

Faith in the Board Room

Genesis 23

INTRODUCTION: Alistair McIntyre, in his book “After Virtue,” shares a classic story where he asks you to imagine that you're standing at a bus stop when a young man you do not know and have never met before comes up to you and says, “The name of the common wild duck is histrionicis, histrionicis, histrionicis.”

Now, even though you understand the sentence and the grammar and Latin are technically correct, you don't know how to make any sense of it. In order to make sense of it, you must put it in a story or context. So, three possible stories could make sense of what this young man said:

- ***He is Mentally Ill*** - That would explain it, mentally ill people often say things with no context.
- ***Perhaps he confused your for someone else*** - what if yesterday someone of your age height and general appearance had approached the young man in a library asking him the Latin word for the common wild duck and today he has mistaken you for that person sees you at the bus stop and comes up and says oh yeah the name of the common well duck is histrionicis, histrionicis, histrionicis”
- ***Perhaps he is a foreign spy***, waiting at a pre-arranged rendezvous and uttering the ill-chosen code sentence that will identify him to his contact.

Now, ***the story you choose would determine how you respond***. If you think he is a spy, you may attempt to take him into custody before he assassinates someone. Which would be really tragic if he were simply mentally ill.

Well, when it comes to things like our work, we can only make sense of our work when we ground our work in the context of a story. What story should shape our work?

ILLUSTRATION: There are four verses in the Gospel of Luke that are easy to overlook. The setting is an occasion in the ministry of John the Baptizer. John had just preached a powerful sermon on repentance, and people were coming to be baptized. They began to ask John a series of questions.

Luke 3:10–14 (ESV)

¹⁰ And the crowds asked him, “What then shall we do?”

¹¹ And he answered them, “Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.”

- ¹² ***Tax collectors*** also came to be baptized and said to him, “Teacher, **what shall we do?**” ¹³ And he said to them, “Collect no more than you are authorized to do.”

- ¹⁴ **Soldiers** also asked him, “And we, **what shall we do?**” And he said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.”

So, you see, the question was, “*Considering my particular station in life and vocation... what should a sincere faith look like?*” John answers - good question, there are particular imperatives that can be applied to various callings. In other word’s a Roman soldier who has repented is still a Soldier of Rome, but he performs his function in an entirely new, different, and better way.

CONTEXT: Now, back to Genesis - remember we began this section of Genesis saying that Abraham was, in many ways, an archetype for the life of faith. That is what Paul meant when he writes, **1 Corinthians 10:11 (ESV)** ¹¹ Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.

In the text before us today, we see Abraham in the boardroom. Keep in mind, passages like this are **descriptive**, not **prescriptive**. So, in other words, you don’t simply copy and paste Abraham’s actions - but rather, you distill principles from the text and appropriate them into your own situations.

You remember the context; the timing is horrible - Sarah has just died, and in spite of all the success God has given Abraham, he does not yet possess a single acre of land on which to bury his beloved. Thus, he must now enter the boardroom with a group of individuals who outnumber him, who worship a different god than he does, and who have all of the leverage in their favor... how will faith behave in this circumstance?

TEXT: Genesis 23:3–20 (ESV)

³ And Abraham rose up from before his dead and said to the Hittites,

The first thing I would draw your attention to is the Posture of the Man of Faith...

1. Posture

⁴ “I am a sojourner and foreigner among you; give me property among you for a burying place, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.”

The word “give” in Hebrew is translated properly, but the context reveals how it is being used. Abraham is not suggesting they GIVE him anything. He is asking to purchase a piece of real estate.

ILLUSTRATION: It’s like one guy asking another, “How much will you take for that rod and reel?”, and the other guy saying, “I’ll give it to you for \$50”.

We know that is what Abraham is saying because of the conversation that follows.

⁵ The Hittites answered Abraham, ⁶ “Hear us, my lord; you are a prince of God among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will withhold from you his tomb to hinder you from burying your dead.”

They are saying, “You need not buy land from us, we will give it to you”, we know that because of what is coming. Now, there are a couple of things going on here.

1. Near Eastern Negotiations have a certain decorum. To fail to honor these rules of engagement can result in a deal falling through or someone becoming deeply offended. So give it to Abraham, that even though this is not his culture, he knows who he is speaking to.
2. Another possible angle here is that Abraham is requesting to purchase land, which suggests that he doesn't intend to leave this land. They recognize that he is a prince of God, and the good favor of God is upon him, so it could be that they simply don't wish to sell him the land and hope for him to continue his life as a tent dweller.
3. Always assume the seller is tactically positioning themselves for a better deal.

⁷ Abraham rose and bowed to the Hittites, the people of the land.

Abraham is well aware of all of the different motives and possibilities at play, yet he presents himself with a certain posture of humility.

- He presented himself in verse 4 as a sojourner and foreigner among you.
- In verse 7, he bows before them.

***Humility and Respect are the foundations of good business.
Your Character is always your greatest collateral.***

But notice, not only the Posture of the man of faith....secondly note the...

2. Precision

⁸ And he said to them, “If you are willing that I should bury my dead out of my sight, hear me and entreat for me Ephron the son of Zohar, ⁹ that he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he owns; it is at the end of his field. For the full price let him give it to me in your presence as property for a burying place.”

Again, there you see the phrase, “give” used with the clear intention of “for the full price”.

Notice that Abraham mentions that the cave is at the end of the field that belongs to Ephron of Zohar - that's significant because had it been in the center of his land, there would be issues of “right of way” that could confuse the process.

Abraham had done his research; he knew which land he wanted, and he knew who the land belonged to. But apparently, he didn't know what Ephron looked like, for he was in the crowd.

¹⁰ Now Ephron was sitting among the Hittites, and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the Hittites, of all who went in at the gate of his city. ¹¹ "No, my lord, hear me: I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. In the sight of the sons of my people I give it to you. Bury your dead."

Notice what Ephron did - he significantly expanded the deal. Now we aren't just talking about Abraham purchasing the cave; now he has to buy the field attached to it as well.

ILLUSTRATION: Recently, one of our very generous church members gave me a fish aquarium, which he had given the ominous name, "money pit". Well, over the course of time, the tank failed and needed to be replaced. I call a company, and the negotiations begin.... You see, it turns out that due to tariffs, COVID, and the supply chain, there are very few tanks available. And the size I want is not at all available. BUT, there is one that is twice as big that he will GIVE me for the deal of a lifetime. To which I replied, I don't want a tank that size because none of my mechanics will work with it - he said, "of course they will, I know how to make it work", What could I do - I bought the tank, and guess what, none of the mechanics worked and all needed to be replaced, which ironically, this guy could make a bundled deal for all of it.

That is what is happening in this text - the deal and the price tag is going up.

¹² Then Abraham bowed down before the people of the land. ¹³ And he said to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, "But if you will, hear me: I give the price of the field. Accept it from me, that I may bury my dead there." ¹⁴ Ephron answered Abraham, ¹⁵ "My lord, listen to me: a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that between you and me? Bury your dead."

So, Ephron is still playing the honor and decorum game, but he also names his price. And apparently, he really likes this field.

Now think about it - the body of Sarah is decaying. Abraham wanted to buy a cave; now he is buying a field, and the price is being gouged because Ephron has all of the leverage.

- Jacob later buys a similar field from the sons of Hamor for 100 shekels of silver.
- Jeremiah buys a similar field at Anathoth for 17 shekels of silver.
- David buys Araunah's threshing floor for 50 shekels of silver.

Ephron declares his field is worth more than all of the other put together and tripled. 400 shekels of silver.

Was it worth it? Let's see... we've seen the posture, the precision... notice thirdly the price...

3. Price

¹⁶ Abraham listened to Ephron, and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver that he had named in the hearing of the Hittites, four hundred shekels of silver, according to the weights current among the merchants.

Abraham takes the deal - he pays the price. Why?

Oscar Wilde once said that *the world is filled with people who know the price of everything and the value of nothing.*

Proverbs 20:14 – “Bad, bad,’ says the buyer, but when he goes away, then he boasts.” In other words, when this deal was over, the friends of Ephron probably patted him on the back and said, “What a fool Abraham was, you took him for all he was worth”, but Abraham knew that land meant something.

In one sense, the land was worth what Abraham was willing to pay for it.
In another sense, the value of this land to Abraham was the fulfillment of a prophecy made many years earlier - that God would give him a land.

This was the place that not only his beloved Sarah's body would rest, this is the place that all of the Patriarchs would return to the dust, till this very day - you can visit the Cave that Abraham purchased in this text. And to this day, the sons of Abraham have profited because of this purchase.

the posture, the precision, the price...

4. Publicity

Abraham is going to follow all of the cultural norms of his day to ensure that the purchase of this land is never contested.

¹⁷ So the field of Ephron in Machpelah, which was to the east of Mamre, the field with the cave that was in it and all the trees that were in the field, throughout its whole area, was made over ¹⁸ to Abraham as a possession in the presence of the Hittites, before all who went in at the gate of his city. ¹⁹ After this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah east of Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan.

Your character should be such that you could do business on a handshake.
Your wisdom should be such that you would never do business on a handshake.

Yes, be innocent as a dove, but be wise as the serpent.

Abraham doesn't want this deal done in secret - he wants everyone in the city to know that the land belongs to him fair and square.

Proverbs 10:9 – “Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but he who makes his ways crooked will be found out.”

Transparency is insurance for your testimony.

ILLUSTRATION: Daniel was hated by his enemies, but he kept such transparent conduct that his enemies said, “We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God.” (Dan 6:5)

John 18:19–21 (ESV)

¹⁹ The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. ²⁰ Jesus answered him, “I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret.” ²¹ Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said.”

Keep your dealings above board. A clean conscience is better than a hidden profit.

the posture, the precision, the price, the publicity...

5. Permanence

²⁰ The field and the cave that is in it were made over to Abraham as property for a burying place by the Hittites.

Faith is always future-oriented.

Later we find in Genesis that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, along with Sarah, Rebecca, and Leah are all buried in the cave in Machpelah. THEN Remember how the story moves forward - Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the sons of Jacob sell Joseph into slavery, he rises in Egypt and is able to provide for his brethren... do you know how the story ends? Joseph says, on his deathbed, made his brothers swear, “Carry my bones from here.” (Gen 50:25)

When the Exodus occurs and the people of God claim the land of promise, the bones of Joseph go with them to this very spot.

So it’s important. But it’s important for more than just a tidbit of family history. This is about faith in the promises of God. Remember, Abraham is not originally from here. He didn’t go back to Heron. He didn’t go back to Ur of the Chaldees for his burial plot.

You tell me what such a place is worth? It is worth more than silver; blood will be spilled over that land.

Unbelief makes deals for a day, faith makes deals for generations.

Proverbs 13:22 – “A good man leaves an inheritance to his children’s children.”

Don’t just build income—build inheritance. Structure your business, ministry, and family decisions so your children stand on firmer ground than you did.

CONCLUSION/INVITATION:

Back in chapter 13 God told Abraham to look as far as he could and told him all of this will be yours. We come to the end of the story, and he owns one little sliver of land. That’s the way life is - we don’t get the fullness of the promise in this world, but in the world to come.

AND God is calling you and calling me to live for what you cannot see based on what has already been seen.

For you see there was another tomb that scripture highlights. Abraham needed to own his tomb, because it would be needed for a while - a true and greater Abraham, Jesus Christ only needed to borrow His for three days.

“Do business God’s way, do life God’s way—and the blessing will outlast the bargain.”