

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

..... *GENESIS*



Characteristics of God's Kingdom: Genesis 23-24

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Church family, this week's sermon is similar to last week because Genesis 22-24 are closely connected. In the traditional Bible reading plan, you read these chapters together. When I read these chapters together, I noticed two critical points. One is more general, and one is more specific.

- The general point is that steadfast love characterizes God's people.
- More specifically, we see that God establishes his kingdom through steadfast love

Thus, the main point of this sermon is that God establishes his kingdom through steadfast love. My hope then is that you would leave today's service ready to show steadfast love to our church family and

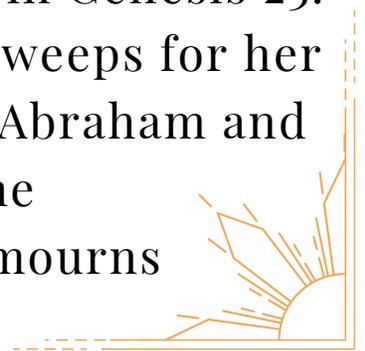
the lost, and this week, we will have ample opportunity to do this since it is VBS week.

Now, today's sermon is a little different. Instead of reading the entire passage, I'll summarize some of it and read smaller sections. Then, we will analyze each character of the story to determine if they express steadfast love or not. Finally, we will discuss the importance of steadfast love.

Before we get started, let's define steadfast love. Love is a commitment to do good to another. Although feelings accompany love at times, it is not a feeling. Love is a commitment to do good for another. When we described love as "steadfast," we describe a constant and loyal love. This love does not waver and is persistent. It does not depend on the performance of the loved one, but it depends on the commitment to love.

THE CHARACTERS OF GENESIS 23-24

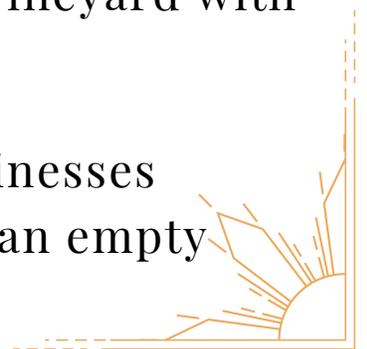
Abraham expresses steadfast love for Sarah in Genesis 23. We see that after her death, he mourns and weeps for her (23:2). Moses has not explained much about Abraham and Sarah's relationship, although we can assume certain things about it. However, Abraham mourns



and weeps over his deceased wife, a response of steadfast love. Moreover, Abraham presses the Hittites to sell him land, and he accepts their first offer, which, as we will see, is an inflated price. Notice something important here. Abraham is not concerned about getting a gift, nor is he concerned about getting a good deal. He is concerned about one thing: providing a place to bury his wife. Abraham's response to Sarah's death indicates his steadfast love for her.

The Hittites, show wavering steadfast love to Abraham. Indeed, when we examine the conversation that they have with Abraham in Genesis 23:4-15, the Hittites are, at first, praiseworthy for their devotion to Abraham. They are willing to give, for free, the choicest of burial places to Abraham (23:6). Yet, as Abraham continually presses the Hittites for a price, Ephron states a cost of four hundred shekels of silver (23:15). This price is inflated. David bought the place where he would build the temple's altar for 50 shekels of silver (2 Sam 24:24). We must remember one standard piece of real estate knowledge here: a house in the city (the land David bought) is always more expensive than the country (the land Abraham bought). Even in Isaiah 7:23, Isaiah announces that a vineyard with 1000 vines was worth 1000 shekels of silver.

Similarly, let's remember that land with businesses attached to them are also more expensive than empty country land. When we compare this

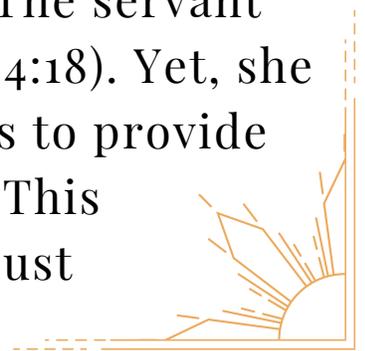


productive vineyard priced at 1000 shekels with a piece of country land priced at 400 shekels, we should come to the obvious conclusion. Ephron is taking advantage of Abraham. This act is not steadfast love.

Thus, the Hittites' reaction to Abraham is mixed and falls short of steadfast love.

Abraham's servant, unlike the Hittites, shows unwavering steadfast love to Abraham. We see this since the servant swears a binding oath to Abraham to find a wife for Isaac from the women of Abraham's homeland. Moreover, the servant fulfills this vow. He makes a long journey northeastward to Haran, to the place of Abraham's family. Then, he prays to the Lord for success on this journey (12-14), and he refrains from eating with Laban until he can explain why he is there (24:33). Finally, the servant makes haste to Abraham to announce his success. Abraham's servant demonstrates steadfast love to Abraham.

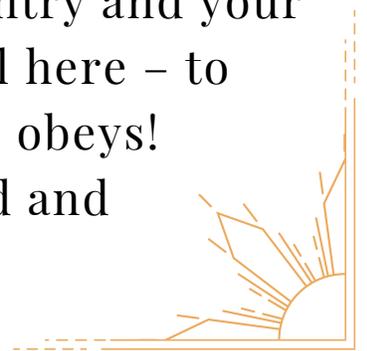
Rebekah similarly demonstrates incredible character in Genesis 24. We see her character demonstrated in her first conversation with Abraham's servant. The servant asks for water to drink, and she complies (24:18). Yet, she not only gives him water; instead, she offers to provide waters for the servant's camels also (24:19). This offering is incredible, but let's understand just



how fantastic it is. She offers to give water to the camels until they have finished drinking (24:20). She is not merely giving them a sip of water; instead, she offers to let them drink fully!

Now, let's think about a camel. Camels can go seven months without drinking water in the desert, and they drink up to 30 gallons of water at one time. Moreover, let's remember that this servant had ten camels with him (24:10). Thus, Rebekah was potentially signing up to draw 300 gallons of water for these camels! This task could have taken 100-130 trips, given that her jar likely held 2-3 gallons of water. This offer is incredible. There is more still—notice verse 21. The servant gazes at her to see if the Lord had prospered her way. He waits to see if Rebekah will follow through on her offer, and she does! Rebekah's character is incredible.

We further see Rebekah's character in Genesis 24:52-60. In these verses, we see Rebekah's family ask her if she wants to go with Abraham's servant, and she says, "I will go." Now, Moses is very intentional here. Let's compare Rebekah's action here to Abraham's in Genesis 12. In Genesis 12, God tells him, "Go from your country and your kindred." Rebekah is faced with the same call here – to leave her family and her homeland – and she obeys! Thus, Rebekah is obeying as Abraham obeyed and expressing the same faith in God's promises.

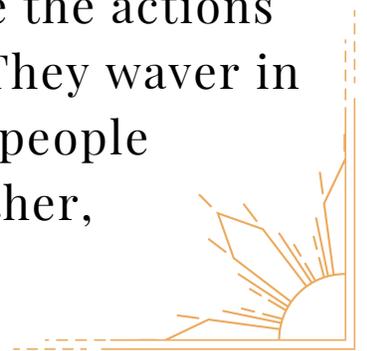


Rebekah is a model of biblical femininity, church family. She is servant-hearted, hard-working, and brave. All of these traits are demonstrated in this text. Moreover, she has faith in God's promises to Abraham; thus, she leaves her homeland and her family. Truly, Rebekah is expressing steadfast love to those connected to Abraham's house.

Laban, like the Hittites, wavers in his steadfast love. In verse 49, the servant asks Laban if he will show steadfast love to Abraham. Laban responds by saying, "Yes" in verse 50. Yet, in verse 55, he requests that his sister remains with them for ten days. Laban, like the Hittites, wavers in their steadfast love.

God is the main character of every passage. We learn that God shows steadfast love to Abraham in this passage since Abraham's servant was successful on his journey (24:12, 14, 27).

Church family, God continually extends steadfast love to the people of his kingdom. One result of this continual, steadfast love is that God's people are also shaped to extend steadfast love. This characteristic is uncommon in the world. We see this fact when we observe the actions of the Hittites and Laban in this narrative. They waver in their steadfast love. Thus, church family, if people are going to show steadfast love to one another, God must first show steadfast love to them.



APPLICATION

Church family, let's notice something significant in Genesis 24. Verse 60 says, "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 him!' This blessing is the Abrahamic promise. Laban and the rest of the family pray that God would give numerous descendants to Rebekah and that these descendants would inherit a land. Moreover, notice how similar this promise is to Genesis 22:16-18. There we learn that Abraham's offspring will "possess the gate of his enemies," while here in verse 60, we understand that Rebekah's offspring will "possess the gate of those who hate him." Do you notice the similarity here? This is intentional.

Moreover, in Jewish tradition, you would read in one day Genesis 22-24. These chapters were seen as a group. I think this shows that just as God's kingdom depended on Abraham's obedient act of steadfast love to God, so the kingdom also depends on the steadfast love of Rebekah. Thus, we could say something similar to what we said last week, "Because Rebekah was obedient, God's kingdom will be established!"

So, church family, last week, we asked the question, "How will your faith manifest itself in good



works?" This week, I am asking a more specific question. "How will your faith express itself in steadfast love this week?" For Rebekah, her faith and steadfast love manifested itself in diligent and brave work. Guess what, church family, many of us will excel in applying this text this week. Do you know why? Because this week is VBS! I do not know a lot about VBS, but I know enough about it to conclude that many of us will express the diligence of Rebekah and the bravery of Rebekah for the same reason as Rebekah. We have experienced God's steadfast love. Thus, church family, this week at VBS, let's be diligent: let's be prepared, let's show up on time, let's advertise even still, and let's be quick to share the gospel. Why? Not because all of these things are fun; they are not always fun. Let's be diligent like Rebekah because, like Rebekah, we believe God's promises.

Now, some of you might say, "I am not involved in VBS." Wrong. Even if Allison has not recruited you to do a specific task like games, missions, or music, you still have a job. Please pray. Please, church family, let your steadfast love for the Lord motivate you to pray diligently this week for the salvation of many kids and their families.

Non-Christian, our God shows his people steadfast love. Steadfast love is a love that is constant,



independent of our performance, and loyal. This love is most clearly seen at the cross. There, we see Jesus dying for sinners like you and me. At the cross, Jesus takes your place so that his righteousness could be given to you as a gift. If you trust that Jesus is Lord and turn from your sins, then the father would see you no longer in your sin but clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Friends, God shows steadfast love to those who trust that Jesus is their righteousness. Would you come to Jesus today?

PRAYER

Oh God, move us, by your steadfast love to express steadfast love to one another this week and the lost who will come to our church campus. Lord, bring many people to our church through VBS, and as they come, let them experience your love as we meet their spiritual and physical needs. Do this, we pray, for your glory. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.