

A WOMAN LIKE REBEKAH

Genesis 24:10-28 (NASB)

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The Bible is filled with great women and mothers. In this study of the life of Rebekah we will see great truths which can encourage the heart of any woman. Men are invited to listen along because most of these truths apply to them as well.

The background to the story of Rebekah's life begins with Abraham the patriarch. God called Abram out of Ur of the Chaldeans--modern day Iraq--and said: "Leave your country and go to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you." In one of the greatest acts of faith in all history, Abram did just that. He traveled to what would later be called Israel and began to discover the blessings of God in that place. He and Sarai went through a great test of faith there. God promised that a great nation would flow from them, but Sarai, whose name was changed to Sarah, was barren. How would God provide an heir? How would the promise be fulfilled? After a false start where they tried to produce an heir through Hagar, Sarah's maidservant, God miraculously opened the womb of this old woman and the promised heir was born. They called his name Isaac.

Sarah died, Abraham grew old, and there was one more problem to solve: Where to find a wife for Isaac? Abraham knew that he was not to take a wife from the abominable pagans living in the land, so he sent his servant back to his family in Ur. As we shall see, God's sovereign hand was arranging the fulfillment of his covenant with Abraham. A great nation would indeed rise from his family, and through them the promised Messiah of Israel would be born.

We pick up the story in the Bible with Abraham's servant planning how he will choose a good woman from the possible candidates: **"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. 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. He said, 'O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today, and show lovingkindness to my master Abraham. Behold, I am standing by the spring, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water; 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'"** (Genesis 24:10-14). Note carefully that this cagey servant is combining faith and wisdom. He prays for God's guidance, and then he also constructs a clever test which very few women would pass. I'll explain why in a moment.

A SERVANT'S HEART

The story continues: **"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. 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. Then the servant ran to meet her, and**

said, **‘Please let me drink a little water from your jar.’ She said, ‘Drink, my lord’; and she quickly lowered her jar to her hand, and gave him a drink**” (Genesis 24:15-18).

I don’t know if the servant closed his eyes when he prayed for God’s guidance, but before he was done he looked and saw a beautiful, strong young woman. Like any man on the hunt he ran right over to her and delivered the first part of his test. This first part was designed to open communications and reveal whether she was a courteous person with a basic willingness to serve. After all, Rebekah had drawn five gallons of water with her own strength, and the servant could have drawn his own. But to Rebekah’s credit, she instinctively granted the stranger’s wish and gave him some of her own water.

Deep in Rebekah’s soul was a willingness to be a servant of others. There was not much sacrifice involved in this first act of service, but it revealed her first reaction. I know that when I meet people I draw a lot on a first impression of their willingness to treat me with courtesy. It says a lot about them to me if they will go beyond courtesy and give me a little help in some way.

But the real test for Rebekah went much further. Remember that the servant prayed for the woman who would not only extend courtesy to a complete stranger but who would voluntarily perform sacrificial service, as we read earlier: **“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”**” (Genesis 24:14).

And see what happens next: **“Now when she had finished giving him a drink, she said, ‘I will draw also for your camels until they have finished drinking.’ So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough, and ran back to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels. Meanwhile, the man was gazing at her in silence, to know whether the LORD had made his journey successful or not”** (Genesis 24:19-21). Rebekah voluntarily offered service beyond the call of duty, and the servant just sat back and watched with amazement.

Why do I call watering the camels sacrificial service? John Maxwell, in a little book called *Running with the Giants*, forces us to consider the arithmetic. He writes: “[Abraham’s servant] had ten camels, each of which could drink twenty gallons of water... ..10 camels at 20 gallons each = 200 gallons, 200 gallons drawn with a 5-gallon jar = 40 trips, 40 trips (at a conservative) 3 minutes each = 2 hours. What seemed like a simple offer of kindness would have taken Rebekah two hours to fulfill!” (p. 53-54). This puts Rebekah’s service in a whole new light, and what a wonderful picture it must have painted in the servant’s eyes: a beautiful, strong, courteous woman who was willing to serve sacrificially of her own free will! He probably had to stifle himself from saying: “Will you marry me?”

She could not have known that this character trait was a reflection of the Messiah of Israel to come, Jesus of Nazareth, who said: **“...Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many”** (Matthew 20:26-28). Jesus’ words are crucial to understanding sacrificial service from God’s perspective. When done voluntarily as an act of faith it is not slavish subjugation but a fine act of nobility and a reflection of God himself. That’s why John Maxwell includes Rebekah in a book entitled *Running with the Giants*. Jesus tells us: “Don’t look for the giants on thrones, in the glare of the camera lights, or in the board rooms of

the corporate world.” They may be there, but that’s not how they are identified. The giants are the people who are most like Christ, who wrap a towel around their waists and wash others’ feet.

The world needs great mothers who will act in sacrificial ways for their families and communities. This is a trait which has been massively undermined in our self-oriented society. Women are told that mothering doesn’t really matter very much, that it is too much trouble, and that it is beneath a truly self-respecting woman. This is a tremendous hindrance to any woman who seeks to fulfill her God-given role. There is such a long list of sacrificial duties related to motherhood, and it hurts to have a recording playing in your head all the time; “This is your fault. If you had only rejected this like we said you would be free of dishes, diapers, rebellious teenagers, and cleaning house.” Rebekah defines greatness in the sight of God by serving with no complaint. Giving generously was a part of her adult decision matrix.

Servanthood goes far beyond the family. It is a propensity to seek the good of others. The world also needs great women who will serve other women sacrificially by looking out for them in many ways. Out-of-wedlock pregnancies, for example, are a huge problem in the world today. We need women to be involved in younger women’s lives and speak up to say: “You are contemplating a more difficult life-change than you could ever imagine. It would be better to live in such a way that single parenthood can never happen. It’s not that hard! It’s good for you and it pleases God.”

There is a sacrificial service to the children of single mothers as well. The world needs great women who will selflessly step in and give both help and guidance in the name of the Lord. We need women who watch out for the people in their neighborhoods, both children and adults alike. We need women who are involved in our schools, and community service organizations. We need women with servant’s hearts in the church who will represent the heart of Jesus Christ in all kinds of ministries, both personal and organized. These are just examples of ways in which servant-hearted women can change the world.

THE BLESSING OF THE LORD

So what is the payoff of all this service? The first reward is internal. You can have the knowledge that you are doing something noble. The second payoff is also internal--you are pleasing the heart of your heavenly Father who has served you sacrificially by giving his only Son. But Rebekah discovered that there is also a set of external rewards for service: **“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...”** (Genesis 24:22). There was no way for Rebekah to know this, but Abraham was a wealthy man, and his son Isaac was his heir. Her willing heart was leading her into a monumental life change which would give her wealth, servants, high standing in society, a believing family, and a host of other benefits.

It is hard to figure out how God did this, but he correlated Rebekah’s servant heart with the fulfillment of his great plan for the nation Israel and the salvation of the world. Abraham’s servant knew without a doubt that God was revealing his unfolding plan through his contact with this woman: **“[He] said, ‘Whose daughter are you? Please tell me, is there room for us to lodge in your father's house?’ She said to him, ‘I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor.’ Again she said to him, ‘We have plenty of both straw and feed, and room to lodge in.’**

Then the man bowed low and worshiped the LORD. 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.’ Then the girl ran and told her mother's household about these things” (Genesis 24:23-28).

This is pretty much how the blessing of God works. We don't know how he will bless us as we obey him and become transformed into the character of Christ, but we discover the specific blessings as we go. So it is for godly womanhood, whether you become a mother, work outside the home, or both. Though it is a pathway that looks difficult, a servant's heart is a pathway to blessing.

But it is a pathway that must be walked by faith. As you set aside your own needs and desires in order to do good for others, you must believe that God will grant you a greater reward than if you had spent all your energies on yourself. Servanthood is, at its core, an act of trusting and seeking God with your life, as the writer to the Hebrews wrote: **"And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him"** (Hebrews 11:6).

THE HELP OF GOD

Servanthood also leads to many moments when we wonder if it is all worth it. Much service is, by definition, behind the scenes. Who sees our effort, our faithfulness, and the trials we have as a result of not running away? There are several powerful truths subtly revealed in Rebekah's story which answer these questions. When Abraham's servant told the whole story to Rebekah's brother Laban, he pulled back the curtain of the spiritual realm and related a detail about his instructions from Abraham: **“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...’”** (Genesis 24:40). Abraham knew in advance that this journey would be successful! It was never in doubt, and the only way that Abraham could have known was if God told him.

That tells me two encouraging things about having a servant's heart. The first is that God knows all about you! There is never a moment of service which God does not see even if no one else does. There is never a sorrow in service, and there are many, in which God does not share. When you feel alone in some labor of love, God is with you! He sees your every joy and your every pain. He knows your doubts and fears, even those no one else knows.

That's encouraging by itself, but there's more. Abraham revealed that there was an angel assigned to bring about success in this quest for a good wife for Isaac. What exactly did the angel do? Did he whisper in Rebekah's ear: “Don't fear this stranger?” We have no idea how the angels do their work, but we have the promise of God that there are angels assigned to help all who trust in Christ for salvation: **“Are [angels] not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?”** (Hebrews 1:14). As you serve God and people, God's angels serve you! We use the phrase “guardian angels,” but a better term would be “servant angels”--serving you!

FRUIT OF THE INDWELLING SPIRIT

If you are like me, you may look inside your own heart and say: “I don't know how much of a

servant's heart I have in there!" Don't worry! God has promised to implant this trait of Christ within every believer, as Peter wrote in his second letter: **"...His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature..."** (2 Peter 1:3-4). As we believe in Christ and receive the Holy Spirit, God implants the very nature of Christ, who was and is a servant. Servanthood comes with the Christ life if we will obey the new desires within us.

So do not fear if you cannot summon a servant's heart in your own strength. Rather, seek the filling of the Holy Spirit. This has been one of the great themes of The Christian and Missionary Alliance. Not only does the Holy Spirit grant us spiritual gifts and fruit, he grants us by divine power to have the servant heart of Jesus beating within our breasts. All of the charismatic gifts are designed for the good of others and are to be employed in acts of supernatural service. More often our service consists of non-spectacular acts which are nevertheless radiant with the nature of Christ, and which please the heart of our Heavenly Father.

What a wonderful example Rebekah gives us! She was human also, as she revealed near the end of Isaac's life when she conspired with Jacob to steal Esau's blessing. She let her emotions take control of her servant heart. So we are not holding up an impossible ideal at which we will all fail. Rebekah was not a spiritual superstar who was intrinsically better than any of us. She was a normal woman who did great things by trusting God. And it is all the more to the glory of God that the wonder of Christ's nature should shine out from frail people like Rebekah—like us.

Give God an open door to your heart! If you have never received Christ as your Lord and Savior you cannot share in his servant heart. But even if you have, you must still open yourself to this great work of God and move out on it. Jesus said to his disciples: "Receive the Holy Spirit!" Every person who is willing to do that becomes an agent of God's kingdom on earth, changing the world one act of service at a time.