

The Captivating Charm of the Covenant

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Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] Good, let's turn to our reading this morning, shall we? And we are picking up in the book of Genesis, and Genesis chapter 24. We have visited Bibles at the side, at the back, so please do grab a Bible if you don't have one with you.

And it's a long reading, so we're going to split it into two parts, and we'll sing halfway through, and the little ones can head out to junior church, but we're going to read the first half of the chapter. Genesis 24, beginning verse 1. Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years, and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things.

And Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he had, put your hand under my thigh, that I may 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, but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac. The servant said to him, perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land. Must I then take your son back to the land from which you came? Abraham said to him, see to it that you do not take my son back there.

[1 : 31] The Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my kindred, and who spoke to me and swore to me, to your offspring I will give this land.

He will send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this oath of mine, only you must not take my son back there.

So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham, his master, and swore to him concerning this matter. Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and departed, taking all sorts of choice gifts from his master.

And he arose and went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor. And he made his camels kneel down outside the city by the well of the water at the time of evening, the time when women go out to draw water.

And he said, O Lord, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham.

[2 : 39] Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. Let the young women to whom I shall say, Please let down your jar, that I may drink.

And who shall say, Drink, and I will water your camels. Let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master.

Before he had finished speaking, behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethiel, the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, came out with her water jar on her shoulder.

The young woman was very attractive in appearance, a maiden whom no man had known. She went down to the spring and filled her jar and came up.

Then the servant ran to meet her and said, Please give me a little water to drink from your jar. She said, Drink, my lord. And she quickly let down her jar upon her hand and gave him a drink.

[3 : 46] When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, I will draw water for your camels also, until they have finished drinking. So she quickly emptied her jar in the trough and ran again to the well to draw water.

And she drew for all his camels. The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether the lord had prospered his journey or not. When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold ring weighing a half shekel and two bracelets for her arms weighing ten gold shekels and said, Please

tell me whose daughter you are.

Is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night? She said to him, I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor.

She added, We have plenty of both straw and fodder and room to spend the night. The man bowed his head and worshipped the lord and said, Blessed be the lord, the god of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness towards my master.

As for me, the lord has led me in the way to the house of my master's kinsman. Then the young woman ran and told her mother's household about these things.

[5 : 08] Rebecca had a brother whose name was Laban. Laban ran out towards the man to the spring. As soon as he saw the ring and the bracelets on his sister's arms and heard the words of Rebecca, his sister, thus the man spoke to me.

He went to the man and behold, he was standing by the camels at the spring. 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. So the man came to the house and unharnessed the camels and gave straw and fodder of the camels. And there was water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him.

Then food was set before him to eat. But he said, I will not eat until I have said what I have to say. He said, Speak on.

So he said, I am Abraham's servant. The lord has greatly blessed my master and he has become great. He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and servants of female servants, camels and donkeys.

[6 : 21] And Sarah, my master's wife, bore a son to my master when she was old. And to him, he has given all that he has. My master has made me swear, saying, You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites in whose land I dwell.

But you shall go to my father's house and to my clan and take a wife for my son. I said to my master, perhaps the woman will not follow me.

But he said to me, The lord before whom I have walked will send his angel with you and prosper your way. You shall take a wife for my son from my clan and from my father's house.

Then you will be free from my oath when you come to my clan. And if they will not give her to you, you will be free from my oath. I came today to the spring and said, O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, if you now are prospering the way that I go, behold, I am standing by the spring of water. Let the virgin who comes out to draw water to whom I shall say, Please give me a little water from your jar to drink. And he will say to me, Drink, and I will also draw for your camels also.

[7 : 41] Let her be the woman whom the Lord has appointed for my master's son. Before I finished speaking, in my heart, behold, Rebecca came out with her water jar on her shoulder and she went down to the spring and drew water.

I said to her, Please let me drink. She quickly let down her jar from her shoulder and said, Drink, and I will give your camels drink also. So I drank and she gave the camels drink also.

Then I asked her, Whose daughter are you? She said, The daughter of Bethuel, Nahuel's son, whom Milki brought to him. So I put the ring on her nose and the bracelets on her arms.

Then I bowed my head and worshipped the Lord and blessed the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to take the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son. Now then, if you are going to show steadfast love and faithfulness to my master, tell me, and if not, tell me, that I might turn to the right hand or to the left.

[8 : 53] Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, The thing has come from the Lord. We cannot speak to you, bad or good. Behold, Rebecca is before you.

Take her and go and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the Lord has spoken. When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the earth before the Lord.

And the servant brought out jewelry of silver and of gold and garments and gave them to Rebecca. He also gave to her brother and to her mother costly ornaments.

And he and the men who were with him ate and drank, and they spent the night there. When they arose in the morning, he said, Send me away to my master. Her brother and her mother said, Let the young woman remain with us a while, at least ten days.

After that, she may go. But he said to them, Do not delay me, since the Lord has prospered my way. Send me away that I may go to my master. They said, Let us call the young woman and ask

her.

[10:02] And they called Rebecca and said to her, Will you go with this man? She said, I will go. So they sent away Rebecca, their sister, and her nurse, and Abraham's servant, and his men.

And they blessed Rebecca and said to her, Our sister, may you become thousands of ten thousands, and may your offspring possess the gates of those who hate him.

Then Rebecca and her young women arose and rode on the camels and followed the man. Thus the servant took Rebecca and went his way.

Now Isaac had returned from Bir La Rue and was dwelling in the Negev. And Isaac went out to meditate in the field towards evening.

And he lifted up his eyes and saw, and behold, there were camels coming. And Rebecca lifted up her eyes. And when she saw Isaac, she dismounted from the camel and said to the servant, Who is that man walking in the field to meet us?

[11:10] The servant said, It is my master. So she took her veil and covered herself. And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done.

Then Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah, his mother, and took Rebecca. And she became his wife. And he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

Amen. Well, may God bless to us his words this morning. Well, turn with me, if you would, to Genesis chapter 24. 24.

And I think that's page 17 if you have one of the church visitors' Bibles. We're coming back to the book of Genesis at really a transition point.

The cycle of stories centered on Abraham begins in the last paragraph of Genesis 11 with the generations of Terah, Abraham's father. And it ends really with a matching little paragraph at the end of chapter 22, the genealogy of his brother, Nahor.

[12:18] And these two brackets, if you like, they frame the whole main story of Abraham. And then the long story that's centered on Jacob and his family begins properly at chapter 25 and verse 19.

You see there the familiar little title phrase, these are the generations of Isaac. Interestingly, there's no account beginning, these are the generations of Abraham.

There's no long saga centered on Isaac. And it's as though his story almost is something of a transition. In any way, his life story is a bit lackluster compared to Abraham's.

So chapter 23 through to chapter 25 verse 18 is what you might call linking material. It links to the next main movement of the story.

But they are vital chapters nonetheless because at this point big questions arise. Will this story of God's promise to Abraham survive?

[13:22] That quad promise, remember, that God gave to Abraham of a place to dwell, a land of promise, a people from his seed, knowing God's presence, his protection, and his blessing.

And of course, through all of that, the plan of salvation for the world. Can that really survive the next generation? That's an ever-present question actually in the household of faith, isn't it?

Will any church survive to the next generation? Will the faith in any family survive to the next generation? And certainly here, God's covenant promise seems to be hanging by a thread.

chapter 23, remember, Abraham's wife, the matriarch, dies. Then in chapter 25, as we'll see next time, Abraham himself, the great patriarch, dies.

And it all seems to be the opposite of what we'd hoped for. If you read from chapter 25, for example, verses 12 to 18, what you see is Ishmael's seed, the non-covenant family, the seed of the serpent, opposed to the true seed of faith.

[14:31] You'll see that Ishmael's seed is flourishing, multiplying. But still, Isaac, the promised seed, he has no offspring at all. And again, it often looks like that, doesn't it, in the story of God and his kingdom.

On the face of it, it can often appear that the church is in decline, that opposition is on the up and on the up. And we ask the question, well, can the church survive? Can the gospel survive?

Can God deliver on his promises? Well, that is the crucial question, really, in these chapters. And the answer, of course, is an unequivocal yes.

Yes, God's plan is marching on for those who have eyes to see. In chapter 23, Sarah dies. Yes, but what did the very last couple of verses of that chapter tell us?

Well, she was buried in the land of promise. And not in a borrowed tomb, but in a piece of property that Abraham had taken possession of as his very own.

[15:37] A foothold of real estate in the place that God had promised him. And now, in chapter 24, between Sarah's death there and then Abraham's death in chapter 25, God, again, makes it clear that not only is his promise for the land firmly under control, but so also is the promise of the seed because here Isaac gets a wife.

Now, if you're sharp-eyed, that's trailed in chapter 22, verse 23, in just those three little words in brackets. Bethuel fathered Rebekah.

Just a little thing there to whet your appetite for more. And that more now is unfolded completely in this delightful story full of romance, full of excitement in chapter 24.

And the point is very clear and it's wonderful. God's promise and purpose in his story is not just moving on unstopped as promised with effortless power, but if you like, it's dancing on delightfully. It's full of the most enchanting interest and full of romance. There is nothing remotely boring about our God and his ways. To be part of his story is to be part of the most exciting and enthralling and in fact romantic story ever told.

[16:57] And that's certainly what we get a glimpse of here in Genesis 24. The story itself is a masterpiece in its own right. It's full of tension and twists just like any great classic love story.

And the structure helps to make the story even more vivid. As we saw, you get two parallel accounts that Paul read for us one after the other. First, just recounting the events as they unfold. And then secondly, it's told all over again, this time from the perspective of the servant to the family. And it's a great story, but interestingly, unlike the great love story of, well, Romeo and Juliet, for example, they are not the chief actors, the lovers in this story.

Here, the chief actor in the drama is completely silent. He never speaks. But his presence, of course, is everywhere. The Lord, his name is mentioned, I think, 17 times throughout the story. But he's never seen, he's never heard. But he's the chief actor and he is the director, if you like, of absolutely everything that is happening, even down to the most trivial details.

[18:13] And so the message is absolutely clear, whether it was for Moses' first hearers, the traveling Israelites on the way to the promised land, or indeed us today. And it's this, you can be confident, utterly, in the promise of this God.

He is utterly committed to his purpose, and as he is, he's also full of compassion for his people. And it's to that end that all the power of his effortless hand of providence, his wonderful providence, his enchanting providence.

It's to that end that everything is directed. And this is a story that's deliberately designed to fill us with wonder at the captivating charm of our covenant God.

So let's look at the text. Start at verses 1 to 9, because they tell us about Abraham's godly confidence in the Lord's promise. Two great temptations for the traveling Israelites under Moses, and indeed God's people ever afterwards, two great temptations were assimilation and abandonment.

Assimilation of the people to the culture all round about, especially through intermarriage with the people of Canaan, or abandonment of that journey.

[19:39] Let's choose a leader and go back to Egypt. It was a common refrain, wasn't it, in the Exodus story. And likewise, for New Testament Hebrews, for Christians today, we face exactly the same pressures, don't we, to assimilate to the culture around about us, and to abandon the race of faith altogether.

As we saw last week, the book of Hebrews is full of warnings and encouragements not to fall prey to either of these temptations. And these verses here are giving us just that same encouragement. And they do it by pointing to Abraham, who is the father of all the true faithful. And at the heart of this message are the two statements that you see there in verse 3, and then in verse 6, and again in verse 8.

Not a wife for Isaac from among the Canaanites. And verse 6, not to take Isaac back to the land from which God had called Abraham out.

Again and again repeated in verse 8. No assimilation and no abandonment for the covenant family. Come what may, however difficult and seeming impossible it might be, Abraham had supreme confidence in God's promise.

[20 : 57] And his attitude was to trust God and obey. Now Abraham faced an obvious need here. Not just a personal need, it was a kingdom need.

God's plan, God's purpose in salvation obviously cannot go on without a wife for Isaac. But faced with that dilemma, Abraham's absolute priority was godliness.

Much more so than guidance. It was gospel principle, not what you might try to call gospel pragmatism.

There'd be many, many arguments, wouldn't there, in favor of a local wife for Isaac. Maybe from among the Hittites that you read about in chapter 23. The diary that would come to him would surely gain the family more real estate in the land.

The alliance with those people would surely give Abraham even more influence over the locals. But nevertheless, Abraham is adamant. Verse 3, not a wife from the Canaanites among whom I dwell.

[22 : 04] Why is he so adamant about that? Well, if you remember, these are a people who we know are under God's particular curse. Way back in Genesis 9, it records the curse of God upon Canaan and their descendants.

In Genesis 15, God said to Abraham that they were under a special curse for their awful iniquity and God would ultimately judge these people. And Moses' first heroes knew that very, very well.

Leviticus 18, just one example, is full of speaking of their abominations, their sexual perversions. Deuteronomy chapter 7, God warns them never, ever to give their children to the Canaanites in marriage.

Why? Because they will turn away your sons from following me to serve other gods. And what God's people have to understand, whether it's the Old Testament people of God or the New Testament people of faith, it's what Abraham clearly understood here, that true faith in God will be marked by distinctiveness.

Because the call to covenant grace is the call to covenant holiness. Walk before me and be blameless, God said to Abraham in Genesis 17.

[23 : 20] You will be holy for I am holy, God was repeatedly saying to the Israelites. At the very heart of the call of God, the call of the gospel, is a call out of this world and its ways.

A call to separation from sin. That's what holiness is in its primary sense. Separation. A mark of being at odds with the rest of the world. Genesis 3, 15 says that right at the start, God's true seed are those in whom he puts enmity, opposition to the world and the devil.

By faith, at the beginning, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out. Out, to be a stranger, to be an alien in this earth. And that's what Abraham's articulating here now at the end of his life.

God's people, the people of the covenant, must be distinct from the people of the world. And so real faith must be prepared to say no.

Real faith begins with those necessary negatives. Remember Psalm 1? Not the counsel of the wicked. Not the way of sinners. Not the seat of scoffers.

[24 : 34] Jesus himself was always saying that you are to be not as the pagans. Not so with you, my people. And so even when it may seem that it would be much easier, maybe even better for the ongoing cause of the covenant community to compromise a little, to assimilate with the world.

No, obedience must come first. Even if it seems as though God's own purpose is going to be put at risk by his people's unwillingness to be pragmatic.

So God's servant here, Abraham's servant, says, well what if I can't find a wife from your kindred master? Or what if she won't come? Well, says Abraham there in verse 8, even then there is no going back there.

Even if no wife materializes for Isaac, there's to be no going back and there's to be no Canaanite wife. We will just have to trust God that he can still do everything that he's promised to do.

Now that is real godly confidence, isn't it? Real trust in God when the chips are down. Do you think that was easy for Abraham? Of course it wasn't easy.

[25 : 53] Just as it's far from easy when a Christian man or more often a Christian woman who longs for a life partner, I can't find a truly Christian partner. when the New Testament is just as clear as the Old Testament about not being unequally yoked with someone outside the family of faith, only in the Lord, says Paul.

Because it's exactly the same reason, because you'll surely be turned away from the living God otherwise. There's so many ways, aren't there, in life when we can justify taking matters into our own hands.

It's the same for somebody who's burdened with same-sex attraction. And you wish that you could have the life partnership that others have, and it can be an ongoing struggle, an agonizing struggle, to say with Abraham, no, no, no going back there, whatever.

No abandoning God's call, no assimilating to the world around, no matter what. God's people, you see, are holy, separated to Him.

Even if it seems that our lives are going to be blighted, or even to be lost, as a result of obedience to Him. Doesn't verse 8 remind you of the story in Daniel chapter 3 of the three men in front of Nebuchadnezzar in the burning fiery furnace?

[27 : 20] What did they say? Our God we serve is able to deliver us, but if not, let it be known to you, O King, we will not serve your gods, or worship the golden image.

All right, it's chapter 4 and 5, and the apostle said, you may threaten us, but we must obey God rather than men. You want to see real faith?

Do you want to know what real faith looks like? Well, that's it. It's godly confidence in the Lord's promise that says no to abandoning God's call.

No to assimilating of the world. Even when to go that way looks to be the very way of folly and loss and threatens everything that God seems to have promised as his plan for his people and maybe for your life.

Because, you see, as Paul says, we look not to the things that are seen, but the things that are unseen, to the eternal promise of God, which cannot ever fail.

[28 : 28] What's the point if we gain the whole wide world, says Jesus, and yet lose that? Trust and obey. Abraham's godly confidence in God's promise, no matter what, because God's promise in his gospel is eternal.

And real faith, therefore, considers fidelity to that as of first importance before everything else in the world. And real faith trusts God to provide all that we really do need and will need.

And that's what the rest of the chapter really reminds us, that our God, in whom we do trust, he will not fail us, not ever. Verses 10, right through to verse 61, show us the Lord's gritty commitment commitment to his purpose.

We needn't fear because God's power will accomplish all his purposes according to promise, and not just efficiently and effortlessly and reliably, but marvelously, wonderfully, through just the quiet working of his delightful providence in the life of his people.

The brilliant storytelling, these verses. We don't have time, of course, to really do it justice, but let's just look at some of the details, some of the interplay between the wisdom and the prudence of this faithful servant on his errand, and the overarching providence of God that is at work silently and hiddenly at every single point.

[29 : 57] Verse 10 tells us, do you see, that the servant sets off to Mesopotamia, and he arrives in the city of Nahor, Abraham's brother, and that whole journey, huge long journey, is just there in one verse.

There's no detail, except, well, an apparently trivial detail about the number of his camels. Why is he telling us that? Well, read on. The camels are going to become quite important, aren't they? And already we have that sense, don't we, that unseen and unheard God's hand is weaving everything together to bring about an encounter that quite literally will change the course of history, indeed eternity.

Now let's just be clear here at this point. This is not a chapter that is in the Bible here to give us a blueprint about how to find the right wife. This is not a guide about what we should do.

It's telling us what God is doing and why to fulfill his plan and purpose. But nevertheless, it does tell us, I think, rather a lot about how God does tend to accomplish his perfect purpose in the lives of his people.

[31 : 04] Derek Kidner says this. This story, this story told with unobtrusive artistry, gives living form to the charge, in all thy ways acknowledge him and he shall direct thy paths.

And it's true because it is a story about courageous obedience by a few of God's people that literally shaped the whole course of history. It's not about God's giving obtrusive guidance, supernatural guidance at all.

But rather, it does show God's gentle leading as godly faith, as godly obedience is exercised by his people and it leads naturally and easily to these wonderful conclusions.

And that should give us, I think, great comfort as well. Because we needn't fear as Christians as though our life was one great obstacle course that God lays for us with all kinds of traps and hazards.

all sorts of things that might make us trip up and fall. No, we sang, didn't we, when you walk with the Lord in the light of his word, what a glory he sheds on your way.

[32 : 12] When we do his good will, he abides with us still and with all who will trust and obey him. Because he has a gritty commitment to his purpose.

His kingdom purpose for the whole world and also for his people. So this isn't a pro forma for guidance for us to adopt. It's a pattern of godliness for us to learn.

And above all, it's teaching us, isn't it, about the real provider of goodness, the God that we can trust in all of our journeys in life. It all matters. And notice just three things, I think, that stand out here that the text draws attention to about Abraham's servant and the way he goes about this mission.

First of all, notice his attitude to God. Everything he does is in an attitude of prayer. There's prayerful dependence on God and God's covenant faithfulness, his steadfast covenant love.

Verse 12, O Lord, God of Abraham, show steadfast love, show covenant love and faithfulness.

Verse 14, again, show steadfast love, covenant love to my master.

[33 : 25] Keep your covenant. Verse 27, blessed be the Lord who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness. He's not forsaken his covenant, his promise.

See, this prayer is not sort of voodoo prayer, is it? It's not prayer for revelations in advance about which girl is the right one for me? Put a big arrow on her head. No, it's trusting prayer, isn't it?

It's gospel prayer. He's appealing to God's covenant promise. And he's asking God to act in line with what he's promised. It's putting the gospel first, isn't it?

And the concerns of the gospel. And by the way, that's so important for anyone's prayer. Also about this particular issue of marriage and seeking a marriage partner.

Put the gospel first, always. Christopher Ash's book is rightly titled marriage, sex in the service of God.

[34 : 25] That's what marriage is. It's a blessing to serve the kingdom of God. And Abraham's servant is very clear what this marriage is all about. We've got to be just as clear in our thinking about marriage for ourselves, for one another in the church.

And that's what his prayer was for. His prayer was for the furtherance of the kingdom through marriage. marriage. And so his attitude was one of prayerful dependence on God. He was prayerful, but notice he wasn't passive.

Now he understood that a right attitude to God leads to right actions under God. And he's very practical. Look at verse 10 again. He mentions gifts that he brings from his master.

It's those gifts, and we'll see in verse 30, tackle Laban's interest. As we'll see in the story later on, Laban has a particular eye on these sorts of things. But the servant also is very perceptive.

It's quite shrewd, isn't he, in assessing the female of the species. Look at verse 14. His prayer there is not for some sort of miraculous sign. It's a prayer that simply there will indeed be a woman who is worthy of his master.

[35 : 35] And just because he's so deeply concerned with the concerns of God's covenant and its future, the test that he sets here is very clearly, isn't it, a test of character. He's looking for a woman whose own heart and soul shows signs of being attuned to the ways of the covenant God.

He's looking for a servant-hearted woman. He's looking for one who's eager to be hospitable, to be helpful beyond the call of duty. Well, he didn't just have one camel, did he?

We were told he had ten camels. Apparently, a carer, every camel will drink at least 25 gallons of water. So, 250 gallons of water is a lot of humping water from a well, isn't it?

And a woman who'll do that, well, surely she's certainly someone worth talking to. And by the way, it's interesting that in the New Testament, when you see the key qualifications for Christian leadership in the church, one of the key issues is hospitality.

And a huge part of that, obviously, is down to the woman of the house, to the leader's wife, isn't it?

So, in particular, for anyone in ministry, and any young man seeking a future in ministry, that is the kind of wife that you need, the kind of wife who will be willing to water ten camels, and will do it willingly.

[36 : 58] If you find one like that, don't hang around. Verse 15, what do you know? Having prayed for such a thing, there is a woman just like that.

And here she comes. And she's called Rebecca. Isn't that interesting? And not just that, but she's got an alphabet of qualities to add to them.

Look at verse 16. She's attractive. A, very attractive. And B, she's got breeding. Verse 24, she's from just the right family. And C, she's chaste, says verse 16.

She's a maiden that no one had known. And D, she's diligent. Again, verse 16, she's a doer. She's not just a looker. She's right out there getting the work done, willing to serve.

And she's E, energetic. Verse 20, she runs, do you notice, back and forward to water all these camels. She goes the extra mile or ten for this complete stranger.

[37 : 59] And I'm sure I could go on and fill in the alphabet, but you get the picture, don't you? And again, I'll say, young men, if you find one like that, don't hang around. Get your act together quickly before somebody else pips you to it.

And that is what this servant did. Do you notice? He was prudent. He makes sure he gets the deal done on the spot. There's no waiting around, verse 33. Even as you would customarily do, to have a meal first before you got into any discussion.

No, he is straight on. He lays out his stall. Verse 36 pointedly says, all of Abraham's blessing and wealth now belongs to Isaac. In other words, this man is a very great catch for any woman and for her family.

But notice, there's absolutely no hiding of the most important thing, is there? He's constantly talking about the Lord, the Lord, and his covenant, and this special family's place.

And so in verse 50, it all falls into place. She's yours. This is clearly the Lord's doing, says the family.

[39 : 11] And again, the prudent servant doesn't wait as the customer would dictate. And they ask, verse 56, he says, no, no, don't delay me because the Lord has prospered my way.

A man with the right attitude to God, a man of prayerful dependence, but unafraid to take the right actions under God. He's practical, he's perceptive, he's prudent.

He gets it done. And don't miss, thirdly, his right acknowledgement of God. Do you see? Both parts of the narrative end, don't they, with his reverent praise, with his thanksgiving to God.

Verse 26, and then again in verse 48 and verse 52. Everything he has done, after he's done that, he acknowledges actually that all of it is God's doing.

God had led him. God had woven the way marvelously in answer to prayer. And he acknowledges that fully and freely before everyone. He bowed in worship before the Lord.

[40 : 11] And I do wonder if that's something that we all need to learn better than we do. We often find ourselves echoing those words in verse 50, don't we, that this thing has come from the Lord.

The Lord has answered our prayer wonderfully. But do we always remember to give that clear and public thanksgiving, that gratitude?

Something we need to remember, isn't it? But this servant bowed his head. He blessed the Lord.

And although the Lord had never uttered one word throughout this, never performed any great sign or wonder, God had led him.

Look at verse 48. He led me by the right way to the very daughter of his master's kinsman. A right acknowledgement of God.

So, verse 61, Rebecca sets off with the servant with the blessing of her family. God's purpose has been achieved. Not in a boring way, not in a mundane way, not a bit of it.

[41 : 18] One thing this story shows us is that God is a God of wonderful romance. A God of wonderfully captivating charm in the way that he works out his purpose in the life of his people.

He's anything but dull. God loves to preside over wonderful love stories. And we shouldn't be surprised at that either, should we? And in one sense, you know, there is truth for Christians to say that, well, all that really matters in a marriage partner is that you find someone of the opposite sex and someone who loves the Lord.

Well, yes, that's true, you know, in as much as, and this is a word for younger people here, don't be waiting around forever and ever for God to put a big arrow on the head of the right one for me.

That's silly. And that's crippling. But on the other hand, God does love a good love story. And he does tend to bless his children with excitement, with romance, with the delight of stories of attraction and marriage.

It's full of captivating charm. Our God is not just dull and not just practical. And if you put first things first, if you put God's steadfast love, if you put the concerns of his kingdom first, then our Lord says to us, he will add to us all that we need on our way there, including a life partner, if, but only if, that is what's best for you in God's plan and God's purpose.

[42 : 48] But remember, we're not Isaac, are we? Not everyone's marriage is vital in that sense for the sake of the kingdom. In fact, none of our marriages are vital in the sense that Isaac's was.

And our Lord Jesus himself is very clear, isn't he? That not everyone, not even all of his followers, will marry in this life. That is not the only fulfilling way to a life of faith with the Lord.

And yet the Bible also tells us at the same time that every Christian marriage is vital for the cause of the kingdom in terms of the witness of the church and the health of the church.

And so whether we're married or we're not married, the apostle says to us, let marriage be held in honor among all. And so to that extent, there are things, aren't there, usefully to help us think about that in this passage.

But let's not miss the main thing. Isaac's need for a wife is the particular focus in this story. But the real question behind all of it is simply this.

[43 : 53] Can we have confidence in the promise that God makes to his people? Can we have confidence in what God tells us about our lives and our future?

Can we trust him and obey him even when it might seem to be better to do otherwise, can we? And the answer is yes, because God is committed, grittily determined for his purpose for the whole world forever to be fulfilled.

And his marvelous providence will and indeed is always weaving together everything towards that certain end, sometimes in the most wonderful and delightful and captivating of ways.

And the Bible says, in all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your path. It says to us, delight in the Lord and he will give us the desires of our heart because those will be his desires.

And look at the little epilogue, the last paragraph that ends this story from verse 62 because it reminds us here, doesn't it, of the really personal aspect to God's amazing providential working among his people?

[45 : 13] Because this narrative is telling us all about God's gritty commitment to his plan and purpose for the whole world, for the future of his kingdom. But it's also reminding us of something just as important to you and to me.

And it's of God's gentle compassion for his people. That's what this last paragraph tells us so wonderfully, that God's powerful providence, though it's vast, though it's concerned with the outworking of his big picture for the world, it's also deeply personal.

And it's focused, isn't it, on the little people that belong to his flock. You see how in verse 62 the camera comes right back now onto Isaac, the promised seed upon whom everything hangs.

And notice how the focus here is very much on Isaac the man. It's on his humanity, isn't it, as a human being. We're told he's returned from Beir Lahai Rui, the well of the living one who sees me. Do you remember that was the name that was given to it in chapter 16 in the time of Hagar's loneliness and her distress out there in the wilderness? Very evocative, this picture here.

[46 : 23] Here's Isaac. He's out all alone. He cuts a lonely figure in the Negev in a desert place. He's in a desert region. And we're told he's out alone.

He's meditating. And all of his family, all of his brothers, you'll read about them later in chapter 25, all the sons and daughters of Abraham's concubines, they've all been sent away, far away, to a far country.

So he's got no kin. His mother's died. His father's now very old and about to die. And here he is. He's a nomad. He's a stranger in a strange land, lonely and grieving.

But look at verse 63. He lifted up his eyes and behold camels. And Rebecca lifted up her eyes and she saw a man. And God, the living one, who sees Isaac, who knows his needs, meets his needs.

Verse 67, Isaac brings Rebecca into the family tents and she becomes his wife and he loved her. And so Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

[47 : 40] See, this story doesn't end, does it? And so the promised family line will continue and God's grand plan of salvation is on track. Of course that's implied.

Of course that is of vital importance. That is of overriding importance. But what is explicit in the text here is the Lord's gentle compassion, his personal comfort to Isaac in his grief.

And I'm so glad that that little detail is right in our text here before us. Aren't you? Because it tells me that my God, who cares about and who is utterly committed to his covenant, he also cares about and has great compassion on his children.

He cares about his big picture for the whole world, but he cares even about little people. The God of the covenant is also, says the apostle, the father of mercies.

The God of all comfort who comforts us in all our affliction. Our God is the living one who sees us. He sees deep into your hearts today, deep into my heart.

[49 : 02] There's a challenge in that, of course, isn't there? Because you can't hide anything from this God. But there's a great comfort, isn't there? Because he sees and he knows our cares and our fears today.

He knows our loneliness. He knows our griefs and our sorrows. He knows our needs, our deepest thirsts and hungers. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

And the same gentle compassion of our Lord will bring us comfort also and strength. It may not be a wife or a husband or whatever it is that you think is the answer to your need at the moment, but he will give you.

He will give you what you truly need. Because he's the Lord who has compassion for his children. Listen to the Lord Jesus.

Oh, you of little faith. Do not seek what you're to eat or what you're to drink or what you're to be worried about. For the nations of the world seek after these things and your Father knows that you need them.

[50 : 17] Instead, seek his kingdom and these things will be added unto you. Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

The God who moves heaven and earth to be faithful to his great and mighty covenant is the same God who promises here to move heaven and earth to provide for his little and needy children.

I don't know about you, but I'm so glad that our God is a God in whose promise we can have godly and trusting confidence. A God who is both grittily committed to his eternal plan and purpose but also gently compassionate towards all his precious people.

no wonder when Rebecca was offered the opportunity to join herself with this family of this God and know this blessing.

No wonder she said, yes, I will go. I will join the people of this God. She joined her heart, didn't she, in union with the promised seed of Abraham, with this God, with this wonderful God, and he became her God.

[51 : 39] And that's the wonderful offer, isn't it, that's still offered to every one of us today in Jesus Christ, the true, the ultimate seed of Abraham. His gospel holds out to all of us, the blessing of this God.

It says to us, to his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, he has given all the glory and the riches, not just of this world, but of all worlds. And says to us, will you go with him?

Will you join yourself to this God? I can't imagine why anyone would want to do anything else but to be captured by the charm of our covenant God.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, how we thank you for your commitment to your covenant promise.

And how we thank you for your compassion towards all of your covenant children. Help us, Lord, to trust you, to obey you, and so to know the wonders of your love.

[52 : 57] For Jesus' sake. Amen.