

# Sermon

Sunday, November 4, 2018

Charleston, SC

8:00 am & 10:30 am Sermon Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67 Matthew 11:28-30

*God is a Promise Keeper*

The Rev. Al Zadig, Jr.

Let me begin this morning with a difficult question: Have you ever been betrayed? Whether you saw it coming or it hit you like a freight train, have you ever had your legs taken out from underneath you? Julius Caesar knew betrayal. Caesar over the course of his life loved his faithful assistant Brutus like a son and trusted confidant. Caesar, when the onslaught of assassination attempts hit, resisted with everything he had. But when on March 15, in the year 44, he saw Brutus, dagger drawn working with his assassins, Caesar lost all energy for the fight. He pulls the top part of his robe over his face and utters those famous words, "You too Brutus?"

Have you ever been betrayed? Betrayal has been with us since Adam and Eve did the same to God Himself. There might be someone here today who feels betrayed, that the promises they've been counting on have just not come through. I think of those desiring companionship in marriage. Those desiring children for whom the lack of feels like broken promises and painful betrayal, even at the hands of God.

If you're there this morning, I'm here to tell you four words: God Keeps His Promises. In fact, in Genesis 24, we have four characters who each discover this profound truth: Abraham, Isaac, Eliezer the servant, and Rebekah. It's the story of how 40 year old Isaac, finally experiences the love he never thought he would find, both in Rebekah and in the Lord's promises.

Let's begin with Abraham. Abraham and Sarah were both nearly 100 when their miracle child Isaac was born. Talk about promise fulfilled! By the time we hit Genesis 24, Sarah had passed away and Abraham was about to. On his deathbed, Abraham says to his chief servant Eliezer, "Please, one thing I ask. Make sure my son Isaac doesn't marry a Canaanite, but a wife from our own people." If you are a southern mother here today, you may be praying a similar prayer for your child. *Dear God in heaven, please don't let my daughter marry a Yankee, dear God anything but!* Now, I'm pretty sure my southern mother-in-law prayed that prayer, but it didn't quite work! But for Abraham, his prayer was less about geography. He just wanted his son to marry a woman who followed the one true God, where the Covenant of God would be carried out to the next generations. Abraham knows how critical it is to keep the faith central in marriage and therefore wants his son equally yoked in the one true God. As an aside, this is one of the prayers I pray every day for my children, "Lord Jesus may my 2 sons and my daughter each marry a Christian believer." I urge Grandparents, Godparents, and Parents to do the same!

Abraham was counting on the promises of God to have His son equally yoked. That was Abraham, but let's look at his son Isaac. Isaac was Single for 40 years and he's ready for marriage. He's not mentioned in our story until verse 62, and what's he doing?

He's praying. We can only assume he's praying, "Lord, please deliver me a bride." Which tells us my friends something that many of you live by, but others less so, and it's this: You can pray for yourself! You really can, like Isaac, cry out to God for the desires of your heart. Perhaps someone told you along the way that it's selfish to pray for your own needs, but nothing could be further from the truth. As Isaac prayed for a bride, you too need to be praying for the promises of God to be fulfilled. Isaac, from his knees, was counting on the promises of God that he will find companionship in marriage.

Then there's the get 'er done guy. This would be Abraham's Chief Servant Eliezer, who is charged by Abraham to be a matchmaker and find that right Godly woman woman for Isaac. Everyone needs an Eliezer in their life. Eliezer would no more consider betrayal than fly to the moon. Eliezer is sacrificial, humble, prayerful, and dedicated. But most of all, incredibly, expectant. Earlier in Chapter 24 in fact, Eliezer prays, "Lord show me success in this mission and through it show kindness to Abraham." Eliezer prays with every confidence that God is going to act.

Quick time out, especially to the young here today. When you pray, do you pray expectantly knowing God hears you, loves you, and wants the best for you? Listen to the expectancy in Eliezer's prayer: "Dear God, I'm here where the ladies gather. Let me not only meet

someone here today, but, as a sign, may her first words be something like: "You drink, and I will draw waters for your camels." You and I can really pray that way, with expectancy! Put a bookmark here, we will get back to it, but know this. Eliezer was counting on the promises of God to accomplish his mission for Abraham!

Then there's Rebekah. Her name means captivating. Rebekah had integrity, character, and servanthood. Yet she had a choice to make. Does she trust this strange man Eliezer? Rebekah had to count on the promises of God that she really could trust Eliezer.

So, how did trusting God work out for our four characters? Abraham: Promise Kept! His son would be a man of the Covenant! How? It all happened when Eliezer expectantly prays this prayer, "Dear God, I'm here where the ladies gather. Let me not only meet someone here today, but as a sign, may her first words be: "You drink, and I will draw waters for your camels." Before he finishes speaking, a woman named Rebekah comes and says, "Drink, I will give your camels drink also!" It's a promise keeping miracle! But before Eliezer can celebrate, he has to ask this woman: Whose daughter are you? Are you a woman of the covenant? Yes, she responds, I am the daughter of Bethuel. Eliezer's heart explodes! YES! She is a woman of the covenant! He responds in jubilation, not with Champagne, but with worship, crying out, Praise God who keeps his promises! He is kind. He is faithful! Promise kept: Mission Accomplished!

Quick time out. I know one of the challenges of us asking God to fulfill His promises is the fear that if God does, we won't like it! Like, "He will force me to marry someone I just won't like." Or, "I will have to move somewhere I don't want to move!" That's not the case. When Eliezer prays that prayer, and Rebekah literally responds, "Drink, I will give your camels drink also!" She then

follows Eliezer to meet Isaac, which leads to one of the most romantic moments in Scripture. Rebekah and Isaac look up, see each other, and nothing would ever be the same again.

I'll never forget my first date with Elizabeth, my heart and soul were on fire in a way I thought I was going to explode! In fact, if Rebekah was a poet, she would have written something like what Poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote adoringly for her husband Robert. *How do I love thee? Let me count the ways. I love thee to the depth and breadth and height my soul can reach I love thee to the level of every day's most quiet need by sun and candle-light. I love thee freely as men strive for right. I love thee purely as they turn from praise. I love thee with the passion put to use In my old griefs and with my childhood's faith. I love thee with a love I seemed to lose with my lost saints. I love thee with the breath, smiles, tears, of all my life; and, if God choose I shall but love thee better after death.*

The promises of God are better than we could ever hope or imagine! Consider Isaac. Promise kept. In an age where men married often a dozen times or more, Isaac loved only Rebekah, and for a lifetime! So, on behalf of Abraham, Eliezer, Rebekah, and Isaac, God keeps His promises! Yet, you might be here this morning and your prayers aren't being answered, or you're hearing no. Hear the words of Jesus in Matthew 11, "Come unto me, all you who are weary and burdened, I will give you rest, learn from me. What do we need to learn? I believe it's this. God will sometimes withhold his promises to work on our insides. God is more passionate about forming Himself inside your heart, than He is just being a prayer provider. He wants our hearts right first. Therefore, if we have unanswered promises and prayer in our life, there are three questions we need to ask. three questions to audit our lives. 1. Lord, is this your will for my life? Do I understand your promises accurately?

2. Is there any unconfessed sin in my life I need to give you Lord? Something I need to repent of? 3. Is there someone I need to forgive or confess to? Is this your will? Any unconfessed sin blocking it? Someone I need to forgive? Again, God is more passionate about forming in us a healthy heart and soul than just being a prayer provider. And this is where All Saint's Day comes in. Remember a saint is not necessarily a Christian superhero, a saint is a forgiven sinner. From an earthly point of view, Abraham needed Eliezer and Rebekah, Isaac needed Eliezer and Abraham, and Rebekah needed Eliezer and Isaac. We need each other to help us see the promises of God that we can't see on our own. All Saints Day reminds us it's both impossible to be a Christian without walking with other believers, and it's hard to spot the promises of God without each other. In fact, isolation without the saints, leads to a life of felt betrayal. We need the saints to remind us that God is a promise keeper! We need to hear from another, "I believe God is asking you to look at this part of your life before he answers your prayer." Someone like Eliezer who will pray "expectantly" for you!

I remember meeting with such a saint in my life during a time when I needed to make a big decision. It was The Rev. Barry Black, the Chaplain to the US Senate in Washington who's preached here before. In his Moses like voice, he says, "Al, your answer is this. Which choice will lead you to a greater dependence on the promises of God?" God used Chaplain Black to keep His promise to me! Finally, this morning, one more angle on this love story. In a deeper way, Rebekah represents us, even the church, and Eliezer the humble servant represents Jesus Christ. The question is, will we trust the promises of Jesus, and go where He leads, as Rebekah trusted Eliezer, knowing that as a promise keeper, He truly had the best for her.