

“Looking for Mrs. Laughter”

Genesis 24:1-67

November 13th, 2016

The royal edict was proclaimed near and far. The young prince, who would soon ascend to the throne, was looking for a suitable princess. All the noble families of the kingdom were to escort their eligible daughters to the court, for from among them the future queen would be chosen.

It is said that 2,000 highborn young ladies were brought before the prince. But, he was attracted to only one. This “courtship” took place nearly 470 years ago. In 1547, the young prince was crowned king. Shortly thereafter, he made the girl of his dreams his queen.

There began a new era in that nation’s history, one in which the king was regarded as father to his subjects. A traveler in that land wrote home, “I think no prince in Christendom is better beloved.”

The king proved to be a godly man, a friend to the poor, a builder of churches, a humble ruler who fasted and prayed, a monarch who believed that men in his government should be good men, and that the children of his kingdom should be set early on the paths of righteousness.

The queen encouraged her king. It was her tenderness which had tamed the wild boy and urged him into a manhood of dignity. It was her virtue which had inspired his godliness, her compassion and understanding which had served as moral examples for the wisest leader that nation had ever followed.

Sounds like a marriage made in heaven, doesn't it? For sure, this brief story from long ago makes us think of the Scripture passage before us today in our continuing sermon series through the Book of Genesis – a series I’ve entitled, *Book of Beginnings: God’s Grace in Genesis*. Here in **Genesis 24**, we see Abraham initiating the search to find a wife for the son of God’s promise – his own dear son, Isaac (whose name, you’ll recall, means “Laughter.”) As such, what we see in this longest chapter in all of Genesis, is the process of finding a wife for Isaac – thus explaining the message title, “Looking for Mrs. Laughter.”

Because of the length of the passage, and the repetition of some of the dialogue, I’ll not read each verse in this passage, as is our typical practice. Instead, I’ll provide comment at various places in the account.

I find commentator Dale Ralph Davis’ outline of this chapter helpful:

MP 1 – God’s Promises Require Faithful Activity (verses 1-9);

MP 2 – God’s Providence Maintains God’s Purposes (verses 10-61);

MP 3 – God’s Provision Satisfies His Servants (verses 62-67).

Let’s look at the first 9 verses, our first point, **God’s Promises Require Faithful Activity**:

“Now Abraham was old, well advanced in age; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. ² So Abraham said to the oldest servant of his house, who ruled over all that he had, “Please, put your hand under my thigh, ³ and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell; ⁴ but you shall go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son Isaac.”

⁵ And the servant said to him, “Perhaps the woman will not be willing to follow me to this land. Must I take your son back to the land from which you came?”

⁶ But Abraham said to him, “Beware that you do not take my son back there. ⁷ The LORD God of heaven, who took me from my father’s house and from the land of my family, and who spoke to me and swore to me, saying, ‘To your descendants I give this land,’ He will send His angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. ⁸ And if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be released from this oath; only do not take my son back there.” ⁹ So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning this matter.

As we learned last chapter (23), Sarah had died and Abraham purchased a burial plot in the Promised Land and buried her there in Canaan, the land God promised to Abraham and his descendants. The opening verses of this 24th chapter reveal Abraham is concerned with the continuation of his family line. For that to happen, son Isaac needed to have a woman to be his wedded wife. Marriage is essential for covenant continuity.

Abraham turns to his trusted (nameless) servant, binding him on oath, to find a bride for Isaac from among his people back in his homeland (Mesopotamia).

It is most relevant to our times, that we note the language of marriage continues to be used of man and woman who come together as one – a husband (married man) and a wife (married woman). This is the fourth important couple to which it applies thus far in the Book of Genesis.

* We noted the first use of ‘wife’ back in chapter 2 (**Genesis 2:24**) – “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” The term ‘wife’ is used of Eve another 7 times in **Genesis chapters 2-4**.

* It is used of Cain’s bride in **Genesis 4:17** – “And Cain knew (loved sexually) his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch.”

* It is used of Noah’s bride in **Genesis 6:18, 7:7, 7:13, 8:16 & 8:18**;

* It is used of Abram’s bride numerous times between **Genesis 11:29** and today’s text.

Church – fellow believers in Jesus Christ – young and old - as children of God, we must seek fidelity and holiness in every part of our lives. The part of life addressed here is marriage. According to God’s Word, sexual relations between a man and a woman are to take place only within the bond of holy matrimony. Any other sexual relationship is sin, and as such, it displeases God and is damaging to those who persist in it.

The Bible calls sex before marriage “fornication.” The Bible calls sex among two people married to others “adultery.” Both are terribly destructive sins that must be acknowledged, forsaken, and forgiven. Safeguards must be put in place to keep it from happening again. To continue living a life that includes fornication or adultery in no way reinforces one’s verbal profession of faith in Christ. In fact, continued fornication and adultery disprove words that portray a belief in Jesus. They are practices of those who do not know Jesus as Lord and Savior; it is not to be the practice of Christians. Moving out, and thereby ceasing carnal knowledge, is one way of preventing its reoccurrence; the other is to get married, and soon, if living together.

Yet, these verses also point out another principle of marriage. The charge for God’s people to marry only within the boundaries of God’s people was to be maintained throughout the Old

Testament and the New. Holy marriages are essential for ongoing covenant fidelity. Consider, for example:

* In the 7th chapter of Deuteronomy, we find God speaking to His people through his servant Moses about the peoples of the land (**Deuteronomy 7:3 & 4**) - “Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. ⁴For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the LORD will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly.”

* In I Kings 11, we see what happened to King Solomon, who neglected this principle. **I Kings 11:1-4** – “But King Solomon loved many foreign women...²from the nations of whom the LORD had said to the children of Israel, “You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods.” Solomon clung to these in love. ³And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. ⁴For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as *was* the heart of his father David.”

* The book of Ezra decries the intermarrying of godly seed with secular seed. And, we see the principle continues into and through the New Testament, when we read the Apostle Paul’s instructions to the Church at Corinth (**I Corinthians 7:39**) – “A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.”

* Another key passage is found in Paul’s *second* letter to the Corinthian believers (**2 Corinthians 6:14-18**) where we read: “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? ¹⁵And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? ¹⁶And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” ¹⁷Therefore “Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.” ¹⁸“I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty.”

But, what is an unmarried person to do if the right person doesn’t come along? What if no Christian man or woman comes across the radar screen of your life as a viable candidate?

You may be familiar with the name J. Gresham Machen. He was the professor of New Testament at Princeton Seminary and he later taught at and led Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia.

At one point in his life, he was apparently quite serious with a lady from Boston. She was said to be ‘intelligent, beautiful, exquisite’ – a hard combination to beat. They were quite devoted to one another for a time, though the relationship never blossomed into an engagement.

The reason was that she was a Unitarian. She didn’t believe that God was One, yet Three in Person – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. She was not a Christian. She apparently made a real effort to believe but could not bring her mind to a point where she could share Machen’s Christian faith. Machen, on his part, could not think of uniting to one who could not share basic agreement with him regarding his faith. So the relationship was ended. Sometimes covenant faithfulness may require that. Holy marriage matters.

So, dear ones whether you may be now or sometime in the future in the market looking for a spouse, or if you are ministering from God’s Word to those who may be, you have no reason to be looking or encourage looking among the unbelieving. God’s Word forbids intermarriage between those who profess saving faith in Jesus Christ, and those who deny him in unbelief.

Having discussed **God’s Promises Require Faithful Activity**, we now see **God’s Providence Maintains God’s Purposes**. That runs from verse 10 through verse 61.

I would encourage you to read all of this chapter, perhaps as a way to end your Lord’s Day. An interesting thing we find here is that God never speaks in this story, though He is often mentioned by others. Consider Abraham’s nameless servant’s prayer in verses 12-14: “...O LORD God of my master Abraham, please give me success this day, and show kindness to my master Abraham. ¹³ Behold, *here* I stand by the well of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. ¹⁴ Now let it be that the young woman to whom I say, ‘Please let down your pitcher that I may drink,’ and she says, ‘Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink’—*let her be the one* You have appointed for Your servant Isaac. And by this I will know that You have shown kindness to my master.”

As verse 15 points out, *before the man was done praying*, Rebekah arrived on the scene with pitcher in hand. She gave water to the servant, and she watered the 10 camels, which likely required several trips back and forth from the well to the animals. God was clearly working behind the scenes, but He was working to fulfill His purposes in delivering just the right wife for Isaac to Abraham’s servant, and He was doing so through the actions of His people. This is called the doctrine of God’s providence.

Question #11 of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* summarizes the doctrine for us when it asks, “*What are God’s works of providence?*” The answer, “God’s works of providence are, his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.”

“The God of Scripture is not simply a God of miracles who occasionally injects his power into life. He is far greater because He arranges all of life to suit and effect his providence. This makes all of life a miracle. God is over all. He is all-powerful, all-knowing, all-present, and all-controlling. This is the God of Scripture.” (Hughes, 316-17)

After Rebekah had finished watering 10 thirsty camels and the servant, the servant asked her in verse 23, “Whose daughter *are* you? Tell me, please, is there room *in* your father’s house for us to lodge?” Rebekah replies in verses 24 & 25, “I *am* the daughter of Bethuel, Milcah’s son, whom she bore to Nahor.” ²⁵ Moreover she said to him, “We have both straw and feed enough, and room to lodge.” She not only was beautiful, hard-working, and pure, she was a woman from Abraham’s people! Rebekah was the granddaughter of Nahor, Abraham’s brother.

The servant’s response to God’s providence is seen in verses 26 & 27 – “²⁶ Then the man bowed down his head and worshiped the LORD. ²⁷ And he said, “Blessed *be* the LORD God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His mercy and His truth toward my master. As for me, being on the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master’s brethren.”

Our highest privilege is to worship God. It is most appropriate for us to do so when God shows us later that He has been silently there all the time, working through people, times, reactions, and circumstances to bring about things we never could have dreamed would happen!

So, friend, even if you are presently in the midst of a titanic struggle with spouse, family member, co-worker, neighbor, or fellow member of the Church, step back and know that God is working in and through that difficulty. He has been working in it even before you realized it was taking place. Trust Him; take Him at His Word. Look for the change in your heart first, so you can then see the change of heart in another.

We've seen **God's Promises Require Faithful Activity** and **God's Providence Maintains God's Purposes**. We now see **God's Provision Satisfies His Servants**. That's verses 62-67. Follow along with me as I read them now:

⁶² Now Isaac came from the way of Beer Lahai Roi, for he dwelt in the South. ⁶³ And Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening; and he lifted his eyes and looked, and there, the camels *were* coming. ⁶⁴ Then Rebekah lifted her eyes, and when she saw Isaac she dismounted from her camel; ⁶⁵ for she had said to the servant, "Who *is* this man walking in the field to meet us?"

The servant said, "It *is* my master." So she took a veil and covered herself.

⁶⁶ And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. ⁶⁷ Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent; and he took Rebekah and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's *death*."

These verses take place back in Canaan, and we see Isaac "meditating" in the field at evening time. It could be that he was praying; it could be that he was thinking about God's work in his life, or it could mean that he was wondering how the trip for his wife was going, assuming Abraham had told him about it. One thing that is very likely is that Isaac was thinking about his mother Sarah, given how verse 27 ends (he was comforted after his mother's death).

God had delivered yet again on his promises. For godly seed to populate the earth and bring about His plan of redemption for His people, God needed to provide a wife for Isaac. And He did so in guiding Abraham to realize his grandchildren must come from godly seed. God guided Abraham's servant to Mesopotamia, and He guided Rebekah to the servant. He then brought Isaac and Rebekah together as husband and wife, thus securing that Abraham's heritage would continue.

This passage also gives us a picture of our Heavenly Father getting a bride for His Son. The Church is compared to a bride for Christ in **2 Corinthians 11:2 & 3** and **Ephesians 5:22-33** among other places. Dear ones, to be among the people who are the Bride of Christ, you must be a believer in Jesus Christ. *Do you realize that without Him, your life is meaningless? Do you understand that without saving faith in Jesus Christ, you will not be with Him in glory after your life here on earth comes to a close?*

No one is a child of God merely because he was born into this present life. That is simply physical life, and unfortunately many people believe that to be all there is. We must experience a second birth – a birth of the Spirit, where God causes you to realize your great sinfulness and need to be forgiven. That work of God's Spirit leads you to find forgiveness and reconciliation

with a Holy God when you place all your trust in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Who then becomes your Advocate with God the Father...a heavenly husband who laughs with joy over His bride... and with His bride both now and forever.

I began this message relating a true story from history, but it wasn't the full story. Let's return to that as we bring this message to a close.

One day, the benevolent, loving queen fell ill. The king frantically summoned his finest medical advisors. The king wept. The king prayed. The queen died.

And the king changed. The fairy tale was finished. A nightmare was only beginning. After 13 years of glory and goodness, that nation's benevolent ruler became its most evil monarch.

The king threw himself into a life of indulgence and drunken revelry. He seized those who had been his friends and tortured and killed them; a sadistic beast of a man, he did likewise even to his family.

He was more than a king, really. He was the czar of all Russia. With his bride by his side, he was Ivan the Wonderful. Only when she, Anastasia Romanovna, was gone – the fiend that remained was *Ivan the Terrible*.

May God be merciful to us as we seek to live for His glory -