

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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SARAH, GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

Genesis 23

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When we reflect over the life of Sarah, what do we see?

- Sarah was a supportive wife who followed Abraham.
- Sarah had faults that remind us of ourselves.
- Abraham's love for Sarah is seen through his grief.

INTRODUCTION: From the beginning, we see that Sarah was a good wife to Abraham. In fact, they were good for each other. They had no children, had far passed the traditional child-bearing age, and they had accepted their fate. They would be remembered as the ones God did not bless, because that's how people thought in their day.

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 23:1-6

Sarah lived to be a hundred and twenty-seven years old. ² She died at Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went to mourn for Sarah and to weep over her.

³ Then Abraham rose from beside his dead wife and spoke to the Hittites. He said, ⁴ "I am a foreigner and stranger among you. Sell me some property for a burial site here so I can bury my dead."

⁵ The Hittites replied to Abraham, ⁶ "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."

The scripture continues where Abraham sought to buy a cave as a burial site for Sarah. The cave and the field it was in were both offered to Abraham for free. A second time, Abraham insisted on paying full price for it. The owner said it was worth 400 shekels of silver but offered it for free. Abraham paid the price in a public setting.

SARAH WAS A SUPPORTIVE WIFE WHO FOLLOWED ABRAHAM

EXPLANATION: When Abraham got a command from God, Sarah followed. Then the prospect of a son got their attention. She accepted God's command to Abraham as her command from God as well. We could say that she didn't really have a choice. While that may very well have been true, having no choice but to go with him doesn't for one minute mean that she would be agreeable to everything, does it? We have stories in the Bible of wives who made life difficult for their husbands by not supporting them, or by just keeping things stirred up all the time.

ILLUSTRATION: Let me state a disclaimer at this point. It's very possible a couple may choose to follow the career of the wife while the husband supports the wife. That's not uncommon today. I remember in high school when I first heard that women's roles in society were changing to the point that husbands might follow their careers and become house-husbands. Several guys said, "Hey, that sounds cool." So my message here today is more about supporting each other's goals and dreams than it is assigning roles to men or women.

ILLUSTRATION: Young people don't tend to seek out older people who have a long track record of relationship steadiness, do they? A long time ago when I led youth ministry, it was humorous seeing how most youth got their relationship advice from peers and through pop culture icons who were not very good at maintaining relationships. For one of our youth meetings, I brought in one of the oldest and longest married couples in the church and interviewed them. If you need relationship advice, it's a good idea to seek it from people who are successful at maintaining relationships.

EXPLANATION: If we were to interview Sarah today, what would she say are the keys to a long marriage?

- She would say, "Be supportive." When God called Abraham, she went along. But we do not have a record of her resisting Abraham's lead.
- She would also say, "Forgive." It's true that she was the thinker behind getting Abraham and their servant, Hagar, together. When Hagar gave birth to Ishmael, she got all mad about it. Abraham and Sarah had many more years together and eventually had Isaac, so it's clear she forgave her husband and lived in harmony with him. The two times that Abraham lied and said that

Sarah was his sister to save his own hide ended up with Sarah being taken from him and being prepared to be in harems. But she must have forgiven Abraham because we don't have any record that she held it against him. Sarah's faithfulness to her husband overshadowed his misguided thinking at times.

SARAH HAD FAULTS THAT REMIND US OF OURSELVES

If Sarah were alive today, I'd be a little more of a gentleman here and not point out her faults, but she's been gone a long time and her faults are recorded in scripture.

The first fault I see is when she tried to help out God by setting up Abraham and Hagar. Sarah knew she was too old to have a child and she either figured that God had forgotten her, had changed his mind, or had made a mistake. She came up with a plan, a plan to help God and to help Abraham. In the end, she helped no one.

A second fault I see, which is closely related to helping God, is impatience. Waiting for a son was no game for Sarah, she was so old and barren that she knew it would take a miracle for her to conceive and have a child. As the time clock ticked, she grew older. Her impatience cost her in several ways. Her relationship with her husband changed, and so did her relationship with her servant.

Another fault was when she laughed when the angels told her she'd have a son, then she lied about it. Her laugh was a mocking laugh, because if it had been a joyful laugh there would have been no reason to lie. But Sarah was human, wasn't she? We can't be too tough on her.

The story of Abraham and his increasing faith in God is not just a story about Abraham. It is very much about Sarah as well... her faith increased over time.

ABRAHAM'S LOVE FOR SARAH IS SEEN THROUGH HIS GRIEF

Remember Lot, the man who sought to cover his own rear end? Remember Lot's wife who turned to a pillar of salt? Did Lot grieve over her? No.

When Sarah died, she and Abraham were in a foreign land that would one day be populated by their descendants.

The scripture says Abraham “went to mourn for Sarah and to weep over her.” Mourning and weeping are signs that someone was loved and will be missed.

ILLUSTRATION: It’s important to let people grieve as they want to grieve. A few years ago, I was in a ceremony where a man who had died was being honored by a new program that was named in his memory. His family was invited to attend. When the ceremony started, his son who was six or seven started crying and walked out. He went into the men’s room, and everyone could hear his loud weeping. His mother followed as did several others. I went to see if I could console him in some way. A group of us were in the men’s room trying to console a boy who was inconsolable. Only a few times in my life have I heard grief expressed at that magnitude. There was a problem, though. His own mother was telling him not to cry, and others were telling him to be strong. Things were said like, “Your dad wouldn’t want you to cry like this,” and “Big boys don’t cry.” I had to say, “He’s grieving.”

EXPLANATION: Abraham, a man of God, was by the body of his beloved wife of over a hundred years. He had reasoned that God would raise Isaac from the dead, and he had also reasoned that God would not raise Sarah from the dead. She had lived a long life. She had been part of God’s promise with the birth of Isaac.

If a man of God – not just any man of God, this is Abraham we are talking about – if Abraham was grief-stricken at the death of his elderly wife, then we can rest assured that big boys *do* cry.

ILLUSTRATION: Again, it’s important to let people grieve as they want to grieve. Last year, one of our ethnic congregations experienced a loss. A woman who was about sixty years old died of an asthma attack. The family didn’t understand ambulances and calling 9-1-1, so they took her in a car to Southern Hills. They didn’t understand the Emergency Room. To get help for her, her daughter stood in line at the patient information desk while she died in the car. It was indeed a tragedy. Anyway, the family asked me to lead the funeral. They wanted an American funeral and an American burial. Terry Hudgins and Kori Bailey helped the family, and they looked into indigent burial in Nashville. They learned about that process and told the family, who refused. They called a local funeral home and, in my mind, I thought the funeral home would never get paid. I

thought there is no way they can pay for this. I led the funeral and we went to beautiful cemetery in Smyrna. The whole people group rallied together and money came from all over the country. To my surprise, within a few days, I saw a stack of money totaling over \$9,000 in cash and checks and the funeral home was paid off. Let people grieve the way they want.

APPLICATION: I've mentioned this before, and this is a good time to mention it again. We all have an upcoming appointment with death. Don't be dismissive about what will happen to your body when you die. "Well just cast me along the side of the road somewhere." I've heard people say that. Do you realize your funeral is really your last will and testament? Do you realize it's the last opportunity for the story to be told about how you came to faith in Jesus?

EXPLANATION: Abraham's grief was real. He didn't want benevolent burial. He wanted to pay for it. He wanted the best he knew to provide at the time. The woman he'd lied about who was taken by the Pharaoh of Egypt, the woman he lied about who was taken by King Abimelech, the woman who bore him a son, the woman who stayed at home while Abraham formed an army to go whip another experienced army, the woman who had been with him on this travels, the woman who had been with him through thick and thin, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health - she wasn't just a piece of property to Abraham. She was his wife, his companion, his soul mate... and now she was gone. The journey they had together was absolutely incredible.

I am speaking to a lot of people who have experienced grief. In fact, I am not sure I know of any church that has had as many deaths as we have had. I've been with you when you grieved. I've felt your grief. And I've watched you as you said goodbye to your loved ones, and I've watched as you've found life again in a new way.

Abraham was about to experience his new normal. We'll find out later that he lived to the age of 175 which means he had many more years without Sarah. He would eventually marry again and have more children. You may not have realized that.

Life goes on when we experience a loss and the love of Jesus will provide the compassion we need to get us through tough times.