

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
July 25, 2010**

Genesis 24

Lessons from A Marriage Made in Heaven

- 1. God's answers to the prayers of his people***
- 2. Our willingness to follow where God leads***

Hymns: 380 – 444 – 473 (vv. 1,4)

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

Do you know any “marriages made in heaven?” What does that term mean? A marriage made in heaven is a marriage that seems to be perfect. The match between man and woman fits perfectly in every way – No fights or conflicts. Peace, love, and harmony. The perfect marriage! Some also look at two people they never would have pictured as marriage partners due to their backgrounds or personalities and yet who have a great marriage, and say that they have a “marriage made in heaven.”

Today we will look at a marriage made in heaven. But the term will have a different twist. It will actually fit better in this case, because heaven truly had a hand in putting it together. It is the story of the marriage of Rebekah and Isaac.

As we look at this story today, let's learn about:

- 1. God's answers to the prayers of his people**
- 2. Our willingness to follow where God leads**

1 – As Genesis 24 begins, Abraham is living in the twilight years of his life. Long before this, he had followed God's voice to the Promised Land. He had lived there for many years and put his faith in the promise of a son that would be the ancestor of the Savior. That son had been born to him and his wife in their old age. That son Isaac was now 40 years old. Abraham was 140 years old.

His wife Sarah had died three years before this time. Abraham's thoughts now drift toward the future of his son as he himself will leave the world.

Abraham has specific wishes for the wife that his son will have. (Don't forget that in their culture arranged marriages were common!) Abraham will not have his son marry a Canaanite woman. There are a number of reasons Abraham felt strongly about this:

- This woman would be the wife of the man of the promise of God, his own son. It would be wise to remove the temptation of a godless wife from the picture.
- This woman would be the mother of the next man in the line of the promise of the Savior. She would have a profound influence on his upbringing.
- The Canaanites as a whole were a doomed people. God had condemned them for their perversions and idolatry and they would be dispossessed from the land.

Because of this, Abraham gave his chief servant a command. He told him to go to Nahor, or Haran, to get a wife for his son Isaac. A look at a map might be helpful. You might remember that Abraham's original family had originated in the land of Babylon, located near the Persian Gulf. Abraham's father Terah had moved the family northwest up the Fertile Crescent to the area by the city of Haran. That area became the family's new home. Abraham was commanding his servant to go back to that area to find a distant relative who was God-fearing to be the wife for his son.

We see great faith in Abraham as he gives this command!

- We see that Abraham required the servant to take an oath in God's name that he would do this.
- We also see it in Abraham's responses to his servant's concerns. The servant asked, “What if she won't come with me?” That was a logical question to ask! But Abraham expressed the confidence that God would send his angel ahead of him to make his mission successful. He

said that the servant would be released from his vow if the woman will not come, but we sense this was more to quell the servant's own fears rather than displaying doubt in Abraham's heart that the mission would be successful.

- The servant suggested, "Maybe I could take Isaac with me up there." But Abraham was clear that his son should not leave the Promised Land. He knew that God would be giving the land to his descendants and under no circumstances was Isaac to leave it.

What faith Abraham displayed!

The servant goes on his expedition. He had 500 miles to travel. He took ten camels, along with gifts for the young maiden. The trip would take one month. As he neared Haran, questions began to enter his mind. After all, he had no GPS. He had no cell phone and no home number for any of the relatives. He was going along blindly. Not only that, but there were many women who could be coming and going at the well where the caravan would be pausing. Who would be the woman he had come to fetch?

He turned to the Lord in prayer. He asked that the woman who gave him a drink and offered to water all his camels would be the one the Lord had picked to be Isaac's wife. We view this not as a demanding, selfish prayer but as a bold request for guidance. This is reminiscent of Proverbs 16:3: "*Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.*"

The content of this prayer exhibited wisdom on the part of the servant. What would such a test show about her character? What would it show about her generosity? Her courtesy? Her industriousness? After all, how much of a chore would it be to water ten camels? What if they each drank 20 gallons? Have you ever waited in line at the gas station for other people to fill up their cars? How long would it take ten people to go ahead of you with modern pumps? So again, what would this show about the type of woman Isaac would marry? How hard working! (Young men, are you taking notes?)

We heard the rest of the story in our readings. In a decisive, immediate way, God answered that prayer and pointed out Rebekah to the servant, who would be the fulfillment of his prayers.

Here we pause for our first lesson from this marriage made in heaven. Our first lesson comes from the faith believers exhibited in this whole process:

- An oath taken before God
- Prayers offered for guidance
- Worship given when God's hand was recognized – Twice!

What does this teach us about our prayer and worship as we live our life of faith? I remember when I was in grade school I learned the hymn:

**With the Lord begin your task
Jesus will direct it
For his aid and counsel ask
Jesus will perfect it
Every morn with Jesus rise
And when day is ended
In his name then close your eyes
Be to him commended**

Wonderful words! Do they describe your life?

- Do your days begin with prayer? Do they end the same? Or do you insult God by falling asleep during your prayers?
- Are our prayers offered to God in a constant flow of our daily life? Or are they sadly lacking some days?
- Are our prayers offered as a first resource to God's throne or as a last resort?
- Do we come to God's throne only when we're knocked down? Do we view prayer like we view the car manual in our glove compartment? Do we pull it out only in cases of emergency? Or is our prayer life a constant communication with our Lord?
- How about the frame of mind we have after bringing our prayers to God? Do we have firm confidence, such as the confidence that Abraham and his servant

exhibited? Do we have peace of mind? Do we have a calm trust that God will work things out?

- Do we have patience in waiting for God to answer? Do we exhibit the patience that Isaac himself was showing? We hear that he had gone out into the field “to meditate.” What do you think he was meditating on? It could very well have been the wife that was supposed to be coming his way. If so, what a wonderful example for us in him also!

May we be constant in prayer as Abraham and his servant were, and may we have a calm trust that God will give us every good thing!

As we do this, may our comfort and assurance come from a verse such as Romans 8:32: “*He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*” God, who loved us enough to save us from our sins through our Savior Jesus Christ, will continue to be with us, hear our prayers, and answer us with good things!

2 – The story of Rebekah has one other lesson for us today. We’ve been looking at this from the perspective of Abraham and his servant. What about Rebekah’s perspective? What about her family’s thoughts?

We read in vv. 50-51: “*Laban and Bethuel answered, ‘This is from the LORD; we can say nothing to you one way or the other. Here is Rebekah; take her and go, and let her become the wife of your master’s son, as the LORD has directed.’*” Put yourself into these men’s sandals for a moment. What would your thoughts have been? In the course of their first meeting these men believed the servant’s story and saw the hand of God in action. What did they say?

- “She won’t ever leave our home.”
- “That’s too far for us to send her, even though we see God’s hand in action here.”

Not at all! Even though they would be far from a family member and a willing worker, they

were willing to submit their actions to God’s direction that they saw.

What about Rebekah’s thoughts? When the servant wanted to leave the next day, they wanted him to delay. We hear, “*But he said to them, ‘Do not detain me, now that the LORD has granted success to my journey. Send me on my way so I may go to my master.’ Then they said, ‘Let’s call the girl and ask her about it.’ So they called Rebekah and asked her, ‘Will you go with this man?’ ‘I will go,’ she said.*” She was prepared to leave immediately with the servant.

Think about Rebekah’s situation at that time:

- She would be leaving a familiar place for an unfamiliar one
- She would be traveling a long distance
- She was going to a place where she might never see her immediate family again. Remember, there were no airports, no train, no texting, no e-mail, no instant messaging, no cell phones, no Skype
- She was going to marry an unseen husband

What willingness she exhibited in following God’s direction when she saw it!

Herein lies our second lesson this morning. Are we willing to follow God’s direction and accept his “assignments” in our lives?

I can’t help but think of the Thiesfeldts as I ask that question. For twelve years Mr. Thiesfeldt was principal at Evergreen Lutheran High School and both he and Lisa were dear members of our congregation. It’s strange not seeing them here this morning, since they left two weeks ago. Greg, as you know, accepted a Call to serve in Minnesota as principal at St. Paul Lutheran School. That was a difficult move for them and for us! How and why would that happen? It involved the difficulties of packing boxes, selling a house, and all the other details of moving. It also involved leaving deeply loved ones who are friends. Yet Mr. Thiesfeldt saw and sensed that the Lord’s will would have him serve in that school in his kingdom. He followed God’s direction. Why would a wife go along who

had deep ties in our church? This was God's direction for her family.

I can't help but think also of our new second pastor and his wife. They have come 2000 miles west to be here at our congregation. Why would they do this? After much prayer, I'm sure, before Call Day and graduation, God gave his divine guidance that the place they should be in his kingdom is in our congregation by his grace. He spoke to them in a way similar to how he spoke to Rebekah long ago. What have they done? They have packed their belongings and come to serve in God's kingdom where he would have them be. They have willingly followed God's direction.

What is our motivation for such willing service? "It's the right thing to do?" "You can't fight city hall?" No, the motivation for a Christian to follow God's voice when he calls is Jesus Christ himself. Jesus said in John 6, "*I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.*" What did God the Father ask of his own Son? He bid him to come to earth as one of us, yet still as the God-man, and to be the Savior of the world. He gave him the mission of living a perfect life in our place and being sacrificed for the sin of the world. What was Jesus' attitude when his Father gave him those directions? **He willingly followed his Father's plan.**

The spotlight now shines upon you members here today. What plan or direction has God given you in life? We could mention many:

- Has God made you the "peacemaker" in the family? Are you playing that role repeatedly?
- Perhaps God has made you the "spiritual counselor" to a friend or family members in a way you never would have envisioned. You're a spiritual leader!
- Maybe you're not the confrontational type, but you must be the "rebuker" for someone in their sin.
- Are you still having to be an active parent for an adult child?
- Maybe you've become a caregiver for an elderly parent.

- Have you had to become financial provider for relatives who have hit bad times?
- What if your grade school or high school child says, "I have a desire to go to Martin Luther College in Minnesota. I want to be a pastor or teacher." Will you say, "Out of the question – Too far!"
- Are you single when you would rather be married? Has God not opened that door for you?
- Are you married and childless, wondering why God has put you in that station of life?
- Are you caught in a marriage to someone that has traits you never imagined or who has lost the faith?
- Has God put a cross on you that you must bear? Do you have a "thorn in the flesh?"
- Have you had an unwelcome job change?
- Perhaps you're going to have to move due to circumstances beyond your control.

What will our attitude be when God gives us "assignments" that we would not have envisioned or chosen? **May we learn a lesson from Rebekah today and follow God's directions, submitting our will to his. After all, we see how God continued the line of the Messiah through her as he continued his plan for the salvation of the world.**

We've come to the end of our lessons today from this marriage made in heaven. As we close our look at an account from the life of an OT believer we don't often focus on, **may these two lessons stay with us:**

- 1. God answers the prayers of his people**
- 2. We willingly follow God's direction for our lives**

As we do this, may we do it to the glory of the God who has done so much for us. He will continue to bless us and guide us! Amen.