
Loyalty and Faithfulness

Genesis 24

Introduction

Loyalty – this word rings in our hearts from the brave sacrifices of American soldiers to the fierce devotion of much loved dogs.

Cleveland Browns and Cincinnati Bengals fans understand true loyalty.

And we are even loyal to strange things like Marion's Pizza and Bill's Donuts.

Sometimes it seems that we are losing the sense and sensibility of what faithfulness and loyalty mean. It can be lost in the pursuit of self-centered agendas or bent and twisted in the demand for ignoring moral failure.

This morning we will see, in the truest sense of the word, what a loyal servant looks like: spiritually strong, faithful and quietly loyal.

Because of the length of this morning's text, we will spend most of our time reading through it with little comment.

Listening through the Story

(All Scripture Text from the English Standard Version, Crossway Books)

A Commission for a Servant (v.1-9)

The story opens with Abraham's commissioning of a servant for a most important task.

Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years. And the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. ² And Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh, ³ that I may make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell, ⁴ but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac." ⁵ The servant said to him, "Perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land. Must I then take your son back to the land from which you came?" ⁶ Abraham said to him, "See to it that you do not take my son back there. ⁷ The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my kindred, and who spoke to me and swore to me, 'To your offspring I will give this land,' he will send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. ⁸ But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you must not take my son

back there.”⁹ So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter.

According to the old maxim it takes two to make a marriage – a single daughter and an anxious mother. Well in this account we have an unmarried son and a father “well advanced in years” who may have been anxious to some degree. At this point in time Abraham is about 140 years old.

Abraham wants to provide a godly wife for his son, Isaac. He knows the wickedness of the culture around him in Canaan. So he sends his most mature and able servant to go back to the family homestead and there find a wife among God-fearing people. There are two requirements: he must bring the wife to Canaan and his son must not be required to go back there. In a solemn oath, the servant takes upon himself the responsibility.

An Obedient Dependence on God (v.10-28)

Now, let’s watch his obedient dependence on God.

¹⁰ Then the servant took ten of his master’s camels and departed, taking all sorts of choice gifts from his master; and he arose and went to Mesopotamia to the city of Nahor. ¹¹ And he made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at the time of evening, the time when women go out to draw water. ¹² And he said, “O LORD, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. ¹³ Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. ¹⁴ Let the young woman to whom I shall say, ‘Please let down your jar that I may drink,’ and who shall say, ‘Drink, and I will water your camels’ – let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master.”

¹⁵ Before he had finished speaking, behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham’s brother, came out with her water jar on her shoulder. ¹⁶ The young woman was very attractive in appearance, a maiden whom no man had known. She went down to the spring and filled her jar and came up. ¹⁷ Then the servant ran to meet her and said, “Please give me a little water to drink from your jar.” ¹⁸ She said, “Drink, my lord.” And she quickly let down her jar upon her hand and gave him a drink. ¹⁹ When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, “I will draw water for your camels also, until they have finished drinking.” ²⁰ So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw water, and she drew for all his camels. ²¹ The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether the LORD had prospered his journey or not.

²² When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold ring weighing a half shekel, and two bracelets for her arms weighing ten gold

shekels, ²³ and said, "Please tell me whose daughter you are. Is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?" ²⁴ She said to him, "I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor." ²⁵ She added, "We have plenty of both straw and fodder, and room to spend the night." ²⁶ The man bowed his head and worshiped the LORD ²⁷ and said, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the LORD has led me in the way to the house of my master's kinsmen." ²⁸ Then the young woman ran and told her mother's household about these things.

This servant, who is likely Eliezer mentioned earlier in Genesis, makes the long 450 mile trip back home to the city of Nahor.

An average day's journey was about 20 miles, but with the size of this caravan it may have taken over 3 weeks to arrive.

Abraham knew that his brother had children who had married and they had children (See Genesis 22:20-24). The servant goes where he does, not on a whim, but with the wise instruction from Abraham. But he has no clue as to the lady God would have for Isaac. Imagine the sense of responsibility. So, he does what God's people do: he prays in dependence upon God. He is recognizing that God is not just at work in the miraculous, but also in the day-to-day mundane flow of events. So this is not a sign or a fleece. God is pleased to honor the servant's dependence on Him and interrupt his prayer by bringing the right girl along at the right moment. Thus, the servant's prayer request is an expression of reliance on the power and providence of God.

So, God brings Rebekah, a beautiful young unmarried woman, to the well at the right time. She does exactly what the servant had asked God. His dependence on God means now he is confident to approach her and to ask for lodging in her father's home. He learns that she meets Abraham's requirements. He praises God for the answer to his prayer.

A Humble Appeal in Boldness (v.29-49)

The story now moves to the proposition in a humble and bold appeal.

²⁹ Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban. Laban ran out toward the man, to the spring. ³⁰ As soon as he saw the ring and the bracelets on his sister's arms, and heard the words of Rebekah his sister, "Thus the man spoke to me," he went to the man. And behold, he was standing by the camels at the spring. ³¹ He said, "Come in, O blessed of the LORD. Why do you stand outside? For I have prepared the house and a place for the camels." ³² So the man came to the house and unharnessed the camels, and gave straw and fodder to the camels, and there was water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him. ³³ Then food was set before him

to eat. But he said, "I will not eat until I have said what I have to say." He said, "Speak on."

³⁴ So he said, "I am Abraham's servant. ³⁵ The LORD has greatly blessed my master, and he has become great. He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male servants and female servants, camels and donkeys. ³⁶ And Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my master when she was old, and to him he has given all that he has. ³⁷ My master made me swear, saying, 'You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell, ³⁸ but you shall go to my father's house and to my clan and take a wife for my son.' ³⁹ I said to my master, 'Perhaps the woman will not follow me.' ⁴⁰ But he said to me, 'The LORD, before whom I have walked, will send his angel with you and prosper your way. You shall take a wife for my son from my clan and from my father's house. ⁴¹ Then you will be free from my oath, when you come to my clan. And if they will not give her to you, you will be free from my oath.'

⁴² "I came today to the spring and said, 'O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, if now you are prospering the way that I go, ⁴³ behold, I am standing by the spring of water. Let the virgin who comes out to draw water, to whom I shall say, "Please give me a little water from your jar to drink," ⁴⁴ and who will say to me, "Drink, and I will draw for your camels also," let her be the woman whom the LORD has appointed for my master's son.'

⁴⁵ "Before I had finished speaking in my heart, behold, Rebekah came out with her water jar on her shoulder, and she went down to the spring and drew water. I said to her, 'Please let me drink.' ⁴⁶ She quickly let down her jar from her shoulder and said, 'Drink, and I will give your camels drink also.' So I drank, and she gave the camels drink also. ⁴⁷ Then I asked her, 'Whose daughter are you?' She said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore to him.' So I put the ring on her nose and the bracelets on her arms. ⁴⁸ Then I bowed my head and worshiped the LORD and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to take the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son. ⁴⁹ Now then, if you are going to show steadfast love and faithfulness to my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, that I may turn to the right hand or to the left."

The great humility of the servant Eliezer is seen in how he makes his appeal. He identifies himself as the messenger of his master. He relates his prayer to God and God's providential answer. As he relates all this, the attention is on his master and his great God. One of the effects of his speech is to see if Laban and Rachel will resonate with it. Will they rejoice in God who has moved like this?

The last sentence that makes up verse 49 is proof that Eliezer is relying on ordinary providence not special signs. If her family does not consent, then, he goes on to find someone else. God's providence has brought him to Rebekah – but that does not mean that Rebekah is identified as the only one Isaac can marry – he can move on. So, those who want this story to be about Divine guidance still have to take into account this most important element.

A Gracious Granting of the Request (v.50-60)

Ah, what a gracious granting of the request yet a love that wants to cling!

⁵⁰ Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, “The thing has come from the LORD; we cannot speak to you bad or good. ⁵¹ Behold, Rebekah is before you; take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the LORD has spoken.”

⁵² When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the earth before the LORD. ⁵³ And the servant brought out jewelry of silver and of gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah. He also gave to her brother and to her mother costly ornaments. ⁵⁴ And he and the men who were with him ate and drank, and they spent the night there. When they arose in the morning, he said, “Send me away to my master.” ⁵⁵ Her brother and her mother said, “Let the young woman remain with us a while, at least ten days; after that she may go.” ⁵⁶ But he said to them, “Do not delay me, since the LORD has prospered my way. Send me away that I may go to my master.” ⁵⁷ They said, “Let us call the young woman and ask her.” ⁵⁸ And they called Rebekah and said to her, “Will you go with this man?” She said, “I will go.” ⁵⁹ So they sent away Rebekah their sister and her nurse, and Abraham's servant and his men. ⁶⁰ And they blessed Rebekah and said to her,

“Our sister, may you become thousands of ten thousands, and may your offspring possess the gate of those who hate them!”

The family gives their consent. The servant shares the gifts that Abraham has loaded him down with. The next morning, the family wants to delay their departure, but bow to the servant's persuasion and Rebekah's consent. They give their blessing both rejoicing in her marriage and recognizing Abraham's covenantal status.

A Joyful Union in Marriage (v.61-67)

The story closes with the journey, the meeting and the joyful union in marriage.

⁶¹ Then Rebekah and her young women arose and rode on the camels and followed the man. Thus the servant took Rebekah and went his way.

⁶² Now Isaac had returned from Beer-lahai-roi and was dwelling in the Negeb. ⁶³ And Isaac went out to meditate in the field toward evening. And he lifted up his eyes and saw, and behold, there were camels coming. ⁶⁴ And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she dismounted from the camel ⁶⁵ and said to the servant, "Who is that man, walking in the field to meet us?" The servant said, "It is my master." So she took her veil and covered herself. ⁶⁶ And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. ⁶⁷ Then Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother and took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

The servant brings Rebekah home to Isaac. In the Lord's providence they meet out in a field away from eyes of others. The servant rehearses what God has done. So Isaac and Rebekah are married. He takes her into his mother's tent, indicating that she is now the clan matriarch.

For the first time in the Scriptures, we have recorded for us that a man loves his wife. In fact, after the Adam and Eve narrative, this is the next marriage recorded in any detail. The trajectory of the marriage motif in Scripture has gone from Adam and Eve to Isaac and Rebekah. It will, much later in Scripture, land on the Lord Jesus and His Bride, the church.

Bringing the Story Home

So what is God's intent in this story? How do we go from the of Abraham and Isaac to the days of computers and space travel?

Faithfulness, the Central Theme

First, this is a story about faithfulness. Faithfulness in this sense is a *loyal love*. Each of these, Abraham, the servant, Rebekah and God all act out of loyal love, faithfulness.

Abraham acts with faithfulness to God's covenant.

He prepares for the future in obedient faith in God's promises concerning Isaac. He believes what God has said and then moves with practical steps of action to bring about what God has promised. He prepares and plans for Isaac's marriage to a godly wife. His loyal love to God causes him to practically plan for the future.

The servant acts with faithfulness to his promise to Abraham.

He perseveres to carry out his responsibility in obedience to his master and to keep his promise. He depends on God, prays to God, thinks and plans carefully, overcomes obstacles and objections all out of loyal love to his master.

Rebekah responds with faithfulness to the promises of marriage.

She listens to what God has done, to the proposal of marriage and the prospects arising from what the servant promises. She recognizes the providence of God. In loyal love for God, banking on promises she believes, she moves forward into the unknown.

God acts with faithfulness to His character and promises.

Underlying everyone's faithfulness is the faithfulness of God. He is behind every scene in the story. That He is carrying out His purpose and exercising His power moves the men and women to believe Him in an obeying way. In an expression loyal love, God meets their need in the midst of the ordinary flow of life.

God's people, in response to the faithfulness of God, respond to Him in loving loyalty. This is what sustains God-pleasing relationships. We commit ourselves to faithfulness in all our relationships, working out the tension that sometimes creates by prayer and dependence on the powerful providences of God.

Providence, the Focus of Trust

We have here an example of how we can focus our trust in God who is at work in our lives. I know we assert this often. But this is important to remind ourselves of this often. While it may seem that God is absent in our world, He is not. He is intimately working in the midst of the mess to bring about what He has planned. This is not fatalism, where we just bow to the immovable forces of fate or chance. No, this is humble trust in a holy and loving God moving to show Himself to be great.

This is a critical element about wisdom in decision making. God's will is that you obey Him, make wise decisions and rest in the providences He brings. What a restful place this has been for me over many, many years. To even be able at points to, like the servant, lean against the wall a bit and watch the amazing hand of God guiding the ways and paths of men.

Dependence, the Highlighted Characteristic

The world today despises dependent people. But this is the highlighted characteristic here. The servant stands out as a person who is dependent on God. It emerges through his praying and his praising. These two aspects of our lives most clearly show what or whom we are dependent on. The servant prays. God moves in His ordinary providences. The servant perceives God at work. Then, he praises God. He rehearses several times what God has done. Does this mark our own lives? Do people see and hear in us a radical and practical dependence on God in our prayers, our perception of things and in our praise?

Reflect and Respond

I want to close by framing some questions for you.

Does loyal love to God cause you to practically plan for the future? Our believing in God and our resting in His promises and character should cause us to be diligent in our planning and preparation.

Do you depend on God, pray to God, think and plan carefully, overcome obstacles and objections all out of loyal love to your heavenly Master?

As a believer, do you engage God daily in these steps of dependence: a need arises (a problem); you pray in dependence on God; you do what you must and should expecting His providence and power to move; you perceive the working of God; then, you praise Him to Him, to yourself and to others.

Maybe you are here this morning and have not thought about your relationship with God in this way at all. Maybe for you, God is here for you, not you for Him. For you, God is someone who is supposed to ease life and give you significance and importance. May I challenge that thinking as gently as I can? You are here for God, whether you realize it or not. He is the King, sovereign and supreme. Thoughts like these are unworthy of Him, disloyal to Him and an expression of rebellion against Him. This is what the Bible calls sin. It has separated you from God and brought you under His judgment. But He sent His son into the world to take the punishment you deserve. Jesus Christ died on the cross and was raised from the dead so that you can believe in God and bow to Him. These are first steps of love and loyalty to God. Won't you consider them today?

In loyal love for God, banking on His promises, do you believe God and move forward with confidence into the unknown? Our lives should show an outward and inward reliance on God that gives a sense of confidence and hope. Misplaced loyalties and misdirected loves will undermine this. May I commend to you a fierce loyalty to God as an expression of your love for Him.

Does faithfulness, loyal love, mark your marriage? Aim the gaze of your heart on your spouse along. Do not betray that love. Do not think or act with disloyalty. Keep you covenant. Keep your promises.

In expressions loyal love, God will meet you in the midst of the ordinary flow of life. Not that we see everything becoming God. Rather, we see God's hand working in everything. Here is the place of rest and peace. Even when involved in great responsibilities and important ministry or work with the whirlwind and mess and temptations swirling - ah what sweetness there is where we know that our faithful, our loving and loyal God, is working all things for our good and for His very great glory.