

“Then Jesus answered and said to them... ‘You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life;’”

“And These Are They Which Testify of Me”

Sermons on Genesis
Chapters 23,24
A Bride for the Son

With Study Questions

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Preface: A Different Method

Grant for me, in these few chapters before us, the freedom to depart from the threefold method of study applied thus far. Instead of observing points of difficulty, emphasis and primary importance, I will seek, with some fear, a different method.

A “Type” Versus an “Illustration”

Our theme verse has been from John 5:39 where our Savior teaches, **“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.”** Jesus taught that the Old Testament was about Him. Therefore, my fear is not in seeking His gospel on the pages of Genesis, where it is easily found. But in order to proceed with caution, before I proceed to give any exposition on chapters twenty-three and twenty-four, a necessary distinction must be made—a distinction between a “type” and an “illustration.”

I think it may be safely said that all types are illustrations, but not all illustrations are types. A type is not guess-work. A type is a clearly given foreshadowing of something to come. For example, Adam, as a representative of the human race, was a type of Christ, who also represented the human race. This is explicitly stated in Romans 5:14. Similar examples are found with the serpent in the wilderness and Christ, the rock and Christ, manna and Christ’s body, etc. It requires no guess-work and no liberty is taken.

An illustration can be much looser. In an illustration the New Testament writers have not explicitly stated that the Old Testament example is a foreshadow or type. So with an illustration we must be much more careful. Our illustrations should not drive our theology whatsoever. If we use an Old Testament story as an illustration, our theology must already be firmly in place and we should not force comparisons.

When we study a type, however, we can more safely extract our theology. We know with great certainty, for example, that even though we weren’t in the garden of Eden with Adam, the sin of Adam, and subsequent condemnation have been deposited upon us as a race. We, following the authority of the type, can also surmise that, even though we were not on the cross or in the tomb with Christ, His victory and righteousness are deposited or imputed to us.

I labor this point because it is my desire, over the next couple of chapters, to study these chapters by way of illustration. Realizing that illustrations, and even types, fall short of the reality they are designed to portray, I will seek to be careful to avoid forcing comparisons. Good reformed theologians have tread

here prior to myself. This alleviates, but does not altogether remove, my fear. But since it is always good to approach the text with fear, I am satisfied.

Illustrating the Bride

What do I intend to illustrate and what will be the illustration? In short, what I intend to illustrate is the work of God, His Spirit, and His message in procuring a bride for His Son. The illustration will be, primarily, Abraham sending his servant to procure a bride for his son.

Preview

In chapters twenty-three and twenty-four we see: the death of Sarah followed by a lengthy account of Abraham purchasing her burial place. After the burial of Sarah, Abraham, who is well-advanced in age seeks a wife for his son. Abraham is living in Canaan and makes it quite clear that he does not want his son, Isaac, to marry a Canaanite. He sends his servant, who many believe to be Eliezer, on a long journey to Abraham's own country—his family—to find a wife for Isaac. The servant loads up ten camels and many of his master's goods and proceeds on this journey with a promise that God's angel will be with him.

Not knowing who the wife for Isaac will be, he lays down some conditions in hopes of a positive response from God, regarding the identity of the woman, and God answers his prayer. Rebekah, a grand-daughter of Abraham's brother, is the woman. After some discussion with the family of Rebekah, she and her nurse and maids, return with the servant to Isaac. Chapter twenty-four ends with a record of Isaac marrying Rebekah, a proclamation of Isaac's love for Rebekah and her bringing comfort into his life.

I. The Burial of Sarah

Chapter twenty-three opens with the death of Sarah at the age of one hundred and twenty-seven years. There has been much speculation regarding the lengthy bartering between Abraham and the Hittites regarding the cave of Machpelah, which became the final resting place, not only for Sarah, but also for Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, Leah, and Jacob.

Negotiating With Hittites

We learn here that Abraham didn't have a problem giving money to a pagan or ungodly people in exchange for a piece of property. He didn't sanction or boycott the sons of Heth because of their idolatry. This is not to say that a sanction or boycott isn't sometimes appropriate. But I do remember, years ago, some people up in arms when we almost bought a building from the Mormon church. This hardly seemed to be a concern for Abraham who, at one time,

granted even the king of Sodom many possessions he could have justifiably kept for himself.

Buried in the Promised Land

We will learn in chapter twenty-four that Abraham's family is far off. So why does he go to such great lengths to purchase a burial place in Canaan? Perhaps (and I say perhaps because the text does not so clearly indicate) it was because Canaan was the land God had promised his descendants. Perhaps it was because Abraham knew that, even though he was merely a sojourner in that land presently, eventually that land would be the dwelling of his God and his people. Abraham wasn't willing to consign that which was precious to him to a foreign land. That which was most precious to him, including his own final resting place, was to be in the promised land. To the best of his ability he made arrangements for himself and his progeny to dwell in the promised land forever. Jesus said,

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰“but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal (Matthew 6:19,20).

To Abraham, and to us, Canaan was a foreshadow of heaven itself. To the best of our ability we are to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven. As we shall soon see, it was of the utmost importance to Abraham that his family function within the parameters of God's spoken, and eventually to be prescribed, will.

Abraham's efforts at making sure his family find their final resting place in the promise land of God serves well to illustrate how we should make every effort to submit ourselves, and those under our care, to the guardianship of the captain of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10).

II. A Bride For Isaac

Electing a Bride

Chapter twenty-four begins with Abraham putting his servant under oath to find a wife for Isaac from among Abraham's own people. We had earlier seen Isaac as a foreshadow of Christ and Abraham typifying the Father who was to sacrifice His only begotten Son. Here we read of Abraham, the father, electing a bride for his son. Very similar this is to the parable of the wedding feast.

The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son (Matthew 22:2).

The Apostle Paul teaches that we are the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5). And even further we see the arrangement between the Father in the Son through the words of Jesus in His high priestly prayer.

I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word (John 17:6).

Although it appears random to us, the bride of Christ is an elect group. The servant was sent to a specific people. Long before a believer comes to faith, in the hidden chambers of eternity, he is the elect of God. Long before Rebekah knew she would be the wife of Isaac, Abraham had made his plan. Long before you and I would call upon the name of the Lord, God had His divine plan.

...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, ⁵having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will (Ephesians 1:4,5).

How glorious it would be for Rebekah to find out that her inclusion in the great plan of redemption was far more than her own mere whim, or even emotional or intellectual gravitation toward something she found appealing. How wondrous would it be for her to discover the plan that brought her to her beloved. How wondrous it is for the believer to realize that his inclusion in God's glorious eternity is a result of something divine and from eternity past.

A Sufficient Message

In verse five the servant has a concern:

Perhaps the woman will not be willing to follow me to this land. Must I take your son back to the land from which you came?

The woman may not be willing. He suggests bringing Isaac in the flesh. Perhaps that will be convincing. One thinks of the story of Lazarus and the rich man. The rich man, now in the torment of Hades, pleads for his brothers.

“Then he said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him (Lazarus) to my father’s house, ²⁸‘for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of

torment.’²⁹ Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’³⁰ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’³¹ But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead’“(Luke 16:27-31—parenthesis mine).

Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10:17). If one rejects the word of God, they will not be persuaded, though one rise from the dead. People often think they can effect a conversion if they give enough evidence. But here we learn that even a miracle is of no effect if one rejects God’s word. Abraham rejects the idea of sending Isaac for the sake of persuasion. Instead he relies upon the promise and power of God (verse 7).

In verse eight Abraham makes a notable comment.

And if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be released from this oath; only do not take my son back there.

Jesus, sending His followers after His own bride calls for an even stronger response.

And whoever will not receive you nor hear you, when you depart from there, shake off the dust under your feet as a testimony against them. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city (Mark 6:11).

Let’s not misunderstand. The gospel is to be presented in a loving and winsome fashion (Romans 9:3; 10:1). But the message contained in the gospel is never to be compromised or embellished and the integrity of the gospel is never to be handled in such a way that it would be trampled under the feet of men. Before the person is allowed to do that, the conversation ends—for the sake of the gospel and for the sake of the person.

A Steward of God’s Grace

In verse ten we read of the servant’s departure. He is leaving Canaan (the type of heaven) and representing Abraham (an illustration of the father) and proceeding to bring back a bride who is presently residing as an alien. His mission is to bring her back to her proper dwelling. This messenger is an ambassador for Abraham. As Paul writes pertaining to Christians, **“Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:20).**

The servant is handling all the master's goods (verse 10) in his representation. How precious the calling for Christians who are called to be **"...good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10)**. We ought to be careful not to handle the Christian faith fast and loose.

Recently a man on Christian radio was arguing against the notion of full-time clergy. He argued that if people would study a half hour a night they would be sufficient to minister. There are too many pastors who go too deep and then come up for air for forty-five minutes on Sunday to minister to the congregation. It is my opinion that the problem is quite the opposite. Would we hire a doctor or lawyer who studied a half-hour a day? How much more those who are called to labor in the word and doctrine (1 Timothy 5:17)?

Delivering the Message

In verse thirteen the servant positions himself by a well, knowing that this is where the women come to draw water. His strategy is basic. There is nothing all that complicated about it. He goes somewhere he can interact with people in a very casual way. In verse fourteen he prays that God will give his efforts success. His opening line will be to simply ask for a drink of water. He will not force the issue. She will not merely offer him a drink but offer to give his camels a drink as well (this is no small piece of work). As the Spirit of God prepared Cornelius to receive the message from Peter, so can the messenger perceive a willingness on behalf of those who will receive the message.

It has been my nature in the past to seek to convert the most rebellious and ignore the most compliant. In doing so I may be ignoring the Rebekah's and spending too much time preaching to the king of Sodom.

A Messenger of Blessing

After the camels are finished drinking the servant gives her a golden nose ring and two bracelets. The servant now blesses the one who is to receive the message. Those who deliver the message of Christ are to be a blessing to those who receive the message of Christ. And although there is no guarantee that Rebekah will not fall under the proverbial category **"As a ring of gold in a swine's snout, So is a lovely woman who lacks discretion" (Proverbs 11:22)**. A blessing is conferred upon her nonetheless.

A Blessing to Her Family

The young woman is now informed as to who the servant's master is (verse 27). In excitement she runs home to tell her mother. When her family sees the beauty of the ornaments given to her and hears of the authority of the one who gave them they deem their entire household to be blessed (verses 29-32). Although this is not always the response of a household who has a

member come to faith, the convert should seek to be a blessing and a house with wisdom should recognize the blessing.

Untold Inheritance

In verse thirty-five the servant proclaims the riches of his master and then explains that it will be Rebekah who will be heir to all those riches. As Paul writes of Christians, **“In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will” (Ephesians 1:11).**

Laban and Bethuel (her father and brother) immediately acquiesce before the word of God.

Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, “The thing comes from the LORD; we cannot speak to you either bad or good.

⁵¹ “Here is Rebekah before you; take her and go, and let her be your master’s son’s wife, as the LORD has spoken (Genesis 24:50).

The most intimate and protective custody on earth amounts to naught when compared to the glorious custody of God. As Jesus said,

And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life (Matthew 19:29).

No Delay

In verse fifty-two we learned that Abraham’s servant rejoiced greatly over the positive response he had received. How this echoes the Apostles joy when he hears of the faith of those to whom he had ministered. Rebekah’s brother and mother wanted Rebekah to stay ten days (verse 55) but the servant was anxious to go to his master. They left it up to Rebekah who agreed to go straight away. Remember the words of Jesus,

Then He said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” ²⁰They immediately left their nets and followed Him (Matthew 4:19,20).

To smell is different than to taste and to taste is different than to eat. In verse twenty-two she had received the bracelets and nose ring. In verse fifty-three she jewelry of silver and gold, and clothing. The choice was given to her as to whether she would like to delay in communion with the man who was the source of all this beauty. “I will go,” was her only response.

Similar to what we see in the new covenant, the blessing to the one results in the blessing to her household and her progeny. Verse sixty is the blessing for Rebekah.

**Our sister, *may you become*
The mother of thousands of ten thousands;
And may your descendants possess
The gates of those who hate them.**

Truly the gospel is a victorious message.

Meeting Isaac

The chapter ends with these words.

Then Rebekah and her maids arose, and they rode on the camels and followed the man. So the servant took Rebekah and departed. ⁶² Now Isaac came from the way of Beer Lahai Roi, for he dwelt in the South. ⁶³ And Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening; and he lifted his eyes and looked, and there, the camels were coming. ⁶⁴ Then Rebekah lifted her eyes, and when she saw Isaac she dismounted from her camel; ⁶⁵ for she had said to the servant, “Who *is* this man walking in the field to meet us?” The servant said, “It *is* my master.” So she took a veil and covered herself. ⁶⁶ And 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. So Isaac was comforted after his mother’s *death*” (Genesis 24:61-67).

The gifts of Christ are designed to lead to Christ. Such was the case with Rebekah and Isaac. Such ought to be the case with the gifts God has given His servants in the church. We have been endowed with His gifts and are to proclaim the glory of His message. But let us push it one step further, for alas, unveiled oneness with Christ is not known this side of glory. One day we shall see Him in His fullness. We shall know the full expression of His love. For all that impedes the full knowledge of Christ—the depravity of our own souls—the noetic effects of the fall of man—will be fully removed, and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

But what about that last sentence. Jesus has no mother and He needs not our comfort. But there was a death and there was a joy and there was a reason for that joy.

Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).

Jesus takes great joy in His bride. Greater love has no man than this, to lay down his life for his bride. Christ’s love for His bride is beyond measure.

Questions for Study

1. Explain the difference between a “type” and an “illustration” (page 2).
2. Why do you suppose Abraham went to such great lengths to purchase that particular burial place for Sarah (pages 3,4)?
3. How was Abraham’s election of a bride for his son similar to God’s election (pages 4,5)?
4. We’re not sure why Abraham didn’t want Isaac to go with the servant but when compared to the story of Lazarus and the rich man what do we learn about God’s message (pages 5,6)?
5. What does it mean to be a steward of God’s grace (pages 6,7)?
6. Discuss some of the practical applications in delivering the message (page 7).
7. A messenger of God’s word should be a source of what (page 7)?
8. Discuss the value of knowing of the inheritance (page 8).
9. Why do you suppose Rebekah decided not to delay her departure (page 8)?
10. What are the gifts of God designed for (page 9)?
11. Discuss the joy of Christ (page 10).