Hope in the Heartache — Delivery Transcript

Genesis 23 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, June 2, 2024 · *The Patriarchs*

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We're going to be in Genesis chapter 23 this morning. And as you're turning there, it's somebody said at the beginning of this service, talking about the last service, you know I was really struck by the contrast of this joyful, excited, eccentric decorations for Vacation Bible School, the thought of fun and you know kids playing and then your sermon being about death. I just couldn't handle the discrepancy, the contrast. But you know we teach and preach through books of the Bible in this church. I'm committed to what's called expository preaching, which just means that the main point of a sermon should be the main point of a text, whatever text it is that we're working through.

And because of our conviction about what we believe the Bible is, that it is the Word of God, and that the word does the work, not the preacher. The Holy Spirit inspired the words of Scripture, not the words of some preacher. That the best thing we could do is just to let the word do its thing. And so we don't kind of pick and choose. We just kind of pick a book and let the book say what it's going to say. And we find ourselves in Genesis chapter 23 this morning, which is about death.

So a lot of people when it comes to death, they ask the question, what happens when you die? What happens when I die? I remember wrestling with that question at a young age. It's kind of weird that I was thinking about it that young of an age, but I think all of us somewhat at some point or another wrestle with the question of what happens when I die. And that's an important question. You need to be ready to face death. But it's ultimately an unhelpful question because after you're dead there's nothing you can do about it.

So you can have as many ideas as you want to have about what happens when you die before you die, but there's nothing you can do about it after you're dead because you're dead. A more helpful question is what happens when they die? And when I say they, I mean the person that you most fear losing, or that you most grievously lost. For some of you don't have to wonder what happens after they die because they did just die. A lot of people in our

church right now have lost their spouse, whether it was a husband or a wife of many, many years.

Some people in our church have had to walk through that question when it comes to the death of their children. An unspeakable horror that no parent wants to walk through. It's backwards. Usually the parent goes first, but some parents have had to wrestle with what do I do now that they're gone. For some of you, it was a brother or a sister, a mom or a dad. What happens when they die? That's a very important question because your death date will come, but it will happen once and you'll be gone when it's there.

But the death date of the people you love, that's something you're going to have to walk through again and again and again. In fact, the more people you love, the more you're going to have to learn how to wrestle with and walk through the reality of death. And what I've been struck by as we've been working through the book of Genesis is just how instructive the life of Abraham is on walking through these seasons of life, the highs and the lows. If you're new to the Bible, if you're new to the story of Abraham, I don't think you can understand the story of the world without understanding the story of Abraham.

He's the OG founding father of faith. He's kind of the source code for the three monotheistic religions in the world, whether it's Judaism, Islam, or Christianity, they all try to trace back some roots back to Abraham. He was a man of God who was called out of paganism, idolatry, security, and doing things his own way, and God said, if you'll trust me and follow me, I will bless you. And I promise to give you certain things. He promised Abraham land. He promised Abraham descendants, a line, lineage. And he promised Abraham that through your descendants I'm going to bless all the nations of the earth, which for Abraham, just like every other person born after Adam and Eve in Genesis three, they had been longing and waiting for that promised descendant.

That seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent and restore what had been lost through the fall. And that's basically what God says, I'm going to do through you, Abraham, if you'll trust me. And so we've seen him trust the Lord. Now he hasn't been perfect. Amen. There's been mountain highs and valley lows. There's been winds. There's been triumphs, but there's also been failures. And shame and embarrassment. But what we've seen, even though God chose an imperfect man, is that God was perfectly faithful in every season and he's been faithful to every promise.

And most recently we've seen in the life of Abraham in Genesis chapter 21 that God fulfilled his promise of a promised son. But that in Genesis 22, sometimes God tests us around the things that we love the most, and that Abraham was confronted with having to offer up his son as an offering to the Lord. Saying goodbye to the thing that he had waited his whole life to obtain. And it was in that great tragedy and that great test of faith that God proved himself faithful and reaffirmed his covenant promise.

We're going to see a similar dynamic in Genesis chapter 23, except this time Abraham isn't having to potentially offer up the life of somebody that he loves. But he's actually going to have to grieve and process the loss of the person he loved the most, which was his wife. And what we're going to see, I hope to show you, is that it is often the heartaches of life. It's those dark nights of the soul that God uses more than anything else to establish in us a greater hope. in him and his covenant promises.

That for whatever reason in God's kingdom he has decided to use the heartaches of life to establish hope in our hearts. And that he does that in a way through suffering that he cannot do through any other means. And so it is natural for us, inevitable even for God's people to walk through these dark days, but to not walk alone and to not walk without God accomplishing that greater work of faith. So with that on the table, let's pick up in Genesis chapter 23, starting in verse 1. We're going to read through the entire chapter.

We don't usually do this, we just kind of work through it line by line, but today we're going to read the whole chapter because it's one of those chapters you just got to kind of see the whole thing before you can break it apart. So chapter 23, starting in verse 1, it says that Sarah, that's Abraham's wife; she lived 127 years. Those were all the years of her life, and then Sarah died in Kiriath-arba, that is Hebron, in the land of Canaan. And Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.

If you underline in your Bible, I want you to underline that phrase, that is Hebron in the land of Canaan. One of the things when you're reading the scripture if you want to know the main point of a chapter or a passage is to look for themes that are repeated over and over again and I think we're going to see this theme repeated. Also want you as we read the rest of the passage to notice other words or phrases that get repeated over and over again. I'm going to try to highlight them on the screen if you read along in that way.

When Abraham got up from beside his dead wife, he was finished grieving, and then he goes and he spoke to the Hethites. I am an alien residing among you. Give me burial property among you, so that I can bury my dead. The Hethites replied to Abraham, Listen to us, my lord, you're a prince of God among us. Bury your dead in our finest burial place. None of us will withhold from you his burial place for burying your dead. Then Abraham rose, and he bowed down to the Hethites, the people of the land.

And he said to them, if you're willing for me to bury my dead, listen to me, and ask Ephron, the son of Zohar, on my behalf, to give me the cave of Machpelah, that belongs to him. It is at the end of his field. Let him give it to me in your presence for the full price as burial property. Well Ephron was sitting among the Hethites. So, in the hearing of all the Hethites who came to the gate of his city, Ephron the Hethite answered Abraham, No, my lord, listen to me I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it.

I give it to you in the sight of my people. Bury your dead. So Abraham bowed down to the people of the land, and he said to Ephron, In the hearing of the people of the land, listen to me, if you please. Let me pay you for the price of the field. Accept it from me, and let me bury my dead there. Ephron answered Abraham and said to him, my lord, listen to me. Land worth four hundred shekels of silver? What is that between you and me? Bury your dead. So Abraham agreed with Ephron, and Abraham weighed out to Ephron the silver that he had agreed to in the hearing of the Hethites.

Four hundred shekels of silver. So Ephron's field at Machpelah, near Mamre, the field with its cave and all the trees anywhere within the boundaries of the field, became Abraham's possession. In the sight of all the Hethites who came to the gate of his city. And after this Abram buried his wife Sarah in the cave of the field at Machpelah near Mamre. Underline this, that is Hebron in the land of Canaan. The field with its cave passed from the Hethites to Abraham as burial property. Now it's easy to read a chapter like that and just you know it goes right over your head.

I've got to be honest, when I was putting the sermon preaching calendar together, there was at least initially in me a like I don't think I can preach that chapter. Let's just kind of tuck it into a chapter I can preach this. I don't know what's all going on here, but none of it feels immediately practical or relevant. And I regret thinking those thoughts because as I was working through the text as we got closer and closer to it, I noticed a connection between two things. Now, I said earlier, one of the things you want to do when you're reading the Bible is to try to look for repeated phrases or words that show up again and again.

There was a lot of those in this chapter. He had the phrase, in the presence of. The gates of the city was something that was repeated over and over again. This idea of this kind of legal binding transaction between Abraham and Ephron. But the other word that got repeated more than any other word was the word dead. In fact, it's kind of natural to think this chapter is about Sarah because it's her death. Sarah's name is only mentioned twice, maybe three times. Every other time Sarah's name is mentioned is not Sarah's name.

It's my dead. He doesn't call her by Sarah. He says, let me bury my dead. My dead this, my dead that, my dead, my dead, my dead. This is a chapter about Abraham grieving death. It's the death of his wife, but he's grieving death. This is a chapter about death. And I think it's emphasized over and over and over again, death, grieving, dark night of the soul, terrible heartache. Juxtaposed against the second big truth coming out of Genesis 23, which is Abraham's receiving the promise of God. Now, what do I mean by the promise of God?

He's receiving the promise of God to give him land. If you remember this back in Genesis chapter 12. One of the immediate promises of God to Abraham is that if you'll follow me, I'm going to give you the place that I'm going to show you. And Abraham has been banking on that promise. That's the reason he left his father's house and the security thereof. And he's

been wandering as an alien and a sojourner all over the place. And he had spent some time there in Mamre and Hebron, and he'd gone back down to Beersheba, and he's been to Egypt, and he's been all these different places, but he's never had any land for himself.

He's never owned anything. He's always been a sojourner. In fact a lot of times from Genesis twelve onward we've seen little lines like the Canaanites were in the land. Or the Hethites were the people of the land. It's been emphasized that the land doesn't belong to Abraham, but for whatever reason, in chapter 23, what you see is that it is through death, it is through the dark night of Abraham's soul that God actually established and confirmed his covenant promise of land. And those two truths are intentionally brought together by Moses in Genesis 23 to tell us that sometimes it's in the heartaches of life, it's in the great hurts. of life that God establishes in us his covenant promise and establishes in us more importantly greater hope in his covenant promise and I think that's the main point of Genesis 23.

It's not just the grieving of death it's the receiving of God's promise. And when you look at Genesis 23 through that lens, a lot of things begin to open up from my perspective, namely it gives a template for how God's people are to think about death, how to walk through death, not just our own, but the death of people. that we love. And some of it's easy, it's on the surface. It's laid out in the way that Abraham grieves the death of his wife. If you look there again in chapter 23 verse 2.

It says that Abraham doesn't just mourn for his wife, but that he weeps for her. And those are two totally different words. The best way that I know the difference I sometimes will do funerals for Elmwood funeral home because a lot of times people don't have a preacher. They don't they're not part of a church home and so they hire a preacher and a lot of times they'll they'll call me to serve in that capacity. And I'm used to doing funerals for people who grieve the life of someone that they love.

But every now and then I'll do a funeral where the person's at the funeral, they're grieving in the official sense of the term, but it's almost like they got a smile on their face because the person is dead they're not grieving, they're not weeping, they're they're not mourning the loss. That's not what you see with Abraham. You see this official, this word mourn. He's mourning the death. This word mourn is that kind of funeral word for weeping. It's an official ending of life. It's a memorial service. He's mourning, but he's not just mourning, he's weeping.

In other words, Abraham has been completely wrecked by the death of his wife. This is someone he loved deeply. This is someone they had shared intimate moments of life. They've seen God come through on the mountaintops. They've seen God come through on the valley lows. And in every season they were hand in hand, walking together, husband and wife. He wasn't a perfect husband. I'm sure I know he had regrets about lying about his wife being his sister and losing her to an Egyptian king and again to Abimelech and God's faithfulness to

work through Abraham's foolishness and preserve the integrity of his family and his promise and their relationship.

I'm sure there was grief and tears of grief, but most importantly there were tears of shared love, of memories, and that's something that we can all resonate with because when someone you love dies, it's like there is this inevitable, unstoppable grief that floods your heart, and you cannot help but weep. You cannot help but mourn. And grief is funny. It plays tricks on people. You think you're okay one minute and then bam, you're not okay anymore. And you just lose it. And tears—some people say tears are a sign of selfishness.

I think that's nonsense. Some people I guess can cry because they're selfish, but more often tears are a sign of shared love between you and the person that you lost. And what that tells us about death is from a Christian perspective, that death is not natural. That death is an intrusion, if you're taking notes. Death is an intrusion into the way things were originally meant to be. Which seems odd because a lot of people, and maybe even a lot of other religions, would say death is the most natural thing in the universe.

Death is woven into the fabric of the universe. You have spring and summer, followed by fall and winter. Things live, things die. It's part of the natural course of things. Animals live, animals die. Yes, I acknowledge that. That's true. Death is inescapable, it's inevitable, whatever you want to say. But death isn't natural because when someone we love dies, or even when someone we don't even necessarily love, but someone who got in a car accident and their life is ended. There's something in the heart of every human that says that's not right.

That shouldn't be. That's wrong. It's not just sad. It's wrong. It's unjust. There's within us because God has put eternity in the heart of every man and woman. There's in us a angst in the face of death where we say this is an intrusion. This is not the way things are meant to be. That's why Abraham weeps. That's why Jesus wept. At the tomb of his friend Lazarus. We just sang about it in that song. We sang the second to the last song. He wept at the tomb of his friend Lazarus, not just because he was sad Lazarus was separated from him.

Jesus knew he was going to raise Lazarus from the dead. Jesus knows he's actually got really great theology. He knows all that stuff. Why was he grieving? He was grieving because death is a thief. Death steals from us something God originally designed us to possess and inherit and enjoy, namely eternal fellowship with one another in loving relationship, that divine, Trinitarian, eternal love between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We've been invited to enjoy that love, not just with God. But with God's people as we love one another, as we love our wife and our husband and our sons and our daughters, we were meant to enjoy that forever and ever and ever.

And when you are confronted with the reality of death, there's something in you that says this isn't right. This is wrong. It was meant to be something bigger, better, longer, and it's right to acknowledge that. And it's right to grieve that. And it's right to be angry at that. In fact, the word weep, not here, but in John 11 with Lazarus, it's like sometimes the analogy that's used is of a horse pounding his foot on the ground because he's mad. And that's what Jesus felt at death, and that's what we should feel at death.

It's an intrusion. And it's okay to grieve. But death is not just an intrusion; it's also a unique teacher. And in some ways, as an intrusion, it is a teacher because it's teaching us really important things about life and about God and about ourselves. Solomon says in Ecclesiastes chapter 7, it's better to go to a house of mourning than it is a house of feasting, which is really an odd thing to say. It'd be like saying, I'd much rather go to a funeral than a party. Who says that? Well, Solomon says that.

Why does he say that? He says if you read the rest of the verse. Because that's the end of all mankind, and the living should take it to heart. In other words, if you'll let it, death is a wonderful teacher. It can instruct you in ways that nothing else can. One of the ways that death is an instructor is because when you ask the question, why death? Why is there death in the first place? The answer to that question from a biblical perspective is because of the reality of sin. The first time death is mentioned in the book of Genesis is in Genesis chapter 2, when the Lord says to Eve, if you eat of this fruit, you shall surely what?

Die. You'll surely die. Death is introduced through your rejection of my design, in other words, the wages of sin. Is death. Now she didn't physically die in that moment, but there was a spiritual death that transpired in her rejection of God's design, and that introduced a brokenness to this world. It introduced a curse on the ground. It introduced a death and decay on the universe so that everything from that moment is now just drifting further and further away from life, further and further towards death because of the reality of sin in our world.

That sin is the reason for cancer, disease. Brokenness in our relationships, enmity between husband and wife, mom and daughter, husband and son. It's all because of sin. And death, for whatever reason, has a way of just making that very clear. Why death? Because of sin. The other thing death makes clear is what really matters in life. It is a teacher in that it powerfully illustrates the things that really matter in life are not how much money you have or how much stuff you've accumulated. It's the impact that you had on people.

I've done a lot of eulogies, I've done a lot of funerals, a lot of people I didn't even know. Never once have I ever had someone say, I want him to be remembered for how much money he made. No one's ever said that. No one's ever said I want to celebrate mom because of all the shoes that she owned. You know, she owned a lot of shoes. Never once has anyone

said that. It's never about material prosperity or stuff or anything like that. It's always the impact they made on the other person relationally.

It's the love. It's the support. It's she believed in me when no one else would believe in me. She showed up when everybody else checked out. It's those are the things so what that teaches us is that what really matters in life are the relationships that God has put in your life. That sometimes it's wrong of you to sacrifice relationships in an effort to pursue material gain because you can't take that with you. You know they say there's no U-Hauls attached to caskets. Never see anything like that. A phrase I came across the other day is that he who dies with the most toys still dies.

I just love that phrase. You're still dead. Death is no respecter of persons, right? It doesn't matter how wealthy you were, it doesn't matter how influential you were. You're still dead. And there's nothing you can do about it. So live for the things that matter the most. Live with an awareness that this world is not right. It's broken. That sin has mucked it up. It's ruined things in a way that we cannot fix or remedy. Death is an intrusion and it is an instructor. But the main point of Genesis 23, as I said earlier, is that death is an invitation, and it's an unexpected invitation.

It's an invitation that you wouldn't expect to hear in that season, but it is an invitation nonetheless. And you see it in Genesis 23 because it says in verse 3 right after Abraham grieved his wife, it says he got up from beside his dead wife and he spoke to the Hethites. I think that's striking. I'm assuming he grieved for a long time, he was very sad, but his next order of business was the land, God's promise. I'm going to, this is an opportunity for God to show up and show off and deliver his promise to me.

By giving me a burial property for my dead wife. This took incredible initiative on Abraham's part. This took incredible faith. This is Abraham taking initiative. This is Abraham believing and trusting in God to do what only he can do. And it was not an easy ask because Abraham didn't own any property, and there was no reason for these Hethites to give him any property. And so the whole chapter is really the exchange between Abraham and the Hethites. And you see these little clues about in the presence of or at the gates of the city, the juxtaposition between let me just give you the land versus Abraham's no, let me buy the land.

What you see is this argument. Now they're overly polite. In fact, I think that's just the way they engaged in business back then. They were like, the more gracious you can be. The more of a better negotiator you were. So they were very deferential, very polite. But at the end of the day, it is a haggling over. Can I own this for myself? So let's read it again. It's just kind of instructive. Starts with Abraham recognizing I am an alien among you. Abraham recognizes that the Hethites are the people of the land.

I don't have any property for myself, so let me get burial property among you. Notice his emphasis on property. He uses the word give, but he's not saying give as in give it as a donation. He's saying no, let me buy it. And their response is, verse 5, listen to us, my lord. You're a prince of God among us. We respect you. Abraham had saved the day if you look back in Genesis 13. He had defeated the kings of the east. He was a stud of a man. He was very courageous and brave.

He had a reputation for being respectable. So they're saying we'd love to let you bury your dead in our finest burial place. None of us, doesn't matter who you pick we're going to let you bury your dead in our place, but it's going to be our place, not your place, is what they're basically saying. So Abraham rose to verse 7 and he bowed down to the Hethites. Notice the phrase, the people of the land. So he's showing deference, he's showing humility, he recognizes God has promised me this land, but it doesn't belong to me right now, it belongs to you.

So if you're willing for me to bury my dead, listen to me and ask Ephron, son of Zohar, on my behalf to give me the cave at Machpelah that belongs to him at the end of his field, let him give it to me in your presence for the full price, again, as burial property. Notice what Abraham does. He gets very specific. He names one guy and one section of one property for a specific purpose. Why is he doing this? I think he's doing this because he knows under any other circumstance he probably wouldn't receive the land.

You know, farm land was precious. So he asked for a part that's got a cave. He can't farm a cave. It's got full of trees. So maybe he identifies it for that. Maybe he just liked oak trees. You know, he did settle near the oaks of Mamre last time he was here. He also picks one individual, Ephron. Why does he pick Ephron? I don't know. Maybe he has some dirt on him. I'm just kidding. He probably didn't have dirt. Probably maybe he owed him a favor. Maybe they were friends. There was a special sympathy between the two of them.

The text doesn't really shed any light. But it does show Abraham. I don't want charity from you, brother. I want to buy it. I want to pay the price. And it just so happens that Ephron was listening in on the conversation. He was, verse 10, sitting at the city gates. Sitting among the Heathites, so in the hearing of the Hethites who came to the gate of his city, Ephron the Hethite answered Abraham, No, my lord, listen to me, I'll give you the field, I'll give you the cave. I give it to you in the sight of my people bury your dead.

What he's saying is, and again where are they having the conversation? They're having the conversation at the city gates. That doesn't mean anything to us, but back then the city gates was like the courthouse. It was the appraisal district. It was where the city leaders did official city business. And so the reason he's saying, let it be in the presence of your people, let it be at the city gates, let me get property, let me pay, is because What Abraham wanted was official deed of trust that I own the land.

But Ephron is essentially saying, listen, it's in the sight of the people. I mean, I'm going to keep my word. I just don't want to sell it to you, brother. We don't have to do the paperwork. You can bury your wife in my property, but Abraham won't have it. It's not enough. Some people say it's because he doesn't want charity. It's kind of like when Abraham defeated the kings of the east and he liberated Sodom and Gomorrah. He refused to take from the king of Sodom any payment for what he had done.

He says, no, Sodom will not make me rich. I'm trusting the Lord for my provision. So maybe that's what's going on. Maybe Abraham just knows if you give it you can take it away, but if I buy it's mine I lean towards the second, less towards the latter, but it could be either one. So Abraham bowed down, verse twelve, to the people of the land, and he said to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, listen to me if you please, let me pay you for the price of the field.

Accept it from me, let me bury my dead there. And so Ephron caves, sort of, kind of. He answered Abraham and said, my lord, listen to me, land worth four hundred shekels of silver. What is that between you and me? Now if we didn't know better, when he says, what is that between you and me? You're like, oh, Abraham's getting a good deal. He's not getting a good deal. I can't know this for sure because different cultures weighed out a shekel differently. But I know there's other places in the Old Testament where people are buying fields for nine shekels of silver.

So either their monetary base was severely devalued, or Abraham is having to pay a bunch of money from his friend Ephron. Probably not a friend. 400 shekels. This being a man who is predisposed towards being a little stingy, do we all remember that? When Abraham went into Egypt, he said to Sarah, Pretend you're my sister. So that I can get rich. You guys remember that? I want it to go well with me in the land. He does the same thing with Abimelech. I think one of Abraham's weak spots was money.

He liked having money. He liked being wealthy. The Lord had given him a lot of wealth. And so now he's got to bury his wife, and it's going to cost him 400 shekels of silver. But he doesn't hesitate. He doesn't blink. He says sold. And he weighs out the money and he buys the field. Why? Because he was trusting in the promises of God over and above anything else in his life, even if I have to give up everything I own. I'm going to do it. I'm going to trust in the promises of God.

I'm going to walk in the path that God has laid out for me. Incredible demonstration of faith. And so he gets the land. Verse 17. The field at Machpelah near Mamre, the field with its cave and its trees anywhere within the boundaries of the field became Abraham's possession in the sight of the Hethites who came to the gate of the city. And then after that it says he buried his wife in the cave in the field near Mamre, that is Hebron, in the land of Canaan.

That phrase there, Hebron, the land of Canaan, it's repeated two times, once in verse two and again at verse nineteen.

It's what literary people call an inclusio. It's a way of the author saying this is what it's all about. It's all about Abraham receiving the land, the promised land of Canaan. And so death is an invitation to trust in the promises of God. And we, in the face of death, should trust in the promise of God. Now. What is the promise that we're trusting? It's the same promise that Abraham is trusting, except in the case of Abraham, the way God articulates it is with land. But if you think about it, the land promise in Genesis chapter 12 is a throwback to Genesis chapter 3.

Every generation from Genesis 3 onward has been wrestling with the question: is this the seed of the woman who is going to reverse the curse? Restore the land and restore communion with God. Because when sin entered the world, God made a promise in Genesis 3:15. Theologians call it the protoevangelium, the first gospel. And it's the Lord promises Adam and Eve from the seed of the woman. First he says, I'm going to create enmity between you and the woman. And from the seed of the woman will come an offspring who will crush the head of the serpent.

In other words, he's going to reverse the curse. He's going to restore the land. And so what every generation of God-fearing people had been anticipating from Genesis 3 onward was how do we get back to the land? How do we get back to the promised land? And what you see is God selects mediator and that mediator fails. The world gets wicked and so God hits the reset button and Noah comes along and God works through Noah, but Noah's not a good man and so he and then the world gets bad again and so he chooses another man named Abraham and Abraham's not a perfect man either but God is being faithful to his covenant promise nonetheless, and now he's giving Abraham the seed of the promise, which is this land, which is just a burial plot, but that burial plot becomes Sarah's grave, it becomes his grave, it becomes Isaac's grave, it becomes Jacob's grave, and it's now known as the grave of the patriarchs.

And it was kind of like the seed of the promise of the genuine promise which was not a burial plot, but the promised land. The promised land which is Canaan, which God's people do inherit. If you read the rest of the book of Genesis on into Exodus. You've actually got to read way further than that. But eventually Joshua they take the land they defeat the Canaanites. They have that land flowing of milk and honey, but even then they can't keep hold of it. Through disobedience and rejection of the Lord, they get the land, they lose the land.

They get the land, they lose the land. They get the land, they lose the land. And you got to get this idea that maybe it's never been about the physical land in the first place. It's always been about something that the land represents, namely communion with God and fellowship with God and peace everlasting and that land is available to God's people, but not geographically,

fundamentally, but spiritually, and not through a deed of trust, but through a person, that person being the Lord Jesus Christ. He gives us the land. He's the guarantor of God's promise to Abraham and David and Adam and Eve and the promise of the new covenant as well.

That he will be our God and that we will be his people and that we will know him from a place of the heart and that he will forgive us of our sins and that we will have union with God and communion with God now and forevermore. And death is an invitation to trust that promise. Now, how can we trust that promise in the face of death? Because the guarantor of that promise, the Lord Jesus, secured that land for us through his death. It's through death that Jesus defeated death. Just like it was through the death of Abraham's wife that God honored the promise of the land.

It's this beautiful comparison of shadow and substance. The shadow in Genesis chapter 23 and the substance in the Lord Jesus Christ. And ultimately, the greatest truth of Genesis 23 isn't explicit in Genesis 23, it's implied, but made explicit in the New Testament, which is that death is an enemy that will one day be erased. That because of the death of Jesus on the cross, he destroyed death, and that even though it still happens today, the sting of death has been removed, the victory of death is no longer on us because Jesus has triumphed over death through his own death on the cross and his resurrection from the grave.

And it was that resurrection faith that Abraham had. If you go back to Genesis 22, he offers up Isaac as the promised son and he tells those people, Stay here, my son and I will return to you. Even though he knew Isaac was going to be offered up to the Lord as a sacrifice, he was going to be a cessation of life was going to take place. I've got to trust my child in the Lord's hands. The Lord is going to be faithful to keep his promise and raise my promised son from the dead.

He had faith in the resurrection. He had faith in the city that was to come. He had faith in a God who would keep his promises, even if I can't see it right now, even if it looks far off in a way and in the distance. That's the faith that we're invited to possess. The book of Hebrews comments on this chapter very quickly and then we'll be done. It says in the book of Hebrews that Abraham was looking—go back to chapter 11 verse 10. He was looking forward to the city that has foundations whose architect and builder is God.

I'm not looking for the Heathite land. I'm not just looking for a burial spot for my wife. I'm looking for what God is building. I'm living for what God is building. And it says two verses later in verse 13 that Abraham and Sarah and all the other heroes of faith, they died even though they didn't receive the things that were promised. That's interesting. They received it, but they didn't receive it. No, they received them and they saw them from a distance and they greeted them. And look at the language, just like Abraham in Genesis 23, they confessed that they were foreigners and temporary residents on the earth.

This is Abraham saying, I know that the fullness of God's promise has not been given to me yet, but it does not nullify the promise of God. And so even if all I have is the seed, I will greet it from a distance. And I will confess myself as an alien and a sojourner in this world because this world is not my home. My home is in heaven. My inheritance is in heaven. And even if I have to lose everything that's precious to me, my money, my wife. My child, I'll gladly give it away because the God who promised true life will make good on his promise to me.

And that is what Genesis 23 is pointing us towards. It's what Peter, when he was writing to a group of suffering Christians who were being killed all the day long, he said to them, even in your suffering, open up your eyes, look towards heaven, and bless the Lord. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy has caused us to be born again into a living hope through the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. He says of this inheritance and hope that it is—I don't think I have it on the screen, but it's—imperishable, undefiled, unfading, kept in heaven for you, and that you are being guarded by God's power through faith. for a salvation that is ready to be revealed at the last time.

And what is that salvation in the book of Revelation? It paints a beautiful picture that there's coming a day where heaven will descend, the new Jerusalem will fall down and invade this earth, and then we will be God's people, and God will be our God, and He will wipe away every tear from their eye. Death will be no more. Grief, crying, and pain will be no more. Because the previous things have passed away. And then the one seated on the throne said, look, I'm making everything new. Death will be erased.

Death will be abolished because Jesus keeps his promises. And so in life or in death, our hope is in Jesus. And even in the heartaches of life the deepest of turmoil. God is working. He's active in your pain and your tears, and he is establishing in you, if you'll let him, an even greater hope. That you can walk with him through the valley of the shadow of death and you don't have to be afraid because he's with you. And he's gone through that same valley. And he's come out on the other side so that death is now but a shadow, not the substance, because the substance was absorbed by the Lord Jesus Christ and abolished through his resurrection from the grave.

And so if you're here this morning and you do not have that hope, if you don't have faith in Jesus, this morning is an invitation for you to receive Him into your life by faith. Do not wait until your death date to answer the question, am I ready to meet Jesus? Today, if you hear his voice, don't harden your heart. Respond to the Lord Jesus with repentance and faith, recognizing my sin has separated me from a holy God, but that God in his great love for me has sent his son into the world so that I might be forgiven of my sin. and be reconciled to God and have hope of eternal life.

And it's not just for you and your death, it's for the death of every person you love. You entrust yourself to the Lord, and then you entrust the people you have to painfully say goodbye to today to the Lord, knowing that we have a living hope in the Lord Jesus Christ, that He is the resurrection and the life. And that anyone who believes in him, though he die, yet shall he live. And if they live and believe in him, they never really die. And so you don't have to grieve as someone without hope.

You can grieve as someone who has a living hope. in the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's God's offer to each of us if we'll receive it by faith. And so as we enter into a time of invitation, I want to invite you to receive the living hope that is in Jesus our Lord. I'll be here at the front if you want to pray about anything. I'm going to ask Jace if you don't mind being available to pray.