

Senior Citizens

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[0 : 0 0] This is the evening service on October the 19th, 1997. The preacher is Dr. Paul Barker. The sermon is entitled Senior Citizens and is from Genesis chapter 5 verses 1 to 32.

What on earth do you make of all that long list of strange named people? Well, let's pray that God will help us to understand it. God, we recognize that in your word there are lots of things that are obscure, foreign, look rather boring and dull.

We pray tonight that you will open our eyes to see wonderful truths in your word. For Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. September the 1st, 1990.

It would have been Brett's eighth birthday, except for the fact that just three weeks before that, he'd been knocked down by a car and killed.

And I had been asked to take his funeral. And on his birthday three weeks after he died, his mother and two brothers were driven, I took them to the cemetery to visit the grave.

[1 : 2 9] They didn't have a car. So we drove to Springvale and we stood by the grave and we said some prayers and cried. But his two brothers, being fairly young, I think about age nine and five, didn't really want to stand there too long.

They wanted to explore. So I took them on a little walk around part of the cemetery at Springvale while Brett's mother still stood at the grave.

Brendan, the youngest, wanted to read names. He was only five and he wanted to find some interesting names on the graves and on the memorial plaques. The older brother, Graham, who was nine, he wanted to find out the oldest person and the youngest person who died.

And as we walked around the cemetery, we saw the graves and memorial stones for all sorts of different people, people who'd never met each other, people who had nothing in common with each other.

People who died old and full of years, people who died after long illnesses, people who died tragically young. Occasionally we saw people who were members of the same family who died on the same day, we presume, from an accident.

[2 : 4 9] All these unknown people, different stories but we didn't know them, different ages, different genders, different places of origin, different religions, all being buried or all having been buried.

at Springvale Cemetery. Different reasons for death and different loved ones left behind. But despite all those differences, there was one thing that every single one of them had in common.

they were dead. Fairly obvious, but quite significant. When we read Genesis chapter 5, it's like walking through a cemetery.

All sorts of strange names. Methuselah, Mahalalel, not the names we call our children these days. people that we don't really know very much about.

We don't know who their wives were, what their house was like, or what occupation they had. We don't know whether they travelled or what they did in retirement. Can you imagine the social security fund having to pay out somebody who's retired from the age of 65 to 969?

[4 : 03] But then on the other hand, imagine the superannuation contributions you'd have to make in your 30 or 40 years of work to cover the rest of your life. No, Genesis 5 is like a cemetery.

It is a list of dead people. And in fact, it emphasises the fact Thus all the days that Adam lived were 930 years and he died.

Thus all the days of Seth were 912 years and he died. Thus all the days of Enosh were 905 years and he died. Thus all the days of Kenan were 910 years and he died.

Thus all the days of Mahalal were 895 years and he died. And the same for Jared and the same for Methuselah and the same for Lamech. and at the end of it all Noah is still alive but if you read on into chapter 9 Noah also dies it's a list of dead people real people from a remote age all of them incredibly old but all dead what do we make of their incredible age?

not many of us would want to live to 99 let alone 969 well some people try and be clever and think well it's obviously talking about months not years so divide it all by 12 and you end up with something sensible and yes if you divide somebody who dies at age 969 by 12 because it's months not years you end up with somebody dying at age 80 and you think yes I've solved the problem but then how do you explain somebody who gives birth to a son at the age of 5?

[5 : 42] some people think it's talking about a dynasty so that Mahalalel is Mahalalel's dynasty like the house of Tudor or Windsor or the British royal family type houses but when you read it it's very clear that it's an individual it's an individual who gives birth to a son not a dynasty and they're connected through that son no it's not a dynasty no mathematical formula can solve the problem of the long lives that these people lived if indeed it's a problem it's obviously not a problem to the person who wrote it seems to be more a problem for us in our modern times some people like to think that it's astronomical significance to these numbers but yet there's no indication of that in the passage it's clearly meant to be the length of life that they lived we also know that from other ancient sources from other nations around about from about 2, 3, 4 thousand BC that they had long lists of kings and leaders and they lived a lot longer than these people did so maybe it's not such a problem after all indeed this passage is meant to tell us that these are real people who lived for a long time and then died what's it mean?

what's the significance? why is it here? last week's passage was really interesting Cain and Abel Cain killing Abel it's gripping stuff and next week's passage is world famous Noah and the flood and all those animals great children's stories but in the middle of it all we get this long list of people who died why?

one of the things it's saying for it's certainly emphasizing the fact that they died one of the things it's saying is this that as sin entered the world through Adam and Eve the first people and spread from generation to generation indeed all died for the wages of sin is death and that's what God said way back in the garden of Eden to Adam and Eve didn't he?

when you eat of this fruit you shall die you see the serpent had it wrong the serpent said to Eve and to Adam tempting them to eat the forbidden fruit oh you won't die ignore God he's wrong and they ate the fruit they were glad they didn't die immediately it took another 930 years well Adam was 930 years when he died we don't know how old he was when he was tempted in the garden you see this passage is telling us that God is right sin leads to death may take a while but what God says comes true in the end as Paul says in the New Testament in the book of Romans death reigned from Adam and here is the demonstration of that from Adam for 10 generations to Noah is what we've got here and he died and he died and he died and he died and he died and so on God is right sin leads to death and this passage shows us that the sin of Adam and Eve has spread last week we saw it spread to Cain the son of Adam and then through the line of Cain but here in a different line we find the same sort of thing all people are sinners is the Bible's consistent view here is that being portrayed in one particular way but of course it's not the end of the story is it if it were purely a statement of death then there wouldn't be succession

Adam died end of story and nobody lived happily ever after but this is a story of life as well as death there's a mixture here and therefore there are glimpses of hope yes all die but on the other hand there is life as well and indeed in this passage there are four important indications of hope and the purposes of God the first derives from what God first said to humanity in chapter 1 if you were here a few weeks ago you may remember he said to the first human beings that he made be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and God blessed them as they went forth to do just that and here what do we find we don't just find Adam having a son and him having one son and him having one son and at the end of it all you end up with one person but rather embedded in this list of people we find one son singled out but he also had other sons and daughters so what you find is a family tree spreading

[10:34] Adam and Eve had many sons and daughters only three of them ever get mentioned in the Bible and Seth the one that singled out here he had many sons and daughters and so did his key son have many sons and daughters but I'm sure if you added up all the sons and daughters of the sons and daughters of the sons and daughters of the sons and daughters going all the way back to not King Caractacus but Adam you end up with a huge multitude of people spread out across the earth it's showing that God's blessing is still at work despite the sinful humanity that's there God blessed humanity and said fill the earth and multiply and that's what's happening so there's a sign of hope because God's blessing doesn't expire as soon as sin enters the world well the second key pointer to hope is something you think I've obviously passed over by mistake probably thinking no you've got it wrong when you've said and he died and he died because there's one significant exception the chap called Enoch in verse 21 when Enoch had lived 65 years he became the father of Methuselah so far it's just like the previous generations

Enoch walked with God well that's a bit unusual because that's not mentioned of anybody else in this list after the birth of Methuselah 300 years and had other sons and daughters thus all the days of Enoch were 365 years basically it's saying what's been said of the previous ones but there's no and he died Enoch walked with God then he was no more because God took him it implies that Enoch didn't die rather somehow we don't know how God just took him alive up to heaven presumably to God's place just as happened with Elijah centuries later in the Old Testament and in a similar sort of way what happened with Jesus at his ascension as well taken up living from this earth to heaven indeed heaven and earth meeting together in these people you see in the midst of the cemetery there is hope because there is in a sense a grave spot that's unoccupied

Enoch's he didn't die he's in heaven and the reason for that that's given it's told twice it's stressed therefore it's something that we're meant to pay attention to he walked with God it's a fairly enigmatic expression isn't it we don't often describe people fellow Christians even as people oh they're walking with God as though we go down to Westerfold's Park to have an afternoon stroll with God or something like that what does it mean to walk with God it's a fairly rare expression in the Bible though there are related ones Abraham later on the great father of faith in the Bible walks before God not with him but before God similar sort of idea a little bit different it's probably a bit like the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve lived where God dwelt with them and God was walking in the cool of the day probably suggests that before the sin Adam and Eve and God would actually meet each other in the garden and perhaps walk together in the garden later on in the Old Testament one of the prophets summarizes in one sense some of the things that God wants of his people and one of those is to walk humbly with your God similar expression to what we get here about Enoch to walk with God we realize from that passage and others is something about holiness and uprightness of character it's a term denoting following and discipleship following God's laws not just once off oh today I walked with God but it's an ongoing repeated sort of process

Enoch walked with God that was his habit in his life to walk with God in the book of Deuteronomy God through Moses exhorts the Israelites to walk according to the ways of God similar expression not quite the same but the same sort of idea to make as your practice or habit obedience of God but also take note it's not talking about perfection it's not saying Enoch was perfect and he never sinned because the idea of walking with God or walking in the ways of God has the idea of humility about it first of all Micah the prophet said walk humbly with your God that is knowing your unworthiness knowing that you aren't perfect nonetheless able to walk humbly with your God the writer to the Hebrews in the New Testament centuries after these events of Genesis happened spoke of Enoch along with a whole list of other heroes of the Old Testament by faith

Enoch he says that is Enoch's walking with God is a demonstration of faith it's trusting God and faith is not doesn't mean we're perfect but rather faith knows that we're imperfect but God in his mercy forgives us both in the Old Testament and the New so for Enoch to walk with God doesn't mean that he was perfect but rather that he exercised humble obedient faith in God he trusted God he knew he was forgiven for his failures he responded to God not at a sense of pride but humility knowing his unworthiness but yet enjoying an intimacy with God Enoch therefore is a model for how God's people are meant to live to walk with God to walk with God in humility because we're not worthy of being God's people to walk with faith trusting God for all his promises to come true and part of that is trusting God that through Jesus' death we're forgiven that we don't need in a sense to be perfect because our sins are covered by Jesus' death on the cross

[16:44] Enoch therefore is a model for us a challenge to us even a promise for us that if we walk with God we will not taste death now maybe we're not going to be caught up to heaven as Enoch was but as we understand in the New Testament for those who do walk with obedience and humility and faith in God death has lost its sting death is nothing of any consequence for those who are Christian people because of Jesus' resurrection from the dead you see Enoch in the end points us to God not to himself Enoch points to a God who has got power to break into the cycle of death and bring life even in the midst of this symmetry of a chapter well that's the second glimmer of hope the first was that people were filling and multiplying across the earth the second is that

Enoch is the example for us to follow in a demonstration of God's power over death and the third one is the very line of people itself the line begins with Adam but his son is Seth Adam's third son the first Abel was killed by Cain and we saw Cain's line last week ending up in depravity and further sin and degradation Seth comes along provided by God to replace Abel the line itself you see is a glimmer of hope it is God's provision in a sinful world not just to replace Abel as though one son really can replace another but rather God producing or providing a line of hope separate to that of Cain in the end of course it's the line of salvation a line that ends up with Jesus Christ and indeed with us as well this is God's provision for salvation otherwise all we end up with is the degradation of the line of Cain which ends up in boastful murder and violence and revenge this is the line that links Adam to Noah the one through whom some salvation came as we'll see in a minute but this is also the line that will ultimately conquer

Satan and evil and death back in Genesis 3 God in cursing the serpent had said that its struggle would be with the seed or the offspring of the woman if we stop the Bible at Genesis 4 and the line of Cain we think that evil has conquered but this line says no God's promise that evil will be conquered by a descendant of Eve is still being held out here it's not fulfilled here none of these people do it but in the end it's pointing forward that God's promises will one day be fulfilled in his time but having said this about this line of people it's not to say that these are great people or good people or perfect people indeed there's an ambiguity about them Seth we're told in verse 3 was made in the likeness and the image of Adam not God humanity in Genesis 1 was made in the image of God and so for

Seth to be made in the image of Adam is probably implying that he's also made in the image of God but the way it's said reserves judgment it distances Seth from God it's now a two stage image if you like some of you may have seen those new drink drive ads where beer glasses are put down and the image through them gets slightly more blurred well maybe this is saying something like that that Seth is in the image of Adam who has fallen and sinned who was made in the image of God so now we're getting a little bit of a blur there's a little bit of remoteness between Seth and God there's a bit of ambiguity you see about human nature here this is not a perfect human being being created like Adam initially was but rather somebody who's an admixture of good and bad of God's ideals but mixed up also with wrong things as well it's interesting that in our day and age there is such an interest in genealogies and yet so often we're not interested in the

Bible's ones but I would imagine that for almost every one of you somebody in your family or a relation has tried to trace back part of the genealogy of your family I know that in my family that's the case my father's side and aunt has traced it back on my mother's side my grandfather has traced it back as well as my mother's cousin tried to trace it back I remember years ago when I was a child on holidays in Scotland my grandparents were with us and outside a house in the very north tip of Scotland we stood and had our photo taken because this is where probably great great great great great grandpappy or somebody like that once lived years later my grandfather found out that it was the house next door I remember going a few years ago to a pub near Launceston and there in that pub my great great great grandfather was once the proprietor they had a list of all the proprietors going back to 1840 something when the pub was built it's actually an historic building and there is William

[22 : 29] Price 1854 I think it was when he bought the pub we're all interested it seems without genealogy we want to find somebody who's famous or rich or wealthy back there or alternatively we want to find out who we're related to could it be that we're related somewhere to each other as distant long tenth cousins or something like that genealogies are interesting they give us some sense of identity and history and this one here does the same thing because this is our family tree we're descended from it these are our ancestors if you add enough greats together you'll get back to Methuselah in your family and in mine and in each one of ours because we all go back through Noah and therefore we all go back through this line in the end to Adam this is our family tree and we as Christian people are testimony to this line being the line of salvation we as Christians demonstrate the fact that this is the line of hope because through this line of people has come salvation to the world and indeed to us as well it's also a reminder to us that despite the sinfulness of these people and us

God's purposes will not be thwarted he will keep going bringing about his good purposes for this world well the fourth glimmer of hope is the last person in the list the tenth generation from Adam Noah the line you see leads to Noah probably the one person in the list whose name we know well when Lamech had lived 182 years he became the father of Noah no it doesn't quite say that notice what it says he became the father of a son he named him Noah saying out of the ground that the Lord has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands Noah's name is the only one that is explained we don't know what Methuselah or Mahalalel or Enosh mean unless we're Hebraists but this is the one that's explained why to draw attention to this person and to show what God has in store through this person the name

Noah means comfort and relief it's the same word as the prophet Nahum it's the same word that's embedded in the town that Jesus spent much of his adult life Capernaum literally the village of Nahum the village of comfort and rest it's the same word that's used in that famous passage in Isaiah's prophecy we may know it from Handel's Messiah comfort comfort my people speak tenderly to Jerusalem that her warfare has ended her iniquity is forgiven comfort and rest and indeed that's what Noah did as we'll see next not next week but the week after through Noah there was comfort rest salvation if you like life from death through the ark and for his family and though he dies as we see in chapter 9 Noah is the one through whom there is salvation if only for a small group of people nonetheless salvation thus

Noah prefigures the great saviour who is to come through Noah's obedience and faith in God yes there was salvation for his family his sons and their wives eight people in all but nonetheless there is a glimpse there of the salvation that God has for the world Noah is the one who offers comfort and rest but prefigures the greater one who will come offering real and eternal comfort and rest Noah is the one who provides refuge for his people admittedly through a boat but prefiguring the one who offers eternal refuge under the wings of an almighty God in the midst of this list of dead people Noah is a glimpse of hope well let's draw this to a conclusion Genesis 5 shows that God is the judge and that sin will be punished and punished by death as he said initially to Adam and Eve death is all around in this chapter but yet there are glimmers and glimpses of

God's mercy and hope there are glimpses of hope in Enoch the one who walks with God there are glimpses of hope in Noah the savior of his family for from the beginning of the Old Testament all the way through it to the end the Old Testament looks forward to the overcoming of sin and death which entered the world through the sin of the first people it demonstrates God's extraordinary commitment to his creation he didn't just make it see it fall and then abandon it but he remained steadfastly committed to it despite its sin despite its evil despite its frustration for generation after generation after generation God stuck with us and he's still doing the same with us today and he'll not give up and he'll not let his purposes be thwarted by stubborn and rebellious humanity but this chapter points us forward to where the Old

[28 : 08] Testament is heading to the one the coming savior who is greater than Noah to the one who conquers death in a bigger way than Enoch ever did for he conquered it eternally and he conquered it for us it points forward to the one who perfectly walks in humble obedient faith with God and it invites us to follow that one to walk with him indeed to come to him cemeteries are sad places death is sad death in this world is in the end the result of human sinfulness in one way or another but our hope is in the one who conquered death our hope is in the empty grave in the midst of the cemetery for without him who rose from the dead the final word here would be and he died but with him the final word is this the free gift of

God is eternal life through the Lord Jesus Christ Amen