

Introduction

When I was a teacher, one of the subjects I taught each year was economics. I always enjoyed teaching economics because the subject matter in the classroom would often overlap with the everyday experience of the students. On occasion a lightbulb would turn on about why something works the way it does. Putting together *why* blueberries are cheaper in July than they are in December can be pretty cool for a 15 year old to figure out!

One of the things I would cover every year in my class was the idea of a “zero-sum game”. A zero sum game is a situation where more for me means less for you. The classic example to describe a zero-sum game is that of eating pizza. If we order a pizza and there are 8 slices and I eat 6 of them, that only leaves 2 slices for everyone else.

The concept is simple enough to understand. What’s more difficult to convey is the fact that most of the economies in the world are not “zero-sum games”. Put another way, there is always more pizza! For most things, if someone has a lot of it, that actually *doesn’t* mean that there is necessarily less for everyone else.

This is accentuated by the fact that as humans we are prone to envy and comparison. You don’t have to teach your young children to be aware that their sibling got a bigger cookie than them. They notice and they often assume that means that there is a global cookie shortage.

Because we are this way, the Bible speaks directly to us in this regard. The Bible teaches us not to envy. The Bible teaches us to seek the good of others. The Bible teaches us to consider others more worthy than ourselves. The reason the Bible goes out of its way to *teach* these things is because *they need to be taught*. These are not usually attitudes that humans take up on their own without encouragement and discipleship.

And the reason I bring up these themes in my introduction is because we have a wonderful examples of such humility in the in our passage. Both the servant of Abraham and Rebekah are examples of this kind of humility and selflessness.

There are two points that I am going to draw from the passage this morning.

1. Those who serve should seek the glory of their master (vv. 1-14)
2. There must be a fitting bride for the groom (vv. 15-28)

Those Who Serve Seek the Glory of their Master (vv. 1-14)

The scene is set with Abraham being old and advanced in years.

The Problem and the Oath

This account from near the end of Abraham's life focuses on a problem and an oath. The problem is that Isaac needs a wife. The oath is what Abraham's servant will take in order to obtain a wife for Isaac.

It is most likely the case that the servant is Eliezar of Damascus who first appeared in [Gen 15](#). Eliezer was actually in line to inherit all of Abraham's possessions when Abraham was without a son. Eliezer was a great servant of Abraham. He was willing to be surpassed by Isaac, the heir of the covenant.

In verses 3-4 Abraham makes it clear that he does not want his son Isaac to take a wife from among the Canaanites. Rather, Abraham wants Eliezer to go back to the land that he came from so that Eliezer might find a wife for Jacob.

We aren't given many details but we can pick up some context clues about why Abraham would not want Isaac to take a wife from among the Canaanites. While there are some good examples of the people of the land treating Abraham well, there are also stark examples of wicked behavior amongst the people of Canaan (like Sodom and Gomorrah). But we can also look forward in the book of Genesis to the accounts of Jacob and Esau's marriages. In [Genesis 26:34-35](#) we are told that Esau took two Hittite women to be his wives and "they made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah.

But there is more to the oath that Abraham wants Eliezer to take. Not only does he not want Isaac to take a wife from the land of Canaan, he also doesn't want Isaac to return to Mesopotamia. God has promised Abraham that Canaan will be given to his offspring so it is important that Isaac stay in the land. But it is also

important that Isaac's bride be willing to come to this Promised Land as well. We will look at this in more detail later.

Eliezar takes the oath, knowing that he will only be released from this oath if the woman refuses to return with him. This is a momentous occasion in the story of Abraham's life. There is a passing of the baton going on. Eliezar is given control of all of Abraham's possessions and he is going to initiate the transition of Abraham's house to Isaac. Here at the beginning of the story Eliezar is Abraham's servant. At the end of this account, he will be described as Isaac's servant.

Seeking Abraham's Success

In verses 10-11 Eliezar loads up 10 camels and heads to Mesopotamia and has the camels stop for water at a well outside the city of Nahor. This is the first time in the Bible that we have a future bride at the cite of a well. Later in Genesis, Jacob will meet Rachel at a well. In the book of Exodus, Moses will meet Miriam at a well. This is one of the reasons why the account of Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman in [John 4](#) is so intriguing. They meet at a well.

The well (or the spring) is a symbol of life in the Bible. There was a spring that flowed out of the garden in Eden. Much of the Temple imagery that you find in the Bible indicates that the Temple is like a spring that flows out of to bring life to the world.

This connection between wells and women and life is a big one in the Bible and it takes us back to Eve, who is named the mother of the living. The seed of the woman that will crush the head of the serpent is still in view and the question is whether or not Eliezar will find such a mother of the living at this well.

In verses 12-14 Eliezar lifts up his voice to God and prays that God would grant him success for the sake of his master Abraham. He prays that a woman would come and give him water when he asks and then offer extra hospitality to give waters to his camels as well.

This is the point I've been driving toward in this first section. Eliezar is a model example of a servant to Abraham. He seeks the success of Abraham. Eliezar wants God to make Abraham's name great even though part of that process has been his own demotion.

This is precisely the stature that we are to take in God's house! We are servants of God and we, like Eliezar, should be looking to make the name of Jesus great and seeking to serve in His kingdom. Just as John the Baptist said, "He must increase and I must decrease." we too must take a similar approach.

Eliezar understands that what will bring Abraham success is the finding of a worthy bride for Isaac, which leads us into our next section.

There Must be a Fitting Bride for the Groom (vv. 15-28)

Rebekah's Extravagant Hospitality

In verse 15-16, Rebekah appears with her water jar to get water from the well. Moreover, she is beautiful in appearance and she is the daughter of Bethuel who was the son of Nahor, Abraham's brother.

In verses 17-19 Eliezar asks for a drink and Rebekah provides it. Once she has given him a drink she says that she will draw water for his camels too. This is quite a feat of hospitality by Rebekah. Some of you may know that camels drink a lot of water. Ten camels drink a ton of water! What's more, the well that Rebekah drew water from is likely a well that you would need to walk down into in order to receive water. This was no small task and it likely took some time to perform.

We can begin to understand why Eliezar prayed that this action would be the sign that he has found the right woman. Looking back on Abraham, he is a man of generous hospitality. When the angels come and visit him he shows extravagant hospitality. This is the way of life in the covenant and Isaac is the heir of the covenant. It is fitting that a bride for Isaac should have the same disposition.

This also helps us to make sense of other aspects of Abraham's instructions concerning a wife for Isaac. He wants the woman to be willing to leave her father's house and go with Eliezar to a land that she doesn't know. Just as Abraham was called to be a man of faith, leaving his father's house, his kindred,

and his land, so too is Rebekah being called to a similar act of faith. The bride is to befit the groom who is the air of this covenant.

Eliezar rejoices by giving jewelry to Rebekah and by asking further hospitality in verse 23. It doesn't come as a surprise that Rebekah opens their home to Eliezar before running ahead to tell her household of all these things. Eliezar is overjoyed and he bows his head in worship to God.

Conclusion

One of the benefits we have from our own perspective is that we get to read the scriptures in light of what has taken place in Christ. Here in this story, we have a bride for Isaac, the son of the covenant promises. Isaac is clearly a figure of Christ (remember the binding of Isaac). This means we can understand Rebekah as a type of the bride of Christ, the church.

The church, like Rebekah is called to live by faith. The church must be willing to follow God's word wherever it leads us. The church must be oriented to the groom who is in a faraway country.

But the church must also practice the extravagant hospitality of Rebekah. This is most clearly presented in our table fellowship each week in the Eucharist. Each week the doors of the church are opened up to the world.

The world is called to repent of their sins. To ascend into the heavenlies where we join with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven in the praise of our triune God. To be consecrated by the Word of God. To offer us our tribute, our prayers to God, and our confession to God. And to ultimately heed God's invitation to the table where we have peace with God.

But this pattern is to extend itself out beyond the walls of the church. Just as there was a spring in the garden that flowed outward, bringing life to the world, the well of salvation that springs forth from the church is to flow out into the world.

The way it does so is through you, the body of Christ. Jesus said that whoever believes in Him would have rivers of living water flowing from them. This happens as you open your own doors and invite people to your own table. This is the culture war. It isn't done through tweeting or podcasting. The culture war

is won through worship and table fellowship. Let us commit ourselves to such hospitality even if the Lord sets a table for us in the presence of our enemies. Hospitality can be a dangerous game. But do not fear, death has been defeated in the death of Christ and His blood covers you. As you taste the wine this morning, know surely you will never taste the sting of death!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN!