

BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

“The Death Of Sarah”

Genesis 23:1-20

2002

Introduction

County Council Meeting: Only two things we can be sure of – death and taxes!

Most of us live as if we’ll never die. Death, even under the most expected circumstances, always seems to catch us by surprise. But the fact is, death is a part of life.

In Ps. 89:48 the Psalmist asked the universal question, “What man can live and not see death; or save himself from the power of the grave?”

As a pastor, I’m often asked how a God of love could allow suffering and death. But the Bible says that, “God takes no pleasure in the death of anyone” (Ezek 18:32).

In fact, according to Scripture, universal death is the result of universal sin (Romans 5:12). “For the wages of sin is death” Rom 6:23. And since every human being has sinned (Is. 53:6; Ro. 3:23), every human should expect to die (Heb. 9:27).

In light of this eventuality, two of the most profound and beneficial questions I think we can ask ourselves are:

1. “How would you like to be remembered at your funeral?”
2. “What steps do you need to take for that to happen?”

There are really only two things to live for in life:

1. Temporal things: houses, cars, promotions, the next deal, the next vacation, and the next shopping spree
Col 3:1-2 “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”

2. Eternal things:

What kind of memories are you leaving your friends and family?
What kind of spiritual legacy are you creating?

I The Death Of Sarah

- A. Sarah lived to be 127 years old [Verse 1]

Interestingly, Sarah is the only woman in the Bible whose age at death is recorded.

She is also one of the few women whose example we are encouraged to emulate.

Nowhere in the Bible are we told to look to Mary as an example of a godly woman. But twice we are told to look to Sarah as such an example (Isaiah 51:1-2, 1 Peter 3:3-6).

These facts show us that although Sarah certainly had her faults and failings, she was an extraordinary woman of faith and obedience.

B. She died at Kiriath Arba (also known as Hebron) [Verse 2a]

Josh 14:15 “(Hebron used to be called Kiriath Arba after Arba, who was the greatest man among the Anakites.)”

C. She was **mourned** by Abraham [Verse 2b]

Mourn = Caphad (saw-fad') = “To wail or lament”

It is remarkable that this is the only time we are ever told that Abraham wept. He had been through so many bitter disappointments and heartaches in his life:

1. He was disappointed when Lot left him.
2. He was heartbroken when he sent Ishmael away.
3. His was devastated when he had to offer Isaac upon the mountain.

But the only time the record reveals that he wept was when Sarah died. I think this reveals the depth of his grief and love for this woman.

The grief Abraham endured was tempered by his knowledge of, and belief in, the resurrection of the dead.

Heb 11:19 “Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead ...”

Application:

- 1 Thess 4:13-14 “Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.”

II The Eulogy Of Sarah - 1 Peter 3:1-6

A. She was a woman of **beauty**

1. She was outwardly beautiful

Gen 12:11-12 “As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, 'I know what a beautiful woman you are. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me but will let you live.'”

Now, it is no sin to be beautiful or to be well dressed (Prov 31:22). But it is wrong to be preoccupied with outward appearances at the expense of inward beauty.

In fact, Proverbs 11:22 puts it rather bluntly, “A beautiful woman who lacks inner beauty and character is like a pig with a gold ring in its snout.”

The apostle Paul strikes the right balance:

1 Tim 2:9-10 “I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.”

Application: The importance of avoiding stumbling a brother with provocative dress

2. She was inwardly beautiful

a. She had a **gentle** and quiet spirit [1 Peter 3:4-5a]

Our culture teaches women to be assertive, aggressive, and to concentrate on the outer beauty. It engenders the kind of contentious spirit that the book of Proverbs frequently warns us to avoid (Proverbs 21:9, 19).

A woman ceases to act with a “quiet and gentle spirit,” **when** she begins to promote herself and bring attention to herself rather than God and her husband.

Eph 4:1-3 “I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

b. She made herself beautiful

Col 3:12-14 “Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”

B. She was a woman under **authority**

1. She was **submissive** to her husband [1 Peter 3:5b]

Why does God call for submission?

1. God has established a spiritual order in Creation - 1 Cor 11:3
2. God created woman to be a help meet to man - 1 Cor 11:8
3. The woman was deceived - Gen 3:16; 1 Tim 2:12-15

But there is another reason for a wife's submission to her husband – and it evangelistic in nature because marriage is designed by God to portray the relationship between Christ and His church (Ephesians 5:22-33).

Application: Your marriage can be a very powerful form of evangelism!

2. She was obedient to her husband [1 Peter 3:6a]

Ladies, can you imagine your husband coming home one day and telling you that God spoke to him and told him to sell everything, leave all your relatives and get on a plane? With no idea of where you would live or how you would survive financially?

But that's exactly what Sarah was asked to do! She could have resisted and dug her heels in. She could have refused and laid down an ultimatum. But she didn't!

Instead, she submitted herself to Abraham, first in her spirit, and then in her lifestyle. Because of this, she became an example of godly submission for us all.

Heb 13:17 "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you."

3. She was **respectful** toward her husband [1 Peter 3:6b]

She called Abraham, "Master".

Gen 18:12 "So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?"

Notice, Sarah honored her husband even in her mind!

- C. She was a woman of **faith**

1. She put her **hope** in God [1 Peter 3:5]

Sarah was submissive, not because her trust was in Abraham, but because her hope was in God. She trusted God to work in and through her husband.

Heb 11:11-12 "By faith Abraham, even though he was past age-and Sarah herself was barren-was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise."

2. She did what was right [1 Peter 3:6c]

1 John 2:29 "If you know that [Jesus Christ] is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him."

1 John 3:10 "This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother."

3. She did not give way to **fear** [1 Peter 3:6d]

Ps 147:10-11 "His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse, nor his delight in the legs of a man; the LORD delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love."

Sometimes women can be -- well -- emotional, occasionally controlling, and every now and again, manipulative in the way they deal with their husbands. But Peter talks about the godly Christian wife as being exactly the opposite. She is not fearful or panic-stricken about the future, because her hope is firmly placed in God. She calmly and quietly submits to her husband, knowing God's purposes will be achieved because of, or even in spite of, her husband.

Prov 31:30 “Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. “

III The Negotiations For A Tomb

Legal transactions were typically conducted at the city gate, where the city leaders were present and where witnesses were at hand (Ruth 4:1ff). The terms of the agreement were determined by a sequence of negotiations based on the customs and culture of that time.

A. Abraham spoke to the Hittites saying: [Verse 3-4]

1. “I am an **alien** and stranger among you”

Abraham was an alien and stranger in Canaan for two reasons:

- a. He was originally from Ur of the Chaldeans
- b. He recognized that his real home was no longer on earth, but in heaven.

Heb 11:13-16 “All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.”

Application:

Phil 3:20-21 “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”

2. Sell me some property for a burial site

Burial site = Qeber = “A sepulcher”

It’s ironic that Abraham would have to humbly bow before these people and ask them for a piece of ground to bury his wife when God had already promised him that one day his offspring would “possess these very gates” (Genesis 22:17)!

Acts 7:5 “He gave him no inheritance here, not even a foot of ground. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child.”

B. The Hittites replied to Abraham saying: [Verse 5-6]

1. “You are a mighty **prince** among us”

Mighty Prince = 'elohiym nasiy' = “An exalted king or sheik”

Gen 21:22-23 “At that time Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his forces said to Abraham, "God is with you in everything you do.”

Application:

1 Peter 2:11-12 “Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”

2. “Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs”
3. “No one will refuse you his tomb”

They were making a generous offer to share their family tomb with Abraham’s wife. However, a borrowed tomb was not acceptable to Abraham. There was nothing wrong with a borrowed tomb. Jesus Himself was buried in a tomb (Matt 27:60). But Jesus only needed His tomb for three days, whereas Abraham needed his tomb for his extended family for generations.

Abraham was communicating in the clearest of terms that Canaan was to be his temporary “home-away-from-home”!

C. Abraham bowed down before the Hittites and said: [Verse 7-9]

1. Intercede with Ephron on my behalf
 - a. Have him sell me the cave of Machpelah
 - b. Have him sell it to me for the full price

Gen 14:22-23 “But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.’”

D. Ephron was sitting among the people and replied: [Verse 10-11]

1. I give you the field and the cave that is in it
2. I give it to you in the presence of my people. Bury your dead.

Ephron was handling this transaction in the way that was typical of ancient and modern bargaining in that culture. As a gesture of kindness, he offers to give the property to Abraham. To which Abraham was expected to refuse. Then, Ephron would suggest an inflated price, which he would claim to be a fair price. Under normal circumstances, this would be the starting point of haggling and negotiations for a mutually agreeable price.

E. Abraham bowed down and said to Ephron: [Verse 12-13]

1. I will pay the price of the field
 - a. Accept it from me so I can bury my dead

Ps 112:5-6 “Good will come to him who is generous and lends freely, who conducts his affairs with justice. Surely he will never be shaken; a righteous man will be remembered forever.”

F. Abraham agreed to Ephron’s terms: [Verse 14-18]

Ephron persists in his offer to give Abraham the land free of charge, but he also places a value on the “gift” that is offered. This accomplishes two things:

1. It names his inflated asking price
2. It makes it almost impossible for Abraham to bargain over the price without looking like a cheapskate.

After all, if Ephron is so generous as to offer to give the land to Abraham, how could Abraham be so small as to dicker over the price?

1. He paid 400 shekels of silver

The average cost of a valuable field was about 40 shekels of silver. Clearly, Ephron was taking advantage of Abraham at a time of emotional loss.

Lev 25:14,17 “If you sell land to one of your countrymen or buy any from him, do not take advantage of each other. Do not take advantage of each other, but fear your God. I am the LORD your God.”

2. He was deeded the field in Machpelah near Mamre

- a. In the presence of all the Hittites
- b. In the gate of the city

By closing the deal on the tomb in Machpelah, Abraham was “staking his claim” in the land which God had promised.

IV The Burial Of Sarah

A. Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave [Verse 19-20]

1. In the field of Machpelah near Mamre in the land of Canaan

Today there is a great mosque where it believed that many of the patriarchs of the Old Testament are buried:

It was the place where Isaac and Ishmael buried their father, Abraham.

It was the place where Isaac and Rebekah were buried.

It was the place where Jacob and Leah were buried.

And it was the place where Joseph buried his father, Jacob - Gen 49:29-32

B. Abraham was deeded the field and cave

1. By the Hittites as a burial site

Conclusion

What if were you were to face God today and give an account for yourself? Are you ready?

1. What earthly legacy are you going to leave family and friends?

Are you really giving your best time to your spouse? To your children?

Tip: Decide how you would like to be remembered and then work backward.

2. What eternal destiny are you preparing for?

Job: Is there life after death?

Jesus: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.” John 11:25-26

If you want to be assured of eternal life you must:

1. Repent of your sins

Repent = Metanoeo = “To think differently and to change course.”

Rom. 3:23 “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Rom. 6:23 “The wages of sin is death.”

Acts 3:19 “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord ...”

Ezek 33:11 “I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die?”

2. Reconcile your relationship to God through Jesus

Reconcile = Apokatallasso = “To put right a broken relationship”

1 Peter 3:18 “For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

3. Realign your loyalty & allegiance to Christ.

2 Cor 5:15 “And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”

You need to decide to follow Jesus as your Lord and Master -- whatever the cost.

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