

SERMON GUIDE

Death and the Promises of God

Genesis 23



SERMON NOTES

On April 12th, 1945, Franklin Delano Roosevelt died. He was the sitting President of the United States, and the country was still at war with Japan and Nazi Germany. Even though the war was only weeks away from being over, it was a shock to the world, and particularly to Americans. He had not been in good health for some time, but he had been in office so long he was like a father figure to Americans. He took office in 1933 during the Great Depression. He brought the country out of that period and then navigated it through the attack on Pearl Harbor and WW2. He won the Presidential election 4 times. He was in office 12 years before he died, and had he not died, could have ended as the President for 16 years. Just for some perspective, if you were 5 years old when Roosevelt became President, you were 17 years old when he died, and he had been President that entire time. For a 20-year-old single, they could be a 32 year old married professional with multiple children. The death of Roosevelt shocked Americans. It didn't seem real to them. It felt like a family member died.

But why did it shock them? Why does death still shock us?

Every person in this room is going to die someday. Unless the Lord comes back first, in 100 years from now, nobody in this room will be (with the rare exception of the possible newborn who lives to 100). It's a sobering fact. But we know this. In fact, we know that every person we see and know is going to die. Yet for some reason every time we hear the news that someone we know has died it shocks us. Think about that. It stuns us every time. We can't reconcile what we know in our heads with the shock it creates in our hearts.

Why is this? Why does it produce these responses of shock and surprise? I think there's a few reasons.

- We push death out of our focus on most days, so the news of someone's death pulls it back into focus and reality for us.
- It serves as a mirror to remind us that it's coming for us one day too.

Death is a part of life in a fallen world. Death was ushered into creation through sin and rebellion against God. Death was a punishment for treason against God. We see in Genesis 3 the fall of man and

in Genesis 4 we see death. Death is a huge part of Genesis. We see it in the genealogies. We saw it in the Flood. We saw in Sodom and Gomorrah. And now today, we see the matriarch of the covenant people: Sarah.

Exegesis

Our passage today marks the end of the focus of Genesis being on Abraham. From this point on, we are going to see the development of God's promise to build them into a great nation. We will shift to Isaac's story, then Jacob's, and then Joseph and the move to Egypt during famine.

Sarah lived 127 years. She's the only woman in all of Scripture that has her age mentioned. It had been 62 years since Abraham and Sarah left Ur to follow God's call (Genesis 12). It's been 37 years since the birth of the promised son, Isaac.

Sarah had been by Abraham's side the entire time. They went through a lot together. She went along with the schemes of Abraham to deceive foreign leaders about her being his sister (instead of wife). She concocted her plan to fulfill the promise (Hagar).

Sarah wasn't perfect. She was a sinner in need of grace. She doubted God and laughed at the prospect of Him giving her a child. Yet through all this, she was a woman of faith. She is mentioned in Hebrews 11:11 in the list of the faithful.

Now she's gone. She has been Abraham's wife and sidekick for over 100 years. Truly the two were one flesh. The text tells us that Abraham went to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. He loved her deeply. Don't ever think that in the ancient world the relationship between husband and wife was merely one of duty and mutual interest in surviving. They loved one another and cared for another with their whole hearts. Abraham grieves the loss of his wife. It's okay and natural to grieve loss. Even as Christians we suffer when we lose people we love. The two ditches we avoid are: 1. despair and grieving like those without hope and 2. not grieving but glossing over it as if it didn't hurt.

The Hittites know about and respect Abraham. They call him a "prince of God." They offer him great options for burying Sarah.

Abraham goes and purchases a cave and field attached to it from Ephron son of Zohar. He's going to lay Sarah there. One of the significant things about this is he's buying a place to bury Sarah. He's investing in the land of Promise. He doesn't yet possess the land. This is a part of God's promise to Abraham and his descendants. So Abraham doesn't return to Ur to bury Sarah. He buries her in Hebron. He buries her in what will become Israel. This is an act of faith in God's promises.

Interesting to note that Abraham and Sarah lived in the 1800-1600 BC period. And even in this time in human history you see 1. individual property ownership and 2. property value assigned for transactions.

This business transaction happens in a business meeting of Hittite leaders at the city gate. This was for the purpose of integrity of deals and to ensure justice and proper payment. This was a society ordered and structured to make sure people didn't get ripped off. And there were specific details in this contractual agreement: the field with the cave, the trees, and the field were made over to Abraham. They became his by right because he purchased it. Abraham buys the cave (and field) and pays full price. He doesn't expect a handout. Now, I don't want to veer too far off here, but I want to make a note about this in terms of application. Oftentimes Christians want other Christians to give them discounts for goods and services. I believe we should do the opposite. We should pay full price, and maybe more, to support other believers in their businesses. People in church often want things for less from other believers while being willing to go pay full price to someone else they don't know. Abraham pays the full price of what the cave and field are worth.

Application

1. Death is inevitable for us all

Sarah lived to old age, but she still dies. The wages of sin is death. Until Christ returns, all will die at some point. This recognition ought to fuel how we live our lives each day. Each day is a gift, not a right. And while our days are numbered by God in His divine wisdom, we do not know the day or the hour. So, we should live seeing the need to steward the time we have. Despite Sarah's immense importance and connection to God's promises and plans, she still dies. She served God's purposes in her generation and died. We will do the same.

2. Burial and honor show the dignity and worth of humans

It is important to Abraham to find a place to lay Sarah's body. He is going to "bury" her. The cave will be the place her body will lay. Ancient burial practices in Israel meant laying the body in a tomb. Then after

the body was only bones, they would collect the bones in an ossuary (box). The family tombs would contain these ossuaries. Why do this? Why not just put the bodies on the ground somewhere out in the woods. Why do we go through elaborate burial practices with human bodies? Why do we have services to honor and remember the lives of individuals? Because human beings, every human being, is made in the image of God and has worth and dignity. People are valuable because they are made by God. He has bestowed on mankind an inheritance worth that we recognize even after they die.

3. Every funeral points toward a coming promise

One significant thing about this story is Abraham buys a burial ground (cave and field) in the Promised Land. He did not inhabit or own the Promised Land. Remember God had him walk the land and told him it would be his and his descendants, but they had not yet fully possessed it. In fact, in Abraham and Sarah's lifetimes, it would not happen. Approximately 650 years passed between the promise to Abraham and Joshua leading the people of Abraham into the land. But watch this: Abraham buried Sarah there. It was very much an act of faith for Abraham. This land is where his people would dwell. He could bury his wife there, even though it was currently Hittite land, because God keeps His promises. For us, when we bury our dead, we do so in faith that one day Christ will raise them in glory. My son, Kaleb, is buried at Barton's Creek Church cemetery. That is where my grandfather and grandmother are buried. Other family members are there too. And right beside Kaleb's grave are two plots where Katrina and myself will be. One of the most sobering things in the world is standing on top of the ground you will one day be under. But here's the thing...death doesn't have the final word. There is a promise we are trusting, just as Abraham did.

The Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 17, Question 45 asks: What benefit do we receive from the resurrection of Christ? The answer: First, by His resurrection He has overcome death, that He might make us partakers of the righteousness which by His death He has obtained for us. Secondly, we also are now by His power raised up to a new life. Thirdly, the resurrection of Christ is to us a sure pledge of our blessed resurrection.

Close

Death is inevitable until Christ returns and puts death to death. But until that day, we bury and honor the dead by remembering the great promise of resurrection to come. In this way, death has lost its sting. It still hurts, but we know it is not permanent. There's a greater story still to be told. And that is

only possible because of what Jesus accomplished for us through His own death and resurrection. Put your hope and confidence in Him, friends.

Grieve and mourn in hope, with faith, just as father Abraham.



- How was your week? What is one thing you're grateful for and one thing that challenged you?
- How did you grow in obedience to Christ over the last week?
- Where did you go to share the gospel or have a spiritual conversation with someone?
- What is a sin you have been struggling with that you need to repent of?



- **REVIEW**

- Read Genesis 23 and then have someone else in the group read it again, preferably from a different version.
- Additional Scripture
 - Isaiah 51:1-2
 - 1 Corinthians 15:21-24
 - 1 Corinthians 15:42-44
 - 1 Corinthians 15:52
- What big takeaways did you have from the sermon?
 - What did this teach you about God?
 - What did this teach you about man?
 - What did this teach you about salvation?

- **REFLECT**

- Why did Abraham seek to buy a burial plot for Sarah in the land of the Hittites?
- Why did the Hittites offer the land for free, and why did he insist on paying for it?
- How does Genesis 23 present the theme of legacy?
- Why does death leave us unsettled even though we know it is inevitable?
- How does Abraham's purchase of the burial plot reflect his faith in God's promise?
- How does the Christian view of death differ from despair, and how can believers grieve with hope?

- **RESPOND**

- What is a practical step you can take as a result of this sermon?
- Do you have a proper view of death? Do you need to change how you view death?

- **MEMORIZE**

- **Psalm 18:7** – *The Lord is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him.*



LOOK AHEAD

- **BUILD UP:** How will you grow in your love and knowledge of the Lord this week? We have several discipleship opportunities for you to participate in.
 - **MDWK** is a time of education and growth in order to build up the Journey Church body. We offer a handful of intentionally chosen classes that cover a broad range of topics and are taught by quality teachers from within our congregation. Classes are at 6:30p every Wednesday. Contact Morgan Cates (morgan@tjclive.com) for more information.
 - **TJC Women** seeks to equip women to be rooted in the Word of God and bold in their faith. Our events and small groups focus on letting the gospel shape all spheres of our lives. Gather is the first Saturday of every month. Contact Laura DiLeonardi (laura@tjclive.com) for more information.
 - **TJC Men** exists to equip men to show Jesus as incomparably glorious in every sphere of their lives. The men's ministry meets on the 2nd Saturday of every month at 8:00a in the student center. Contact Morgan Cates (morgan@tjclive.com) for more information.
 - **TJC Students** is passionate to see every parent equipped, every leader developed, and every student disciplined into baptized, self-feeding, disciple making followers of Jesus who are letting the gospel shape every sphere of their lives. Our student ministry meets on Wednesday nights from 6:00p-7:30p for MDWK worship and Sunday mornings at 8:30a and 10:00a for small group. Contact Larry Davis (larry@tjclive.com) for more information.
 - **TJC Kids** believes that the Gospel saves, sanctifies, gathers and sends. It is our desire to see our kids understand that the Gospel truly does change everything and we will do this primarily by teaching our kids to love Jesus, showing them they can have fun in the process, and making sure they stay safe. Contact Nick Judd (nick@tjclive.com) for more information.
 - **TJC Young Adults** exists to equip young adults ages 18 to 29 in becoming passionate followers of Jesus who enter their life in Christ. We do this through intentional relationships, fellowship, and worship centered around the gospel. The Fount meets Tuesdays at 7:00p. Contact Hunter Christian (hunter@tjclive.com) for more information.
- **SEND OUT:** Who in your sphere of influence needs to hear this story, your story, or the gospel? We have several opportunities for local and international missions.
 - **For the City:** Acts 1:8 calls us to be engaged where we live and among the nations. The people of TJC seek to bring truth, grace, and hope to Lebanon and the surrounding area by mobilizing the church to be salt and light, not only for the city, but for your city. Take part in faithfully and obediently using your gifts to declare God's glory among those who

are hopeless living among you today. Contact Jeff Long (jeff@tjclive.com) for more information.

- **For the Nations:** At TJC we exist to show Jesus as incomparably glorious to Lebanon and beyond. We are ambitious and passionate about strategically taking an active role in finishing the Great Commission as we actively pursue the unreached peoples of the world by mobilizing the entire church to pray, send, go and welcome international friends among us. Contact Shawn Casto (shawn@tjclive.com) for more information.

- **PRAYER**

- **Pray over any request from your group members.**
- **Pray for our directional elders:** Tim Lance (Administrative Pastor)
- **Pray for our replanters:** Christ Fellowship (Gallatin)
- **Pray for our short-term teams:**
 - Central Asia Team departing on March 7, 2025
 - Southeast Asia Team departing on March 7, 2025
 - Europe Team departing on March 21, 2025
 - Southeast Asia Team #2 departing on April 25, 2025
- **Pray for our long-term units on the field:**
 - The Wilsons
 - The Grays
 - The Starks
- **Pray for the unreached.** Want to keep up with Unreached People Groups? Download the Unreached of the Day App <https://joshuaproject.net/pray/unreachedoftheday/app>