

Genesis Ch25v1-11 - Hope In Death

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[0 : 00] Well, you may be wondering, why aren't we reading the Gospels and the Resurrection? Isn't it Easter Sunday? Well, I think there's hope here.

So let's pray and ask for God's help to us. Our Father God, we thank you for this day where we, especially as your church across the world, remember and celebrate Christ risen from the dead and the hope that that brings to all who will put their trust in you.

Father, we pray that from your word today, we would be encouraged in the hope that we have, that we would leave this building filled with assurance and confidence of our eternal destiny with you, filled with a message of hope to a broken and dying world.

Father, help us by your Holy Spirit, we pray. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. But it reads like any other obituary.

Look at verse 7. Abraham lived 175 years. Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years, and he was gathered to his people.

[1 : 43] Not much to ponder over, is there? Just another death notice. Let's move on. Well, let's not be in such a rush this morning, because it may seem quite ordinary to us, but these verses, verses 7 and 8, are filled with glorious hope.

Abraham's death tells us with absolute certainty that death is not the end. In fact, we, like Abraham, can have the same guaranteed hope.

The story of Abraham can be our story too. So we have a very simple structure this morning, easy to remember, summarised in four words.

Here's the first one. Abraham lived. Look at verse 8 with me. Abraham lived to a good old age.

In fact, he was 175 years old. Wow, you say, really? You want me to believe that? That's impossible. Nobody lives that long.

[2 : 58] Well, the record of Genesis tells us, when we read from the beginning, that people lived to be hundreds of years old. However, what we see happening as we read through is a gradual decline in how long people lived.

As the effects of the curse take hold, so the span of life shortens. In fact, the writer of Psalm 90 would later record this.

He says this, Our days may come to 70 years or 80 if our strength endures. That's a pretty accurate assessment for life today.

70, maybe 80 years will live if our strength endures. But let's not miss the point. Abraham lived a good old age.

We could say he died a happy and contented man. A man with a big family dishing out his inheritance. However, when we take time to look back on Abraham's life, it's a surprise he even lived so long.

[4 : 13] You see, in many ways, Abraham's life was a failure. He messed up big time. Remember the different accounts that we've been looking at?

First, there were the lies Abraham told about his wife Sarah. Whenever they arrived to a new place, they were nomadic people, so they would travel from one destination to another.

And when they arrived in a new place, it seemed the ruling lords were known for killing off the men and taking all the women.

So Abraham came up with a wonderful plan. And this is what he said. It's recorded for us in Genesis. He says to his wife Sarah, This is how you can show your love to me.

Everywhere we go, say of me, He's my brother. It seems it was a regular practice. Everywhere we go.

[5 : 10] Not very courageous of Abraham and not very protective. It seems he was quite happy to kind of push his wife into danger, put her into the arms of another man.

Well, as long as he saved his own bacon, that was okay. Not a great husband. Then there was the whole business with Hagar, Abraham's wife's servant.

He went and got her pregnant as he tried to fulfill God's promises for himself. And it was a disaster. Desperate family breakdown.

And then, after Sarah died, chapter 25, verse 1, Abraham, Abraham, we're told, had taken another wife.

Which suggests that he actually had more than one living wife. In fact, the text tells us that he did have others. Look down at verse 6.

[6 : 11] But while he was still living, he gave birth to the sons of his concubines. Now, concubines were other women that men took. Well, they weren't quite a wife or in the category of wife, just a little bit below.

But they took them to themselves nonetheless. Whatever happened to God's command about marriage being an exclusive union between one man and one woman?

Given Abraham's life, we wouldn't be surprised if God had stepped in and ended it early. In fact, it wouldn't be a shock to us if God's patience had run out completely with Abraham.

It seems these 175 years actually tell us more about God's faithfulness than Abraham's greatness.

In fact, the only reason Abraham lived as long as he did is because God promised him many years and God kept to his promise.

[7 : 21] Just look back at chapter 15, verse 15. There God made a promise to Abraham. Chapter 15, verse 15.

He says, You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age.

The same words that we have in chapter 25. God kept his promise. You see, the life we have is a God-given life.

God made us. He sustains us. He provides for all that we have. We all owe our very existence to God. Scripture reminds us of that.

Look at the verse on the screen. This comes from Isaiah the prophet. This is what God the Lord says, the creator of the heavens, who stretches them out, who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it, who gives breath to his people, and life to those who walk on it.

[8 : 37] Job said something similar. In his hand, in God's hand, is the very life of every creature.

And in his hand, is the breath of all mankind. Breathe in. Ah!

Breathe out. Ah! That's God sustaining you. The fact that you are breathing right now, the fact that you breathe through your sleep, is God sustaining you.

Not because we're deserving, but because God is faithful. And as I look at my life, both present and past, I'm amazed at how God has been patient and persistent with me, despite all my rebellion, and all the times I've walked away from God and ignored him.

My years, 51 though they may be, is not about the greatness of Johnny Grant, but the faithfulness of God, which should lead us all to humble praise and thanks, to marvel at God's goodness and kindness to each one of us.

[10 : 00] So before you tuck into your Easter roast today, let me encourage you, round the table, to stop and say, thank you God, for life.

Thank you God, for your faithfulness to me. Your grace and your mercy. And perhaps, even sing a verse of, great is thy faithfulness.

God is good. Abraham lived. We live. This is the story of us all.

So the first word, lived, told you it was a very simple outline. The second word, died. Look at verse 8. Abraham breathed his last and died.

I was watching a health program the other evening and in the program we were introduced to a middle-aged mum. I think she was around about 40. Her name was Linda.

[11 : 06] And a number of tests were arranged. Her weight was taken, her height, her BMI bloods were taken. She did a stress test.

And then all of the results were fired into this computer program. It chugged about for a little while and then it spat out the calculated age of her predicted death.

74. 12 weeks later, after a change in exercise, diet and lifestyle, the same results were repeated.

All the information fired into the computer. And guess what? Age of death? 86. 86. An increase of 12 years from 12 weeks activity.

Wow, I wonder, what if you did a year's activity? What would that give me? Well, doesn't that say something about us? We somehow think that we can just add years to our life.

[12 : 05] And if we're younger, we think, wow, we've got buckets of years. It's kind of an eternity. We can't even think that far. I've got so long to live. But whatever our exercise plan, whatever our eating habits, we cannot change the inevitable.

We will breathe our last. You see, our life is transient. The list of names in the genealogy, if you just look forward to verses 12 to 18, we get this long list of names.

And it helps move the story along to the next generation. But it also reminds us that with every birth comes a death. So look at verse 12.

This is the account of the family line of Abraham's son, Ishmael. Well, what happened to Ishmael? Look at verse 17. Ishmael lived 137 years.

He breathed his last and died. Here today, gone tomorrow in the blink of an eye. You see, I think the text is forcing us to stop and slow down in the busyness and the rush of life and all the things that we plan to do and want to do and say, slow down and consider your own impending death.

[13 : 34] Look what Psalm 39 says. Show me, Lord, my life's end and the number of my days. Let me know how fleeting my life is.

You have made my days a mere hand breath. The span of my years is as nothing before you. Everyone is but a breath.

Even those whom seem secure. Or consider this, what James says, the writer in the New Testament. What is your life?

You know what your life is? It's a mist. You know the mist that appears in the morning? There for a little while. And then vanishes as it is burnt up by the sun.

You're nothing more than the steam out of a kettle. Vapour. You see it and then it's gone. Think about what days you have.

[14 : 40] How long do you think you're going to live? Our lives are temporary. We don't last. We're born and then we die. The God who gives us life will one day take our life.

We won't die a second too early or a minute too late. It may come at old age, but it may come through an accident.

One day we will breathe our last. All the things that we wanted to do, all the plans for our retirement, gone in a flash.

Are you ready for your last breath? Abraham lived. Abraham died.

And we die. This is the story of us all. Well, third. Gathered.

[15 : 45] So Abraham lived. He died. And was buried. Right? Well, not so fast.

Let's not go to the funeral too quickly. Look at the text. Verse 7. Abraham lived 175 years. Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age.

An old man and full of years. And he was gathered to his people. You say, what's this gathering all about?

Well, gathered to his people. It's a rare phrase to find in the Bible and seen just on a few occasions throughout the Old Testament.

But it's hinting, it's telling us that though there's a death, there is a life after death. He was gathered to his people.

[16 : 42] His soul departed and his physical body was left behind. Look at the progression. We're told that he lived, he died, then he was gathered.

And then in the next verse, we read about his burial. So this isn't just another term for burial. He was gathered to his people. Oh, he was buried. No.

It's something distinct, separate from he was gathered, then he was buried. And it's not another term for an ancestral grave. Because we know that Abraham didn't go back to his ancestors.

He was buried in a small cave alongside his wife, Sarah. So it seems the author wants us to stop and take on board and recognise that, yes, he lived, he died, but there is a life after death.

Where you say, well, isn't that stretching things a little bit, Johnny? Aren't you reading a little bit too much into it? Well, I don't think so because the burial that we read of in verses 9 to 10 point to that.

[17 : 58] Look at verse 9. His sons, Isaac and Ishmael, buried him in the cave at Machpelah near Mamre in the field of Ephron, son of Zohar, the Hittite, the field Abraham had bought from the Hittites.

There Abraham was buried with his wife Sarah. Well, you go, well, what's all the detail about this burial plot and the place it is and that he bought it?

Why not just tell us he was buried? Well, remember, God had made a promise to Abraham that he would have a land that he could call home, the promised land of Canaan.

And as a sign of his faith in God's promises, as we read at the end of verse 10, Abraham bought a burial site in Canaan. Yes, it was the Hittites, but the land was known as the land of Canaan.

And this whole account of buying the land is recorded for us back in chapter 23. It's not a lot of land that he manages to buy. It's just a field with a cave in it, somewhere to bury the dead.

- [19 : 17] But for him, it was much more than just a burial site. It was a foretaste of what will one day be received. You see, when Abraham bought the land, he was investing in his future inheritance.

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

It's on page 1209, if you're using a church Bible. 1209, Hebrews chapter 11.

And here we see a gathering that Abraham was looking forward to. We'll pick it up in verse 13.

We've read other verses in chapter 11, but here's verses we haven't read. Chapter 11, verse 13. All these people were still living by faith.

- [20 : 31] People like Abraham were living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised. They only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth.

They saw life on this world as temporary. Verse 14. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own.

But what kind of country was he looking forward to? Well, we're told. Verse 15. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return.

Instead, 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.

Now, you can keep your Bibles open there in Hebrews. We're going to come back to it in a minute. But look, when Abraham died, he was first of all raised and gathered to his people.

- [21 : 48] He joined all those who by faith were longing for their eternal home. You see, the physical land of Canaan, the place where he was buried, was pointing to not just the promised land, but the eternal land.

The land of the new heavens and new earth, a new country. An inheritance that would never perish, spoil or fade. In fact, it was something that was guaranteed.

It's promised to us by God. And he promises to keep us for that glorious inheritance. It's a double security.

You see, this is what is promised to all God's people. We can have the sure and certain hope that we will be gathered with and to his people, that death is not the end of the story.

Abraham lived. He died. And he was gathered. And we too can also be gathered.

- [23 : 04] This is the story of God's people. So fourth, lived, died, gathered, raised.

You see, Abraham longed for a better country. But why was he so confident about his future? How was he so assured of his eternal destiny?

Well, one word. Resurrection. Abraham believed that God could raise the dead. well, how do you know that?

Well, because the Bible tells us. Have a look at verse 17, Hebrews chapter 11, verse 17. This is recording the account of when Abraham was called to sacrifice his son Isaac, although in fact God never intended that to happen because he would provide something in place of Isaac.

but let's see what it says here, verse 17. By faith, Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son even though God had said to him, it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.

- [24 : 33] Even though that the promised blessings rested in Isaac and in his family to come, Abraham believed. What did he believe? Well, look at verse 19.

Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead. Abraham knew God to be faithful and he would never break his promise.

So Abraham reasoned in the faithful God that he is. He calculated. He weighed it all up about the character of God and all his promises made.

that even if his son was sacrificed, even if his son died, God could take Isaac by the hand and raise him from the dead.

That's what he believed. And that's what gave Abraham his confidence and assurance. God could raise the dead.

- [25 : 34] God would say, God could raise the dead. God could raise the dead. Did God raise the dead?

Was Abraham right to put all his hope in God? God Well, what Abraham reasoned we have had fulfilled.

You see, we have something better and greater. What Abraham longed for for God to do, we now look back on to what God has already done.

We have something better and greater, don't we? because we know that God has sent his son, his only son, the son he loved, to die for us.

He died to deal with all of our failures over all the years that we may live. He takes our disobedience on himself and he is punished in our place.

- [26 : 39] He dies our death. But more than that, the scriptures tell us that three days later Jesus bodily and physically walked out of that grave, out of the tomb of death came a life that destroyed death.

So all who put their faith in Jesus have absolute confidence and complete assurance that death is not the end, it is only the step into our eternal destiny, that better country, that heavenly city.

you see, the death of Abraham gives us a picture here of how we should understand our own death and resurrection.

all centred in and founded upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ as he looked forward in faith, we look back in faith. For Abraham, a resurrection has happened and a resurrection is yet to come.

Well, what do you mean? Well, first for Abraham, when he first died, his soul was raised. He was gathered to be with his people, the people of faith.

- [28 : 04] His physical body remained. It was left to decompose in the grave alongside his wife Sarah. But his soul was raised, gathered with the company of God's people.

Now, that is true for Abraham and that is true for us if we put our faith in God. The moment we die, our soul will be raised, gathered to be with the company of God's people.

But second, there's another resurrection, isn't there? For Abraham, way back then, he was waiting for the Lord's return. When Jesus would come again and his soul would be reunited with his body, a brand new body, not a body that would get corrupt and get sick, but a body that would never get sick and never suffer again.

And when the Lord Jesus would come again, at that moment in the future, Abraham believed that what he longed for would become a reality.

He would step into that new creation, that promised land. Not just a soul, but a physical being made new.

[29 : 32] That isn't just true for Abraham, it is true for all who trust in God. Well, how can we be so sure? Well, go with me to 1st Thessalonians.

It's on page 1188. 1st Thessalonians chapter 4, it's on page 1188. We're going to read these verses together, because I think they bring a conclusion to what we've been thinking about.

We're thinking about a gathering to be with God's people, that's our first resurrection, and then when Christ returns, that full and final resurrection, where we will be gathered with all God's people.

Verse 13, we'll pick it up, chapter 4, verse 13. Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death.

Now, what's sleep in death? Well, there's a similar phrase at the end of verse 14, where it says about fallen asleep in him, and the end of verse 15, the same thing, fallen asleep.

[30 : 55] It simply means that those who have died trusting in God. People like Abraham, any person who has died and has been trusting in God, sleep in death.

Their soul is raised. So let's read from verse 13 again. Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, who died trusting in God, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind who have no hope, because we do have hope.

Verse 14, for we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, that is, if we're still living by the time Jesus is coming again, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

[32 : 20] So people like Abraham, people that we know of who've died trusting Christ, will rise. And what about us if we're still alive? Verse 17, After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will be with the Lord forever.

What a sight! What a gathering that will be! All of God's people from all time and all history gathered together as one new people, raised from the dead, given their brand new body, looking forward, enjoying and experiencing that heavenly country, the new creation, where there is no more suffering and no more death.

Verse 18, Therefore, encourage one another with these words. So you see, Abraham's death didn't end in death.

He lived, he died, he was gathered to his people, and he along with us are looking forward to the Lord's return, where he will gather all God's people, and we will reign with him forever.

What hope we have, what encouragement for us today. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the life of Abraham.

[34 : 18] We thank you for his life and his account recorded for us, telling us all about what he did, how he died, how he was gathered, how he's longing and looking forward to that final resurrection.

thank you Lord, that with the same faith, we too have hope. We have hope in death today, life to come for all eternity.

Peace with you, rest at last. Thank you Lord Jesus for your victory over death today.

Please will you send us with that word of encouragement and may we encourage all those we meet with the truth of our risen saviour.

Amen.