

Midweek Meditation for the week of September 13, 2020

Genesis 22-23

As you may remember from last week, we talked about Abraham's test of faith, where he was asked to sacrifice his only son Isaac. And at the very last minute, the angel of the Lord came onto the scene and told Abraham not to harm the boy. And then God knew that He could trust Abraham, and that Abraham feared God.

We did not talk about the last several verses of chapter 22. Quite frankly, I am not quite sure what the point is for these several verses being tucked in here. Apparently, Abraham and his company hear, by a messenger perhaps, from their family, that they left in the area of Ur. He is told about how his brother, Nahor, now has a family born to him from Milcah.

Have any of you ever known someone who had trouble coming up with a name for your children? How about this, "Uz and Buz?" These are two of the eight children born to Nahor. I believe that the real purpose for this explanation of Abraham's brother's family, is to tell us about the birth of one of Nahor's sons, Bethuel. He eventually became the father of Rebekah. And Rebekah will soon become the wife of Isaac. So now we move onto Chapter 23. In this chapter, we get the sad news that Abraham's life-long partner in marriage has passed away at the age of 127 years old. It is said that Sarah died at the place that is now called Hebron. Now we don't really know why Abraham is in Hebron and not in Beersheba. We don't know if he has relocated from where he was in Beersheba to Hebron permanently, because it says in the last chapter that Sarah and Abraham stayed in Beersheba for a long time. Or, maybe this just happened to be the place where he was when his dear wife died. The two places are about 26 miles apart. Hebron is to the Northwest of Beersheba. You may remember that when Abraham was visited by God just before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, he then had his tent pitched by the great trees of Mamre, which was a location just outside of Hebron. So, perhaps Abraham pilgrimaged to Hebron at the time when Sarah was nearing the end of her life. We really just don't know why Abraham is in Hebron, but it really doesn't matter that much. Abraham is at Hebron now, and Sarah has passed away. The Scripture says that Abraham rose from the side of his dead wife and he spoke to the Hittites. He told the Hittites, who were the people who were native to Hebron, that he was alien in this land. And since he was a stranger he would gladly pay for some property in order to bury his wife, Sarah. The Hittites said to Abraham, "Sir, listen to us, you are a mighty prince among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will refuse you his tomb for burying your dead." But Abraham wanted to pay for the place where he would bury his wife. Abraham wanted to bury Sarah in a place called the Cave of Machpelah. He again asked the Hittites if he could talk to the owner of this cave. He said, "Intercede for me with the Hittite, Ephron, the son of Zohar, so that he will sell me the Cave of Machpelah." Now Ephron was sitting among the other Hittites and he also said to Abraham "I will give the field and the cave that you desire so that you will have a burial place for Sarah." But again, Abraham insisted that he should pay for the land. And this went back

and forth for a while until Ephron finally yielded and said, okay, you win. The place you desire for the tomb of Sarah is worth 400 shekels of silver. But you really don't have to pay. But Abraham insisted and weighed 400 shekels to the Hittite Ephron. And Abraham was deeded the field and the cave and the trees within the borders in order to bury his wife.

This passage is interesting on a couple of notes. So many years before Sarah's death, this land was promised to Abraham and his descendants. And yet at the time of Sarah's death, perhaps 50 or more years after God's promise, Abraham and Sarah are still aliens in this land. Isaac is still single, and without an heir. Abraham, the heir of God's kingdom, has to buy land even to bury his beloved Sarah. Sarah and Abraham were considered royalty in this land where they did not own a single parcel of ground.

Perhaps they were alien to this world, because their home was with God. We often over value the things of this world until we remember that they are here today and gone tomorrow. We might own the land where we live, but only for a time. The land where our home is has been part of this earth since this earth was created. So, we really don't own anything. We just occupy the land where we live for a time. And then, after we die, someone else will dwell on the land that we called home. It is after we die when we are really occupying the ground that God intended for us, and that is our place in the Kingdom of Heaven. Perhaps God kept Abraham and Sarah as aliens in this promised land, because, as the old hymn goes, "This world is not my home. I am just a passing through. My treasures and my hope are placed beyond the blue. Many friends and kindred have gone on before and I can't feel at home in this world anymore."

And yet, it was very important for Abraham to have a place of rest for Sarah in this world. A place where Abraham, the father of our faith could come to mourn. And a place that was sort of an earthly connection between this world and the next until Abraham and Sarah would meet again in God's Kingdom. Just another place where we get a view of the frailty of even Abraham's humanity, and another place where we can learn from his example how we can deal with our own frail humanity until we come to the home that God really has in store for every one of us. Last week we walked with Abraham in his strength and in his faith when he encountered the ultimate test. And today, we walk with him in his time of mourning and grief as he teaches us the difficulty in saying good bye as the one he loved passes into God's Heavenly Kingdom. Let us pray ...