

**Genesis 24: 28-53; "If you will Deal Kindly and Truly," Sermon #
69 in the series - "Beginnings", Delivered on May 21st, 2006,
by Pastor Paul Rendall in the Morning Worship.**

What do you do when your grown responsible daughter comes running into the house and tells you that that there is a man outside from a foreign country and he has persuaded her of his good intentions and is hoping that he can come inside and make you a proposal for her hand in marriage? Well I think many of us would smile condescendingly and say with a note of suspicion in our minds, "This man may have persuaded my daughter, but he is not going to persuade me." You would probably tell her, "Tell him to make an appointment and I will speak to him at a convenient time." "It will be later, much later." If you are thinking this way, it is good that you are a careful man and it is good that you are a protective father. If you are a wise and godly man, you are not going to let just anyone come in quickly and convince you that you should let him take your daughter to be his wife. You have probably memorized the verse in 1 Corinthians 7: 37 which says, "Nevertheless he who stands steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but has power over his will, and has so determined in his heart that he will keep his virgin daughter does well. So he who gives her in marriage does well, but he who does not give her in marriage does better." You are the godly and reluctant father who rightly believes in courtship and in slowing things down in any relationship that your daughter might be developing with a young man, so that you can see just what he is like and what his intentions are.

I agree with you, and hope along with you that any eligible suitor who comes to you asking about your daughter will meet all of your godly expectations. But I would have you to remember some principles this morning in the way that you deal with the young man who comes to you, that will do you in good stead in any situation that you find yourself in regard to the courtship of your daughters. Abraham's servant says in verse 49, "Now if you will deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me." The way that Laban and Bethuel deal with Abraham's servant in the courtship proposal and the matter of letting Rebekah go with him to be Isaac's wife has some good lessons for us in terms of our dealing kindly and truly with people in this kind of situation, and indeed in many other situations of life as well. So the question that we are asking this morning is this. What are the good lessons of dealing kindly and faithfully that we can learn from this situation of courtship that we have just read about? And I think that we will see that these are lessons that can be applied to other areas of life in

terms of how we receive people into our home environment and our family life. I have 4 lessons to give you on this subject this morning.

1st- It is important that you give the person who may become your son-in-law, or brother-in-law a good welcome when he first comes into your home. (Verses 29-31)

Now I take it that Bethuel, Rebekah's father was very old, just like Abraham was very old at this time. And I think that it is quite possible that Laban, Rebekah's brother did much of his business for him and represented his mind and will in many of the decisions that were made in the family. So Laban was acting the part of Rebekah's father at points, to help Bethuel who could not quickly and clearly sort all these things out for his daughter as he normally would if he were a younger man. This whole episode shows us the importance of brothers and other members of the family having the right kind of input and attitude in relation to courtship. It should not be an attitude of suspicion and skepticism. It should not be the kind of attitude that believes that there can be nothing positive about our daughter or our sister meeting a man and finding a husband. I have seen this kind of attitude in godly men before. Rebekah had "run and told her mother's household these things" which Abraham's servant had told her. Laban, when he saw the nose ring and the bracelets on his sister's wrists, when he heard her relate what happened; he went to the man and found him by the well with the camels. He immediately went out to meet him and to greet him. He said, "Come in, O blessed of the Lord!" "Why do you stand outside?" "For I have prepared the house, and a place for the camels." This is indeed a good greeting. It is true that some commentators have questioned Laban's motives for this greeting saying that his whole history shows him to have been a man given to covetousness, and when he saw the nose ring and the bracelets that he concluded that Abraham was a wealthy man and that is why he was so happy to have him there. But I think that this goes too far. I believe that Laban was genuinely concerned for the welfare of his sister and he realized that this man's master was a godly man and he was rejoicing in his spirit and this came out in his speech. He too, was rejoicing that God had led this man in this way and was pleased that Rebekah was excited about the prospect of the wonderful things that could come about.

We should learn from this that it is good, when our daughter is old enough, and she comes to us and tells us that there is a young man who knows the Lord, and that he has taken an interest in her, that we respond well to the person that comes over to visit our household. We respond with an interest in what the Lord may be doing here and we don't unnecessarily quash the exciting possibilities of what may come about. We do not need to draw rash conclusions in any direction; that either he is, or he is not

suitable. But we can greet him kindly. "Come in; why do you stand outside?" There is going to be (or should be) a hesitancy on the part of any seriously interested young man, to impose himself on your family. He will be feeling this and may communicate it by a reluctance even to come in. This is where you can as a father or brother put him at ease. If you have heard a good report of his faith and good intentions, then believe it. Don't treat him with suspicion as some kind of foreign invader.

Part of the welcome is preparing the house, as we see here. "I have prepared the house, and a place for the camels," Laban says. You know, some people might think to themselves, "Why should I clean the house and prepare things nicely when we are really quite informal most of the time around here?" The answer is that there is a time and a place for everything, as it says in the book of Ecclesiastes. "There is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven." Part of that list of things that follows is that "there is a time to gain, and a time to lose; a time to keep and a time to throw away." Let's throw out the trash, clean up the clutter, put on clothes that make us look better than slobs. Tuck in your shirt, put on some shoes, comb your hair and brush your teeth. First impressions are important. Is it really necessary to be casual and informal in all situations? I think not. This is not a good time to say, "Well we are just a casual sort of people around here and we want you to know that we don't care what you think about the way that we live, the way that we dress or how we keep house." No, a little more formality in our first meeting a person is good, and the way that we prepare for a person who comes into our house, shows that we care for them. No preparation shows no real care for the guest. Especially in a situation like this. Now I am speaking mostly to the men here. Most of the women may go too far overboard on preparing the house. And she will probably tell you, men, that she can't have the young man in if things do not look right. Listen to her and help her with the preparations.

2ndly- It is important to minister to the needs of a suitor or guest that comes from afar. (Verse 32 and 33a)

"Then the man came to the house. And he unloaded the camels, and provided straw and feed for the camels, and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him." And "food was set before him to eat," it says. Now I will not spend much time here, but let us take notice of what Laban and his father's household did for their guest and do the same for ours. Let us take care that they have a good place to sleep and food enough to eat and a place where they might clean up. Let us inquire and ask for what they might need during their stay. I have been greatly encouraged by the families that I have stayed with when I have gone to be a guest preacher

at the church in Minneapolis or Rockford, or some other place. They have done these very things that I am mentioning now and which are the concerns mentioned in the text. They have asked very plain and pertinent questions of me and seen to the needs and even the comforts of my stay. Brethren these things are commendable for each of our households to engage in. It shows kindness in a human sense, and it is obvious that we ought to love all men, especially those who are of the faith, in this simple and straightforward way. But let us ask ourselves, is this what we do? Do we think of the care of the ones who come to us, not only in the way of courtship, but also those who are visiting the church and who may have need of a meal or a place to stay for the night? This is Christian hospitality. There is perhaps no worse attitude of heart and mind that we can fall into than that of often being suspicious of those whom we don't know well; wondering what they are trying to get away with and what they are trying to get from us. Let us counteract this kind of a mindset with the words of Paul in Romans 12: 10-13. "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to (or pursuing) hospitality."

A 3rd Lesson that we learn from our text about how to deal kindly and faithfully in the courtship process is that it is important to be a good listener. (Verses 33-49)

We find here that even though Laban set food before Abraham's servant that he "would not eat it until he had told about his errand." They could have objected to this and tried to go ahead with the meal and the social amenities. But the servant of our text was a faithful servant. He wanted to explain himself and all that God had providentially ordered in regard to Rebekah. And being good hosts, Bethuel and Laban let him do it. This may not be the case with the young man who comes to your house inquiring about whether he might court or marry your daughter, but the spirit of being patient listeners applies in every case and it is very clearly seen in these hosts, Bethuel and Laban. They say to him, "Speak on." They let him speak and they let him relate everything that they should know about Abraham and Isaac and the mission that his master had sent him on.

Parents, it is essential that you be a good listener in regard to the young man who will come to you asking for permission to court and marry your daughter. Let him speak for himself. Do not immediately sit him down and give him all your expectations without first getting to know him by letting him speak and learning everything that he would wish to communicate to you about himself. If you are a good listener and you urge him to speak about himself by your asking him appropriate questions, you will pick up

far more about whether he is the right man or not by the things that he will say about his parents, his brothers and sisters, and why he has sought out your daughter. If he is a servant of the Lord, if the Lord is his master, guide, and friend, that is the very thing that will come out in his conversation with you. That is what came out of the lips of Abraham's servant. It is almost all about what God had done for Abraham and what God had done for him. It is a very good sign in a young man when he speaks about what the Lord has done for him and what the Lord has done for his family to bless them and to help them. Laban and Bethuel hear that the servant's master Abraham has been blessed greatly by God and that he has become great in the land of Canaan. They hear that he is particular about who his Son Isaac should marry. It is not to be one of the daughters of the land who do not worship God. He doesn't want Isaac to be unequally yoked with an unbeliever. He speaks of his master's faith that God would send His angel with him on his mission to prosper him in the way, and how this was truly so. He was led right to the house of relatives by his providential contact with Rebekah at the well. He explains to them how the matter was of such great importance that he had taken an oath regarding its success, and if he didn't succeed in finding a godly woman from among his master's relatives he would be freed from the oath. He told them of his prayers at the time that he came to the city and pulled up in front of the well, that God would help him in the particular way that he did, which could not have happened by chance, but only by God's providential ordering of it. He spoke of Rebekah's good and kind response which was in perfect accord with his prayers, "Drink and I will give your camels drink also." You see how much was learned in a short time by listening carefully. By listening carefully they knew that the faith of Abraham was holy and strong. They learned that Isaac was in submission to his father's godly counsel and advice to await God's choice for him rather than going after the daughters of the land. They knew that there would be no compromise in this matter. They knew that this was a family of faith and prayer, trusting that God would lead them and give to them a suitable bride for Isaac and that God was leading him through the servant, to them. This truly is a blessed outcome.

Be good listeners parents, when the young man who wants your daughter to be his wife talks of himself and his family. Much can be learned of his character, his goals and desires, and his relationship, or lack of it, with God. "What the heart is full of, that will it speak; sometimes in a short time, or sometimes it will take longer. But you should wait to give your permission to court and marry until you can discover by good listening, what this young man is really like, and what he is made of. Only by good listening can a right evaluation be made and everyone be blessed by the

decisions that are arrived at. The conclusions that were made by the servant and Rebekah and her family were made in a very short period of time and cannot be the standard practice of courtship in our day. But I think that they are given to us to show us what great things that God can do in a very short period of time, so that skeptical and unbelieving men can have their faith strengthened to know the goodness of God. There is not a formula for every case, but the principle needs to be adhered to that the parents of the girl, yes, and everyone involved would be good listeners.

And then 4thly and finally- It is important when you are trying to learn to deal kindly and faithfully with a young man in a courtship situation that you link your own kindness to the Lord's kindness and His providential ordering of things. (Verses 49-52)

Notice how Laban and Bethuel, having heard all about the gracious way that the Lord led this servant, refused to make a big deal about their own authority in the matter, but deferred to the way that God had plainly shown Abraham's servant and them what the truth of the matter was and how they ought to proceed. When the servant asks them if they will tell him whether they will deal kindly and faithfully with his master they don't go into a big conference about it. Now there was authority to be exercised in this matter and they are going to exercise in what they say in reply to the servant's question. A decision needed to be made, and either Laban and Bethuel believed that God was in this whole matter, or they believed that He was not. This servant was on a mission, an errand on behalf of his master and his master's son, and he needed to know then and there whether they would acknowledge the Lord's leading and kindness in the way the servant had been led, or whether they would not acknowledge it. It required faith. They said to him, "The thing comes from the Lord; we cannot speak to you either good or bad." "Here is Rebekah before you; take her and go, and let her be your Master's son's wife, as the Lord has spoken." How had the Lord spoken? He spoke by His providential leading. But that leading was based on the principles of revealed truth; The truth of the proven character of Abraham, Isaac, and their servant. And it was confirmed by the good responses of Rebekah and her family based upon the truth of what was good and right and true and honorable as the servant came to them. What a blessed thing that this is when it takes place in our day as well. We have much more truth to go by and work with in the Biblical revelation given to us. It will go well with us if we heed it.

I am a servant on a mission today as well. I come on an errand of gospel preaching to you this day. God is full of blessing; great and holy and loving and kind. He has an only-begotten Son who he is seeking a bride for. Will you be one of those who will forsake sin and leave all to follow him and to be married to Him? He sent His dear Son into the world that He might

die for you sins. Now He would have you to receive this offer of eternal marriage that you might have eternal life; now and forever. Will you go with this man? Will you deal kindly and faithfully with me and with the Spirit who would convince you of our good intentions or must I turn to the right hand or to the left to preach to others who will receive Him and have Him as their husband? Are you willing or not? We will speak more of this next week.