

Genesis Ch23v1-20 - Hope at a Funeral

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[0 : 00] Sarah lived to be 127 years old. She died at Kiriath Arba, that is Hebron, in the land of Canaan.

And Abraham went to mourn for Sarah and to weep over her. Then Abraham rose from beside his dead wife and spoke to the Hittites.

He said, I am a foreigner and a stranger among you. Sell me some property for a burial site here so that I can bury my dead. The Hittites replied to Abraham, Sir, listen to us. You are a mighty prince among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs.

None of us will refuse his tomb for burying your dead. Then Abraham rose and bowed down before the people of the land, the Hittites.

He said to them, If you are willing to let me bury my dead, then listen to me and intercede with Ephron, son of Zohar, on my behalf, so that he will sell me the cave of Machpelah, which belongs to him and is at the end of his field.

[1 : 16] Ask him to sell it to me for the full price as a burial site among you. Ephron the Hittite was sitting among his people and he replied to Abraham in the hearing of all the Hittites who had come to the gate of his city.

No, my lord, he said, listen to me. I give or I sell you the field and I sell you the cave that is in it. I sell it to you in the presence of my people. Bury your dead. Again Abraham bowed down before the people of the land and he said to Ephron in his hearing, Listen to me, if you will, I will pay the price of the field.

Accept it from me so that I can bury my dead there. Ephron answered Abraham, Listen to me, my lord. The land is worth 400 shekels of silver.

But what is that between you and me? Bury your dead. Abraham agreed to Ephron's terms and weighed out for him the price he had named in the hearing of the Hittites, 400 shekels of silver according to the weight current among the merchants.

[2 : 39] So Ephron's field in Machpelah near Mamre, both the field and the cave in it, and all the trees within the borders of the field, was legally made over to Abraham as his property in the presence of the Hittites who would come to the gate of the city.

Afterwards Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave of the field of Machpelah near Mamre, which is at Hebron in the land of Canaan.

So the field and the cave in it were legally made over to Abraham by the Hittites as a burial site. Interesting account. Let's pray. Father, we trust that every word written in Scripture is your word to us.

None of it is wasted. All of it important. And so we pray and ask that by your Holy Spirit's power you would help us to concentrate and to hear your voice to us afresh, strengthening us and blessing us today.

[4 : 08] In Jesus' name we pray this. Amen. Well, it's a reality for us all, isn't it?

Look at verse 1. Sarah lived to be 127 years old. She died at Curious Arbor.

Sarah lived and Sarah died. It's the story of us all. Our day, or one day, our names will appear in RIP.ie.

We mightn't live to be 127 years old, but the same words will tell the same story. Johnny lived and Johnny died.

So the big question we all need to ask and what I want us to think about this morning is this. Am I ready to die?

[5 : 15] Am I ready? Is everything prepared for your funeral? You see, chapter 23 seems to be all about Abraham looking for a grave to bury his wife Sarah.

And not from being from these parts, he didn't have a family grave. There was no plot for him to go to. So Abraham has to go through the whole business of asking the local town council if he could buy some land.

And he's very respectful about it. Look at verse 7. Abraham rose and bowed down before the people of the land.

Verse 12. Again, Abraham bowed down before the people of the land. And finally, after a bit of wheeling and dealing, a place has been identified, the cave of Machpelah.

And the price has been agreed, 400 shekels of silver. Handshakes all round. Abraham gets his grave and Ephron gets his money.

[6 : 31] And so, verse 19, afterwards, Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave of the field of Machpelah.

Well, not much of a story, you say. There's nothing really here to hold our interest, just the sale of a piece of land.

Why don't we move on to chapter 24, to the love story of Isaac and Rebecca? Well, before we do this, I think the whole story teaches us how we are to prepare for our own funeral.

Not how we can go about buying a grave or how we can get the best price for our coffin, but how we are to live our life as we wait for that inevitable day.

So, let's look at the text together and see how we can prepare for our own death. First, in preparation, live as strangers in the world.

[7 : 45] Live as strangers in the world. Abraham may have come from out of town, but he's been living in these parts for at least 80 years. He's hardly a blow-in.

Yet, look how he sees himself. Verse 4. I am a foreigner and a stranger among you.

Now, a foreigner was somebody who didn't have any rights. He didn't carry a passport. And a stranger meant that you had no land. He was at the mercy of the landlord.

Now, we might think Abraham is a bit extreme in describing himself as a foreigner and a stranger. Even the locals saw him as somebody with greater honour.

Look at verse 6. Sir, listen to us. You are a mighty prince among us. Abraham, you're one of us now.

[8 : 42] You're one of the family. No, Abraham understands his status. Verse 4. I am a foreigner and a stranger among you.

He lives his life like a refugee or a displaced person. Now, why would he do that? Well, I think there's two reasons.

Here's the first. Because he sees that life is temporary. For Abraham, this is how he viewed life. He saw life on this earth as a temporary dwelling place.

He was just passing through. You see, Abraham and Sarah knew that they only had a fixed number of years to live. They understood that life was temporary and Sarah's death was a reminder of that. You see, most of us live as if we're going to be here forever. We plan our life as if we're never going to die. And if we do think about the future, we think about all that we're going to do in our retirement.

[9 : 56] No, this account reminds us that we are temporary beings. We live and we die. One day our names will appear in R.I.P.

second reason is that Abraham knew this was not his home. Being a foreigner and a stranger, this earth was not home for him.

In fact, that is the status and position of all of God's people. Peter, who was a disciple or apostle of Jesus, wrote a letter to a bunch of Christians who were going through a hard time.

They were finding it difficult. And this is how he wrote, this is how he addressed them. To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered.

heard. And as the letter goes on, he encouraged them to live out their lives as foreigners and strangers here on earth.

[11 : 08] This is how God's people are to think of themselves. Now, I'm not suggesting that it's wrong to buy a house or that we should sell up all our goods and go and live off grid.

No, it's about an attitude of our heart. One writer put it like this. Christians, that is followers of Jesus, are like immigrants, foreigners, temporary residents, refugees.

We do not belong. We are outsiders. The death of Sarah was hard for Abraham.

Look at the end of verse two. Abraham went to mourn for Sarah and to weep over her. Of course he would miss Sarah.

They had been married for years. Yet in the sorrow he knew this was not the end. They were strangers on earth, temporary residents, longing for their eternal home.

[12 : 21] So let's ask ourselves the question how do you live your life? If you see this world as your only home, then life will be lived as one big bucket list.

We live our life focused on what I want and doing everything that I please, planning our life all around the things I want to do. But if life is temporary, and if we understand that this earth is not our true home, then we will be outward focused.

Instead of serving self, we will be serving others. We will be a generous and a kind person. Why? Because we know that everything that we have on this earth we're not going to take with us.

It is all temporary. It will vanish in a puff of smoke. We are looking forward to our eternal home. So how do you prepare for your funeral?

Well, first, live as a stranger here on earth. Second, in preparation, live by faith in God's promises.

[13 : 45] live by faith. Our first reading, chapter 23, seems to be all about Abraham just buying a grave.

A plot has been identified, negotiations take place, the price is agreed, but finding a grave in the right place is all important.

not because of the view, but because of the promises that have been made. Remember God's promises?

Let's go back to chapter 12 to remind ourselves just what God had promised. Chapter 12, there were three main promises that God made.

chapter 12, verse 2, there was the promise of a people. God was going to bring about a people for himself through the family of Abraham.

[14 : 50] Verse 2, I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you. Then there was the promise of the people being blessed, end of verse 3, and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

There would be a son coming from the line of Abraham who would bring blessing to all the nations. And then third, there was the promise of a place to live.

Let's pick it up in verse 5. Abraham took his wife Sarai and his nephew Lot and all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran and they set out for the land of Canaan.

Now underline that. Canaan. And they arrived there. Verse 7, The Lord appeared to Abraham and said, To your offspring I will give this land.

So God's people will be in God's place and they will be blessed. Now it's important to understand that this promise was crucial and Abraham needed reminded of it.

[16 : 10] So look at chapter 17 verse 8. God reminds him again of this promise. Chapter 17 verse 8.

The whole land of Canaan where you now reside as a foreigner I will give as an everlasting possession to you and to your descendants after you and I will be their God.

Back to chapter 23. So there we have it. God's great promises that he will have a people who will have a place to live in and they will be blessed.

Yet despite all of these promises Abraham still has no land. He doesn't own anything. In fact he's having to negotiate with the locals to try and buy a small field.

Now just because Abraham has no land doesn't mean that God has forgotten. What God says God does. What God promises God will fulfil.

[17 : 25] It mightn't be according to our timing and it mightn't be in the way that we expect but God will fulfil his promises. So armed with that promise Abraham now claims the promise.

Remember the land that God had promised to Abraham was the land of Canaan. Now look where Sarah dies in verse 2.

She died at Kirias Arba, that is Hebron, in the land of Canaan. And where is she buried? Well look at verse 19.

Afterwards Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave in the field of Machpelah near Mamre which is at Hebron in the land of Canaan. You see Abraham is looking forward in faith to what God had promised.

And as a sign of his faith in God's promise he buys up a piece of land. He buys a burial site in Canaan. It's not a lot of land, it's just a field with a cave at the end, a few rocks.

[18 : 44] But it is a piece of the land that God had promised. You wouldn't call it prime real estate but it is a foretaste of what will one day be received and one day enjoyed.

You see Abraham was investing in his promised inheritance. Verse 14. Ephron answered Abraham, Listen to me my lord, the land is worth 400 shekels of silver.

That's over a year's wages. That's a lot of money. But what is that between you and me? Come on, let's do the deal and you can bury your debt.

So Abraham agreed to Ephron's terms and weighed out for him the price he had named in the hearing of the Hittites 400 shekels of silver according to the weight current among the merchants. In other words, the scales were tipped in favour of the seller. Seems crazy money, doesn't it? Surely Abraham could have negotiated a bit better and got a better price.

[20 : 05] He could have even gone across the border and found something a little bit cheaper. No, it may seem a lot of dosh, a lot of money to spend on a burial site, but this was an investment in something to come and you couldn't put a price on that.

For Abraham, this burial site pointed to something greater and far more eternal. come with me, please, to Hebrews chapter 11.

Hebrews chapter 11, as we've seen over the weeks, is crucial to our understanding the life of Abraham. Hebrews chapter 11.

Hebrews chapter 11. Hebrews chapter 11. Hebrews chapter 11. Here the writer helps us understand Abraham's faith and all that he was looking forward to.

We'll pick it up in verse 8. By faith, Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obedience, obeyed and went, even though he didn't know where he was going.

[21 : 35] By faith, he made his home in the promised land, like a stranger and in a foreign country. He lived in tents, as did his children, Isaac and grandchildren, Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.

life. Why would he live like that? Because for Abraham, life was temporary. This was not his home. Why? Verse 10. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. God. Look, when Abraham acquired the piece of land, he was claiming his inheritance by faith in what God had promised him.

You see, the physical land of Canaan pointed to a better and more eternal land, a city built by God, the land of the new heavens and the new earth, the world that God will one day put right, the world where there will be no more suffering or struggles and no more death.

This is what God has promised to all of God's people. We have a glorious inheritance, God's people in God's place in a land, an eternal land full of blessing and you can't put a value on that.

[23 : 10] This is an inheritance that no money can buy. In fact, if we want to be part of it, we can claim that inheritance by faith in God's promise.

This is something God delights in giving freely to all who will trust him. Isn't this something worth investing in with all of your life, whatever may come, so that you may gain eternity and a home forever.

So how do we prepare for our funeral? Well, we live as strangers and we live by faith in the promise of God.

And continuing in preparation, we live with the hope of the resurrection. We live with hope. Let's go back to chapter 23 of Genesis.

Abraham claimed the promise. He bought his burial site, a cave at the end of a field.

[24 : 33] As far as Ephron was concerned, this land wasn't worth keeping, not much value. Yet to Abraham, this burial tomb filled him with hope.

You see, hope in the Bible is not wishful thinking. It's absolute confidence and complete assurance. It's 100% guaranteed.

And that's what the burial site for Abraham represented. Sure and certain hope. Look at verse 17. So Ephron's field in Machpelah near Mamre, both the field and the cave in it, and all the trees within the borders of that field was legally made over to Abraham as his property in the presence of all the Hittites who had come to the gate of the city.

Verse 20. So the field and the cave in it were legally made over to Abraham by the Hittites as a burial site.

The legal documents were signed and sealed. The deal has been done. It can't be undone or rewritten. It's legally binding.

[25 : 54] This plot of land, this burial site, belongs to him now and forever. He now has a stake in the promised land.

You see, for Abraham, this grave was a source of a strange kind of comfort. Yes, he buried and grieved for his wife, but this grave also filled him with hope.

It was a reminder of his glorious and eternal inheritance, an inheritance that belonged to him and it was secured forever by God's promises.

Nothing and no one could undo what God promises. Nothing can take away with what God will fulfil. Isn't it strange how a burial tomb can fill a person with such great hope?

Well, for us, there is a greater hope to be found in another burial tomb, but this one is empty.

[27 : 08] The promise that Abraham looked forward to becomes a reality through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. You see, Jesus, the promised son of Abraham, the God man, came into the world to live as a foreigner and a stranger amongst us.

He had no rights. God He had no home. He came to this world with an outward focus, not to be served, but to serve.

And to serve by giving his life as a ransom. He died our death, taking the blame for the wrong things we have done.

and he was placed in a cave, a burial tomb. There Jesus was buried. But this was only a temporary tomb, because three days later, Jesus Christ physically and bodily walked out of that tomb.

He crushed death, he destroyed the grave, and he secured for us our eternal inheritance.

inheritance. Who would have ever thought that you could find such hope in a burial site?

[28 : 35] You see, faith in Jesus Christ gives us absolute confidence and complete assurance that our eternal destiny is secure.

What Jesus has done on the cross and through his resurrection seals the deal. it can't be undone. It can't be rewritten.

It's secure forever. Sarah lived and Sarah died.

Johnny lives and one day Johnny will die. die. But that's not the end of the story, is it? We have hope, absolute confidence, and complete assurance.

So are you ready to die? Have you made preparations for your funeral? people? Well, to prepare for that inevitable day, we are to live as strangers.

[29 : 51] We are to live in faith and we live with hope. As we close, I'd like us to turn, please, to 1 Peter.

1 Peter chapter 1. This is the letter where all God's people are referred to as foreigners and strangers.

We live our life here temporarily. This world is not our home. We are longing for something better and greater. And here is a promise that is worth investing your life in.

Giving your all for something to something that you can never ever lose. Let's read 1 Peter chapter 1 verses 3 to 5 as we reflect and meditate on God's great promise.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In his great mercy, he has given us new birth, a new beginning, a new life, into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade.

[31 : 36] This inheritance is kept in heaven for you who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

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and we praise you, Lord God Almighty Father, Son and Holy Spirit for the life that we have received by faith for the promises that are now ours because of Christ's resurrection from the dead help us to live our life as strangers living our life temporarily longing for our eternal home walking each day by faith in the sure and certain promises of God looking forward and longing for our eternal home that will never perish spoil or fade thank you that heaven is kept for us and that we are kept for heaven help us to prepare for our funeral for our good and for your glory

Amen Well I'm sure there's many songs that we could sing in response to what we've just thought about but here's one that fits well what is our hope in life and death if this is where your faith is then you will want to sing and answer Christ alone Christ alone I encourage you if you're able to stand and sing and to sing to one another to encourage us as we live our lives here on this earth God bless you I need you

I need you to bring you