

The Beginning of the End

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[0:00] So God, you are so good in the simple fact that we get to gather and be in your presence! So Lord, help us to cherish this time, to hold it dear, to hold your word so precious! as we open it this morning. Would your Holy Spirit cut to the heart each individual in this room as we read your word this morning? God, would we see you more clearly? Not only for what you're doing in our lives, God, but expand our view, God, to see who you truly are, what you're doing in this world, Lord, what you've been doing since the beginning of time, Lord. So God, we offer James to you in humble submission, Lord, as your servant. Would your Holy Spirit minister to him?

Would it continue to minister to him in the ways that he's been pouring over this word this week? And as he does so, Lord, God, would he be able to shed light, God, into who you are in your deep care for us as we open your word? So thank you, God. We pray this all in your son's name. Amen. Good morning, everyone. Ooh, nice and loud. Thanks, Alex. Thank you very much. Um, uh, just to reiterate, um, for the retreat in December, we would love everyone who calls the gathering as a part of the community, their community to come and cost must not be a problem. Okay? So hear me loud and clear. If you're looking at those prices going, I'm not sure, sign up, sign up, sign up, and we're going to figure it out. And if you're someone who actually has a burden for helping others as well, I encourage you to pray and go, well, how many people can I help and support and come as well? Okay? So that's part of what we do as a family. So do not feel as though, oh, that's going to be the problem. Please do not let that be the problem. Um, anyway, um, last week, we had a climax, uh, the climax of Genesis 22 of, uh, Abraham finally offering Isaac up to the old writer. Um, I watched a movie this week, which also had a very strong climax, the Odyssey. Who's, can you put your hand up if you've watched the Odyssey? Gabs, you watched it? Yes. Uh, Juju and I are actually talking about, uh, can I have the feedback down a little bit on the speaker? I'm hearing, um, we're talking about starting a movie club to talk about this film. Um, it's so good. As climaxes go, it's pretty strong. I won't spoil anything, though. Again, I've told Gabs this before he watched it. You've had 3,000 years to find out about the story.

Uh, so you deserve to have his support for you if you still haven't watched it. Um, the climax last week was pretty epic. You have Abraham who's waited for 25 years for this son. And then finally, he does it. And I share the story about my dad before he passed, kneeling down at the cross, uh, in our church, just in tears, telling me, James promised me one thing. Focus on him. Be true to your calling. Say yes when he calls you to go. And that's been the marker of my life all the way till now. I imagined Abraham and Isaac at the cross at Calvary when Abraham sees Jesus on the cross. Imagining, by the way, this does not happen. Different time. But just imagining, given what he had gone through in Genesis 22.

[3:21] Given that he was willing to give his son, whom he loved, to God. And then seeing God do the exact same thing, going, now I know, now I know, this God, this Father, loves us so dearly that he would not withhold his only son.

Thankfully for Abraham, he offers up Isaac, but then God says, no, stop. I have a replacement for you. I have a substitute for you. There's a ram there that you can use instead. But at the cross, you see, God does not say, stop.

He says, in fact, he says nothing. Psalm 22, Jesus quotes the words, Why, my God, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

For our sake, because of his love for us, he turns away from his son, whom he loves. So that we can live again. That was the climax of last week.

And going back to the Odyssey, one of the things that really struck me, of course, this, who knows whether Odysseus was a real person or not. But the story itself, what Nolan tried to do was just depict this character who had gone on a journey, was a sojourner, but also was filled with grief.

[4:31] Right? And that's kind of what carried him through all the way. It made me think, the journeys that we're on and the grief that we hold, whether there's moments where there are true gladness, joy of what God's given us.

But you and me would both be lying if we didn't say that our lives also bring us with grief nearly every day. And we look here now, post-climax, we see a really interesting passage here where, actually, Abraham deals with grief.

I always have a saying, which is, I really love talking to people who are acquainted with grief. Not because of any weird thing, but because when I look into their eyes, I know that they know that this life is not all there is.

That there's a soberness to it. There's a clarity to life that I think only grief can give you. And you see here, what Abraham does with grief is he points to eternity.

He points himself to eternity. And it's through a seemingly very mundane, trivial, real estate transaction. And that's what we're going to be doing today.

[5:43] We have the climax of Genesis 22. And now we come down to something that's seemingly very earthly, very mundane, and very tragic. And we're going to see what the Lord has in store for us.

I'm going to invite Sonny to come up to minister to us and read to us the Word of God. So as per our tradition, can I invite you to stand out of reverence and awe for the Word that's about to be spoken over us.

Genesis 23. Genesis 23.

The Hittites answered Abraham, Abraham, hear us, my Lord. You are a prince of God among us. Bury your dead in the choices of our tombs. None of us will withhold from you his tomb to hinder you from burying your dead. Abraham rose and bowed to the Hittites, the people of the land.

[7:00] 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. 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 his city. No, my Lord, hear me.

I give you the field and I give you the cave that is in it. In the sight of the sons of my people, I give it to you. Bury your dead. Then Abraham bowed down before the people of the land.

And he said to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, But if you will hear me, I give the price of the field. Accept it for me that I may bury my dead there.

[8:01] Ephron answered Abraham, My Lord, listen to me. A piece of land worth four hundred 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. Four hundred shekels of silver. According to the weights current among the merchants.

So 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 procession 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, Hurrion, 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. This is the word of the Lord. Thank you, Sonny.

[9:06] Please take a seat. I don't know, when you read the Bible, do you find every passage that you read just exciting and invigorating and something that you can take away?

That was not me on Monday morning. When I read that passage, again, I was like, okay, we had just such a great time going through Genesis 22. One passage that everyone is familiar with. Then we reached 23, and I'm like, okay, well, where do we go with this?

What is it, Lord, that you are trying to show us in this? But before that, though, if you have your Bibles, which I do hope you do. I haven't shamed people for a while. Paper Bibles. Paper Bibles is the way to heaven. It's the way to salvation.

The apps will not get you there, unfortunately. That's what it says in the Bible. You should read it. Genesis chapter, if it's your first time here, I'm joking. Kind of. Pass it aggressively. Now, the end of 22 is really interesting.

22 is this fascinating passage, right? But for some reason, the author decides to leave a couple sentences at the end, just after the whole epic incident on the hill. And then he says, Now, after these things, it was told to Abraham, Behold, Milcah also has born children to your brother Nahor. [10:13] Uz, his firstborn, Buzz, his brother, Chemuel, the father of Abraham, Heseu, Hazo, anyway, the whole list of names. And moreover, his concubine, whose name was Rumah, bore Teber, Gaham, Tahash, and Maka.

Isn't it interesting that that's just a random piece of information there that he leaves in one of the most key chapters in the whole Bible? I don't know if you find it interesting. I did. Interestingly, because his brother Nahor, 25 years ago, was not called out of Ur.

So he didn't have to leave home. He stayed home. He didn't have to take a leap of faith to go out and away. Almost just to rub salt in the wounds, is Abraham's just offered his son, his only son whom he loves, his only chance of livelihood, his social future is based on this one son.

He offers him up. And then suddenly he receives news from home, saying, hey, do you remember that brother that you left who actually doesn't follow God and doesn't believe in God and is still worshipping the moons? He has so many kids, is basically what it's saying.

Isn't it fascinating? When you take that leap of faith to follow God, you don't know where he's going to lead. You don't know how he's going to provide for you. And most often, it doesn't make sense. Abraham's like, wait, I was told to leave my home and then you'll bless me with family and my family land.

[11:27] Right now, I don't really have much, whereas my brother, who didn't listen to you, doesn't have a relationship with you, is at home living at large with 12 kids and tribes.

How's that fair? What does that even mean? Do you think it's funny that the author here just seems to have a sense of humor here, who's kind of just showing, hey, what we see in this world is not all there is.

There is more to it. And then sadly, 23 starts. Sarah lived 127 years. These were the years of the life of Sarah. And then she dies, is what it says.

The consequence of the curse, even though there are promises that are made to him and his family, there is the consequence of this curse, which still remains, which is that we will die. Genesis 25, that whole list of descendants.

And he died and he died and he died and you'll die and you'll die and you'll die and I'll die. And we will all die. Isn't it sobering?

[12:28] When we talk about acts of faith, when we talk about trusting, when we talk about choosing faith over fear, we also still must acknowledge that there is death. Death is still very much part of the picture here.

In fact, Abraham's in a bit of a weird place now. He had two promises given to him. One, that you'll have family and two, your family will have land. He's received one through just Isaac, but he's not got any land.

And then it carries on here and it talks about it. Verse 3, he goes to the Hittites, which at that point were, again, a prominent people along with the Egyptians, along with the, you know, eventually with the Greeks.

So the Hittites were a big group. And so they were the ones who were kind of owning Canaan right now. And so Abraham goes to them and says this. 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.

Brackets. God had promised me family and he had promised my family all of this land. But actually up until this point, I do not own a single piece of land. I only have one son. And now my wife has died.

[13:27] And actually when we left earth 26 years ago, I promised her, I told her, God said that we would have lots and lots of land and lots and lots of descendants. But sadly, she's now dead.

And she had two sons, one who we sent away. Well, Ishmael wasn't really her son. But then Abraham, I offered up. And now she's gone. And I, as a husband, was not able to show her what God had promised us.

I want us to feel a little bit of just the pain and heartache that Abraham would have gone through. Maybe his husband sits with wife, his wife sits with husband going, what were the dreams that we had to sail away, to enjoy our future together?

All the things that God had promised us together. And now we sit. And now he sits here with grief. Going, didn't get any of it. Couldn't even give my wife a house.

Here's what he's saying. I'm a sojourner and a foreigner. And I couldn't give her a house. Could you at least give me a cave to bury her? They respond to him by saying, verse 6, Here is my Lord, you are a prince of God among us.

[14 : 35] Bury your dead in the choices of our tombs. None of us will withhold from you his tomb to hinder you from burying your dead. So they like him. So, again, he's a wealthy man. Remember, he's a wealthy. Genesis 13, he had so much money he had to split from his nephew.

So he's got a lot of people, a lot of cattle, and of course a lot of tents in the camp of Abraham. And they know him, and they say, hey, you're a prince of God. Wouldn't that be great to just be described as that by people outside of the faith?

There's something about you that is just different. You're a prince of God. And, hey, you do, look, we know you've been a sojourner. We know you're a foreigner, which means we don't really want to give you our land. But, hey, just take your pick.

Where do you want to bury your wife? You do that. And so then he says 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 the cave of Machpelah.

Actually, something else just interesting here is he's a foreigner. He's a sojourner, and yet he still acts with integrity at every step of the way. To the point where other people on the outside look in and go, you're a good guy.

[15 : 39] I would love for us all to be there. I would love for people to look at me outside in that same way. And so he goes, okay, there is actually one piece of land. Actually, it's just a cave.

It's the end of this field owned by a guy called Ephron. If we can just speak to Ephron, and I can buy that cave off him so I can bury my wife. That's all I want. Brackets, despite God has promised me so much, yeah, I'm not getting any of it.

I'm just going to buy the cave. 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. Remember, the gate of the city is a very important place. Remember, Lot was hanging out at the gate of the city. It's the place where all the transactions are done. Okay? This is the interactive brokers of the day.

And this is where they sit and wait, and actually everything is made official and exchanged here. Everyone knows about it. So Ephron is sat there, and he's going, okay. And then a fascinating interaction happens.

[16 : 38] And this is where it gets into literal real estate business transaction here. And he says this, No, Lord, hear me. I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. In the sight of my sons and my people, I give it to you. Bury your dead.

Interesting here. Abraham asks for a cave. He only wants a cave. But then Ephron comes to him. It seems as though it seems warm and kind of generous.

He says, hey, don't just take the cave. Take the field. Take the field. My son's going to see it. Take it. Bury your dead. And do what it is that you need to do. On the surface, this looks like a good piece of generosity.

But we actually, if you keep going down further, you'll see that it actually isn't. Bury your dead. Then Abraham bowed down before the land of the people, again, showing respect. Even though they don't worship his God, he still respects the society and the structures that are in place.

And he said to Ephron in the hearing of the people, But if you will hear me, I will give the price of the field. Accept it from me that I may bury my dead there. Abraham's like, thank you so much for offering me this cave and this field.

[17 : 36] But I insist. I want to buy it off you. What's Abraham thinking? He's thinking, okay, well, you might say yes to me now, but your kids might not say yes to me in the next generations.

And then you'll take that field and that cave back off me again, unless we make it legal. So he's respecting the structures that are in place for society, honoring them, and also insisting that he does not take shortcuts.

He does not cut corners in this. He lives as a man of faith and integrity. And he says, please let me buy the field. And this is where Ephron's true colors are exposed. And he says this.

Ephron answers, Abraham, my lord, listen to me. A piece of land worth 400 shekels of silver. What is that between me and you? You and me. It's okay.

It's just you and me. 400 shekels of silver. This is where you know it's been exposed. Because 400 shekels of silver is actually about 40 years of wage.

[18:34] I put it into AI and it's the equivalent would probably be about 5 million Hong Kong. What people, what scholars believe here is that he's charging an exorbitant price for the field that Abraham only wants in the cave.

Can you see he's showing his true colors here? And actually if you've been in the Middle East, if you've even done any kind of bargaining and kind of negotiation, this is typical Middle Eastern negotiating.

Actually if Abraham at this point said, oh thanks, I'll take the cave and I'll take the field, thank you very much, there would have been chaos. But instead there was this almost superficial negotiation that gets Abraham to the point where he pays full market price for a piece of land that he didn't actually want.

And he just wanted a cave to bury his wife whom he had promised so much and she had passed without seeing any of it. This was a grieving man. If you look at just verse 2, Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.

Just the grief that comes and all he wants is the cave. And he's pulled into this fascinating thing that happens with Ephron. So Ephron's like, fine, I will charge you the 400 shekels of silver.

[19:54] And he does that and even then 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. So even then, even the weighing of the silver was still a *hoi xin ga*.

It was still saying, hey, we're going to decide and it will fluctuate depending on how much silver there is. And back in those days there were less silver than actually there is now. So this was a very, very expensive piece of property that he was buying for his wife.

So they do it. And what can we learn from this whole story? And that's it. And as I was sitting there this week going, what can we see from this passage that we can actually take away from? And the first thing is that you see a grieving sojourner who was very much willing to grieve.

I can tell you this. I always hold grief and gratitude hand in hand. There's not a moment that goes by in my life where I don't look and go, there are things that I'm grieving.

There are things that I've lost. Every yes I say, yes, everything I say yes to, there are 10 no's that I have to say no to. We all carry grief in some way.

[21:03] That's almost part and parcel of this life here. And you see a grieving sojourner living in a certain way where he doesn't get the promises fulfilled.

And we now sit here and we have the whole Bible and we see Hebrews 11 that's filled with all these great things said about Abraham. At this point he doesn't know. He just knows that the wife that he loved is now dead and she didn't get what was promised.

And in his last act of honor to her, last act of love to her, who no doubt, I mean, those of you who have moved house a lot of times will know how painful it is.

So again, I'm projecting here, but there'll be a moment where the wife's going, can we just settle down now? I'm so tired of this tent. Abraham, didn't you say that God had promised us this land forever for our descendants?

Why are we still living in this tent? And this tent has a leak. It's just horrible and dark and dingy. He doesn't do anything until she passes and he insists on paying full price for this land.

[22:08] He is a grieving sojourner, but he is pointing to eternity. He's pointing himself to eternity and I'll show you why. The reason why he insists on buying this land is because he doesn't just believe that God's promise was about giving them the land in their lifetime.

Remember, last chapter, last week, what does Abraham believe in? He believes that there's a chance, actually there's a big chance that God can raise Isaac from the dead. That's why he's willing to offer.

He's like, I don't know how it's going to happen. Even if I have to sacrifice and kill Isaac, some way, Hebrews 11 says this, Abraham thought, don't worry. Even if I offer Isaac up, God will raise him

from the dead somehow.

So Abraham believes in the resurrection from the dead. So the reason why he buys this land for his wife who never got to see the land is, hey, I know I didn't get you this land in your lifetime, but I assure you this, when you resurrect, you will resurrect in the place that God promised you.

That's why he bought this land. Because he's saying this will be a marker, this will be a deposit, this will be a down payment for our future because the promise that we receive from God isn't in this lifetime, it's for the next one.

[23 : 16] And the moment, Sarah, you wake up, the moment you resurrect, you will be resurrecting in the lands that God promised you. Because of that, I am willing to pay above market price for this land so that when you wake up, when, not if, when you wake up, when you are resurrected, you will be in exactly the place that God promised you.

He's not going to take any shortcuts because there was another way that he could have done this, which was not bury her, just cremate her. Just get it out of the way. Why does he need to engage with the locals, get this favor from them or pay so much for them?

He didn't have to do any of that. He never, he'd held restraint all this time anyway. Why buy her the land now? She's not nagging anymore. And yet in his eyes, there's something that needs to be done here that is beyond their life, beyond their lifetime.

So he's going to insist on buying this land. And because it was done in the presence of all these other leaders around the city, around the gate, this transaction would be official and it would pass down the generations.

Guess who ends up getting buried there in the future? Not just Sarah, but Abraham himself. And then Isaac. And it continues and continues. Just another moment of sentimental value here.

[24 : 26] This place in Hebron is basically where after they split with the nephew Lot, so Lot goes this way and they go this way and they set up in Hebron. It would have been where they settled those many years ago.

And so he's like, no, I'm putting a deposit on this, a down payment for this. This is for our future. He sees something beyond death. It makes me think, how do we approach our earthly things now?

Do we approach them with an eternal mindset? I once heard a quote that I've shared many, many times before, that there are two most important days in your life.

Today and that day. Today, the day that you're living in right now, and that day when you meet your Creator. Those are the only two important days in your life. And our prayer is that that day impacts the way you live today.

When was the last time you made an investment that didn't really make sense in an earthly sense, but makes absolute sense in an eternal sense? When was the last time you invested your time, your resources, your money, your efforts, your love into something or someone or some project with eternity in mind?

[25 : 36] If we're honest with ourselves, that doesn't really happen because we make investments for this life. We choose to put time into studying so we can invest into getting the grades that we need to get to the university that we need to get to the job that we need so that we can get the lifestyle that we need all in this life.

But when was the last time we said, I'm going to make an investment that I'm not going to see, that the world isn't really going to understand, but it is so much bigger than what I experience in this life. And there's going to be a moment where I'm going to experience it in eternity, where my wife is going to wake up and she's going to be in paradise.

Do we here live with eternity in mind? It's impossible to go through the story of Abraham without looking at Hebrews 11.

So I want to turn to us there for the next bit, and then I'm actually going to invite a friend up. So if you can stay awake till then, I promise you it will get more interesting after that. Hebrews chapter 11.

Growing up always, I've used this, I've felt this was just a hall of fame. Of people who just put their trust in the Lord, who never put a foot wrong, who never made a mistake, who lived life completely trusting in their God.

[26 : 46] But what I have more recently seen is that is not the case. You look and Abraham, by the way, is the one who's had the most written about him. 11 verse 8. By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance.

By faith he obeyed. That's the thing. He obeys and goes out, not knowing what he's going to get, not knowing where he's going to go. And he went out, not knowing where he was going to go, is verse 8. By faith he went to live in the land of promise.

The land that was promised to him, he lived there in faith, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob. Why? Because he was looking forward, verse 11, sorry, verse 10, for he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

Just step with me into the life of Abraham again. He's promised this big land. He goes, leaves everything he's ever known, and goes and lives there. And he lives in tents, never settles down. And somewhere along the way, things turn, and he realizes that he's not actually living for Canaan anymore. He's living for a city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. He's going further away.

[27 : 51] I think that's a bit of the life that we have as followers of Christ. In the early stages, when we choose to follow Jesus, it's because he's going to help us find purpose. He's going to help us find meaning. He's going to help us find, and some of us think, he's going to help us find, bring health and wealth, which is going to be much more happy.

And that's often how we start. And I'm not saying that's all terribly wrong, but I'm saying that would be a real terrible shame if that's where we stayed. And so then what happens is, as we start following Jesus, we end up at the place where, actually, Jesus, I'm kind of losing interest in the gifts that you're going to give me, and I'm more interested in you.

Because those gifts have got to come from somewhere. And the kingdom of God is the gift that keeps on giving, so I'd rather come towards you. And that's where you end up. King David, Psalm 27, says, The one thing I ask now, the one thing I seek is to dwell in the house of the Lord, to gaze upon his beauty, to inquire in his temple.

All I care about is you now. The life of a believer, those seasons, those cycles that we go through, the whole objective is to get to a place where, Jesus, I want you more than the things that you can give me.

And recognizing, especially, that I may not even get it. Hebrews 11, verse 13. 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.

[29 : 11] Abraham is there. He speaks to the Hittites and says, I am a sojourner, a foreigner. I am a stranger. I am an exile. This doesn't really belong to me anymore. If we could all just get there, to a place where we look at the comforts and luxuries and excitement and the gifts of a city like Hong Kong, and go, and yet I desire a better country.

I desire a city whose builder and foundation and designer is God himself. This isn't enough. With that said, what we're praying for is that actually heaven would come onto earth.

Every time I walk into Hong Kong Park, I'm like, what a beautiful park that's surrounded by these incredible buildings. It reminds me a little bit of just the book of Revelation where there's going to be, it's going to be a garden city. But the whole point is, and again, remember, my wife loves trees. That's why we have a tree in our church. But if you just look, even look around, anywhere that's nice and hip and cool these days, whether it's Hong Kong or if you like Shenzhen, then you go to Shenzhen and you see all these things. What do you see? Trevor's like, yes, amen.

All these malls and all these places that are cool, what do they have? Trees. There's something in our hearts that are just crying, just yearning for this garden city.

[30 : 23] Actually, may the good things in the city, in reality, actually point us towards those things. Abraham gets to the point where he acknowledges and sees them from afar, but he recognizes he's a stranger and an exile, and he's now looking for something else.

I wonder whether we can live with that kind of heart. It's funny. He buys his land. They end up staying there, and this is where my conclusion is before I bring other people up.

You fast forward to the end of Genesis. Joseph. Remember, they end up in Egypt, right? And Joseph is very, very powerful. He's not a sojourner. He's not a stranger. He's not an exile. He's the second most powerful man in Egypt.

And when he dies, what does he make and promise? Take my bones. I do not want to be in Egypt because our people, our family, were promised a land in Canaan. So when you leave, and God will come and deliver you from Egypt, and when you leave and come, take my bones with you and wander in the desert for 40 years.

He didn't know that, but take them with you wherever you go because I want my bones to be buried with my ancestors, with my great-great-great-grandmother, my great-great-great-grandfather. Why? Because God promised us something that we will realize.

[31 : 31] Maybe not in this lifetime, but in eternity we will. So take my bones home, please, is what Joseph is saying. He lived with that eternal mindset just like Abraham.

Abraham, of course, had this interaction with Ephron, and Ephron thinks he gets a great deal. Five million Hong Kong for a field and a cave that he doesn't really use anymore. And yet what he doesn't realize is that Abraham actually gets the better side of the deal.

That Abraham paid 400 shekels of silver for his family to have the whole land of Canaan, the whole of the promised land. He just won't see it just yet. Abraham himself doesn't see it.

Sarah definitely didn't see it. And yet Abraham lived with that kind of faith. It reminds me of Judas.

Not for 400 shekels. He just had a bag of 30 coins. And he exchanges it.

How often do we deal in the earthly, thinking we just want the best deals that we can here, when God's calling us to live with eternity in mind, to look at something far greater?

[32 : 36] The truth is everything that we have here will fade away. It will go. It will rot. It's interesting. When Jesus comes in John 8, he was talking to the people who are, who are you?

Are you greater than Abraham? And then he really annoys them by saying some stuff. But John 8, verse 56 says this, Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.

Jesus quotes their founding father of the faith and says, Your founding father saw this day. He saw me and he was glad, which is why he was willing to make a down payment, a deposit into a future that he wouldn't even see, because he saw the city.

He saw the better country. And he was glad. Would we all be like Abraham and recognize and acknowledge that everything that we have promised to us from this book, from God himself, we may not even realize before death.

And that's how we can grieve. That's why 1 Thessalonians 4 says, We grieve not as those who have no hope, because we have an eternal inheritance that awaits us that we won't see here.

[33 : 49] You can count on it. But yet, the moment Jesus comes, the moment Jesus, the one who's resurrected, comes back for us, the moment we're all woken up, raised from the dead, we will be in the land of promise and where he will rule with grace and truth and peace and love in a kingdom that will never end.

That is the hope that we have. That is what we are going for. Jesus, the Son of God himself, who was outcast, who became a sojourner and a foreigner and a stranger and an exile, ends up sacrificing himself.

His tomb becomes a deposit for our life. And now he lives and his spirit lives inside us and that is the deposit and the guarantor of our faith.

Do we recognize that? Can we live by that? That the great climax is not here yet. We live in the already but not yet.

We're waiting for the moment where our King comes back for us and makes all wrongs right. When you are grieving, when you are sojourning, can I encourage you to look at the cross?

[35 : 14] Can I encourage you to look at Jesus and see that there is something beyond the grave? Can I encourage you to look at the empty tomb and remember there is something beyond the grave?

I'm going to invite a dear friend up now to have a chat. I'll tell you what we're trying to do here.

Trying to have different ways for us to engage in Scripture together and engage with each other together.

And so we had J1 last week come and share with us what it means to trust, what it means to wrestle with that trust. This week I'm going to have a dear friend Queenie come up to talk about this passage.

Again, I've given some advance notice for people who come up that have been chewing over this passage as well. And the goal is actually at some point maybe there's going to be some Q&A; where we can actually talk about this and engage in the Word of God together as a community.

Just first disclaimer right here, once we get to that stage where we have questions coming, I can assure you I won't know the answer to every question. But I think the whole point of this is that we engage with Scripture together and ask the Holy Spirit to guide us and teach us.

[36:19] So can we give a warm round of applause to Queenie? Hello, how about Queenie? I always like to joke about what you do but I would love for you to introduce yourself to the people and what it is that you do and what you think that God has really called you to do in the place that you're working.

Thanks, James. So I'm a barrister so I'm the sort of lawyer that goes to court. Sometimes people ask me, I've probably said this before, if I make good coffee and they think I'm a barista and I always say yes.

Actually, some barista tried to add me on LinkedIn which I am. But no, I actually go to court and I love what I do because for myself, I definitely feel called to the workplace and yeah, there's many, many opportunities there.

Sorry, testing. So you've always said that you love your job and in loving your job and being very good at your job, you've become one of the youngest senior councils in Hong Kong, I believe. What is it that you love about your job?

I like the intellectual stimulation. I find it interesting. I like arguing with people and actually, just through my work, I actually get to meet a lot of different people and some actually have become very, very good friends and a lot of the people I meet, I may not meet if I were not doing my job and so I see all of these as opportunities and yeah, that's...

[37:44] Queenie's one of those people I love talking to because I received some advice in the past where always seek out rooms where you're not the smartest in the room which isn't hard for me but honestly, I look, I find people at Queenie and I just want to just talk and see how her mind works and how she engages especially in society.

We talked about Abraham here who lives as a sojourner, as a foreigner but lives with integrity and with faith and almost lives with eternity in mind. What does that look like for you as you navigate kind of the environment that you're in?

Yeah. It may or may not surprise you but it surprised me to realise that not everyone plays by the rules. So as a lawyer, my job is to do what I can for my client within the rules but I've found that not everybody does that.

I mean, all sorts of people do all sorts of things so actually, just even doing what I'm supposed to be doing. I think that in itself is something. It counts for something. You say that so easily but I can't imagine that being easy.

When someone takes the gloves off and does something that they do, what's your response? How's your process in responding to it? I'm trying to think of sort of a real-life example which is when someone approached me to try and do a case or he offered me a case in a way that I was not supposed to be taking it.

[39:01] I mean, I don't want to go into the details but in a nutshell, I just said no and I just extracted myself from the situation and I told the receptionist, I said, if this particular person ever calls again, then just don't put the call through.

So I think sometimes it's about sort of extracting oneself from that situation. I mean, not every situation you can kind of get out of but if there are ways to get out of it and to protect oneself from that, I think that's one way forward.

But I'm assuming when you make that decision to extract oneself, it most often probably comes with a cost. Is that right? Yeah, it does. I mean, it happens from very early on in my career.

So in theory, things like, do I get good cases? Do I get paid? Et cetera, et cetera. It is more of a thing. So it can come at a cost. But, you know, most important things often do come at a cost.

So I think it's really just about making that decision. I asked you to look at Genesis 23 and just to meditate over it. What stood out to you the most as you read this chapter? I think one of the things that really stood out to me is that it's about something quite normal.

[40:11] You used the word mundane and I think that was also one of the words that had come to my mind. Sort of just buying this piece of land to bury his wife, et cetera, et cetera. But I think that was also quite important for me because I think most things I do are almost or everything I do is just sort of normal and ordinary.

And I was just thinking about this further, James. I may never do anything sort of amazing or spectacular, but one thing I am guaranteed to be able to do is like ordinary stuff because I go to work, I talk to people on a day-to-day basis.

And I dare say for all of you, I mean, you may all be doing spectacular things already and all the time, but I bet you also do normal things like go to work, talk to people, buy coffee, talk to whoever. And so I think how we carry ourselves and how we do that is something worth thinking about. And like you were mentioning earlier on, and there's another thing that stood out to me, is how the Hittites, who I assume are sort of non-Christians, et cetera, how they described Abraham. Abraham, and they described him as Prince of God. I think some translations say Mighty Prince, et cetera, but I think it does have the word Elohim, which kind of means God.

[41 : 24] So I take it as, there is a reference to God. And like you were saying, part of it was probably because he was very successful, he was doing very well, he was very wealthy, all the rest of it. But it didn't just say you amazing person or you prince, it is prince of God.

And so somehow they recognized that there was something about him that sort of came from this God that they didn't even really know. And so that was a really good reminder for me, I think, in my, just doing my ordinary stuff, my going to work, my doing normal things.

How do I do it? And what impression do I give to people? What do I make people think of? Can I just reflect a little bit of God? And if I can just do a little bit of that, then I think it's kind of what I'm trying to do.

I suspect a lot of people will agree with you in the sense that most of our lives we're living somewhat mundane lives doing repetitive things. Especially in the field of law, again, I can just imagine, I'm just imagining documents and you live in a world of black and white but you actually live it in a very colorful way.

Tell me then, when you're dealing with contracts and people and things that are seemingly mundane and we all have our equivalents to those things, what do you remind yourself in terms of to bring color into your life and to bring purpose into your life?

[42 : 40] I think one of the things is to think about what God has called me to do and the way God brought me into this profession, into my particular working place, all that sort of thing.

I definitely see God's fingerprints all over it and it's definitely him who brought me to this profession and to my particular chambers. and so I think that helps me remember that I'm here not just because I have nothing better to do with my life but I'm here because God put me there and then I want to see well so what is God wanting to do in my life?

And so a lot of it is also trying to be aware and trying to be open to spotting whatever it is that he's doing and sometimes it can just be something completely unexpected.

It can be just a conversation that I decide to pick up and then I decide to pick it up and then a friendship builds and then a really deep friendship builds and yeah so that does happen and it has happened and I hope will continue to happen.

You made me think that even though we all live in the physical realm dealing with the physical things but when you live with eternity in mind the possibilities end up being endless. You actually don't know when you're going to encounter something that will actually be life changing not just for you but for some people that are actually involved right?

[43 : 55] As you looked at the passage and reflected were there any things that actually troubled you or confused you or actually just convicted you? Anything that comes to mind? I think Abraham's humility to these people and his engaging with them in a very respectful way I think is something that really encouraged me.

It's easy for people to kind of feel judged actually I feel when they talk to Christians. They may I mean actually I can give you an example I mean at the time I was doing something with a Bible study organization that for some utterly silly reason at the time said leaders are not allowed to drink for example and so I just had to suck it up and not drink apart from on special occasions and then but then I discovered that all my friends all my chambermates they were all they all felt very very judged and so I think and I didn't try and say it in a judgy sort of way but I would stand with my lemon tea but they would still feel judged but I think that kind of really emphasized for me how actually culture is really important and how to engage with people in a way that enables them to feel comfortable I mean not in a kind of oh wait you just sit and do crazy things wait but within reason how one can still engage with people in their culture and in a way that's respectful to them and that they can find acceptable which I think

Abraham really did. you talk about culture it reminds me of a conversation we had last night I feel as though there's two groups of people that we always need one is the group of people that are actually sharpeners and keep us accountable and it's the you are the average of the five people you

spend the most time with so look at the five people you spend the most time with and you'll see yourself and that may encourage you and comfort you or it may horrify you and terrify you so have a think about that but there's a group of people who if I want to be that kind of person I need to surround myself with these kind of five people that's one group but then there's another group which is we are in this world but not of this world and we scatter out into hey actually I'm going to be very different in this group and I need my first group to help me to anchor me otherwise I'll lose my way but I also need the second group and you're someone who I know has both a lot right I'm very very blessed with a lot of friends and I would just also add that the whole kind of being part of the culture you know or somebody that stands out is not sort of mutually exclusive and I think it's learning to try and hold all of this together and trying to marry it together in a way that is helpful to people I also as I was hearing you talk I'm just imagining Abraham he's grieving he wants to buy this cave and then he agrees on this exorbitant price just imagine all the elders at the gate just kind of sniggering and like almost kind of just chuckling to each other it's like this foreigner doesn't know anything we're going to totally just sell this ladder in a way and yet somehow he lives just like I know and it doesn't matter why?

because I live with eternity in mind so you can do whatever under the table stuff you do I'm unfazed because I am a child of God I'm a prince of God and I'm not affected by this any final thoughts from you?

[47:04] yeah I mean you started by saying this passage is all about grief and actually I wasn't really necessarily going to talk about it very much today but the occasion just arose and grief is something that I have wrestled with as well I've actually shared here before so some of you may have shared I lost a very close friend to suicide a couple of years ago actually just when I started coming to the gathering and actually I think this is like probably not the world's best passage on grief in that it just talks about it in about two sentences so this is not the main point of today but it also so happened that just when I was having breakfast with friends my counsellor also told me about a grief support group that she is about to run and so I just also wanted to open that up to anyone who might feel that's helpful the group is for anyone who's lost someone either recently or a long time ago it doesn't have to be recently so it can be both and it's just an occasion and a space where you can explore some of the emotions in you

I certainly found that I thought I was okay but then I various things happened I realised I was not and everyone's at a different place but if anyone is interested please feel free to come and talk to me my counsellor is called Eugenie and then this is going to be held at Watermark's premises in Wongshukhang and there's a little flyer which I can send around in the gathering WhatsApp chat group later on as well but do come and talk to me if anybody's interested it's on Thursdays for six weeks starting on the 10th of September and actually you say it's only the first two verses that talk about grief but I happen to think this whole chapter grief is the springboard as in he loses his wife and it's in that moment having not bought any land for the whole of his life decides now I'm going to do it and I think at least I can speak from personal experience grief I don't think ever ends and I lost my dad in 2003 and I'll say to this day it's still something that keeps going but I'll say the point of grief is to point us to eternity that loss that we have should remind us of what we've gained in Christ and I think you're right grief doesn't just sort of end and I hate this concept my counselor keeps talking to me about it and I've sort of come to terms with it a little bit

I think is learning to coexist with grief and everything else in life so yeah so even if time has passed etc even if you've been able to do lots of things like Abraham was able to do a whole bunch of things like buy a spot of land etc etc sometimes one still needs to give oneself that space yeah round of applause for Queenie thank you thank you so much so we're going to finish with just a time of response through song now Kelly and the team up but maybe the prompt here is this what is the grief that you're going through as a sojourner you know maybe you know you may not be a mighty warrior like Odysseus you may not have the resources of Abraham but yet you are grieving that there is loss in your life and I respectfully and lovingly wonder today whether that can point you to eternity where again the passage in Thessalonians hits me every time that we should not be uninformed when we go through grief and when we lose loved ones that we do not grieve as those who have no hope but there is going to be a day where the

Lord comes back and wakes us all up and when we wake up we will be in the land of promise what grief can you take to Jesus today what sorrow can you take to Jesus today and in exchange he gives you joy not because he will fulfill your promise but because your promise will be fulfilled in

eternity through him and what he did on the cross that allows you to tolerate to fight to survive through the mundane through the pain just imagine for a second with me that we believed in an eternity that actually exists a garden city where there is no pain tears separation anxiety and fear imagine with me if we lived for that day today Jesus we come to you you who designed and built a city a kingdom that has no end that holds justice and love and grace and truth hand in hand where the rivers flow we sit in a moment of grief now knowing that we are not there yet but whilst we sit in the already and not yet we pray that you would give us the wisdom on how to navigate this dark world and sometimes the gloves are off sometimes there is ridicule sometimes there is pain and persecution help us to live as faithful followers pursuing eternity with integrity help us to be in this world but not of this world help us to bring the land of promise into this land of exile we worship you the beginning and the end the alpha and omega the ancient of days