

OUR INHERITANCE COMES THROUGH DEATH
Genesis 23

Meditation for Funeral of Henrietta Van Schepen
January 19, 2008

PURPOSE - To teach the meaning of death for the Christian - as a means to enter our promised inheritance from God - and to encourage those present to die in Christ.

MAIN IDEA - As a picture of the believer, Sarah enters her promised inheritance through the means of death.

I. INTRODUCTION

Let's open our Bibles to Genesis 23.

1. When I thought of Henrietta in the light of Scripture, the person of Sarah, wife of Abraham, came to my mind.

(i) With that, came a HOST OF ASSOCIATIONS:

A. MATRIARCH of the faithful.

B. DEVOUT WIFE

C. A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN - Henrietta had such beautiful skin. Of Sarah, it says in 1 Peter 3, she had the "*unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit*".

- Henrietta too had that inner beauty.

2. Most importantly, Sarah was the one in whom the life of a son was miraculously conceived. In her BARREN YEARS, she became pregnant with new life - which brought her GREAT JOY ... and so she named that life, Isaac - LAUGHTER!

(i) The fruit of Henrietta's life too testifies to one BORN AGAIN. By the grace of God, new life within her! The life of THE Son - her joy!

- This is a Christian's most PERSONAL & SIGNIFICANT connection to Sarah.

3. The passage before us now, however, for the occasion upon which we're gathered today, is probably the most RELEVANT connection between Henrietta & Sarah.

It's titled, "The Death of Sarah"

Read Genesis 23

II. PRINCIPLE & BACKGROUND

THROUGH DEATH, SARAH SECURES GOD'S PROMISED INHERITANCE.

1. Our story begins with the accounting of her death at 127 years old. She was taken out of this age. The place that knew her, knows her no more.

(i) And Abraham WEPT. She was his wife; his lover, his friend. She bore his son. She fought his battles. She knew his struggles. He wept.

(ii) Isaac too grieved. It doesn't say it in this passage, but in the next chapter we learn that it wasn't until he married Rebekah - some time later - that he was finally comforted about his mother's death.

She had given him birth, nursed him, changed his diapers, mended his clothes, kissed his skinned elbows, rejoiced in his growth and accomplishment.

2. DEATH HURTS. We rightly mourn.

But what is HOPEFUL about this chapter is what Sarah's death LEADS TO!
= the first OFFICIAL SECURING of the very land that had been PROMISED to Abraham & Sarah by God
= the land of Canaan - their promised inheritance.

(i) THROUGH DEATH, IT COMES ... God's promises!

3. The chapter is mostly this story of NEGOTIATION between Abraham, and EPHRON, the Hittite.

He needs a place to BURY SARAH, yet he owns no property. He is an "alien & a stranger" on earth (v. 4).

But God has promised him a HOMELAND - Canaan. He believes God's

promises and Sarah's death becomes the means by which it is obtained.

4. He insists on buying that land - paying the full price for it.

Back then, if it was only gifted to him, he ran risk of future Hittites reclaiming the land after Ephron's death.

(i) Abraham PAID for the LAND in FULL.

- Most commentators state that he paid an EXORBITANT amount for it, way beyond what it was worth - that Ephron was simply going into Middle-East bartering mode:

Starting with, "You can have it for free" - posturing ... knowing Abraham wouldn't consider that ... Then setting a ridiculously high cost - 400 shekels - more than a laborer could expect to make in a lifetime (\$1 million).

A. But Abraham, a wealthy man, pays it without negotiation ... FULL PRICE ... and PUBLICLY CERTIFIES his ownership.

5. So Sarah is buried in the cave in the field of Machpelah - and the Promised Land officially begins to become their home!

Through death we secure God's promised inheritance.

III. APPLICATIONS

The truth of this story speaks to us with at least 3 levels of meaning.

1. Henrietta's death is not her end, it is the BEGINNING of her promised inheritance from God.

(i) That is what Canaan represents. The kingdom of God which will culminate in a new heaven and new earth. It is the believer's Promised Land.

- For such, death is merely a DOOR to the beginning of the inheritance.

A. So ... *"Where, O death, is your sting? Where, O grave, your victory?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 15)*

2. Which leads to a second level of meaning.

- Sarah's death and Abraham's payment is **PROPHETIC** of another Person who was buried in a cave to officially secure our rights to the eternal Canaan.

- (i) It is through Jesus' death that we secure God's promised inheritance.
- That death **PAID THE FULL PRICE** for entrance into the kingdom.

A. He was put in a tomb - the Ransom for our salvation - the penalty of sin paid ... in full measure.

Then, **RISING** from the dead, God publicly declared that **IN HIM** there is forgiveness of sins and life everlasting ... His Kingdom.

Through **JESUS'** death, we secure God's promises.

3. Finally, our passage's principle speaks not only of Henrietta and Jesus, it speaks **TO** each of us ... **TODAY ... THROUGH DEATH WE SECURE GOD'S PROMISED INHERITANCE.**

- (i) Jesus said, "He who **LOSES** his life for my sake will **FIND IT!**"
- If anyone would come after me, let him take up His cross & follow me.

WE DIE TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN - "Not my will, but Thine be done"

- (ii) We die **ONCE** to enter salvation, and over and over again to grow in it.
... *"Not my will, but Thine be done"*

A. Jesus said, "He who dies that death has passed from death to life - already in this age - and has **NO FEAR** for the age to come"

4. More than that, even in this age, we begin **ETERNAL LIFE**
- we know the presence & goodness of God
- we know the **JOY** of his reign
- we enter the kingdom and receive its **BLESSINGS** - as Henrietta's life testifies to so abundantly!

THROUGH DEATH WE SECURE GOD'S PROMISED INHERITANCE - now

and in the age to come.

V. CONCLUSION

1. The death that gathers us here today INVITES everyone of us to CHOOSE this SPIRITUAL DEATH

= this death of the self for the sake of the glory of God in Jesus Christ.

2. The death that gathers us here today is a SOBER REMINDER that unless we choose that death of the self for Christ's sake, we risk ETERNAL DEATH.

"He who loses his life for my sake will gain it", Jesus promises, "But he who keeps his life in this age will lose it."

THROUGH DEATH WE SECURE GOD'S PROMISED INHERITANCE

3. Have you died in Christ, that you might begin to live?

May we be able to answer according to the witness of Henrietta's life and the testimony of the apostle Paul:

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. And the life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2:20)

AMEN!