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Sermon

July 11th, Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (Rev 1:5-6 NKJ)

Our sermon text for this Sunday is taken from the 25th chapter of Genesis, starting at verse 7:

The total days and years of Abraham's life were one hundred seventy-five years. 8 Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man who lived a full life, and he was gathered to his people. 9 His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the Cave of Machpelah in the field of Ephron, the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is near Mamre. 10 This was the field that Abraham had purchased from the descendants of Heth. Abraham was buried there with Sarah, his wife.

This is the Word of the LORD!!!

Mercy, Grace, and peace are yours through your God and Father, and through His Son, Jesus Christ, true God and Man, dear fellow Sons and Daughters of the King...

What do you consider to be old? Perhaps that's a bit of a sliding scale relevant to your own particular age. 40 is the age when you're officially "over the hill", or so they say. Is 60 old? 70? Certainly, 80...right?

I am not trying to get the congregation mad at me. There is actually Biblical evidence of this. Moses, a man who lived to be 120, wrote in Psalm 90, **The days of our lives are seventy years; And if by reason of strength they are eighty years, Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; For it is soon cut off, and we fly away. (Psa 90:10 NKJ)** As of 2018, the life expectancy in the United States is 78.5 years. Some people die at a young age. Some well outlive a typical life span. Just a few weeks ago, the Guinness World Record for oldest living man was set by one Emilio Marquez. He is 112 years young and will be 113 in August.

Yet, we know from the Bible that people used to live for much longer. Before the flood, Methuselah lived to the ripe old age of 960, just 40 years shy of 1,000! God had determined that He would henceforth limit that number. Today, we are pretty blessed to see 80.

But Abraham wasn't "over the hill" when he saw his 80th birthday. He lived to be 175. Why? Why did he live such a long time? Because God had promised him as much. But in the end, he still died. That's what we

do. You can be blessed with a long life, but we're all going to die unless Jesus returns first.

We can we take away a few things from the death of Abraham. It's always good to be reminded that the things of this world pass away, and that we are no exception. But, for the believer, death is not the end. It's not a final period, rather it's an ellipsis. There is still more to come. Today, we will have a eulogy of the victorious. It mentions the memorable and it provides closure, but it's never the end. And so we pray: LORD, SANCTIFY US BY YOUR TRUTH, YOUR WORD IS TRUTH, AMEN!

Do you know the difference between a eulogy and an obituary? You might if you have had to bury a loved one and produced these things. An obituary is a brief biography about a person, and often it gets published in the paper or online and it announces the funeral service. A eulogy is a bit different. It is a speech given for the departed loved one. It praises and honors the memory of the person.

What we have before us today is more of an obituary than it is a eulogy. **The total days and years of Abraham's life were one hundred seventy-five years.**

This merely is a short and simple summery of Abraham's life, and it announces his death. One could

write a long and descriptive eulogy for Abraham. He is basically the human narrative for most of the book of Genesis. Because we have been given so much information about Abraham from the Holy Spirit, we could really write a long eulogy about his life, and we never met the man!

Yet at the same time, this brief obituary says a lot with just a few words: **Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man who lived a full life, and he was gathered to his people.**

When he had died, the Bible says it was a “good old age”. We tend to think about old age as “bad”. Age can be a sensitive topic because it reminds us how far we might be from our “prime”. It can also be sensitive because it can remind us at least statistically how close we might be from death. But a long life is nothing to scoff at or despise. As the insurance slogan goes, “We know a thing or two because we’ve seen a thing or two...”

This verse is more than just listing a number. It’s also another example of the LORD keeping His Word. In our sermon text from 4 weeks ago, when God promised **"Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. (Gen 15:15 NKJ)** That is exactly what happened! Abraham was 75 when He first was called by the LORD to leave his hometown. He was 175 when the LORD called him to his eternal home. He spent 100 years walking with the promises of the LORD. He saw His promises fulfilled and then some!

The fact that Abraham was alive for so long is worth mentioning. But it’s not the only thing that would be in his final paragraph. Obituaries are still printed in newspapers, and they are interesting reads. You can read the life stories of people who you’ve never met. But they are also unique because of what they do not say. They often are a list of the highlights in life. The things they did, the people they interacted with, the places they lived. They, however, hardly mention the lowlights.

Abraham was a man. A human who trusted in the LORD. He did some incredible things. The Bible lists

them. He also did sinful things, some of which is also listed. Our text is only a brief obituary and is hardly a eulogy. But the book of Hebrews has a good one. **By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; 10 for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. (Heb 11:8-10 NKJ)**

Abraham, like all of us, saw a lot of sin and grace. The Bible says, **"Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." (Rom 4:3 NKJ)** And that’s the real eulogy. So often, funerals miss this point. Yes, when people die it is easy to say nice things about them. Some see it to be distasteful to bring up the bad things they did. “You don’t speak ill of the dead”. But for the Christian, it’s irrelevant. When I die, I don’t want people saying how I was such a good person. I’m not good. I am SINFUL! What did Jesus say in our Gospel reading this morning? **No one is good but One, that is, God.** We are not “good” people. He truly is. The only reason we can be good is due to our Good Shepherd. That’s why when the Christian dies, it’s not about them, it’s all about Christ and what He did for them!

A good eulogy provides closure. That’s what funerals and victory services are all about. The person who died is gone. They have their closure. But we remain. We struggle with the loss of someone we loved. Closure is all about moving on.

When Abraham died, there was closure as well. **9 His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the Cave of Machpelah in the field of Ephron, the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is near Mamre. 10 This was the field that Abraham had purchased from the descendants of Heth. Abraham was buried there with Sarah, his wife.**

No doubt, there was probably resentment and strife with these two sons of Abraham. Imagine being Ishmael. Your half-brother, who is 14 years younger than you, is the heir, legitimate. When he was born, Ishmael and Hagar were cast out. It must have been hard. Yet, the two brothers were able to come together and bury their father.

Abraham was blessed with long life. But this meant that he would witness his wife's death. In chapter 23, we have the account of Sarah's death. Abraham buys this cave from Zohar the Hittite to bury her in. He paid a pretty penny for it. 400 shekels of silver, a ridiculous amount...

When people are grieving and looking for closure, they can be taken advantage of. Funeral homes can charge stupendous amounts of money for coffins and urns. Does the price of the box you are buried in really matter? Some caskets can be in the \$10,000 range. A person in a plywood casket is no different than a person in a mahogany and bronze one. They are both still dead.

When Abraham bought the cave from Zohar the Hittite in the land of Mamre, he most certainly was being taken advantage of. But Abraham didn't squabble. His wife would be buried there. And he would be buried with her when he died.

But this wasn't just highway robbery. It was an act of faith. God had promised him this very land which he had forked over 400 shekels of silver for. He made a point to pay for it. He needed a place in the promised land which his descendants would one day live. Even when Abraham was grieving over the death of his wife, he still trusted in the promise of the LORD.

When a loved one of ours dies, we too struggle with grief. I don't care what your faith level is, death still hurts. It's painful. It's the unintended result of sinful people living in a sinful world. When a loved one dies, a lifelong spouse like Sarah, or a loving Father like Abraham, we look for comfort and closure. That fact that the loved one was a good person doesn't fully comfort. The fact that the loved one had a long and full life also does not comfort. So how do we move on?

There is a detail in this story that has the key for this. You may have missed it. **8 Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man who lived a full life, and he was gathered to his people.**

The phrase here that Moses by the Holy Spirit describes is special. **he was gathered to his people.** This is the first time that this phrase is used in the bible, but it is used later. What does that phrase mean exactly?

Here is where I disclose that I do not know exactly what it means. I have some ideas, but I cannot insist on them. I think that when this phrase is used, it is similar to how the death of later kings of Israel is described: **So David rested with his fathers, and was buried in the City of David. (1Ki 2:10 NKJ)** Or, it is like when Jesus said that Lazarus, even though he had already died, was merely sleeping. I think that "gathered to his people" is in the same vein as those phrases. Quite simply, He went to heaven.

But the phrase is interesting. Notice, it is spoken first. Then afterward it talks about burial. It makes me think of Abraham's spiritual significance. He was gathered to "his people" that is, a people who were his. Father Abraham had many sons, and many sons had Father Abraham. Those who die trusting in the LORD, they have the same faith that Abraham had. They too are accounted as righteous.

Abraham's body would rest in the **Cave of Machpelah**, and that remains the case to this day. Apparently, there is now a shrine over that cave. It has an interesting history. It was at first a basilica, then it converted into a mosque, than it was retaken during the crusades, and once more taken back and reconverted. Abraham and his family's bones are there, but that's not really all that important. That's not really where they are. It's just where they left behind some things.

This is a point that Jesus emphasized. Once, being tested by the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, He responded to them,

"But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, 32 `I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob '? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." (Mat 22:31-32 NKJ)

God **IS** the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They are not just dead. They are with their God and LORD. Their bodies remain in that cave. But they will not remain their forever.

Have you buried some loved ones? Where are they buried? Where do you plan on being buried? Again, people try to take advantage of people facing these questions. They try to upsell you on a certain choice burial plot, or even get you to spring for a mausoleum. It does not matter! If you buried a loved one, guess what? It's not their final resting place! Those who trust in the LORD are at rest with Him now! **But those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint. (Isa 40:31 NKJ)**

He is not the God of the dead, but of the living! It doesn't really matter where you are buried because your final resting place is in heaven with your LORD!

How do we have comfort and closure in the face of death? How do we move on? Abraham was laid in a cave. But that cave pointed ahead to another one!

The fact that Jesus did not remain in His tomb is evidence that Abraham will not remain in his. Jesus died to pay for our sins and was raised for our justification. Death did not hold Him. **But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. (Rom 8:11 NKJ)**

One day, those patriarchs of faith will come out of that cave. One day, the loved ones that you have buried will no longer be in earth. They will be in the body! You also! Why should old age frighten us? Because we are closer to death? Age has nothing to do with death! Sin does! The older you are, the more

grace you have received from your LORD! Whenever you do die, you are not simply buried. No! You are gathered to your people!

Paul writes **For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. (1Co 13:12 NKJ)** When you age, your eyesight starts to go. But, as you start to lose your ability to see, the sooner your real sight will be restored. Right now, we see a dim reflection. But when we are gathered to our people by faith in the LORD, that is the moment when we finally see clearly. No matter how old and learned you are, right now we only know so much. But when you are with Jesus forever, then you know just as you are known!

People often struggle with writing obituaries for loved ones who have recently died. They want to make sure they get it all correct. Except for the mistakes that loved one made. Obituaries and eulogies are all about "how should we remember this person".

Here in our text, **Abraham breathed his last.** It is quite the thing to witness, the last breath of a person. Perhaps you have been there when this has happened. It is something that is hard to forget, but many want to. We don't want to remember our loved one broken down, unable to draw another breath. We want to remember them the way they really were.

That is the beauty of having faith. Once you have been given faith in Christ, then you know that death is not the end. We have been baptized into His death. His righteousness has been given to us! His obituary becomes yours as well. He died, but He rose again! So too shall we! Our death is never the end. Your obituaries are not finished! You will see God. You will be raised from the dead. Where He is, there we will be also! Never apologize for old age or imminent death. All it means is you are that much closer to having your sight fully restored! All praise and thanks be to Jesus Christ, the LORD of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and You! He is the LORD of the living! AMEN!!!