

32. The Captivating Charm of the Covenant (2007)

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[0 : 0 0] So I'll leave that with you. We're going to turn now to our Bibles, and our first reading this morning is in the book of Genesis, chapter 24. It's a very long chapter, a long story, so we're going to break it into two and sing in between.

Page 17, if you have one of our church Bibles, and after our reintroduction to Genesis last week, we're going to resume our studies at this chapter.

And I'm going to read the first 33 verses just now, and then we'll read the second half of the chapter later. The structure of the chapter, you'll see, really falls into two parts, each telling the same story.

First of all, we have the events as they unfold, and then secondly, we have the events told by Abraham's servant as he discusses all these matters with the family.

So we get the story, as it were, twice over for extra dramatic effect. Genesis 24, then, at verse 1. Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years, and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things.

[1 : 1 0] 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 might make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not take a wife from 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.

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.

[2 : 3 3] They made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of 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, covenant love, to my master Abraham.

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 woman to whom I shall say, Please let down your jar, that I may drink, and who shall say, Drink, and I'll water your camels.

Let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I'll know that you have shown steadfast love to my master. Before he'd finished speaking, behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel, the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, came out with a 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. When she'd finished giving him a drink, she said, I'll draw water for your camels also, until they've finished drinking. So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw water, and she drew for all his camels.

[3 : 56] 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 half a 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. 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.

[5 : 02] 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 made a place for the camels. So the man came to the house and unharnessed the camels and gave straw and fodder to the camels.

And there was water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him. And food was set before him to eat. But he said, I will not eat until I've said what I have to say.

And they even said, Speak on. Well, we'll speak on in a minute. But let's sing on first. Well, let's pick up the story again at verse 34.

Of Genesis chapter 24. Laban says to the servant, Speak on. It was very unusual, actually, if you notice verse 33. Food was set before him.

The custom would be that absolutely nothing would happen or take place before the hospitality, before the meal in that culture. So it's highly unusual that the servant says, No, I'm not going to eat even until I've told you my mission.

[6 : 08] Speak on then, says Laban. 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 servants and female servants, camels and donkeys.

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 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 where you come to my clan. If they will not give her to you, you'll be free from my oath. I came today to the spring and I said, O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, if now you are prospering the way that I go, behold, I'm standing by the spring of water.

Let the virgin who comes out to draw water, to whom I'll say, Please give me a little water from your jar to drink, and who will say to me, Drink, and I will draw for your camels also. Let her be the woman whom the Lord has appointed for my master's son.

[7 : 31] Before I finished speaking in my heart, behold, Rebecca came out with her water jar on her shoulder. 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. And I asked her, Whose daughter are you? She said, The daughter of Bethuel, Nehor's son, whom Milcah bore to him.

So I put the ring on her nose and the bracelets on her arms. And 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 may turn to the right or to the left. Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, The thing has come from the Lord.

We cannot speak to you bad or good. Behold, Rebekah 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 servants heard these words, he bowed himself to the earth before the Lord.

[8 : 48] The servant brought out jewelry of silver and gold and garments and gave them to Rebekah. 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.

And he 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 for a while, at least ten days. After that she may go.

Again, that would be the normal custom. 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. They called Rebekah and said to her, Will you go with this man? She said, I will go. So they sent away Rebekah, her sister, and her nurse, and Abraham's servant, and his men.

And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, Our sister, may you become thousands of ten thousands, and may your offspring possess the gate of those who hate them. Then Rebekah and her young woman arose, and rode on the camels and followed the man.

[9 : 53] Thus the servant took Rebekah and went his way. Now Isaac had returned from Bir Lahai Roy. That's the well, remember, the name of the well.

It was where Hagar met the Lord. It means the well of the living one who sees me. Isaac had returned and was dwelling in the Negev, the southern desert.

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 Rebekah 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? The servant said, It's my master. So she took her veil and covered herself.

And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. And then Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah, his mother, and took Rebekah. And she became his wife, and he loved her.

[10 : 52] And so Isaac was comforted after his mother's death. Amen. May God bless to us this his word.

Well, if you would turn to Genesis chapter 24, a chapter full of the captivating charm of the covenant of God's grace.

Coming back to the book of Genesis at a point of transition from the cycle of stories about Abraham to the cycle of stories about Jacob.

The Abraham story really ends at the end of chapter 22 with that little genealogy that you see there of the family of Nahor, Abraham's brother. That matches a little genealogy at the end of chapter 11.

And those two together really act as brackets, holding in the whole of the great story of Abraham. And then the Jacob story begins properly at chapter 25, verse 19, where you see that familiar little phrase, These are the generations of Isaac.

[11 : 59] Isaac. And we have that story unfolding. By the way, there's no account or generations of Abraham. No particular whole cycle of stories about Isaac.

And we may ask why that might be. It does seem that Isaac's life turns out to be something of a lackluster affair. But at any rate, the story moves straight on to the cycle of stories about Jacob.

So what we have in chapter 23 to the first half of chapter 25 is something of a transition. It's linking material between these main movements of the stories. But nevertheless, they are vital chapters all the same because big questions arise at this point.

Will the story of God's promise survive? Will the quad promise, as Ralph Davis likes to call it, the promise that God gave Abraham, will it survive?

Promise that he would have a place to dwell in, the land of promise. A great people from his seed. A people knowing the presence and protection, the blessing of the Lord. And above all, the plan of salvation for the whole world.

[13 : 06] Can that promise really survive into the next generation from Abraham? That's an ever-present question, isn't it, for the people of faith. Can any church survive into the next generation?

Will the faith in any family survive into the next generation? And certainly at this point in the story, the covenant promise seems to be hanging by a thread. Chapter 23, we have Sarah, the great matriarch.

She dies. Chapter 25, Abraham himself dies. And all we seem to see, if you look at chapter 25 and verse 12 and following, all we seem to see is that Ishmael's seed, the non-covenant family, the seed of the serpent opposed to the seed of faith, Ishmael's seed is flourishing.

But Isaac has absolutely no seed at all. And again, so often on the face of it, that is how it seems for the community of God's people, doesn't it?

This church seems to be on the decline, whereas opposition and entrenched warriors against the faith seem to always be on the rise.

[14 : 16] So can the gospel actually survive? Can God deliver on these great promises? Or is it all to come to nothing? Well, the answer, of course, is an unequivocal yes.

Yes, God's plan is marching on for those who have eyes to see. Yes, it's true in chapter 23, Sarah dies. But what does the very last verse of chapter 23 tell us?

Sarah was buried in the land of promise and not in a borrowed tomb. That's the whole point of the story. In a piece of property that Abraham has purchased for his own.

A real piece of real estate in the land of promise. A token of something that's to come. And now in chapter 24, between Sarah's death and Abraham's death, God likewise makes clear that not only is the promise of the land absolutely secure, but so also is the promise of the seed.

Because it provides for Isaac, a wife. Now for the sharp-eyed that was trailed back in chapter 22, verse 23, just in three words in brackets in our Bibles.

[15 : 24] Do you see them? Bethuel fathered Rebecca. But just enough there to hint and to whet our appetites for more. And that more is fulfilled here in chapter 24 in this delightful story, full of excitement, full of romance.

And the point is clear. And it's really very wonderful. God's story is not just moving on unstopped. Not just with effortless power is he fulfilling his promise, but God's promise is dancing on delightfully.

Full of the most enchanting interest. Full of the most wonderful romance. There's absolutely nothing remotely boring about God and his ways.

And to be part of the story of this God is one of the most enthralling and exciting and romantic things that could ever happen to a person. That's certainly what we get a glimpse of here in Genesis chapter 24.

The story itself, as you saw when we read it, it's a masterpiece in its own right. It's got all the tension, all the twists of a classic love story. As I said, the structure helps to make it more vivid with the two parallel accounts following exactly the same pattern.

[16 : 35] First the events as they happen, and then as the servant recounts them to the family. Well, it's a great story. But unlike Romeo and Juliet and other great love stories, it's not actually Isaac and Rebecca who are the chief actors in this story.

In fact, it's a little bit like the actor who won the Oscar in the Best Picture this year. He didn't say a single thing in the whole film. It was a silent movie. Well, the chief actor in this story also is silent.

He never speaks, and yet everywhere his presence is felt. Of course, it is the Lord. His name is mentioned 17 times all the way through the story.

But you never see him, you never hear him. But he's not just the chief actor in the story, he's the director of absolutely every single thing that happens, even the tiniest little details.

And the message is very, very clear, whether it's for Abraham, sorry, whether it's for Moses' first listeners, the Israelites in the desert, the traveling Israelites, or whether it's us today.

[17 : 45] The message is this. Yes, you can have confidence in the promises of this God because he's utterly committed to his purposes. He's full of compassion for his people.

And all the power of his effortless providence is at work, quietly, silently, but wonderfully and enchantingly, to bring about every single thing that he has purposed for the people that he loves.

This is a story that really is designed to fill us with wonder at the captivating charm of our covenant God. So let's look then briefly at the text in some detail.

And first of all, verses 1 to 9, where we see Abraham's godly confidence in the Lord's promise. There were two great temptations that were always there for the traveling Israelites under Moses and then ever afterwards in the land of Canaan.

And the two great temptations were assimilation and abandonment. Assimilation to the culture around, especially through intermarriage with the pagan Canaanite peoples, or abandonment of the journey with God.

[18 : 57] Let's choose a leader and go back to Egypt, the people said on more than one occasion. And just in the same way, for New Testament Hebrews, for New Testament Christians, we face exactly the same pressures, don't we?

To assimilate to the pagan culture around and to abandon the race, the walk of faith with our God. We saw last week that the book of Hebrews is full of warnings and encouragements not to fall prey to either of these temptations.

And these verses give us just exactly that same encouragement by pointing us to Abraham, the father of all the true faithful. At the heart of the message of this section, the first nine verses, is verse 3 and verse 6 and 8.

Not a wife for Isaac from among the Canaanites and not to take Isaac back to the land from which God had called us out. No assimilation and no abandonment for the covenant family.

Come what may, and however difficult, however impossible it might seem to make life, Abraham had supreme confidence in God's promise. His attitude quite simply was trust and obey.

[20 : 10] Abraham faced an obvious need here, didn't he? Not just a personal need, actually. It was a kingdom need, a gospel need. God's plan and his purpose in salvation plainly cannot go on without a wife for Isaac.

But faced with this dilemma, Abraham's priority was godliness, not guidance, as it were. It was gospel principle, not mere pragmatism for the sake of the gospel.

There would be all sorts of attractive arguments, wouldn't there, to take a wife from one of the locals, perhaps one of the Hittites that he'd been dealing with in chapter 23. No doubt a diary would have gained even more real estate in the promised land, and he could have argued that.

No doubt it would have given much greater influence to Abraham's family and clan within the local population. But Abraham is adamant, not a wife from among the Canaanites.

Why is he so adamant about that? Well, you might recall back in Genesis chapter 9 that we're told that these people were particularly under God's curse.

[21 : 17] There was a curse on Canaan. Genesis 15, remember, God had said to Abraham that there was a special iniquity of these people in the land of Canaan, and God would ultimately bring them to utter judgment long time later after the Exodus.

And of course, Moses' first hearers knew that only too well. They knew what Moses had said in Leviticus chapter 18 about their abominations and their sexual perversions. In Deuteronomy chapter 7, they were commanded specifically by God not to give their children in marriage to these people because they will turn your sons away from following me and to other gods.

And what God's people have to understand, whether they're the Old Testament people under Moses or whether it's the New Testament church, we need to understand as clearly as Abraham did that true faith in God will be marked by distinctiveness because the call of covenant grace is the call to covenant holiness.

Walk before me and be blameless, is what God said to Abraham in Genesis 17. You will be holy because I am holy. It's a repeated refrain of God all through the Scriptures.

And at the very heart of the gospel call, the call of God is a call out of this world and its ways. It's a call to separation from sin. It's what holiness means, a setting apart as distinct and separate.

[22 : 48] Genesis 3.15 is the very first expression of that when God says that his seed, his holy seed, are those into whom he has placed enmity, that is opposition to the world and to the devil.

By faith, Hebrews 11 tells us, Abraham obeyed God when God called him to go out, to become a stranger, an alien, among the peoples of the earth.

And that's just what Abraham is articulating here at the end of his life. God's people, the people of the covenant, must be distinct from the people of the world.

So real faith must always be prepared to say no. Real faith begins often with necessary negatives. Psalm 1, do you remember?

Not in the counsel of the wicked. Not in the way of sinners. Not in the seat of scoffers. But in the way of the Lord. But Jesus himself constantly, not as the pagans do.

[23 : 52] Not so with you. You're distinct. And so even when it might seem that it would be so much easier, so much better even, for the cause of God's family to compromise and to assimilate with the world, no obedience must come first.

Even if it seems that by doing that you might be putting God's own cause at risk. What if I can't find a woman for your son, says the servant to his master?

Or what if she won't come? Well, verse 8, even then, says Abraham, no going back there. Even then. Even if no wife materializes for Isaac, there's no going back.

There's no Canaanite wife. We still have to trust that God can do what he has promised, even despite that. Now that is real godly confidence, isn't it?

There's real trust in God when the chips are down. Do you think that was easy for Abraham? It wasn't easy at all. Do you think it's easy for a Christian man today, or perhaps more often a Christian woman, who's longing for a life partner, but cannot find a truly Christian person to marry?

[25 : 12] In the New Testament, it's just as clear as the Old Testament. You're not to be unequally yoked with somebody outside the family of faith. And it says plainly, only in the Lord are you to marry.

For exactly the same reason, because you'll be turned away from the living God. Do you think that's easy? That's not easy at all, is it? There's so many ways, aren't there, you can justify taking matters into your own hands.

Exactly the same thing if your particular struggle is same-sex attraction. You'd long for that kind of life partnership that others can have.

An agonizing struggle of faith, isn't it? To say, no, not back there. No abandoning God's call. No assimilating to the pagan world around.

I will not do that, no matter what. Do you think that's easy? That God's people are holy. They're separated to Him. Even if it seems that our lives are going to be blighted and perhaps even lost as a result of being obedient.

[26 : 25] I don't know about you, but verse 8 here reminds me immediately of Daniel chapter 3 and the three men about to be thrown into the fiery furnace. What did they say? Our God, Nebuchadnezzar, our God, O King, is able to deliver us, but if not, be it known to you, O King, we will not serve your gods or bow down to the golden image.

Acts chapter 4 and 5, the apostles were threatened. They said, we must obey God rather than men, even if it costs us our lives. Want to see real faith?

See what it looks like? Well, this is it here, what Abraham's doing. Godly confidence in God's promise that says no to abandoning God's call, that says no to assimilating to the world.

Even if to go that way looks folly and looks as though it will lose and throw away perhaps so much of what seems to have already been achieved in the cause of God, in your life, in your faith, and in your church.

Because as Paul says, what we see are not just the things seen, but the things unseen, which are eternal. The eternal promises of God, which can never fail.

[27 : 40] And what's the point of gaining the whole wide world if in the end we lose that? Well, I find that a very great, great encouragement, don't you? Especially perhaps at the present time.

Trust and obey. Abraham's godly confidence confidence in God's promise, no matter what, because God's promise in the gospel is eternal. And real faith considers fidelity to that promise as of first importance above every domestic need, above every other need.

It trusts God's wise and good providence to do and to give what we really need. And that's what the rest of the chapter really reminds us, that our God, in whom we trust, he will not fail us, not ever.

Verses 10 through to 61 show us God's gritty commitment to his purpose. We needn't fear. God's power will accomplish all his promise and all his purpose, not just efficiently and reliably, but marvelously and wonderfully through the quiet workings of his delightful providence that is all around the lives of his people all of the time.

These verses are brilliant storytelling, aren't they? We haven't got time at all to do it justice, but just notice some of the details and how we see the interplay between the wisdom and the providence of this, the prudence, rather, of this faithful servant and the marvelous providence of God that is superintending everything at every stage.

[29 : 17] Verse 10, the servant sets off to Mesopotamia and he arrives in the city of Nahor, Abraham's brother. And the whole journey there is covered in one verse. Do you see that? Apart from this detail, it seems a bit trivial about the number of his camels.

Why is he telling us that? Well, of course, the camels are going to be important in the story, aren't they? And already, we have the sense that unseen and unheard, nevertheless, God is weaving everything together for this encounter which is going to change the course of history.

And let's be clear, by the way, this chapter is not in the Bible as a blueprint for guidance as to how we're to find our wives. Let me just make that clear. It's not a guide for what we should do.

It's a testimony to what God is doing and why he's doing it to fulfill his faithful plan and his purpose. But nevertheless, I think it does teach us quite a lot, actually, about how God does tend to accomplish his purposes in our lives and the lives of his people.

Derek Kidner has a helpful comment when he says this. This story, told with unobtrusive artistry, gives living form to the charge. In all thy ways acknowledge him and he will direct thy path.

[30 : 33] And that's true. It is a story of courageous obedience. Just a few of God's people. But obedience, nevertheless, which did shape the course of history. It's not a story about God giving obtrusive, special, fantastical, supernatural guidance.

Not that at all. Quite the reverse, actually. It shows God's gentle leading. And when godly faith and obedience is being exercised, it leads naturally, as it were, to very wonderful conclusions.

I think that's a great comfort to us as well, isn't it? Sometimes as Christians, we fear as though the Christian life was an impossible obstacle course with traps and hazards around every corner, as though God was going to trip us up and make us fall.

Well, it's not like that. No, when we walk with the Lord in the light of his word, what a glory he sheds on our way. When we do his good will, he abides with us still and with all who will trust and obey.

Because he is a God who is grittily committed to his purpose for his people, his kingdom purpose, and for all of his kingdom people.

[31 : 48] So it isn't a performer for guidance for Christians to adopt. It's more like a pattern for godliness that we're to learn. And above all, it is about the great provider, the great provider of goodness, the God that we can trust in all of life's journeys to do all that he wisely purposes in our lives.

Just notice, then, three things that stand out about this servant in the text and his mission. Things I think that the text draws our attention to. First, his attitude to God.

Everything is done, isn't it, in an attitude of prayer, prayerful dependence on God and especially on God's covenant faithfulness, his steadfast covenant love. Verse 12, O Lord, show steadfast love, your covenant love and faithfulness to Abraham.

Verse 14, show steadfast love to my master. Again, verse 27, blessed be the Lord who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness. See, this servant's prayers are not sort of voodoo prayers.

They're not prayers for special revelations in advance about which girl is going to be the right one and so on. It's not that. It's trusting prayer. It's gospel prayer. It's prayer that appeals to God's covenant promise and asks God to simply act in line with what he has promised.

[33 : 07] It's prayer that puts the gospel and the concerns of the gospel first. By the way, that also is very important, isn't it? In anybody's prayer about marriage and about marriage partners.

The gospel comes first. It always does. Marriage is, as Christopher Ashe's book is so well titled, it is sex in the service of God. Marriage is given so that we might better serve the kingdom of God.

And Abraham's absolutely clear that that is what this marriage is to be all about. And we've got to be just as clear about that in all marriages. Marriages of ourselves, but also one another, in the church.

That's what this servant's prayer was for. It was for the furtherance of the kingdom of God. And so his attitude was one of prayerful dependence on God right from the start.

He was prayerful, but he wasn't passive. He understood that a right attitude to God leads to a right action under God. He's very practical.

[34 : 08] Verse 10 tells us about these gifts that he's bringing from his master. In verse 30, we see it's those gifts that tickle Laban's interest. We'll see later on in the story that Abraham, that Laban was a chap rather taken to material things.

He was also very perceptive, this servant. Very shrewd, isn't he, about the female of the species. See, his prayer in verse 14, when you look at it carefully, it's not a prayer for some miraculous sign.

He's simply praying that as he goes to this well, he will find a woman there who's worthy of his master. Just because he is so concerned with the God of the covenant and the future of the covenant, the test that he sets is a test of character.

He's looking for a woman whose heart and soul shows signs of being attuned to the covenant God and to his ways. He's looking for a servant-hearted woman, a woman who's hospitable and helpful, who'll go beyond the call of duty.

Now, he had not one camel, but ten camels. And I'm told that a camel drinks at least twenty-five liters of water. And that's a lot of filling jars of water, isn't it?

[35 : 22] A woman who'll do that, well, that is a girl worth talking to, surely. That's what this servant is thinking. By the way, actually, let me just say, the New Testament is very interesting, isn't it, in the qualifications for Christian leadership.

One of the key things it flags up is the quality of hospitality. And that's something that's largely often, well, always really, down to the woman of the house, isn't it, the leader's wife.

Let me just give you a tip. Any young men who are thinking about going into ministry, you're looking for a wife, you need the kind of woman who will water ten camels and not complain about it. A ten camel woman is an essential for a minister's wife.

Let's get back to the text. Verse 15. What do you know? There is a girl just like that. And her name's Rebecca and here she comes before he's even finished praying.

And not just that, but you see here the alphabet of other qualities that she's got. Verse 16. She's A, attractive. Very attractive even. She's B, got good breeding.

[36 : 36] Verse 24. She's just the right family. Verse 16. She's C for chaste. She's a maiden. No man has known her. She's D for diligent as Verse 16 and following shows.

She's a doer, not just a looker. She gets right on with it. And she's E for energetic. Verse 20. She runs, as you notice, back and forward with these jars to feed all these camels and to water them.

I guess I'm sure I could get it on and finish off the alphabet. But you get the picture here, don't you? And then, another little aside. If you can spot one like that, then don't hang about, all right?

Get on with it. Get your act together. That is what this servant did. Did you see? He's very prudent, isn't he? He makes sure he's going to get this deal done and quick. There's no waiting around, verse 33.

He's not even going to wait and have the customary meal. Now, straight on. He lays out his stall. He plays up Abraham's blessing and his wealth in verse 36 and makes a point of saying, all of this belongs to Isaac.

[37 : 40] In other words, this man is quite a catch for your family. But you notice also how upfront he is about the Lord and about the exclusive nature of the call upon Abraham and his partner.

There's no hiding of the most important thing, is there? And that's important for us to note as well. So anyway, it all falls into place, verse 51, and they say, she's yours. This is clearly the Lord's doing.

It's indisputable. And again, the prudent servant doesn't wait, as the custom would dictate. Verse 56, don't delay me, he says, since the Lord has prospered my way.

A man with the right attitude to God in prayerful dependence is unafraid of the right actions under God. He's practical, he's perceptive, he's prudent, he gets on with it.

And do you notice also, though, his right acknowledgement of God? You see how both parts of the narrative end with praise and thanks to God. You see it in verse 26 and then again in verse 48 and verse 52.

[38 : 44] After all that he himself has done, he acknowledges that actually all of this has come from the hand of God. It's God who led him. It's God who's woven everything together marvelously in answer to prayer and he acknowledges that fully and freely before God.

I wonder if that's something that we need to learn a lot better than we do. I think it's something I need to learn. We often find ourselves echoing verse 50, don't we, about something. This has surely come from the Lord.

We've prayed and the Lord has answered our prayer wonderfully, but is our every request for prayer that is answered by God? Is it met with humble acknowledgement and thankfulness and praise?

I wonder about that. I doubt it. But this servant bowed his head and blessed the Lord. And although the Lord had not uttered one word or given any great miraculous sign or anything, he had led him as verse 48 says, in just the right way to the daughter of his master's kinsman.

The right acknowledgement of God. When you walk with the Lord in the light of his word, what a glory he sheds on the way.

[40 : 04] And so Rebecca sets off with a servant with the blessing of her family. God's purpose is achieved. But in a boring way, in a mundane way, not a bit of it.

One thing this story tells us above all is that God is a God of romance. He's full of excitement and interest in the way that he's working out his purposes in the lives of his children. He's anything but dull.

He loves to preside over great love stories and romances. We shouldn't forget that either, should we? In one sense, it's true to say, as it's sometimes been said, that the only thing that really matters for young people to know about marriage is that you find a partner of the opposite sex and you find a Christian and just go and find them and get on with it.

In one sense, that's right advice because people, you don't want to be waiting around forever, waiting for God to somehow miraculously reveal that this is the right one for you.

That can be terribly crippling. It's a foolish way to think. But on the other hand, don't forget that God loves a great love story. He tends to bless his children with the excitement and the delight of stories of attraction and marriage that give us stories to tell.

[41 : 20] He delights in captivating charm and injecting that into our lives. Not just dull and practical, our God. And if you put first things first, if you put the concerns of God's steadfast love, his kingdom, his gospel, right up there as the priority in your life, you can trust him.

He will walk with you and he will weave things into place in your life. And if what's best for you is that you do have a life partner in marriage, he will do that for you.

And you know what? He'll throw in a whole lot of romance along the way. It won't just be dull. On the other hand, do remember, none of us is Isaac.

Not everyone's marriage is absolutely vital for the furtherance of the kingdom of God. In fact, none of our marriages have anything like the significance of Isaac's marriage.

And Jesus himself is clear, isn't he, about his disciples. Not everybody in this life will be married like that. But there is a sense, isn't there, in which every single Christian marriage is vital for the cause of the kingdom and its quality, in terms of its witness to the world, in terms of the nurture and the health of our children.

[42 : 38] That's why the New Testament tells us whether we're married or whether we're single. Let marriage be held in honor by all. To that extent, there are things, I think, that this passage may usefully help us to think about in that regard.

But let's not miss the main thing. Isaac's need for a wife is the particular focus of this story, but the real question is simply this, as always.

Can we have confidence in the promises that God has made to his people, about our lives, about our future with him? Can we really trust and obey, even when it seems obvious to us that it might be much better to do something a different way?

Can we do that? And the answer is yes, we can, because this story tells us he is committed with gritty determination to his purposes for the whole world forever, and his marvelous providence can and will and is, weaving everything together to that end, all the time.

And sometimes doing it in the most delightful and interesting and exciting and romantic of ways. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths, and indeed he will often delight your paths too.

[44 : 01] As the psalmist says, delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. You see, the little epilogue that ends this story in the last few verses reminds us of the wonderfully personal aspect of God's amazing and powerful providence at work for his people.

The narrative is telling us about God's resolute and gritty commitment to his plan and to his purpose for the whole world and for the kingdom, but it also reminds us of something else just as important for us.

And it's the Lord's gentle compassion for his people. That's what verses 61 to 67 are telling us, isn't it? That God's powerful providence, though vast and though concerned with a big picture for his world, it's also deeply personal.

It's also focused on the little people of his flock, people like you and me. verse 62, you see the camera comes back to Isaac. And notice, he's seen here not so much just as the promised seed upon whom the whole future of the promise depends, but the focus is very much on Isaac the man, Isaac the human being.

He's returned from this well that means the well of the living one who sees me, named from Hagar's time of distress and loneliness. It's very evocative. I think Isaac casts a rather lonely picture here, doesn't he, in verse 63.

[45 : 37] He's back in the Negev, in the desert region, and here he is all on his own going out in the evening meditating, and he is alone. As we'll see, all his family, all his brothers have been sent far away.

His mother's dead. His father's very old. He's a nomad. He's among a strange people in a strange land. He was lonely. And he was grieving.

Look at verse 63. He lifted up his eyes and behold, there were camels coming. And Rebekah lifted up her eyes and behold, she saw a man. And God, the living one who sees Isaac, knows him and knows his needs and he meets his needs.

Verse 67. And Isaac loved her. And so, Isaac was comforted after his mother's death. You see that the story doesn't end. And so, the promised family line lived on and God's plan and purpose is on track.

It's not what it says, is it? That's implied, of course. It's of vital importance. That's of overriding importance. But what is explicit in the text is the Lord's gentle compassion to bring personal comfort to Isaac in his grief?

[46 : 57] And I'm so glad that that little detail in the text is there, aren't you? Because you see, it tells me that my God, although he is utterly committed to and caring about his covenant, also is a God who cares about and has compassion on his children.

He cares about his big picture. But he cares about his little people. Because the God of the covenant, as Paul tells us, is the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles.

Our God is the living one who sees us. And he sees deep into your heart and into my heart. There's a challenge in that, of course, isn't there? Because nothing in our heart can be hidden from him.

But isn't there a great comfort in that, too? He knows your cares, your fears. He knows your loneliness. He knows your griefs and your sorrows.

He knows our needs. He knows our deepest hunger, our deepest thirst. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

[48 : 10] And the same gentle compassion of this same Lord will bring us comfort and strength also in our time of need. It may not be a wife or a husband or the particular thing that you feel might be the answer to your need at any particular time.

But he will give you what you truly need. He's a comforter because he's the Lord who has compassion on his people and he's given us his promises again and again and again.

just listen to the Lord Jesus. Do not seek what you're to eat or you're to drink nor be worried for all the nations of the world seek after these things and your father knows you need them.

Instead, seek his kingdom and all these things will be added to you. Fear not, little flock, for it's your father's good pleasure to give you a kingdom.

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

[49 : 23] I don't know about you, but I'm so glad that my God is a God in whose promise we can have godly and trusting confidence. A God who's both grittily committed to his eternal plan and purpose, but also gently compassionate to his precious people, caring and comforting us in our needs.

No wonder when Rebecca was given the opportunity to join herself to this family, the family of blessing, to join the great story of grace and to join the people of the God of grace.

No wonder when she was asked, will you go? She said, I will go. She joined herself in union with the promised seed of Abraham and this God, the God of all comfort, became her God.

And that's the wonderful offer, isn't it, that comes to all in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, the true and the ultimate seed of Abraham? It holds out to us the blessing of this God.

It says, to his son, the Lord Jesus Christ has been given all the riches and blessing in heaven and earth and all eternity. So will you go with this man?

[50 : 43] Will you join yourself to this God? Rebecca said, I will go. Can't imagine why anybody would want to do anything else than be captivated by the charm of our covenant God and his great gospel of covenant grace.

Let's pray. Lord, I we thank you that you are the God that you are.

God we can trust. God we can obey and know your marvelous providential care is all around us.

Will never forsake us and will accomplish every purpose that you have promised until the very end of this world. Teach us, we pray, the joy of walking with you in the greatest story ever told.

For Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.