

A Grave That Teaches Hope

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- [0 : 00] Good. Let's turn now to our Bible reading for this morning. And we are working through the book of Genesis. And we're in Genesis chapter 22 and 23 this morning.
- If you don't have a Bible with you, we have visitor Bibles just at the side here at the back. Please do grab a Bible if you need to. So Genesis and chapter 22.
- And we're reading from verse 20. Genesis 22 and verse 20. Now after these things, it was told to Abraham, whose name was Rumah, bore Tiba, Gaham, Tahash, and Makai.
- Sarah lived 127 years. These were the years of the life of Sarah. And Sarah died at Kiriath Arbor, that is Hebron, in the land of Canaan.
- And Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. And Abraham rose up from before his dead and said to the Hittites, I am a sojourner and foreigner among you.
- [1 : 52] Give me property among you for a burying place, that I may bury my dead out of my sight. The Hittites answered Abraham, Hear us, my Lord.
- You are a prince of God among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will withhold from you his tomb to hinder you from burying your dead.
- Abraham rose and bowed to the Hittites, the people of the land. 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 the city. No, my Lord, hear me. I give you the field and I give you the cave that is in it.
- [3 : 08] 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 fields. Accept it from me that I may bury my dead there. Ephron answered Abraham, My Lord, listen to me, a piece of land worth 400 shekels of silver.
- What is that between you and me? Bury your dead. Abraham listened to Ephron. And Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver that he had named in the hearing of the Hittites, 400 shekels of silver according to the weights current among the merchants.
- 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 possession in the presence of the Hittites before all who went in at the gate of his city.
- After this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah east of Mamre, that is Hebron, in the land of Canaan.
- [4 : 27] The field and the cave that is in it were made over to Abraham as property for a bearing place by the Hittites.

Amen. And may God bless to us his words. Amen. Well, do turn with me, if you would, to Genesis chapter 23 and the passage we read there together.

Now, this passage today is a good place to pause our studies in Genesis for the moment because you'll see the last verses there of chapter 22 with the little genealogy.

It's a bookend, if you like, that encloses the whole of the main story of Abraham. It began with a genealogy of his father at the end of chapter 11 and ends with this one here.

And that gives a structure to the story of Abraham, but it does more than that, actually. It drops in a little reminder that this story, of course, isn't principally Abraham's story.

[5 : 41] It's actually something far, far bigger. It's God's story. And, of course, that doesn't end here. This story is of his great promise of salvation.

It's a story that marches on and will march on right through the generations. What if you notice that little reminder there in verse 23? It's just three words.

It's an aside in brackets in our Bibles. Bethul fathered Rebekah. So in the middle of this list of 12 names of the sons of Nahor, there's just one of his grandchildren mentioned.

And it's the only girl, Rebekah. Why is that? Well, of course, the writer is prompting us, isn't he, to keep on, read on, and see, because this little girl, Rebekah, is going to be something rather special.

What he's saying is keep your eye on Rebekah. She's the future. Funny enough, I rather remember thinking something similar myself about 30 years ago, but that's another story I'm not talking about here.

[6 : 49] But you see, before we get this whole story of a death, the death of Sarah, Abraham's wife, Isaac's mother, before we get into that, Abraham's giving us a little information of the future.

He drops in the name of Isaac's future wife, the name of the one who would bear the promised seed, the one who would be the mother of Jacob, literally the mother of Israel.

So what he's saying is don't worry, God's got the future in hand. Nothing can interrupt his gracious purpose, not even death. Not even what we fear most, not even what we grieve over can ever throw God's ultimate purpose off track.

Not for Abraham's family and not for your family or mine. And God wants his people to know that. He wants us to know that, especially when we're about to face painful things and grievous things.

In the world, said the Lord Jesus, you will have tribulation. But take heart, I've overcome the world. Don't fear, don't despair, especially in times of sadness.

[8 : 10] And of darkness. Bethul fathered Rebecca. Three little words there, just in parenthesis. But those words spell hope. Hope for the future.

And in fact, it is hope that totally surrounds this story here in Genesis chapter 23. Because it's all about a grave that preaches hope.

It may seem a rather strange story for us. And I have to say, lots of scholars seem to be rather baffled as to why this story is here. But when we understand what it's really about, it could not be more wonderful to bring us real encouragement and real hope.

And of course, that's what the Apostle Paul tells us. The Old Testament is written for. To bring us encouragement and hope. So let's look at it then under three headings. First of all, look at verses 1 and 2, which are all about the tears of real grief.

Sarah lived 127 years. These were the years of the life of Sarah. And Sarah died at Kiriath-arba, that is Hebron, in the land of Canaan.

[9 : 18] And Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. Sarah's death is a cause of real grief, real pain to Abraham.

Remember, this is the man who is a giant of the faith. He's the friend of God. This is the man who overcame kings, who weathered extraordinary trials. He even obeyed God's command to the extent that he was on the point of offering his own son on the altar of God.

And he could do that because the New Testament tells us he so trusted God that he knew God could raise the dead. This is a man who had real resurrection faith.

And yet in the place of bereavement and loss, we see him mourning and weeping for Sarah, his beloved wife, his partner of more than 60 years.

This is the grief, isn't it, of the real saints of God. It's real pain. We're told Sarah was 127. She was very, very old. And of course, in our culture today that so idolizes youth, we sometimes think, well, the death of somebody old can't be nearly as bad as the loss of somebody young.

[10 : 36] Well, of course, the loss of a young person, especially a child, that is very devastating. But don't forget the grief of the elderly. When you think to yourself, oh, well, you know, he was in his 80s.

Or she was over 90. They had good innings. When somebody's been married for more than 60 years, as Abraham had been to Sarah, to lose your life partner like that, that's losing a part of yourself.

That's a devastating loss. And there can't be, can there, anything but the tears of real grief, real loss. I remember reading about William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, and something that he said to his sons when they were on the way home from his wife's funeral, from burying his wife.

He said to them, we no longer have a home, just a house and some furniture. And that's the expression, isn't it, of real personal grief and pain, even from the lips of a giant of the faith.

Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah, to weep for her. And as Christian believers, we know, don't we? We know that death is conquered. We know that like Abraham knew it, even more than Abraham knew it.

[11 : 54] We know that we grieve, not as those who have no hope. But we do grieve. And we do shed tears, because death is still an enemy.

Death is the last enemy, says Paul. And only when the Lord Jesus comes again, will that last enemy be destroyed utterly and forever. Only then will every tear be wiped away.

But until then, the saints of God will grieve. And we'll weep. Tears of real grief. And by the way, that's why it's so insensitive.

It's just foolish, isn't it, when sometimes Christians want to pretend that that isn't so. And they'll say, oh, well, so-and-so was a believer, so we mustn't weep. We must just celebrate and clap and shout hallelujah.

No, no, no tears at the funeral. Well, Abraham shed tears. He went in to weep and mourn for Sarah.

[12 : 54] Because even the greatest ones of faith know that our full salvation is in the future. That this world will always be under the shadow of death.

And that Christian joy, although it is real, does not exclude real pain. The Lord Jesus understood that, didn't he? He wept at his friend's grave.

He who is the resurrection of the life and the life, he himself understands our tears. And we need to understand the tears of the grieving too, don't we?

Sarah wasn't a faultless wife, we know that, but she was a faithful one. She was a woman of real faith. She's held up as an example of faith in the New Testament. And Abraham here also is an example to believers.

Just like the Lord Jesus, he also shed tears of real grief. So don't be afraid of the tears of grief. If you're grieving for the loss of a loved one, a life partner perhaps, a parent, a child, the Lord knows.

[14 : 01] He understands your tears. He's a God who weeps with you. He's said to us that our tears are precious to him. Psalm 56 says he keeps our tears in a bottle.

He records them in his book. Don't be afraid of the tears of grief and don't be afraid to share in the tears and the griefs of others. Often we don't know what to say, do we, when people are grieving.

It's hard and we know we want to share these burdens, but sometimes we find it difficult to know what to say. Sometimes, you know, we don't need to say anything. The Bible just tells us to rejoice with those who rejoice and to weep with those who weep.

And I know sometimes when I've been grieving, it's not particularly people's words that I've wanted. It's just their tears alongside mine. Those things alone can be a great comfort, can't they?

Abraham went into mourn, to weep for Sarah, the tears of real grief. And yet, of course, life must go on, even in the face of death and of great loss.

[15 : 10] And there is a danger, isn't there, that grief can overcome and paralyze us. And that's why it's not just good psychology, it's actually good theology to have to face up to all the tasks in hand.

There's things to be done, there's arrangements to be made, there's a funeral, there's a burial, this sorting out affairs and so on. So verse 3, we're told Abraham arose from before his dead wife to make these funeral arrangements to organize Sarah's burial.

But there's more to this here than just Abraham keeping busy to help him cope. There's more here than just normal funeral arrangements. And that's what explains the great length of this text, which is all about securing for Sarah exactly the right grave.

It may seem strange to us at first, but these verses have a very powerful message about real faith. Because they tell us that amid the tears of real grief, Abraham nevertheless bears witness to the tenacity of real faith.

That's what this whole complicated story about bargaining over graves and so on with the Hittites, that's what it's about. It's about the tenacity of his real faith. Sarah's burial is for Abraham an act of real and determined faith.

[16 : 36] That might not seem like that at first to us. Certainly we can see the tenacity. There's three rounds of bargaining. You'll see each begins the same way with Abraham opening a discussion with the Hittites in verse 3.

And then again in verse 7 and in verse 13, Abraham rose up and said to the Hittites, Abraham rose and bowed down and said to the people of the land and so on, what's going on here?

Well, it might seem strange, mightn't it, to be haggling at the time of a funeral. It seems like it's in rather bad taste to us. I suppose that's why some undertakers undertakers can fleece people, can't they?

Because they can make them buy all kinds of expensive and unnecessary things that nobody really needs for a funeral. But nobody wants to be seen to be mean and stingy when their loved one's just died, do they?

It's bad taste. People can be exploited. But that's not what this is about. We mustn't miss what this is really about. Verse 4, Abraham says, he's just a sojourner, a foreigner.

[17 : 46] He's a resident alien in this land. And yet, he's determined here that he will have property in possession as a grave for Sarah.

Verse 4, give me property, he says. And he's so determined to have it that he's willing to push and bargain and pay very heavily so that he gets it.

A fully-fledged, permanent, everlasting, resting place in the land of promise. In the place where the living God has said he dwells.

Look at Abraham's tenacity. Look at his skill in negotiating this real estate. We have to see what's going on behind the facade, the facade of politeness and flattery.

That it's all part of a typical business transaction in the Middle Eastern culture. First of all, in round one, in verses 3 to 6, Abraham requests property as a burial place.

[18 : 45] And it seems at first, doesn't it, that he strikes gold because they say to him, oh, we see you're a prince of God. You can have any of our tombs that you like. But actually, Abraham hadn't asked for a tomb, had he?

He'd asked for property, for real estate, for his own piece of land. And what they'd offered, actually, was just the loan of a tomb in verse 6.

Use one of ours, they say. Now, why is that significant? Well, because as a foreigner, as a sojourner, as a resident alien, Abraham wouldn't normally be allowed to own real estate.

It's often the way in some countries, isn't it? Because if he did own real estate, he wouldn't be a resident alien anymore. He'd be a fully-fledged member of society.

He'd have all the equal rights and privileges with the Hittites. So the Hittites honor Abraham, they flatter Abraham. But what they don't want is for Abraham to actually be part of their own landowner's club.

[19 : 46] And that's the unexpressed subtext that's going on here. But Abraham is very tenacious. And Ryan 2 begins there in verse 7. You see, very lightly, he bows to them.

And very skillfully, he picks up on their generous offer. He says, oh, thank you very much. You're very understanding. Well, yes, I would love one particular tomb. It's just a cave at Machpelah.

And if Ephraim will sell it to me, not just loan it, I'll pay top dollar. As long as it's all public and proper, verse 9. As long as we'll do the deal in your presence, in full view of everybody.

It's a very small thing, he says. It's just a cave at the bottom of a field. Well, verse 10, you see, Ephraim just happens to actually be there in person. Well, of course, Abraham knows that very well.

And either Ephraim smells a big profit for himself, or else perhaps he thinks he can put Abraham right off by saying to him, well, you see, it's not quite so simple.

[20 : 52] Look at verse 11. That's what he's saying. He's saying, you see, without that cave, well, the whole field is useless. It's all part and parcel of one thing. Imagine him saying something like this.

You see, nobody would want to buy a field like that and build a house on it if there's a graveyard at the bottom of it. We'd probably think like that, wouldn't we? So what he's saying is, it's all of a piece.

Oh, well, I'll give you the whole thing, he says in verse 11. And Abraham does very well that that's the customer way of just saying, look, mate, it's all or nothing. And I want a good price for the whole lot.

Don't think you can just buy that little bit at the bottom. So the final round begins in verse 12. And Abraham calls Ephraim's bluff. And he says very loudly, in everyone's hearing, verse 13, oh, that's very generous of you.

But of course, I could never accept that as a gift. Name your price. And I'll pay it in full. And Ephraim, you see, he seizes the moment. Price, ah, well.

[21 : 53] Did I mention it's a mere 400 shekels? But what's that to a man of your substance? I mean, it's just a trifling thing, isn't it, between men like us?

In fact, we can't be sure, but it seems very likely, actually, that was an exorbitant sum. If you read later on in the Bible, in 2 Samuel chapter 24, hundreds of years later, David bought the whole of the threshing floor of a runner for a mere 50 shekels.

And that included all his livestock, all his oxen. And that was a piece of land big enough for the entire temple of God in Jerusalem to be built on, hundreds of years later, for a fraction of this price.

So it seems like, actually, this was an exorbitant price. But the point is, do you notice, Abraham didn't haggle with him at all, totally against the custom.

He immediately accepted the full offer price in the sight of the public gaze, verse 16. And immediately, he actually weighs out the silver in front of all of the Hittites, using their own scales, their own currency.

[23 : 02] So no one could ever gainsay that Abraham had got undisputed legal title to this piece of real estate, a permanent property.

It's a story of tenacity and negotiation, for sure. But you might be saying, well, what on earth has that got to do with faith? And why on earth does somebody who was quite happy to be a sojourner or a resident alien all through his life, to have no land, to have no settled house, just to live in tents, why on earth is he so determined that he has to have a permanent piece of real estate for a grave?

Well, the answer is, because of his faith in the promise of God, the promise of a future, the promise of a destiny with the God of promise in the land of promise.

Abraham wasn't going to follow custom and take his wife back to their homeland and bury her in the Ur of the Chaldees. He was going to bury her right there in the promised land and in a permanent bit of land that would belong to him forever and ever.

And that is because he knew that the future of his family was real and that it lay in that place, in the land, in the kingdom of his God, the Lord, the covenant God who made that promise to him.

[24 : 37] See, there's a paradox here, isn't there? Verse 4, he says, literally, a sojourner and a foreigner am I. There's a great pathos in that statement.

And it's often at times a bereavement, isn't it, that we feel very keenly that sense of homelessness in this world, in our earthly pilgrimage. And yet, at the same time, that also can be a great comfort because that very sense of homelessness here points us to the wonderful reality of where our true home actually is, our eternal home.

When Hudson Taylor's wife died in China, he wrote this to somebody, love gave the blow that for a little time makes the desert more dreary, but heaven more home-like.

I feel like I've often echoed that sentiment to me when they've lost a loved one in the Lord. They've often said things like this, I'm sure they've said it to you, that the thought of heaven has suddenly become that bit more wonderful and they long for it more than ever before.

As long as people can be a bit pompously pious and say, no, no, no, you shouldn't be longing for your loved ones to see them again, you should be longing just to see Jesus in heaven. Well, don't be more holy and pompous than the apostle Paul.

[26 : 01] He wrote to the Thessalonians, didn't he, reminding them in their grief that they would be reunited with their loved ones when Jesus returns. And he said, be comforted, be encouraged by these things.

And that's what this chapter is about, you see. Abraham is tenacious in his faith in God's promise of the future. And that is why he's determined that Sarah will be buried in the land of promise.

He's determined that though he is a sojourner on earth, he will not be homeless in the future. This burial was an act of faith. You see, he's claiming for his wife and for himself and his family to follow him later.

He is claiming real estate in the place that God has promised as his eternal home. He was looking to the future, to his permanent dwelling place in God's land.

He was looking to the certain fulfillment of the promise that God had given him. In other words, he was looking to the day of resurrection, to permanent citizenship in God's city, in the city with real foundations.

[27 : 13] The Bible tells us the whole of Abraham's life was lived with that future in view. Listen to what the apostle tells us plainly in Hebrews chapter 11. He says this, Abraham went to live by faith in a land of promise as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise for he was looking forward to the city that has foundations whose designer and builder is God.

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

For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. They desire a better country that is a heavenly one. And therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God for he has prepared for them a city.

Abraham knew that. He was looking to that future. And so even in the darkness of bereavement and even in the midst of the tears of real grief, he shows the tenacity of real faith.

And he plants his dearest loved one in the land of promise in sure and certain hope of the fulfillment of the promise of God for a real future, for a real homeland, a heavenly country, a permanent city built by God.

[28 : 46] years ago, I read about the Moravian Church. They were started, remember, by Jan Hus, who was one of the very earliest Protestant reformers about 100 years before Martin Luther.

He was burnt as a heretic in Prague. But I remember reading that they call their graveyards in the Moravian Church, they call them God's Acre.

God's Acre. And they see themselves as planting their dead in God's Acre, like planting seeds waiting for them to grow. And actually, they bury their dead or certainly they used to traditionally, not in their nuclear families, but as they call them, by their choir, which meant by the place that they sat in church.

And so, as it were, the whole congregation would gradually be buried in church as they sat in life waiting for the resurrection of the dead. And traditionally, on Easter Sunday morning at sunrise, they would go and hold a service in the graveyard.

A wonderful picture of the whole congregation awaiting the resurrection, the church militant on earth alongside the church, triumphant in heaven, rejoicing in resurrection faith.

[29 : 58] I think that's a lovely expression of that resurrection hope. And see, that is what Abraham's faith is doing here. He's planting his beloved one in God's acre.

He's trusting God's promise for the future. And he's staking a permanent claim in the land of promise to an inheritance that he knew would be everlasting. And that's what God had promised back in Genesis 17, verse 8.

God promised him everlasting property, possession. That's the same word that's used three times in this passage here of property, verse 4 and 9 and verse 20.

I will be your God and your offspring's God, he says, and I will give you and your offspring the land as an everlasting possession, as permanent property.

How could Abraham possess the land forever personally along with his future offspring? well, only if he rises to live forever bodily.

[31 : 08] And that's why when Jacob died all those years later in Egypt, remember, he insisted also not to be buried in Egypt, but taken back to be buried in the land of promise in this same place, the cave of Machpelah.

And Joseph, do you remember, at the end of his life, he insisted that God in the future would come and lead his people out of Egypt and back to the land and he insisted that his bones were to be taken with them back to the land of promise.

And when you read in the book of Joshua, you read that he was buried there in the land of promise in the place that his father, Jacob, had bought and made his own centuries before. And you might ask yourself, why on earth all this interest in graves and in bones?

Well, friends, it's because the bones of God's people have a future. A permanent future in resurrection bodies, in a resurrected world.

That's the Christian hope. The Christian hope is not to be wisps and ghosts floating around in some disembodied state forever. Not at all. The Christian hope is for real flesh and blood bodies in a world of real substance where we will have real estate of our own, a real home forever that will never perish or fade.

[32 : 32] And that's what this chapter is reminding us of. It is a great resurrection chapter. In the even clearer language of the New Testament, it's exactly what Peter is telling us in the opening chapters of his first letter.

We sang a paraphrase of that at the beginning. Yes, says Peter, we are exiles, but we are elect exiles. We're born again into a living hope, he says, through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead to an inheritance, to property, to real estate that is undefiled, that is imperishable, that is unfading, and that is kept in heaven for us.

as we wait, even as Abraham waited, for a salvation ready to reveal only in the last time when Jesus returns. And friends, when we are walking the dark valley of the shadow of death, we need to be as tenacious in our faith as Abraham was in his.

We need our faith to remain fixed on that living hope that we have even more certainly than Abraham had it, of that glorious future harvest that will spring to life out of the plantings in God's acre that we sow with tears and sadness now, says the psalmist.

We will reap with great songs of joy. We have a living hope. And that brings me finally to these last verses, which in verses 17 to 20 show us some tokens of real hope.

[34 : 11] Because you see, the last few verses of the chapter emphasize that Sarah's grave was exactly that. It was a tangible token in the present of all the fulfillment of God's promises and provision for her life in the future.

Put your phone off Neely, would you? He doesn't know. There you go. See, this whole story is about just one little field. It's about one little unobtrusive cave at the end of a field.

But, it's something real, isn't it? It's something visible. And it was something that Abraham had. He had the title deeds.

And God had promised Abraham the whole land in the future for his offspring and also somehow for himself as well. In fact, God had promised him a city for eternity.

It was the forever God. You remember the everlasting God we saw last time who had promised him these things. And he'd lived his whole life standing on these promises and many others. But he also would die in faith, not yet having received these things, but having seen them from afar.

[35 : 18] But he did receive some things along the way. Small things, perhaps, but tokens of real hope. And that's what this chapter is about.

Look how it's framed. Look at the beginning. Sarah dies in verse 2. Where? In the land of Canaan. And she's buried at the end, verse 21. Where? In the land of Canaan.

In the promised land. Not just any old place, but in a place of Abraham's possession. Give me property, he says at the beginning. Something permanent.

Something that's ours forever. And look at verses 17 to 20. It tells us again and again, beyond doubt, that is what he got. A field, verse 18, properly made over to Abraham as a possession, as a purchase.

Permanent, not loaned. Publicly attested before everybody in the city gate. Verse 20, made over to Abraham as property, as permanent real estate.

[36 : 20] God had promised him an eternal future, an eternal home. A place that he would dwell forever, settle with God. And with the multitudes of God's people, all his spiritual offspring, in fulfillment of those great covenant promises.

And Abraham himself would die, having never yet seen it. Seen it only from afar in the future, knowing it was to be. But he didn't die without possessing a piece of it.

He had in his hands the title deeds to a stake in an everlasting possession. God's promise was on its way to fulfillment.

And it's rather wonderful, I think, that it was amid the tears of real grief that through the tenacity of real faith, God granted him these tokens of real hope. But that's our God, isn't it?

What a wonderful comfort to Abraham in the hour of grief and sadness and loss to know that God had not forgotten him. That God hadn't forgotten any of the promises he'd given him about these blessings to come, about a hope for a future.

[37 : 32] And that as a token of that hope, there was a real place there in time and history, a cave in Hebron. very near Mamre, says verse 19.

Do you remember? Mamre was the place where God had given so many of those promises to Abraham about the wonderful future. And here was a place near where those promises were given that he could go and see and stand and touch.

It was a standing witness to the reality of that promise being fulfilled already in part, tangible, a token in the present of a future still to be revealed.

Think of Moses' first readers hearing this after decades in the wilderness as they're about to enter the land of Canaan, carrying the box with Joseph's bones in it and to know that they would soon come to a place where they would see where Abraham and Sarah were buried, a place that speaks about God's promise being fulfilled, a standing witness to the past and to the future, telling them that their faith is not in vain, that their hope in God can be fully assured, seeing that grave that preached to them the hope of God's glorious promise, the hope it preached to Abraham and to all his offspring.

And think about us today, the people of God who are in Christ, who are Abraham's true offspring, who are heirs of this same promise of the future. Aren't we also people who can look to a grave that preaches hope to us, a real tomb, in a real cave, in real time, in history, in a real place, not so far away actually from Hebron, but by Jerusalem, a glorious grave that preaches hope, the hope, the same hope of resurrection and everlasting life.

[39 : 36] Not because that grave has within it the bones of a patriarch, but because that grave is empty. Because Abraham's true and great seed, the Lord Jesus Christ, conquered death, rose from the grave.

So that we also might have that same hope, the hope of resurrection, the hope of redemption of our bodies made absolutely sure and certain. And of course, we're still waiting for that too, aren't we, as Abraham is.

But in the empty tomb of Jesus, you see, we have a wonderful token of real hope. Because He is the firstfruits and His resurrection is the down payment that guarantees ours.

And we too have an inheritance that's promised in Him. We don't yet possess it all just as Abraham doesn't. But we still have that down payment. In fact, we have something permanent as well, don't we?

Because the Apostle Paul tells us that when we believe, we were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire full possession of it.

[40 : 46] And the presence even now of the Holy Spirit in the midst of the church, He brings us, doesn't He, tokens of real hope. Hope for that promised future. Just think of the everyday means of grace that God's given us just in the fellowship that we have in the church with other believers.

The hope that we see when we see other people coming to faith. That's a tangible token, isn't it, of God's promise at work. Of His promise being fulfilled and of the certainty of its ultimate fulfillment.

I've often said what Dick Lucas used to say, do you want to see a real miracle? Well, look around in church at the person sitting next to you. There is a miracle of the grace of God. And isn't it true that our lives also are often punctuated with so many gracious tokens of real hope that remind us, especially in dark times, especially in times of grieving and suffering, that God hasn't forgotten us, that He's alive, that He cares, that He still loves us, that there is a hope for the future.

Answered prayers are tokens of real hope, aren't they, reminding us that God is real. Sometimes it's a striking word in our daily readings that seem to just speak into our situation in life right now.

Or maybe it's a letter or an email or a contact from someone that we don't expect. All of these things, they can come to us, can't they, as tokens of real hope, reminders. Maybe little things in themselves apparently insignificant, like a cave at the end of a field.

[42 : 21] But real things, tokens that remind us that even in our tears at times, which can be many, can't they, and very bitter, but remind us that our faith isn't in vain, that our hope can be assured.

That's what the cave of Machpelah was to Abraham. It was a grave that preached to him hope, hope for the future. It was a reminder to him of the God who is fulfilling his promises tangibly in history and that he will bring all of his promises to fruition in eternity, forever.

But aren't you glad that at the very heart of our faith we also have a grave in real time, in real history, in a real place, a tangible token, an empty grave a grave that preaches hope, sure and certain, for our future.

Let's pray. Lord, even amid the tears of real grief, we pray that you'd grant us also the same tenacity of real faith to grasp hold of your glorious promises so that you'll open our eyes to see and to rejoice in the bountiful tokens of real hope that bless our path so often by your grace as we walk with you day by day in this veil of tears.

Help us, Lord, to grasp hold of these things so that we may live now for the glory of Christ and then hereafter we may know that we shall live forever in that glory with you.

[44 : 20] Thank you for the encouragement and the hope that we have in these scriptures and may they live in our hearts today, we pray for Jesus' sake.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.