



Sermon

9th July 2023

Find Rest for your Soul in Jesus

Genesis 24:34-67; Matthew 11:27-30

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Last week, as we picked up the account of Abraham, we explored an Old Testament type – a prophetic illustration of a truth to come.

As the story of Abraham's line continues to unfold, there is another significant account. Abraham is getting on and wants to be sure his son is married – ready to fulfil his part in God's solemn promises to bring forth many, many people from Abraham's line. He is determined that his son should not marry into the local people.

I think his concern was two-fold:

- **To protect Isaac from being overwhelmed by the local religious beliefs.**
The people among who they lived worshipped pagan gods with unacceptable practices to God Almighty. If Isaac were to marry a local girl, he would, according to Genesis 2:24, leave his father and mother and join to the girl. There would be high risk of his being absorbed into her family and his religious position being overwhelmed.
- **He had been promised the land of Canaan by God.** Intermarriage with the Canaanites would vastly complicate the fulfilment of this promise.

There is a parallel principle for us today from this practice. As Christians, if we marry outside the faith it compromises our ability to worship God and to obey him. If you are committed to God first and then commit to a spouse who does not share that belief it is going to cause conflict. Sadly, experience shows there is often loss - first of Christian worship and then of belief.

That is why, Paul says, "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers!"¹ If you are in the situation, God can still help you and you can still serve him. But it has its difficulties and he wants to spare us those.

Back to the story. Abraham's servant was his steward - no insignificant figure. He oversaw all Abraham's property and would have been his heir if Abraham had not had a son.

He travelled with a number of men and a train of ten camels, bearing gifts and supplies. He went praying to his master's God. The servant proposed a sign by which he will recognise the right girl: when he asked for a drink of water, she would offer to water his camels. This is the form of guidance often called "laying out a fleece" after Gideon's use of it.

For her to say yes to the drink of water for him, was only common hospitality - to offer to water his camels was far beyond anything one would expect. A camel which has gone without water for a few days will drink as much as 90 litres. Ancient jars for drawing water held about 11 litres. She is offering to make 80+ trips from the spring to the watering trough. It is an extraordinary offer.

And that is the point. As a test of God's involvement, it had to be an abnormal response. Sometimes you hear people propose such fleeces and the test is not at all decisive. Sadly too often, it is when faced with temptation people will pray "If you don't want me to do this, let such and such happen." Faced with an opportunity to

¹ 2 Cor 6:14

steal, “If you don’t want me to take this, let the owner come back now.” That is not a means of finding God’s will but of avoiding it. The thief already knows God’s will but is trying to find an excuse to get around it.

The story is important for the account of God’s covenant promises; it is important as part of the ancestry of the Messiah, of faith, of promise. But it has another side to it. Like last week, it serves as a type. Remember a Biblical type is a something which illustrates something else later in the Bible. In this case, the servant is seen as a type of the Holy Spirit.

Let’s compare the servant with the Holy Spirit:

Abraham’s Servant	The Holy Spirit
Sent to do Abraham’s will – (<i>Abraham</i> means father of many nations)	The Holy Spirit is sent by the Father.
The servant is sent to find a bride for the only son.	The Holy Spirit brings us to Christ, sanctifies us and prepares us corporately to be the Bride of Christ who is the only Son of the Father.
Rebekah, bride for the son.	The Church, bride for the Son.
The servant would have been heir, had there not been a son (highly regarded and ranked).	The Holy Spirit is co-equal with the Father.
The servant brings gifts to the bride both as indications of betrothal and earnest of the master’s goodwill	The Holy Spirit is the earnest/guarantee given to us now of the future God has for us.
The servant is unnamed.	Jesus said that the Holy Spirit will not speak of himself. ²
Elsewhere we find the name of Abraham’s steward is Eliezer ³ which means “Comforter.”	Jesus said, “When the Comforter comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.” ⁴

Do you see the parallel between this story and the work of the Spirit finding the bride of Christ for the Son of God?

Jesus is longing and waiting for time when he returns to take his bride home. The Holy Spirit is sent to woo us to become the bride of Christ and will present us to Jesus “without spot or wrinkle.” As we listen to the Holy Spirit’s guidance and learn to trust him and obey him, we are being changed and made ready for a glorious future with Jesus.

Take Jesus’ Yoke

The context for the Gospel reading is that John the Baptist had sent messengers to Jesus from his prison cell seeking confirmation that Jesus was the Messiah they were expecting. Jesus sent back a message that he was doing the things Isaiah had prophesied about the Messiah. He then commented to the crowd about John and the fickleness of the people who disapprove of John because he was austere and criticise Jesus because he reached out to sinners. But Jesus is secure in his identity regardless of the criticism of the people. He went on to make this wonderful statement about who he is:

² John 16:13

³ Gen 15:2

⁴ John 15:26

“All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

These are not the words of a mere man. There is a unique relationship between God the Father and Jesus. There was knowledge of each by the other in a way that no one else had. Furthermore, all things are committed to the Son, Jesus, by the Father – Jesus is the exclusive agent of the Father. That is a huge claim. This is a claim to divinity. Here too, there is the equivalent of John 14:6, “no one comes to the Father but by me,” when Jesus said, “... no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

If you want to know the Father, Jesus has to reveal him to you. Isn't that your experience? It is mine. When I came to Jesus, I gained access to the Father. When I came to Jesus, and only then, I entered into relationship with the Father. It is Jesus who reveals the Father to us.

When speaking about the Genesis passage, I said the Holy Spirit draws us to Christ. Like Abraham's servant he searches for us and draws us to come to Jesus. And here we have Jesus' words of invitation. It might help you to hear them from another translation:

²⁸ If you are tired from carrying heavy burdens, come to me and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take the yoke I give you. Put it on your shoulders and learn from me. I am gentle and humble, and you will find rest.

³⁰ This yoke is easy to bear, and this burden is light. [Contemporary English Version]

We can be glad to hear Jesus' words, "Come to me ..." Here is an invitation to find rest, to learn his ways and embrace a new life. He is the one who says, "Come to me all you who are heavy laden and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon you and you will find rest for your souls."

What does Jesus mean by his yoke? The yoke was a term for a rabbi's teaching. We immediately think of the yoke on animals which are ploughing. But there is also a shoulder yoke. People use these to carry loads on their shoulders. On a webpage which sells this sort of yoke, the manufacturer wrote:

'...With the yoke I could carry two 40lb (18kg) buckets of water without any discomfort, whereas I would previously have to stop *en route* to the trees several times because my fingers would hurt carrying one bucket.'

The demands of Jesus' teaching are light compared to the rigours the Rabbis laid on their disciples. How many fathers have shared a load with a young son, by carrying the beam nearer the centre so they take more load, while the boy excitedly helps Daddy? In the same way, we may not be aware of it, but he arranges matters so he carries the greater load.

Jesus said that by coming to him, by following his teachings we will find rest for our souls. How many of us long for rest? I don't mean an afternoon nap; but relief from deep weariness and stress. Jesus knows that and offers his way. He knows about the need for rest.

Do you long for rest for your soul? That is what Jesus offers. This last week, I have had an uptick in salvation prayers. Last Sunday, someone came forward for prayer after a service and came to Jesus for salvation. That night at Messy Church, as we reviewed the miracles of Jesus, we had the opportunity to pray out loud asking him to be our friend, our saviour, our Lord. I could hear a number of voices joining me in that prayer. Then during the week, someone else decided to ask Jesus to be his Lord and Saviour so that as he put it, he could be a follower not just a fan.

We have in the gospel reading today, the assurance that Jesus is divine and that he is only one who can reveal the Father to us. We have the invitation to come to him and take up his yoke – adopt his teaching, his ways and there find rest for our souls.

You might want to do that today.

Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. I believe that You died for my sins. I want to turn from my sins. I now invite You to come into my heart and life. I want to trust You as Saviour and follow You as Lord, in the fellowship of Your Church. Amen.

If you prayed that prayer and it was significant for you, I want you to come and talk to me after the service. I will have a small booklet to help you process what you have just done.

“Come to me and rest:” In Mark’s gospel recording the return of the disciples from their ministry tour, Jesus said: “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”⁵ It is not just rest, it is going aside with Jesus and learning of him, being schooled by him. Whether you have just received Jesus or known him all your life, perhaps you need to take some time like that. Make time to go aside with him, without tasks to do, without oughts and shoulds and rest with him.

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⁵ Mark 6:31