

An Old Man's Greatest Joy – *Genesis 24:1-9*

Introduction – John, in his last years, wrote, “*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth*” (3 John 4). John is writing particularly about his spiritual children, but of course our covenant children are the first crop of our spiritual children. We long to see our children succeed in life, education, vocation, health, and get established in this life. But, if we are thinking as Christians, the first and most important longing for parents is that our children are walking in truth. The same goes for what pastors and church leaders long to see in the community of the church they are shepherding. Seeing generational faithfulness is an old man's greatest joy. And so, we come to the *last recorded words* of an old man, Abraham.

Overview of the Text – Abraham was old, and Abraham was blessed in all things (v1). One thing only he lacked, to see his son married in the promises of that covenant God had given him. He calls on the elder of his household, possibly Eliezer (Gen 15:2-3) to a special mission. If it was Eliezer, then this proves this servant's incredible loyalty and submission to Abraham and Abraham's God, for he would have been the heir if Isaac had not been born. This may be part of the reason for such an oath, for by placing his hand under Abraham's thigh (his loins, his source of procreation), he was swearing not only to Abraham but to his seed (v2). The servant was told to swear to get a wife for Isaac only from Abraham's homeland and people, not from the local Canaanite pagans (vv3-4). The servant asks if he could take Isaac out of Canaan to do so if necessary (v5) and Abraham warns him not to do so (v6). Abraham either discerned or heard from the LORD that His angel would go with the servant and based this on the promise the LORD had given him (v7, Gen 12:7). Abraham puts his faith in God, but he does not presume upon God and so tells the servant how he would be released from the oath if this did not take place (v8). And so, the loyal servant made such an oath (v9).

A Wife for Isaac – Three or four years had passed since Sarah died, Isaac was now 40 years old and still unmarried. The delay seems to be connected to Abraham's specific understanding of how the promise through the seed will continue. Remember all those genealogies we have read through? Abraham meditated on them more than we have. The promise would come from Noah to Shem, but specifically through Eber and then to Terah (Gen 10-11). The land/people of Terah's people were particularly important because of the covenant promises given to Abraham as he looked back and as he looked forward. Abraham prioritized kinship ties to preserve the identity of this new covenant people. We are the recipients of that same New Covenant and it has grown full bloom (Gal 3:7-9, 26-29). The sons of Abraham are so by having the same faith as Abraham; it is no longer a blood connection. This New Covenant community is to have the same commitment to covenant faithfulness for generations for the sake of the kingdom of God and to the glory of Christ's reign over heaven and earth. That is the Christian's greatest joy.

The New Covenant and Your Kids – We are to dedicate ourselves, and our children, to the service of the Lord (Josh 24:15, Eph 6:1-4). And like Abraham, we ought to train our children in the love of the Lord so that they would never marry outside of the covenant, never place their children in the hands of a spouse who did not love the Lord as they did. We must set that example before them in our marriages and then instill the same love for God and His covenant to do the same and more. In the Old and New Testament, we are taught to only marry in the Lord and to do so because God desires holy seed (1 Cor 7:39, 2 Cor 6:14, Mal 2:15, Psalm 128:5-6).

To continue in faithfulness, Isaac will need a faithful wife. And this is the undergirding need for the covenant blessings to continue; this is why Christian men and women need to marry. We are to look beyond, far beyond our own years as we raise our children and as we pray for them to seek godly spouses. It is this obedience to the covenant that makes sure that no faith, no hope, no ministry dies with one's own life (Isaiah 59:21). Children and young adults: Do not marry an unbeliever; dedicate yourself to pursuing and receiving a godly spouse.

Ummm...What about Romance? – We should pause here and talk about romance or the importance of that feeling of “being in love.” Of course, having romantic feelings for one another is a wonderful...feeling...but not a foundation. Wormwood, a senior demon, advises his demon nephew, in Lewis's “Screwtape Letters” about this in letter 18: “*Humans who have not the gift of continence (meaning self-control) can be deterred from seeking marriage as a solution because they do not find themselves ‘in love,’ and, thanks to us, the idea of marrying with any other motive seems to them low and cynical.... They regard the intention of loyalty to a partnership for mutual help, for the preservation of chastity, and for the transmission of life, as something lower than a storm of emotion.*” We've been deceived by novels, movies, cartoons, and shows to think that a storm of emotions is a good foundation for happiness in marriage. It is a lie. We must teach and instruct and pray against these lies; our kids must seek a virtuous and good and faithful partner (Prov 31:10, 18:22, 20:6).

The New Covenant and Their Kids – Abraham is not simply interested in seeing Isaac married. He is motivated to see God’s covenant promise fulfilled in generations he will never live to see. The promise of the covenant is to a thousand generations (Deut 7:9) and the desire for generations to come is the refrain of the Psalms (Psalm 22:30, 48:13, 78:4-7, 102:18). We live in one of the most prosperous and wealthy nations and ages, and yet we have one of the lowest birth-replacement rates, the lowest in the history of our nation. A so-called Christian nation. But the Lord seeks godly offspring. Far more than hearing from your mother, “when will I have grandchildren?” you should hear from the Lord, “bring forth and raise up godly offspring.” And to the many families having many children in our midst, remember amid the difficult, expensive, self-sacrificing days of parenting that God is pleased. God will bless. God is blessing. Stand on the promises. Walk in those promises. And pass those promises on to your children by cultivating a family filled with grace, forgiveness, laughter, and joy. *“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth”*

The New Covenant and the Kingdom – Abraham’s commitment to God’s covenant went far beyond his immediate family. The gospel he received was for the world (Rom 4:13). We have a responsibility as a community of believers and as the body of Christ to the next generations. That is why there are baptism vows from the congregation given to welcome the baptized baby into the covenant and promises to assist the parents. And so, be zealous for the covenant community and the generations to come. Give yourself to generational ministry. Think long-term in your planning and in your serving. That’s why we build schools and churches along with homes. Who has God put in your path that you could be investing in (*“though by this time you ought to be teachers...”* Heb 5:12)? Pastors should be teaching new pastors (2 Tim 2:2). Older men likewise, should be teaching younger men and older women, younger women (Prov 2, 2 Thess 2:15, Titus 2:1-8). There are many good things being done in this church. But there are many more opportunities that you creative people can discover and do. There are people who need you to meet with them and pray, or study the Word together, or provide vocational wisdom and training, or financial assistance, or a host of other generational, community, evangelistic and church-life things I have never thought of – but you have.

There is an old saying, “there are only two things in this world that will last forever: the Word of God and people.” If the Lord tarries, one day, you will be old. Abraham wanted to know he was leaving a legacy based on God’s promises. John wrote in his old age, having ministered to the saints for decades, *“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth”* Pursue the greatest joy.