

GENESIS 24:1-21

THE MISSION FOR A MATE

It has been said that there are two things you don't talk about in certain company; religion and politics. It should be obvious to most why that is the case. Both topics can quickly get people's blood pressure on the rise. Why is that? What gets people so spooled up that they are willing to go to blows, at least verbal blows over these things? Well, usually it is conviction. We all have deeply held convictions over things in the arenas of faith and politics. Unfortunately it has been my experience that many times people are better versed in politics than faith. At any rate, we all have deeply held convictions that are fundamental to just who we are. They are pillars of the philosophy that is our life. They are the anchors that hold down all the decisions we make. They are the foundations for all the reasoning that we do. These deeply held convictions make up our worldview.

Our worldview is just what it says. It is the way in which we view the world. This worldview has been compared to a pair of glasses that allow us to see the world in a certain context. Once again the example of the Grand Canyon comes to mind. To the Christian that takes the Genesis account literally, the canyon was made by a lot of water over a short period of time. To the skeptic that believes in evolution and uniformitarian principles of geology the canyon was carved out by a little water over millions of years. Their worldview, the type of glasses they are wearing, frames the view of the canyon. They are both looking at the same piece of land, but they interpret it differently due to what they believe. Of course they cannot both be correct. Therefore, putting these two different individuals in the same room would most likely end in an argument.

The truth is that we run in circles where we are with people that we agree with for the most part.

Today we will see that Abraham takes this most important principle to heart when it comes to choosing a wife for his son Isaac. He knows that they need to be compatible, but at a level that is often overlooked in this modern day and age when people tend to get together for all the wrong reasons.

Let's look now at the first 9 verses of Genesis 24.

Gen 24:1 Now Abraham was old, well advanced in age; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things.

Gen 24:2 So Abraham said to the oldest servant of his house, who ruled over all that he had, "Please, put your hand under my thigh,

Gen 24:3 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;

Gen 24:4 but you shall go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son Isaac."

Gen 24:5 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?"

Gen 24:6 But Abraham said to him, "Beware that you do not take my son back there.

Gen 24:7 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.

Gen 24:8 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."

Gen 24:9 So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning this matter.

First of all we see that the chapter opens with the statement that Abraham is up in age and that he has been blessed by God in everything he has done. You may recall that Abimelech had observed the same thing. Abraham is an example to everyone around him. We have seen him mess up some things, but overall he tends to get things right.

So Abraham calls his right hand man in to send him on a mission. Though he isn't named here, it is most likely Eliezer, the same guy we read about in chapter 15.

Gen 15:2 But Abram said, "Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house *is* Eliezer of Damascus?"

In verses 2 and 3 we see that Abraham makes Eliezer place his hand under his thigh and swear that he won't choose a wife for Isaac from among the Canaanites, but that he is to go back to Abraham's family to the North to find him a wife.

Despite how you feel about arranged marriages, they have been the norm for thousands of years. Sometimes they were arranged for political reasons, sometimes for financial ones. Dating, being on the hunt for a spouse is a fairly recent thing.

Placing your hand under the thigh of another was a tradition that meant that the promise was one of great importance. Eliezer would not have taken this mission lightly.

Abraham is not being a snob here. He is being practical, for many reasons.

He wants his son to have a good wife, one that won't lead him astray spiritually. The Canaanites were pagans to the max. The world in which we live, where spiritual matters or religious matters as they are so often termed, are seen as peripheral is a very recent phenomenon.

The world of multiculturalism that is so often touted today did not exist back then. Your faith, be it paganism or Judaism was the thing that defined you. Your nationality defined your culture, which in turn was defined by your religious convictions. Your faith was the first thing people encountered when they met you.

In general they could tell what your religious beliefs were by where you lived. Nowadays we tend to sweep that under the rug or at least it is taboo to discuss it until later when we get to know them better.

Abraham wants his son and his wife to be compatible. It is most important that they be compatible spiritually. Remember, the plan of God is in a sense riding on this. Isaac is next in line in the genealogy that eventually leads us to Jesus. He needs to be a man of faith. His children need to be raised by a mother that believes in the same God that Abraham and Isaac do.

God designed marriage. Therefore He gets to define it.

God's design is that the wife be a helper suitable for the man. They must be compatible.

Gen 2:18 And the LORD God said, *It is* not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.

Gen 2:18 And the LORD God said, "*It is* not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."

Although physical attraction is one of the first things sought out in today's world, it shouldn't be the deal-breaker.

Pro 31:30 Charm *is* deceitful and beauty *is* passing, But a woman *who* fears the LORD, she shall be praised.

1Pe 3:3 Do not let your adornment be *merely* outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on *fine* apparel—

1Pe 3:4 rather *let it be* the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible *beauty* of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.

They must be compatible so that the household runs smoothly.

Mat 12:25 But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: "**Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand.**"

It was explicitly stated in the Law that the men of Israel were not to take women of other religions as wives. Solomon did this and it was his downfall.

The New Testament confirms this.

2Co 6:14 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?

2Co 6:15 And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?

2Co 6:16 And 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."

2Co 6:17 Therefore "COME OUT FROM AMONG THEM AND BE SEPARATE, SAYS THE LORD. DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAR, AND I WILL RECEIVE YOU."

2Co 6:18 "I WILL BE A FATHER TO YOU, AND YOU SHALL BE MY SONS AND DAUGHTERS, SAYS THE LORD ALMIGHTY."

When counseling young couples prior to marriage, this is often thrown out the window. I often hear, "But I love her/ him!" Then they avoid you altogether.

The truth is that a Christian has no business marrying a non-Christian. The two are incompatible if the Christian's faith is any more than just lip service. Look at what Paul has just told us.

Abraham knew and respected these principles. We should also.

Next we see a "But what if?" from Eliezer.

Gen 24:5 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?"

Eliezer is merely thinking things through. We all have to deal with these things.

"Well, what if this happens then what?"

Eliezer asks Abraham, what to do in the event that the woman doesn't want to move to Canaan. Should he then move Isaac up to her hometown?

Abraham is adamant that either God will provide a woman that will move to Canaan or else Eliezer will be released from the oath. How does he know this?

His decision is based on the Word of God.

Gen 24:7 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.

Abraham is not interested in a close fit. He is looking for the perfect woman for his son. This is because he knows that Isaac has a role to play

in the plan of God. His wife will also play a vital role. If she is not the right one, if she is just a pretty face or the just the first one that comes along, or will marry him if he is willing to relocate, then she isn't the right one. She must be willing to move to the land that God promised him.

Gen 24:8 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."

Today we are seeing how our faith should affect our every move.

Now we move from Abraham and his principles to setting the plan in motion. We now have a man on a mission.

Have you ever been sent on a mission? Most of us probably think of Mission Impossible or James Bond when asked that question. If you were ever a child however, and I'm sure that most of us here were at one time, then you have been sent on a mission. If not while playing with your friends, you were sent on a mission at one time or another by your parents. I grew up in the days before remote controls for the TV. That meant that I had to change the channel on the TV whenever Dad wanted it changed. It didn't matter if I was in the room or not. When he called I had to drop what I was doing and change the channel.

As I got older and had to earn a living, I had other missions on which I was sent. No matter what the task at hand, all I can remember was that I wanted to be successful at completing the mission. If it was fixing a car, then I wanted to fix it quickly and get it right the first time. If it was fixing aircraft, then I wanted to be the "go-to guy." If it was routing trucks then I wanted to route trucks more efficiently while carrying more freight than anyone else.

You get the picture. I am sure you have been in the same situation at some point in your life. At some time you had something you were tasked to do and you desperately wanted to accomplish it for the person

that sent you. This is where we find Eliezer today. He has been tasked with the feat of finding a wife for his employer: Abraham. He has to journey to another land and find the perfect bride. Think about it! You are basically told to go to a certain city and find a wife for someone else! I mean, you've been told the family from which she is to come, but it is still what is referred to as a cold call! You are showing up unannounced to someone's home and you want to take one of the young ladies in the home away to another land to marry a man she has never heard of or never seen.

What would you do? I know what I would do. I know what I would say. I would say the same thing I always say when I am in over my head, and that is quite often. I would say, "God help me!"

That is what Eliezer does. So beginning with verse 9, let's pick up the story.

Gen 24:9 So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning this matter.

Gen 24:10 Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and departed, for all his master's goods *were in* his hand. And he arose and went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor.

Gen 24:11 And he made his camels kneel down outside the city by a well of water at evening time, the time when women go out to draw *water*.

Gen 24:12 Then he said, "O LORD God of my master Abraham, please give me success this day, and show kindness to my master Abraham.

Gen 24:13 Behold, *here* I stand by the well of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water.

Gen 24:14 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."

Gen 24:15 And it happened, before he had finished speaking, that behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, came out with her pitcher on her shoulder.

So we start today with Eliezer swearing an oath, that he would not find a wife for Isaac from among the Canaanites. So he takes 10 camels and all they can carry, and I'm sure he has some help going with him and journeys to the homeland of Abraham's kinfolk. He times his arrival in town to coincide with the time that women went to the community well to draw water for the normal operations of the household. She was probably getting water for the evening meal as well as baths. When he gets to town and finds the well, he then prays for God to direct him to the right woman by her responding to him a certain way. He didn't go to the mall or the local bar. As we often see in the Bible, the local well is the place to find women.

We need to see what is going on here:

1. Eliezer takes advantage of the time of day knowing that there will be many women around. Is this presumptuous? I don't believe so because he has already been given his mission, therefore he knows the task at hand. He is just making the best use of his time knowing that most likely a young lady from Abraham's family will be there at a certain time of day.
2. He then asks God to single out the young woman by having her respond to him a certain way. Is this presumptuous or tempting God? In this instance I don't believe it to be. Eliezer is asking God to guide him through what is known as providential circumstances. And while this isn't necessarily a bad way to discern God's will, we are often guilty of ignoring the circumstances that we don't like or at least attributing them to the devil while focusing on the circumstances that lead us to what it is that we really want in the first place.

However, in this case Eliezer is setting the gauntlet up beforehand. He isn't making up the rules as he goes along. He actually sets things up so as to make it harder for a young lady to fit the bill.

b. **Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink:** Eliezer was wise enough to ask for a sign that was remarkable, but (in human terms) possible. He didn't tempt God by asking for fire to fall from heaven or for protection as he leapt from the pinnacle of the temple.

c. **Let her be the one:** In praying this prayer, there is a sense in which Eliezer "stacked the deck" against finding someone. It would take a remarkable woman to volunteer for this tedious task. Considering that a camel may drink up to 20 gallons, watering ten camels meant at least an hour of hard work.

d. **By this I will know:** Eliezer cares nothing about what the woman will look like. He wants a woman of character, a woman whom God has chosen.

At some time in our lives, we have all probably asked God for a sign that would lead us in the right direction. As I have already said though, we have to be careful "interpreting" these signs. Some would argue that we aren't to look for circumstances like this. They would say that we are to listen to the Holy Spirit. I strongly agree that we should listen to the Holy Spirit. In fact, that is what we are told to do.

Joh 14:26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

There was a time that the Apostle Paul thought that it was the right time to go to visit certain churches, but the Holy Spirit told him not to go. However, there were other times when Paul weighed the circumstances around him and acted logically according to them, but he was always praying for God's guidance and for His will to be done.

2Co 2:12 Furthermore, when I came to Troas to *preach* Christ's gospel, and a **door** was opened to me by the Lord,

Col 4:3 meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a **door** for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains,

Rev 3:8 "I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.

My way of dealing with the unknown has always been based on Rev.3:8. If God opens doors no one can shut, and shuts doors that no one can open, then I ask Him to shut the doors he doesn't want me to enter, and open the doors that He wants me to enter. As some have said, I'm remedial and need all the hints I can get.

Gen 24:15 And it happened, before he had finished speaking, that behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, came out with her pitcher on her shoulder.

Gen 24:16 Now the young woman *was* very beautiful to behold, a virgin; no man had known her. And she went down to the well, filled her pitcher, and came up.

Gen 24:17 And the servant ran to meet her and said, "Please let me drink a little water from your pitcher."

Gen 24:18 So she said, "Drink, my lord." Then she quickly let her pitcher down to her hand, and gave him a drink.

Gen 24:19 And when she had finished giving him a drink, she said, "I will draw *water* for your camels also, until they have finished drinking."

Gen 24:20 Then she quickly emptied her pitcher into the trough, ran back to the well to draw *water*, and drew for all his camels.

Gen 24:21 And the man, wondering at her, remained silent so as to know whether the LORD had made his journey prosperous or not.

We see here that God answered his prayer even before he had finished praying. God is omniscient. He knows everything. He declares the end from the beginning.

The young lady spoke and did just as Eliezer had asked. In verse 21 we see that he remained silent and wondered if she was the one.

We have all been at this stage before also, the place in time where things look as though they are going to work out, yet we aren't quite sure. You see, Eliezer has some clues but he still doesn't have all the clues. In fact, even if he has the right girl, he still doesn't know if she will want to leave her home and family to move south.

This is actually what we should expect to see. God has given us the end of the matter in the book of Revelation, but what we see most of the time in the rest of the Bible is that HE only gives us some of the clues. He gives us enough information to get us to the next stop on the journey. By faith we believe that He will then direct us from that point forward. He told Abraham to go. That was it, no more instructions until he got to the next town.

Our lives are usually the same way. We get enough info to get us to the next stop and then we don't get any more until we have fulfilled that leg of the journey. Why should God give us the whole picture if we're not going to be obedient in the first steps?

Eliezer's dedication to his master has brought him this far. He is a smart man that takes advantage of the circumstances around him and in prayer diligently works to further the portion of God's plan in which he is privileged to have apart.

- We all have a part in God's plan.
- We should be as diligent to carry out his plans also.
- We should be thankful and praise Him along the way for the small victories that occur along the way while at the same time keeping our eyes on the prize at the end of the race.

This afternoon I'm asking you to ponder where you are in this story. I want you to ask yourself if your life is being lived as Eliezer's was. If it is, then we should all eventually see the fruit of it and in turn we should all be blessed by it.

Now is the point in which we should ask ourselves some very important questions. This is the time for self-reflection and examination.

Going back to Abraham, his principles and the search for his son's wife.

- Does our faith define us?
- Is it the first thing people encounter when they meet us? Do we bring it to the forefront?
- Is it a deal-breaker when it comes to relationships, especially when it comes to marriage?
- Are we taking God's plan for us into account when we build relationships?
- Are we taking God's plan for us into account when we make business decisions, relocation decisions, decisions as to what job we will take and the career field we pursue?
- Seek God's will for your life.
- Realize that you are most likely already in the middle of a mission like this one.

If you are confused, sit at the well and ask God for guidance.