

Now faith is the confidence in what we hope for and the assurance about what we do not see.

If you've been following our series on the life of Abraham you won't be surprised why it concludes today. V 8 of Genesis 25:

Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man full of years; and he was gathered to his people.

It's the sort of summary that reads like an assessment of a fruitful, worthwhile life.

The kind of eulogy you might hear at many a funeral that reflects a fulfilled life. ***'He had a good innings'*** is the phrase that comes to mind.

It can be fitting to recognise the legacy of a life 'well lived'. Perhaps the surprise for us as we read v 8 of Genesis 25 is that Abraham died still longing.

So that's the question this morning 'What are you longing for?'

I want to answer the question from Hebrews 11, our second reading.

Specifically, v 16:

Instead, they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Our message today is in two parts:

- 1. Abraham's Longing**
- 2. Our Longing**

Abraham's Longing

People who've lived lives in the public sphere are often asked: *'If you could do it all again, would you do it differently?'*

The most troubling answer is the person who boldly declares *'I wouldn't change a thing!'* while most of us are thinking we could probably give them a few suggestions.

When we look back at the life of Abraham we'd probably make a few suggestions about his decision-making.

We have a love for this thing called Reality TV. We kind of know it's 'rigged' TV but we enjoy feeling just a little bit closer to the characters on the screen. Whether they're cooking or building for the prize, or surviving for their lives on some remote island.

Abraham and Sarah present like they'd be good candidates for Reality TV. Lots of messy moments in their lives that could be embellished. We'd have to call it '*The Old and the Restless*'.

So we're perhaps surprised by the author of Genesis 25's assessment:

⁷ Abraham lived a hundred and seventy-five years. ⁸ Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people.

He was given an honourable death. Buried by his sons in the plot where Sarah was buried.

But the text moves on pretty quickly. V 11:

After Abraham's death, God blessed his son Isaac, who then lived near Beer-Lahai-Roi

And this is the author's intent. Abraham's longing is shaped by what God has made of his life.

The person who says '*I wouldn't change a thing*' almost certainly hasn't encountered the true and living God of the universe. Who through the Lord Jesus Christ says 'I'm changing everything'.

If you don't feel like your life has been turned upside down since coming to Christ - or perhaps we should say, put up the right way - then you're probably just aiming for self-sufficiency. The '*I wouldn't change a thing*' life.

Abraham's longing is shaped by what God has made of his life. His promises are the eternal reference point for assessing what really matters when it comes to our longings, our desires, our hopes, our future.

Either side of our Abraham eulogy we read genealogies. Testimony to God's promises – Genesis 12 - that through Abraham there would be many descendants of God's blessing.

Yet at the same time the author says in v 11 that Isaac is where we should look for that seed God had promised. There is divine direction in this passage.

Abraham's longing has him looking forward, not back. The best is yet to come. Even when his earthly life had been so full of blessings.

We've all known that sobering phrase '*It's time to get your affairs in order.*' Sometimes it comes to us in the most overwhelming of circumstances.

Perhaps you've experienced it yourself. Perhaps you're there now. I pray you're not there on your own.

If you're in Christ you can be quite certain you're not. At a very profound level Christ's work on the cross put your affairs in order.

By the power of his Holy Spirit you have a longing like Abraham. You have been given a view of what is to come. You have one hand gripping eternity.

You long to see his promises come true. Just as you've seen them come true when he redeemed and restored and renewed you through his victorious death and resurrection.

Full of years. Gathered to his people. We're meant to note that Abraham's longing had been realised. God had blessed his life, and now he had brought him home.

In death we talk about paying our last respects. And there is something appropriate about that human act.

If you have died in Christ remember there was a payment made on the cross that reaches to the throne room of God. And there are three words that must have come to Abraham's as he was 'gathered to his people, to enter into the presence of his God:

no more longing!

Abraham may have been buried respectfully by his sons, but it was not his funeral we are meant to note in this passage. It is the faithfulness of his God. He longed for his promises.

My second point. Where is your longing?

Our Longing

The New Testament writers are unapologetic about the place of Abraham's faith in the eternal plan and purposes of God.

We can go to Romans, Galatians, or James, to understand how even this fragile and flawed servant of God was none the less by God's grace used to achieve his purposes to bring us to Christ.

Our second reading from Hebrews ties his longing to what should be our longing. Hebrews 11:1:

Now faith is the confidence in what we hope for and the assurance about what we do not see.

V 8. By faith Abraham obeyed. V 9 By faith Abraham lived like a stranger in a foreign country. V 10. By faith he looked forward to the city with foundations whose architect and builder is God.

I've never been much into camping. Give me the blessing of the outdoors. But please can I enjoy it in comfort.

But the reference to tents in v 9 is quite deliberate. Don't let this world become so permanent in your longing that you can't be packed and ready to leave at any moment.

And the crux, the centrepiece, the cornerstone, of your longing is explained in v 13:

All these people were still living by faith when they died

And as they entered the city whose architect and builder is God there are three words written across the gateway at the entrance:

No more longing

There is one word in the English language that is mentioned more in the book of Hebrews than any other book in the bible.

It is a word that captures Christ's sacrifice for us. The redemption he's made for us. The life he has secured for us. The covenant he's made with us. The possessions he shares with us. The country he has for us. The resurrection he promises us.

A word that ties us to Abraham. To Christ. To each other in him. Hebrews 11:40

God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

Better. The longing God has placed within us.

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Confidence. Assurance. They are the bookends of your longing. They are the blessings of the promises of God that have come to us through Abraham's seed, the Lord Jesus Christ.

I hadn't seen it before in this passage, but I discovered why they are called longings. Listen again to the words of v 13:

They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth.

Longings are the promises of God that we welcome from a distance. Longings mean we take the long view. Only to discover that in the cross of Christ we draw near to God, who will finally draw us into his Kingdom when Jesus returns.

The day will come when there will be no more longing. According to Revelation 21 no more tears. No more death. Or mourning. Or crying. Or pain. For the old order of things has passed away.

I don't much care what they say about me at my funeral. Not much I can do about it really.

What you don't want them to say is 'I am sure if he had the chance to do it all again he'd do it just the same.' So if you're around at the time just check the eulogy beforehand if you wouldn't mind.

What I do want them to do is talk about Jesus Christ. That the blessings of his better sacrifice were the longing that triumphed over all longings this life might serve up.

And if they feel they have to say anything about my life, I pray they can group me in with the longing believers of Hebrews 11:16:

***Instead, they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one.
Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them***