

First Things – Genesis
Genesis 25:1-16
“The Good Don’t Always Die Young”

I. HOW FRUITFUL ABRAHAM’S LIFE WAS

- A. Connected to the power of God
- B. Committed to the plan of God

II. HOW PEACEFUL ABRAHAM’S LEAVING WAS

- A. The promise that accompanied his death
- B. The place that awaited his death

III. HOW FAITHFUL ABRAHAM’S LORD WAS

- A. His work was continued
- B. His word was confirmed

1. There is an ancient proverb that says, “Whom the gods love dies young.” The proverb originated from a story told by Herodotus, the Greek historian.
2. In the story, a mother asked one of the gods to give to her two, young sons the greatest gift anyone could receive. In answer to that request the two sons laid down to sleep, and never awoke again.
3. More recently, Billy Joel sang that, “Only the good die young.”
4. Understanding that neither Greek philosophers nor rock stars ever give much heed to the Bible, we come to a text in Genesis 25 that reminds us that the good very often die after *long* lives, blessed by the grace of God.
5. Genesis 25:8 records the quiet, gentle death of one of the greatest men who ever lived. It says, “...*Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people.*”
6. Though the death of Abraham comes at the half-way point of only the first book of the Bible, the impact of his life and faith reverberate throughout the remainder of Scripture.
7. This friend of God and Father of the faithful lived *and* died in a way that speaks to all of us who follow in His steps and know His God.
8. There are some lessons to be learned from this last chapter in Abraham’s earthly story. As we will see, it is the grace of God, as much as the goodness of Abraham that really speaks to us.
9. Looking at this text, notice with me firstly:

I. HOW FRUITFUL ABRAHAM’S LIFE WAS

1. Abraham was a full 75 years-old when he first heard the call of God and began his journey of faith. Seventy five years is a lifetime for many people, but at 75, Abraham had a whole century left to go.
2. While you would think that a man well into his 100's would settle down and retire, our text indicates that Abraham decided to remarry and started another family.
3. The opening verse of chapter 25 says, *"Then again Abraham took a wife, and her name was Keturah."* Verse two indicates that with Keturah, the old man fathered an additional six sons.
4. The fruitfulness of Abraham's life speaks to us about living life to its fullest and redeeming all of the time that God gives us. Consider Abraham's fruitfulness with me.
5. We know first of all that his longevity and fruitfulness was:

A. Connected to the power of God

1. In Romans 4:19, Paul says something important about Father Abraham. He said, *"And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old..."*
2. Paul indicates that when Abraham was 100 years old, his body was "dead". The idea is that before Isaac was born, Abraham's body was passed the stage of being able to reproduce.
3. Nevertheless, Abraham believed that God was able to work a miracle and to use the aged bodies of him and Sarah to produce the promised son.
4. When we come to chapter 25, and Abraham's marriage to Keturah, he is probably around 150 years old, and apparently, whatever God did to his old body was still working.
5. My point is that Abraham's fruitfulness in the later years of his life was directly connected to the power of God and to the strength that only God could have given him.
6. Can I remind you of what Isaiah 40:31 says? *"But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."*
7. There is a lesson here for those who are living in the twilight years of their lives. You don't have to sink into inactivity! You don't have to give up living for and serving the Lord!

8. As long as you will stay connected to the power of God, He will give you strength to do what He calls you to do, and you can still be fruitful in the work of the Lord.

9. I read about a birthday card that was sent to an older lady. The card read, "They don't make them any better than us... Younger, yes, better no."

10. Just because someone isn't younger, doesn't mean they can't be better. We serve the God of the ages, and that includes all ages.

11. Abraham's fruitfulness was connected to the power of God. Furthermore, the text indicates that Abraham's fruitfulness was also:

B. Committed to the plan of God

1. Though Abraham was the new father of six new sons, verse 5 of our text includes an important detail. It says, "*And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac.*"

2. The old man never lost sight of what God had said to him so many years before, "*...in Isaac shall thy seed be called.*" (Genesis 21:12)

3. Though Abraham lived a fruitful life in his later years, it remained a life focused on the ultimate plan of God for him and his people.

4. This is a challenge for those who face the temptation of seeing their retirement years as a license to step away from the work of the Lord.

5. A couple of years ago, at the age of 62, Pastor John Piper published a brief book entitled, "Rethinking Retirement".

6. In that book, he tells of a man named Ralph Winter, the founder of the U.S. Center for World Missions. In his early 80's, Winter was still traveling, speaking, and writing for the cause of Christ.

7. When Mr. Winter was about 60, he wrote an article entitled "The Retirement Booby-Trap". In that article he said:

"Most men don't die of old age, they die of retirement. I read somewhere that half the men retiring in the state of New York die within two years. Save your life and you'll lose it...Where in the Bible do they see [retirement]? Did Moses retire? Did Paul retire? Peter? John? Do military officers retire in the middle of a war?"ⁱ

8. With some 78 million Baby-Boomers nearing retirement age, the fruitful life of Abraham stands as a challenge to them to not lose focus on the plan of God in their last years.

9. Your age does not *disqualify* you or *dismiss* you from serving Christ with all your heart. There is a fruitfulness and a productiveness, for His glory, that we ought to pursue until the day we die!

10. Looking at this closing chapter in Abraham's life, we see here not only *how fruitful Abraham's life was*, but we see also secondly:

II. HOW PEACEFUL ABRAHAM'S LEAVING WAS

1. I have recently been reading the biography of an evangelist named Manley Beasley, a unique man of God in his generation.

2. For the last several years of his life, Manley lived near the point of death, his body racked with a number of diseases.

3. In the biography, one of his closest friends, another evangelist named, Sonny Holland, says, "Manley taught me how to die." He went on to say that Manley called him two weeks before his death, and said, "Bubba, it looks like I'm gonna be leaving ya'll...God hasn't spoken to me about staying any longer..."ⁱⁱ

4. Just as Abraham teaches us some things about how to live in this world, he also teaches us some things about how to leave from this world.

5. Consider the peacefulness of Abraham's leaving. For one thing, consider:

A. The promise that accompanied his death

1. Look again at how the text describes the passing of Abraham. It says in verse 8, "*Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people.*"

2. While Abraham may not have known the exact date of his death, he did know something about it before it happened.

3. You see, back in Genesis 15:15, before Isaac was even born, the Lord made this promise to Abraham: "*And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age.*"

4. Throughout the many years of Abraham's life, he had no reason to fear death. Though he knew it was coming someday, he also knew the promises of God regarding his death.

5. In much the same way, those of us who know Jesus Christ really have no reason to fear the day of our death. Like Abraham, we have been given promises that take the sting out of death.

6. Jesus said to Martha in John 11, “...*I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die...*” (John 11:25-26)

7. I read this week some thoughts from children on the subject of death and dying. Marsha, age 9, said, “When you die, you don’t have to do homework in heaven unless your teacher is there too.”

8. Kevin, age 10, said, “I’m not afraid to die because I’m a boy scout.” My favorite was from Alan, age 7. He said, “God doesn’t tell you when you are going to die because He wants it to be a big surprise.”

9. While God does not tell us when we are going to die, there is no reason for death to be a big surprise. Moreover, there is no reason for death to be feared when we cling to the promises of Jesus for eternity.

10. As we think of the peacefulness of Abraham’s leaving, consider not only the promise that accompanied his death, but notice also:

B. The place that awaited his death

1. Two important things are said in regards to Abraham’s passing. First of all, verse 8 says that he was, “...*was gathered to his people.*”

2. Then verse 9 adds, “*And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah...*”

3. In essence, the Bible says that there were two places awaiting Abraham when he died. The first was the place of his people, and the second was the grave. Think about these with me.

4. I love what F.B. Meyer says about Abraham’s being gathered to his people. He said, “What a lovely synonym for death! To die is to rejoin our people; to pass into a world where the great clan is gathering, welcoming with shouts each new-comer through the shadows.”ⁱⁱⁱ

5. And of course, the cave of Machpelah was Abraham’s only earthly stake in the land that had been promised to him by God. His burial there was a sign of his faith in the day when it would all be his.

6. Like Abraham, when we die, we do not disappear into oblivion. There is no annihilation or cessation of existence.

7. If we are *in* Christ, then the moment we die, our souls will go to be *with* Christ, and to join the people of God who have gone on before us.

8. Meanwhile, our bodies will go into the ground, a deposit of faith toward the day when the trumpet will blow, and Christ will call our bodies to rise and be transformed forever.

9. With this in mind, all those who know Jesus can face death, whether sooner or later, with the steadfast hope that it will not be our end.

10. The poet Dylan Thomas said:

*Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at the closing of the day,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light*

11. Abraham's death reminds us that when you have hope for what comes after this life, you *can* go gently and peacefully into that good night, and there is no need to rage against the coming of death.

12. Looking at this text, and the record of Abraham's passing, we see here not only *how fruitful Abraham's life was*, and *how peaceful Abraham's leaving was*, but notice with me also:

III. HOW FAITHFUL ABRAHAM'S LORD WAS

1. Apart from the Lord Jesus, Abraham may very well be the most important character in the Bible. Yet, with his death the Bible does not end.

2. In fact, in chapter 25, the narrative just keeps rolling on, and the storyline moves on almost uninterrupted by what was a monumental event.

3. The reason for this is that while Abraham died, Abraham's God did not. He continued to manifest Himself and move in the lives of His people.

4. Abraham's days of faithfulness were over, but the Lord God remained faithful. Consider the faithfulness of Abraham's Lord in this text. First of all, notice that:

A. His work was continued

1. Notice what the text says in verse 11. There we are told, "*And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac...*"

2. God's covenant with Abraham was only the beginning of the work He was going to do in the world.

3. Even after Abraham's death, that work continued in Isaac's life, and would continue after his death as well. Generation after generation of Abraham's descendents would come and go, but God's work would outlast them all.
4. Though God began this covenant work with Abraham, His work was not limited to the life of Abraham. He was working toward something much bigger than Abraham.
5. Someone once said that "God buries His workmen, but not His work." Abraham's death is historic in the pages of God's Word, but it was not hurtful to the progress of God's work.
6. Something I inherited from my dad, I suppose, is a love of Christian history. Part of that interest involves finding and visiting the graves of Christian heroes from the past.
7. I have stood by the graves of a number of great preachers and servants of God, including Charles Spurgeon, John Wesley, and John Bunyan.
8. Inside those graves are the bones of men who have long gone on to heaven. Their legacy and memory makes them special to me, but their days of service are over.
9. However, the cause and the King for which they labored lives on today! I still labor as they once did, because God's work still goes on even when His servants cannot.
10. As we see the faithfulness of God in this text, we are reminded that His work was continued after the death of Abraham. We see also that:

B. His word was confirmed

1. The name of Abraham's first son, Ishmael, has been absent from the Biblical record for several chapters leading up to this one.
2. However, we are told that after Abraham's death, Ishmael joined with Isaac in honoring and burying the body of their father.
3. Then, the Holy Spirit includes for us a section on the descendants of Ishmael, beginning in verse 13.
4. While their names mean little to us, there is something about this list that we should note. Look at the last phrase of verse 16. Describing the sons of Ishmael, it says, "...*twelve princes according to their nations.*"

5. Back in Genesis chapter 17, Abraham had pleaded for God's blessing to fall on Ishmael. While God declared that Isaac was to be the chosen seed, He also said that He would in fact bless Ishmael.

6. The Lord's exact words to Abraham were, "...as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation." (Genesis 17:20)

7. Though Abraham had died, God's Word still proved itself true. God kept His Word, even when Abraham was not alive to see it.

8. You and I can be sure that though God's people may pass, yeah, even heaven and earth may pass away, but the Word of God lives and abides forever!

9. Today, we live thousands of years removed from Abraham and his life. However, we still have the Word of God, as sure today, as it was to Abraham.

10. And when we are dead and gone, our children and grandchildren will still have the Word of God to hold to and to trust in as surely as we do now.

1. Verse 7 says, "*And these are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived, an hundred threescore and fifteen years.*"

2. 175 years is a long life. Yet, it is not the just the length of Abraham's life that makes it significant. It is the Lord of Abraham's life that really makes it shine.

3. Abraham's life *and* death speak to us today. They speak to us because of the God He served.

4. We can know and serve that same God today, through His Son, the Lord Jesus.

5. In Him, through Him, and by Him, we can be fruitful so long as the Lord gives us life. Because He lives, our death will be only the beginning of our lives.

6. He is faithful to us now, and will remain faithful long after we have passed from this life. To Him be glory forever and ever, world without end, Amen!

ⁱ Piper, John, Rethinking Retirement, (Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL, 2008), p. 24

ⁱⁱ Owens, Ron, Manley Beasley, (CrossHouse Publishing, 2009), *Amazon Kindle Edition*

ⁱⁱⁱ Meyer, F.B., Abraham, (Christian Literature Crusade, Fort Washington, PA, 1979), p. 158