

Life and death as a stranger

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[0 : 00] There's two Bible readings for this morning, both not in Genesis, one in Hebrews chapter 11! verses 8 to 16, and the other will be 1 Peter chapter 2 verses 11 and 12.

We will start with the reading from Hebrews 11, 8 to 16. By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance, and he went out not knowing where he was going.

By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.

For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.

Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven, and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

[1 : 26] These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Now the second reading from 1 Peter, verses 11 and 12. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

[2 : 43] Morning everyone. My name is Martin. I'm one of the pastors here. We're going to be looking this morning at Genesis chapter 23. It would be a great help to you if you had your Bibles open at that passage.

And we'll look at some of the surrounding context as well. But let's pray as we come to God's word. Heavenly Father, we thank you that we can gather here this morning.

We thank you that you speak to us in the pages of the scriptures. Please help us to turn our minds and hearts to your word this morning.

Enable me to speak clearly and truly. And we pray that you would write your word on each of our hearts.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, sometimes Christians look different.

[3 : 44] Sometimes we look a bit odd. I wonder for anyone who has no background with anything Christian at all, if they just came through the doors of church on a Sunday morning and sat amongst us, as I hope they do, I wonder how they'd find the experience.

I remember once when, I think it might have been when I was at Bible College. I can't exactly remember who gave this advice. But let's say it was a lecturer at Bible College. who suggested that, I think I remember who it was now, but it doesn't matter, that for Christians, to get an understanding of what it's like for someone who's had no contact with church before to walk into church, Christians, why don't you go and walk into a TAB?

I mean, some of us may have a background with TABs and gambling, but I don't personally. I think many of us wouldn't. And if I walked into one, I would have no idea what to do. I mean, there'd be screens, there'd be people around, there must be a counter, I wouldn't know even where to start. And some people walking through the doors of church will feel like that. They can feel very different. There's other things Christians are involved in that may not feel that different. I was wondering,

would a Christian soccer team look different from a non-Christian soccer team?

Could you tell the difference by looking at two soccer teams? I think it might be hard. I mean, maybe if you observe the two teams over a period of time, you might notice some differences.

[5 : 18] Maybe you might start to notice that the Christian soccer team, the soccer team where everyone's a Christian, they don't ever blaspheme or say the name of Jesus in a sort of angry way.

Maybe they don't swear as much. Maybe they're a bit kinder to team members when they make mistakes or fumble the ball or something.

Maybe over time you'd notice some differences. Maybe not. I don't know. Some of you play soccer. You can tell me. But I think one of the times when the distinction between believers and non-believers is at its clearest, is in the face of death.

In the face of death. I have been to the funerals of those who aren't Christian, and I've been to the funerals of those who are Christian, those who believe in Jesus, and there is a very, very stark difference.

At the death of believers, there is hope amidst the grief, a hope that is based on what is true. Well, the passage before us today, Genesis chapter 23, is about death.

[6 : 32] Death, the word for dying or the dead, or dead, occurs nine times in chapter 23, which is more than any other chapter in Genesis.

Even Genesis chapter 5 doesn't have the word death as many times. So it's about death. But it's also, in fact, I'd say even more than it is about death, it's about the distinctiveness of God's people. Just like a Christian funeral today, the death of one of God's people in this chapter, Genesis chapter 23, is an occasion for the display of their distinctiveness.

But I want to start with some context to help us place Genesis chapter 23. We will get to the text of chapter 23 soon. But I want to play some context, and also to help sort of start to bring this series that we've been looking at on the life of Abraham to a close.

We have one more talk next week on Genesis chapter 24, but it's a long chapter. It'll be school holidays then. There's no grace kids. The kids will be in. So in a sense, I want to start to sort of simplify next week's talk by starting to wrap up the series now and showing what's happening as these chapters of Genesis, this section of Genesis, draws to a close.

[7 : 49] Because we are coming to a major transition point in the book of Genesis. You may be aware that the book of Genesis is divided into parts, into sections, which have the same kind of heading.

You know you're entering a new section because you get this heading in the book of Genesis. And some commentators call it the Toledot formula, from the Hebrew word, Hebrew word Toledot, which means generations.

The heading looks like this. It's usually in this form. These are the generations of, and then a name. So the last time we've seen that heading in the book of Genesis, and I think this passage will come up on the screen, is way back in Genesis chapter 11, verse 27.

Now these are the generations of Terah. Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran, and Haran fathered Lot. And what followed that heading have been 14 chapters focused on the life of Abram, Abraham, one of Terah's sons.

Well, we're approaching, just keep that passage up there, we'll talk about that a bit more in a moment, but we're approaching the next headings in the book of Genesis. So if you look ahead to Genesis chapter 25, verse 12, these are the generations of Ishmael, followed by seven verses.

[9 : 12] And then chapter 25, verse 19, these are the generations of Isaac, followed by ten and a half chapters under that heading. Now this is also typical of Genesis, where when we get to these different sections, Genesis will deal briefly with the less important branch of the family tree, family line, in this case Ishmael's, and then at greater length on the more important branch, Isaac's.

You see the same pattern in Genesis chapters 36 and 37. First Esau, one chapter, then Jacob, 14 chapters, the rest of the book of Genesis from that point. Now if you've been paying attention, you might notice a couple of things.

So chapter 11, verse 27, these are the generations of Terah. The section of Genesis that follows isn't really about Terah, it's about Terah's sons, and in particular one of them, Abraham.

When we get to chapter 25, we have these are the generations of Ishmael, and these are the generations of Isaac. Something's missing. There's no heading in Genesis, these are the generations of Abraham.

It's like, in a sense, Isaac doesn't star in the book of Genesis in the way that Abraham and Jacob and Joseph do.

[10:38] But we're approaching this major transition. What's going on in these two and a half chapters before we reach it? Well, in chapters 21 and chapter 22 of Genesis, the story of Abraham has reached its climax.

Chapter 21, the birth of Isaac. Chapter 22, the binding of Isaac. The testing of Abraham's faith. He's offering his beloved only son as a sacrifice, and then God providing a substitute.

Those chapters, the birth of Isaac, the offering of Isaac as a sacrifice, and then God providing the sacrifice. Through those, God sealed his covenant with Abraham to bless all nations through Abraham's singular seed.

Those two events are really what the whole story of Abraham had been building toward. And what we have in chapter 22, verse 20, to chapter 25, verse 11, is a kind of coda to the story of Abraham. In narrative terms, you could call it the denouement. The main events have taken place. This is just kind of tying up a few loose ends and bringing some threads together.

[12:02] Back in chapter 11, verse 27, we said, now these are the generations of Terah. Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran, and Haran fathered Lot. Now in chapter 11, verse 28, Haran died.

And Lot, Haran's son, has featured at various points in Abraham's story. So it's, you know, it's while Abraham is featured, Lot's been there too.

Haran's heir has been there too. But what about that third brother, Nahor? In chapter 11, verse 29, we're told he had a wife named Milca, and then nothing more.

We hear nothing more about him, Abraham's other brother. But at the end of chapter 22, he finally makes a reappearance. Chapter 22, verse 20, now after these things, it was told to Abraham, behold, Milca has also born children to your brother Nahor.

Who was his firstborn? Who was his brother? And so on. Eight sons by Milca, and then four more by a concubine named Ruma. So Abraham's brother, Nahor, has been remarkably fruitful, had all these sons.

[13:13] In contrast to Abraham's single son by Sarah, Isaac. Well, let me try and show you in a bit of an overview how this coda to the story of Abraham works.

I've got a diagram that will come up on the screen. Because I want you to see how these chapters of Genesis are woven together. The main events, and can we just have that diagram up on the screen?

Yeah, thanks James. The main events are chapters 23 and chapter 24. In chapter 23, Abraham seeks to acquire a tomb for Sarah.

In chapter 24, Abraham seeks to acquire a wife for his son Isaac. Isaac is not mentioned in chapter 23. Sarah is not mentioned in chapter 24 until we get to the final verse of chapter 24, which you can look at, chapter 24, verse 67, where we read, then Isaac brought her, her being Rebecca, his new wife, then Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah, his mother, and took Rebecca, and she became his wife, and he loved her.

So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death. Can you see how that verse kind of binds together, sort of links together, chapters 23 and chapter 24? They seem completely separate, but then this final verse just brings them together.

[14:35] In chapter, the end of chapter 22, as you just saw, we have that list of Nahor's children by his wife Milcah and his concubine Ruma.

Now on the one hand, that's providing background for chapter 24 because Nahor's family are going to feature in chapter 24. That's where Abraham sends a servant to go and find a wife for Isaac.

But they also, they also kind of are balanced by the beginning of chapter 25, we read that Abraham took another wife whose name was Gerturah, and she bore him, Zimran, and a list of six sons.

Chapter 25, verse 6, 5 and 6, Abraham gave all he had to Isaac but to the sons of his concubines, Gerturah and Hagar, Abraham gave gifts and while he was still living, he sent them away from his son Isaac.

So we've seen all these sons born to Nahor and now all these sons, other sons, born to Abraham. Now when did this happen? Now it's possible that Abraham took this second wife, who's also Gerturah, she's also called a concubine, after the death of Sarah.

[15:59] If that's the case, then Abraham took her when he was 137 years old. Which is possible, but I think it's also possible that actually she's been there in the background at a much earlier stage, it's just that Genesis deliberately hasn't mentioned her.

It's sort of left it until now to even mention this other woman and these other sons. Whatever the case, we're seeing this remarkable fruitfulness but it's set against this remarkable fruitfulness. All these sons is in contrast to the one son who will be the heir of Abraham's legacy and the blessing that's been given to him. And so, in chapter 25, from verse 7 to 11, when we read at last of Abraham's death at 175 years, this section of, this whole section, this whole section of Genesis finishes in verse 11, after the death of Abraham, God blessed Isaac, his son and Isaac settled at Beelahairoi.

It's this masterfully woven narrative that draws together all these bits and pieces, these threads, showing the passing of God's blessing to the next generation, from Abraham to Isaac.

But we're going to focus our attention today on verse 23 and next week on verse 24 and today we're going to focus on another idea that links together these two chapters which is that which I mentioned at the beginning of the talk and that is the distinctiveness of God's people.

[17:58] Let's go back to chapter 23, verse 1. We'll step through it now from chapter 23, verse 1. Ah, we can get rid of that diagram. We won't need that again. We can get 23, verse 1 and we will step through it from there.

Sarah lived 127 years. These were the years of the life of Sarah. Now Sarah's the only woman named, the only woman in the Bible whose age we are told at the time of her death.

Verse 1 doesn't use the word death, rather it uses the word life twice but it's structured in such a way that verse to show that Sarah's life was finite. The words the life of Sarah start and end the verse and kind of wrap around the 127 years that was its span as beginning and end.

127 years, verse 2, and Sarah died at Kiriath Arba, that is Hebron, in the land of Canaan and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.

Sarah isn't by any stretch the first person to die in the Bible but she is the first person in the Bible whose death is mourned.

[19:16] And so we see here the story of Abraham and Sarah intersect in this personal and visceral way with the story of Adam and Eve.

Abraham and Sarah are in Canaan, not Eden. But humans were not created for death and so the fitting response to death is to mourn and to weep as Abraham does here.

We mourn when people die because any death is a loss. Any death, the death of any person, any human being made in God's image is the unravelling of something good.

The unravelling both of the individual person but also of all the relationships that they're part of. When someone dies there is a void, an empty, frayed space in human community.

We mourn when someone dies and our mourning says this is not the way it is supposed to be. But most of chapter 23 is not about mourning Sarah, it is about burying Sarah or rather about Abraham's attempts to acquire a burial site.

[20:49] And the negotiations Abraham enters into go through a series of three exchanges. You can see that on your outlines, three exchanges in each of which Abraham makes a request and receives an offer.

So first exchange, the request comes in verses 3 and 4. And Abraham rose up from before his dead and said to the Hittites, 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. Now let's think carefully about Abraham's request here because as we've seen in previous chapters, the art of biblical narrative is to convey much in a few words.

Abraham says, I am a sojourner and a foreigner among you. When Jen and I moved to Newcastle 20 years ago, we were told when we moved here it would be 20 years before we became Novocastrians, like before we were accepted as Novocastrians.

It was 20 years now. It's our 20th year and I've got to say Newcastle feels like home. We've bought a house, we've at different times sent kids to school, we've played in sporting teams, joined gyms, been part of the community.

[22:11] Most of the time, if Jen or I go somewhere around Newcastle, we will bump into someone we know. I don't think there is actually nowhere on the planet that I could live that would feel more like home to me now than Newcastle.

By the time of Sarah's death, Abraham had been living in the land of Canaan for 62 years. 62 years! And here is how he saw himself.

I am a sojourner and foreigner among you. A sojourner, I'm passing through. This is not my home. A foreigner, I'm an alien, I don't belong.

He saw himself as an outsider at the mercy of the Hittites, and the other people living in the land. And so he said, give me property among you for a burying place.

The key words there are give and property. You think the Australian housing market is bad? Well, Abraham's 137 years old, he's lived in Canaan 62 years and he's still on the rental treadmill.

[23 : 26] But now he wants a piece of land he can call his own. Property. Nothing big, nothing flashy, in fact, not even a house to live in.

He just wants a grave. He just wants a tomb. Somewhere he can bury his dead out of sight, but a burial place that would be his, that would belong to him.

Abraham lived in Canaan as a sojourner, but he wanted to bury Sarah on his own land. How would the sons of Heth respond, the Hittites?

Verse 5. The Hittites answered Abraham, 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. First notice the contrast in what they call Abraham and what he called himself.

[24 : 30] They call him Lord. They say, you're a prince of God among us. The word prince there is a title for a chieftain or a ruler. Abraham may not have owned land, but he was wealthy.

Perhaps the Hittites even recognised that God was with him. They call him a prince of God. Abraham described himself as someone lowly. The Hittites described him as someone mighty, someone honoured.

But what did they actually offer? 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.

Now on the face of it, this is a generous offer. The choicest of tombs, none will withhold from you. It's an open invitation. Bury Sarah wherever you like, whichever tomb you want.

The best of tombs. You have complete freedom of choice, Abraham. But as often in business negotiations, what is not said can be even more important than what is said.

[25 : 34] For example, here the Hittites do not use the word give, nor do they use the word property. And notice the possessive pronouns, the choicest of our tombs.

None of us will withhold from you his tomb. What they're offering, Abraham, is not a piece of property which would become his, but a place in their tombs.

That Sarah would be interred in one of their burial places. Now, I mean, it's possible that the Hittites are being insincere, that they're sort of making a show of being courteous and generous and so on, but actually they're withholding.

They want to maintain their monopoly on the land and deny Abraham any opportunity to get even his tiny share, portion of it.

You could read chapter 23 and that would make sense, but on balance I don't think that's the case. I think, at least at this point, their words are sincere. What they're proposing is in essence that they would treat Abraham as one of their own.

[26 : 49] They know Abraham's a man of substance, they want closer ties with him. Abraham sees himself as a foreigner and a sojourner, they see him as a prince of God in our midst.

They want Abraham to be one of them and whichever Hittite got to share his tomb with the great Abraham would be honoured by the association. Well, let's look at the next request and see if that fits, the second exchange in verse 7.

Abraham rose and bowed to the Hittites, the people of the land. Now, notice in verse 3, Abraham rose and spoke to the Hittites, now he rose and bowed.

A physical gesture of respect, deference, abasance, a word that can even be used of worship. He bowed to the Hittites, now further described as the people of the land.

We remember that this land, which currently belonged to the Hittites and others, is the land that God had promised Abraham and his descendants.

[28 : 02] God would give it to them in time. And verse 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, 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.

Abraham names the burial place he wants, the cave of Machpelah, currently belongs to Ephron, the son of Zohar, but Abraham doesn't merely ask that he can bury Sarah there, which had already effectively been offered in verse 6, to bury her wherever he liked, Abraham emphatically wants to purchase it for the full price, not a gift, but fairly purchased, let him give it to me, not share it with me, but transfer it to me, in your presence, a legally binding contract, taking place at the gate of the city where business transactions occurred, as property, Abraham would own it.

How would Ephron respond? Verse 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 the city. See how many times we're hearing the word Hittites in that verse? No, my Lord, hear me, I give you the field, and I give you the cave that's in it.

In the sight of the sons of my people, I give it to you, bury your dead. Three times Ephron now says I give, and in fact, not just the cave, but the field as well.

[30 : 05] In the sight of my people, there are witnesses, implied there's no need for payment, this is my gift for you, you don't need to pay Abraham. Now why did Ephron make this offer?

Well, I think there are four possibilities. Let me talk through the four of them. Was it about tax levies on the land?

Now some commentators suggest that according to later Hittite law, if you gave away a small part of your land, the person who received the small part wouldn't have to pay the taxes on the land, but if you gave away a large part or the whole thing, the person who received the land would have to pay the taxes.

Just acquiring a small part didn't bring any tax obligation with it. So maybe Ephron doesn't want to just give a small part, he wants to give the field as well, so that Ephron is relieved of the tax obligations of the land.

I mean, that's possible, right? I don't think that is likely the explanation because that law is later, it's not exactly clear how it would have applied at this time, and the earning potential of the land would primarily be with the field, not the cave, so Ephron is offering to give away something valuable, people, and I don't think Israelites reading Genesis would have that sort of later Hittite law in their minds as they read this text anyway, so I don't think that's the explanation here.

[31 : 37] Okay, second possible explanation, possibly if there's no purchase price, could Ephron or his sons contest the legality of the exchange later? I mean, maybe they want to leave open to the idea that they could come back at a later stage and say, well, Abraham didn't pay for it, now we want it back.

I guess that's possible, I think that is possible, and from Abraham's perspective, maybe it's a less secure exchange if he doesn't pay the full price, but this may be part of the explanation.

Third possible explanation, maybe what's taking place here is a social pantomime. I mean, Ephron could make the offer, which would win Ephron's social credit for being so generous, to give away the land and the cave, but it would be an outrageous breach of social etiquette for Abraham to accept the offer, so Ephron can make the offer risk-free, knowing that Abraham's never going to accept it.

Again, I think that's possible, but I don't think it's the best explanation. I think the most likely explanation for why Ephron is offering to give the cave and the land is that Ephron wanted to place Abraham in his debt.

Legally, formally, he would be giving the cave, giving the field for nothing, a generous gift, but in an honour culture, a gift given like that wouldn't necessarily be a no-strings-attached gift.

[33 : 14] Financially, Abraham would be debt-free. Socially, Abraham would be obligated to Ephron. The gift would form a bond between the two, a sense of duty, less tangible than money, but actually stronger and deeper and more enduring.

In other words, Ephron is again offering what the Hittites had offered in verse 6, a way of honouring, answering Abraham's request that would result in Abraham and his family moving a few steps closer to being one with the Hittites.

One clue that persuades me this is how we take this chapter comes actually in the beginning of the next chapter. Look at chapter 24. Remember I showed you how these two chapters are linked?

Look at chapter 24 verses 1 to 4. This is where Abraham begins to look for a wife for his son.

Chapter 24. Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years, and the Lord had blessed Abraham in

all things, and Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he had, put your hand under my thigh that I may make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell, but will go to my country and to my kindred and take a wife for my son Isaac. See, chapter 23 is about land, chapter 24 is about descendants, a wife for Isaac, but in both cases Abraham recognised that his family must remain distinct from the people of the land.

[35 : 01] If he accepted the Hittites offer to share a tomb or to receive land free, a free gift of land, if he took a wife for Isaac from among the Canaanites, either of those things are the kind of moves that step by step would see Abraham's family and Abraham's descendants merge in with the Canaanites and cease to be a distinct line.

So look at how Abraham answered Ephron with his third request, the third exchange in verse 12. verse 12. Then Abraham bowed down before the people of the land.

Notice he's now, he's gone from rising to rising and bowing, now just to bowing. Abraham bowed down before the people of the land and he said to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, he said to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, But if you will hear me, if you will hear me, I give the price of the field.

Accept it from me that I may bury my dead there. The Hittites tried to forge union, but Abraham insists on distinction.

He insists on paying the price for the field. Now, before we move on to Ephron's offer in verses 14 to 15, let's spend a few minutes thinking about this. What we see in Genesis is that Abraham and Isaac and their descendants were called to be distinct from the nations for the sake of the nations.

[36 : 47] God's not against the nations, far from it. God called Abraham, God made covenants with him for the sake of the nations. So that through Abraham's seed, all the families of the earth might be blessed.

But Abraham's family couldn't bring blessing to the nations by blending with the nations. They needed to remain distinct. The heirs of God's promises, the chosen channel for his blessing would need to be a holy people.

Called to be separate. Called to be different. Called to be distinctive. All around, as Ephron and the Hittites beckoned to Abraham, the nations would beckon to Israel, join with us.

Intermarry with us. Become one with us. Worship with us. And when at last the promised seed of Abraham came, in due course, when the prince of God, in whom the nations would find blessing, came, the offers did not stop.

The offer of the easy path to glory. Look, all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. All these I will give you.

[38 : 15] If you'll fall down and worship me. The offer of fame and recognition. Lord, everyone is looking for you. The offer to prove himself in the world's eyes.

Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you. The offer to be a conquering Christ, not a suffering Christ. Far be it from you, Lord. This should never happen to you. The offer to have others defend him. Lord, shall we strike with the sword?

The offer to defend himself. Will you not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?

The offer to escape. If you are the son of God, come down from the cross. He saved others. Let him save himself if he's the Christ, the chosen one.

[39 : 21] The seed of Abraham came and the offers did not stop. But the seed of Abraham could not save others if he saved himself.

He couldn't be the kind of Christ God called him to be if he was the kind of Christ they asked him to be. He couldn't help the nations if he was like the nations.

Of course, in many ways, Jesus had to be one of us. Made human. Sharing flesh and blood with us. Tempted in every way as we are. But he also had to be different from us.

Without sin. Separate. Spotless. Undeified. The Holy One of God in our midst. The righteous one. Who suffered for the unrighteous. Jesus could only bless the nations by being distinct from the nations. And there's a sense in which that's true even of us, the people Jesus has saved.

[40 : 40] The New Testament calls us saints. Holy ones. People who are called to be a part. Set apart by God. Of course, we've become holy ones in a different way to Jesus.

He's holy one by virtue of his own, by his own virtue and merit. We're holy ones only because we've been sanctified in him and by God's spirit.

We've been washed. We've been purified. We've been made holy. Set apart by God. But redeemed people are transformed people. And to bless the nations, we must be distinct from the nations.

You are the salt of the earth, Jesus said. But if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It's no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand and it gives light to all in the house.

[41 : 43] In the same way, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Or as we heard earlier from 1 Peter, Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul.

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. Like Abraham, we live in this world as sojourners and foreigners.

This is not our home. And who you vote for is not going to change that. Whether Australia is multicultural or monocultural is not going to change that.

That we are sojourners and foreigners is not a political accident. It's a theological given. This is not our home.

And every week, perhaps even every day, we will face offers from the world. Offers from the people of the land. Join with us.

[42 : 58] Be like us. Make your home with us. The world will offer you what Christian ethicist Andrew Cameron calls false inclusion.

I mean, that's what's being offered to us. False inclusion. Belonging. The examples I'm about to give are partly mine and partly borrowed from his. Your office common room is dominated by grumbling about managers or the sarcastic mockery of customers.

They expect you to join in. In your trade, everyone does business cash in hand. That's just the way things work.

It keeps paperwork down. It keeps the customers happy. You've just been given a promotion. The boss sends you out to start giving quotes. What do you do?

In the playground, a circle of girls giggles about another girl's odd habits and unflattering fashion.

[44 : 07] They look your way, inviting you to join in. It's Pride Month and your coach hands out rainbow armbands for everyone to wear during the game.

He holds one out to you. A board meeting drifts towards a decision that camouflages an injustice or makes more money at the expense of some wider community good.

Your vote is in doubt. You need to speak. They're eyeballing you. The pressure we face in moments like that is extreme.

There is a powerful drive to fit in. To become one with the people of the land. But salt that loses its saltiness is good for nothing but being trampled underfoot.

A lamp put under a basket cannot be seen. To bless the nations, we must be distinct from the nations. But when we are, there will be a cost.

[45 : 15] Let's look at Ephron's final offer to Abraham in verse 14, the third offer. Verse 14, Ephron answered Abraham, Abraham, my lord, listen to me.

A piece of land worth 400 shekels of silver? What is that between you and me? Bury your dead. Abraham listened to Ephron and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver that he had named in the hearing of the Hittites.

400 shekels of silver, according to the weights current among the merchants. Abraham had declined Ephron's gift. But now Ephron names his price 400 shekels of silver.

His speech is smooth. I mean, what is that between you? This little piece of land, what is that between you and me? But actually, the price he nominates is steep. It's hard to know exactly because we don't know how large this plot of land is that Ephron's selling to Abraham.

But we could compare it to other prices in the Bible. The value of a slave in the book of Exodus is given at 30 shekels of silver. The annual contribution to the tabernacle, half a shekel of silver.

[46 : 23] A field that would be sowed with 220 litres of barley seed, 50 shekels of silver in Leviticus 27. The redemption price for a firstborn son, five shekels of silver.

A gift offered to a prophet for an oracle in 1 Samuel 9, a quarter of a shekel. A reward given to a soldier for killing an enemy king, ten shekels of silver and a belt.

Or a kind of hyperbolic reward, like a ridiculous amount of money, a thousand shekels. The price David paid for the temple site and for some oxen to sacrifice there, 50 shekels of silver in 2 Samuel 24.

The price Jeremiah paid for a field during the siege of Jerusalem. Now, admittedly, during the siege is probably not the best time for property prices if you're selling. But 17 shekels.

17 shekels. Given Ephron's immediate willingness to part with the field for nothing, it's probably not incredibly large. His livelihood didn't depend on it. But that alongside these other, you know, kind of prices we see in the Old Testament suggests to me that 400 shekels for this field is a high price.

[47 : 43] Probably very high. I mean, it was probably just Ephron's starting price. Haggling would have been standard. He expected Abraham to bargain him down.

Or maybe Ephron's like the, you know, the tradie who quotes you five times the price to fix some leaking pipes because he doesn't actually want to do it. I mean, he names this ridiculously high price.

But Abraham doesn't bargain. He just pays the price. He doesn't want to give Ephron, the Hittite, any opportunity to claim that he has shown, that he has shown Abraham a favour.

Or to claim in the future that the payment was insufficient. He pays the high price to be distinct from the nations, that he might be for the nations.

Likewise, whenever we offer, whenever we refuse an offer of false inclusion, it will cost us something. There'll be a price we must pay. You might lose some business or customers.

[48 : 51] You might lose some opportunities. It might cost you some friends, some friendships. People will resent you at times. People will, as 1 Peter 2 says, speak against you as evildoers.

But how can you help the nations? How can we help the nations unless we are salt and light? So, verse 16, Abraham weighed out for Ephron the full price.

And verse 17, 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 to Abraham as a possession in the presence of the Hittites before all who went in at the gate of his city.

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

Can you hear all the repetition in that section? I mean, in a sense, the burial of Sarah is secondary here almost to the transfer of the land, the acquisition of the land by Abraham.

[50 : 12] This chapter is not only about burying Sarah, it's also about Abraham acquiring property in the land, a small part of the land, just a tiny part, but a deposit that guaranteed what was to come.

As we have a deposit, a guarantee of our future inheritance in the Spirit of God who sanctifies us. The offers were declined.

The high price was paid for the sake of what God had promised. And when the world beckons you with its offers of false inclusion, and when you bear the cost for saying no, remember the one who said no to the challenge to come down from the cross, the one who died alone, forsaken by all, the one who bore the cost for you, so that through him, the blessing of Abraham might come to all nations.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for our perfect, holy, spotless Lord, who willingly gave his life for us, who bore the cost of being apart from the nations, so that he might be for the nations. We thank you for Jesus. We thank you that through him, we come to receive the blessing that you've promised to Abraham, that we have an inheritance, an eternal inheritance prepared for us, that we have our sins forgiven, and we may call you our God and our Father.

[52 : 22] We thank you for the blessing you've given to us through Jesus. And we pray, Lord, that you would help us to be distinctive, to live as salt and light in this world, to say no to all the world's offers that would be displeasing to you, that would muddy our distinctiveness, give us a desire to please you, to live as your holy people, to bear whatever cost may come, and not just for you, Lord, but as we seek to live distinctive lives in this world, we pray that it would impact those around us, that people would come to praise you, they would glorify the name of Christ, they would be drawn to what is different because they can see that it is good.

We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen.