

The Death of Sarah

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Date: 10 December 2017

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again for a little to the chapter that we read in the book of Genesis, chapter 23.

I'm reading at the beginning. Sarah lived for 127 years. These were the years of the life of Sarah. Sarah died at Kiriath Arba, that is Hebron, in the land of Canaan.

And Abram went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. And Abram rose up from before his dead and said to the Hittites, 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. And so on. We've been looking at the life of Abram.

And the life of Abram, as we know, was a quite remarkable life. You cannot look at the life of Abram without also looking at the life of Sarah. Because Abram and Sarah were a real couple.

[1 : 01] There was no doubt whatever, a very devoted couple. A couple very much in love. And in fact, Sarah, without any question, is one of the most remarkable women in the scripture.

In fact, as far as I'm aware, she's the only woman whose age is recorded at the time of her death. At the age of 127 years.

And Sarah then, obviously she lived about 37 years after the birth of Isaac. Abram and Sarah had been through an incredible amount together.

They had been living a normal and indeed a prosperous life in our of the Kaldes. Until God called them out. Their lives changed forever.

When that call came to leave. And to go to a place that the Lord would show them. From living in a, I suppose, in a secure city.

[2 : 05] And living a prosperous life. Because Abram was a rich man. They became pilgrims and strangers. In this world. A radical change in their circumstances.

And their life was full of ups and downs. And when you look through their life. There were times that Abram and Sarah had a tumultuous relationship at times.

There were times that, there's no question about it, that Abram disappointed Sarah terribly. There were times that Abram was ready almost to, well the expression is used, to push Sarah under the bus to save his own skin.

There were times where he was ready to compromise Sarah's integrity and Sarah's very life. In order to save his own life. And these, that would have caused, you can imagine, no end of issues in Sarah's life and in Abram's life.

There were times when Sarah threw her impatience to have a child. It was through her decision. And eventually Abram went along with it to take Hagar, the servant girl that they had, to take her as another wife.

[3 : 26] In order that they might have a child. And so that, it was almost like a surrogate mother that she would then, Sarah would adopt a child. Abram initially wasn't for going along with that suggestion.

But he did eventually. So there were, there were dodgy decisions. There were really strange things. Times the house became divided. Because the birth of Ishmael from that relationship at a human level didn't work.

And particularly when Isaac was born, it became a house of conflict and division. And in the end, Hagar and Ishmael had to leave.

So there were a lot of heartaches. There were a lot of pains. There was a lot of sorrows. But there were a lot of blessings. And I suppose, to a certain extent, although some of what took place in the life of Abraham and Sarah might be not the sort of things that we might have to go through, a lot of the, maybe things that there are a lot of similarities.

And one of the things it highlights, that following the Lord doesn't leave us immune from all life's troubles. Sometimes people think that once you become a Christian, or that once a Christian couple marry, then that, that's kind of the end of problems.

[4 : 42] That everything is going to be, going to be plain sailing. No, it's not. That doesn't mean that at all. Because we are still sinners. And all the potential and all the propensity towards sin still lies within our hearts.

And so we find ourselves that there are times when there are all these things. There's resentments and self-interest and selfishness and pride and lusts.

And all these things that cause our own problems. But yet, side by side with that, there are so, so many blessings. And Abraham and Sarah's life, although it was tumultuous and there were difficulties and sometimes divisions and all these sort of things, it was still a life that was full of blessings.

And at the end of the day, neither Abraham nor Sarah, for all the money in the world, would have changed their circumstances or their position. Because they loved each other with a deep love. There's no question whatever. With a great devotion for one another. And also a great devotion and love towards the Lord. And in fact, I think if you were to look at a home, at a life, Abraham and Sarah set out a great example.

[5 : 59] In fact, when you go to the New Testament, that is highlighted there. Of Sarah, of just what a beautiful and gracious woman she actually was. So, at one level, they are a model.

But it just shows us that despite all that they were, a great man of faith and a great woman of faith, yet it didn't leave them immune from trials and problems and difficulties in this life.

Now, we see there that the time has come when Sarah has died, has come to die. And the language would indicate, I think, when it says that Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.

That he went in. It would almost indicate there that he wasn't present at the time when she died. I think the language would bring that out. And Abraham is heartbroken.

Because they've been probably about a hundred years together. I'm sure at least a hundred years together. I don't know what you would celebrate at a hundred years of marriage. It's quite an amazing thought.

[7 : 10] But, as we say, they had journeyed right throughout life all this time. And so, poor Abraham is now, there's no doubt that he's absolutely heartbroken.

That the great love of his life has been taken away. And here he is for the very first time in Canaan, in the land of promise on his own. Because from the moment he left out of the Kaldi, Sarah was always there at his side.

They journeyed together every step of the way with the Lord. And now, for the first time, Abraham is all alone. And we find that he is mourning for her and weeping for her.

And again, we have to highlight that grace and faith doesn't prevent weeping. And doesn't keep away a broken heart.

Of course we're broken hearted when those that we love are taken away. The Lord Jesus, he wept by the grave. It wasn't that tears ran silently down his cheek. The actual word describing his weeping was almost just broken hearted.

[8 : 16] There was just this huge, like you'd almost see his body convulsing with the weeping. We find David when his son Absalom, the anguish.

He was distraught when the news came that Absalom had died. We find Joseph weeping over his father. We find it so often in the Bible. Mourning and weeping because of death.

And we know death is that great robber. It comes in and takes away those whom we love. And our lives are never the same again. Abraham, although Abraham lived for years later and he remarried, he would say, my life was never the same after Sarah died.

It would never be. And although people get on with life. And sometimes we think when we look at people who've suffered grief and sorrow. And we say, oh, they're doing fine. They might not be doing fine.

They get the appearance. They've learned to cope. Or sometimes they're learning to cope. But there's always the pain. There's always the sorrow. There's always the missing piece within their heart, within their lives.

[9 : 22] Their lives never the same. Never can be the same. And we've got to remember that. That's why we need the grace always. Because that grace doesn't matter how many years will go by.

I remember with a particular lady who had a very tragic life. And some of that tragedy went back over 60 years.

And I remember sitting and I could see the tears still running down her face. Because it doesn't go away. It's there. Pain is still there. It's always, it'll be there forever in this world.

So here is Abraham and he's broken hearted now that Sarah has died. But you know the wonderful thing that, and there's no question whatever, we'll come to that as we move on, that Abraham knew that although this was a parting forevermore in this world, that it wasn't a parting forever and ever and ever.

Because Abraham was a full believer in the resurrection. And the reason that we know that is because he saw the day of Christ and he rejoiced. And when he was brought to sacrifice Isaac, he fully believed that the Lord would raise him from the dead.

[10 : 38] So you see, Abraham believed in the resurrection. He saw the day of Christ and he saw more than just that Jesus would be in this, or the Messiah would be in the world.

But God gave him to understand who the Messiah would be and what he was going to achieve. And so Abraham was someone who believed in the resurrection. And he knew that he would meet up with Sarah again.

I do not know what our relationships in the world to come will be like. They will be real. They will be centered in Christ. But the one thing I'm absolutely convinced of, that they won't be inferior to our relationships here.

Our relationships here are powerful and strong. And I believe that with all the great blessings and all the wonderful experiences that we have known in this world, in family and in friends and in acquaintances and all these things that in the world to come with the Lord, that our relationship, although it will be different to what it was here, it will not be inferior.

It won't. And we can't really go beyond that. But that is one of the great things, that although Abraham was going to bury his wife, he knew that although this was a parting that was breaking his heart, and it was a parting forevermore in this life, that it wasn't a parting forever and ever and ever.

[12 : 12] Life is precious. And I think it's at a time like this that we ought to just reflect on how important it is to live life. We often use the phrase, live each day as if it was your last.

And try and live that at home and live it at work and live it in your relationships. Because one day it will be the last. And you know one of the worst things when death comes is to have loads and loads of regrets.

It's one thing to mourn and to grieve when we lose those whom we love. But it's another thing when we're really grieving because our life is full of regrets of things we've done and things we haven't done.

So I think it's very important. And I'm sure all of us know that our lives, we've done things that we shouldn't have done, and we haven't done things that we should, and so on.

But ask for the grace every day to live it in such a way as if this was your last. Because life is short, it's precious. It's just such a wonderful gift.

[13 : 20] And let us seek it to live it to the glory of God. But as we said, Abram had never been before in the land of Canaan without Sarah. But Abram now had to get up and go about his business because he had to arrange not only for the burial, he had to find somewhere to bury her.

And it's here we find really something quite amazing to a certain extent. Because here is Abraham and he is now in the land of promise. He is in the land that God has given to him.

God at one time told him, Right, Abram, see where you are. Look north, south, east, west. Look all around. See all this land. All this land is yours and your descendants.

It's an amazing promise. So at one level, the whole land belongs to Abram. But at another level, he doesn't own one single bit of it.

And that's quite an amazing thing. He was aware that he was living in that land as a pilgrim and as a stranger. Not one bit of that land did he own.

[14 : 37] And yet, at another level, this whole land was going to belong to him and to his descendants. And it's here we find how gracious Abram is.

Because that's one of the things we've noticed as we've gone through his life. That there's an honesty and an integrity about Abram in his dealings. Quite different to his grandson Jacob. Remember, Jacob was somebody who was always wheeling and dealing. Abram wasn't like that. Abram, in all his business transactions, in all his dealings, there was an honesty and an integrity about what he did.

And that's exactly what we find here as well. He goes up to the Hittites who are there in the land and he says, Look, my wife has died and I want to bury her. And they said, Oh, because they had such, you can see, the respect that they had for Abram.

They called him a prince. They could see that God was with them. They had a great, great place for Abram. And they said, No, you can use any of our tombs. Feel free.

[15:40] But Abram said, No, no. No, no. He said, Thank you. But he said, I want to purchase. And he told them the particular part there that he wanted to bury.

There, there was stone tells there. He said, And if you're willing that I should bury my dead, hear me and entreat for me Ephron, the son of Zohar, that he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he owns.

It's at the end of the field. And so Abram says, No, I want to purchase a place myself. You see, he could have, he could have gone up to these people and said, Look, I know you're living here.

I know you've been there before I came. But the God of heaven and earth has given me this whole land. So I can bury anywhere. It's all mine. But he doesn't say that.

Abram is gracious. And he's dealing in such a, such a gracious way. And he says, No, I want to buy it. And so we find that, that Abram, he does this.

[16:44] He does, they go through the whole transaction. And of course, we find that the place, this site, Machpelah, on the east of Mamre, is what is today Hebron, which is the second most important religious site to the Jews after Jerusalem.

And Abram is making a huge statement here when he says he wants to bury Sarah in Canaan. Because at that time, in fact, it's quite similar even to this day.

At that time, when a patient died, they went back to the roots. They went back to where they came from. If you were far away, your burial was back at home, back to where you belonged.

Abraham doesn't do that. And he's making a statement. He said, This land, although I don't own a single part of it, this is my land.

Sarah's going to be buried here. I'm going to be buried here. My children are going to be buried here. Because God has bequeathed this land to us. This is our land.

[17:53] And you see, Abraham was seeing the promises of God. He was seeing way beyond. And so he's making this great statement. And it was by faith he bought that land.

And you see, he didn't want to take anything from the people. There was so much in this. And so Abraham has this particular site.

And Abraham, of course, we know that Abraham himself was buried there. He lived to the age of 175. And so was Isaac and Rebekah. They were buried in the cave of Mapella in that burial site with the trees, that piece of land that was purchased there.

Jacob and Leah were buried there as well. Jacob had bought land. He bought land in Shechem. And although he wasn't buried in the part that he bought, Joseph was buried there in that part that Jacob bought.

And again, we saw, when you read the life of Joseph, you see his faith, his great dying command to his people, to his sons.

[19:03] He said, God is going to take you out of Egypt. Do not on any account leave my body here in Egypt. Take my bones.

Take them, carry them out of Egypt. And take them to Canaan. And bury them there. Because it's a land of promise. It's the land that God gave to my great-grandfather Abraham.

And where Isaac is buried. And where Jacob is buried. And that's where I'm going to be buried. You see, the great faith of Joseph. Because at that time, everything was going well.

He was second only to Pharaoh in the land. And years and years, and indeed centuries were to pass, before eventually Israel went into that awful time of, where you could almost say there was a form of genocide.

And where Pharaoh, the Pharaoh at that time, was trying to destroy them. But anyway, we find that at this particular time, when we follow Abraham's life and Sarah's life, Hebrews chapter 11 runs a

commentary on it.

[20 : 11] Because one of the wonderful things it tells us, there it is, that they saw themselves as strangers and pilgrims in this world.

Was Abraham disappointed that he didn't own any of the land? You know, I often used to think that when I was younger. Like a lot of you, I grew up with the Bible stories.

And although I wasn't a Christian, I knew the stories inside out. And I used to think, because I knew the Bible stories fairly well. And I used to think, I was kind of tough on Abraham.

Because he was given this land, and yet he didn't own any of this land. He must have been really disappointed about that. Was he? No. Abraham was a man of faith. And he was seeing, he believed the land was going to be his.

He believed that it was going to be his descendants. And you know, I'm not a political person, and I'm not going to get involved in politics. But you know, all that's happening in the world today, it's all, you go to the Middle East, and it's Abraham's two sons, Isaac and Ishmael.

[21 : 24] It's still the conflict. Between the two, the two particular divide, between the Israelis and the Arabs, the Palestinians.

All that's going on there, it's to this very day, it is still the division, that took place in that household, way back. And it's, it's, it really is quite, quite extraordinary.

Because, just to, where we are in the 21st century, you can retrace it all the way back, to Mamre, and to the tents there, and to Abraham's home, and Hagar, and Sarah, and Ishmael, and Isaac.

It's all there. That's where it all began. And it's still the division, is to this very day. But Abraham was seeing, he was seeing by faith.

And it tells us in Hebrews chapter 10, chapter 11, verse 8, looking, this is, this is why Abraham wasn't disappointed. Because he was looking beyond. And this is what it says, he was looking, for the city, that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

[22 : 39] Abraham knew, yes, geographically, here's the land. But it's only a picture of something else. It's a picture of a greater land, and a greater city. And it is pointing to the city, that will endure forever.

The city shall be flourishing. You know, in Psalm 72. And that is the glorious city of heaven.

Abraham was seeing that. And that's why he was never disappointed, in this world.

His roots, never went down in Canaan. Though he knew this land was going to belong to a seed, after him, for right down to the present day. He knew that.

And he knew that all the nations of the world were going to be blessed through a seed, through the coming of the Messiah. He knew all that. But he was never disappointed. Because he was looking further on.

Further on all the time. And you know, the Lord is teaching us the same. Because Abraham's roots never really went down. He went from place to place to place.

[23 : 40] Do you know, we're the same in this world. And you know, there's times, if the Lord sees us beginning to get too settled in this world, where the roots are going down too deep, he'll bring something into our life, or allow something into our life, to loosen our attachment to this world.

Because he's always got to remind us, hey, you're just a pilgrim here. You, this is not your home.

Ask yourself this honest question. If, supposing, you know, our lifespan is limited nowadays.

None of us are going to be Methuselahs living to 969, or some whatever age, or something around that. We have a, we have a limiter. Some people, live 110, or some people have a huge lifespan, as far as we can see it here.

But supposing, supposing we were, that all of a sudden scientists found a pill, that would enable you to live for a thousand years, in health and strength.

Would you say, hey, that's what I want. I want to live here, in this world, as I'm living, forever and ever. That would suit me, that would be brilliant.

[24 : 59] Or are you today saying, you know, I am glad. Yes, I, I, I enjoy life, and there's so many blessings. And I try to live life to the full, and I've no problems with that.

But I wouldn't, want to live here forever. I'm actually looking forward, to where I'm planning, where I'm going. Because the Bible is holding out, before me, where I am going.

What I am going to receive. And you know this, I'm really looking forward to that. And that's, the difference with a Christian. Because the Christian, Christian is somebody, who knows why they're here, and they're living their life, they're seeking to anyway, to the glory of God.

They know, where they're going. They're going to that eternal city, whose builder and maker is God. They know that they are just pilgrims, and strangers here.

Yes, there are so many blessings in this life. And we appreciate the blessings, and thank God for them. But it's all of it, just for a wee while. And you know this, we accept that.

[26 : 13] Because we're looking ahead. And that was a wonderful thing, about Abraham's faith. That's what faith does. Faith brings, what's way beyond, and brings it, right with you, present with you.

It's like looking with binoculars. And you're seeing something, that's distant, and it brings it, into the present. Brings it, really close to you. And that's, how Abraham was living.

He was looking beyond, this world. All the time, he was seeing beyond. He knew why he was here. He knew where he was going. He was never disappointed, with what God was, doing with him, or allowing to happen to him, because he was seeing.

He saw, Jesus said that, Abraham saw my day, and rejoiced. That was what, it's not wonderful. But that's what faith does. Faith brings close.

And that's how you live your life, as a Christian. Because faith is bringing heaven to you. You're saying, you know, I know where I'm going, and I'm looking forward to it.

[27 : 20] You don't look forward to death. None of us looks forward to death. It's not something, that you look forward to. It's something, that you have to go through. It's an appointment, we have to keep.

The grave is an appointment, that we have to keep. But we know, that it's not the end. We were talking about that, last Sunday night. That Jesus, he said, I have the key.

Remember, Jesus said, I have the key, of death, and Hades, or the grave, or what's beyond, the place of the dead. Because Jesus, went there. He went into death.

He defeated death. He went into the grave. He defeated the grave. And he says, I want victory over it all. And our faith, accepts that, believes that, knows we have to go through death, knows that we're going to be put into the grave.

But we see beyond that. And we see the eternal city. And we see there the crown of life. We see there the righteousness, that will be ours.

[28 : 22] We see ourselves being led, and fed by the Lamb. We see ourselves, as amongst the saints in glory. And although there's so much, we don't know or understand.

Our appetite is whetted. And faith is clinging on, and saying, you know, the future's great. And that's, that's the difference.

That's what the Christian faith gives. And it changes life, because, you know, so many people, they live their lives, and they're, they're, they're down, and they're saying, I've heard people say, what's life about?

What's it about? Well, you know, life really, is about preparation. This life is a preparation, for the everlasting life, that will come.

Yes, it's a life that we're involved in, all the time, but all the time, God is at work, preparing us, for the world to come. Is that your hope today? Is that what you're looking forward to?

[29 : 22] Because as Abraham, buried his beloved Sarah, and as Abraham would go back home, and he would say, life is never going to be the same again, but with the next breath, he would be saying, ah, but I'll soon see her again, because I will be in, the presence of the Lord, with her, forever.

That's what faith does. Is that what your faith, is like today? Or is it possible you, don't even have faith? Well, if you don't ask the Lord, because, you know this, the Lord wants to give you faith, just as he wants to give you wisdom, and he says, if you don't have it, because you haven't asked for it, ask, ask me, that you will, that's what he's saying, ask me, and I will give, and he'll never turn away, from those, who truly seek him.

Let us pray. Oh Lord, our God, we pray that you will bless us, and that you will bless this word, to our soul. We pray that you will encourage us, as we go on, because some days, we can get down, some days, our faith can be vibrant, and we see so clearly, other days, our faith is, it's not so vibrant.

Some days, we struggle, some days, the clouds of sin, hide you, in all your glory, and sometimes, we don't see the way, we should, but we ask, oh Lord, that you will give us a faith, to see you, and the faith to believe.

Lord, take us, to our home safely, we pray to bless a cup of tea, in the hall afterwards, and we pray that everybody, will be kept safe, with the underfoot conditions. Take away from us, in our sin, in Jesus name, Amen.

[31 : 07] We'll conclude singing, from Psalm 30, and sing Psalms, Psalm number 30, and sing Psalms, and we sing, verses 1 to 5, the tune of St. Minver, O Lord, I will exalt your name, for you have rescued me, you did not let my foes rejoice, and gloat triumphantly, Lord God, in need I cried to you, and you restored my health, O Lord, you brought me from the grave, and saved my soul from death, you holy ones, sing to the Lord, sing out with joyful voice, when you recall his holy name, then praise him, and rejoice, on page 34, Psalm 30, tune St. Minver, O Lord, I will exalt your name, O Lord, I will exalt your name, for you have rescued me, you did not let my foes rejoice, and O triumphantly,

Lord God, in need I cry to you, and you restored my health, O Lord, O Lord, you brought me from the grave, and saved my soul from death, you holy ones, sing to the Lord, sing out with joyful voice, when you recall his holy name, then praise him, and rejoice, his anger, God, God, my thank God, our Lord, his sin, for years may us through our splash, and our joy comes Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore. Amen.