

The movie "The Princess Bride" is a spoof on romantic fantasy stories. And, at one point the hero says to the heroine, "Life is pain, Highness. Anyone who says differently is selling something." It's a funny line in a funny movie... and yet, there are times when we wonder. It sometimes seems that "Life is pain." You know that there is never a moment in life when we don't have something heavy on our hearts to bring before God. Why? Why does life seem so full of pain? One season of suffering after another.

I want to point out something that you may not have noticed about Abraham's life as told to us in Genesis. We don't hear much about the times of ease and tranquility... those times without deep lessons or serious problems. Why? Well, they must not be as important. Apparently the most important times of life are those times that are the hardest... and looking back on your life, you know that this is true.

Laura Story sings a song some of you may have heard, "Blessings."

*We pray for wisdom... Your voice to hear
We cry in anger when we cannot feel You near
We doubt your goodness, we doubt your love
As if every promise from Your Word is not enough
And all the while, You hear each desperate plea
And long that we'd have faith to believe
Cause what if your blessings come through raindrops
What if Your healing comes through tears
What if the thousand sleepless nights are what it takes to know You're near
What if trials of this life are Your mercies in disguise
When friends betray us
When darkness seems to win
We know the pain reminds this heart
That this is not, this is not our home*

And, this is exactly what the pain in life does. It forces us to look to God... again and again...

It reminds us that this world is not our home.

...that actually, we don't want to live here forever. We are passing through, with our eyes set on something else.

We desire a better country.

And, so did Abraham.

This text in Genesis is about that desire... and the indications that we are getting there.

With that in mind, let us visit a New Testament text in preparation. **Hebrews 11:8-16**

And, so God is not ashamed to be called Abraham's God... and Sarah's God...

Because they died without receiving the promise, but believing that they would... all the while desiring a better country.

And, according to the Bible, God is not ashamed to be called Isaac's God, and Jacob's God...

And Wes Fahlberg's God, and Juna Carlson's God, and Carlton Leikvold's God, and Detlov Lindquist's God...

Detlov who said to me over and over while in his room over at Bethesda,

"I will lift up mine eyes to the hills from whence cometh my help."

We who believe, like Abraham, are looking for a better country, future fulfillment of all of God's promises.

Genesis 22:20-23:20

I. News from the Old Country vss. 20-24

These verses set up the rest of Genesis for us. We learn where Rebekah will come from. That will be important.

But, we are also reminded of where Abraham has come from, for these are his folks, back in Ur.

This is important for what happens in chapter 23 for a very simple reason.

For... where does one usually bury your loved ones? Even today... you bury them with their own people.

But, as we are reminded of Abraham's people, we realize that he doesn't do that.

He buries her in the new land, far from where they are from.

What does that mean?

It means the same thing that it meant for the first people buried out here in this graveyard.

They have moved. Their home is not in the old country any longer.

Abraham and his family, Isaac, and his children and grandchildren... all of them they now live here. They're staying.

In fact, we discover just this when Abraham's grandson, Jacob dies. **Gen. 49:29-33**

And, so, we too, who are looking to live forever in a new country, have to make a break in our hearts from the old country. Like Abraham. Like the homesteaders when they came here.

If you are going to have a new life in a land of promise, you have to leave the old place behind.

Which is what we are doing here on earth all our lives. We're working on living for God and leaving to be with God.

And, if we are really going somewhere else... we are going to have to experience loss on our way there.

II. Mourning before Blessing

vss. 1-2

This is the first time in the Bible where we are confronted by the sadness of death.

We have read before that people have died, and even when we are not told of it, we know that they did die.

But, this is the first time we are made to feel the loss that comes with death's parting.

And, the mourning of Abraham colors this whole chapter. Death is such a painful part of the curse.

And, so, Abraham sits in his tent next to the body of his lost wife... weeping.

Jesus felt it at the grave of Lazarus. He wept, we are told. Why? Because of the pain of death.

Many of you have felt it as well.

David sung in Psalm 23 of the "valley of the shadow of death"... and "shadow" is a good word for it.

It is oppressive, painful, a tearing in our soul...

But, David says he finds "comfort" in the Lord. "Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me."

Jesus says in Matt. 5:4, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

And, in Rom 12:15 we are told to "weep with those who weep."

You see, if you refuse to sit and think, to embrace the loss, and feel the mourning and the weeping, and share it with others...

Then you miss out on the comforting and the blessing... that come from others and from the Lord.

The pain is for a purpose.

Think of it all this way. We are constantly tempted to take the good gifts that God gives us... things, memories, people... and hold onto them with every ounce of effort.

But, God prides our fingers off of them and forces us to let go... because He wants us to look to Him and seek Him.

Because ultimately our joy and treasure must be in Him... or we lose it anyway.

Consider a poem that I first heard when I was a teenager.

I counted dollars, while God counted crosses,

I counted gains while He counted losses.

I counted my worth by things gained in store,

He sized me up by the scars that I bore.

I coveted honors and sought degrees,

He wept as He counted the hours on my knees.

I never knew, 'till one day by the grave,

How vain are the things that we spend life to save. Author Unknown

James 4:9-10 ties mourning intimately to humility. God forces us to cry to Him.

This is the blessed purpose of mourning. David sings...

You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever! Ps. 30:11-12

So, how will God turn our mourning into dancing if we refuse to mourn?

III. Living Like a Prince of God

vss. 3-16

It might seem odd to have an entire chapter devoted to funeral arrangements.

We find nothing like it until we get to Jesus' death in the Gospels.

It is in the course of these preparations that we learn some important things about Abraham.

vss. 3-4 Abraham addresses his neighbors there in Canaan, descendants of Canaan. They have lived there for a long time.

"a stranger and a sojourner among you" = He is not a permanent resident. Nor are we.

vss. 5-6 They treat him with respect: Lit. "a prince of God among us"

They no doubt have heard about Abraham's God because of Abraham.

His God brought him here.

His God rescued him from Egypt and won battles for him.

His God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.

His God made Abimelech an ally.

These people might not know Abraham's God, but they know enough about Him to honor Abraham.

So, Abraham, by his life of faith has been a witness. As should we.

They say they will not refuse him... which is quite an opportunity. Abraham doesn't take advantage of them.

vss. 7-9 Abraham makes a specific request, and he is respectful and mindful of the proper ways to ask.

He asks for the field of Ephron and says he will pay "full price."

We don't know how much the regular price, but when you ask in this manner, you are not going to get a bargain.

Death can be a very vulnerable time for people. In many cases it is a good idea to plan ahead for such times.

Abraham might as well have said, "Please rip me off."

He's the guy you want at your auction. He is what you call a motivated buyer. But, he doesn't care.

He doesn't care because there are much bigger issues in play.

Abraham is standing at a critical moment in the purposes of God and He knows it. He doesn't want to make enemies.

vss. 10-11 Now it is Ephron, the owner, who speaks.

We discover that the negotiations are very public... in the gate of the city, the leaders of the community are all there. Abraham is offered the field and the cave as a gift.

vss. 12-13 Abraham "bowed before the people of the land" and again very politely says he wishes to buy the field.

vss. 14-15 Ephron again says he wants to gift it to Abraham, except he lets Abraham know what it is worth.

It is amusing how he tells Abraham... "What is that between you and me?"

And, certainly the price is far more than the land is worth... and Ephron is not even from Minneapolis!

vs. 16 "Abraham listened to Ephron" = in these four words is a very powerful lesson for believers.

Listen.

You can get far by just listening to people... and not just to what they say, but how they are saying it.

Sometimes we believers are far too full of words. We don't really hear others.

Abraham listens and says not a word now.

He listens and hears Ephron saying very politely, "I want 400 shekels of silver."

Not a word. Abraham simply pays him. Done. And no one can argue.

And the payment is in a form that everyone trusts. Abraham cuts no corners.

No one can say anything about the integrity of Abraham... or of Abraham's God.

And, how is it that Abraham can pay the price? God. God's provision and blessing.

Remember when Abraham deceived Abimelech and God rescued him from that mess?

Because of God and Abimelech's desire to obey God he honored Sarah with a gift to Abraham.

Gen. 20:16

God always knows what He's doing.

And, God is doing something else here as well. Surely Abraham knows it.

IV. The First Fruits of the Promise

vss. 17-20

Notice the repetition of an important idea in these verses?

The land and the cave were "deeded over to Abraham" = without question he has gained this property.

In vs. 18 we find these words, "for a possession" = it is Abraham's

Before this Abraham has owned absolutely no land in this land that God has promised to him.

And, this has been a struggle for Abraham.

Gen. 15:7-8 "how will I know that I will possess it?"

Gen. 17:8 "an everlasting possession"

And, until now it has been all promise and no possession.

Now, however, Abraham owns just a little bit... a taste of what God will someday completely fulfill.

God gives us tastes like this occasionally. It is important not to miss them.

What has God done in your life in recent days to give you just a taste of His eternal blessings?

Sometimes you have got to look hard.

Is there an answer to a prayer of deep longing?

An unanticipated blessing to get you through a tough time?

Sweet time of fellowship in His Word?

Encouragement from other believers?

His power shown in healing or the salvation of someone you love?

A message at a funeral to remind you of more important things?

Make a record of these things so that you don't forget them.

Remember what this life on earth is for...

It is not for getting a nice comfortable place here with lots of stuff.

We don't get to stay here. We will all die.

It is for us to glorify God and enjoy Him on our way to our forever home that He has promised us.

And, God is at work training our hearts to look for this and love it.