

Text: Genesis 24:1-27

Title: "Making Decisions in God's Will"

Time: 10/15/08 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: Decisions are an important part of life. Our country has a big decision to make this November that we are all in prayer about. The job description of the man we elect is going to be primarily, "Make decisions." And so we have endeavored to assess whether or not the candidates have exhibited sound judgment in the decisions they have made in the past. Can they make good decisions?

Our current president has spoken of the desire that he has to make decisions in the will of God. Last month, Sarah Palin came under fire for statements, which she has made in the past, that indicate that she shares this desire as a civil leader. Journalist David Knowles writing for the *Political Machine* complained about this characteristic as follows:

"In fact, newly released video of the governor shows just how easily she mingles religion with politics. God's will, in her eyes, is something we can use to further our political ambition. Here she is on the building of a new natural gas pipeline:

"I think God's will has to be done in unifying people and companies to get the gas line built, so pray for that.'

"Sometimes you need to ask for a little help from the man upstairs, and sometimes you simply follow His clearly laid out plan:

"Pray for our military men and women who are striving to do what is right. Also, for this country, that our leaders, our national leaders, are sending [U.S. soldiers] out on a task that is from God. That's what we have to make sure that we're praying for, that there is a plan and that plan is God's will.'

“Like President Bush, Palin employs the holy spirit [*sic*] to justify her policy positions. If it's something you want, like an oil pipeline, you pray He'll help you get it built. If it's a badly mismanaged war (McCain's words) then it's all part of God's plan, be patient.” [<http://news.aol.com/political-machine/2008/09/02/sarah-palin-iraq-war-gods-plan/>; accessed 10/16/08.]

People like this journalist exhibit a pagan ignorance of the important role that an appreciation of our need for the blessing of Divine Providence has played in the history of our Republic, the greatest nation that God ever raised up among men. After 10 weeks of deliberation at the Constitutional Convention, our founding fathers reached an impasse that threatened to dissolve their hopes for a unified nation before it even had a chance to get started. In that moment of imminent despair, Benjamin Franklin, perhaps the most irreverent of the men gathered then for that work, rose and made the following proposal:

“In this situation of this Assembly, groping as it were in the dark to find political truth, and scarce able to distinguish it when presented to us, how has it happened, Sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of lights to illuminate our understandings?

“In the beginning of the Contest with G. Britain, when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayer in this room for the divine protection. — Our prayers, Sir, were heard, and they were graciously answered. All of us who were engaged in the struggle must have observed frequent instances of a Superintending Providence in our favor. To that kind Providence we owe this happy opportunity of consulting in peace on the means of establishing our future national felicity.

“And have we now forgotten that powerful Friend? Or do we imagine that we no longer need His assistance? I have lived,

Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth – that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid?

“We have been assured, Sir, in the sacred writings, that ‘except the Lord build the house they labour in vain that build it.’ I firmly believe this; and I also believe that, without His concurring aid, we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel: We shall be divided by our little partial local interests; our projects will be confounded; and we ourselves shall become a reproach and bye word down to future ages. And what is worse, mankind may hereafter from this unfortunate instance, despair of establishing governments by human wisdom and leave it to chance, war, and conquest.

“I therefore beg leave to move – that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven, and its blessings on our deliberations, be held in this Assembly every morning before we proceed to business, and that one or more of the Clergy of this City be requested to officiate in that service.”

Franklin speaks of the building of a house and the need for the concurring aid of God in doing so. This is the concern of Abraham in this chapter, and it ought to be the concern of us all as God’s people: “How can we best make decisions in the will of God, with His concurring aid?” I think the passage we read this morning gives us four principles in this regard.

I. Make your decision with obedience to the Lord’s parameters (vv. 1-10).

Illustration: A parameter is a boundary. We are going to be playing soccer against Londonderry Baptist in a few weeks, and we will do it on a soccer field. The field provides parameters or boundaries for the game. When the ball goes off the

field, it has violated a parameter and is out-of-bounds. The passage before us indicates that obedience to the parameters or boundaries of God's will for our lives are an important part of making a decision that is in His will. I want us to see three of these parameters Abraham respected:

1. Abraham's desire to please God was a parameter for his decision (24:1, 7).

Application: He recognized that the blessings of life that he had known were gifts from God, and he had a desire to be faithful to the One who had promised still greater blessing ahead.

Do you have the kind of relationship with the Lord that simply wants to please Him come what may? The passage mentions walking with the Lord's angel and believing His promise. Do you desire to do that? Or is it a greater priority to you to please yourself? In order to make a decision in the will of God, we must have a desire to please Him, and that comes from maintaining our relationship with Him. His promise is that if we walk in the Spirit, we shall in no way fulfill the desires of the flesh (Gal. 5:16).

2. The clear warnings of the Lord were a parameter for his decision (24:2-6, 15:12-16).

Application: God had given Abraham some clear warnings about the people that he lived among. He understood that they were a people whose iniquity was ripening in preparation for a great work of God's judgment. That warning meant something to Abraham. It provided a boundary for him that helped him make a decision in God's will.

Today, single people are provided with similar warnings (1 Cor. 7:39, 9:5, 2 Cor. 6:14). We cannot make a decision in the

will of God if we refuse to heed the warning's of God that apply to that decision.

3. The priority of God's calling was a parameter for his decision (24:7-9).

Application: God had given Abraham and Isaac some specific things to do, and they could not be done if Isaac married a woman who was unwilling to follow him as he accomplished that calling. If God has called you to attend this church, and serve in a certain capacity here, and the decision you are contemplating keeps you from doing that, you are kicking the ball out-of-bounds, and the game you are playing simply cannot be won for the will of God in your life that way. The priority of God's calling is an important parameter for our decisions, and in order to make decisions in the will of God we must respect these parameters.

II. Make your decision with trust in the Lord's promise-keeping love (vv. 11-14).

Application: In most decisions there are variables that we can control and variables beyond our control. God allows variables beyond our control as a part of our decisions because He wants us to understand our need for his promise-keeping love (vv. 12, 14). Nothing is beyond His control, and we are called to trust that this is indeed true about Him.

The Bible is clear that those who are willing to trust Him make prayer a priority.

Illustration: You know, I like fresh vegetables; but I cannot say that I sense a need to depend on fresh vegetables. If I really felt the need for the nutrition of fresh vegetables, I'd make sure that our kitchen is always stocked with them. I might even plant a garden. I enjoy them; I think they are nice; but I do not really feel a terrific need for them.

Application: Those who understand their need for trust in the Lord's promise-keeping love are moved to pray for it. That is how we keep our shelves stocked with trust in those promises.

We see this in the life of Abraham's servant. In our own day, we see this when some great threat or tragedy befalls someone. Do you really sense your need to trust the Lord's promise-keeping love as you make a decision? Our times of prayer are important to us here at New Boston Baptist Church, and they suffer from unfortunate neglect. Prayer is the way we demonstrate trust in the Lord's promise-keeping love. It needs to be more to us than a nice thing to do once in a while. A weak prayer life can make for a very low level of trust in God's promises that results in some very bad decisions.

III. Make your decisions with sensitivity for the Lord's work of providence (vv. 15-21).

Application: Note that we are told about the timing of Rebekah's appearance. The doctrine of God's providence tells us that God is in control of the circumstances we face, and so we need the ability to see His hand at work in all things in order to respond according to His will.

Illustration: When we moved from Texas to South Carolina, I found a realtor that happened to go to Colonial Hills Baptist Church, which happened to be a church with a host of New England connections.

The day Victor called to talk to me about the need for a pastor here happened to be after I had just arranged to be in the area for a different purpose. None of these acts of God's providence are "just so happened" happenings. They are God-directed circumstances. Sometimes these circumstances show us more plainly the will of God for our lives, especially when we are not out-of-bounds and ignoring God's parameters, and when we are in prayer trusting His promises.

When it comes to the role of God's providence in our decision-making, we can trust the promise that "the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in His way" (Ps. 37:23). Expect the Lord to show you His ability to make the ordering of your steps plain to you through His work of providence. He delights in doing so.

IV. Make your decisions with thanksgiving over the Lord's provisions (vv. 22-27).

Application: Did you notice that God did for Isaac here things that were exceedingly abundantly above what even the servant asked for? Later we will see the life of Jacob who attempts a lot of what this servant did in his own strength and on his own terms. He had to learn the hard way, because he did not understand how to make decisions in the will of the Lord with the aid of His concurrence. Abraham's servant has much to teach us all in this regard.

Isaac is the happy beneficiary of the enormity of the Lord's blessing on the life making decisions in the center of His will. When we make our decisions in God's will, He often pours out a blessing that is far too great to have been anticipated by us.

When he does, we need to be thankful to the Lord for His blessings, not take them for granted. A complaining, discontented spirit is antithetical to making a good decision in the will of the Lord. The failure to give thanks for His leading is poor preparation for future blessing. From time to time along the path of the blessing of God's will for our lives, we must stop to pray with Moses: "Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation" (Exod. 15:13).

Conclusion: Does God care about the decisions we make? Yes He does. This is certainly true when it comes to leaders of civil

governments. We should desire those who recognize with Franklin their need for Heaven's wisdom and assistance.

But it is easy to be critical of politicians and journalists while excusing ourselves. We too need to make our decisions according to God's will to know the fullness of His blessing. May we make these kinds of decisions for His honor and glory. Think of how blessed our lives, our marriages, our homes, our local church, and even our nation might be if each of us did so.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*