

Death Brings Abraham Even Closer...

Genesis 25:1-18

Halifax: 10 January 2016, 10:30 AM

Introduction:

Today, after three weeks of seasonal messages, we are returning to our regular sermon series in Genesis.

- We find ourselves in that portion in the narrative that speaks of the close of Abraham's earthly pilgrimage.
 - And truly, it has been a pilgrimage, as the man has spent that last one hundred years of his life in Canaan without an inheritance in this world,
 - but living constantly in hope of the eternal inheritance that God has promised to him in His house.

And today, as we read of his death in Genesis 25, we find that by death he is brought even closer to the blessing that God has promised him!

- My dear brothers and sisters, if you are in Christ, this will be true for each one of you as well—death will bring you even closer to all that God has promised!
 - In 2 Corinthians 5:8, Paul expresses our Christian hope in death with these words: **We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.**
 - We know that even while our bodies are in the grave, our spirit will be present with the Lord until the resurrection;
 - And we know that though we are removed from the earth, the Lord will faithfully continue His redemptive work on the earth until the day of Christ's return.
 - In Philippians 1:23, Paul refers to this time of departing from this world to be with Christ as "far better" than continuing here...
 - And of course the eternal state (when our bodies are raised and we enter into our final inheritance) will be yet far better than that!
 - Death brings us one step closer to the blessing that our gracious heavenly Father has for all of His children.

Please direct your attention now to the reading of God's word from Genesis 25:1-18.

- This is God's holy Word... Genesis 25:1

Genesis 25:1-18: Abraham again took a wife, and her name *was* Keturah. ² And she bore him Zim-ran, Jok-shan, Me-dan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. ³ Jokshan begot Sheba and De-dan. And the sons of De-dan were As-shu-rim, Le-tu-shim, and Le-um-mim. ⁴ And the sons of Midian *were* E-phah, E-pher, Ha-noch, A-bi-dah, and El-da-ah. All these *were* the children of

Keturah. ⁵ And Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. ⁶ But Abraham gave gifts to the sons of the concubines which Abraham had; and while he was still living he sent them eastward, away from Isaac his son, to the country of the east. ⁷ This *is* the sum of the years of Abraham's life which he lived: one hundred and seventy-five years. ⁸ Then Abraham breathed his last and died in a

good old age, an old man and full *of years*, and was gathered to his people. ⁹ And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, which *is* before Mamre, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, ¹⁰ the field which Abraham purchased from the sons of Heth. There Abraham was buried, and Sarah his wife. ¹¹ And it came to pass, after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac. And Isaac dwelt at Beer Lahai Roi. ¹² Now this *is* the genealogy of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's maid-servant, bore to Abraham. ¹³ And these *were* the names of the sons of Ishmael, by

their names, according to their generations: The firstborn of Ishmael, Ne-ba-joth; then Kedar, Ad-be-el, Mib-sam, ¹⁴ Mish-ma, Dumah, Mas-sa, ¹⁵ Ha-dar, Te-ma, Je-tur, Na-phish, and Ked-e-mah. ¹⁶ These *were* the sons of Ishmael and these *were* their names, by their towns and their settlements, twelve princes according to their nations. ¹⁷ These *were* the years of the life of Ishmael: one hundred and thirty-seven years; and he breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people. ¹⁸ (They dwelt from Havilah as far as Shur, which *is* east of Egypt as you go toward Assyria.) He died in the presence of all his brethren.

May the Lord fill us with the patience and hope that comes through the scriptures.

- Let us consider the rich deposit that the Lord has given to our faith in these words.

I. First, see how Abraham finishes his days with faith in our gracious heavenly Father and His promises. Death comes when God has finished His work in us.

A. We are told how he settles his estate in faith before he dies...

1. We are given information that he took another wife besides Sarah and Hagar.

- Her name was Keturah, and she bore to him six sons.
- Faithful expositors are divided as to whether he took her before or after Sarah died.
 - If after, it means that the youthful vigor that Abraham received to bring forth Isaac remained with him long after Isaac was born,
 - and that after Isaac married, he was lonely and took one of the servant girls to be a concubine—that is, as a wife whose sons are provided for, but who do not receive an inheritance.
 - The fact that the account of Keturah does not occur until after Sarah's death does not require that her marriage to Abraham occurred after because it is clear that everything is not in chronological order...
 - If it were, Abraham's death would come after the birth of Jacob and Esau because chronologically, it occurred 15 years later.
 - If he took Keturah before Sarah died, it means that he added yet a third wife to his polygamy.
 - As he did not hesitate to take Hagar, and as this was a custom of his day about which he had not been clearly taught, it could well be that he would have done this.
 - It seems strange that there is no mention of Keturah until this point in the narrative, but as she was clearly a concubine rather than a surrogate mother, it may be that she was not mentioned because there was never a threat to Isaac's inheritance by her sons as there was with Ishmael.
 - The fact is, we are not told when he took Keturah—only that he did take her and had six sons by her—and that is all we need to know.

2. And the important point, perhaps, is that we see Abraham acting in faith in the wise way he divides his inheritance.
 - a. Instead of having an executor to settle his estate after his death as we do, Abraham took care of this before he died...
 - And he did it according to the clear commandment of the Lord that Isaac was to be his sole heir.
 - His procedure is described in verses 5 & 6: **And Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. 6 But Abraham gave gifts to the sons of the concubines which Abraham had; and while he was still living he sent them eastward, away from Isaac his son, to the country of the east.**
 - b. This was completely in keeping with the customs of the day in which the sons of concubines were provided for (given gifts as it says) and the sons of the free wife were given the inheritance.
 - Clearly, Abraham provided well for all of his servants including his concubines and the sons of his concubines, but only Isaac was his heir.
 - c. And note as well that in wisdom, he also sent the sons of his concubines away to the east which would avoid them inhabiting Canaan.
 - It would have caused lots of problems in the future when Israel returned to conquer all of the land of Canaan if their brothers were there, living among the Canaanites.
3. This kind of wise obedience is what should be exercised by faithful Christian fathers today...
 - Care must be taken to provide for all as one is able, but the inheritance should be directed to kingdom purposes—
 - So if there are apostate children, or children who are not serving the Lord, fathers should leave their inheritance to the children who are faithful.
 - Of course for many of us, we may have little of this world's goods to leave to our children,
 - but the most important inheritance we can leave them is an inheritance in the Lord Jesus Christ through patient discipleship...
 - commanding them in the way of the Lord that they may follow Him and receive His gracious promises!

TRANS> But you see how Abraham prepared for death in faith...obeying God's command that Isaac should be his sole heir.

- B. Secondly, we see that he died full of days...
- In verse 7 & 8, we are told: **This is the sum of the years of Abraham's life which he lived: one hundred and seventy-five years. 8 Then Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years,**
1. A hundred in seventy-five years is certainly a long life...
 - but know that in the Lord, death is never a moment too soon or a moment too late.

- God had appointed the span of our life on this earth, and it is for us to accept His decision in this regard whether He takes our children before they see the light of day or has us to continue into old age.
 - So instead of fretting about how long we shall live, let us rather focus on serving the Lord as long as we have breath and on finishing well for Him.
 - We are not here for our own purposes, but for God's purposes, and it is for us to serve Him in faith, looking to His promise in Jesus for a godly life here and for glory after.
 - If we do, we are assured that we will receive His rich blessing!
 - And indeed, how true this was of Abraham!
2. We are told that he died full of years.
- This fullness was not just from living for *many* years—it was from seeing the salvation of God and tasting of God's goodness!
 - That is what makes a believer's life full!
 - As Robert Candlish so eloquently puts it:
 - **Is he full? Is the pilgrim satisfied? Is he ready to depart?**
 - **It is not because he can reckon some threescore and ten revolutions of the sun; or it may be fourscore; or even like Abraham, an hundred, threescore, and fifteen.**
 - **Nor is it because he can say of the various sources of interest and pleasure upon earth, -- I have drunk of them all.**
 - **But it is because he has eaten the bread of heaven and drawn water out of the wells of salvation;**
 - **because he has been filled with the fullness of God; because has been partaker of the unsearchable riches of Christ. ...**
 - **It is by the tokens of the divine love that he has received,**
 - **the gracious dealings of God with his soul that he has noted,**
 - **and the wonders of grace and mercy that he has witnessed in the church of the redeemed, that the believer reckons himself to have lived long on the earth....**
 - **He is satisfied with length of days, for his eyes have seen the salvation of God.**
 - What a glorious fullness this is my brothers and sisters!
 - How blessed it will be for you if you can die in such fullness!
 - Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness—
 - All the fullness is found in Jesus Christ and in walking with Him!
 - He loves you and has rich blessings for you all through your life if only you will walk with Him!
 - While I don't look forward to my body weakening from old age, I must say that in the Lord each year of my life brings new blessings in the fullness of God's salvation,
 - and I look forward to receiving all that God has for me.
 - As a believer, who would want to go back to the old days?

- Each year brings you new experiences with the Lord, even through your deepest earthly trials!

II. But death itself, if it is death in the Lord, brings its own blessings!

- We see with Abraham how death brings us closer to God's blessing in both body and spirit...

A. Like him, your spirit will be "gathered to your people."

- You can see that at the end of verse 8—that Abraham was **gathered to his people**.
 - What does this mean?

1. Well first let me tell you what it does not mean...

- a. It does not mean simply that we are gathered to the tomb of our fathers.
 - Abraham was indeed buried with Sarah, but he was not buried with his fathers—they were back in the land that he had forsaken when God called him.
 - And besides, we are told that he died and was gathered to his people—then, after that, he was buried.
- b. And clearly, this does not refer to resurrection either, because the resurrection of the body does not occur until the last day,
 - And Abraham and others that we read about are said to be gathered to their people as soon as they die.

2. So what does it mean to be gathered to your people?

- a. It means that your spirit goes immediately to be with those who have died before you.
 - The Jews referred to this as being gathered to Abraham's bosom, and Jesus uses this same expression in Luke 16:22.
 - Abraham's bosom was the place where those who died in the LORD went, but the place of torment (which Jesus also speaks of in Luke 16) was the place where the others were gathered.
 - If you are in the Lord, then you are gathered with those who die in the Lord; but if you are not in the Lord, then your people are those who die in their sins, without forgiveness.
 - In Jesus's description of these two gatherings, we are told that from the place of torment the rich man lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom..."Then he cried, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame."
 - So you see clearly that there are two very different gathering places!
- b. But now the whole character of the place called Abraham's bosom is even better than it was before!
 - Because now that Jesus Christ has come, has died, has risen, and has ascended to God's right hand,
 - He Himself has been gathered to His people!

- Abraham is no longer the central figure in this place because now our dear Lord Jesus Christ is there!
 - Now that Jesus has been gathered to His people, those who die in the Lord are said to be gathered to Him!
 - As we read in 2 Cor 5, **to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord!**
 - When we die, our body will go to the grave, and our spirit will go to be present with the Lord!
 - That is why in Philippians, Paul speaks of his departing from this life as departing to be with Christ!
 - When we are gathered to our people in the Lord at death, we are gathered to Jesus Christ Himself!
3. So you see that though Abraham, like Paul, died with fullness from this life,
- what he received at death was far better!
 - Though he had walked with the Lord and experienced His salvation and His rich love and grace,
 - death did nothing but advance that blessed communion all the more!
 - And I say, how Abraham and those who were gathered with him must have rejoiced when Jesus Christ ascended in the clouds to join them!
 - We cannot begin to fathom the pleasures that will be ours at His right hand!
 - Blessed are those who die in the Lord!
 - Just be sure that you are in Him so that death will be “far better” for you!
 - It is often wrongly said of those who die outside of the Lord that now their suffering is over;
 - but the truth is, what they had here was only the beginning of their miseries!
 - That is why when Paul is thinking of in 2 Cor 5:9 when he says: **Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. ¹¹ Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.**
- But it is not just in spirit that Abraham is brought closer to God and His promise by death.
- B. He is also brought closer to God His promised blessing in body.
- We are told in verse 9 & 10 that Isaac and Ishmael buried his body: **And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, ¹⁰ the field which Abraham purchased from the sons of Heth. There Abraham was buried, and Sarah his wife.**
1. With his death and burial, he was brought one step closer to the resurrection.
- a. It may not seem like it at first, for death and burial leads to the decay of the body.
 - Because of the fall, the curse of God is upon us that we return to the dust out of which we were made.

- It is a great humiliation for those who were made to rule over the earth to now be completely subdued by it.
- But that is not the whole story for those who die in the Lord!
- b. We are buried in the hope that these self-same bodies that rot and decay and return to dust will rise again!
 - We know beyond any shadow of a doubt that Abraham at least believed that God was able to raise up Isaac's body because we are told that he believed this in Hebrews 11.
 - And now that Jesus has come and been raised from the dead, we have the absolute promise from His own lips that He Himself will raise up all the dead at the last day,
 - And we are told that those who die in the Lord will be raised up with new bodies that will not decay.
 - c. So you see that death is a step toward immortality.
 - Our bodies were united to Jesus Christ when we believed, and now, though they go to the grave, they are said to be asleep in Jesus.
 - No longer does the believer in the tomb have the infirmities of our present bodies with their sicknesses, deformities, weariness, weakness, pain, and injuries!
 - Though he is yet waiting for the resurrection, never again will he be hindered by his body in his service to and communion with Christ.
 - Far from being a hindrance, when his body is raised up, it will be like Jesus' glorious body—it will be a vessel of honour in which he will be able to serve God forever!
 - Abraham had buried Sarah in this hope, and now he himself was buried in this hope.
2. And besides the hope of the resurrection, he was also brought one step closer to his promised inheritance of the land.
 - a. This is especially demonstrated with Abraham because though promised the land of Canaan, he did not own any of it until he purchased a burial place for Sarah—the cave of Machpelah as mentioned in our text.
 - You will recall that he purchased this burial plot because he believed that God would indeed give him this land as an everlasting inheritance.
 - This was not mere figurative talk—
 - The Lord told him that he would die before he received it and that his descendants would receive it after 4 centuries in Egypt.
 - But He also made it clear that Abraham would personally receive it—not just his descendants after he was gone, but he himself.
 - b. And so when Abraham was buried there, in that portion that he had purchased for burial, he was that much closer to receiving it...

- In four or five centuries, his remains would be surrounded by his offspring when Joshua brought them in to possess the land...
 - And his grandson Jacob and his great-grandson son Joseph would be buried beside him.
- Yet, even after this, the land would be taken from them and restored, they received God's discipline for their sin,
 - and in the captivity, they would be driven out as the Canaanites were, but still the promise of an everlasting inheritance would remain as it does to this day...
 - In other words, Abraham has yet to fully receive this land—in the resurrection—when he will truly and fully possess it!
- c. And now that Jesus has come, the promise expanded!
 - He is given not just Canaan, but the whole earth as His inheritance!
 - It has already been given to Him, and He will bring all of His people to inherit it at the last day when He raises their bodies and glorifies them.
 - He told us that **the meek shall inherit the earth!**
 - In Jesus Christ and it will completely renewed with no more curse!
 - It will be beautiful and fruitful and it will be under the authority of Christ who commands the waves and the winds according to His will.
 - Romans 8:20-25 says: **“For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; ²¹ because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. ²³ Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. ²⁴ For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.”**
 - We will not fully possess it until we possess it without the curse, and that will happen when Jesus returns at the last day to take possession of it for us and to conquer death!

TRANS> So death brings Abraham and all who die in faith one step closer to our promised inheritance, blessings that God has promised us in both body and spirit.

III. And finally, I want to show you that even though the Lord's most faithful servants die, His redemptive work continues unabated in a new generation.

- A. We have seen faithful Abraham receiving the promises of God that were to bring forth blessings to all the nations of the earth!
 - 1. It was promised that in his seed, all the families of the earth would be blessed,
 - but how can this be when Abraham is not there to guide them?

- Sometimes, we wonder how the church will continue when we see faithful men who led the church go to their graves.
 - What will become of the church without these faithful and capable leaders who seemed to hold everything together?
 - And there is no denying that they were indeed faithful and capable leaders and that they did hold things together.
2. But what was it that made Abraham great? Do you remember—all the way back in chapter 12?
- It was not that Abraham was so great to start with.
 - It was that the LORD came to him and said: **Gen 12:2: I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing.**
 - Abraham was just an idol worshipper with his fathers, but it was the Lord who called him and blessed him that he might be a blessing...
 - The blessing did not depend on Abraham, but on the Lord who gave him the blessing.
- B. And what do we see in verse 11 but the Lord blessing Isaac—the next generation.
- **Gen 25:11: And it came to pass, after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac. And Isaac dwelt at Beer Lahai Roi.**
1. Immediately, we are given hope that God’s blessing will continue in the earth—that His redemptive purposes will go forward!
- God had promised that the blessing would continue through Isaac, and we see that already He is fulfilling that promise.
 - The church will never perish because in every generation, the Lord will raise up faithful believers who will serve Him and, as it were, pass the baton on the next generations.
2. Yes, there are times of declension when the organised church is brought down, as at the captivity and as in Christ’s day when the official body of the church rejected Him as Messiah,
- but there was still a Jeremiah and an Ezekiel and a Daniel and a Nehemiah and Ezra and many others at the time of the captivity,
 - and there was a Peter, James, John, and a Paul in the days when the official church rejected Christ and when He returned to heaven...
 - and so at in the days of Arius there was an Athanasius;
 - and in the days of indulgences and idolatry, there was a Martin Luther and a John Calvin and many others to carry the baton.
 - How dismal things looked when Jesus was departing from this world.
 - How could the weak disciples possibly continue without Him?
 - But do you remember what Jesus told them about His departure?
 - He told them it would actually be *better* for them, that it would be to their advantage for Him to go away.

- He told them that when He went away, He would pour out the Holy Spirit on His church as never before, and that the Spirit would work in them and in the unbelieving world!
 - He told them that they would pray and that their prayers would be heard.
3. And perhaps the most significant thing of all is that in every case the men God raises up are men noted for prayer...
- They are men near to God's throne of grace who come to Him to find mercy and grace to help in the church's time of need.
 - Is it not instructive that we find Isaac at Beer Lahai Roi, the place where God was memorialised as the God who lives and sees me?
 - He is the God who watches over His people in their weakness and who is ready to help them when they call on Him.
 - It was at this well that He saw and heard Hagar and Ishmael...
 - And it will be here that Isaac prays when his wife is barren and receives answer from heaven.
 - Every generation has men who pray for the barren church, and in every generation the church continues by His grace.
 - The LORD lives and He will bless and keep His church forever!
 - We can be thankful for faithful leaders, but our ultimate confidence must be in the Lord.
 - He is the one that gives us faithful leaders.
- C. But what about the enemies of the church—especially those who profess to know God? Will they not destroy the church? Do we not feel their crushing power?
1. What will happen with Ishmael or the sons of Keturah when Abraham is gone?
 - Will they not rise up against the promised seed of Isaac to destroy them when Abraham is gone?
 - Who will stand up against them?
 2. We see in our text that the potential enemies of the church are also in God's hands.
 - It is not just the church, but also the enemies of the church that are in His hands.
 - a. We have already seen how Abraham wisely sent the sons of Keturah away and gave them gifts to help prevent future conflict...
 - Yet, these sons did come back to haunt Israel in later years—
 - think of all the trouble they had with the Midianites in the days of Gideon—
 - And Jetur and Naphish who were Ishmaelites that fought with Israel on the other side of the Jordan in 1 Chron 5:19.
 - The church has many enemies today—the Lord has told us repeatedly to expect this.

- b. But what we are taught in scripture here is that God is the one who is in control of these nations and who uses them according to *His* purpose.
- 1) God had promised to Abraham that He would prosper Ishmael and bring forth 12 princes from him...
 - And in verse 16 of our text we see that this is exactly what the Lord does: **These were the sons of Ishmael and these were their names, by their towns and their settlements, twelve princes according to their nations.**
 - 2) Now if God was so careful to promise this and then to fulfill it, does this not show that He has some great purpose for the Ishmaelites?
 - And can we not assume that He also has a purpose for the sons of Keturah—
 - and for the Assyrians and the Babylonians...
 - and for the chief priests who crucified the Lord Jesus...
 - and for the Arians and the Papists and the Mormons and the Jehovah Witnesses and all the apostate protestants of our day?
 - 3) Where we have inspired history, we see again and again how God uses the church's enemies for the preservation of the church!
 - When we grow cold and indifferent to His grace and to our Lord, He sends them against us to chasten us...
 - It looks like they are going to destroy us, but instead they are a means by which He restores us.
- c. And we also find that these very enemies are among the nations that God promises to bless through us...
- He is going to bring some from among them to salvation!
 - Very often, they are brought to repentance through the church's testimony as they see God's faithfulness in preserving His people.
 - Listen to the wonderful words of Isaiah 60 where we are told of the blessing of the gospel reaching the sons of Keturah...
 - **Isaiah 60:1-7: Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. 2 For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the LORD will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. 3 The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. 4 "Lift up your eyes all around, and see: they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters shall be nursed at *your* side. 5 Then you shall see and become radiant, and your heart shall swell with joy; because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you. 6 The multitude of camels shall cover your *land*, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come; they shall bring gold and incense, and they shall proclaim the praises of the LORD. 7 All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together to you, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you; they shall**

ascend with acceptance on My altar, and I will glorify the house of My glory.

- The sons of Keturah were sent away only that they might one day be restored to the blessing of Abraham's house through Isaac when the Lord Jesus came.

Conclusion: And so you see that even in death the LORD not only continues, but even advances His blessing!

- How faithfully He preserved His church in the Old Covenant until the promised Saviour, our dear Lord Jesus Christ was brought forth!
 - And even in the death of that dear Saviour that looked so much like it would be the end of all hope, life came bursting forth for the nations!
- Let us take heart even in death!
 - With God, even death itself brings us that much closer to all that He has prepared for those who love Him and for those that He will yet call among the nations!
 - How He loves us!
 - How faithful He is to do all that He has promised—
 - Not one of His promises will fail!
 - Praise be to His name.
 - Jesus will come and He will reign over all the earth and all of His enemies will be brought under Him.
 - **Heb 10:23: Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.**
 - **Psalm 48:12-14: Walk about Zion, and go all around her. Count her towers; mark well her bulwarks; consider her palaces; that you may tell it to the generation following. For this is God, our God forever and ever; He will be our guide even to death.**