

## “To Be Daughters of Sarah and Sons of Abraham”

Text: Genesis 23:1-24:14; 25:7-11

By Pastor Rand Lankheet, at New Horizon URC, First sermon, on May 6, 2018

**Introduction:** Currently, the average life span in Canada is around 81 years for a woman.

And 77 years for a man. However, in the book of Genesis, most people lived to be much older.

For example, in Genesis 23 we read that Sarah died at age 127. 127!

And in chapter 25, we read that Abraham lived to be 175 years of age. 175!

Very interestingly, the only woman in the Bible whose age at death is given, is the woman Sarah.

That indicates how special she is. Sarah had a special place in God’s plan of redemption ( 救赎 ) .

You see, Sarah is the mother of Isaac. And through Isaac, she becomes the ancestor ( 祖先 ) of Jesus.

In the Bible Jesus is described as the “seed of the woman.” Yes, the seed, the descendant, of Eve, the first woman. And, yes, Jesus was born of the woman, Mary.

But, Jesus is also the seed of Sarah. The descendant of Sarah.

Here’s something else very interesting. To show how special Sarah is. In the New Testament,

Peter gives instruction to Christian wives married to non-Christian husbands. Peter uses the example of Sarah, the wife of Abraham. He writes, “Wives, be submissive ( 顺服的 ) to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they...may be won by the conduct ( 行为 ) of their wives. [Wives,] Do not let your adornment be merely outward... rather, let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible ( 不腐败的 ) beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.” Then Peter writes: “As Sarah [also] obeyed Abraham...whose daughters YOU ARE if you do good.” [I Peter 3:1-6.]

Christian wives are called to be “daughters of Sarah.” Daughters of Sarah!

What a wonderful description for you as wives today!

That you as wives should show the same “gentle and quiet spirit” that Sarah showed.

What a different model for wives than what our world gives today. For both men and women.

Today, the world tells us that women must be assertive ( 有决断的 ) and strong. They must demand their rights. They must “lean in” hard. Of course, we should correct certain wrong ideas of women and wives, found in older stereotypes ( 旧规矩 ) . Also, in many traditional churches. But let this biblical teaching must be heard. Women, wives, mothers, God calls you to show a “gentle and quiet” spirit. Then you are, truly, “daughters of Sarah.”

I think this helps explain for us, why Abraham grieves so much when Sarah died.

Genesis 23:2. Abraham [quote] “came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.”

This tells us quite a bit about their relationship, through the years of their marriage.

Of course, no marriage is perfect. All husbands and all wives are sinners. They have their faults and failures. And the Bible tells us about the faults and failures of Sarah and Abraham.

But by God’s grace they enjoyed a loving and caring relationship. They both had a true faith in the coming of Jesus. They looked forward to the Lamb who would be

sacrificed ( 被献祭 ) for the sin of the world. Now at her death, Abraham is grieving, greatly. He is weeping.

He had loved her so much, for so many years.

As a token ( 象征 , 记号 ) of his love for his wife, Abraham looks for a proper burial place.

And he finds one in the territory ( 地区 ) of the Hittites. It’s on a parcel of land owned by a man named Ephron. On that parcel of land was a cave that could be used as a burial place.

It was known as the “cave of Machpelah.”

Abraham enters into negotiations ( 谈判 , 讨价还价 ) with the Hittites and with the man Ephron. To buy that plot of land. These negotiations tells us something about Abraham's reputation.

Ephron and his friends refer to Abraham as a "mighty prince." Verse 6.

Interestingly, the name "Sarah" in Hebrew means "princess."

So Abraham, the "prince," is now burying his precious "princess," Sarah!

So the field of Ephron, with that "cave of Machpelah" becomes the property of Abraham.

There he buries his beloved wife, Sarah. When Abraham dies some years later, his body is also placed in that cave. And later, Isaac, and his wife, Rebekah, are buried in that same cave. And much later, Jacob and Leah, are also buried there. In that cave of Machpelah.

Now we have to be careful about making applications here. Many of these biblical details are

"descriptive ( 描述的 ) , " not "prescriptive ( 约定俗成的 , 惯例的 ) . " That is, the details describe the customs of that day. They do not necessarily prescribe how we must do things today. Cultural customs around death and funerals and burials are many and varied. Traditionally, in Jewish and Christian there is no burning or cremation ( 火化 ) of the body. There is burial, of an entire body. And usually there is a plot of land, with a special marker of some kind.

Today, however, in many countries, there is no longer enough property available for burials.

Or to maintain gravesites ( 墓地 ) for hundreds of years. And what money is spent today:

\$20,000, \$30,000 dollars, or more. For a fancy coffin ( 棺材 ) , for nice cemetery plot.

For limousines ( 豪华轿车 ) and police escorts ( 护送 ) , to lead a procession of cars!

So, I am not convinced of all our old traditions.

But surely the Bible teaches that we must treat the dead body with respect. God created us not

only as souls, but also as bodies. Our bodies, like our souls, are in the image of God. /

And when a loved one dies, it is good to gather with family and friends. That we may

have a special time of mourning ( 哀悼 ) . And a time of remembrance. Laying to rest, the earthly remains of our loved one. These things also show love and respect for the person who has died.

We also must grieve properly. Even to weep at the death of our loved ones.

Some Christians have wrongly said we should not mourn on these occasions. Today it is popular to call these “celebrations.” But be careful with that. It is good and godly to grieve, to mourn as the loss of a loved one. Remember Jesus, when his good friend Lazarus died? We read that Jesus wept at the tomb of his beloved friend. It is a sign of our love, isn’t it, when we grieve and when weep? And that grieving, helps us deal with our loss.

In fact, in 1 Corinthians 15, the apostle ( 使徒 ) Paul tells us that we should grieve when our loved ones die. But, he writes, we do not grieve “like those WITHOUT HOPE.” As followers of Jesus, we grieve our loss. But we have something the world does not have: we have the hope, the guarantee, that our loved one someday will be raised from the dead. And as they have loved Jesus, we shall join them, in our new bodies, in the new earth. So, as we grieve, we look forward in faith to the return of Jesus. When all things shall be made new.

Women and girls, may you especially be “daughters of Sarah.”

May you share in the beautiful heritage ( 遗产 , 传统 ) of Sarah, trusting in the Lord.

Displaying a quiet and gentle personality.

That someday, if Jesus delays his coming, and you die, you also will be greatly missed.

2. Now let us look at the end of Abraham’s life. Here we have to be brief.

This should be a sermon in itself, but instead of 10 sermons in this series, we have only had 9 sermons. So I will have to do some summarizing.

When Sarah dies, Abraham is an old man. Chapter 24:1 makes this point.

But, wonderfully, we read that through his life the LORD gave Abraham many blessings.

Now in his old age, he is specially enjoying these blessings.

Yet, there is one more thing Abraham wants. You see, his son Isaac is single. Evidently Isaac is

no longer young—he’s in full adulthood. Abraham knows God’s promise for numerous descendants. To become a large and mighty nation. With Isaac still single, Abraham must have wondered: “how will this be? How will my descendants become a great nation?”

So Abraham sends out his servant, to find a wife for Isaac. We didn’t read all of chapter 24.

But, basically, Abraham’s main concern is that Isaac would not marry a woman from the unbelieving people who lived in that land. That seems to be his main concern:

that his son Isaac must not marry an unbeliever...or someone who believes in false gods.

We know what happens, today, very often, when a believer in Jesus, marries an unbeliever.

Usually, the unbeliever pulls the believer away from Jesus. Away from the church. And then, when children are born, they are given a mixed message. Mother goes to church, but father does not. Father is a follower of Jesus, but mother is not. How confusing for the children!

In this series we have learned about the “covenant.” That is, the loving relationship God makes with his people, through Jesus. God says: “I will be your God, and you shall be my people.” Not just you, individually. But also your children after you. Children and grandchildren, throughout the generations. They also must be raised to love the Lord.

So, before he dies, Abraham wants to make sure that Isaac finds a believing wife.

He sends his servant to the faraway land of his ancestors. When the servant of Abraham travels there, notice how he prays. Verse 12: “O LORD God of my master Abraham, please give me success this day, and show kindness to my master Abraham.” Covenant ( 盟约 , 约 ) kindness of the Lord, from one generation to the next generation.

That’s how God normally works: from Christian parents to their children.

Parents, may God show you special kindness, in bringing believing spouses to your covenant children. That you may have the joy of Christian grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Even for the later generations you will never get to know. All to the glory of God.

-Wonderfully, God directs the servant of Abraham to the right woman. To the woman, Rebekah.

We don’t have time to go into detail. But, essentially, Rebekah agrees to travel back with this servant. And to marry a man she has never met before. The man Isaac.

Now I wouldn’t advise you as parents finding a spouse for your child, using this method.

To marry someone they have never met before. □ What’s happening here is something unique in that culture. And it is unique in God’s plan of redemption. At every step, the Lord miraculously

guided the servant to the right woman. And the Lord miraculously guided Rebekah, and her father, and her brothers. And she is brought back, to marry Isaac.

Here's the main point: Abraham is thinking of the covenant promises of God.

To be God not only to him, as an adult. But to be God to his child, after him. And to be God to his grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Again, we as believers must do things so differently from the world. We must teach our children correctly about the kind of person they should marry someday. Not to be thinking mostly about outward beauty. Nor to be thinking of someone who can make lots of money. But, more than anything else, that our children must marry in the Lord.

Now, in the New Testament we read that not every Christian is called to marriage.

The Bible speaks of those given the gift of singleness. And not everyone married is necessarily called to have children. But for those called to marriage and family, may God give you someone who loves the Lord. And if God gives you children, may you raise them, likewise, to love the Lord. To trust in Jesus as their Saviour.

Some years after Isaac was married, Abraham died. At the age of 175 years.

Listen to what Hebrews chapter 11 says about Abraham. I'm quoting from the New International Version. "By faith... [Abraham] made his home in the promised land, like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac... For he was looking forward to a city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.... All these people [including Sarah and Abraham, Isaac and Rebekah] were still living by faith when they died.... They were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them."

What an example, given by Abraham and Sarah. For their children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren. What an example for us, even today. That we should not become too attached to things of this world—not to our homes, our possessions. Not even to our spouses and children.

But that by personal faith in God, trusting in Jesus, we are looking forward to a better life, someday. To a better place, someday. To be taken to heaven, when we die in the Lord. And, someday, when Jesus comes again, to be brought into new earth. By God's grace.

A new earth. Where we will never get old. We will never get sick. We will never die.

We will never have funerals or burials. We will never say goodbye.

But, in Jesus, we will be together, forever. LET US PRAY.