

## Living in light of the PROMISES

### Genesis 23 - 25

I know we've got a few budding preachers in our congregation. And let me just say. What I'm about to do. Don't do it. Do what I say. Not what I do. Because I'm going to use MY WIFE..... in an illustration. I've got permission. I'm not a total nong. But nevertheless...don't do it.

See I've noticed something about my wife. The penny's dropped. Because I've noticed. That there's a distinct change in Cathy. When the holiday's coming. I've noticed....there's a spring in her step. There's that extra, almost superhuman ability to cope. Just knowing that holiday's coming. Does it work that way for you? Doesn't matter if it's a week away, a month away. 6 months away even.... If the holiday's planned. If it's crossed off in the diary. If it's paid for. If we've got the receipt.

Everything changes. And same goes for me. When that precious piece of paper comes in the mail that says BOOKING CONFIRMED. It's almost like the future's brought into the present.

It's a beautiful thing. Note to self. Get next holiday booked. Very important.

It's just an example of how the future or at least your hopes for the future, shape the present. And the fact is, when you call Jesus Christ Lord. When you pin your hopes on Jesus Christ, you pin your hopes to all that he offers, all the promises

that are a part of that. It should make a significant change. To the way you see things now. To the way you live life and make all sorts of life decisions.

This is the last talk on the life of Abraham this morning. Three chapters. And three big events.

Number 1. The death of his wife Sarah. Number 2. The marriage of his son Isaac. And number 3. The writing of his own will.

There's no major battles. No more passing off his wife as his sister. No visions, in a way, just the normal things of life. Significant things. But everyday things.

And you could just skim over it as a sort of a mop up of Abraham's last days. Tying together the loose ends.

But it's much more than that. Because what you see in here. In the wake of offering Isaac up on the altar. In the twilight years of his life. What you see here is a man whose VIEW TO THE FUTURE.. makes every bit of difference NOW. He's not just looking forward to his HOLIDAYS. He's looking forward to what God's promised. So the way he lives, the everyday things in the PRESENT....are enveloped by his hope for the future.

You see it again and again here

Where his wife is buried. Matters. Because of the promises. Who his son MARRIES. Matters because of the promises. Who gets his stuff when he dies. What he does in the now. Is totally bound up in what he knows God's got for him in the future.

And the challenge is for us.....does the same go for you?

Is your trust in God's promises something that shapes even the most basic things in your life, NOW?

So lets go to Event number 1 for Abraham. And the funeral arrangements for Sarah.

In the opening words of chapter 23 we're told pretty abruptly that Sarah dies. Her death takes up exactly two verses of Scripture.

**Genesis 23:1-2** Sarah lived to be a hundred and twenty-seven years old. <sup>2</sup> She died at Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went to mourn for Sarah and to weep over her.

Now .....when you get to a certain age here in Australia, it seems like it's almost compulsory that you become a GREY NOMAD. And you travel around the country terrorizing other road users by towing your caravan everywhere at 80km/h.

You become a WANDERER for a while. But for most people. They've at least got a home base. Well Abraham and Sarah. They've been wandering around in the promised land for 62 years. They have ONE SON, Isaac, 37 years old and UN-MARRIED. At the time of Sarah's death. But in the land God's promised to be theirs. Not one square inch of property. They can call their own.

Now, if I go before Cathy, I suppose she'll have to make that decision about REAL ESTATE for me. She'll have to work out where she's going to park me.

But it's a bit different here. In Abraham's time.... you don't go to the council. You bury your family. In your own family cemetery. In your own family burial plot.

But Abraham doesn't even own that much. He doesn't even have a spot for a plot. In the land God's told him...will be his as an everlasting possession.

I suppose you could forgive Abraham for being a bit cynical about the promises. But that's not the case at all.

Let's pick up on the negotiations there from verse 3. The majority land owners in Canaan. Are the Hittites. So Abraham goes to them to buy a plot.

He's well known, he's been living with them half his life. But he says.

<sup>4</sup> "I am an alien and a stranger among you. Sell me some property for a burial site here so I can bury my dead."

And the negotiations go back and forth.

He honours them. He bows down low. They honour him. It's all pretty formal stuff.

Verse 6 Sir, listen to us, You are a mighty prince among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs.

It's a kind offer. They say when you move to country Australia, you've got to be there at least 10 years before you're considered a local. And it's like they're saying to Abraham. You're one of us. Take your pick of our tombs.

But he's like a dog with a bone. NO, but I want to BUY IT for the FULL PRICE.

And if you look at verse 9 he's got a particular place in mind. The cave of Machpelah. He says tell Ephron who owns it. I'll pay the FULL PRICE.

But Ephron happens to be there. And he jumps up. No, he says, I'll GIVE IT TO YOU Abraham. No, I'll BUY IT. Name your price.

In the end. The money changes hands. Four hundred shekels. And Abraham's the proud owner of a fairly over-priced block of land in Canaan.

So what's going on? Why so much fuss? Why does he dig his heels in? Why won't he just accept their gift?

It make sense. When you get where Abraham's coming from. See Abraham's living in the present. In light of the future. He's living in the light of God's promises. See God didn't say. He and his descendants would be really chummy with the people in the land. So they'd be allowed to live there and share their stuff. God said. He and his descendants will OWN THE LAND. The Lord bound himself with an oath. Your EVERLASTING POSSESSION God said.

So here he is. Dog at a bone. Taking possession. So he can bury his wife. Pretty much right smack bang in the middle of the promised land. Because he trusts what God's said.

Romans 4 tells us that Abraham's righteousness came from the fact that he was fully persuaded God had power to do what he had promised.

Here's Abraham's belief in action. When Sarah dies, she's going to be buried here in the land of Canaan, because God promised.

So Abraham buries his wife.

The land's going to be his. And HIS PEOPLE will live in it.

So that's where his dead. Are going to be buried. And don't forget. He's not just bought the plot for Sarah. That's where HE'LL BE BURIED too. And Isaac, and Jacob. At the end of Genesis. In chapter 50 there's Joseph who dies in Egypt, making his kids promise on oath. They'll take his bones up from there. To be buried in the promised land.

Which brings us to event number 2.

Abraham's son Isaac. Needs a wife. Chapter 24.

Now, if you've had the TV on at all in the last six months you'll have seen the ads for the reality TV show farmer wants a wife.

If you're really sad. If you've got no life. You might've even watched it.

Well Isaac wants a wife. Or I should say. Abraham wants one for him. So he sends his servant on a journey.

And if he was emphatic about buying the land. Get a load of this. He calls in his servant.

He says. Put your hand under my thigh. And swear an oath.

V3 This is what he has to swear:

<sup>3</sup> I want you to swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among

whom I am living, <sup>4</sup> but will go to MY COUNTRY and MY OWN RELATIVES and get a wife for my son Isaac."

Ok says the servant. But what if she won't come back?

Verse 6 - MAKE SURE.... that you don't take my son back there.

Here's the deal. Number one Isaac doesn't marry someone from HERE. Has to marry someone from his own people.

Number two. He's not to go BACK THERE.

Now, I pity the boys who have to come to ask me if they can marry my GIRLS. Because I'm sure... NO ONE will be good enough.

But that's not the point here. It's not just that he doesn't think the locals are good enough for his little boy.

There in verse 7. Here's the point. Abraham spells it out.

<sup>7</sup> "The LORD, the God of heaven, who brought me out of my father's household and my native land and who spoke to me and promised me on oath, saying, 'To YOUR OFFSPRING I will give this land'.

There's a pretty clear statement of his motivation. He's living in the light of God's promises.

And in light of God's promises. Who Isaac marries.... matters.

And chapter 24's another one of those great little stories where you see God's hand putting all the pieces together.

The servant gets close to the well. Works out his plan. I'll say this. And if she does that. She's the one. So Rebecca HAPPENS to come along. HAPPENS to say the very words he'd prayed for. HAPPENS to be unmarried. HAPPENS to be a stunner. HAPPENS to volunteer to water TEN CAMELS of a stranger. And just happens to be Abraham's niece.

See old Abe's not so crazy after all. And the servant gets the point. And if you look at verse 27 he bows down in worship to the Lord and he says...

...."Praise be to the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his kindness and faithfulness to my master".

See. Powerful people can make things happen. Some things. But only a sovereign God can work all things...to suit his purposes. So it makes a lot of sense. To worship and serve him. And to live according to his words.

It makes sense. To make decisions. To live life. In the present. According to God's promises for the future.

And that's how Abraham's playing it.

SLIDE – HEBREWS 11

Hebrews 11 is that great chapter in the New Testament that list off the heroes of the faith. Right through from Abel and Enoch and Noah to Moses and the judges and the prophets. They did all sorts of things. They shut the mouths of lions. They quenched the flames. They're heroes. They're tortured and jeered at.

They're heroes. They're flogged. They're chained, imprisoned, stoned. All sorts of things. And they're heroes.....because they're like Abraham.

They've got the same faith as Abraham. They're heroes.....Because they live. In the light of God's promises.

SLIDE – HEB 11:13 - 16

**Hebrews 11:13-16** <sup>13</sup> All these people were still living by faith when they died.

They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.

<sup>14</sup> People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. <sup>15</sup> If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup> Instead, they were longing for a better country-- a heavenly one.

Abraham lived his WHOLE LIFE and saw barely the beginning of God's promises materialize in his lifetime. But this is what the writer of the Hebrews says marked him out.

He admitted he was a stranger and an alien.

He was looking forward to a country of his own.

He didn't want to return.

He looked forward to a heavenly country.

And the New Testament holds him up as an example we ought to copy.

Finally chapter 25 he makes out his will. He has other kids to another wife after Sarah dies. And even though he's generous to them. Verse 5. Here's his will.

**Genesis 25:5** <sup>5</sup> Abraham left everything he owned to Isaac. <sup>6</sup> But while he was still living, he gave gifts to the sons of his concubines and sent them away from his son Isaac to the land of the east.

Because God's said it's through Isaac. The promises will be fulfilled.

And Abraham breathes his last. They bury him beside his wife. In his own plot. In the middle of the promised land.

Father Abraham. Our father in the faith. We're his children in a sense, the New Testament says. If we believe God's promises.

He's a great model. Of someone who lives in the light of God's promises. And God's made great promises to us. In the person of Jesus. The promise of forgiveness of sin, promise of sonship. Promise of eternal life with him. Promise of Heaven.

Through faith in Jesus.

So here's the obvious question. Are you living in light of the promises?

Are you **LOOKING FORWARD** to that heavenly country, so much that it actually feels like you're only a temporary resident here? So much that you make those everyday decisions about all sorts of things. Based on what God's promised?

Who you're going to marry. Where you're going to live. Send your kids to school. Job. Friends. House. Car. Holidays. Retirement. Are you living...in the light of God's promises?

Do you feel...like a stranger on this earth?

SLIDE – HEB 12

Hebrews 12 goes on to say.

**Hebrews 12:1-2** Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, (all those heroes of the faith) let us THROW OFF everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles,

It's like you imagine Rowan or Nick or Ange or Freddy or Brenda running the half marathon and they're wearing ski gear or they're carrying the washing basket or something. Throw it off, it says.

Anything that hinders you living in light of the promises. Throw it off. The sin that tangles you up so you just live like anyone else. Throw it off. Disentangle yourself. Get your gaze sorted out.

And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. <sup>2</sup> Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Jesus endured the cross. Because he had his eyes fixed on the joy before him. And as we fix our gaze on Jesus. And look forward to what he's promised. Then it's sort

of natural. That the way we live now. Will be impacted by what we're looking forward to.

And here's the great thing. Every decision you make. To do something. NOT DO SOMETHING. If it's made in the light of what God's promised. Then whatever it is... sort of becomes a testament to those promises.

Why did you buy a house in that suburb? Because it's close to a good church.

And that's important. Because I'm living in the light of God's promises in Jesus.

Why didn't you join in with the rest of us in slagging off that co-worker? Because I'm living in the light of God's promises in Jesus. You might not say it quite that way. But you get the point.

Why do you spend your money that way...why do you spend your time that way....why do you treat people that way...why did you marry that person..... the choices you make, the things you do. They're going to say something about your hope for the future. If you've got your hopes pinned on Jesus.

Let me just finish by saying this. It wasn't easy for Abraham. It won't be a piece of cake for you. But God's faithful. Let's encourage one another. To live today. In light of God's promises to us in Jesus.

Amen.