

Sermon – July 5, 2020
“I will draw for your camels also”
The Rev. John C. Wright

Text: Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67

Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come Holy Spirit, come. Visit, fill and anoint the sharing of these words. Make them to be a blessing for your people, a blessing that leads to life eternal and fruitful labor as we tarry here on this mission field. Amen

Good morning everyone. Happy Independence Day! I pray that this experiment in following God as a nation will continue to allow us as citizens, as congregations, as communities, and as a nation to discern God’s will and to grow closer to Him and His will for us as individuals and as a nation. Welcome to everyone who is watching on live stream this morning as well.

Have any of us ever stood at a decision point in our lives and struggled to discern God’s will? Often in my life I have made decisions without so much as a thought as to what God’s will was for me. I remember clearly, as the date of my undergraduate graduation from Virginia Tech approached, sitting in our family’s kitchen in West Virginia and putting together a spreadsheet of options as I tried to decide which of several job offers I would select. I remember comparing pay, benefits, location, job aspects, advanced degree support, types of work, and many other options. None of the columns on my spreadsheet had the heading of “God’s will.” Now God did bless my decision that day and has been present with me in my decision, but I cannot say that I chose my job offer based on guidance from God. At that time, I had no concept of how to bring God into a decision-making process nor even a thought that I should do so. Over the years I have made many life decisions and have helped others make life decisions as well. And in some cases, I have been blessed to see people try to incorporate God in various ways into their decision-making process, noting that some of the options were good ones and some were not so God-honoring. Some people will take their Bible and close their eyes and let the Bible fall open, and then place their finger on the page, open their eyes, and take the verse that is selected as God’s direction. Let me state that this is a very bad use of God’s word to guide one’s life. There are many verses in the Bible that you do not want to find your finger under for guidance. How do

we make key life decisions, decide our vocation, decide whom to vote for, choose our life mate, decide where to live, to have children, to buy a home, change jobs, medical treatment ... in God's will? The list of decisions is long and we need to find a way to bring God into our decision-making process. This morning's stop on our Old Testament tour takes us into a key moment for God's people. Abraham has been blessed by God with longevity and he is now advanced in years, yet his son Isaac has no wife or children to continue the development of Abraham's family into the great nation that will bless all other nations of the world.

This morning we will look at how a wife is chosen for Isaac, how God's hand is in that choice, and how this key decision is made. I will caution us at the beginning of this stop in our Old Testament journey that while the discernment process used in this selection of a wife works for Abraham's servant, we are in a different time and place and have much better discernment tools at hand that we are to take advantage of as we seek to bring God into decisions in our lives. I will close this morning with some thoughts on how we are to discern God's will in our lives.

Let me catch us up to where we are in the story of God's people by mention of a key stop that we have skipped over on our journey. Sarah has died and Abraham has bought a cave in the land of Canaan as a place to bury her. Now Abraham has decided that he needs to act to help secure a wife for Isaac. He has required an oath from his oldest servant to follow his directions and go to the land of Abraham's family and get a bride there for Isaac.

The qualifications Abraham gives the servant for Isaac's wife are not the list that we would expect in today's culture. Instead, he tells the servant that she is not to be of the people of the land of Canaan, and she will need to be willing to respond to God's call on her life to leave her family and to cleave to a new family. She will need to leave her gods behind and come to know and worship the one true God. Abraham also tells the servant that Isaac must not leave Canaan so he will not be tempted to stay elsewhere. Isaac is to remain in the land of Canaan.

The servant and his companions have traveled for some thirty days and they arrive at the correct village in the cool of the evening, the time when women come to the spring to get water. The servant has met Rebekah at the well and after interacting with her has placed a gold ring on her nose and gold bracelets on her arms. Rebekah has returned home wearing these items, and her brother Laban has gone to the well, found the servant, and invited him and his companions to come to their house and enjoy their hospitality. The point where we enter the story is where the

servant is telling Rebekah's family his version of the encounter at the well and why he has come to their town.

First, the servant tells them that Abraham has been blessed by God and is wealthy. The ten camels and the golden ring and bracelets on Rebekah speak to his wealth. The bracelets alone are worth about a year's wages for a field worker. The servant tells them that Abraham and Sarah had a son in their old age, he is the heir to all of Abraham's wealth, and he needs a wife. Isaac's wife must be from among Abraham's own family. There is no requirement for her to be a follower of Yahweh. The key requirement is for her to not have a connection to the land that God has promised to give to the descendants of Abraham.

The servant tells those listening that Abraham has sent the servant on this mission under oath and has told him an angel of the one God will go with him to give him success. The servant upon arriving this day at the spring in Abraham's home town prayed an oracle to God that outlines how he will recognize God's hand in identifying Isaac's bride. Notice what he prays. He is planning to ask the women for a small drink of water (a little sip) and to look for the woman to give him a drink and then volunteer to water all his thirsty camels. The tradition in this time was for strangers to ask permission to use a town's water source before they drank or watered animals, so his plan is consistent with any traveler's actions. As the servant is praying, Rebekah arrives at the spring. She draws water and then the servant asks for a sip of water. She immediately gives him all the water he can drink, no small sip, and then she volunteers to water the camels. Given the average size of a water jar and the amount of water a thirsty camel can drink she has just committed herself to making 80 – 100 trips to the spring to bring water to these ten camels. This is extravagant hospitality. Her actions meet the oracle the servant has prayed to Yahweh the God of his master Abraham. The servant gives Rebekah a nose ring and puts bracelets on her arms. Then the servant worships the LORD as praise for the guidance he has been given. His mission is partly successful for he thinks he has found the one God has identified, and now he has come to Rebekah's family and made known why he is here and what he is requesting, Rebekah as a bride for his master's son.

Rebekah's family recognizes the hand of a god in the selection of Rebekah as a bride and they agree for her to become Isaac's wife. They see the hand of a god in these events and as such they decide that Rebekah should go with the servant. They do want Rebekah to remain with them for ten days, possibly time for them to better assess the safety of her new situation, but

the servant is anxious to return with her to his master. They have not asked Rebekah if she is willing to be a bride, but they do ask her if she is willing to go immediately with the servant and she agrees. Rebekah, like Mary, Abraham, and many others in God's story of His people, agrees to fully cooperate with God. She will leave her family and journey to a new land and worship a new god, a god who has called her into the story of Abraham and Isaac and many others to come. She does not yet know this God, but she is willing to obey this call that comes in this strange manner, and she leaves behind her family and goes into the unknown with this servant.

There is no information about the trip back to the land of Canaan, the promised land. We do know that Isaac and Rebekah meet in the land of Canaan and become husband and wife. We are told that Rebekah is brought into Sarah's tent and that Isaac loved Rebekah. The story of God's people will continue on as it winds its way through history and the lives of so many men and women who respond to God's call and become part of the promise of a family, a people and a nation through whom God will work to bring about his plan through the death and resurrection of His only son, whom he loves.

As I stated at the outset, let me share a few insights about discerning God's will in our lives. It is very important that we know how to seek God's will and seek to live in a manner that is consistent with God's will. So, how do we discern God's will for our lives?

Let me state again that using an oracle to receive direction from God is not a good practice as it puts us in the position of seeking to control God. If we are not careful in crafting an oracle, we will put ourselves in God's place, the issue that Adam and Eve had, the struggle of all humanity. This issue of poor use of oracles has been seen too many times in the history of Christianity. As example, people were drowned by testing them with the expectation that if God is with them, He will miraculously do something abnormal to save them from drowning, the natural outcome when you put someone under water for more than a few minutes.

We see issues with using oracles, yet we will pray these prayers to God and take His will as being carried out in our actions and circumstances. We may have some success in our own actions, using the gifts that God has given us in our strength to accomplish our will that we are overlaying on God's will. But this is not the way to honor God in our lives. It is not the way to find God's will. It is too easy for us to see what supports our oracle and disregard what does not.

God is in control and can and does bring good things out of our decisions both good and bad. We are not in control of God and need to discern His will using the revelations about God

that we have been given through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ found in the word of God, the scriptures of the Old and New Testament.

We live in a time that is after the coming of Jesus Christ, God's complete revelation of who God is, placed into the same flesh that we occupy. We have an example to follow so that we can understand what God expects us to do in our lives. We have also been given the Holy Spirit to guide us into truth. The Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost on all believers and we believe it is given today in baptism. We have this Helper, this paraclete, to guide us. We also have a cloud of witnesses, other Christians, who have gone before us and have left us their writings, knowledge, and wisdom that we may grow into Christ. Finally, we are together in a congregation of God's people with whom we worship, whom we are to encourage and with whom we are to share our lives. They have wisdom that can help us if we will turn to them and ask for help.

How should we make life decisions with God? First, we are to trust God and be willing to obey God. We have the opportunity to seek to know God through Jesus Christ, his word and example. We have our Bibles, the very word of God, that we can consult and study to help us evaluate decisions in light of what is found in scripture. The very first question we should ask ourselves when seeking to evaluate a decision is to ask, "Is what I am planning consistent with scripture?" Not a single line of scripture that we have lifted out of its context, but with all of scripture. Our decision must be consistent with God's word.

Close to consulting scripture is to have certainty that our plan honors God. The results of our decision need to find us living in a manner that honors God. We should not place ourselves in situations where our actions are not God honoring. This is a place where other Christians can be helpful if they will come along beside us and lovingly share their own experiences and knowledge about what they see us planning or doing. They are not to point fingers and judge us, but to be willing to walk with us and to help each other grow into the image of Christ.

We also need to commit ourselves before we make a decision to be those who will do God's will. Abraham gets up early in the morning and heads out on his trip to sacrifice Isaac. He obeys God. He is seeking to set aside his own interest and obey God. Once we have looked at scripture and learned what God asks of us, we need to be willing to obey what we learn. As we seek to obey God, we need to ask God in prayer to help us identify places where our self-will

reigns and we are driven by selfish motivations and surrender them to God and seek to simply obey.

Next, we need to ask God in prayer for help to clearly think about the decision and to guide our thinking. We want God to clear our thoughts of feelings and conflicts and help us to think about the decision and its ramifications to ourselves and others. We need to make decisions with a clear mind that has been renewed by God and is open to hearing His direction.

We should also seek out other Christians who are full of the spirit and listen to their thoughts on our plans. This is where being part of a small group that meets together regularly is so helpful. It is in these groups trust is developed and we are able to share our plans in a manner that allows other Christians to help us work to clarity and a path forward that honors God.

When we seek God's help in making decisions, we are to look for open doors, closed doors, clear thinking, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. God may give an abnormal circumstance to confirm our plans, but more likely, God is seeking to work in our minds and hearts to give us godly discernment. Above all, when we make bad decisions, don't despair. Turn to God, confess our situation, and accept the grace that he has for us. Don't let our failures pull us down. Let them fill us with the love of God who loves us enough to allow His son to die for us that we may live as people of grace, in the steadfast love of God.

Pray with me: Jesus, send the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to discern your will for our lives from the great issues we need to decide to the small things where we need your guidance so that all of our life may honor you. Teach us to pray, teach us your word, and place in our lives those who are filled with the Holy Spirit who will lovingly guide us into a deeper knowledge and walk with you. Convict us of any sin in our lives and then guide us into changes that are needed so that all we are and do honors the Father. Amen.