



Ask God Why?

Genesis 24:19-34

Sixth in a sermon series on Genesis

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Louie and his daughter sat at the breakfast table early Tuesday morning. So early, in fact, the sun wasn't up yet. With sleep still in her eyes Lily turned to her dad and asked "Can I play outside?" He replied "No, it's too early and it's still dark out." Lily paused for a moment while watching her dad spoon oatmeal into his mouth, then she asked "why?" Louie told her "It's because the sun isn't up yet." Without hesitation she asked again "why?" Louie told her that the earth rotates, it spins around, and when it turns far enough the sun appears on the horizon and lights everything up." Looking out the kitchen window Lily asked "why?" Louie knew where the conversation was going and he was already tired. He did not want answer anymore "why" questions, but Lily persisted, "why?" Louie answered as he could, but he knew he hadn't paid enough attention in earth science. He was afraid he wouldn't be able to correctly answer anymore "why" questions so he simple said "because..." and left it at that.

Scientists have studied this "why" phenomenon and ironically asked why children are so quick to ask "why." What they found out is asking "why" accelerates learning and facilitates a better understanding of the unknown. It helps children to learn and grow, getting a better handle on life. Asking "why" is an important question.

Our text this morning reveals to us that the question of "why" isn't just for children and scientists. Rebekah and Isaac had been married for 20 years. Up until then they didn't have any children. So they prayed to God, who is creator of all things and who knows every person even before they are formed in their mother's womb, for a child. Being the daughter-in-law and son of Abraham I am quite sure they knew of the promise God had made to Abraham and Sarah to give them many descendants, but without children and grandchildren that promise would go unfulfilled. As the Psalmist proclaims, God does not turn his ear from us and he did not turn his ear from Rebekah and Isaac. The Lord granted their prayers for a child by graciously empowering Rebekah to become pregnant. In doing so, God kept the promise he had made.

Rebekah's pregnancy, however, wasn't easy. Once she could feel her unborn twins moving about she sensed they weren't just tumbling around in her womb. No, something more was going on. The original biblical language suggests it was far more than a little rough housing, more than elbowing and kneeing. It was an all out fight. Because of this Rebekah's pregnancy was miserable, painful, and taxing. In the midst of her pain and the conflict happening within her she turned to God in prayer. She asked God "why?" Why was this happening. It wasn't supposed to be this way. Why would God allow this to happen? Why are things the way they are? Children don't hesitate to ask "why." Rebekah didn't hesitate to ask God. She cried out, "why" God?

There are times in our lives when we don't ask God "why." I think it is because we sometimes get caught up on words like sovereign, omnipotent, and omniscience. The big words used to describe God, which make God seem distant, unconcerned, and aloof. Other times we don't ask why because we think it makes us bad Christians, doubtful followers. Rebekah, however, was not worried theological terms or being a bad Christian. She was concerned with the "why." Through her example we learn that we can ask God "why." Why is life filled with conflict, grumpy neighbors fighting over property lines? Why do bad things happen to good people like those homes and business were destroyed by the tornado of 2013 or Elizabeth is in so much pain? Why does evil exist in a world created by an all loving God? Why do people lie to and abuse one another? Why can't we all just get along? My biggest question of why is: "God, why do people suffer?" Everywhere I look people are suffering. This morning, there are people here who are suffering. They are lonely. They are facing cancer. They are covered by a dark cloud of depression. They have been discriminated against because of their race, nationality, and gender. They are hurting because of what others have said. Why God? Why do people suffer? We all have why questions. Some are big others are little and it doesn't take any of us very long to think of them. Lily asked her dad "why." Rebekah asked God "why." I ask God "why." You can and should ask God "why" too.

God isn't like Louie who grew tired of Lily's questions. God loves hearing from you, for you are God's child, precious in his sight. So be bold and ask God all the "why" questions you have. God wants to hear them. The Bible tells us "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask God anything, God hears us" (1 John 5:14). God does not grow tired of listening to you. God doesn't grow tired of the "why" questions. God is always listening to you.

Louie was also afraid to answer Lily's questions because he didn't know the answers. God, however, knows the answers to our every question. God answered Rebekah... Although, God's answer probably wasn't what Rebekah was expecting. God told her she would have two children, twins to be precise. Those twins would live at odds with one another. No parents want to hear that their children don't like one another, but God was working through the brokenness of this world to bring about his good purposes on earth. God was graciously present to Rebekah and her family. In this, the text reveals to us another truth. When we ask God "why", we need to be willing to hear God's answer, even if it isn't what we expect. Even if it isn't what we want. Even if it doesn't always make sense to us, but we can be sure God always answers our questions.

The Scientists mentioned earlier point out that asking "why" accelerates learning and helps us to better understand the unknown. When we ask God "why" we are drawn into a deeper relationship with God. In short, we get to know God better. The "why" questions we ask of God bridge the gap of the unknown. Asking God "why" makes space in our lives in such a way that God no longer feels like some supreme being who set the universe in motion long ago and then left it to itself. In asking God "why", God enters into our lives with grace, mercy, love, and answers.

From this text and Rebekah in particular we learn a few things. First, that is good and proper to ask God "why" things happen, whether or not they happen in the middle of conflict as was the case for Rebekah, or not. Second, God always answers our questions and often God's answers aren't what we expect, but that is alright because God is always working out his purposes for our good. Third, in asking God "why" our relationship with God deepens. God becomes less unknown to us in those questions, while at the same time becoming more present to us through them. Like Rebekah don't hesitate to ask God "why." Why is a good question and one God wants to hear from you.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

A Time For Prayer

Glory to you, almighty God! You spoke, and light came out of darkness, order rose from confusion. You breathed into the dust of the earth, and we were formed in your image. You looked on the work of your hands, and declared it was all good. And still you speak, breathe, and look for us. May your blessing be upon this church, its executive board, its deacons, its volunteers, and all of its members. We praise you!

Glory to you, Jesus Christ. You met us as a refugee, a threatened child, the Word made flesh, born in a forgotten place. You called us, by name, to leave what was comfortable, to be your disciples, companions, and friends. You saved us by kneeling at our feet, stretch your arms wide to take away our sins, walking through death to life again. And still you meet, call, and save us. May Christ be present with all the volunteers and attendees of VBS tonight and every night. We praise you.

Glory to you, Holy Spirit! You brooded over chaos, mothering and shaping God's new creation. You inspired prophets and evangelists to discover the right word for the right season. You liberated the early church for mission, claiming all of life for the Lord of all. And still you brood over, inspire, and liberate us. May the Spirit continue to move within the church and direct us to fulfilling your call.

Glory to you, God, Three in One! You are surrounded by the song of the saints in heaven, and you are present with us now. We adore you.

Amen.