

A Blessed Life

Grace Fellowship | Cory Hughes | Genesis 25:1-18

Take your Bibles and turn them to Genesis 25. Today in our text, we're going to read about the end of Abraham's life. Maybe that shouldn't be a surprise to you, seeing how the service has all been about death and coming to the end of one's life. But this text that we're going to look at is one of those that if you're reading through your Bible on your own, you would probably just tend to read right past the names and not think much about it. In fact, one commentator, as I was studying this week, had this to say about the end of this section: "And yet, here we are." But as I've gotten to meditate on this passage and consider the questions that arise when I read it, I have just been floored at how much God has revealed to me this week through this passage. And so if nothing else, let that be an encouragement for you. When you think God's Word doesn't have anything to offer you, you're the problem, not it, right? And so that was me at the beginning of this week. So I'm excited to share with you all what God has shown me through this passage this week.

So let's just jump right in and read it together. We're going to read 18 verses in chapter 25, if you will, along with me. Abraham took another wife whose name was Keturah. She bore him Zimram, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. Jokshan fathered Sheba and Dedan. The sons of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim, and Leummim. The sons of Midian were Ephah, Ephher, Hanoah, Abida, and Eldaah. All these were the sons or the children of Keturah. Abraham gave all he had to Isaac, but to the sons of his concubines, Abraham gave gifts. And while he was still living, he sent them away from his son Isaac eastward to the east country. These are the days of the years of Abraham's life, 175 years. Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age. An old man, full of years, and was gathered to his people. Isaac and Ishmael, his sons, buried him in the cave of Machpelah in the field of Ephron, the son of Zohar the Hittite, east of Mamre, the field that Abraham purchased from the Hittites. There, Abraham was buried with Sarah, his wife. After the death of Abraham, God blessed Isaac, his son, and Isaac settled at Beer-lahai-roi.

These are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's servant, bore to Abraham. These are the names of the sons of Ishmael named in the order of their birth: Nebaioth, the firstborn of Ishmael, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. These are the sons of Ishmael and these are their names, by their villages and by their encampments, twelve princes according to their tribes. These are the years of the life of Ishmael, 137 years. He breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people. They settled from Havilah to Shur, which is opposite Egypt in the direction of Assyria. He settled over against all his kinsmen.

Father, this is Your Word, and we want to be changed this morning. We want to understand You better, not for the sake of mere head knowledge, but for the sake of relationship and

transformation more into the image of Jesus Christ. So would You do that this morning through the preaching of Your Word? I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Now maybe after we read that, you're thinking the same thing that commentator said: "What is here?" But I've titled today's sermon, "A Blessed Life." A Blessed Life. This is a good way to sum up the end of Abraham's life. Really, all of his life has been blessed by God. Seeing as how when we're introduced to him back in Genesis 12, we're told about God's promises to bless him and make his Name great among the earth so that he will be a blessing to all the families of the earth. That was 13 chapters and 100 years ago that God promised those things. And here at the end of Abraham's life, what we see, if you don't see anything from this text, is that God keeps His word. God's Word to us is solid as a rock. As I'm holding my son back this morning and we're talking about sinking sand—does anybody else do that? I wanted him to feel it. So I'm holding him. Every other ground is what? Sinking sand. And he's going to ask me about that later, why I kept doing that. But I think that's true. It's just true that there is no place to stand that will give us any foundation like God's Word and God's promises. Those are things we can stand flat-footed on and never have to worry about our footing.

Abraham has lived a blessed life. Look at verse one. It tells us that after Sarah's death, he remarried a woman named Keturah. Some of you wives might be elbowing your husbands and say, "You're not allowed to do that." Who knows? But we're told about six sons, seven grandsons, and three great-grandsons in this passage, if you look at the family tree. All these were the children of Keturah. And when Moses is writing this to his first audience, Israel, they would have known these names very well. I'm not going to bore you to death by telling you about all of these names. If you want to know, you can look that up. But when they hear these names, they're hearing trade partners, allies, enemies, even family names. The most recognizable name on the list would be Midian. And some of you might remember that Moses marries a Midianite woman by the name of Zipporah. But the main point in naming these specific sons of Abraham would be to show Israel just how prevalent Abraham's offspring was. Basically, Moses is writing this and saying, "That people and that people and that people and those people all came from our father Abraham."

But then in verse five and six, we get some puzzling information added to this genealogy. It says that Abraham gave all he had to Isaac, but to the sons of his concubines, Abraham gave gifts. While he was still living, he sent them away from his son Isaac eastward to the east country. So I think the biggest question that popped up immediately is the issue of concubines. Where did this come from? We've not been told until now that Abraham had concubines. I thought he was a godly man. How could it be that he had concubines? Well, here's a couple things to note. In 1 Chronicles 1:32, Keturah, who is named here as a wife, is actually going to be referred to as a concubine. And secondly, the only other son mentioned in this passage is Ishmael, so perhaps Hagar might be seen as a concubine too. So I don't think there's a need to read that and think Abraham had some secret stable of women that we're not ever told about. It's not probably the right way to read that. Language is flexible.

But the other thing to pick up here is that Isaac, the son of promise, was purposefully separated from his half-brothers. Abraham purposefully separates Isaac from the rest of his sons. We're told that he sends his sons with Keturah eastward. And while he gave them gifts, he gave his son of the promise, Isaac, all that He had. Now here we begin getting hints of what Moses desires for us to know. Which is that God keeps His promises to bless Abraham's offspring forever. But there is a real and important distinction within that blessing. Let me repeat that. God is a God of His Word. And He is going to keep His promise to bless Abraham's offspring. But in that blessing, there are very important distinctions of how He blesses. Are you with me? We're going to get into this much more in a moment, but for now let's just take a step back from the details we're given and note how God has blessed Abraham's life. He's now been given a very large family, even though at 90 years of age he had no physical offspring. He's got more possessions than he knows what to do with. But the greatest blessing of all is that Abraham knows God. That's the greatest blessing of all.

And for this reason, we read verse seven. These are the days of the years of Abraham's life: 175 years. Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age. An old man and full of years and was gathered to his people. Here's what the wording is conveying here. Here's what Moses wants us to know. Abraham lived a full life. Abraham lived a blessed life. And don't miss that last phrase. After he lives a blessed life, look at what it says: "He was gathered to his people." What does that mean, he was gathered to his people? Well, commentators agree that this speaks not to his family coming to his funeral, nor his physical burying spot beside Sarah, but rather gathering is speaking about life after death. Life after death. Remember, church, we as New Testament believers have a much more robust theology and understanding of life after death than these first readers had. Moses' audience would be learning of and putting together the pieces of what is Yahweh's life after death. God is revealing through Abraham's death that there is life after death, and in that life you will be gathered to a certain group of people.

Jesus expounds on this idea in Matthew 25, verse 31. Here's what He says: "When the Son of Man comes in Glory and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. Before Him will be gathered all the nations and He will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats and He will place the sheep on His right but the goats on His left. Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.' Then He will say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'" That's a sobering passage and I only read a small bit to you. I would encourage you, maybe this afternoon, put a marker in your Bible and go back to that passage after hearing the rest of this message. There are some key details I left out on purpose that are even more shocking and help us understand why some are being separated here and others are being separated there.

Now which people was Abraham gathered to? I believe he was gathered to God's chosen people. All those like him who had received God's spiritual blessing. This is a distinct

people that the Bible often refers to as the elect. So when Abraham took his last breath and passed into eternity, he was gathered with all the saints before him, men like Abel, Noah, Shem. We'll read a similar statement about Ishmael shortly, and I believe his people, the ones he's gathered to, stand in stark contrast to the people Abraham's gathered to. But before we get there, look at verse nine. It says that Isaac and Ishmael, the son of promise and the son of the flesh, buried him in the same cave where Sarah was buried. Now this is interesting that the two boys are reunited. The last time we read anything about Ishmael was back in Genesis 21 when a feast was being given in honor of baby Isaac. He is now eating solid food. You can just think of a nice plump baby standing up here. And they're having this celebration, this feast. And Ishmael is a teenager at this time, probably 15 or 16. And he is mocking, in a way, baby Isaac that really upset Mama Sarah. And she goes to Abraham and she demands that that boy and his mother be banished. And Abraham does it. He sends them off. That was nearly 70 years prior to this moment. So a long time had passed.

So questions: has Ishmael come back around once Isaac grew up? Have they been around each other? We don't know. We just know 70 years after he's banished away, here they are burying their father. And I know when we actually get into the weeds of the story, like details left out kind of drive us crazy, don't they? I was talking to a church member this week, and he had questions about things being left out. "Well, what happened here?" And I just said, "I don't know. I don't know." Passages like this sometimes evoke more questions than they give answers to. But the story tracks on, questions unanswered. And I want to say just a tidbit about that as you read your Bibles. When the Scriptures don't make something clear, don't let that bother you terribly. Rather, consider something like this: It must not be that important if God did not tell me about it. If He didn't tell us about it, maybe it's not that important. Maybe it's not something I need to know. And trust Him about what He has revealed.

So in that vein, onward to verse 11. After the death of Abraham, God blessed Isaac, his son. Who blessed Isaac? God blessed Isaac, his son. And Isaac settled at Beer-lahai-roi. So here's what's happened. God's blessing has now passed from Abraham to the promised son, Isaac. He now carries the mantle of God's covenant promises. Isaac is carrying the promised Seed that we have been tracing since Genesis 3. Which is why I believe the blessing spoken of here, "God blessed Isaac," is the spiritual blessing of God. The spiritual blessing of God. Which we're right to contrast with the physical blessing of God given to Ishmael in verse 12. Look at that. In this last section, we read that Ishmael has 12 sons who are all princes. I mean, that sounds blessed. And in a similar ending to the life of Abraham, it says that Ishmael died at 137 years—that's a long life—and was gathered to his people. As I said a minute ago, I don't believe these are the same people. I believe Moses is intending for us to see a contrast between the spiritual seed of the promise and the physical seed of the flesh. Or as I'm going to emphasize in the rest of our time today together, Moses wants us to see a difference between God's spiritual blessing and God's physical blessing. We must know and understand the difference of the two.

Here's a question to consider: Had Ishmael and Abraham both received God's blessing? Answer? Yes. Yeah, in a general sense. Let me show you. Back in Genesis 17:20, you can write that down or flip over there. God says, "As for Ishmael, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes and I will make him into a great nation." God has promised to bless Ishmael in this way. Now, this blessing sounds very familiar to the way that God blesses Abraham and Isaac, but let me show you the difference. In Genesis 15, this is what God says to Abraham: "Fear not, Abram. I am your shield. I am your shield. Your reward will be very great." Then five verses later, we see that Abraham believed the Lord. He believed what He says. And God counted it to Abram as righteousness. That's the Old Testament spot where we get our understanding of justification by faith. It's what Paul picks up on in the New Testament. So don't miss that. Don't miss this. Was Ishmael blessed by the hand of God? Yes. But was he blessed by the presence of God? No. No, and this distinction really gets us where we need to be with this morning's passage.

If we don't understand the difference between God's physical blessings and His spiritual blessings, then this passage, the Bible in general, and much of life along with death, will be very confusing for us. As I studied this passage, I found myself asking: why is God blessing the seed of the flesh who opposes the seed of the promise? Why is God doing that? This seems counterintuitive. It makes sense to bless Isaac because that's Your boy. He has Your presence. He's carrying the seed of promise. But why is Ishmael getting blessed too? And I believe the reason this was tripping me up is because I don't have a good enough division in my head and heart—and that second part matters—when it comes to God's physical blessings and His spiritual blessings. For some reason, the two are like tethered in my mind. But let me warn us, this is extremely dangerous. Extremely dangerous for those two to be linked. And as I ponder the implications of this kind of error, I've come to realize that this is precisely the error that is perpetuated in the prosperity gospel. The prosperity gospel says that the physical blessing you receive is a sign of the spiritual blessing of God. But is that true? Is that biblical? No, it's not. In fact, we see in Genesis, all throughout the Bible and even now, many people receive God's physical blessings but do not receive His spiritual blessings. God's physical blessings, church, are received by all in varying degrees for sure. But if you have been born—if you are conceived in your mother's womb—you are a recipient of God's physical blessings. It's true. But His spiritual blessings are not received by all. Not received by all those who have been born, but only by those who have been born again.

We must keep this in mind. Because when we begin conflating God's physical blessings and His spiritual blessings together, we tend to misunderstand what God is actually doing in our life, which can cause incredible frustration, even leading to a shipwreck of our faith. I'm going to repeat that because now after this Word and meditating on God's Word, I really believe what I just said. When we conflate or mash together God's physical blessing and His spiritual blessings, we misunderstand what God is doing in our life, which can at best cause incredible frustration, but at worst can lead to a shipwreck of our faith. So a blessed life, going back to our title, is one that receives and responds to both God's physical and

spiritual blessings appropriately. And this is precisely what we see in the life of Abraham, even during his final years.

I want you to listen to what Hebrews says about Abraham. Just listen to this: "By faith... Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as inheritance. And he went out not knowing where he was going. By what? Faith. He went to live in the land of promise as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God," not to the city he was dwelling in and being promised, but to a greater promise is what Hebrews says he was looking for. Don't miss this next part: "He died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen and greeted them from afar. And having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth, for people who acknowledge that kind of thing make it clear that this is not their home, but they are looking for another home. For if they had been thinking of the land from which they had gone out, they would have an opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country. That is a heavenly one. Therefore, because they don't love this, but they love that which they can't get a hold of yet, God is not ashamed to be called their God. For He has prepared for them a city that awaits."

Here's what the writer of Hebrews is getting across and the big takeaway for this morning's message. Here it is: God's physical blessings are meant to be a window through which we see, by faith, God's spiritual blessings yet to be fully received. I'm going to repeat it. God's physical blessings are meant to be a window—a window through which we see through them by faith God's spiritual blessings yet to be fully received. Let me show you how Abraham's life exemplifies this. When Abraham receives a son, when him and Sarah receive finally an offspring of their own that they have waited so long for, Abraham is able to see through the gift of Isaac to God's promises of an offspring as numerous as the stars. And in so doing, this frees him up. This empowers him. This causes him, allows him, moves him, motivates him to walk his son up a mountain, put him on the altar and say, "Lord, he's Yours. You gave him and I'm giving him back." Why? Because he's looking through his son, through him to what God has promised to do. We don't see Abraham squabbling with God like, "But Lord, Lord, You gave me this son. I waited so long for him. Why would You take him from me?" We don't see Abraham responding this way because he understands all of God's physical blessings are meant to show us greater realities than themselves. Meant to show us greater realities.

But here's the problem. This is the problem. We naturally tend to see God's physical blessings not as a window, but as a portrait of the life we desire to have right now. That's what we see God's physical blessings as. So when God calls us to give His blessings back to Him, our heart response has more in common with the rich young ruler than it does Abraham. If Abraham looks at Isaac as a portrait and not a window, then he will not be able to see God's plan to bless him and all the families of the earth in an ultimate and eternal way through Isaac. Which as we know is going to be what? Through Isaac, Christ will come, Jesus will come, and He will lay His life down, and His blood will redeem a people for

Himself. But if Abraham is seeing Isaac as a portrait, he misses that. He misses that greater reality, why? It's almost like he's taken this portrait of what he wants and stuck it right in front of this window. And now he cannot see what God is doing because he's so enamored by what he has.

Here is a warning, the warning implied from the Hebrews passage we read: If you are not seeking a better life, if you are not seeking a better home, if you are not seeking a better family as Abraham was by looking through God's temporary physical blessings, then you are guilty of hijacking God's blessings and turning them into a portrait that you worship. You are an idolater. But aren't we all guilty of this? Just this past week, this hits me, how guilty I am of this. I'm having an excellent day. And I won't tell what day it was, because maybe if you were a part of it, you'd think that's why I was having an excellent day, he saw me that day. But I was having an excellent day, one day this week. Meetings are going well. Haircut timed out perfectly. Pretty sure I'm catching every green light on Quintard. That's when you know. The stars feel like they're aligning perfectly for me. And I get to do something at lunch that I don't get to do often. And I'm not saying you should do this. But I love CeCe's pizza. And I thought, man, I got like 17 minutes. And I go in and I pile a plate high full of pizza, promising myself I'll just have one even though it's like this. And as I'm about to dig into nine different kinds of pizza, I get a text on my phone, a group text. And someone has asked this question: "Who's poor in spirit today?" And then they quote Jesus saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." I was like, what is this? Poor in spirit? If I'm honest, like I was a little jarred by the text. How do you feel poor in spirit when everything is going the right way? Like even just the word poor, I could not associate with in this moment. And my spirit, I felt like I was soaring. I felt like God's hand was just all over me today. Just knocking it out of the park.

And this is when it hit me. I've begun conflating God's physical blessings with His spiritual blessings, and now I'm unconsciously basing my spiritual condition on how well things are going, or in other words, how good my picture looks that day. Church, I want to warn us against this. I need you to warn me against this. We will all be judged based upon what we did with God's physical blessings. Did you turn them into the life that you wanted? Perhaps that was a portrait of self-righteousness and morally upright living. That was your portrait. Maybe it was secret, gross immorality and licentiousness—scandalous in every regard—but it doesn't matter what your portrait had if you're not looking through God's physical blessings in order to behold and believe God's spiritual promises, namely the Lamb of God Jesus Christ who takes away the sin of the world, then you are not living a blessed life. You are living the front end of a nightmare that is about to take a sharp curve and for eternity you will be in torment. That's what you're living.

God's physical blessing of life is meant to be a window through which we see and long for the promises of God and of eternal life. Don't fall in love with this life. Enjoy it. Thank God every day for it. And ask Him, "Lord, how do You want to use what You've given me in order to advance Your kingdom?" I promise you, if you pray that to God today, He'll answer it. Pray that prayer. "God, how do You want to use what You've given me to advance Your

kingdom?" He'll have an answer for you. When God's physical blessings in your life become a window, then you will enjoy looking through them at the future promises of God not yet to be received. But when they remain a portrait, you will always be discontent with them, always idolatrous and blind, unable to see the true glory that is on the other side.

Now perhaps you're sitting here today and you're struggling to relate because God's physical blessings feel foreign to you. Well, two things. Number one, perhaps you're overlooking many of His blessings because they're not the things you want on your portrait. My call to you would be to consider the blessings He has given you and look through them to the other side. Number two, some of you, I know, are dealing with tremendous suffering. And while I'm sure Abraham suffered, his death recorded for us here seems to even be pleasant itself. So for you, that may make this story hard to relate. But here's who I would point you toward this morning: Jesus. As the author of Hebrews tells us, Jesus was not able to just look through God's physical blessings, but He was able to look through the cross, despising the shame. What does that mean? That means He was able to see the cross and regard it as nothing. Why? For the joy set before Him. He looked through it, not at it. While Abraham exemplifies for us how to look through blessings and behold the promises of God, Jesus exemplifies for us how to look through blessing and suffering in order to behold and believe the promises of God.

You know, one of the things I'm looking forward to us doing in the future with all this work going on in our building is removing this monstrosity. I just made up a word, I think. I'm not against PowerPoint, but you see what that's covering up, right? Hoping we do projection on either side. There's a shout out for whoever's in charge of that. But the reason I desire that is because I love seeing the cross when we worship. The cross is a visible reminder of what MacArthur told us. That death no longer has a sting. Death no longer is dreadful. For we have been crucified with Christ. And we no longer live. We have pulled the portrait off the wall and tossed it. That was repentance. And now we behold His glory, dimly although it may be, through all things in our life. For many, this is why death is so awful. It's because it's the destruction of their portrait. "This grandeur picture that I've spent my life painting and building, it's about to be thrown into the fire." But for us, death is the day that we get to pass through that window that we've been staring through our whole life and behold, in His presence, the God whom we've longed for.

So if you're here today and you don't know God, all of this that I'm speaking about is so foreign to you. Here's what I would want you to know. Sin is your problem. Sin is blocking you from seeing the glory of God. If you will today repent of your sin and call out to Jesus to save you, then He will be faithful to do so. And He will give you a window through which you can see and behold all His promises. He will open your blind eyes. Church, we're about to get the privilege to do just as Jesus told us to do when we gather, which is to eat and drink in remembrance of Him. And here's how I want to instruct you today with the supper. We're going to take bread in your hands and we're going to take juice. But I don't want you thinking that there is something special in and of these elements. What are these elements, church? These elements are a window that we see through to the true meaning

of their purpose. The body of Christ broken for us. The blood of Jesus poured out for the forgiveness of our sins. And we do this by faith. That's where this meal comes alive. That's where this meal takes its meaning, is when we don't think of it as some ritualistic seance and it's just in the thing. When we look through the thing, while beholding it, and glory in who He is and what He has done. Amen?

Let's pray. Father, we thank You for Your grace this morning. Thank You for Your mercy, and we thank You for Your truth given to us by Your Holy Spirit, and Lord, does it live in us. Thank You for the rich treasures that we get to possess. Even now, Lord, I know that some saints in this room are just struggling to get back to the window and be reminded to look out the window. Lord, would You help them? Father, for those who face dire circumstances and suffering, be near to them and remind them even today that this will soon pass. I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

I'm going to open the table and I would invite you to come. This meal is for believers today. And so if you have repented of your sin and placed your faith in Jesus, then we welcome you to the table. But if you have not done that and you don't know God, then we would ask you to talk to me or one of the other pastors that you saw up here today after service. And we would love to introduce you to God so that you can be baptized and come and take this meal with us. So I'm going to open the table and you come.

What is our hope in life now? Christ alone, Christ alone. What is our only confidence? That our souls to Him belong. Who holds our days within His hand? What comes apart from His comfort? To the end, the love of Christ in which we stand. Oh, sing hallelujah, our hope springs eternal. Oh, sing hallelujah, now and ever we confess Christ our hope and life and death. What truth can calm the troubled soul? God is good, oh God is good. It's His grace and goodness known. Redeemer's blood. Who holds our faith when fears arise? Who stands above the stormy trials? Who sends the waves that bring us nigh unto the shore, the Rock of Christ? What shall we see? Christ He lives, Christ He lives. Through what we've won will heaven bring everlasting life within. There we will rise to be with the Lord. And sin and death will be destroyed. And we will be saved. Hallelujah, now and ever we confess Christ, our hope and our death.

Would you take a moment and think about God's Word today and ask God to help you see through these elements to the truth they represent. Church, this is Jesus' body broken for you. Eat. And this is His blood poured out for the forgiveness of your sins. Drink. Amen. Amen. I'm going to give you your benediction. And as I do that, you can go ahead and reach across the aisle and grab someone's hand as we do here at Grace Fellowship. And I want to remind you that we will have equipping classes in the community center. So you can make your way over there. All of the classes are over there. Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely. And may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; He will surely do it. Praise Him, all creatures here below. Praise Him, above ye heavenly hosts. Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Thank you for being here.

