

<b>Topic</b>	A Bride for Isaac
<b>Reference</b>	Genesis 24
<b>Date</b>	9 August 2020
<b>Speaker</b>	Dr Peter Ng

A bride for Isaac, but actually if you look into this passage, it is about one of the longest narratives in the entire Bible. You know why? Because it repeats what the Lord has done through choosing Rebecca twice and then there is a reason why he repeats it. Now let us start with a word of prayer first.

Lord we ask that you speak to us today through this seemingly innocent passage about matchmaking, but yet it has deeper implications for how we live our lives. We ask O Lord that through the spirit reveal the truth. We ask for Jesus sake. Amen.

So is this passage about marriage? Are we going to get, for young people among our midst, matchmaking tips or parents like Yee Dian, you know, do we learn certain principles here so that our children will get properly married? I think a lot of sermons have been preached on Genesis 24 looking at that particular and yes the Bible has input in this area, but if we were to think that this passage is all about the marriage and the matchmaking, which is made so much simpler nowadays we just have to swipe left, swipe right. We don't have to go through all that trouble, go back to Tong San and get a woman.

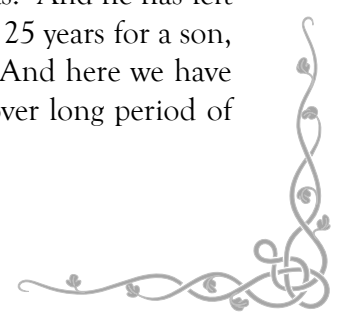
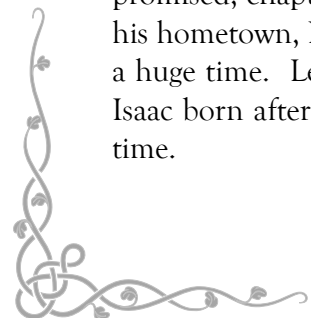
We would have missed the point. It is not about that. The whole passage is about how we live our lives. Basically, there are three points that come from here

1. How do we live our lives? We should align our lives with His calling.
2. We should feel for his hand in our lives.
3. We need to trust it his purposes in our lives or our world.

**ALIGNING OUR LIVES WITH HIS CALLING:**

Now there are four scenes to this particular narrative, if you look. So the one, it happens in Canaan, hometown, two happens in Mesopotamia in a town of Haran and then back to the ranch again at Canaan with Isaiah, Rebecca, the servant. And we want to see all these principal players in this narrative, how they work out the story.

We need to put this passage in the context of the whole narrative of Genesis. There's a purpose. So do you know that this passage is almost last chapter on the life of Abraham. So we cannot preach this chapter unless you look back on the life of Abraham. It is about the life of Abraham. It isn't about just choosing a husband or a wife. If you look back, in Genesis chapter 12 where God gives promises of descendants and a blessing of the whole world of nations and then all he has in chapter 13 is the land is promised, chapters 15 and 17 the land and nation as promise again, and that's all he has. And he has left his hometown, Mesopotamia at the age of 75. God promised him a son. He has to wait 25 years for a son, a huge time. Left at 75 years of age and only got a son when he was 100 years of age. And here we have Isaac born after the 21<sup>st</sup> chapter. And then it looks as if God acts, small movements over long period of time.



And the next thing that happens in this whole 25 chapters of Abraham's life is that his wife gets a burial plot. Very strange, live of faith. All he has gotten out of his life of faith is a whole bunch of promises, Genesis 13, 15 and 17 and after he has offered his son, God reinforces promise that he will give him land and a blessing. And then he gets a burial plot for his wife. And if you look very carefully here, the burial plot is at Hebron. It is one of the three places where he actually set out initially to put altars. Very strange.

If you look at chapter 23 huge amount of verses, 16 verses and how he got the burial plot. Two verses, by the way, my wife died 127 years died and the whole chapter is about him getting the land. I say what kind of author is this. It is like President Trump, you know, 160,000 people died and he is down on top by the top by economy. Is so insensitive, but you must understand why Moses writes in such way. Moses is interested in a life of faith, taking God's promises and having these promises realize in a life of faith.

That's why 16 verses on the land. Now he promised him the land right out of so many years, 50 years here, you know what land he got it, only one burial plot and whole idea of getting his burial plot, if you look at chapter 23, is actually offered to him for free by the Hittite, but he won't take it for free because for free means not yours you know. He offers to buy, in fact, he pays over price. If you look in chapter 23, double the time, 18 verse and verse 20, Abraham got this parcel of land as his property. So this is the down payment of the promise land. He went to the promised land with a promise of the whole land and at the end of his life what does he got, a son with a promise of perhaps marriage in continuing his progeny and a piece of land to bury wife. That's all he got. And then this is a place at Beth Pella, which is at Hebron. Inside these walls is basically where the burial site off and Sarah and then later on Abraham was there.

Now let's start off our passage and the passage says,

*1 Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years.*

Why tell you that he's old. The fact is all old and well advanced in years, you know why, in the Old Testament long life is a blessing from God. That's why he purposely tell you he is old. Nowadays, you tell you are old, they look and they pity with us. Oh my God, the fellow. Old means blessing, advance in life, other people have not made it, you know.

*And the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. 2 And Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household,*

Many commentators postulate this is Eliezer, the one that he probably wanted him to be the heir because he didn't have the faith to believe that it will be an Isaac.

*who had charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh, 3 that I may make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell, 4 but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac."*

Here is the last bit of his life. He has lived his life by faith, believing in the promise and all he got in return from God is one miserable cave, and the land around it and he still trusts God, and he is going to put it all on the line because if Isaac doesn't get the right wife, the whole promise falls apart and he is willing to come up and even at the age of 170 something years old, he is going to put it all on the line. And here you have, why go back to Tong San and get woman, which is ridiculous. You know why? Because the distance is 450 miles, and you're asking a lady who comes from a city of near Haran to come and go to cowboy town, remote wilderness, far far away, danger of a 450 miles. It is not a highway, you know, you go goal with a whole bunch of bandits around the side. There is a sacrifice for the lady to come and you rely on your servant. Eliezer was no spring chicken anymore, old man. It's difficult.

Why did he do this? It's easier for you to fall in love with the girl next door, right? Plenty of girls, don't tell me no girls in Canaanite. Local girls plenty, why must go overseas? Right. You know, pragmatism is the antithesis of all the spirit led. Proverbs says, there is a way that seems right to man but its end is the way of deaths. Sometimes the easy way out, the girl next door may not be the right way. Here you can see Abraham directly moving against the trend of his time. He's a man on a mission. He is fulfilling his calling and a last bit of his calling is to ensure that a next generation has this vision and it is very resolute about it.

*5 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?"*

Obviously, no woman wants to follow you, what for you go to, you know, from Kuala Lumpur you go to Greek. It is very difficult.

*6 Abraham said to him, "See to it that you do not take my son back there."*

Why don't you want to take your son back there? He won't come back anymore. There's a fear, isn't it.

*7 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. 8But 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 twice he said, cannot take it back there, because the promise depends on Isaac.

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

Now if you look at this passage, there are three things that up pop up very clearly that gives the reason about why he insists that you go back to Haran to get the wife. One is God's promises. You see when we make decisions in life, however easy or how difficult it is, is always based on the kind of principles on which we found our lives on. Otherwise, if you just make it the moment, we are going to wind up in trouble. So therefore his decision making is always bond on three things.

- God's promises,
- God's deeds

- God's purposes.

First of all, it's based on God's promises who swore to me. Who spoke to me and swore to me, to your offspring, I will give you this land. So the whole thing is about the promise of God. He is basing his decision, his actions, his dreams, all based on this one promise. Number two on God's deeds,

The Lord, God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my kindred

God has taken him safely, not without adventure, not without some detours here and there, but God in the end has brought him all the way from Ur of the Chaldeans right across thousands of miles to the Promised Land. It is based on God's deeds. God can be trusted. And the last one is that's God purposes.

He will send his angel before you, and you will take a wife for my son there.

So therefore God has his purpose of doing this and this is God's side. On our side, we have to trust his promises. We are to experience his deeds, recognize them and we are to obey his purposes. See God's promises is to be obeyed.

*8 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.” 9 So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter.*

Here the last act of his life. He is going to put it all on the line. You see, this kind of guy is like a gambler. Everything you put on line, but now is gambling on God. That whatever it is, it is done God's ways. You see a life of faith always puts everything on the line. He is going to trust God either you got a young lady whom God has chosen from my hometown or nothing at all. The whole promise falls flat and this is a big thing.

### **Now how do we live our lives?**

We either live our lives based on God's calling, which started in Genesis chapter 12 or we live our lives based on our ambition. What's the difference in calling and ambition? Calling always has to originate from someone outside. Someone has to call you. How do you live your life? How do you make decisions? How do you decide which wife to marry? It is not a private decision. It is a calling. We live either according to our calling or according to our ambition. What is our ambition? It is what we decide to do with our lives and the trouble is that if we look into society, they mix the two up.

Here we have Steven Pressfield, famous American writer. He writes,

“Ambition, I have come to believe, is the most primal and sacred fundament of our being. To feel ambition and to act upon it is to embrace the unique calling of our souls. Not to act upon that ambition is to turn our backs on ourselves and on the reason for our existence.”

So for him, ambition is actually looking into the calling within us. He look within ourselves? Famous show host, Oprah Winfrey says,

“Your calling isn’t something that somebody can tell you about. It’s what you feel. It is the thing that gives you juice. The thing that you are supposed to do. And nobody can tell you what that is. You know it inside yourself.”

This kind of thinking has permeated our thinking. Everything is based on what we feel. In fact, he says passion will bloom when we are doing what we love. So whenever we make decisions, it is not based on the calling it is actually based on ambition on how we feel. Look at Timothy. Paul writes to Timothy before he dies in this last epistle.

*5 As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering,*

This is asking someone to choose the other path.

*to do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

That means finish your calling. An example is Paul

*6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day,*

That is what it is about. You know Ravi Zacharias wrote a whole book on this Isaac and Rebecca, a very interesting book. It is not very expensive, you can buy it on Kindle. And he tells of a true story of a young man and a young woman in her early 20s who were basically totally head over heels in love. And they wanted to marry, but the young man suddenly got a disease. He never described in the book, what kind of disease it was, but Ravi was counseling them and he only had two years to live. And even then sex would have been precarious. He would have died. And he was counseling them as to whether they should go ahead get married, after all love is the most important thing in life, right. It's better to have love and then lost than never loved before. So he counselled them and after great, great struggle, they came up to Ravi with a decision and it's not like your movies, you know. In the movies you get married, right. Two years, they fellow died and you can find another one. No, they decided not to marry. The reason, why is that? Here's a young woman with a prime of her life. The kind of investment of her emotional investment would be and she would be so transformed by this man in two years of beverages, it would have been difficult for her to recover. And would she ever find another man like that? And the other man who will marry her later on will always live in the shadow of that one man. And he prefer to have left this young woman alone. So that she could find a full life. Now to do that, they had to think with their minds, not with the heart. And that's where this young man truly loved the woman.

Now, we could live for ourselves. I remember watching a TV program with my wife, now under the MCO we cannot go anywhere. So you buy a big TV like I did and then you go on YouTube. Wow! my God and we have been to Canada, we have been to Alaska, we have been to everywhere, it is so much cheaper isn't

it. YouTube only what. And then you go and see and then we went to this place, we have this bear Island. We have this beautiful island, you go there and you just see the bears and eating salmon. And there are some people who live in that cabin in Bear Island or bear reserve and you know they lived their whole life there. Everyday wake up, walk into the forest, see the bear catch the fish, go back, have breakfast then got lunch, go again. Imagine doing that for 50 years of your life. It is good for a few minutes, but it's not something that you could base your life on.

See, that is what emotions are like. Happiness is like that. This is Victor Frankl, famous Jewish psychiatrist. He writes,

Happiness cannot be pursued. It must ensue. It's a byproduct. One must have a reason to be happy. It is the pursuit of happiness that actually twats happiness.

If we're chasing after happiness, it's going to melt in your hands like ice cream. Malaysia used to be at number 35 in the world ranking of being happy. Last year, I don't know why it went down to 80. I don't know why, but last year renowned to 80. You see happiness, at one moment we are at number 35 in the world, in one year within a certain few events we are down to 80. Should you base your life on happiness. And you know the happiness after a while psychologist say. Good things happen or bad things happen, you, you always go back to a baseline. It's not the way to live your life.

Let's look at the last bit of this passage.

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

Can you see sequence there? First, the sequence and young people how is it different from today's sequence? Today's sequence, I fall in love and then you get married. Here you actually heard all about what has happened and then he brought her into the tent. He took her in. In those days, no marriage ceremony. They go together and have sex and then it's counted as marriage. It is a little bit different from today. Today we have the big dinner and all that.

So in those days he made a decision, he took her, she became his wife and then he loved her. But why go through all this trouble? You know, today it's so different, isn't it? Everything is based on our feelings. In fact, Ravi Zacharias gave a very interesting point. He says,

Love is like an onion~  
 You taste it with delight  
 But when it's gone you wonder  
 Whatever made you bite  
 Love is a funny thing, just like a lizard  
 It curls 'round your heart, and then jumps into your gizzard  
 Love is swell, it's so enticing  
 It's orange gel, it's strawberry icing  
 It's chocolate mousse, it's roasted goose

It's ham on rye, it's banana pie  
 Love's all good things without a question;  
 In other words, it's indigestion.

Interesting poem isn't it. I mean, it describes love as a many splendid thing. It makes the world go around and yet you get indigestion from it because if you just only base your life on feelings. David and Bathsheba follow your feelings like Oprah Winfrey, isn't it. One day, instead of going to war he's at home, and the he looks across from his couch and then he saw a woman bathing, I don't know what he was doing, watching women bathing, and the woman was very beautiful. David sent and inquired about woman, is this not Bathsheba, and then they say the wife of Uriah and you know what happened? He fell in love and that was it and he committed sin.

What about Amnon and Tamar?

*1 Now Absalom, David's son, had a beautiful sister, whose name was Tamar. And after a time Amnon, David's son, loved her. 2 And Amnon was so tormented that he made himself ill because of his sister Tamar, for she was a virgin, and it seemed impossible to Amnon to do anything to her.*

See cannot touch, so every day he is lusting away and suddenly he raped her.

*14 But he would not listen to her, and being stronger than she, he violated her and lay with her. 15 Then Amnon hated her with very great hatred, so that the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her. And Amnon said to her, "Get up! Go!"*

Very strange isn't it. He lusted after her. He wanted her. The whole world revolved around her. The moment he had sex with her, gone. Opposite feeling. He hates her. You see if you base your life on feelings, it will be a disaster. In fact, there were two professors who have written this book, interesting book called "The Molecule of More". They say, much of our lives in terms of falling in love is basically based on one molecule. You know what the molecule is, it is dopamine. Dopamine is a high, which you get when you see a woman which you like, and she smiles back at you and say hello, and the dopamine comes and then your whole life, you are wrapped around her little finger. The only trouble with dopamine is that it doesn't last and you must have more dopamine from what, not, if you say hello again, doesn't work. It must be another woman say hello. It must be something new, otherwise it doesn't last.

In fact, you need so many hellos, Solomon has 700 wives and 300 concubines because he is on the dopamine high and every time must have a new person, new person, a new person, that's not how you live your life. And yet we live in a society where why people get married. You ask the young people because we fall in. Love is number one, this is the Pew research. Love is number one reason why we get married. And because we base our lives just on that the number of people who are getting married actually dropped from 72% from 1960 down to 2008 52%. Number of people who are never married also have been rising. Marriage in Pew research recently done in 2013 is getting obsolete because 39% of people no longer believe in marriage. Why? Because if marriage is based on just a feeling and half the people who will get married divorce anyway. So it becomes out of fashion. In fact, what you have to do is dopamine gets you there, but you need to have an attachment. It's a different kind of love. It's kind of love with two

different kinds of hormones, is vasopressin and oxytocin, which are released when you actually hold hands and you touch. Here are some experiments on prairie voles. They are little like rabbits or rats, and you'll find that if you actually give them an injection of vasopressin, they actually love each other. You block the vasopressin then they don't love each other anymore. It's an attachment. Erich Fromm said,

“Love is a decision, it is a judgment, it is a promise. If love were only a feeling, there would be no basis for the promise to love each other forever. A feeling comes and it may go. How can I judge that it will stay forever, when my act does not involve judgment and decision.”

What he is saying is that, love has always got to be a decision, a judgment, is a promise because if it is based on a feeling, you can't promise the feeling will be there. Can you promise a feeling we'll be there 10 years from now, 20 years from now? You're going to need a lot of dopamine, right? Your wife would have changed shape every two years because new ma, dopamine comes only when you are new. She can change shape but maybe not in the way you like. You know they describe dopamine and vasopressin like two things, one is a Merry go round, the other one is a bridge and if you go to New York city you will actually see the bottom of the bridge, a merry-go-round.

So you've got a merry-go-round, you go round and round and after the merry-go-round, you got to get on the bridge. Dopamine puts you on the merry-go-round. You go round and round, is fantastic going round and round. After the merry-go-round, it drops you off at the same spot it starts. You go nowhere. You can go round and round, it stops you there, round and round drops you there. Some of us are like that. No more dopamine round and round pump, divorce. But the important thing about the dopamine is that it drops you back at the bottom of the bridge and you need to climb the bridge and that bridge is called attachment, a more mature kind of love, by oxytocin and vasopressin. That's the long term permanent relationship.

We can approach marriage with an immature kind of idea that I am on the merry-go-round, but you actually wind nowhere anywhere, trying to relive the romantic moment then you go back to the same hotel, had dinner, candle light with your wife. You know, it's never same. It is never the same. Because dopamine is different from vasopressin. If it's the same, there's something wrong with you. So we develop a permanent strong emotional bond. All right. It's always a decision.

God determines who walks into your life, it is up to you to decide who you let walk away, who you let stay and who you refuse to let go.

So basically love is always a decision. So why didn't he marry the girl next door? I mean, if love exists, if marriage is just based on love, why couldn't Isaac married the girl next door, because he is a son of a very special man. He is a son of a man given the promise for the next generation and not just a nation, a nation that would be separate, special, worshipping God and light to the world.

Joyce Baldwin, a commentator on Bible Speak Today series writes,

The success of this enterprise dependent on the separateness of the people of God, a necessary condition for developing a counterculture that would reflect their walk God.



You see the way Abraham lived even right down to choosing a wife for his son is completely different to what other people do. And that ingredient is absolutely necessary because God chose his people, his family, and that is how we should live, because that is the way you live when you become the next generation of the people of God. Brothers and sisters in Christ, young people, if you belong to Jesus Christ, you are a separate people, you are a special people. You cannot just marry somebody, anybody or the girl next door based on your dopamine. It is always based on the fact that you are called separately, to what a separate path, to be a separate people, to reflect your walk with God.

*In you all families on the earth shall be blessed. I will make you as a light for the nations that my salvation will reach to the ends of the earth.*

You cannot be a light to the nation if your whole life is shared by somebody who does not share that light. You know, at the end of Jesus' life in that beautiful high priestly prayer, which he prayed for in John 17. He said,

*I glorified you on earth and accomplished the work that you gave me to do*

You know, Jesus did a lot of things, but not everything. When he spend time, you know how many pupil, 12. Do you think he went to hospital to clear everybody from Subang Medical Center? He could have gone there and cleaned everybody but he didn't, he healed only certain people. He could have started a revolution. He could have started a political party, he could have written a book, be nice, the epistle pistol of Jesus Christ. Why didn't you do all those things? You see, your calling involves not only the things that you do, but the things that you didn't do. There are a lot of things which Jesus Christ did not do. Because he had to choose the things that work according to his calling and the same thing with all of us.

There are a lot of people whom you can marry, who say you cannot marry your man or this woman, but a lot of things that you decide that you do not do because you have a calling to fulfill the mission God has for you.

## **FEEL FOR HIS HAND IN OUR LIVES**

See how the servant does this.

*10 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. 11 And he 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.*

So he goes, he doesn't go empty, how to catch women like that empty, you must spend a bit like. So he brings 10 camels. 10 camels what, they carry something right. Don't tell me all empty one. They carry some barang barang to show that, you know, Abraham got some means. Let some of you men, you know waiting to catch your lady, make sure you have got a condo, you have got a credit card. If any of them missing, no chance. So it's part of the culture. So God works within the culture. I'm not saying you must marry because you've got credit card and car and condo, right. I'm just saying it is part of the culture and

he also uses wisdom. Isn't it? He goes in front where the women go and draw water, isn't it. He could have gone in front of the boy school and said, God do a miracle. Yeah. That one will be a miracle, but he is actually using wisdom.

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

The word steadfast love is 'hasid'. The most important word in the entire whole Old Testament. It is a love which God has exhibited time and time to his people. It is a love, not just of emotion, but of action. It's an action kind of word. So basically he says, show steadfast love to by master. So he is actually acting praying by faith.

*13 Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. 14 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 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."*

So he not only prays about it. He puts out in very reasonable thing. He sits down in front of the spring of water, all the women coming and he looks very poor thing with the tongue hanging out. So, you know, and then if the woman comes, please give me drink and she will not only give him drink but give drink to what his camel. He got 10 camels. You know how much one camel will drink? Anybody know here, 25 gallons. You know how one bucket how many gallons, three, how many cameras are there 10? How many trips do you make? 83. 83 trips. I mean, wish woman out of her mind will go and give you a drink and then go and drink as if you've got a petrol station. Fill your car plus 10 BMW behind that, you go and fill all of them for you. What's wrong with this woman? Very unusual, isn't it. But he's looking using wisdom for characteristics of an excellent wife, because you cannot just any woman become the matriarch of the new nation, correct. And so therefore you look Solomon years later on write.

*17 She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong.*

Wow 83 times lift the bucket. You got to be real strong. Not those you chap, put three linen, lie on some mattresses and you feel one seat. The biblical example of woman is strong, all right. So people like Susanna who work out very good.

*18 She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night.*

*19 She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle.*

*20 She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy.*

Not only is she strong, she is generous and kind. That's why the servant is sitting there and the criteria is that she is generous and she is kind.

*25 Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.*

*26 She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.*

This woman exudes kindness.

*30 Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.*

Young man, the charm, the beauty is fleeting and this servant knows that, but before he even finished, you don't have to have all night prayer meetings.

*15 Before he had finished speaking, behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, came out with her water jar on her shoulder. 16 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. 17 Then the servant ran to meet her and said, "Please give me a little water to drink from your jar." 18 She said, "Drink, my lord." And she quickly let down her jar upon her hand and gave him a drink.*

Here when Rebecca comes straight away the author references back. And he references back that he is born the Bethuel, son of Milcah. If you actually see here in the line that Nahor is the brother of Abraham and he married this woman called Milcah and had a son called Bethuel. Bethuel's daughter is Rebecca, which means Abraham's grandniece is actually Rebecca, nicely in the same family. This is not by accident. This is arranged by God. And after Jacob, you will see the 12 tribes of Israel come.

You see God goes backwards in time to secure his promises. He lays the background. That's why in Genesis chapter 22, right after the sacrifice of Isaac straight away this passage comes up to tell you that God has before the beginning of time laid the background. You need to see the hand of God. You need to feel the hand of God. And before he is finished praying, she turns up, right pedigree, she drew for all his camels, all 10 camels

*21 The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether the Lord had prospered his journey or not.*

*22 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,*

This is initial investment. You take you girl on date, must pay first. All right, nowadays people go dutch, not a good idea. So he shows his generosity by putting something out in there and then he hasn't found out what this woman is about. And then he talks to her and she says, I am the daughter of Bethuel, son of Milkah whom she bone to Nahor. The bells are now going. Oh my God, all the people in his whole city of Haran I meet this one, the grandniece. And then she says,

*25 She added, "We have plenty of both straw and fodder, and room to spend the night."*

So she's kind, she's open.

*26 The man bowed his head and worshiped the Lord 27and said, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the Lord has led me in the way to the house of my master's kinsmen."*

So he recognizes this is the hand of God. Not only that bonus point, Rebecca very beautiful you know, I'm not saying don't go for beautiful girl, this is bonus you know, but it's a secondary. And you notice that when the servant goes to look for a wife, you know, you think he brings a laundry list from Isaac, hey remember must be like that. What shape must like vegetables, must be able to work out, must have what color hair and must not fart in bed, all these sort of criteria. All of young people have got this laundry list on, you know. There is no laundry list, isn't it all right? Because it's not important, whatever differences you have, of course your differences she is a woman and you're a man. That itself got plenty of differences of which you can work out. So your marriage is never made of compatibility you know. It is anchored in the calling of God.

And then the next character here is Laban. Laban as we know from later on in Genesis is a very greedy fellow. So here we have him as a brother who seems to take charge of everything and he is taking charge of all this negotiation.

*29 Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban. Laban ran out toward the man, to the spring. 30 As soon as he saw the ring and the bracelets on his sister's arms, and heard the words of Rebekah his sister, "Thus the man spoke to me," he went to the man. And behold, he was standing by the camels at the spring. 31 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."*

Now after this the whole passage repeats itself. I mean I won't get you to read because the whole thing repeats itself. Simply because the author wants to impress upon us that this is something miraculous. You don't travel 450 miles and go to some nondescript fountain with plenty of founders around people get water and of all the places you find Abraham grandniece. There was no Google in those days and no Waze in those days. For you to find somebody that is absolutely miraculous and the moment he prayed, the woman appears like that. It is so wonderful that the author repeats it again. Then he looks for a response and this is a response,

*49 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 hand or to the left."*

That means do you agree or not? If you don't agree, I better find somebody else. Okay. So this is Laban and the father Bethuel and they confirm and they say these words

*50 Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, "The thing has come from the Lord; we cannot speak to you bad or good. 51 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."*

The word, we cannot speak to you good or bad is the same Hebrew word in chapter 3 of Genesis when God knows that you eat of it, your eyes will be open and you will be like God knowing good and evil. Knowing good and evil, good or bad is only determined by God, which means Laban and Bethuel looking at the circumstances of the repeated narrative, understand from the coincidental sequence of events that this is God's hand. And if it's God's hands, what can we say? We have to agree and this shows their obedience as well. And then Laban tries his old tricks. Why don't you stay 10 days more? Maybe he

can, you know why got 10 camels outside right, can squeeze more money. But the servant very wisely said, no, we have to go. And he brings the whole thing too Rebecca

*57 They said, "Let us call the young woman and ask her." 58 And they called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" She said, "I will go."*

And in fact this is exactly similar to Abraham 50 years earlier where the promise is given. You know, she would have spent much time with the servant. The servant would have told him about Isaac isn't it, handsome fellow, very strong, works out two hours every day, Godly man. The promise, all the adventures of Abraham, the whole idea of the promise, now he would have told her everything, and for her to agree and leave to go to unknown land based on a promise. And so she steps out by faith. She recognizes the hand of God and even the others who sing confirm the hand of God, they blessed Rebecca and said to her

*"Our sister, may you become thousands of ten thousands, and may your offspring possess the gate of those who hate him!"*

This is actually, if you look at it, it's almost prophetic because it actually turns out to be true. So the decision making in this situation depends on the overall direction of God's call in our lives. We follow his calling, we reject other alternatives. We commit our endeavor to God in prayer. We establish certain criteria in wisdom commensurate with the call. We step out in faith and we look for confirmation in terms of signs and response. This is the practical lessons we learned in decision-making.

Lastly, we have to trust in his purposes in our world. Here you have Isaac right. What was he doing, of all this adventure there what was Isaac doing? You know, what he was doing? He was praying. He was out in the field, meditate. What do you think you'd be meditating on? What's she going to look like? Fat, thin, beautiful, ugly, taller than me, shorter than me, does she like McDonald's or not. I mean, he is thinking. If you are a young man, you will not be thinking about computer games. I know most of you think about computer games, but he will be thinking about his future. What would she be like? And he is actually meditating on what God will do at. And do you know, it is harder. It is easier to go with the servant and then pick and choose. It is harder to sit and wait for God to choose the right one for you.

So he would be thinking, I'm so helpless. I'm 37 years of age, no woman yet. What if the servant is unsuccessful? What would she be like? Maybe I have a girlfriend next door. He would be thinking all these sort of things and then he was not bound. His son later on Esau.

*8 So when Esau saw that the Canaanite women did not please Isaac his father, 9 Esau went to Ishmael and took as his wife, besides the wives he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebaioth*

You see, you can disobey, it is still your choice, but Isaac was obedient. He was not bound but he was obedient because he saw the covenant and when we decide who we marry we are ultimately responsible for the decisions we make, but we make it in obedience. Even when Isaac was a bound, you think old man who is pushing 120 years old can go and grab a 30 something year old fellow and tie him down. He was bound and obedient. He has always been an obedient son. And then we come to the almost hallmark moment. Look at verse 63 and 64

*63 And Isaac went out to meditate in the field toward evening. And he lifted up his eyes and saw, and behold, there were camels coming.*

Basically his prayers were answered. You know you may be pushing 30 something years of age, oh my goodness, all I look up I see is camels but behind the camel may be somebody coming. So God takes a long time, but he is never late because his timing is perfect. God has the one for you and

*64 And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she dismounted from the camel 65 and said to the servant, "Who is that man, walking in the field to meet us?" The servant said, "It is my master." So she took her veil and covered herself.*

Only a self respecting woman will put on a veil, so that's the custom in those days. So don't be too forward girls.

*66 And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done.*

The servant told Isaac all the things he had done. I want you to look at a sequence of events. He told Isaac all the things, which means he went there. He did this, God answered, the parents said yes, everything you know, then only based on that information

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

Why is the tent of his mother, because she becomes a matriarch of the whole tribe, you know, she's the boss lady and he then she took her she became his wife and he and

*and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.*

Someone once said no one falls in love by choice. It is by chance. No one stays in love by chance. It is by work. No one falls out of love by chance. It is by choice. And this is very wise. He makes a decision. You may have found a girl by chance, but you make a choice and you don't stay in love by chance, you know, dopamine, you must change to oxytocin and vasopressin. You must attach and you must make the decision. It is by work. and when you fall out of love, do not come and tell me and follow that, everybody has no more dopamine, right? It's by choice. You decide to stay in love. You decide to stay with the person and you love that person.

Now God seems to work through seemingly precarious efforts of men. What if Abraham made a wrong decision, never mind you take my son, let him go and choose. What about the wisdom of the, maybe he stood in front of the wrong fountain, asked the wrong woman, or he was faithless, took the 10 camels and go away or Laban and Bethuel could have negotiated for higher price or Rebecca could have said, why should I go 450 miles to an unknown place, to live in tents, you are offering me tents. You know, you think I want to go. You saw all Isaac while he's waiting. So why so long? Why God's over? I better marry the girl next door because she's in love, we grew up together.

You see. It seems seemingly precarious when we look at our lives and everything could have been, could have been, could have been, if we do a movie every step of the way could have gone wrong. And yet at a back of it, Abraham was very confident. He knows that,

*7 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.*

Abraham was very confident and convinced. Did you see the angel guys in the passage? We don't see him. Sometimes angels work quietly through a seemingly jumbled sequence of events and yet the angel is there every step of the way.

You know, life is like this. If you look at a back of tapestry, all the threads go everywhere. You don't know what, I'm pushing 35, still no wife and or whatever. It's so confusing. But at the back, if you follow God's purposes, he creates a nice tapestry. If you look on the long view, it all makes sense.

And if you look in the life of Rebecca and Isaac, they gave birth to Jacob and through his tortured life, there's 12 tribes of Israel came out. We have a challenge before us today. Abraham's final test. Died at 175 years. This is the last adventure of faith before he died. And he lived his life based on a promise. Hebrews summarizes it very well

*8By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. 10For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. 11By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. 12Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.*

He only lived in tents. All he received was one miserable cave with a bit of land behind it and the promise that his son would marry this woman from town. And you know God leaves Abraham with two successful ingredients for his life. The two successful ingredients, his life is God's promises and God's deeds, only two things. And God gives us today two things in our lives to make decisions, whether it be a marriage or a job, or the way you live or how you live.

It's always two things, his promises and his deeds. I'm going to end with this illustration. You know, I always watch MasterChef because one day I want to be a master chef, but whenever I go to the kitchen my wife groans, terribly groan, don't know whether from the stomach area or what. How many of you watch MasterChef? What they do is that they actually have novice cooks and then basically they put them through a series of tests and they come up with beautiful dishes and you have to cook everything within one hour. And one of the interesting bits of the competition is that they give what we call a mystery box, a box and then inside the box are a assortment of things from which you have to make something with.

And every mystery box is different. And it could be sometimes cheap things, things they only cost \$1 or 50 cents. And yet your master chef, you have to make a case beautiful. \$1 thing must taste like a hundred ringgit. Life is like that isn't it. Abraham's mystery box has only two things God's promise and God's deeds. Our mystery box is 1-Peter chapter three.

*3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

His deeds, we are born again through the resurrection of Jesus. He has risen. That is his deed and we are born again. And his promise and inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, unfading kept in heaven for you, guarded by God's power. Only two things he has given you and your mystery box. You open the box, it could be you living in Malaysia, you living Australia, you 35 years old, you 23 years old, you could be so many things inside the mystery box. It could be \$1 thing or \$200 things, but it's up to you to use those ingredients because each one of you God has led you on a different path. Each one of you have a different thing inside your mystery box, and God is going to guide you using His deeds and His promises to make a masterpiece out of your life.

Whether in marriage or your job or your service in church. You can't look at your mystery box and say, why I got \$1 thing that fellow got \$50 thing, you can't say that. It is what you do with what God has given you. God gives you the ingredients. Everybody's ingredients are different and everybody's power is the same. It is God's deeds and God's promises. You take God's deeds and God's promises and you open your mystery box and you make the masterpiece of your life. And you only got a certain amount of time. You know the most precious commodity in life, you know is what, and the Greek philosopher Seneca knew this. The most precious commodity in life is time and is not that it's not enough of it. You know what it is, it is because we waste it.

You look in your life and how much time that you waste doing all the things that actually don't contribute to your calling for which you stand before God in judgment one day. Use that time because that time is the one hour, which you could make your life a masterpiece, let's pray.

Father Lord, we just thank you for your word. And before us each day you have our mystery box, all the ingredients in life that has been given to us. Some of them are not very good. Some of them are aches. Some of them are sadness. Some of them are disasters in our lives, but whatever it is in our mystery box of our lives, you have given us two things. You have given us your promises, which is based on your steadfast love that you will not let us go based on your promises. And we have seen that your son has risen from the dead. We have seen the death cannot overpower him. So we're going to ask this day O Lord that you fill us, help us align our lives to your calling. Help us feel your hand in our life just like the servant could feel God's hands and help us trust and be confident on your purposes for us. We ask all this for Jesus' sake. Amen.