

The Death of A Princess

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[0 : 00] Let's turn now to Genesis 23, looking at this passage where we find an account here of the death of Sarah.

We've been following the life of Abraham recorded in these chapters for us, from chapter 12 through to this point in Genesis. And we've seen many things in regard to Abraham, but of course we also realise that all the things that we read about Abraham and his experiences in life were shared with his wife Sarah.

There's not many people that can say they have been married for over a hundred years. But Abraham and Sarah were married for a hundred and twelve years.

And what an amazing journey they were on together as they lived by faith. As God called Abraham from Ur of the Chaldeans, along with his then family, and Sarah with him from that time, shared in that life of faith which they had together on this great journey.

They had been married for about fifty years by the time that God called them out of Ur of the Chaldeans. So it was an entirely new experience for them together to share in this life of faith.

[1 : 29] And that is such a great experience, isn't it? To share together a life of faith. It's such a privilege to know of that kind of relationship where together we have a share in the things of faith on life's journey.

And Abraham now comes to the stage where he has to face the death of Sarah. After all of these experiences and after all the rich experiences he had along with her, he now comes to the time of her removal from his life.

A very difficult time for anyone. A very solemn time. A very special time in its own way for those who believe. Because there is, as we'll see from Abraham's life, an attitude of faith to the things of death. Just as there is to the things of life. And that too is important for us. It's important for us how we face the issues of death.

Just as it's important how we face the issues of life. What kind of view do we have of death? What is our opinion of death? How do we actually think of death?

[2 : 44] What kind of thing is it? What kind of understanding do we have with regard to death? And what lies beyond death? These are things of course which faith itself looks to in a special way.

Because as we come by faith to look upon the issues of death and all that's related to death. Faith looks back. Faith looks back to the past. And faith draws encouragement from the past.

And faith also looks to the future along with hope. When we come to experience death in a believing sense. So that's the first thing we're looking at today.

From this experience of Abraham. It gives us a Christian attitude to death. A Christian attitude to death. And the second thing that we learn from this incident is a Christian witness to hope.

Because that's what Abraham was. To those around him. These Hittites. These local people in the land. His way of dealing with his wife's death.

[3 : 52] Just as they had seen him living his life with her. It was to them a witness of a believing hope. So we can say for ourselves that it gives us a Christian witness to hope from this passage.

A Christian attitude to death first of all then. Sarah lived 127 years. And she died at Kiriath Arba. That is Hebron.

And Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah. And to weep for her. The place of grief. Of mourning. That's to say in a public sense.

As well as in a private sense. We all know that it's right to mourn in a private sense. We all know the place of grief and of mourning. And of expressing that in the privacy of our own lives.

In the privacy of our hearts. In the privacy of our homes. Of our rooms. Whenever we find that we need to express that grief. Whenever we find grief entering into our human experience.

[4 : 55] Through the removal of loved ones. But we're dealing here with something that's public. A public grief. A grief that's actually seen by others.

In relation to the circumstances of this man Abraham. Now some people will suggest to us that. For a Christian to express grief publicly.

Especially over the death of a fellow Christian. That it's not appropriate. To really give much expression to that. In terms of a public expression of grief.

After all. A believer. When they die. Goes to a better place. We understand and know. From the word of God. That we go to be with Christ. Which Paul assures us.

In Philippians. Is far better. Why should a believer then grieve. Over the death of a fellow believer. Why should someone even like Abraham. Grieve publicly.

[5 : 51] Over the removal of his wife. When he knows she's gone to a better country. And some will go so far as to say. That it's misplaced.

To express public grief. In these circumstances. Well is it? Well of course it isn't. And not only does the Bible tell us.

That it's appropriate for us. To show grief publicly. It's actually necessary for us. It's something that God himself. Not only gives an allowance for.

And gives us the facility. And the liberty to do. There's a sense in which he requires it of us. If you go through the Old Testament. You'll find that. Especially with regard to the death.

Of important leaders in Israel. Such as Moses for example. There were set times of grief. Specified. Over. For. During which.

[6 : 46] The people had to mourn. Over. The death. Or the removal. Of such persons. As such people. As Moses. So that is. That itself tells you. That.

God required them. To give this space. To their grief. To give expression. To their grief publicly. So that. Certain things. Were.

Were brought out. By that. When Paul wrote to. The Thessalonians. For example. We often quote. These verses. With regard. Especially to the death. Of believers.

The Thessalonians. Were afraid. That because. Certain number. Of them. Had passed on. Since they were converted. That they were going to miss out. On the second coming.

Of Christ. And they were a bit perplexed. That. These people. Who had passed on. That had died. They were believers. But. If Christ was going to come. What was going to happen to them? Were they not going to miss out.

[7 : 39] On this. Important event. And. Paul of course. Went on to. To demonstrate. And to teach them. No that's not the case. In fact. They're going to be raised. First. From the dead.

They're going to be. Raised up. From the grave. And resurrection. And they'll go up. To meet the Lord. In the air. They'll be the very first ones. To meet him. And to see him. As he comes. To earth. That last great day. But you see. He said to them. That. We do not mourn. As those. Who have no hope. He didn't mean by that.

We don't mourn. Publicly. Over those. Christians. Who have passed on. Or even those. Who are not Christians. Who have passed on. It's not right. To take from that passage. That mourning. Publicly. Is out of place. That is not appropriate. Inappropriate. Especially in. The case of a Christian. Who is mourning. The death of a fellow Christian. The Bible doesn't. Actually encourage us.

[8 : 34] To think that way at all. It is. Important. That we give. Expression. To our grief. There is a place. For public. Expression. Of grief. In the Christian's life.

Even over the death. Of a fellow Christian. Why is that important? Well. For two things. At least. Because it is itself. As it is with Abraham here. It's a public witness.

It's a public witness. To our view of death. To our view of the issues of death. To our conviction about what death is. And what is beyond death.

It's a way of expressing to others. In a way that is controlled. And yet visibly seen to be moved.

It's a way of expressing the reality of death. The finality of death. And gives also the facility to us. Or the opportunity to us.

[9 : 33] To speak to people about what we think of death. What we think is beyond death. How we as believers face death in faith. And what God means to us. At a time of death.

At a time of sorrow. At a time of bereavement. All of that is built into the fact. That our grief is made public. And as it's made public. It enables us to present to people.

The realities of death. The finality of death. The importance of meeting it in faith. And being prepared for it when it comes. And it also gives an expression.

To the value we place on such things as companionship. And friendship. And as in Abraham's case.

The value that he placed on Sarah's life. As she accompanied him as a fellow believer. Through the issues of life. And now coming to her death. And he's able to express what she meant to him.

[10:33] By his public show of grief. He is saying. This was a remarkable woman. This was someone who shared with me. Since we left Ur of the Chaldees.

So many experiences. This was someone who backed me up. In my dealings with other people. This was somebody who strengthened me. When I needed strengthening. This was someone who encouraged me.

When I needed encouragement. This was somebody who thought better than myself. At many times in my life. This was somebody who kept me sometimes. On the path that I would have departed from.

Had it not been for her experience. And for her wisdom. And for her commitment to the Lord. To show me the right way. When I was about to go off tracks. So many of us can say that.

About our partners in life. And our public grief. When they're removed from us. As an expression of how much. They meant to us.

[11:30] Of how much their love. Meant to us. And of how much value we placed. Upon the fact that God gave them to us. Here then is the place.

Of grief. In the experience of Abraham. And that gives us. All of these things that we've mentioned. That are appropriate. And necessary for us. At this time in our lives.

When we face mourning. And grief. And loss. The second thing. In regards to a Christian attitude to death. Is the propriety. Of burial.

In other words. The proper way. In which to deal with. The dead. With the way that we need to. Have our dead dealt with.

Respectfully. And in a way that shows. That even their bodies. Deserve and require. A proper treatment. In burial. Notice how.

[12:26] Abraham actually speaks. To the Hittites here. I am a sojourner. And a foreigner among you. Give me. Property among you. For a burying place. That I may bury. My dead.

Out of my sight. Now these are important words. That I may bury. My dead. Out of my sight. They're very solemn words. It's not easy. Dealing with.

The issues. Of death. It's not actually easy. Dealing with the facts of death. Describing. The facts of death. Accepting the facts of death. In the cold. And stark reality.

Of death. We're dealing with. A dead body. What remains. Of the person. After they have died. And what this is telling us.

Is that. There is a certain. Dignity. And decency. And way. Of treating. These remains. And it's important. That they are dealt with.

[13:20] In that fashion. Abraham sought. To put his death. Out of his sight. Death. You see. As you very well know. This death. Is a repulsive thing.

Death. Is something. That we caused. By our sin. And that therefore. Invaded. God's creation. We were not. Created with death. Already.

In our experience. We were not. Created by God. With the. Inevitability. Of death. Already. Built into. Our creation.

If you like. It was something. That came. As the wages. Of sin. As the result. Of our disobedience. Against God. As he himself. Specified. The day that you eat.

Of it. You will surely die. And that death. Became. A reality. The moment. We disobeyed. God. And Adam. And so death.

[14:15] As it is repulsive. As it is. In itself. Something that we. Cannot bear. To look upon. Because it's so ugly. Because it's. So opposite. To what we were created with.

In life. So the dead. The dead body. The dead. In the sense of. What remains. Is also something. That needs to be removed. Out of our sight.

Is something that. That Abraham expresses here. As let me bury my dead. Out of my sight. It's removed from our sight.

It's removed from. The space of the living. If you like. Because. It's no longer appropriate. That such a thing. Be left. Without being put out of sight.

And God. Is going to do that. With regard to death. Ultimately. Anyway. Bible tells us. In the book of Revelation.

[15:07] That death. Will be. No more. That's not obviously the case. In the absolute. Ultimate sense. But it is. True.

In the sense of. The whole. Restored. Creation. The restored. Saved. People of God. As they inhabit. The new heavens. And the new earth. Whatever you make of that.

The fact is. There is no death in it. There is no place for death in it. Death is completely removed from it. There shall be no more death. Neither mourning.

Nor crying. Nor tears. Everything to do with death. The death that has invaded God's creation. Salvation takes care of that. Redemption does away with that. Redemption is the abolishing of death.

That's what Jesus Christ came to do. And that's what Jesus Christ did. That's what his death and his resurrection accomplished. That's the essence of the gospel. As Paul says in his writings to Timothy.

[16:04] This is what Jesus Christ brought to life. He brought to light. Life and immortality. Through the gospel. But there will be a place.

Where there will be nothing but death. Everlasting death. Death. The death that is damnation. Hell. Condemnation.

The place. The state. Of the lost. The Bible doesn't hide that from us. But it does say that's outside of what God saved people occupy.

However you think of it. That's what is outer darkness. That is outside of the realm of the saved. And the realm of the redeemed. And the new heavens.

And the new earth. In which righteousness will dwell. God is going to remove death entirely out of the space of the saved. And that too is something that we deal with.

[17:10] When we deal with the dead. When we deal with those whose remains are now with us. We bury them. And we give them a decent burial.

One of the great things. About our own tradition. If you like. And our own practice. Not just in the church. Here. But in our districts.

In our practice. Is the respect. And the care. That's taken. With regard to the dead. It's not something we treat lightly.

It's not something that we use. As an occasion to abuse those who are bereaved. By speaking out of turn. By making advantage of it in some way that's not appropriate.

It's also very important to us. That we set about the funeral itself. In a way that gives decency.

[18:10] And as far as possible dignity. To the removal of the dead from our side. And we bury them. We bury them respectfully. We say appropriate words of these times.

We commit these remains. To return to the dust. Dust. But it's important. That we do formally commit them. To return to the dust.

I think it's important to actively state that. By any minister at the time. Because what you're really doing. Is giving public testimony. That these remains.

Are not going to remain. Dust forevermore. You commit them. You commit them. To return to the dust. Until. The day of the resurrection. When the Lord will return.

And we shall all be resurrected. And we must all appear before. The judgment seat of Christ. Because what Abraham is really saying. In taking such care. Over the. The burial.

[19:12] Of his beloved wife. He is saying. This is not the end of our journey. The end of our journey. Together in faith. In this world. But she is not.

She is not. At the end of her. Life's journey. With her burial. And her burial. Is going to. Lead to life. Beyond death. And there is such a thing.

Although. Abraham of course. Didn't see it as clearly. As we do. In the New Testament age. There is such a thing. As we've said. As the resurrection. We bury with a view.

To the resurrection. We bury with anticipation. Of the resurrection. So we bury. With respect. And we bury with care. We bury. In the way that Abraham.

Teaches us here. To remove our dead. Out of our sight. But to do it. Respectfully. And properly. And decently. We should be greatly thankful. That God has maintained.

[20 : 07] Amongst us. As a people. That way of dealing with death. That way of dealing with the dead. That way of conducting. And participating in. Funerals.

The Christian attitude. Attitude to death. Even. Including. An attitude to the dead. And to how to. Deal with. The remains.

Of those who have died. Secondly. There is a Christian. Witness to hope. Why does the chapter give us.

All these details about. Abraham's negotiations. With the Hittites. Why did he go through. With such negotiations. With the Hittites. And why didn't he actually accept.

The offer that was made. There in verse 6. To begin with. Where the Hittites answered him. Well. Look. We've got. Whatever the best tomb. You find. Belonging to us.

[21 : 03] Here is. Just take that. And use it. Why then did he. Not accept that. Why did he go into this. Protracted. Negotiation. Carefully. And respectfully.

Dealing with the Hittites. Till. Finally. They agreed. That he would. Just. Not just. Obtain. The possession. But he would buy it. He would pay. What was a rather expensive sum.

At the time. He would pay for it. And he would pay this man. Ephron the Hittite. Not only. For the cave. In which to bury his dead. At Machpelah. But. The field that went along with it.

Even the trees are mentioned. Why is all that mentioned here. Why do we have. So much of that. In the chapter. Well. It's to do with. The way that this land. The land of Canaan.

Was promised. As an inheritance. By God. To Abraham. And his descendants. It belonged to the Hittites. In one sense. That they occupied it.

[21 : 58] They had come probably from. A long time before this. To settle in the land. And to claim it as their own. But in a spiritual sense. It belonged to Abraham. Luke.

He said to Abraham. Many years before this. Luke now. Throughout the whole length. And the breadth of this land. For to you. I'm giving it. And to your descendants.

To be an inheritance. To you forever. And as Abraham. Came to negotiate. To them. There's one thing. Just to notice. In passing. Before we come to the detail of it.

And it's. It's the way. In which the. Hittites recognized him. And thought about him. He said to them. I'm a sojourner. And a foreigner. Amongst you. Give me this burying place.

And then the response was. Hear us my lord. You are a prince of God. Amongst us. Bury. You're dead. A prince.

[22 : 51] Of God. Or it could be translated. A mighty prince. But. The word that's used there. Is the word in the old testament. For God. So it's right. It translated a prince of God. What are the Hittites actually saying?

What is this saying? About Abraham's life? What is this saying? About his testimony? It's saying. Not only. That they saw him. As a man of God. In the way that he dealt. With death. And the death of his beloved wife.

They knew him. As a man of God. Long before that. As he walked amongst them. And lived amongst them. As he interacted with them. As he went about dealing with his family. As he worshipped God.

As he set up his altars. As we saw. And offered sacrifices to his God. As he prayed to his God. Which he would have done in public. These people knew this man. As a prince of God.

As a man of God. Who was eminent. For his godliness. For his closeness to God. For his commitment to God. Nowhere more so than.

[23 : 48] What you find as we saw last time. In the previous chapter. Where he had come. So obediently. To follow God's requirements. To the last detail. Even in giving his son.

As a burnt offering. And there was only. An angel shouting from heaven. The angel of the Lord. That actually stopped him. From physically killing his son.

Who was. Dead. And given to God. In Abraham's heart. In Abraham's mind. In Abraham's attitude. In Abraham's obedience. Isaac was dead.

And God stopped him. Actually physically. In expressing that. By stopping him. Slaying his son. Well that's the kind of man. That Abraham was.

And the Hittites knew it. There's a challenge. For me. There's a challenge for me. As a minister of the gospel. There's a challenge for you. Today. As belonging to the church.

[24 : 46] Of God in the world. Lord. When people see us. Day by day. Going about our lives. Are they able to say about me. Are they able to say about you.

There's a prince of God. There's somebody who carries the marks. Of being a God fearing person. A God honoring person. There's somebody who's life bears testimony.

To the fact. That they put God before everything else. This man had that. And they knew it. It was a witness. To him being a believer.

And the quality of his faith. And of his godliness. Was acknowledged even by the pagan Hittites. My Lord. You are a prince of God. Among us.

Therefore. Here is. A place in which to bury your dead. Well the negotiations. As we said. Were carried out. Because Cainan. Was the inheritance.

[25 : 45] Physical inheritance. That God. Had promised Abraham. And his descendants. But as we saw already. When we dealt with this. In previous passages. Abraham. As you see. From Hebrews 11. Looked beyond.

The physical land. Of Canaan. The physical land. For him. Was important. And it was important. That he. And his descendants. Be buried. In that land. Physically. Because of what it represented. Spiritually. Because God had said. It was their inheritance. And because his mind. Went above that. To the spiritual inheritance. What Hebrews called. A better country. That they looked forward to. By faith. Abraham required. That his wife. And himself. And his descendants. Would be buried. In the land of Canaan. And not only.

That they would be buried. In the land of Canaan. But that they would demonstrate. Even to the Hittites. That this was actually. Important to them. Because God.

[26 : 41] Had specified his soul. Wasn't enough for Abraham. That the Hittites. Offered him a piece of ground. And offered him. The best. Even the choicest. Of their tombs.

Abraham could have said. Well thank you very much. I really appreciate that. Your kindness to me. Is quite special. No. It needed to belong to him.

It needed to belong to him. To the extent. That he would actually pay. The right sum of money. Or a sum of money. So that he could then say.

This is truly. And properly. And legally. Mine. You see how many times. Through the passage there. You read about this. Was in the hearing of the Hittites.

All the way through there. You've got this repeated. In the hearing of the Hittites. In the hearing of the Hittites. It was important to Abraham. That it be in the hearing of the Hittites.

[27 : 37] That it be publicly demonstrated. That he had done this. That this was important to him. That he had bought it. That he had paid the price of it. And therefore. It was his. And it was important.

That it be in the hearing of the Hittites. To Abraham. Because he wanted it to be demonstrated. This really belonged to him. And it represented for him. Something far more special.

Than the land itself of Canaan. That it represented. The heavenly country. Of heaven. That's what he looked forward to. When you read these wonderful verses.

In Hebrews 11. About Abraham. He lived as a sojourner. That's what he's saying here. To the Hittites. I'm a sojourner. And foreigner. Among you. And that tells you that.

Although the land belonged to him. In the special sense. In which God had given it. As an inheritance. He knew that there was something more than that involved. He still knew that he was a sojourner.

[28 : 36] That he was somebody passing through. Who wasn't going to have a permanent home. In this world. In this land. Not even in this land of Canaan. He dwelt there.

As Hebrews says. Intense. With Abraham and Isaac. The heirs with him. With Isaac and Jacob. The heirs with him. Of the same promise. For he looked.

To a city that has foundations. Whose builder. And maker. Is God. And then it goes on. To speak about Sarah. And then it summarizes. Before it moves on to the next people in the list.

It summarizes. And it says. These all died in faith. Not having received the promises. But having seen them. And believed them. And embraced them. From afar.

They confessed that they were strangers. And pilgrims on the earth. And truly. They who say such things. Declare. That they seek a country. Even a better country.

[29 : 34] And therefore. God is not ashamed to be called their God. For he has prepared for them. A city. See. He is giving testimony. To his hope.

As he refuses. The offer of these pagans. And. It is interesting. The way. You could actually go into the more. More detail. The way I have got time. To go into the detail of it. Even. In an ordinary

sense.

You can actually see. The wisdom of Abraham. The cleverness of Abraham. As he dealt with the situation. They all as a group. Were committed to giving him.

This land. This place. But. As a group. They may well have. As it were. Clubbed together. And not been. Willing to give him. A place that he would buy for himself. But.

He then moved his tack. His tactic. Was then to. Focus on an individual. And. What he thought. Obviously was. Well. Maybe they won't all agree together. To give me something.

[30 : 30] But. If I give the opportunity. To an individual. To make financial gain out of it. I might get somewhere. That's what happened. He said.

What about this. Ephron. The son of Zohar. He's got a field. He's got a cave in it. Would you ask him. Please. If I can buy that from him.

And Ephron. Of course. Began the bargaining. And it's interesting. How he goes about it. And he sees this opportunity in it. Abraham really. Abraham really doesn't have.

An argument. He's got to face. Whatever the offer. Is. That comes from him. But. He offers the full price of the field. He's 400 shekels of silver. And this man says.

My lord. Listen to. A piece of land worth. 400 shekels of silver. What's that between me and you. Go and bury your dead. In other words. He says. I accept the offer. 400 shekels. Yes. Deal. Deal done.

[31 : 28] That was a lot of money. It's a high price. But Abraham had no choice. And he was. Quite prepared. And quite happy to pay. Because this meant. So much to him.

And so he bought. This field. And it's. Important that we notice. That the first. Occupancy. Of the tomb. Was.

By his beloved wife. Sarah. Sarah's remains. Were the first. To be laid to rest. In the tomb. Of Machpelah.

Why is that appropriate? Well it's appropriate. Because. Along with Abraham. They were the ancestors. If you like. Of faith. Abraham was. The father of the faithful.

The people who believe. He begins. This line. The Lord goes back. Beyond Abraham. But it's at Abraham. That God really. Begins to demonstrate. The importance of faith.

[32 : 25] And how through faith. We come to. Possess. An inheritance. That's why it's called. The father of those who believe. But Sarah. Remember she used to be called.

Sarai. And it was changed to Sarah. It means pretty much. The same thing. Sarai. Literally means. My princess. What a great name to have.

For his wife. My. Princess. And it expressed. What she meant to him. She was his princess. But it was changed to Sarah.

Which means. The princess. Because she is the ancestor. Of all. Who come through. Isaac. Her son. Remember he's her son. Just as much as he's Abraham's.

The promise. The covenant is with Abraham. But it was Sarah. That was given the strength. To conceive. And bear Isaac. For Abraham.

[33 : 22] She is the mother. Of the faithful. And as it was her womb. That gave birth.

Conception. And birth. To the son of promise. So it's appropriate. That she is the first one. To occupy. The new grave.

Of Machpelah. For Abraham. And his descendants. To occupy. When they die. She's the mother. Of the nation.

The mother. Of the nation. Of believers. And her remains. Appropriately. Were laid to rest. In the cave. Of Machpelah. Which Abraham.

Especially. Bought for the purpose. How appropriate. That she. And her remains. Would be the first. To be laid to rest there. She died.

[34 : 20] As the princess. Of faith. Along with this prince. Of God. They had served God. In the presence. Of the Hittites. For these years. Now the question.

To ask myself. And to put to you. In closing. Are you going to follow. Am I going to follow. This princess.

Into the kind of death. That she died. Will we follow her. By faith. Into the death. Of the righteous. And look forward. To having. An inheritance. From which death. Will be fully. Remerved. Let's pray. Almighty God.

We give thanks. That you are. The one who has overcome. Death. In your own. Person. In the person. Of your son. We bless you today. That our outlook. By faith. And in hope.

[35 : 24] Is one that looks. Beyond death. And the claims of death. Even to your own. Claim over death. That you have vanquished it. That you have overcome it. That you have burst.

Through the confinement. Of the grave itself. And that you live. In resurrection. Glorified life. As the head. Over all things. To your people. Oh Lord.

Our God. Help us to walk. By faith. To express. Our faith. In the way we live. Help us to bear.

Testimony. To our hope. Which takes account.

Of death. In its reality. And yet looks beyond it. In the power. Of your resurrection. Help us to give.

Expression to that. In the way. In which we too. Live life.

And approach death. Grant oh Lord. That as we too. Come to experience. Mourning. And trial. And loss. In our lives. That we may do so. Like Abraham.

[36 : 17] That we may do so. In faith. And with. That respect. Which we owe. To the dead. And which your word. Teaches us. To follow out.

In. Our attitude. And practice. We ask these things. In Jesus name. Amen.