

Introduction: This is a match made in heaven. That's the main point of Abraham's servant's message. That's the main point of Rebekah's family's response. That's the main point of the narrator: God is graciously, powerfully taking care of the covenant line out of which will come Jesus, the One in whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed. And to do that, God Himself has been at work for generations, in two families, two produce a marriage made in heaven.

We have seen from the beginning of Genesis that it's in marriage and family that God especially glorifies His image in man, in the context of marriage that Satan attacks for the fall, through marriage and family that God plans to bring the redeemer, and upon marriage and family that the wellbeing of the covenant line has risen and fallen.

Our text this morning again highlights how important an issue this is. In v33, we find that it's more important than food. There we find the servant saying that he will not eat, and indeed there's no eating until v54! It's also more important than politeness, for this refusal to eat would have been terribly rude. It's actually very gracious that the response at the end of v33 is "speak on." What we would expect is "eat first, speak later," just as we saw in Genesis 18.

And there is a lesson here for us. We can be very concerned with earthly needs. We can be very concerned with "fitting in" socially and culturally. And it is possible to let those concerns be more important than such spiritual issues with such eternal implications as marriage and family. So again, God reminds us this morning in this text the importance of what is taking place here.

Because this text gives us specific insight into the family leadership that surrounds Rebekah, we will take advantage of that insight this morning as we come to the text to learn, as Paul instructs us in 1Cor 10 regarding the wilderness generation—that the same Scriptures that are written to point us to Christ also include accounts of both the good and the bad among His people, so that we might learn from example.

It is true that there is much in Bethuel's household that is a bad example, but with the overwhelming emphasis upon how this as a whole was a happy providence, we will take the same emphasis as the text and see what kind of household God sets before us as a blessing. What we find in Rebekah's family is leadership through communication, consideration, and consecration. Communication, consideration, and consecration.

Communication

One of the first things that we see in the text is Rebekah making her report. It seems from v45 that the servant's prayers had been made in his heart, but what she has heard she now relays to Laban. The phrase "thus and so" here indicates a full account.

This enables her family to be the main point of contact from here on. At first reading, I was troubled by the fact that Laban seems to be the primary point of contact—not just because Laban is a scoundrel (he is that) but because it seems that Bethuel is still alive. However, I think we have hints in the text that Bethuel is ill, incapacitated, or even dying. In v28, the narrator had referred to the family as "Rebekah's mother's house." When the servant distributes gifts in v53 there are gifts for brother and mother but not father. Indeed, the only time we hear from Bethuel at all is at the moment of decision in v50, and the text there indicates that even then Laban must act as his mouthpiece.

Now, it would not be uncommon for the eldest brother to play a role in such things. And it is not a bad idea for fathers to bring their sons in on such decision making. Not only do we want to disciple our sons in the kind of wisdom and care that goes into being a father, but fathers desire that in God's providence their sons and daughters would outlive them, and we would wish that when we have passed our sons might hold accountable those men to whom we have entrusted our daughters.

Finally, on this issue of communication, you'll notice the surprising but instructive fact that in vv57-58 the family actually asks Rebekah. Literally, there, it says that they will ask "her mouth." We might say, "get it straight from the horse's mouth." But the point is that there is communication here and consultation here.

And this is important, because without such communication, a biblical family structure can break down into one of domineering oppression. If there isn't open communication between father and daughter, if her interests aren't first, and her comforts and preferences not consulted, then his authority can

become walls of prison rather than walls of protection. When you view someone in a prison, you do not say, “my, how well protected she is.”

But the other is also true. If there is a battle, and she is outside the walls, you don't look at her and say, “my, what an independent spirit; there's a free and happy girl.” You say, “that poor, unprotected girl, like a sheep to the slaughter!” And as we've seen from chapter 3 on, and Ephesians 6 clearly tells us that it's still raging, there is a battle.

Daughters, Satan would have you what our world calls “independent”; he would have you defenseless. Be independent under authority, under the protection of your father or whomever else God has set over you. Fathers aren't perfect, and some may in fact seem more prison than protection, but independence that throws off authority isn't freedom; it's death by defenselessness.

And fathers, keep these lines of communication open. Would you have a daughter who is doing the right thing and yet finds herself not protected in your house but imprisoned there? Then fail to communicate. If your daughters cannot now communicate with you, then opening those lines might begin with repentance and plea. If it is a series of sinful responses that has stood in the way, ask for forgiveness. If it is years of indifference or parental laziness that stands in the way, ask for forgiveness. If she is not coming to you, plead with her. Mothers, if daughter comes to you and not to dad, then urge her every time to come to him too. Counsel her from the Scriptures to honor not just mother but father and mother. Encourage her to trust in the Lord who commands it first and only secondarily the earthly father who loves her.

Oh daughters, open your hearts to your fathers. Tell them your fears, your desires. Try to memorize your day as it happens so that you can tell him all about it. Do you hope someday to have a husband to whom you can tell everything, from whom you look for interest and sympathy? Practice on your daddy.

There are girls who would listen to a message like this and weep for the fact that they have no earthly father. There are girls who are thrown by

providence into the situation of taking such things not only first to God but always only to God for they have no other. There are widows who have no husband to whom to take such things but only to God. And then there are some girls who have fathers, even Christian fathers fallen though they be, who choose to be as alone as orphans and widows and keep it all bottled up.

You daughters who have fathers, take advantage of the gift of God to you. If you are a believer, then I urge you all the more, for you know that the blessing of having a father was purchased by the blood of Christ for you. You deserve no such blessing. Is becoming a daughter who communicates with daddy difficult to imagine? Hard to do? Then you strengthen your resolve, and determine to talk to daddy anyway. And when it feels like it's not working, you just persevere. Have you forgotten Rebekah's strength and endurance running down and up the well? It applies in spiritual things as in physical.

I do hope that you will take this counsel, that you will see the family model here and Rebekah's situation of comfort and protection, and desire it. BUT, if your father is not accustomed to such communication, he may feel more uncomfortable than you do at the idea of making a beginning of it. So, let us fathers prepare together from Scripture truth. Fathers, if this communication begins, and you are overwhelmed, know where your hope lies and from where your help comes. Your hope is in grace alone, and God gives that grace through the means of grace. Let your response then be directed accordingly.

Pray. Continually. Determine that, if only for the sake of your children, your prayer life will quit halting and faltering. If you have no other way, at least join in the prayer meetings and extend that one hour a week into a more robust life of prayer. This is a wonderful chapter in which to give such counsel because we might begin calling Abraham's servant "camel knees." This is what the first century church called James the brother of Jesus due to his constant prayer. And every time we turn around in this chapter we find the servant praying. Respond like that with your daughter. Express true dependence upon God, and from Him you will find that He is worthy of that trust; you may also hope to encourage your daughter to a similar trust. As she

sees you praying, she will know that coming to you is a form not of dependence upon you alone but ultimately of dependence upon God.

And use Scripture. Every time. This may be difficult at first. You may often know a right thing to say, but not know where in the Bible to look. You may be certain that something is wise but not able to come up with a Scripture. If you can, withhold the decision or the counsel until you have located the Scripture. Call me. Call any elder. We will help you. “Pastor James, where does the Scripture say this?” If your speech is, as much as possible, as often as possible, from God’s Word, your daughter will be well-repaid for obeying Him and honoring you.

If the timing is urgent, give your counsel or decision but come back later with the Scripture.

Study the Bible with your daughter not just in family devotions but also as it specifically touches her life.

The Scripture step is extremely important because, in some cases—especially when she is young, you will also have to discipline.

Your daughter is a sinner, and if you are going to parent her as someone who belongs more to the Lord than to you, there will be no way of getting around the discipline that He commands. Ephesians 6:4 tells us that this discipline should be the discipline of the Lord, and it must come with instruction. And this instruction must be the instruction of the Lord. You are not free to give whatever discipline or instruction you wish.

Discipline without instruction is merely punishment. Discipline and instruction that are not from the Lord are merely behavior modification—often by abuse. Christian parenting is neither punishment nor behavior modification; it is the grace-dependent evangelism and discipling of souls entrusted to your care; it requires discipline and instruction together and both of the Lord.

Do NOT expect to have good, biblical communication with your children if your interaction with them isn’t soaked by prayer and saturated with Scripture.

Consideration

A second thing that we see in the leadership of Rebekah's family here is consideration. Consideration for her comfort and joy.

This is an application of the humility that we examined a few weeks ago: considering the needs of others. This is part of the character of both families. We have seen it in Abraham's life, such as his yielding to Lot, though the right of choice was his own. We have seen it in Rebekah's care for the servant. We see it even with the servant in v32. Although the servant is about to refuse to eat himself, he sees to it that his animals eat and that his own men's travel-weary feet are attended.

Now, Laban, scoundrel that he is, knows that consideration of Rebekah's earthly comfort and joy are his responsibility. When he sees the loot in v30 and hears of the sole-inheritance situation in vv34-36, he sees dollar signs and hears cash register bells. But he knows what he is *supposed* to say. So instead of saying, "come in exceedingly wealthy guy!" He says, "come in, O blessed of Yahweh!" And instead of saying, "I love your portfolio!" He says, "The thing has come from Yahweh!"

Indeed, v50 demonstrates an assumption that it is his responsibility to make a judgment of good or bad. Now there's a word that needs some rehabilitation: "judgment"! The judgments of God are the joy of His people, as we read often in the Psalms. And we are called to exercise judgment. And it is a good, and noble, and righteous thing for someone to have good judgment. And it is a bad, and foolish, and cursed thing for someone to lack judgment. But not only the word but even the concept has fallen upon hard times.

Daughters, you *want* fathers who make judgments. It is a great blessing to have a father who makes genuine discernments, genuine judgments of good and bad. This is good. That's bad. But judgment goes beyond discernment to decision. It involves not just a determination of what is good but acting upon the fact that it is good. It involves not just a determination of what is bad but acting upon the fact that it is bad. And such discernment and action must necessarily oppose your will at times and cause disappointment at times. This is unavoidable.

But it is impossible for you to at the same time have a Father who exercises consideration for your wellbeing and fails to exercise judgment. How silly and opposite the girl who screams, "you don't care about me!" when her father's judgment results in disappointment. Rather should she exclaim, "my disappointment is the very evidence that you exercise judgment in considering my happiness; I praise GOD for giving me such a considerate father as you!" It may be, daughters, that you have

spoken the wrong one of those responses recently and have forgiveness to ask sometime today.

And note, fathers, that it is part of good judgment—part of the consideration that we see modeled here in one of these families from whom the world will receive Israel and eventually Jesus—to consider Rebekah’s willingness. In vv57-58 they ask her of her willingness. They are interested in her comfort in the matter, but they allow that a heart that seeks to serve and obey God is more precious treasure and more robust health than situational ease or circumstantial pleasure. This is at no small cost to them. Gen 31:28 imply that such feasting as the “days or ten” (literally) for which they ask in v55 were expected. They are giving up something of their own pleasure in order to submit to a more important joy. It is after all, as the servant has said, going in the way of Yahweh, the way that God has prospered. But they do not force it upon an unwilling Rebekah. They inquire of the willingness of her heart.

So, fathers, you find the perfect, godly man. And he desires more than anything to be your daughter’s provider, protector, companion, and daily pastor for the rest of their earthly lives. And she simply will not have him. What do you do? Father, you disciple your daughter! Yes, it may be that by the time the willingness exists in her heart, the man may be lost, but your consideration for her heart requires not only that you work earnestly toward those things for her that are of truest joy, but that you patiently use the means of grace with her, depending upon God’s grace, to train her in *willingness* to enjoy those things more than anything else! Disciple that daughter in fear and trembling, for it is God who works in her both to will and to do according to His good pleasure.

This issue of consideration is so important, fathers, because the greatest part of your daughter’s wellbeing will always be the condition of her heart. And this is all the more evident in v58 because it takes us back to the conversation in vv5-8, where we first came upon the issue of Rebekah’s willingness. Do you remember the question there? Would she be willing to leave the comforts of Ur to have Yahweh alone in Canaan? Would she be willing to walk after a servant? Will she be a God-delighted, humble wife?

But if you do not consider your daughter’s *willingness*, how will you ever discern such issues of the heart? You seek not only a dutiful daughter but a delighted daughter. She may do everything you decide and yet be only dutiful. You must consult and consider her willingness if you are to disciple her in the path of God-delighted-ness.

But these women with Rebekah were more than that. They are edifying companions and confidants, having been disciple in a Yahweh-fearing home. I wonder if we have a spiritual, life-long, eternal impact view toward those whom we permit as companions for our children. Are we just seeking for our children to have “a lot of friends,” or are we actively trying to provide God-delighted, humble companions who will accompany them beyond the boundaries of our home, throughout their earthly lives, and indeed into eternity?

Would we not rather find for our children three friends who will edify them in Christ for generations than three hundred who will be fun and clean to hang out with for a decade? And we parents who have more than one child, can we not begin as Rebekah’s family did—in our own households? Ought we not be training our children to be lifelong parakletes, men and women of God who provide fellowship and accountability and encouragement in Christ long after they are out of our homes, long after we have gone to be with the Lord?!

And is not a good church home a similar provision for our children—not a place where they can be with other children, but a place where they deal week after week with the Living God! When your children are going to be away from your time, don’t just advise them to find a good church; find it for them. Call the preacher, nail down his doctrine, quiz him on the congregational valuing of the means of grace, get someone from the church to take your child under his wing, bring them, disciple them.

This nurse and these women were just such a provision for Rebekah—not just living household appliances but God-fearing women of the house of Bethuel to be lifelong helps. Her father’s house continues to provide for her comfort and wellbeing all the way until she is in the arms of her husband.

What we see God using here to prepare a wife fit for a child of Abraham is: a father and family that thoughtfully considers and actively provides for all her needs. Perhaps with the eyes of our culture you might respond, “how backward and old fashioned!” But I imagine that as the lifelong recipient of such consideration for her Rebekah’s sentiment about it was something more like, “how safe, secure, and content I am in God’s gift to me of such a protecting and providing, communicating and considerate family!” It was, after all, no sad, oppressed, wimpy woman whom we and the servant met when we came running up to her in v17. She was a joyful, free, strong, godly, humble woman!

Consecration

Finally, then, we come to consecration—setting aside as holy to God. That’s all consecration means, children—setting aside as holy to God.

We have already seen in v50 Rebekah’s family acknowledge their obligation to yield to Yahweh’s will in all things. They know that they all, Rebekah included, belong not to themselves but to God. The servant had acknowledged this even in praying for Isaac in v14, where he referred to Isaac as God’s servant, one who exists for God’s service and in God’s care.

Indeed, the entire episode is presented from start to finish as being from God’s grace and for God’s glory. How sadly out of place v52 would be in our culture, even in the culture of most of our churches! When was the last time you heard of an important decision or agreement like this being responded to by one or both parties falling on their faces and worshiping the living God who gave it to them?

God grant that, among those who live unconsecrated lives, you would have a reputation of being hyper-spiritual. Would that God would take the “spiritual” switch of each of our hearts and break it off in the “on” position! We read texts like this—the heart and mind and words and actions of Abraham’s servant—and find that even by comparison to this man, let alone the very standard of God, we are cold-hearted, earthly minded, worldly Christians. When we enjoy any earthly good, would that our instinctive response would be exclamations of praise to God of the sort that the ungodly would find odd!

How would it appear if, upon the receipt of some great blessing, you would fall on your face right there and give praise to the name of Jesus Christ who alone could have earned such blessing, pouring out good things earthly and eternal for one upon whose soul Hell itself had an eternal claim, but who has been set free and clear at the cost of Christ’s blood! Can you see yourself there on the floor, pouring out praise? Or even just throwing hands and face to the heavens and unleashing an exclamation of praise?

If someone else saw you, even if they were a believer, falling on your face unto God in praise would be a surefire way to be considered exceedingly weird. How tragically different this is from the history of God’s people in the Bible and even in our own history until recently, when all of life was continually seen and responded to as from God and for God!

What an obeying, serving, trusting, loving, thankful, joyful, worshipful people we would be if God would pour out His Spirit to massage the oil of this concept of consecration into our dry, cracking church culture. O let us live by the grace of God, before the face of God, for the pleasure of God!

I'm concerned that as we hear sermons on marriage, some of us are listening for how to obtain from a wife or a husband what is properly found in God alone! Truly, there is an analogy in marriage of what we have in God. But marriage must remain only an analogy, or marriage will become not analogy but idolatry.

Again, would that God would grant for us to live by the grace of God, before the face of God, for the pleasure of God!

Consecration must be what drives everything that we do in our home. Even the communication and the consideration about which we have heard this morning must come out of this consecration.

Your sons are not yours; they are God's. Your daughters are not yours; they are God's. You are responsible to Him for doing with them according to all His will. And be careful how you do so, for as much as you treasure them, you don't even come close to how He does!

Listen to that: Romans 1 teaches us that for Adam's sin and ours we deserve never to have another righteous inclination, to say another appropriate word, or to do even an outwardly acceptable thing. If we get what we deserve, we would fail far miserably than we have ever imagined. And yet we, who deserve never to do any good at all, are responsible to care perfectly for one whom God treasures infinitely. We are responsible to care PERFECTLY for one whom God treasures INFINITELY!

And so we've just put the whole task way out of reach, haven't we? Like Christ in Matthew 5, who was telling the disciples what they *must* do and at the same time telling them things that were *impossible* to do. Christ was multitasking: instructing them in kingdom living and driving them to His cross for forgiveness and to His resurrection for power.

So just as we have had some instruction on kingdom living, revealing a mountain of spiritual impossibility, let us also fly for grace and help to Christ's cross and resurrection. If you are a Christian, you are probably already well aware of how badly you need the Spirit of Christ to work in you the character of Christ for the tasks

about which you have been hearing this morning. But be also continually aware of your need for the *blood* of Christ.

As we think about the amazing task laid before you, and how these children are the treasured possession of the living God, do our hearts not cry for forgiveness for the continual failure that has marked us so far? Do we not tremble at the sure failures that this evening and this week will bring?

And children, as you have heard from the world, and perhaps at times your heart has objected—about “your rights” or “your desires”—have you forgotten that you yourself are not your own? You belong to the God who created you. If you are a believer you know further that you belong to Him who has redeemed you, who has bought you at the price of His own crucifixion. Even cold-heartedness in hearing preaching demands either the blood of Christ or your eternal Hell. Any heart sin this afternoon, just taking some that we thought about this morning: any unwillingness to honor father, any distrust of God’s wisdom in giving you the father you have. These all must be covered in the blood of Jesus.

What the Bible confronts us with today sends us flying to the cross! Our only hope is in God’s free grace in Christ. There is no other hope for a people whose sin so completely condemns them!

But it is a wonderful hope, isn’t it? For He is the God who does good and gracious things despite and even through our wickedness and our foolishness. Consider Laban’s character; we’ve only scratched the surface of it in this text. But God could use that scoundrel to do good, to produce a good marriage for Rebekah and Isaac, even to bring our Lord Jesus Christ.

Do we know ourselves to be scoundrels before God? Incurable spiritual failures? Why—here’s one in the middle of this match made in heaven, this scoundrel and incurable failure, Laban! Let us rejoice in the God of grace, for His grace is not just blessing for the curse-deserving but also infinite power for the utterly incapable. God tells Paul in 2Cor 12:9 that His GRACE is more than enough for Paul, because His POWER finds is perfectly presented in our WEAKNESS. God’s grace is not just blessing for the curse-deserving; it is also infinite power for the utterly incapable!

Our hope as fathers and daughters—indeed the only hope of any Christian—is not in how well we will heed this instruction of the Word. Our hope is in the God whose Word it is, who even uses such as Laban! Our hope is in Christ, who has perfectly earned such grace.

Conclusion

Our hope is in the God who delights to transform wicked fools into wise saints.

That's where this passage, the account of Abraham and Isaac, the book of Genesis, indeed the story of the whole Bible is going: to the manger, to the cross, even to the right hand of God where the descendant of Isaac and Rebekah physically sits even now. This passage cries out to us:

The blood is real! It cleanses from sin all who trust in Christ!

The body is real! In it, our penalty was truly borne, and we have sure hope to receive for our efforts not what we deserve by them, but the fruit that JESUS CHRIST deserves for us to see!

The Spirit is real! We are not left without help, but Jesus has ascended in order to send us another Helper whom He judged to be better for us than even Christ's own physical presence with us.

We have a God who loves to put on display the glory of His Son in a transformed people. We have a Savior who loves to glorify the faithfulness of His Father by securing our promised redemption and transformation. We have a Holy Spirit who loves to glorify Father and Son by applying the transformation.

And we ourselves belong to God: our husbands belong to God, our wives belong to God, our sons belong to God, our daughters belong to God. O let us trust in Him, and as He proves Himself faithful, let us give Him all the glory!