

Bidding A Fond Farewell Genesis 23:1-20

On October 7, 2000, daredevil Davo Karnico became the first person to ski non-stop from the summit of Mt. Everest to the base camp nearly 12,000 feet below. He skied down nearly vertical blocks of ice and narrow ridges with 10,000-foot cliffs on either side. It was an unbelievable challenge that he successfully completed in just 4 hours and 40 minutes...after hiking to the top of Everest. He then spent the next six years skiing down the highest peaks on the other six continents. On September 16, 2019, the 56-year-old Karnicar died in a tree cutting accident on his property. It seems impossible that an extreme skier who had survived such dangerous feats could die cutting a tree at home, but death is an inescapable reality that we must all be prepared to face.

It was Benjamin Franklin who said that “nothing is certain except death and taxes.”

God has a timetable of when that will be for all of us.

We have all heard someone ask the question when they think they have outlived their purpose: “Why am I still here?” “What does God still have for me to do?” Whether it’s based on their age or a terminal illness, what’s the reason God still has them hanging around?

Charles Spurgeon once said “I am immortal till my work is done. Till the Lord wills it no vault can close upon me.”

That’s quite an incredible statement when you stop and think about it. Essentially, he’s saying that there isn’t anyone or anything that will shorten your life until God says so.

Ephesians 2:10 gives the reason why we are around longer than we think might be necessary.

“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

So the bottom line is this: God has work for each of

us to do and our life isn’t over until God says our work is done. That verse says that God has a sovereign purpose, a glorious design for your life, a reason behind our length of days no matter how brief or long they may be. Let me begin with several questions.

Question 1: Do you know what God’s purpose is for your life?

Question 2: Are you doing it?

Question 3: If not, why not?

Question 4: If so, are you as engaged with the same fervor as when you began?

With that turn to **Genesis 23**. Sarah had a purpose in life and there wasn’t anyone or anything that was going to stop God’s plan from materializing.

When God called Abraham to a life of faith by leaving his home, his extended family, his culture, it was a package deal. Sarah was just as much a part of God’s plan as Abraham was. She went with him.

When God said He would make Abraham a great nation through whom all the nations of the world would be blessed, Sarah was part of the plan.

When God said that Abraham was going to have a son to whom the promises would be passed on to, God had no one else in mind but Sarah. He didn’t intend for it to be through Lot or Eliezer his servant, or even through Hagar and her son Ishmael. God’s work would be done through His way.

They were in it together through thick and thin.

In **chapter 21** the son of promise, Isaac was finally born to her and she rejoiced. Her sadness had turned to gladness. Her sorrow had turned to joy. Her waiting had turned to worshipping because what God had promised came true.

In **chapter 23**, the work that God had ordained for her was done and God closed the eyes of her life through death. We begin this chapter by noticing in **verses 1-2** the pain Abraham felt.

I. THE PAIN ABRAHAM FELT – vs. 1-2

Notice first the time he had with her.

A. The Time He Had With Her

Let's recap quickly. How old was Sarah when Isaac was born? She was 90 years old.

How old was Sarah when she died? She was 127 years old.

How old was Abraham when Isaac was born? He was 100 years old.

Now this with test your math skills. How old was Abraham when Sarah died? He was 137 years old.

How old was Isaac when his mother died? He was 37 years old.

An interesting fact to note about Sarah is that she is the only woman whose age is given in Scripture. For some reason the Holy Spirit believed that to be of importance to us as He directed Moses to write. We don't know how old Eve was when she died. We don't know how old Mary was when she gave birth to Jesus or how old she was when she died. Scholars make some educated guesses, but we don't really know.

But we do know how old Sarah was. She wasn't 39 and holding, she was 127.

A woman once asked a younger man to guess her age. He hesitated for a bit in giving an answer. She pressed him to guess thinking he must have some idea. He responded that in fact in did have some ideas, but he didn't know if he should make her 10 years younger based on her looks or 10 years older based on her intelligence.

Little Billy was taking a bus ride with his mother. As they entered the bus, the driver asked how old her son was because children under five were free. She said that he was four, after which Billy chimed in and said that his mother was 41.

When Robyn first became the facility administrator of Mercy Bellbrook in Rochester, she went around meeting the residents. One of the ladies asked her to guess her age. Robyn remembers thinking to herself that someone who asks to guess their age must be proud enough of it for them to want you to

know. She told Robyn that she was 105.

Whether Sarah wanted anyone to know her age or not doesn't matter because the Holy Spirit thought it important enough for us to know. The truth is it shows that she and Abraham had been together a long time, through a lot of miles and ups and downs of life. Together they learned to trust God and to lean on each other. She helped pack up some belongs and head to a place they didn't know but where God would show them.

She conspired with Abraham on at least two occasions to tell a half-truth about their relationship which left them in a pickle in which God had to step in and intervene on their behalf.

She watched as her husband rode off with 300 servants to chase after an army to take back their nephew Lot.

She stood in the wings listening in on a conversation between Abraham and three guests when God affirmed His blessing and her pregnancy.

They were together through thick and thin. I'd like to think that they had a good and solid marriage and that they had been married a long, long time.

So it's no wonder that when she died, Abraham was moved with grief to tears. We see then in **verse 2** the tears he shed for her.

B. The Tears He Shed For Her

It's in Act II, Scene II of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* that we find the two love birds. She is leaning over the balcony. He is lingering below in the shadows so as not to be seen by anyone except his love. They talked the whole night. Romeo would send a message the next morning to her on where to meet for them to get married. At the thought of saying goodbye she feels sadness and sorrow to which she responds with those now often used words: "Good night, good night! Parting is such sweet sorrow."

It was time for Abraham to bid good night to the love of his life and for sure it was bittersweet.

Warren Wiersbe recalls a brief conversation with Dr. Vance Havner after the sudden death of his wife. Wiersbe simply said “sorry you lost your wife” to which Dr. Havner responded “Son, when you know where something is, you haven’t lost it.”

Their faith rested in knowing that this was not final. In the previous chapter they had been living in Beersheba. After living there for some they moved back to Hebron where Sarah died. We read that he went in to mourn and weep for her. Grief is a normal part in the loss of a loved one. There is no reason to be Stoic about the whole thing. Loss is painful and Abraham is expressing what is a natural emotion in losing his life partner.

Depending on the culture and customs, grief was demonstrated in different ways. It might be expressed by going barefoot, stripping off one’s clothes, cutting the beard or cutting the body, fasting or feasting, scattering ashes, or beating some part of the body. We read in the New Testament that grieving people tore their clothes, covered their head with ashes and beat their body. It included loud crying and wailing that began at death and lasted for seven days after the burial. Over time the growth of the funeral ritual led to paid mourners as we see in the NT account of Jesus going to raise Jairus’s daughter or at the death of Lazarus.

The Bible doesn’t tell us who accompanied Abraham in his grief. Probably Isaac and maybe many of the servants. From what we read in I Peter 3:5-6 about her we can conclude that she was well loved as he describes her as the mother of all women who believe (**I Peter 3:5-6**).

The pain of Abraham’s loss was real and evident in his response. But all the while his faith had to believe that to absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

Philippians 1:21-24
II Corinthians 5:1-8

I believe that he must have known that based on what we read about his faith in **Hebrews 11** that he looked forward to an eternal home. That would have certainly helped him understand that such

parting for the person whose faith rests in God is only temporary and that while parting is painful, his tears also were only temporary.

We have the benefit of Paul’s assurance given to the believer in **I Thessalonians 4:13** that he didn’t want them to be ignorant about fellow Christians who had died. The hope of the resurrection gave them the confidence to know that they would see those loved ones again. They could grieve but their grief was different than the grief of those who did not share the same faith in Christ and His resurrection.

Allan Ross writes “The time of death (when the natural inclination is to mourn as the world mourns) should be the time of our greatest demonstration of faith, for the recipient of God’s promises has a hope beyond the grave.”

Job 19:25-27 “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see Him with my own eyes – I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me.”

But while Abraham wept and mourned for his beloved wife, her death was of special interest to God. We already noted that she had accomplished what God had purposed for her life. But greater than that **Psalms 116:15** gives us perspective on how God views death.

“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.” (Psalm 116:15)

When we think of something that’s precious, we generally think of something that has tremendous worth or value, something that is costly.

We have precious stones like diamonds and rubies. There is precious metal like gold and silver. For someone out in the desert, water is precious. Someone who has been adrift at sea, land or another ship can be precious.

Most of the time we call our children precious. Some even refer to a kind gesture as being precious.

But the word means more than just something that is of great value. It conveys the idea that God views the life of His children of such infinite worth that

He has been carefully watching over that person. We might say that God has been protecting what is of infinite worth to Him.

But while Abraham could grieve in pain knowing that she was in God's presence there is a very sobering reminder to us all that comes from death. Sarah's death is a reminder that it is the payment for sin. No one is immune to it and Scripture gives us five types of death.

1. There is a physical death

You don't have to be a Christian to know this reality. Everyone will experience it. There's a day you're born and a day you die. The how remains to be seen. It could be natural. It could be through some disease. It could be unnatural like getting murdered or through a car collision. Some view disease or an accident of some kind to be an unfortunate set of circumstances that cut the person's life short. They don't want to acknowledge God's sovereign hand in any and all of it.

But the Bible is clear that whether it's natural or unnatural the wages of sin is death.

Hebrews 9:27 "For it is appointed unto men once to die."

The NIV says death is man's destiny. That means it's unavoidable and inevitable. We have no choice in the matter. God said to Adam that death would be the consequence of disobedience. Disobedience is sin and sin is death.

Every day that I live, I know that I am growing one day closer to that reality in my life. No matter how much I try to block it from any conscious thought, without a question, unless the Lord comes back, my obituary will be in some newspaper, some people will gather around my casket maybe say a few nice things after which they will put me in the ground.

A second death mentioned in Scripture is a spiritual death.

2. There is a spiritual death

There can be two types of spiritual death.

Wikipedia defines one type of spiritual death as someone who is not spiritual. They call such a person a materialist or an atheist, someone who chooses not to believe in any higher being or universal power.

The Bible has a different definition for someone who is spiritually dead. The Bible says you have either spiritual life or spiritual death and is contingent on your faith in Christ.

I John 5:11-15

Whether you consider what God said in Genesis referring to death there or what Paul said about the wages of sin is death it is the same. There is a double meaning implied. Not only does it mean that we will all die physically, we are all dead spiritually. Sin separates us from God now and brings us under His judgment that will result in an eternal separation from Him. To paraphrase **I John 5:11-12** John says if you don't have the Son (Jesus) you don't have life or to be more blunt, if you don't have the Son, you're dead spiritually and you will die spiritually and not have eternal life. According to **verse 15** if a person acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, he has life, it stands to reason that if a person does not acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God, that person will not have life.

So to be spiritually dead means to be separated from God. When Adam sinned, his actions demonstrated that he and God had become separated. He hid. As representatives of humanity, "Adam carried all of humanity into his sin. Paul makes this clear in **Romans 5:12**, telling us that sin and death entered the world and spread to all men through Adam's sin" (GotQuestions.org). Our sin against and separation from God result in spiritual death.

Ephesians 2:1 says we are dead in our trespasses and sins (see also **Colossians 2:13**) and the thing is we were born in sin, born spiritually dead. We are sinners not because we sin, we sin because we are sinners. A spiritually dead person sins because that's our nature.

Psalm 51:6 "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."

There's no escaping physical death, but there is an

escape from spiritual death. Again, **I John 5:11-12** provide the answer. If you have the Son, you have life. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. When by faith through grace we trust Christ as our Savior to save us from our sin, His Spirit performs a transformation in the spiritual life of that person, which we call regeneration. We then become a new creation **II Corinthians 5:17**. We were spiritually dead and He makes us spiritually alive.

Whether or not a person is a follower of Christ everyone will experience physical death, but the person who follows Christ by faith as Savior is no longer spiritually dead and will not experience what is the third type of death – what scripture calls the second death.

3. There is a second death

Revelation 2:11

Revelation 20:6, 12-14

Revelation 21:7-8

The second death is the culmination of being spiritually dead. **Verse 14** defines the second death as the lake of fire where even death and hell itself will be thrown there. The second death is the final destination of the wicked. It is reserved for anyone who rejects God's gift of salvation through Christ given by grace through faith. The person whose name does not appear in the Lamb's Book of Life will be cast into the lake of fire where there will be eternal and perpetual torment through separation from God.

There is not a starker contrast than between Heaven and the lake of fire.

Eternal light versus eternal darkness

Eternal joy versus eternal sorrow

Eternal pleasure versus eternal pain

Eternal companionship versus eternal isolation

It is this second death, this day of final judgment that should compel us as followers of Christ to share our faith with unbelievers. The second death is a warning to seek salvation through Christ.

We join with the hymnist singing oh what a day of

rejoicing that will be. It will be a day of rejoicing because there will come a day when there will be a death to death itself. That is the fourth death.

4. There is a death to death

Revelation 21:3-4

When we enter the eternal halls of heaven there will never be a tear, no more pain, no more suffering, no more disease, no more having to say "parting is such sweet sorrow." There will be an end of death. No more physical death. No more spiritual death. **Verse 5** says that the one seated on the throne is making all things new. John was to write them down because His words are faithful and true.

But before that day arrives there is one more death the believer is to engage in. It's one that Abraham and Sarah had to face. There is a death to fleshly desires.

5. There is a death to fleshly desires

Colossians 3:5-17

Romans 13:14

Romans 8:5-9

Romans 6:1-2, 6, 11-13

Peter tells us that Christ died for our sins so that we might die to sin live for righteousness. What Christ did on the cross has a direct bearing not only to our salvation but also to our sanctification so that we don't have to continue in sin. At one time we were dead in our sins but now in Christ we are alive to righteousness and instead of being dead in sin we are dead to sin. There is a death to fleshly desires. **Galatians 5:24-25 "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."**

Galatians 5:16 "So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature."

What is the sinful nature? Verse 17 defines it: "For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want."

It is a daily dying to self and living for Christ. It is choosing to do what is right instead of choosing to do what is wrong.

Each day Abraham and Sarah had to choose to die to self and obey God. I have every confidence to believe that when Sarah died she was neither spiritually dead nor will she experience this second death reserved for those without faith in Christ.

Hebrews 11 describes her and others as those who had faith looking forward to what they did not receive in this life, but instead looked forward to the promise of better things yet to come, a city that was being prepared for them.

We are to die to self and sin, die to the old nature.

But still, parting with Sarah was painful.

Now, our time is nearly gone so let me close with two quick thoughts.

II. THE POSITION ABRAHAM FOUND HIMSELF – vs. 3-4a

Philippians 3:20 “**But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.**”

Our Nephew left last week for China. He will be working for Disney China for 13 months teaching English. He is a stranger in a foreign land. That’s how Abraham described himself when looking for a place to bury Sarah. God had promised the land to his descendants, but he still remained a nomad, living in tents, places that were temporary.

A stranger is a person living somewhere whose culture and customs are different. He is in a place where he doesn’t naturally belong.

A sojourner is a temporary resident whose residence is somewhere else. Abraham had come to understand according to **Hebrews 11** that this world was not his home he was just passing through. This world was temporary. The world he longed for was eternal.

Hebrews 11:13-16

Until we understand this world is not our home, it

will be difficult to let go of sinful desires and Peter encourages us with these words: **“Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires.” I Peter 2:11**

Let me close with just a couple thoughts about the petition Abraham made.

III. THE PETITION ABRAHAM MADE – vs. 4a-20

It was customary if you were outside the land of your birth to be buried there. Abraham dispensed with what was customary and made a petition to the Hittites if he could purchase some land for a burial spot among them. He needed to act quickly because the body would start to decay and so the culture rite of bartering ensued. He showed respect to them and told them of the property he was interested in. The owner was contacted and brought to the town meeting. There is politeness in the exchange and he set what was a very high price for the property. He wasn’t interested in selling just the cave that Abraham was interested in, the whole piece of property was part of the deal. The amount he asked was greater than the value of the land. Normally the two parties would haggle over a price until they agreed on an amount. But Abraham dispensed with the customary bartering procedure and indicated he was willing to pay the asked for amount. He weighed out the silver, bought the land and buried Sarah.

There are a couple of things to note here. The first thing is that by burying Sarah there demonstrated a renunciation of their homeland declaring that Canaan was their permanent home. They would not abandon it. The second thing is that it was an announcement that their descendants would permanently settle there. Abraham was prophesying its ultimate ownership.

Physical death is inevitable, but for the believer doesn’t have to worry about the second death. We have overcome spiritual death through faith in Christ. Our challenge is to live in such a way that we have put the sinful nature to death as we live for and look forward to our eternal home.