

The Journey

Our football team was on a journey last year in search of a defining season for a struggling program. It is difficult to get players and coaches to get beyond the wins as the only measure of success. Perhaps your journey centers on rearing godly children in a hostile culture that rejects biblical truth. You may be a Christian business person on a godly journey in a greed-filled, dog eat dog business field. I believe the Bible attests in many places that success is not a destination; it is a journey. The life of our Lord and the paradox of the cross is the most powerful evidence.

In direct opposition to our natural disposition it is not ultimately the destination that defines us. It is not the championship season, a hefty year-end bonus, a thriving ministry, or even something clearly wonderful like graduation day for a gifted young person that is defining. It is instead our heart towards Christ and one another in all the small things of the journey that will define us. Mother Theresa of Calcutta said, "There are no great things, only small things done with great love." Too often my heart runs after the great things, what I believe are the defining achievements, and I miss out on the multitude of small things that God desires for me to be faithful with in my journey.

The metaphor of the journey representing our passage through life requiring a deep trust in God is a common theme in the Bible. Noah with God's plans for the construction of an ark when it had never before rained on the earth or Joseph who was sold by his brothers as a slave, brought to Egypt and imprisoned only later to be raised up as the most important man in Pharaoh's court. Abraham made a great journey when he was first called of God to leave his homeland to become the father of a great nation that God would establish on the earth (Genesis 12). Later his servant went on a journey recorded for us in Genesis 24 to secure a godly bride for Abraham and Sarah's son Isaac. With two children at marrying age my wife Cindy and I understand his heart more deeply now than ever before. Interestingly, his servant is not named for us but we are told that he had charge over all that his master possessed.

Perhaps God wants us to see the servant as a Messianic figure, a type of Christ. The faith, obedience, and delight to do his master's will are Christ-like attributes. He was a humble servant, faithful in his stewardship over all that his master owned. He loved his journey with God. He traveled upon his request to his master's homeland in Mesopotamia over 500 miles away but he was not permitted to take Isaac back with him. No opportunity to shop the bridegroom with his attractive qualities. This would strictly be a faith proposition! He was given some instruction and a great assurance from his master. "He will send his angel before you and you will take a wife for my son from there."

He was not told who would be chosen or how he would find Isaac's bride. He left with "a variety of good things of his master's in hand." These were gold and silver jewelry along with camels and other costly gifts. He had quite a gift for the father of the bride! On first glance success on this journey seems simple to determine...get the bride, make the payoff, and Isaac can be wed. The prayer of the servant (Genesis 24:12-14) seems to indicate this. "O Lord God of my master Abraham give me success today..." Success as he understood it was in bringing

home a bride but from God's perspective that could be done without him. What God wanted to see was his absolute dependence on the Lord. That is how the Lord viewed success for Abraham's servant. This was demonstrated in his arduous trek on camelback, his deep reverence and affection for his master, and finally in his prayer of faith at the well. Abraham told his servant, "You will be free from my oath when you go to my clan. And if they will not give her to you, you will be free from my oath." In other words, trust the success of this journey to the Lord; my requirement is only that you are faithful in what I desire and you are free with respect to the results! What a glorious freedom for us as servants of Christ in the world!

His prayer reflected a boldness of faith that Rebekah would be revealed to him at the well through her specific response. Rebekah, a beautiful young virgin, had been prepared in her faithfulness to the Lord watering the camels each day at the well, awaiting the husband the Lord would choose (And her Father) for her. Before his prayer was finished she was on the scene! She responded to his question exactly as he had prayed for the Lord to confirm her as Isaac's bride! Rebekah received this word in faith and submitted herself as a chosen bride not knowing her bridegroom. Once her father Bethuel heard all that God had orchestrated in confirming his daughter for Isaac he said, "This is from the Lord." The servant's boldness was again seen in his unwillingness to be detained, requiring that Rebekah leave everything immediately to return with him as his master required. To this, Rebekah willingly submitted.

Was the timeless message of Abraham's servant to us that his search for a bride was a metaphor for God's pursuit of us? The search by God for his bride is seen here. The Bible teaches that as his church we are the bride of Christ. Unlike Rebekah, we possessed no beauty, purity, or godly qualities when God first chose us in our sin. In this sense Rebekah is more a symbol of the bride of Christ having been forgiven her sins and being prepared in holiness for the bridegroom. This work of sanctification is a process which Jesus works in us but also requires our partnership. "That He (Christ) might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word...to present the church to himself in splendor...that she might be holy and without blemish." Ephesians 5:26-27

Here are a few takeaways from this story for us as servants of God:

1. View each day as a purposeful step in my journey with the master.
2. Like Rebekah's daily trip to the well to water the camels (And her sexual purity in waiting), consider how the current chapter of my life represents a season of preparation for something greater that is soon to come.
3. Accept that God can accomplish his purposes through anyone but He is choosing me so that I will cherish my great adventure with him!
4. We are the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5) and God is at work through the Holy Spirit (In the process of sanctification) to present us before the bridegroom in holiness.

5. Obey God in all the little things, like Rebekah and Abraham's servant, find joy in them, and the big things will take care of themselves.
6. God himself is the reward of our obedience-deepening intimacy with Jesus! (John 14:21)
7. Faithfulness as a servant on earth will be rewarded with a greater responsibility in our heavenly vocation. (Matthew 25:14-30)
8. Cherish the words that a humble servant longs for and they will define success to you. "Well done thou good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Master." (Matthew 25:21)