came and he had to walk to his destination. He determined from there on that he couldn't depend on God, only himself. Up until that time he didn't have any kind of relationship with God that would merit an answer from God.

We can't think for a moment that God is some genie in the bottle that we rub to get what we want. **Psalm 37:4** states **“Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.”** That doesn't mean that oh, goodie, if I am happy with God he'll overwhelm me with whatever I want, but rather that when I delight in God, His desires become my desires. His will becomes my will not the other way around.

The servant was asking direction for God's will. He was trusting God for specific direction, to have his path laid out straight for him because that was the path he wanted to take.

Again from the pen of Kent Hughes who writes:
“God is always faithful to His children – always!
Our challenge is to be faithful to Him. God does not help those who help themselves. He helps those who entrust themselves completely to Him, as did Abraham and the servant.”

Henry Morris notes: “The Lord leads along the path a step at a time; but before He can lead us along the path, we must be on the path. When a man is doing God's will, as best he knows it, and is willing to do his Father's will even before he knows it, then he will know God's will as soon as he needs to.”

The servant was on the right path trusting God.

So, are you on His path, or are you on your own path asking Him to bless it? The servant is walking in prayerful obedience. Then there is prayerful observation.

B. There Is Prayerful Observation – vs. 15-21

The text tells us that even before he got his amen out, along came a maiden. He approached her about getting some water for him. She said yes and then also offered to water the camels. Now something that you need to know is that this was no easy task. We picture a well as being a hole in the ground where you lower a bucket and haul it back up, dump it in a trough and do it again. Here's what makes the feat even more impressive. An ancient well was a deep hole in the earth with steps that led down to the underground spring. Camels can drink around 30 gallons of water in about 15 minutes. There were 10 camels making it about 300 gallons of water required to fill the thirsty beasts. A typical water jug held 3 gallons so she would have needed to make between 80-100 trips to draw enough water. It would take her between 1 ½ - 2 hours to complete the task. All the while the servant was prayerfully observing how she conducted herself to **“see if the Lord had made his journey successful.”** Is this the one?

Again, Kent Hughes writes **“A woman who would volunteer to do this would be remarkably kind, generous and industrious.”**

When she was done, we see that there is prayerful obeisance.

C. There Is Prayerful Obeisance – vs. 22-27

Convinced that God had not only led him to the right place, but also to the right person, the servant bowed in worship to the Lord for His kindness.

It is always appropriate to pause and praise God for His answers to prayer. Be a grateful/thankful follower. There is no self-adulation here. He went right to the source of his success. It was praise to God.

Isn't God's timing remarkable? The servant set out

several months earlier arriving at his destination at the appointed time God set when Rebekah would be coming out to get some water. God is indeed worthy of praise in orchestrating the whole thing. The servant didn't have to ask multiple maidens, she was the first one on the scene. How great is God? AMEN? It was truly a journey of prayerful faith, a lesson we would all do well to note.

What happens next is a dinner with praiseworthy feasting.

III.A DINNER WITH PRAISEWORTHY FEASTING – vs. 28-54a

We see in **verse 28** that Rebekah is giddy with excitement. Well, okay, maybe just excited. She ran home to mom and dad and shared the incredible news that someone sent from Uncle Abraham was outside town who brought a marriage proposal.

Three things emerge in this passage.

There is a welcoming invitation
There is a word with information
There is wonder that is inherent

Her brother Laban ran out to meet the servant and invited him to stay with them for the night. What really captured the heart of Laban wasn't the story but all the gifts that were lavished on Rebekah and them. While not necessarily evident here, we will see in a few chapters the real nature of his deceptive heart that is subtly intertwined in the text here.

Before dinner, the servant impressed on them the urgency of his errand that couldn't wait until after they ate, which was the customary time for conducting business. They listened to the servant's story of God's blessing on their relative Abraham and how his God had led the servant to them with the request of taking Rebekah back with him to marry Isaac. After a family pow wow they agreed that this was of God and would accept the proposal. With the confirmation from them that his journey had been a success, he once again bowed in reverence and worship of God, again, an indication of his own personal faith. It was a dinner with praiseworthy feasting.

I want to close with one final point from the text. In the closing verses we see a marriage with passionate feelings. It truly is a marriage made in heaven. God had brought it all together by His sovereign plan.

IV. A MARRIAGE WITH PASSIONATE FEELINGS – vs. 54b-67

In the conclusion of the Princess Bride we find Sweet Wesley and Princess Buttercup engaged in a passionate kiss. The author closes with these words: “Since the invention of the kiss, there have been 5 kisses that have been rated the most passionate, the most pure. This one left them all behind.”

Isaac and Rebekah have never met until the day she arrived. All that the servant had told her about this young man served to endear her heart to his and when at last they met she knew all the servant had told her about him was true and he loved her and took her as his wife. What a great love story.

That reminds me of another great love story. God sent His emissary to tell us how much He loves us. The more we hear the more we are endeared to Him. Some day we will meet, and there will be a marriage made in heaven.

Through it all we see God’s grace and faithfulness. It’s His plan, His timing, and His promise. If there is one thought I would leave with you today it is this: Whatever unseen and uncertain God may be asking you to travel, God will make a way. Will you love Him and trust Him enough to believe that He will make your paths straight?