

A time to depart (Gen. 24)

Part 1

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[00:00:01] There are five short readings, all coming from the book of Genesis. Genesis chapter 24, commencing at verse 34.

Genesis 24, verse 34.

And he said, I am Abram's servant, and the Lord hath blessed my master greatly, and he has become great, and he hath given him flocks, and herds, and silver, and gold, and menservants, and maidservants, and camels, and asses.

And Sarah, my master's wife, bare a son to my master when she was old, and unto him hath he given all that he had. And my master made me to swear, saying, Thou shalt not take a wife to my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, [00:01:04] in whose land I dwell, but thou shalt go unto my father's house, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son.

Now verse 50, the same chapter.

Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, The thing proceedeth from the Lord.

We cannot speak unto thee bad or good. Behold, Rebekah is before thee. Take her, and go, and let her be thy master's son's wife, as the Lord hath spoken.

And it came to pass, that when Abram's servant heard their words, he worshipped the Lord, bowing himself to the earth. And the servant brought forth jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment, and gave them to Rebekah. He gave also to her brother and to her mother precious things. And they did eat and drink.

[00:02:03] He and the men that were with him, and tarried all night. And they rose up in the morning and said, Send me away unto my master.

And her brother and her mother said, Let the damsel abide with us a few days, at the least ten. After that she shall go. And he said unto them, Hinder me not. Send the Lord a prostrate my way. Send me away, that I may go to my master. And they said, We will call the damsel, and inquire at her mouth. And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Would thou go with this man? And she said, I will go.

Now shall we turn to chapter 31. The 31st chapter, verse 1.

And he heard the words of Laban's son, saying, [00:03:01] Jacob hath taken away all that was our father's. And of that which was our father's hath he gotten all his glory. And Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban. And behold, he was not toward him as before. And the Lord said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers and to thy kindred, and I will be with thee.

Now down to verse 13.

I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointest a pillar, and where thou vowest a vow unto me. Now arise, get thee out of this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred, And Rachel and Leah answered and said unto him, Is there yet any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house? Are we not counted of him strangers? For he hath sold us, and hath quite devoured also our money. For all the riches which God hath taken from our father, [00:04:02] that is ours and our children's. Now then, whatsoever God hath said unto thee, do. Then Jacob rose up and set his sons and his wives upon camels, and he carried away all his cattle and all his goods, which he had gotten, the cattle of his getting, which he had gotten in Padanaram, for to go to Isaac his father in the land of Canaan.

Now to chapter 35.

First verse of chapter 35.

And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there, and make thee an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother. Then Jacob said unto his household and to all that were with him, [00:05:01] Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments, and let us arise and go up to Bethel, and I will make thee an altar unto God. And I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went. And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears. And Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem. And they journeyed, and the terror of God was upon the cities that were round and about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob. So Jacob came to Luz, which is in the land of Canaan, that is Bethel. He and all the people that were with him.

And he built there an altar.

And he called the place El Bethel, [00:06:02] because their God appeared unto him when he fled from the face of his brother.

May God bless those portions of his precious word to us. Now shall we sing again, this time the hymn 380. 380 O draw me, Saviour, after thee. I would just like to refer you to two or three other short scriptures in the New Testament.

The first is in the 13th chapter of John, verse 1.

Just the one verse, John 13, verse 1.

Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come, that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, [00:07:04] having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.

And in the 17th chapter, beginning from verse 1, these words spake Jesus and lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour is come.

Glorify thy son, that thy son also may glorify thee.

As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

I have glorified thee on the earth.

I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.

[00:08:05] Now a verse or two in the second epistle of Timothy, the last chapter.

I'm sorry to give you so many scriptures, but I think you'll see in a moment how they link up. 2 Timothy 4, verse 6.

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.

I have fought a good fight.

I have finished my course. I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day, [00:09:01] and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

Some time ago, I don't know quite in what circumstances, I was reading in this 13th chapter of John, and the middle sentence in that first verse stuck in my mind, and it's been more or less in my mind ever since.

When Jesus knew that his hour was come, that he should depart out of this world unto the Father.

When we preach the gospel, we are, I think, usually insistent that the time is short.

[00:10:02] Now is the accepted time.

Now is the day of salvation.

And not only do we point to the fact that it isn't only old people who pass through death, but even children and babies.

The story is told of a young child who wanted to know how long they had in this world, and their parent wisely sent the child to the cemetery and to note the length of the grave, see which is the longest and which is the shortest. Well, it was an object lesson. And we are, and must be, if we're going to be faithful to unbelievers, point out that it may not depend upon age, they may be called out of the scene at any age. And then there is that which is the joy of the believer, [00:11:03] the coming of the Lord, which may be at any time.

And I felt that here in this first verse of the 13th chapter of John, we have got a reminder from the Lord himself of the way he looked at things. And when we come to think of this matter of departing out of this scene, I think there are three major questions that may occur in our minds.

First of all, do we want to go?

And secondly, if we want to go, why do we want to go?

And thirdly, how does this desire, if it exists in our hearts, affect us in our pathway today?

[00:12:03] When we're traveling, I dare say most of us have done a bit of traveling in our time, if it's a good long distance, we have some things to get ready. And we wouldn't like to be pushed up to within, say, an hour of the time of our departure before we knew we were going.

We have certain things to do, quite rightly too. And that is true of the believer.

We're not left here just to idle our time away.

We're here for a purpose.

And if that purpose is to be accomplished for the glory of God, then we can't just take a holiday and say, well, a bit later on I'll see to these things, because that later on never may come to you. And I thought in taking these scriptures [00:13:02] that we've read in the Old Testament and one or two more I shall refer to in the New, we have the circumstances and thoughts of people who have to make a change of place. It's a time of departure for them. And that time of departure is something which brings out what is in the mind of the person.

Now if we put that first question to Rebecca, do you want to go?

Let's go over the story.

Abraham had one son to whom he gave all that he had.

And we read in those scriptures that he had a tremendous lot. He was, as they reckoned in the East in those days, [00:14:03] a very wealthy man.

Lots of herds and men servants and maid servants. I think we read of him in one case when he went out to fight with the kings and Sodom and others. There were over 300 men born in his own house. They had large colonies in those days and he was a wealthy man of the day.

And he had this one son who was his love, the son of promise.

He had others. And he gave them gifts and he sent them away but Isaac was his son.

God had one beloved son.

His own dear son, Jesus Christ our Lord. And to him, he's given all that he had.

He is the heir, God's heir.

The one in whom his thoughts and affections are centered, his beloved son.

[00:15:01] And what has he done? God has sought for his son a bride in this world.

His beloved son, as we know, came out and himself bore all the burden of the day in bringing the message of God's love, that was his joy, but in bearing the rejection of men and this final rejection at Calvary that the debt might be paid, that the bride might be found. There and there only is found the basis upon which poor sinners like ourselves can be gathered together to be a bride for Christ.

And the spirit of God is here in the world today calling out those who shall be associated forevermore with God's beloved son.

Like the servant of Abraham, he had to go back to that distant land [00:16:04] where Abraham came from to call out from his kindred a wife for the beloved son of the house.

And the servant goes and faithfully carries out this mission and he tells in that household where he has been guided of this one beloved son whom Abraham has and to him he has given all that he has. And there is Rebecca listening to all that is said and the parents too, they're listening and they come to the conclusion that it is the mind of God that this Rebecca should be the bride for Isaac. And they turn to her and they ask her what she has to say. Is she willing to go?

[00:17:02] It's a long way.

She says, I will go.

There was no hindrance.

In fact, I believe at that time she looked at the wonderful things the jewels of silver, jewels of gold and all those things and the gifts that he had given all around the household. All those things they told of the wealth and greatness of the person to whose company she was being called. And she lost her heart to him and she didn't want to stay there in her home any longer. She wanted to go.

All they said, stay a little while. The reading says ten days but the margin I think says a whole year. Oh no, she says, I don't want to be hindered. And the servant says, I want to get back. I want to fulfill my mission. And there we get the picture which I believe should represent the believer in his attitude answering the question [00:18:02] whether we want to go. There was no want in the mind of Rebecca to stay.

Why? Her father might say you've got everything you want here. You've got all your home comforts. We're with you. We can enjoy life together. But no, there's a new person coming to her life and she says, I want to go. I don't want to stop here. I have an object and that should be the attraction of our hearts. Do we know the Lord to that extent that we've lost our hearts to him? Do we want to go to meet him because of what he is to our hearts?

Is it just a theory? Just something we've read in the scriptures that he is coming and well, when the time comes we should be translated. Is that all it is?

Or is there something about it like there is with Rebecca here? [00:19:01] No hindrance is big enough to hold her back when the opportunity is there to go. I believe that is what our hearts should say as the words of the Spirit we get in the end of the last book in the Bible.

The Spirit and the Bride say come. Even so, come Lord Jesus.

We long to see him because of what he is and what he has done.

It's the value that we set for the person. The affection we love him because he first loved us. There is a reflection of the love of God or it should be in our hearts and there should be no sufficient reason to keep us here.

No pet themes or little things we want to just build up for some reason or other before we go. No, if the voice comes, we hear that voice, there will be no hindrance because there is no greater joy [00:20:02] than going to see him.

Well now we go on to the other case of Jacob and his two wives.

And we find a completely different picture. And I think somewhere between these two we probably find our place.

Because here we have the other extreme where a man is so occupied with the things down here that he forgets all about his meeting with God.

If we go back to the beginning of his history we find in an earlier chapter that he was a deceiver. His name means supplanter, Jacob.

And he had deceived his brother and supplanted him.

And he had stolen the birthright, [00:21:01] stolen the firstborn blessing and he fled with a bad conscience.

And the night after he slept in a convenient place.

We mightn't call it very convenient, he had a stone for a pillow.

And whilst he slept he had a dream.

And in the morning when he got up what were his thoughts?

Was there any question of wanting to leave this scene for a heavenly one?

Rather not.

How dreadful is this place.

It's none other than the house of God, the gate of heaven.

He had a guilty conscience and he was running away from his brother and he couldn't run away from God. God caught him up.

[00:22:02] Well, God was very gracious to him and he spoke comfortingly to him and he told him that he would bring him back again to that very place and give him the blessings that had been promised to Abraham.

So he journeys on and he gets into the same country where Rebecca came from and there he gets into the household of Laban and there we find that he starts his scheming again.

And he is engrossed in his business, shall we say. And it doesn't seem to me that he thought anything more about God or the promises of God.

God had promised him all he needed. He promised him wealth untold. [00:23:02] But he must get down to it himself. He couldn't trust God. He only trusted himself, not himself very far. Everything that he did was to be a bargain or a covenant or an oath.

Everything had to be confirmed and he wasn't going to leave anything to chance and he wasn't going to leave anything to God if it comes to that.

When God spoke to him at Bethel when he ran away he says, I'll bring you back to this very place and I'll do this and that for you. And his answer was, if you'll do this, if you'll do that, if you'll do the other and so on then you shall be my God and a tenth I'll give back to you. That was the sort of man that Jacob was. He was absorbed in his business.

And in the household of Laban he acted in such a way that he thought he was very ill-used [00:24:03] because he had his wages changed ten times. But it was only the way that he operated himself that caused Laban to change around like that and there they were trying to cut one another's throats. One was trying to be a bit smarter than the other all the time. And he went on in that way so long that he really got hated in that place.

And where we read, we found that they were talking together the family of Laban, Laban and his sons and that and they were beginning to grumble. They saw that the flocks and herds were being translated from their father to Jacob and they didn't like it. And so he calls his wives out to the field and they consult together and they determined to go. And then God also enters into this business [00:25:01] and he says to him, now it's time for you to go back and to go back to Bethel. And now here I think is where we get the lesson. Here is a man who has been engrossed in his business and he has got himself thoroughly disliked by his business. He has made his tenure there so uncomfortable that he is glad to get out of it.

Is there sometimes in our hearts a feeling that we should be glad to get out of this scene? I don't mean to say that we have been doing some dodgy business like Jacob but the question is often in our minds and we give expression to it. I think we are all the same. What a wonderful thing it will be when we have done with this scene altogether and we should get away from all the things that are going on today. [00:26:02] That I believe is quite a right way of expressing ourselves. We shall be glad because all the difficulties of the way then will be done with and it will be the fullness of joy to us. But don't let us ever get into the habit of looking at the coming of the Lord in that way that it is just a deliverance away from the things down here because I believe the way it should appear to us is that

it is the untold joy of seeing the one who is to us more than any other person living or dead could ever be.

It should be our joy to meet him and not so much our joy to run away from the things down here. And I believe because there are other things to do down here we may want to get away from untold and awkward circumstances but it may be that in those circumstances [00:27:03] we may find that there is something that we have got to do. Now perhaps we ought to go a little bit further with Jacob because there are other things there to learn and on our pathway through this world it's a sorry thing if we have to look back and we are filled with regrets.

Jacob, when he got on the way he began to think and he realized that God had sent him back that was the first thing but he was there where he was in the mess that he had made because he had made another mess before he came out. He had upset his brother Esau and he had run away with a bad conscience and now that he has got to go back he has got to bear the fruit of what he has done [00:28:02] and he has got to meet this Esau this brother of his whom he has offended and so he gets his scheming going again and God has to meet him in the way and he has to break him down and show him that this is the end you cannot go on forever with this bargaining and so when he had to meet with his brother Esau things were completely reversed and we get what always seems to me is the picture of the prodigal son in the Old Testament. He finds a welcome instead of just the opposite but then his troubles weren't finished because he still had a bad conscience and he crept on a little further and he put up his altar partway but God has said you have got to go back to Bethel what was the next thing? Oh dear, he wasn't quite ready they had got some idols in the house [00:29:03] they had brought some out from Laban's place and that had caused a tremendous fuss when Laban caught up with them but they had still got these idols and he thought to himself well now I can't go into the presence of God in Bethel with these idols we shall have to do something about that and so we read that they dug a hole under a tree and they buried them before they went any further. Well now there is a sorry picture I don't say it reflects in our own lives but it gives us the lesson of the sort of thing to avoid at the other extreme being in a position which we have made for ourselves which is unpleasant and which we want to get away from and the reason for our wanting to go is the unpleasantness of the place and even so we would go away with a bad conscience because of the things that have happened previously in life.

[00:30:01] Well that's a sorry picture but there was a time to depart and the time to depart brought for him all those forebodings and the coming back of the results of the way in which he had lived but the grace of God met him and you will find most beautifully at the end of that experience God says to him no you are not going to be called any longer Jacob the supplanter but you are going to be called Israel a prince with God that's the way that God works and however poor may be our witness here we still shall have a welcome when we meet the Lord and we shall be in his presence for all eternity but it will be our shame if we have to look at our lives like Jacob looked at his and he had to go back in that shame faced limping way that he had to go back [00:31:02] to Bethel well now there are two instances there one wanted to go and the other had to go put it that way he couldn't stay any longer well now this desire to go what does it mean? how does it affect us in this present life? well now if we refer next to those verses in the second of Timothy we find there a servant of God who had come also to this time to depart and he said I have finished my course I have fought, I have kept the faith it was time for him to depart I have muddled up in my quoting but he says it is time for me to go [00:32:02] I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand and although previously and I suppose always he had in the back of his mind that before his conversion he was the worst enemy of God that could be found he called himself the chief of sinners but then God

wonderfully saved him and he went as hard at work in the service of the Lord as he ever did in the opposite direction and so now he is able to say I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand I have fought a good fight I have finished my course I have finished my course I have kept the faith well now here is a man we have a good deal of his history in the scriptures who has been an out and out servant for God [00:33:01] and that there was no time or place where he was not ready to serve his master and there were no circumstances that he wouldn't face for the glory of his Lord we read in the if you want to read more of him in the third of Philippians there you will find what it meant to him to do what he had done in being converted as he was to believing in the Lord Jesus he was an outcast with his own people he suffered the loss of all things there was nothing left they took it all away from him and they would take his life if they could and so they chased him from place to place but he says I don't want these things all those things that were gained to me I count lost count them as dung they are worthless they are hindrances but I reach out towards that is before the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus that's what he was after and he was not going along [00:34:02] like Jacob with his head between his knees he was going forward with the joy and anticipation of seeing the one who loved me as he says and gave himself for me he says the world is crucified to me and I enter the world the cross of Christ makes all the difference and he couldn't look at the world but through the cross of Christ and that was what it was that separated him from the world as it was and the world that he went out to was a wonderful gospel of the grace of God that is why he went out that Christ had loved him and died for him and he saw that this gospel that had reached him was the gospel that was for others also and so he realized though he told us and told others and it's written down by his hand that the coming of the Lord is nigh [00:35:02] and how to expect it how it will come and all that we get it from his own writings but he was diligent in view of that coming it was because the Lord was coming because the time might be short that was the reason why he did what he did with the Lord Jesus it was different he knew that the hour had come when he should depart out of the world unto the Father he knew Paul realized that the time was near he knew by the things that were taking place the way he'd been treated and the way he'd been tried and witnessed against and all the rest of it by the normal course of events of those days he knew that he hadn't very much longer to live but right up to the time [00:36:02] that he was put out of this scene by men he was able and willing to serve the Lord and he did it in view of as he says here henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness he was looking forward to the future and the time of his departure unknown to him only spurred him on to work harder and harder and the object, the joy of the time of departure was for me to live is Christ and to die is gain to depart is to be with Christ and to enter into that fullness of joy as one who has been a faithful servant and has trodden the path to the glory of his Lord well now the other instance that I do want to refer to is the Lord himself because we do get all manner of pictures [00:37:02] of servants who do certain things but in him is the perfect pattern and so when we read in the 13th of Hebrews we get an exhortation to run with patience the race that is set before us not looking behind us not looking to see other competitors to see how well they are getting on or how much better we are doing but looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of faith the Lord Jesus in the 17th chapter the verses we know so well there at the end of his journey here he could look up to his father and say I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do he was able to say that because he knew exactly what he had to do and that it was just about the time of his departure [00:38:02] the apostle Paul he could say that he had finished he had done as much as he could do and he knew within a little that his end was near but we don't know that and we have to go on as the apostle went and many others go on with the work that we've got to do not lagging and say well I think I've done enough now I must sit down we go on as best we can to the end of the journey the Lord Jesus says I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do and in that lovely prayer of his he says the things that he has done I've given them thy word I've given them the glory and various things all the way down that chapter he tells of the things that he has done and then of course

when we go on to the later the 19th chapter [00:39:01] there you get that other word his life's work was finished when he came to the 17th chapter but there was the greatest of all to be done yet and then we get his word it is finished the whole thing is finished his work of witness through this world was finished and he was able to commend the disciples to his father to be kept and then he went on to the cross and he laid the foundation of that which is the foundation of every blessing for mankind and that also was a finished work he bore witness to it himself and as we read in the epistle to the Hebrews also that it is a work which once offered a sacrifice once offered makes perfect for ever so it is a finished work [00:40:01] as far as he was concerned and it is the end of all working for all who put their trust in our Lord Jesus Christ and his finished work well then let me just leave those three questions with you do we want to go or have we some pet theories and objects down here that keep us behind and give us another object which alas may lead us away from the Lord or if we want to go why do we want to go is it the joy of meeting the Lord or is it to escape difficulties down here and if this desire exists in our hearts how does it affect us in our daily pathway and in our service for our Lord Jesus Christ