

BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: Ignite Your Faith: Genesis 12-25 wk. 5

By Pastor Bryan Clark

Message Title: Faith and Works pt. 2

Release Date: Thursday, 8/29/19

[Gen 24: Verse 10]. *“Then the servant took ten camels from the camels of his master and set out with a variety of good things of his master’s in his hand; and he arose and went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor. 11 He made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at evening time, the time when women go out to draw water. 12 He said, “O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today, and show lovingkindness to my master Abraham. 13 Behold, I am standing by the spring, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water; 14 now may it be that the girl to whom I say, ‘Please let down your jar so that I may drink,’ and who answers, ‘Drink, and I will water your camels also’—may she be the one whom You have appointed for Your servant Isaac; and by this I will know that You have shown lovingkindness to my master.”*

[And it came about]15 Before he had finished speaking, behold, Rebekah who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Abraham’s brother Nahor, came out with her jar on her shoulder. 16 The girl was very beautiful, a virgin, and no man had had relations with her; and she went down to the spring and filled her jar and came up. 17 Then the servant ran to meet her, and said, “Please let me drink a little water from your jar.” 18 She said, “Drink, my lord”; and she quickly lowered her jar to her hand, and gave him a drink. 19 Now when she had finished giving him a drink, she said, “I will draw also for your camels until they have finished drinking.” 20 So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough, and ran back to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels. 21 Meanwhile, the man was gazing at her in silence, to know whether the Lord had made his journey successful or not.

[Then it came about]22 When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold ring weighing a half-shekel and two bracelets for her wrists weighing ten shekels in gold, 23 and said, “Whose daughter are you? Please tell me, is there room for us to lodge in your father’s house?” 24 She said to him, “I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor.” 25 Again she said to him, “We have plenty of both straw and feed, and room to lodge in.” 26 Then the man bowed low and worshiped the Lord. 27 He said, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His lovingkindness and His truth toward my master; as for me, the Lord has guided me in the way to the house of my master’s brothers.”

That would be the end of Scene Two. The servant travels about 30-day journey and ends up in the place where he needs to be. And he comes up with this plan. Now I have to say, we need to be careful about these kind of plans in our walk of faith. Typically, we don't recommend that you put God in a box and say, God, if you do a, b, and c, then I'll know that this is your will. But in this particular case, I think there's a reason for it and God honors that. The plan is, as these girls come out, then I will ask for a drink. And when she offers me a drink and says, I will also water your camels, then that's the one.

And so he's just getting this prayer out of his mouth. And up comes Rebekah, and she's very beautiful, and he asked for a drink, and she offers to water the camels. Then he's thinking this could be it. So he enters into this discussion and sure enough, she's a descendant of Abraham. And he falls on his face and he worships God, because clearly God has fulfilled his part of the deal. God has been faithful; this is the one. But of course, the challenge is just beginning. He has to convince Rebekah and Rebekah's family that she needs to go 500 miles away, and marry this person they've never met. So the story continues.

Verse 28. "Then the girl ran and told her mother's household about these things. 29 Now Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban; and Laban ran outside to the man at the spring. [And it came about] 30 When he saw the ring and the bracelets on his sister's wrists, and when he heard the words of Rebekah his sister, saying, "This is what the man said to me," he went to the man; and behold, he was standing by the camels at the spring. 31 And he said, "Come in, blessed of the Lord! Why do you stand outside since I have prepared the house, and a place for the camels?" 32 So the man entered the house. Then Laban unloaded the camels, and he gave straw and feed to the camels, and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him. 33 But when food was set before him to eat, he said, "I will not eat until I have told my business." And he said, "Speak on." 34 So he said, "I am Abraham's servant. 35 The Lord has greatly blessed my master, so that he has become rich; and He has given him flocks and herds, and silver and gold, and servants and maids, and camels and donkeys. 36 Now Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my master in her old age, and he has given him all that he has. 37 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 live; 38 but you shall go to my father's house and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son.' 39 I said to my master, 'Suppose the woman does not follow me.' 40 He said to me, 'The Lord, before whom I have walked, will send His angel with you to make your journey successful, and you will take a wife for my son from my relatives and from my father's house; 41 then you will be free from my oath, when you come to my relatives; and if they do not give her to you, you will be free from my oath.'

42 "So I came today to the spring, and said, 'O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, if now You will make my journey on which I go successful; 43 behold, I am standing by the spring, and may it be that the maiden who comes out to draw, and to whom I say, "Please let me drink a little water from your jar"; 44 and she will say to me, "You drink, and I will draw for your camels also"; let her be the woman whom the Lord has appointed for my master's son.'

45 "Before I had finished speaking in my heart, behold, Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder, and went down to the spring and drew, and I said to her, 'Please let me drink.' 46 She quickly lowered her jar from her shoulder, and said, 'Drink, and I will water your camels also'; so I drank, and she watered the camels also. 47 Then I asked her, and said, 'Whose daughter are you?' And she said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore to him'; and I put the ring on her nose, and the bracelets on her wrists. 48 And I bowed low and worshiped the Lord, and blessed the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who had guided me in the right way to take the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son. 49 So now if you are going to deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me; and if not, let me know, that I may turn to the right hand or the left.'"

The servant now has to move from Rebekah to Rebekah's family. But notice in verse 28, when Rebekah talks to her mother, the writer says, Rebekah told her these things. In other words, what we learned about the plan and how it all played out. And then when you get to Laban in verse 30, she tells him basically what happened. But when he sits down with the family and says, I can't eat until I've told you my mission, until I've told you what happened, the writer chooses to go completely back through the entire story, every single detail. Why did he have to repeat the entire story with all of the details?

Well, I think the reason is because the writer's wanting to make sure that we get it, that we as the readers understand what he's trying to say.. And so, he goes back through the whole thing as a way of saying, that the walk of faith means that first of all, we need to be in alignment with God's plan and purpose. We know what God wants and that's what we're about. And I think that's why he says at the mealtime, I'm not going to eat until I've told you my mission, because I think he clearly understands what God told Abraham, and he's on a mission. And he understands how it lines up with God's plan and purpose. So he tells him this whole thing.

In the process of going through all these details, I mentioned before, I think the reason why God honored this plan, was these details were what convinced Rebekah and Laban and family, that somehow this was a God-thing. Imagine if the servant would have just walked up to Rebekah at the well and said, Hi, I'm Abraham's servant, nice to meet you. Would you be interested in marrying Isaac? There wouldn't be anything terribly dramatic about that. Now, God could have used that in order to bring them together, but probably Rebekah wouldn't have been convinced, and certainly Rebekah's family wouldn't have been convinced. So there's an emphasis on the fact that the servant is saying, this is what I prayed and this is exactly what God did. And there's no question this is a God-thing.

So Rebekah's convinced and now Laban and family are becoming convinced. So, there's really only one way that they can respond.

Verse 50. *"Then Laban and Bethuel replied, "The matter comes from the Lord; so we cannot speak to you bad or good. 51 Here is Rebekah before you, take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the Lord has spoken."*

[And it came about]52 When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the ground before the Lord. 53 The servant brought out articles of silver and articles of gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave precious things to her brother and to her mother. 54 Then he and the men who were with him ate and drank and spent the night. When they arose in the morning, he said, "Send me away to my master." 55 But her brother and her mother said, "Let the girl stay with us a few days, say ten; afterward she may go." 56 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." 57 And they said, "We will call the girl and consult her wishes." 58 Then they called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" And she said, "I will go." 59 Thus they sent away their sister Rebekah and her nurse with Abraham's servant and his men. 60 They blessed Rebekah and said to her,

*"May you, our sister,
Become thousands of ten thousands,
And may your descendants possess
The gate of those who hate them."*

So the servant lays out this big plan and he says; this is what I prayed and this is what God did. Now one of the questions that arises is, what did Rebekah and what did her family believe about God? They probably worshiped the moon god and had no real concept of the God of Abraham, but they would've had a concept of gods. And so clearly, they would have been responsive to the evidence that the gods are working here. And this seems to be something that the gods have done. So Laban and family basically say, the gods are in charge, they've done this, what can we say, take her and go. So they eat and they drink and they go to bed that night, and they'd get up in the morning, and the family makes

what seems like a reasonable request. I mean, this is the last time they're ever going to see this teenage girl. And they're saying, you know, just give us 10 days to kind of say goodbye. But the servant, I mean, he's on a mission, he doesn't have time for that. He says, you know, God's prospered me, I've got to get back, let us go. So, they say, well, let's ask Rebekah, how does she feel about it? Rebekah's convinced. She says, let's go. So, they do, they head out.

Verse 61. *"Then Rebekah arose with her maids, and they mounted the camels and followed the man. So the servant took Rebekah and departed. 62 Now Isaac had come from going to Beer-lahai-roi; for he was living in the Negev. 63 Isaac went out to meditate in the field toward evening; and he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, camels were coming. 64 Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac she dismounted from the camel. 65 She said to the servant, "Who is that man walking in the field to meet us?" And the servant said, "He is my master." Then she took her veil and covered herself. 66 The servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. 67 Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and he took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her; thus Isaac was comforted after his mother's death."*

So they travel this 30 day or so journey and Rebekah sees Isaac coming, puts the veil over, which would have been their tradition. And probably that evening they were actually married. But notice the text says that the servant told Isaac all these things. Now we're thankful at that point that they didn't go through the story one more time. But it is important not to miss that. Because that must've been a significant faith builder for Isaac, as the servant retold the story of what God sovereignly did to arrange this bride, so Isaac would know this is exactly who God has picked for me, in order to bring them together.

You also have to realize, Rebekah probably was just learning about the God of Abraham, but through this event, how that must've strengthened her belief in this God, and his power, and the fact that he really is God, and would have really put her in a position then to enter into this relationship. It is interesting to notice that the end of this story, that Abraham's not mentioned. Abraham is the driving force in the first scene, but at the end of the story, Abraham's nowhere to be found. As a matter of fact, what we have in this story is the passing of the baton; the next section of Genesis is now going to be about the next generation of faith, Isaac and Rebekah. The baton has been passed, and there have been things in this story that God will use to strengthen the faith of both Isaac and Rebekah, that they can take this baton and they can carry it by faith.

The Promise Seed would come through Isaac, through Jacob for generations to come, and eventually would be the Promise Seed, Jesus Christ himself, who would come to Earth, who would die on a cross in order to what? In order to bring together a bride, called his church. God would go out and would pursue, and he would pursue you, and me, and he would gather us together to be the bride of Christ, that we, through Jesus Christ, might marry into this relationship with him. That we might enter into this love relationship, which means now it is our generation's turn to take the baton and to carry the baton, to carry the baton of faith, and to build his kingdom.

But now we're right back to where we started at the beginning. What does that mean on a very practical level? I think the details of the story help us understand a couple of things, helps us understand that the faith walk has to be about God, and about His purpose, and about what He's doing in the world. Faith isn't my rabbit's foot. It isn't my genie, that I rub to get what I want. It's not faith for faith's sake, so that my life is somehow better or more comfortable. Faith is about God, and his kingdom, and that which is eternal. So when I consider steps of faith, that's the first thing I always have to ask. What does this have to do with God and his kingdom? What does this have to do about that which is eternal, and what God's doing in the world today?

The second thing that we wrestle with is the understanding that I have to be willing to do my part. I have to be willing to step out and do what I can do, but all the while remembering that there's going to be God's part. There's going to be that part that only God can do in this journey of faith.

I think as a general rule, we tend to get out of balance and make a mistake at one end of the spectrum or the other. Sometimes we tend to just sit back and wait for God to do something. We have whatever the situation is, and we pray about it, but we just sit there, and we wait for Rebekah to just drop into our tent one day, rather than realizing I have to be willing to do what I can do.

The other end of the spectrum is that we tend to just go after it and do it all ourselves. We just jump in and we try to do it all, and we just hope that God will kind of come along and bless it, somewhere along the way. Where we want to land is exactly where this story took us, and that is understanding that I have to be willing to do my part. I have to use good judgment. I have to make wise decisions. I have to do what I can do. But all the while, understanding that God has to step in and do what only He can do, in order for this journey to be successful, in order to accomplish what He wants to accomplish. It's a combination of both faith and works. We have to understand that if we're ever going to be a people of faith, if we're ever going to practically live out our faith on a daily basis. We have to understand the relationship between faith and works.

Arnie: So Bryan, you took faith and works to a completely new level today. You're telling me I have to be willing to do my part and at the same time I have to be willing to let God do His part. Which part is God's and which part is ours, and how do we not switch things around to our own benefit?

Bryan: So great question. And there's never an easy answer to a question like that. It's always going to require sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. And I think it depends on the situation. So practically you're wrestling with the question, what can I do? So I don't really buy into the let-go-and-let-God theology. So what's my part? What's God's part? In this particular circumstance, what would it mean to be responsible, what would it mean to be faithful? What is my part in this? But there's always things I can't control. I can't change. All I can do is trust God.

So even when we wait, I like to think we wait actively. We're not just sitting back waiting. I'm praying, I'm discerning. I'm reading scripture, so it's like an active-waiting. So I'm wrestling with the question, what can I do? And oftentimes, there's a lot I can't do or control. But I do think we're expected to do our part and not just sit back and do nothing. So again, you wrestle with the question, what would it mean to be faithful today? And I'll do that today, and then I'll figure that out tomorrow. But it's hard to steer us when we're sitting still. So I think often we need to be moving and God redirects.

Cara: What if we miss our cue? I'd like to think I'm wonderful, but I have moments of disobedience [oh my], where I know where God's asked me to do something. This is my time - that's my sacrifice. That's the thing that I have a hard time giving up. He asks me to go to this person, do this, and I wait. And luckily I get up and I go anyway. But what if I miss the part I'm supposed to do?

Bryan: I think ultimately, if your heart is right and you're wanting to walk in obedience, God has His ways of, I don't think like there's a moment you miss and that's it, you're off the team. God has his way of getting you there. If it's a moment you should have had a conversation with a neighbor, then maybe

God uses something else with the neighbor, and maybe you just missed your moment that could have been pretty special.

Cara: His will, will be done regardless whether I'm included in it or not.

Bryan: Yeah. But generally speaking, I don't think you have to get everything exactly right all the time. God's going to get you there. And that's why I say it might be zig-zaggy. You miss a little bit, he redirects. [Right.] But if your heart's right, that's the core of all this. If your heart is right, God will get you there.

Cara: Right? I mean, that's why Arnie came into my life because he is such a nag! [Thanks]. Because he has nagged me to do everything.

Bryan: A good nag. A Spirit filled nag.

Cara: He is my spiritual nag. [Right.] So getting back to our story then, on Isaac's bride, dating practices were a lot different back then. I was still amazed though, at how quickly Rebekah and her family decide that she just is going to go run off with this servant, and marry this guy she's never met. Could you kind of clue us in and what was going on there?

Bryan: Yeah, it is a little hard for us to process. So a very different culture for sure. But remember, the servant was also concerned that this wife wouldn't come with him. So it's a legitimate concern because he wasn't convinced either. So it is this amazing moment where God steps in and Rebekah's willing to go.

Cara: Do you think that's why he said no, we should probably go now, and not give her time to think about it?

Bryan: Well, I think he was a man on a mission. The servant was concerned that maybe this woman wouldn't come back with him, so it was a legitimate concern. But you think about the servant's prayer, and all the details, and then how every single detail was fulfilled. And this is the story then that he shares with Rebekah's parents, that convinced them that God is in this. I don't know what her parents believed, but I think based on what he shared with them, they believed God was in this and they needed to be obedient to God.

Cara: Right. So sort of like our testimony then. We, I mean everybody in this room, all has different testimonies and those can be impactful as well.

Bryan: I think especially when it's out of the ordinary, and God shows up in amazing ways and maybe unexplainable ways, they should be shared.

Cara: What about people though, who feel self-conscious about their faith story? They came to Christ when they're eight [Arnie: it's boring]. They married the love of their life, and everything's hunky-dory, and they've never done anything radically stupid. You know, I mean, everybody's a sinner obviously, but what would you tell someone, that their faith story could actually also be encouraging?

Bryan: Yeah, so there's the dramatic story and it's fascinating, but a lot of people disconnect, because it's like, well then you needed to be saved. But then there's people, it's just the ordinary everyday stuff where God shows up, and everybody goes through trials and difficulties. It's trying to look at well, where's God met me and touched my life in some way? You know, the older you get, boring doesn't sound so bad. [Right.] But it's still an amazing redemptive story. You know, it's not like any of us were right on the edge of being good enough anyway, and Jesus stepped in. So our story is our story. You can't manufacture it.

Cara: And give it some time, because at some point something's going to happen and your faith steps up and ...

Bryan: Yeah, and you trust God with your story, and he'll do the rest.

Arnie: I think it's so interesting that you talk about the baton of faith being passed on from Abraham to Isaac. And you know, I remember as a nonbeliever sitting in all of these psychology classes, it was never thought of as a baton of faith being passed to your kids. It was your hang-ups, your parents' hang-ups being passed on to the kids, to ruin the rest of their lives. So your perspective is so interesting and refreshing and really counter to what most of humanistic psychology would say that, you know, that's really not a good thing. So tell me, how does that look today in a world that just sees getting faith passed on as more of a hang-up than anything else?

Bryan: So I think whether you're talking about families or church families, think of it both ways. You know, we talked in Genesis, the purpose of the family is to perpetuate the kingdom from generation to generation. I think that's how God's created family to work. Again, whether it's church, family or our families of origin. But it's a big part of our job, is to pass the faith on from generation to generation, because it's not just information, it's living. And living in a certain way that reflects our trust in God. So, it needs to be intentional. It needs to be on purpose. But I think for us, whether again, we're talking about church, family or family of origin, it's about what I do with my time. You know, none of this can be done in the fast lane. It's an investment of my resources, my energies, my attention. We do this by example. I mean how many times did Isaac see his mom and dad take significant steps of faith, and that was life changing. I also think there's an element of release and trust. You know, you pass the baton, then you release and you trust, and that can be a very difficult moment. I think fear makes us clutch too tightly, and faith is a willingness to trust God and let go. That has to happen or the baton doesn't really get passed along very well. So one church-related moment comes to mind is, so Lincoln Berean Church, the church where I pastor is 58 years old, and I'm only the second senior pastor, so I followed the founder. I was 34 years old, and there were a lot of people that wondered what are we doing, because they just thought I was too young. But you have to trust and release. And the rest is up to God. That's a significant part of the process.