

Abraham in the House of Mourning

Genesis 23

September 22nd, 2024

I. Introduction

Ecclesiastes 7:2-4

Better to go to the house of mourning

Than to go to the house of feasting,

For that is the end of all men;

And the living will take it to heart.

Sorrow is better than laughter,

For by a sad countenance the heart is made better.

The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning,

But the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

As we see Abraham in the house of mourning, we are led in a godly meditation on death: a meditation that is enriching and that works wisdom in those who have ears to hear.

II. The Text — Gen. 23:1-20

Sarah lived one hundred and twenty-seven years; these were the years of the life of Sarah. So Sarah died in Kirjath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. Then Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spoke to the sons of Heth, saying, "I am a foreigner and a visitor among you. Give me property for a burial place among you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight." . . .

III. Abraham Mourned His Wife

There is a numbness that overtakes a people when death is taken for granted. This is the world we live in, after all. When death is thought of or assumed to be inevitable, as something natural, the loss is there, but grief is muffled. Death is just another fact of life. We're used to it. This is because death has _____ us. We are its slaves. We have learned to live and cope with it devouring everything we love.

With Abraham, the Lord begins to unfold a _____ for him, for his family, for the generations of his descendants, and for the world. The Lord begins to unfold his masterplan of redemption, and suddenly death is thrown out into the light. It is seen to be the horrible, hideous, unnatural thing that it is. We were not made to die. We were made to be blessed in the Lord, and inherit an everlasting possession with Him forever. _____ comes, and death becomes grievous again. It becomes something to bewail and grieve. And so Abraham mourns for his wife and weeps.

IV. Abraham Stood Up

Because we have hope of a future without death, we grieve its unnaturalness and the devastation that death has caused. *And*, because we have a hope of a future without death, we stand up again. Hope both intensifies our grief and it gives us strength to continue; it enables us to take death seriously and yet, we are not conquered by it.

- John Donne: "One short sleep past, we wake eternally / And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die."

V. Burial & Resurrection

There is a specific _____ that goes along with burial. For the Christian, mankind is soul *and* body. The body belongs to the soul and the soul to the body. Death is the grievous blow that unnaturally separates the two. But at the resurrection, our body and our soul are reunited, never to be torn apart again. And that is *good* news. Jesus was not raised a ghost. He was not a disembodied spirit. The tomb was empty, for Jesus was raised a full man, body and soul reunited, never again to be separated.

This theology is reflected in how the Church down through the ages has cared for her dead. As ancient paganism declined across the Roman Empire and as Christianity triumphed over the world, _____ likewise became increasingly rare. Christians proclaimed the Gospel and honored their dead by burial.

VI. Burial & Inheritance

Abraham's insistence on purchasing the burial plot would bear witness to his children that God's promise did not end with his own death or with the death of his family. Their bodies might lay still and silent, yet God's Word continued. God's promise cannot be muffled. From the tomb, Abraham proclaimed this fact. Death would be no _____ to their taking possession of their God-given inheritance.

Our burial proclaims not only that we shall be raised, but that God's promised inheritance of this very earth and these heavens—they are ours. We will be raised and we will return here to inherit all things. Our bodies will lie silent and still, but they will be monuments proclaiming that God's promise has not failed. Death was overcome in Christ, and we will inherit all things with Him in due time.

VII. Thinking of the Next Generation

Coming out of the house of mourning, with a deepened sense of what God is up to Abraham's mind moved toward his _____. Abraham had a mind to make provision for the next generation. This is where a godly meditation on death leads: it directs us to think about those who come after us.

VIII. As we come to the Table . . .

On this Table, we see the weapons which Christ used to defeat death once and for all—to swallow up death with His own life. He gave His life for our sake, so that the promises of God might stand fast—so that we might not be numbed by the therapy of hopelessness—so that we might not take death as anything natural or normal—but so that we might take it seriously, grieve it, and rise up with the Body and Blood of Christ in hand as our taunt: "One short sleep past, we wake eternally / And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die."