

Genesis 24

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Date: 23 March 2025

Preacher: Calum Jack

[0:00] Thanks, Pete. You want to keep your apps and Bibles open on that passage.! The passage has a really different feel to it. If you've been sort of coming along on Sunday mornings, you'll be used to a certain way in terms of the life of Abraham and certain things happening.

But this feels really different. If Genesis 1 and 2 were majestic, describing God's power and creativity and bringing the whole universe together.

And Genesis 3 was tragic when Ab and Eve fell to temptation, bringing curse and banishment from the garden. And Genesis 4 to 23 were realistic about the rise of sin and civilization and the ups and downs of Abraham's journey of faith.

Then this chapter is, well, romantic. 67 verses, like I said, the longest chapter, yet describing what it looks at first glance, the origin of an ancient Near Eastern love story.

And it is a love story, except not principally about Isaac and Rebecca, although it is about them. It is principally, actually, about God's love for his people.

[1:14] And that comes out in the NIV's use of the word kindness. The word kindness there in Hebrew is chesed, which is the word used for the steadfast covenant love of God.

So there in verse 12, the servant prays, Lord, show chesed covenant love kindness to Abraham.

Verse 14, By this I will know that you've shown chesed this covenant love to my master.

Verse 27, prays because God has not abandoned his chesed, his covenant love and faithfulness.

So this is about the love and the faithfulness of God, principally.

But I guess we need to ask the question, well, why is Moses included this particular story here?

Moses was writing a couple of hundred years, a number of hundred years later, really for the people of God as they were about to enter into the promised land.

And so he's writing these things, drawing these things together, but for a particular purpose. And I think we're kind of helped here in looking at actually where it's sandwiched.

[2:26] It's sandwiched between chapter 23, we looked at last week, the death of Sarah, and then chapter 25, which we'll read on and we'll look at next week, and the death of Abraham.

The question then that looms large, as Sarah has gone to be with the Lord, Abraham's going to be with the Lord, is will the Lord's promises to Abraham still stand?

Will his promises still stand? Will God maintain his chesed, his steadfast, covenanted, faithful love to his people after Abraham? Will he continue it to Moses and his people as they enter into the promised land?

Will he be faithful? Will they see his kindness? Will they see him and experience him in their midst as they do that? It's a vulnerable moment for the people of God. Will he pull through on his promises?

And I guess, in terms of thinking about ourselves, it's, you know, we, when we reach vulnerable moments, do you have pause for thought, don't we?

[3:30] Is, is, is God going to be good for this? Is, is he going to pull through on his promises? Is he going to see me through whatever that might, circumstance might be? It might be a, a financial issue. It might be a job issue.

It might be a relational thing. It might be within, within the family. It might be health. It might be as we're on that final furlong, as we're, we're, we're reaching that stage where we will go to be with him forever.

We see good for his promises in our daily experience, in our workplaces, as we seek to be faithful to him, walking humbly before him and, and seeking to be witnesses for him.

Will he be faithful to us as individuals, as a family, as a church family, as we seek to be faithful, to him. And I think this passage is, is long because we're meant to savor it.

We're meant to enjoy it. We're meant to enjoy its good news. As we see that actually God is faithful. Actually God is continuing beyond Abraham.

[4:36] He is doing as he promised. So let's look at the passage. We'll kind of hang it on four headings, four hooks, if you like. First of all, Abraham's godly confidence, then his servant's prayerful action, and then the beautiful providence that kind of brings it all together and the great comfort at the end.

So first of all, Abraham's godly confidence. Verse one, Abraham was now very old and the Lord had blessed him in every way. He said to the senior servant in his household, the one in charge of all that he had, put your hand under my thigh.

I want you to swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from among the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am living, but you will go to my own country, my own relatives, and get a wife for my son Isaac.

The servant asked him, what if the woman is unwilling to come back with me to this land? Shall I then take your son back to the country you came from?

Verse six, make sure that you do not take my son back there. Abraham said, the Lord, the God of heaven, who brought me out of my father's household and my native land, and who spoke to me and promised me by oath, saying to your offspring, I will give this land.

[5:51] And he will send an angel before you so that you can get a wife for my son from there. If the woman is unwilling to come back with you, then you will be released from this oath of mine. Only do not take my son there.

So the servant put his hand under the thigh of his master Abraham and swore on oath to him concerning this matter. So I guess like the last two chapters, we're seeing Abraham thinking really clearly here.

He's sort of applying the promises by faith to a circumstance. He's kind of filling out that preferred future, if you like, which is a future that's lived by faith, trusting in God and his promises.

And it is that, you know, his clear thinking is that Isaac, verse three, should not be a married from the women among the Canaanites, but from his own household of faith.

And if you're new, you're thinking, well, why not the local lassies? You know, it could be argued that, well, they were good for making alliances or garnering power, being able to settle in the land and so on.

[6:56] But we've been seeing all along that Yahweh, God's call on his people is to distinctiveness from those around. Clearly, it's not a race thing, it's a faith thing.

And it is a faith thing because they worship other gods and idols and had some terrifying and disgusting religious practices associated with them.

So it's a fragile moment, isn't it? In the working out of the purposes and the promises of God. Because there are real temptations at this point.

They can lead in at least two directions. One is assimilation with those around about. The other is abandonment of the faith. Assimilation where rather than an exclusive trust in Yahweh, they mix that faith in Yahweh with the kind of the other face around about them.

The faith of the Canaanite gods, which are not real gods at all. Or alternatively, rather than trust in him for the future, just simply abandon him altogether.

[8:06] Rather, in a desire maybe for sort of wealth and health and power and success, enjoy the kind of the, you know, the fruit of the fertility gods and so on of the Canaanites.

But Abraham is clear in terms of his own heart. Like Joshua, as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord. And sadly, we know, of course, that the unrepentant Canaanites are heading for destruction because of their sin.

Now, I want to be a wee bit careful as we go through this passage. I don't want to give the impression that marriage is the only path for the faithful. Isaac has a particular place in salvation history.

He'll be the ancestor of Christ. And that line of succession is key for all of humanity. And whilst in churches, we do want to support those who are married, those who are able to have children as part of their discipleship, being Christ-like and godly in those areas of life, we equally want to support those who are single or who are widowed or maybe married without children or unable to have children or those who are same-sex attracted who want to remain faithful to the Bible's teaching.

So in our fellowship groups, in our community groups, we want to be sensitive to each other's callings and our place in life and include one another in our lives, whatever stage of life or our marital status.

[9:44] And a great way, of course, to do that is what we do each week in our community groups when people from all sorts of backgrounds and stages in life meet together, round a meal, and enjoy fellowship together from the youngest to the oldest.

But that, in a sense, should be just the minimum of what we're doing in terms of engaging with one another. Maybe be thinking about, as a family, you're going out for what?

Who else could we include, maybe for the community group or from the fellowship, in that? Or if you're sort of single and thinking, you know, I'm going out to do this, who else could I invite?

I had a really good example of that. We had a visit from a friend who is young and single, and she was saying, where are you heading next week? She said, oh, I'm heading off on holiday.

All right, who are you going with? Oh, I'm going with one of my best friends or husband and their child. They had sought to include her in their holiday together, which is a brilliant way of kind of sharing fellowship and just encouraging one another at different stages of life, including each other in our lives.

[10:52] But Abraham here is holding to faith, that gritty faith that we talked about last week, that in this fragile moment, he's still holding on, God is good for this.

He will see you. See, the confidence that he has in God will pull through on his promise that the angels will go before you and so on. But even if the woman isn't, you're released from the oath, you know, he's also prudent, he's wise, but he's holding on to gospel principles, not giving into pragmatism, saying, oh, just find a wifery nearby which is more convenient.

And we see in verse five, this poor servant is being stretched. It must have seemed a sort of impossible mission to him because where Abraham was sending him was over 500 miles away.

So no wonder, he suggests, wouldn't it be more prudent to take Isaac with me? You know, I will walk 500 more miles. Will I have to walk 500 more, you know, to bring this woman back and so on? But Abraham sticks to his faith priorities. Isaac is going to remain in the land. You know, if he goes there, he may be distracted and end up, you know, out of the land of promise.

[12:04] And so keep him here. Abraham is determined to just trust and obey. Trust and obey. You know, there's no other way as the old hymn goes. And when it comes to marriage, I think there's a word here for those who are not yet married.

We have folks who are, you know, other folks who are married in the fellowship, who have married believers, some who aren't married to believers, you know, because they've only just become Christians or for some other reasons.

And we want to support everyone who is married. But I think this is a word in particular for those who are not yet married. Because the Bible's teaching is clear on who we should be seeking as a marriage partner.

That believers marry believers. That marriage is between a man and a woman. That sex and sexual acts are to be kept for marriage, not before and not outside the covenanted bond of marriage.

And if you're new to these, and just looking into Christianity, you've not sort of looked into it before, that may seem a shock and even impossible. But there are many here who can testify, actually, that it's not only possible, but even preferable.

[13:15] There's a beauty in it because there are no comparisons with the past. We give a precious gift that is kept for one another on our wedding day, offered freely and within the security of the covenant commitment of marriage.

And when I speak about these things, I know that there are those who have become Christians later on in life and maybe have transgressed in these matters and can feel a sense of guilt and shame.

Well, it's important that you know the truth of who you are now in Christ and all that he has done for you.

The power of the blood of Christ to cleanse us from all guilt and shame. The wonder of the borrowed robes of righteousness with which now cover us and with which we are able to stand with boldness and confidence before the throne of God.

Knowing that, as Romans tells us, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. The law of the spirit of life has set me free from the law of sin and death. That we are new creations.

The old is gone and the new has come. So Abraham has this godly confidence in the will and the way and the purpose of God, in the promise of God, who is able to do immeasurably more than we can ever ask or imagine.

[14 : 35] Who, when faced with an impossible mission, knows what his great successor, the greater Abraham, Jesus, says that nothing is impossible for God.

And so the servant moves forward in a sincere oath, following on from Abraham's godly confidence. And he follows on in prayerful action.

Verse 10, Then the servant left, taking with him 10 of his master's camels, loaded with all kinds of good things from his master. He set out for Aram Nahareme and made his way to the town of Nahor. He had the camels kneel down near the well outside the town. It was toward evening, the time the women go out to draw water. So the servant, verse 10, arrives after probably about a three-week journey.

And we know that he is, verse 2, this Abraham's senior servant in charge of Abraham's considerable wealth and households. So he is a man who is clearly very able, astute, but still knows where his true strength lies.

[15 : 46] And so he bows his head, verse 12, and he prays. He prays, Lord, God of my master Abraham, make me successful today and show kindness to my master Abraham.

See, I'm standing beside the spring and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. May it be that when I say to a young woman, please let down your jar that I may have a drink.

And she says, drink, and I will water your camels too. Let her be the one that you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness, chesed, steadfast, covenanted love to my master.

It's interesting here, the servant is praying about his work. He's bringing the Lord into it. Abraham has laid a big responsibility on him. But the servant of Abraham knows that Abraham's God is a big God, able to do immeasurably more than he can ever ask or imagine.

And it's interesting how the story works out, that God and godly priorities are all over this. But in a sense, God is quietly working in the background, isn't he? In all their ways, they're, as Proverbs 3 verse 5 says, they're acknowledging him and the Lord is directing their paths.

[17 : 03] Leading Abraham at just the right time to make this request. The servant at just the right time to the well. The servant to just the right test.

You wonder if it came to him as he was praying, Lord, what am I going to do here? No, as I pray, it's sort of verbally processing, if you like, with the Lord's. And the Lord is giving him wisdom.

Now, the circumstances are extraordinary, aren't they? But at the same time, there's something very ordinary about them. About the way that things are being conducted, the way that God is working.

There is somebody who is living by faith, there is somebody who is praying, and the Lord is working in the background, orchestrating it all, bringing it all together. And notice the way that he makes the request.

Verse 12, show kindness, so hesed to Abraham, because of, he is the one with whom you've made this covenant promise. He is the covenant head. And so remember this act with mercy.

[18 : 10] And again, if you're new to looking into Christianity and thinking, well, how do I pray? What confidence can I have that my prayer is being heard? Well, the servant has confidence because the kind of the covenant head, if you like, Abraham, is the one to whom the promises have given.

And so he's praying in the light of those precious promises and all that God has for Abraham. So when we pray, we're not praying, you know, just because, oh Lord, I'm so wonderful and so fantastic and because of that, you're bound to answer my prayer.

Or we're not praying because there's some great person in our, in Cornerstone, whose God takes heat off, the great Scotland, Eastern or whomever. We're praying very specifically in the name that is above every name.

The name that is given to us by which we might have access to God the Father. Jesus teaches on this in John chapter 14, verse 12. He said, very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do great works, the great works that I have been doing.

And they will do even greater things than these because I'm going to the Father. and I will do whatever you ask in my name so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name and I will do it.

[19 : 22] We're able to come with confidence in prayer because of Jesus Christ, our covenant head through whom we have access to the Father. The one through whom says, come in my name and that's not a blank check to just do whatever.

In my name means kind of in my character, in the will and the way of God. And as you do that, you can know and have confidence to come because I am your covenant head and the blessings flow from me and one of the blessings is that I'm able to bring you with confidence to the Father to know that your prayers are heard.

And so we should come with that godly confidence and that prayerfulness for the works that we're involved in, whether that's our daily work that we're involved in through the week, whether it's our home life and the things that we're wrestling with, or whether it's, you know, seeking to be faithful as a witness on campus through the Christian Union or out amongst the youth of our community through Young Life or out on the street with street pastors, amongst international students with Friends International.

Bringing all of these things to the Lord, knowing that we are heard because we come in Jesus' name. Do not neglect, let us not neglect the great gift that we're invited to enjoy, the gift of prayer, to help us as we seek to walk faithfully for him.

You know, as a slight aside, as we're seeking to walk faithfully, as we're seeking to be bright lights and witnesses for Christ, as Christ builds his church, the devil will not be happy and he will want to divide and disrupt and discourage and devastate.

[21 : 04] He'll want to tempt and to snatch and to devour. And so we need to be on our guard to tighten up the armor, if you like, that Paul talks about in Ephesians chapter 6 with which we take our stance.

A few things that have happened recently are just in and around the fellowship that made me think, yep, we do need to just make sure that we're tightening up the armor and that we're on our guard and able to stand firm.

But back to the passage. Of course, prayer, when we make it, may not be answered instantaneously. It could even take decades for it to be answered. But this prayer is answered before he's even finished praying it.

Verse 15, before he'd finished praying, Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder. She was the daughter of Bethuel, son of Milcah, who was the wife of Abraham's brother, Nahor.

The woman was very beautiful, a virgin. No one had ever slept with her. She went down to the spring, filled her jar, and came up again. And so what we see is not only God with confidence and prayerful action, but a beautiful providence.

[22 : 06] And again, if you're new to these things, thinking what does providence really mean, it just means, in this context, God's care. And this providence, this God's care, is beautiful to behold.

It thrills the heart. It speaks volumes about the kind of God in whom we trust, whom we love, who we follow, and who we desire to work humbly and faithfully before. We see him just sort of working, orchestrating all of these things.

They could have been very dull in the way that it worked out, but actually it's very thrilling. There's a beauty to it. You know, in the same way as a child might lay a series of challenges for a family, you know, around the house and say, I've done this, so let's do the challenge to everyone's delight and to the creator's delight, the child who's made it up.

So too, as these purposes are worked out, bringing delight and thrill to the servant as he sees just God answering prayer, it is also bringing God delight as he's seeing those seeking to walk faithfully and humbly before him.

It's a great adventure in the Lord's. And as these things, as Rebecca comes out, one commentator noted that Moses comments on her alphabet of qualities, if you like.

[23 : 21] she's A, attractive, she's B, in terms of her breeding, she's up the household of God, she's C, chaste, she's D, diligent, E, she's energetic, could be up to 250 gallons of water required to water all those camels.

But the servant has set her a test, verse 17, hasn't he? And what's he looking for ultimately in this test that he's set? It's character, isn't it?

It's character, it's humility, it's servant-heartedness, it's someone who's hospitable, someone who will go the extra mile. Those kind of Christ-like qualities that we're called to as believers, aren't they?

Man looks on the outward, but God looks on the heart. The servant has observed the outward, but he's testing the heart, the character of this woman. And as believers, men and women, we want to bring more than just the outward things to any relationship, whether that's our friendships or in our households, whether it's to a marriage, to family, in the workplace.

Because we've been given a beautiful gift, we've been given a positional righteousness in Christ that makes us right with God, we are loved by God, we are destined to be with him forever.

[24 : 41] But that positional righteousness has also been worked out in what we could call a progressive righteousness. Our character is being changed, we're being drawn to a greater likeness of Christ by the Holy Spirit as he works in our heart, we're being changed from one degree of glory to another, the right of Thessalonians says.

And we should be bringing that to every and all of our relationships in the workplace, in our marriage, amongst our friendships. Palpably different. Not only that we don't swear or blaspheme, but that we go the extra mile, we're showing kindness and concern for work colleagues.

Maybe in a way that others are just too busy to help another, we go the extra mile with them.

Because we care. Because we're cared for. And that inner dynamic of being cared for is working out.

And so, he asks for a drink, she gives him a drink, he drinks, you know, just in those verses you can see there's a sort of just waiting with bated breath for what will come next.

Has he gone these 500 miles for nothing? And then verse 19, she offers to water the camels. After she'd given him a drink, she said, I'll draw water for your camels too until they've had enough to drink.

[25 : 57] So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough, ran back to the well and drew more water and drew enough for all his camels. Without saying a word, the man watched her closely to learn whether or not the Lord had made his journey successful.

When the camels had finished drinking, the man took out a gold nose ring weighing a becca and two gold bracelets weighing two shekels. Then he asked, whose daughter are you?

Please tell me, is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night? She answered him, I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milca, the son that Milca bore to Nahor.

And she added, and we have plenty straw and fodder as well as room for you to spend the night.

Then the man bowed down and worshipped the Lord saying, praise be to the Lord, the God of my master Abraham who has not abandoned his kindness, his chesed, his steadfast covenant and love his faithfulness to his master.

As for me, the Lord has led me on the journey to the house of my master's relatives. So having prayed, the servant does not forget to praise and thank God for answer to prayer.

[27 : 07] That spirit of thankfulness is so important for us. Yes, we pray, but it's so easy to forget to be thankful. And that spirit of thankfulness, it just, it gives us a perspective.

I think it helps us find contentment as we acknowledge our gratitude to God and actually see him at work in our lives. Laban, when he hears in you, is thrilled.

The servant has no fear in witnessing to the truth and giving testimony to the Lord's leading as he recounts it all to Laban. And we know that Laban is Rebecca's brother who we'll meet again at the future date when we get to season two, if you like, of the Abrams family.

And Laban cannot deny the Lord's hand though. He, although he does try to detain him. Again, something I think that we'll see him do again with Jacob, but by Jacob's time he somewhat honed his skills.

The servant, maybe having seen Abraham deal in his dealings with a cave, is not for waiting. He seals the deal and Rebecca is consulted in verse 57 and they're off. And they bless her, verse 60, with a blessing along the lines of God's own blessing for Abraham.

[28 : 22] And what we're witnessing is this beautiful providence. We're witnessing verse Romans 8, 28, God working in all things for the good of those who love him. It's a beautiful providence.

But of course, there are harder providences that we might come across. But the promise is still true, Romans 8, 28. The promise still rings true that God is working in all things for the good of those who love him.

Whether we find ourselves on the mountaintop or in the valley. And then finally, we come to these verses where we see this great comfort. Verse 62.

Now Isaac had come from Beer, Lahai Roy, which Beer means well, and Lahai Roy. Remember Hagar? That was her well where she was there.

That's the God who sees. And he's been seeing everything that's been going on. He's been overseeing it. His hand, his heart, are all over these circumstances. So I guess the question is, what are you facing right now?

[29 : 28] What are the things that you are sort of, that just create tension in your heart, that just give you a sort of pause for thought and just concern as you think about the coming weeks?

What's going on? Well, know that our God is the God who is Lahai Roy, the God who sees, who knows, and who is near.

He's the same God yesterday, today, and forever. But here, verse 63. So Isaac went out to the field one evening to meditate and he looked up.

He saw camels approaching. So here we have Isaac. He's alone and he's praying. What a guy. And here, coming before him is the answer to his prayers. Verse 64.

Rebecca also looked up and saw Isaac. She got down from her camel and asked the servant, who is the man in the field coming to meet us? Oh, he is my master. The servant answered. She took up her veil and covered herself.

[30 : 28] There's kind of reminiscence here, isn't there, of Adam and Eve in the garden. Here's the one who God has brought for you to be together. And again, the story could have been told and the circumstances could have been much more perfunctory, soulless, but we are getting a setting sun.

Were there evening crickets chirping away? Did a gentle breeze raise goose pimples on their skin? Was there a shiver down their spine? Did they have a sense something special was taking place here?

You know, I'm making a rod for my own back here. But romance is not lost on the Lord. And it should not be lost on us either.

And in true Forrest Gump style, that's all I have to say about that. I can feel the jabs going in the ribs.

Verse 66, Then the servant told Isaac all he had done. And Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah and he married Rebecca and she became his wife and he loved her.

[31 : 35] And Isaac was comforted after his mother's death. You know, if we're going through a kind of season of the season one of the Abrams family and we have these different episodes, this is a kind of feature long episode kind of between that this and season two.

It's long in the telling. It's delicious in many ways in the details. But what's it there for? Is it just for a few lessons on dating and marriage?

Well, there's some issues of that there, but actually primarily, like we said at the beginning, it's all to demonstrate that the promise remains. Our God will remain faithful to the generations beyond Abraham, to his people.

and as Moses is leading them into the promised land, they can walk forward with confidence knowing that all the promises are for them. And as we go out into the week, we can know that all the promises are yes and amen in Jesus Christ.

All the promises. They still stand. as God demonstrated here, as the people worried about the death of Abraham and what will come next.

[32 : 57] He's saying, no, no, I'm your God. And sometimes we worry when we think of what will happen to the church, what will happen to God's people as great men and women of God go to glory.

And I can think of a few of folks that have looked to in my time, whether it's Mr. Still or John Stott, Tim Keller, all of whom have gone to be with the Lord. Dick Lucas is nearing a hundred. Don Carson is stepped back.

John Piper, Sinclair Fergus, they're all aging. But actually, our great confidence is that his covenant faithfulness continues. All the promises are yes and amen in Jesus Christ.

As Charles Wesley said, God buries his workmen and women, but he carries on the work. Are you at a moment of vulnerability vulnerability this morning?

Not sure if God will pull through on his promises. We'll hear him speak loudly and clearly through this passage. I'm good for my promises. They are yes and amen in Jesus Christ.

[34 : 02] I continue my chesed, my steadfast covenant love to you and to yours. So let's, as we go out into this week, have that godly confidence, not in ourselves, but in him and his character.

Let's go out in that prayerful action, bringing it all to him. And whether the providences that we're seeing are beautiful or hearts, know the great comfort that is ours in Jesus Christ, that all his promises are true.

Yes and amen in Jesus Christ. Let's pray. God our Father, we bless you that you've been teaching us.

You are the same yesterday, today, and forever. And we can trust in you. So Lord, help us in this moment just to lift our burdens to you.

knowing that you care for us, that's a promise. Help us to ask and to seek and to knock, to know that we are heard.

[35 : 13] Help us to know that you, with confidence, you are the one and who's keeping power, that you are the one who promises that having begun a good work in us, you will see it through to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

help us to lean hard on you, knowing that all your promises are yes and amen. So let it be in Jesus Christ.

May it bless your name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.