Isaac

The miracle son, the unnamed servant, and a bride who said "I will go"

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, October 10, 2021
PASSAGES	Genesis 24; Genesis 26:1-33; Genesis 21:5-7; Hebrews 11:17-19; Genesis 22:17-18; John 3:16; John 16:13; Luke 9:60
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:59:20 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Isaac's story can seem forgettable, but it is a piece of God's mosaic: the miracle son of an exalted father, who does what he sees his father doing, receives a bride brought to him by an unnamed servant, and goes up the mountain bound and willing. We are caught up into God's story, not the other way round — and like Rebekah, we are invited to hear the testimony and say, "I will go."

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- We don't come to Christ for utility's sake. Our treasure is to know him, whether or not a story helps us on Tuesday.
- God built his new people from a couple too old to have children. He has never needed us to come through for him just in time.
- The unnamed servant at the well shows God already acting behind the scenes; the servant's name hardly matters, only his task.
- Isaac's life rhymes with Abraham's at nearly every turn — Gerar, the same lie, the same wells, the same names, the same promise.
- The Old Testament never lays out Jesus in one place. He is spread across a mosaic, and Isaac is a striking piece of it.

- Rebekah never met Isaac. She heard the testimony about him and said, "I will go" — the response the church is called to.
- Saying yes once is not the end. The Spirit keeps asking, and we keep answering, "I will go."

▶ 0:59:20

"Today I want to preach on Isaac. I don't have a pun — just straight into Isaac." Matt admitted that Isaac is an odd figure, hidden between Abraham's well-known story and Jacob wrestling with God: "I think he married Rachel, or dug a well or something."

Why Isaac seems unremarkable

▶ 1:00:31

Matt was tempted to be defensive on Isaac's behalf, then wondered why his story feels so flat. Part of the reason, he suggested, is an American habit — from William James and the philosophy of religion — of judging faith by its utility: how will this benefit my life? Isaac's story doesn't obviously help on Tuesday.

▶ 1:01:01

> *"We do not approach Christ for utility's sake. Our great inheritance and treasure is to know him, regardless of how he improves my work life Wednesday morning."*

So the aim was to be caught up in Isaac's story as part of God's unfolding narrative.

The one-of-a-kind son

▶ 1:01:46

Amy had preached Abraham two weeks earlier, so Matt began where her story peaked:

> "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, 'Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.' He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back."
>
> HEBREWS 11:17–19 ↗

▶ 1:02:37

“Only son” is striking, since Abraham had Ishmael. The word means one of a kind. Abraham had Ishmael by Hagar naturally and Isaac by Sarah supernaturally, and the promise ran through Isaac. If Isaac needed a sensational headline to get read, Matt offered one: “Mesopotamian Madness: Man Married After His Funeral.”

God has made laughter

▶ 1:03:57

> “Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. And Sarah said, ‘God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me.’ And she said, ‘Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.’”
>
> GENESIS 21:5–7 ↗

“Sometimes when something’s weird in the Bible you have a tendency to skip it. But what if it’s weird because it’s important?” Abraham laughed at the promise, then Sarah laughed, and now laughter is the boy’s name.

▶ 1:05:11

God was starting a brand-new people, and a couple far too old to have children was perfect for it, because everything about the promised line was supernatural. “The church could stand to be reminded of that — that God from the beginning has never needed help from us to come in just in time.”

A servant with no name

▶ 1:05:46

Abraham sends “the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he had” to find Isaac a wife among his own kindred, not the Canaanites (Genesis 24:2–4). Three descriptions, and none of them his name. “The focus is not on this guy. It’s on his task.” (On swearing with a hand under the thigh: “I’m glad we don’t make covenants like that.”)

▶ 1:07:45

> "O LORD, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. … Let the young woman to whom I shall say, 'Please let down your jar that I may drink,' and who shall say, 'Drink, and I will water your camels' — let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac."
>
> GENESIS 24:12–14 ↗

▶ 1:08:20

The prayer reveals what was already happening: God had already appointed someone, and "his invisible hand is throughout this story." Matt assumed not every young woman would volunteer — "I imagine ten camels drink a lot of water." Before he finished praying, Rebekah came out, gave him a drink, and ran back and forth until every camel had drunk, while the man watched in silence to learn whether the LORD had prospered his journey.

▶ 1:10:32

He bowed and worshiped: blessed be the God of my master, who "has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness." Then Rebekah's brother Laban appears — running out "as soon as he saw the ring and the bracelets," Matt noted, and we will see more of him.

"I will go"

▶ 1:12:06

Food is set before the servant, and he will not eat until he has said what he came to say — "that's kind of American." He tells the whole household about Sarah's miracle child, about how God had blessed Abraham, and about his prayer at the well. Rebekah is in the room, listening. It is not hard to imagine the story of the mountain coming up too.

▶ 1:13:49

Reading the servant's words — "who had led me by the right way to take the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son" — Matt choked up and called for water — "I'm not crying" — before noticing his wife was holding a sleeping baby. "This story gets me every time." Then the servant asks for an answer on the spot: tell me, "that I may turn to the right hand or to the left" (Genesis 24:48–49). It is a very fast proposal from "a no-nonsense servant."

▶ 1:16:49

The family agrees — "the thing has come from the LORD" — but asks for ten days. The servant wants to leave the next morning. Not rudeness, Matt thought, just focus on the task. So they ask her.

▶ 1:17:31

> "And they called Rebekah and said to her, 'Will you go with this man?' She said, 'I will go.'"
>
> GENESIS 24:58–60 ↗

▶ 1:18:12

Her family blesses her: may your offspring "possess the gate of those who hate him" — the very words God spoke to Abraham after the mountain (Genesis 22:17–18), now applied to Rebekah. God's hand is confirming that the promise runs through Isaac's line.

▶ 1:18:48

Isaac is out meditating in the field at evening when the camels come. Rebekah veils herself, the servant tells him everything, and Isaac brings her into his mother Sarah's tent, "and she became his wife, and he loved her" (Genesis 24:67). "I just took ten of your minutes" on this servant getting Isaac a wife, Matt said, so that it would stand out.

Same wells, same names

▶ 1:19:56

Later there is a famine, and Isaac goes to Gerar, to Abimelech king of the Philistines — which is why his story "gets blurry; you're like, wait, I thought we just did this." God tells him not to go down to Egypt as Abraham had, and repeats the promise:

▶ 1:21:03

> "Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven … And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed."
>
> GENESIS 26:3–5 ↗

▶ 1:21:37

Right after that promise, Isaac tells the men of Gerar that Rebekah is his sister, for fear they will kill him to take her — his father's lie, word for word (Genesis 26:7–11). Abimelech finds out when he looks out a window and sees Isaac "laughing" with Rebekah — in Hebrew nearly the word *Isaac* itself.

Something playful, maybe a secret kiss. “This story says they love each other.” Abimelech is appalled, and warns the whole people not to touch them.

▶ 1:24:24

Isaac sows the land and reaps a hundredfold in one year, his flocks grow, and the Philistines tell him to leave: you are mightier than we. He reopens the very wells Abraham had dug, which the Philistines had stopped up, “and he gave them the names that his father had given them” (Genesis 26:12–18). At Beersheba God appears: “I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, for I am with you” (Genesis 26:23–25). Isaac builds an altar, and Abimelech comes to make a covenant of peace.

▶ 1:26:09

Matt tallied it: Abraham went to Gerar and so did Isaac. Abraham went to Egypt and Isaac tried to. God used the same covenant language with both. Both were chieftains rich in flocks, both had beautiful wives who struggled to conceive, both told the same lie in a foreign land, both needed room because of their wealth, both made peace treaties, both dug the same wells and gave them the same names.

A piece of the mosaic

▶ 1:28:26

No single Old Testament passage says: a man named Jesus will be the Messiah, suffer, die for sins, rise the third day and be God’s unique son. “That is actually spread out all over the place in this mosaic within God’s story.” And here is a striking piece.

▶ 1:29:00

Abraham, “exalted father,” has a miraculously conceived child who does everything he sees his father doing. Enormous energy goes into getting this miracle child a bride, and the servant makes plain that the son will inherit everything. The son whose name is laughter receives a bride brought to him by the power of God, is blessed to be a blessing, makes peace as a chieftain, and reaps a miraculous harvest. “There’s something very Jesusy about this guy’s life.”

▶ 1:30:34

Both births were foretold, both names given to the parents beforehand, both conceptions miraculous. Hebrews calls Isaac the one-of-a-kind son, the same word used of Jesus in John 3:16. Isaac was young and strong enough to resist his aged father and did not. Both went to the point of death on a three-day journey with two companions, both were bound willingly though neither deserved death, and Moriah, Amy had noted, is tied to the place where the temple would stand. Both, by the Spirit of God, receive a bride they dearly love.

> *"In the big picture, he's not fitting into our story. We are fitting into his."*

Be like Rebekah

▶ 1:33:16

Then Matt allegorized "even harder." The writer could have just named the servant, but leaves him nameless, fixed only on bringing the bride — which reminded Matt of the Spirit, who "will not speak on his own authority" (John 16:13). The servant arrives late, proposes before dinner, wants to leave by morning: are you coming or not?

▶ 1:34:29

"Ponder the faith that she responded to. She heard a testimony. She'd never even met him." Asked to marry and to leave in less than twenty-four hours, she said, "I will go." Matt heard Jesus' own urgency in it: "Leave the dead to bury their own dead" (Luke 9:60) — are you coming with me now?

▶ 1:35:15

This miraculous bride of the miracle son is a lot like the church. God has something big going on that we are often blind to, "but he comes to us knocking and says, will you go? I need to go now — you want to come with?" Not only the first yes of saving faith, but to go where he is going, "to be his beloved."

▶ 1:35:55

The Spirit speaks to all of us, "not just initially come, but ongoingly come." Matt warned against thinking, I said yes originally, now Isaac can do his thing. His challenge: when the Lord puts something on your heart, maybe even pesters you the way that unnamed servant did, answer, "I will go. Yes, Lord." He closed thanking God for "the story of your glory" and asking him to reveal himself more.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Hebrews 11:17–19
- Genesis 21:5–7
- Genesis 24:2–4
- Genesis 24:12–14
- Genesis 24:48–49
- Genesis 24:58–60
- Genesis 22:17–18
- Genesis 24:67
- Genesis 26:3–5
- Genesis 26:7–11
- Genesis 26:12–18
- Genesis 26:23–25
- John 3:16
- John 16:13
- Luke 9:60

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Matt warned against coming to faith “for utility’s sake.” How much of your Bible reading is driven by what it will do for your week?
2. God built his people from a couple too old to have children. Where are you tempted to think God needs you to come through for him?
3. What do you make of the servant’s namelessness and single-minded focus on his task?
4. Which parallel between Isaac and Jesus struck you most, and how does it change the way you read the Old Testament?
5. Rebekah said “I will go” after hearing only a testimony. What might the Spirit be asking you to say yes to this week?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel’s senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church’s governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope’s own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KuKnX5HL2po&t=3560s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.