

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Rebekah—A Woman Who Did Not Finish Well

Genesis 24, 25, 27

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Today's message is the second in our Life of Joseph series. We are beginning this series by taking a look at the female members of Joseph's family. Last week, we learned about Sarah who was Abraham's wife and Joseph's great-grandmother. Today, we are going to talk about Rebekah who was Isaac's wife and Joseph's grandmother.

Today's sermon has three points:

- Beauty should not be skin deep.
- Prayers are not just for foxholes.
- Honest is the best policy.

BEAUTY SHOULD NOT BE SKIN DEEP

Abraham was very old, very blessed by God, and was living in Canaan. He told his servant to go find a wife for his son from the home country. So the servant went and took camels fully loaded with all kinds of good things and headed toward Abraham's stomping grounds.

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 24:11-20, 26-27

He had the camels kneel down near the well outside the town; it was toward evening, the time the women go out to draw water. ¹² Then he prayed, "LORD, God of my master Abraham, make me successful today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. ¹³ See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. ¹⁴ May it be that when I say to a young woman, 'Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too'—let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master."

¹⁵ Before he had finished praying, Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder. She was the daughter of Bethuel son of Milkah, who was the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor. ¹⁶ The woman was very beautiful, a virgin; no man had ever slept with her. She went down to the spring, filled her jar and came up again. ¹⁷ The servant hurried to meet her and said, "Please give me a little water from your jar."¹⁸ "Drink, my lord," she said, and quickly lowered the jar to her hands and gave him a drink.¹⁹ After she had given him a drink, she said, "I'll draw water for your camels too, until they have had enough to drink."²⁰ So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough, ran back to the well to draw more water, and drew enough for all his camels...²⁶ Then the man bowed down and worshiped the LORD,²⁷ saying, "Praise be to the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his kindness and faithfulness to my master. As for me, the LORD has led me on the journey to the house of my master's relatives."

EXPLANATION: It was common practice during this time for marriages to take place within a family. In addition, the son's parents often chose his wife. Sarah, Isaac's mother, had already passed away, and Abraham was concerned that he might die before Isaac was married. He wanted to ensure that Isaac did not marry a Canaanite woman who worshipped pagan gods and that he would not move away from Canaan. So, he decided to send a servant to retrieve a wife for Isaac.

When the servant arrived in the area in which Abraham's family lived, he requested a sign from God. God blessed him, and one of the first women he saw turned out to be Abraham's great-niece. She not only provided the servant a drink but also offered water to his camels. A thirsty camel can drink up to 25 gallons which meant several trips to and from the well carrying large heavy pots of water. So, this offer was an indication of Rebekah's kind heart and servant attitude. Abraham's servant understood that this action was a greater indication of the true nature of the woman than her outward beauty.

ILLUSTRATION: In 1613, English poet Sir Thomas Overbury wrote a poem titled "A Wife". The poem described the virtues that a young man should demand of a prospective wife and included the line, "All the carnal beauty of my wife, Is but skin deep." However, many people believed that Overbury wrote the poem as a dig on the engagement between two prominent political figures of the time and so he was later imprisoned and then murdered as a result. Most of us have never heard of

Overbury or his poem, but we probably do recognize the saying that resulted from it. Today, we use the phrase “Beauty is only skin deep” to imply that physical beauty has little to do with whether or not a person has character, integrity, or other beautiful internal qualities.

APPLICATION: In this day and age, we are consumed with appearances. Whether we’re shopping for a new car or looking for a new friend, we are often more concerned about what’s on the outside than on the inside. Rebekah was a beautiful woman, but more importantly, she had a beautiful heart. The servant was wise enough to know what to pray for. He did not pray for good looks or a wealthy family. When he went in search of Isaac’s bride, he prayed for a woman that stood out because of what was on the inside.

So we see that Rebekah started well and beauty should not be skin deep.

PRAYERS ARE NOT JUST FOR FOXHOLES.

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 25:19-28

This is the account of the family line of Abraham’s son Isaac. Abraham became the father of Isaac,²⁰ and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan Aram and sister of Laban the Aramean.²¹ Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was childless. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant.²² The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, “Why is this happening to me?” So she went to inquire of the LORD.²³ The LORD said to her, “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.”²⁴ When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb.²⁵ The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau²⁶ After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau’s heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them.²⁷ The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was content to stay at home among the tents.²⁸ Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

EXPLANATION: In previous verses, the Bible tells us that Rebekah was a great comfort to Isaac after his mother's death. In fact, although love was not necessarily a component of many of the arranged marriages of the day, the Bible tells us that Isaac loved Rebekah deeply. However, like his mother Sarah, Rebekah was unable to have children. The couple had been married twenty years, and they were still without children. I am sure that Abraham had passed along God's promise to his son, Isaac. From him, God had promised a great nation, but once again, they were faced with the question of how. How would Isaac become a great nation if he and Rebekah could have no children?

There is no way to know whether Rebekah herself prayed. Maybe she did, and it's just not recorded. Maybe she did not, and that's why Isaac had to pray on her behalf. Maybe she prayed for a while, but after so many years, she simply gave up. Regardless, God heard Isaac's prayers, and Rebekah conceived.

Of course, this was before stethoscopes and ultrasounds. So, Rebekah could not have known that she had two sons growing inside her—at least not until they started tumbling around. Sarah was dead. Rebekah's mother was far away. Although she had an elderly nursemaid who had traveled with her, Rebekah may have felt very much alone. Who knows if anyone around her had ever carried twins? Her condition was causing her distress, and in her distress, she called out to God. He gave her some startling news.

ILLUSTRATION: From January to April of 1942, The United States and Filipino militaries fought Japan during the most intense phase of the WWII Japanese invasion of Philippines. Though the American and Filipino forces fought bravely, they were ultimately defeated. More than 75,000 men surrendered, many of whom were later led on the infamous Bataan Death March. During the Battle of Bataan, U.S. military chaplain William Thomas Cummings preached a field sermon where he supposedly said, "There are no atheists in foxholes." The saying has since become a popular aphorism that means no matter how you previously felt, when you are in a dangerous or stressful position, you will call out to God for rescue.

APPLICATION: As far as we know, Rebekah did not ask God for children. In addition, there is no record of her thanking God when she conceived, and we never

hear her praising God when they are born safely. What we do hear is her question, “Why is this happening to me?”

God showed Rebekah extraordinary kindness. He brought her into the family that would become his chosen nation of people. He blessed her with a husband who loved her. He gave her two healthy sons, and he gave her a glimpse into their future. It seems to me that the Bible tends to record the most important lines from a person’s speech and life. Unfortunately, however, this conversation between Rebekah and the Lord is the only one that scripture records.

Many people pray like prayer is medicine. They pray only when they hurt. Rebekah’s prayer falls into that category. It reminds me of those foxhole prayers. It’s hard to know what was going on in her heart and life, but, like Rebekah, we often do not ask God for direction or guidance when we need it. We do not thank him for our blessings when we receive them. We fail to praise him for who he is or all the good things he’s done in our lives, but when something happens to us, when something goes wrong, or something bad happens, we’re quick to ask “Why me, Lord? What did I ever do to deserve this?”

I want to point out that Isaac and Rebekah playing favorites with their kids did not end up well. So, beauty should not be skin deep, and prayers are not just for foxholes.

HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 27:1-8 and 15-19

When Isaac was old and his eyes were so weak that he could no longer see, he called for Esau his older son and said to him, “My son.” “Here I am,” he answered. ² Isaac said, “I am now an old man and don’t know the day of my death. ³ Now then, get your equipment—your quiver and bow—and go out to the open country to hunt some wild game for me. ⁴ Prepare me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my blessing before I die.” ⁵ Now Rebekah was listening as Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau left for the open country to hunt game and bring it back, ⁶ Rebekah said to her son Jacob, “Look, I overheard your father say to your brother Esau, ⁷ ‘Bring me some game and prepare me some tasty food to eat, so that I may give you my blessing in

the presence of the LORD before I die.’⁸ Now, my son, listen carefully and do what I tell you: ...¹⁵ Then Rebekah took the best clothes of Esau her older son, which she had in the house, and put them on her younger son Jacob.¹⁶ She also covered his hands and the smooth part of his neck with the goatskins.¹⁷ Then she handed to her son Jacob the tasty food and the bread she had made.¹⁸ He went to his father and said, “My father.” “Yes, my son,” he answered. “Who is it?”¹⁹ Jacob said to his father, “I am Esau, your firstborn. I have done as you told me. Please sit up and eat some of my game, so that you may give me your blessing.”

EXPLANATION: The patriarchal blessing was a ritual that was usually designated for the oldest son. Traditionally, as the oldest, Esau, would have been the one to succeed Isaac as the head of the clan. Of course, God had other plans, and he had already revealed those to Rebekah. Before the boys were born, he told her that the younger son, Jacob, would actually rule over the older. The Bible does not tell us if she had passed that information along to her husband, but it would be unusual for her not to have told him.

Maybe, like Sarah, Rebekah felt like she needed to help God fulfill his prophecy because she took it upon herself to make sure that Jacob received Isaac’s blessing. The woman who started off with such a kind heart seemed to think nothing of deceiving her husband and cheating her oldest son.

ILLUSTRATION: In 1808, Scottish author, Sir Walter Scott is the one who penned in one of his writings, “Oh what a tangled web we weave/When first we practice to deceive.” It is similar to a line that Mark Twain once wrote, “If you tell the truth, you do not have to remember anything.” While parents may not quote these lines to their children, we have for centuries passed down their wisdom. Deception and lies create one big mess.

EXPLANATION: Isaac received his father’s blessing, but it came at a great cost. Esau was so angry that he wanted to kill his brother. The Bible does not give us details, but I imagine Rebekah’s relationships with her husband and son were also damaged. As a result of all the family drama, Isaac left home. More than likely, he never saw his mother again, and only saw his father briefly before his death. As for Rebekah, let’s just say her finish was not as good as her start. Scripture does not tell us when or how she died and has little more to say about her at all.

In multiple places throughout the Bible, God tells us that deception has no part in the lives of believers.

- Beauty should not be skin deep.
- Prayers are not just for foxholes.
- Honesty is the best policy.

INVITATION: Rebekah's story started off with kindness and ended with deception. She is a reminder to us of a life not finished well. Why don't you take this time to reflect upon your own lives? Do you have a kind heart? Are you willing to go out of your way for others? What about your relationship with the Lord? Do you talk to him on a daily basis? Do you search his word and seek his will, or do you only commune with him when times are tough? Are you living a life of honesty, above reproach? Are you striving to finish as well as you started? The altar is open if you want to come and pray.

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