

Transition to a God-Made City

Series on the Book of Genesis

By Dr. Joel Beeke

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Genesis 25:1-10
Preached on: Sunday, August 3, 2008

Heritage Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids

540 Crescent St NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Website: www.hnrc.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/hnrc

We have two portions of God's word we'd like to read tonight, Genesis 25:1-10 and Hebrews 11:8-16. Genesis 25:1-10,

1 Then again Abraham took a wife, and her name was Keturah. 2 And she bare him Zimran, and Jokshan, and Medan, and Midian, and Ishbak, and Shuah. 3 And Jokshan begat Sheba, and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim, and Letushim, and Leummim. 4 And the sons of Midian; Ephah, and Epher, and Hanoch, and Abida, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah. 5 And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac. 6 But unto the sons of the concubines, which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, unto the east country. 7 And these are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived, an hundred threescore and fifteen years. 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. 9 And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre; 10 The field which Abraham purchased of the sons of Heth: there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife.

Hebrews 11:8-16,

8 By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. 9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: 10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. 11 Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable. 13 These all died in faith, not having

received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. 15 And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. 16 But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

Thus far the reading of God's sacred word.

Dear congregation, we've come to our 28th and our final sermon on the life of Abraham and God's dealings with him. For 100 years, we've seen God blessing Abraham as he endeavors to walk with God. God has called him sovereignly and graciously our of Ur the Chaldees to be the founding father of the people of God in this world. Paul highlights him in Romans and again in Galatians as the archetypal man of faith and yet we've seen throughout this history that Abraham has often faltered. We've seen him reaching great heights of faith and being sunk to great depths of unbelief in the midst of sore trials. The constant in Abraham's life is not so much his faith as it is the great faithfulness of the God of faith.

It's God's grace that is really the headlines of Abraham's life. God refuses to give up on his servant Abraham and again and again as we've traced the history of grace from Genesis 11 at the end, to Genesis 25, we've seen this theme that the great grace of God prevails over the great weakness of men, and isn't that also our experience, dear children of God, that we never are treated by God according to what our sins deserve? It's always the story of grace that brings us into life and it keeps us in spiritual life. Thanks be to God. He's the God of grace to our dying day and from the moment of regeneration to the end of our lives, just like Abraham, we will owe everything to the one-sided, unconditional, sovereign grace of God.

Now, it's that grace that makes us strangers and pilgrims here on this earth, and it's striking to notice how the New Testament in the book of Hebrews 11, summarizes the life of Abraham. We're told that he went out to seek a place to live, following God, not knowing where he was going but obeying. We're told by faith he made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country. He lived in tents. There was nothing permanent about his home. Isaac and Jacob were heirs with him of the same promise. Then we read these remarkable words in Hebrews 11, "For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." You see, with all the ebbs and flowings of faith, all the highs and lows that checkered the checkered life of Abraham, he was looking, he was looking for a city that didn't crumble. He was looking for something better than tents. He was looking for a city built by God and tonight we want to see him being readied for that city and entering that city by the same grace of God that brought him out of Ur and may his experience be ours as well.

Well, our text then is Genesis 25:1-10 and I'll read again only 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." With God's help our theme, then, tonight is "Transition to a God-Made City." We'll see that in three thoughts. First, Abraham's last years, verses 1 through 4. Second, Abraham's house set in order, 5 and 6. And third, Abraham's death, 7 through 10. Transition to a God-made city. Abraham's last years. Abraham's house set in order. Abraham's death.

Genesis 25 actually covers the last 30 to 35 years of the life of Abraham. It seems to have been a quiet period in his life. He has no remarkable visions, at least they're not recorded. No striking dramatic events. It all seems to be relatively quiet and peaceful and yet it's a busy time in the life of Abraham. As we will see shortly, he had six sons in this period. It's a time where he's living by faith as much as ever, trusting and obeying God, that Savior, that King, who we heard this morning controls every event of our lives. But there is much to learn from this passage, for how to live out the sunset years of our lives, and it's good to learn from Abraham how to do so. If God spares us, we will all be facing those sunset years and we need to learn from such godly examples.

What a blessing senior God-fearing people are in families, in the church, in this church. How grateful we are for those who know the Lord Jesus Christ and can speak to their children and grandchildren like Abraham could of these wonderful truths. Certainly, we need to remember as a congregation that old age is an honorable time of life. You must never cave in to contemporary pressures to say that youth is the be-all and the end-all. Youth is the future of the church but youth is not all important, seniors must be ministered to as well.

Samuel Rutherford, one of the great Scottish divines of the 17th century, wrote plainly when he was imprisoned in Aberdeen to his congregation, "Four fancy your deathbed." Fancy your deathbed four times is what he meant to say. In other words, anticipate your death whether you're young or old. Get ready to die. Think about dying before you die.

Well, that's what we learn from Abraham here in this portion and from many in past years and centuries, even in the dark Middle Ages, there was a saying that went like this: memento mori, remember you're going to die. Actually it sounds morbid but it's really realistic but what happened was that people would sell human skulls as something you would put on your desk or something you'd decorate your room with and they'd write on it, memento mori so that when you walked through the room or you sat at your desk, you would be reminded, remember I'm going to die. Prepare to die.

I'm not advocating that we buy skulls, of course, but what I am saying is the message behind it is important for every one of us, no matter how young we are, boys and girls. Those who live well are those who are preparing to die well and must live so as to die. That day is coming. The day is coming sooner than we think. Our obituaries will one day appear in the paper. Our funerals will be held. Our family, our friends will weep for us. Our bodies will be placed in the ground. How important, then, to be ready, and that's

what we see here with Abraham. He was ready. Death came very naturally to him, in a sense.

At the beginning of this chapter, we meet him at age 140. He's still living near the cave of Machpelah near the bones of Sarah, but he's a very lonely man. His beautiful Sarah is dead. Isaac and Rebekah are married and moved to the south country by the well of Lahai Roi. They kept in contact with Abraham, no doubt, but it was quite a distance from Lahai Roi to Machpelah. And Ishmael lived somewhere off in the wilderness of Arabia. He has his own life and his own family, apparently seldom, if ever, sees his father. So Abraham is lonely. It's true he has work to do. Even in old age he's got servants to supervise, but servants are not family. No doubt he does a lot of reminiscing in those days. He has good memories but that just makes the pain of loneliness all the sharper. Many of you seniors know what I'm talking about, especially those of you who are widows or widowers. Your spouse is gone. Your children, perhaps, live in other cities. Perhaps you can no longer drive your own car. Perhaps your health is fragile. You do more reminiscing. Life seems to be passing you by. Life is not easy. It's not easy to be old and to be lonely. And life can be difficult. Scriptures don't speak for nothing of senior years as the evil days, the days when ill health comes; the days when the burdens of old age rest upon you. How important to be ready before those senior years come to make the transition to eternity.

God can convert seniors, of course, but that's not the normal time to begin to seek the Lord. Often when senior years come, seniors will tell you that they've got so many infirmities it seems like their life is just filled with going from doctor to doctor. They've got so many physical concerns they can hardly concentrate on the spiritual. Boys and girls and young people, we must seek the Lord when we're young, when we're healthy, when we're strong. We must give our lives to the Lord, give our bones to the Lord.

Well, Abraham surprisingly at first glance at least, remarries. He's 140 years old and Genesis 25 begins quite abruptly, "Then again Abraham took a wife, and her name was Keturah." Now, maybe you're a bit disappointed by this. He's such a God-fearing man. 140 years old. What's he doing remarrying? Well, remember, when you're old and lonely, companionship is treasured. Abraham is not sinning by remarrying. Today when people remarry, I suppose a similar thing today would be when they remarry in their 70s and 80s. We shouldn't laugh at that. We shouldn't disparage that. We shouldn't be disappointed by that. God has created us as people who long for companionship. He said, "It is not good for man to be alone." To live alone in old age is no small challenge. Alone is alone, as someone said to me. People who judge seniors for remarrying usually are quite young. By the time they're old, they look at things differently.

So let's be grateful when two lonely seniors seek God-fearing companionship in marriage. The Lord has nothing against that and neither should we, and children of such marriages for whom this subject can be a very tender one, should do their utmost to understand lonely feelings of their father or mother.

Many years ago I married a couple who was 82 and 79 and I kind of really kind of jokingly said to them when I left, "Are you going on a honeymoon?" And they said,

"Yes, we're going to Europe. All over Europe for six weeks." And they did and they came back and they lived for 17 more years. He died, I think, when he was 99 just a few years ago. The Lord gave him 17 years of companionship. So God's ways are above our ways.

Abraham had 35 years with Keturah but what is even more amazing is Keturah bears to Abraham six sons. "She bare him," verse 2, "Zimran, and Jokshan, and Medan, and Midian, and Ishbak, and Shuah." Now, some commentators say this probably indicates he actually took Keturah as a concubine earlier on. It's too late, they say, for Abraham to have children, and they say that's reinforced by 1 Chronicles 1:32 which refers to Keturah as Abraham's concubine. But there are several objections to this view. First, it would seem very strange that Scripture would be silent, never referring to these six boys during Sarah's lifetime if they had already been born then. After all, the whole story unfolds with this idea that there aren't sons, that Abraham is waiting for children. The whole notion that before Isaac was born there was only Ishmael is very prominent on the pages of this history. And as for the objection of Abraham not being able to father children in his 140s, the answer really is quite simple: the same God who did the miracle of enabling him to be a father at 100 could do it at 145. With God all things are possible.

But most importantly, we must not forget that this miracle is really the fulfillment of the promises of God. God had promised in Genesis 17:4 that he would make Abraham the father not of one nation, Israel, not of two nations of Ishamelites and Israel, but of many nations. That promise had not yet been fulfilled. God said, "As for me, behold my covenant is with thee. Thou shalt be a father of many nations. Thy name shall be called Abraham, for a father of many nations have I made thee. I will make thee exceedingly fruitful. I will make nations of thee and kings shall come out of thee." Now this happens in Abraham's old age when it would be normally impossible to have children. God wonderfully miraculously intervenes. His word shall stand. His promises shall be fulfilled. Kings would come forth from these sons, as we know they did. These sons would go off in different directions and become nations.

So this, too, was included in Romans 4:17 where it is written of Abraham that he believed in God who quickens the dead and calls those things which be not as though they were. Though he thought his body was dead, he believed in God to fulfill the promises and God did again not only with Isaac but also with these six sons. And even though these six sons weren't destined to be the line of the chosen seed, they still were conceived children by faith. Abraham believed in God. Romans 4:19 says, "being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead."

He married Keturah, we may believe, by faith. Well, why then is she called a concubine in 1 Chronicles 1? Well, probably to indicate that the right of inheritance still belonged to Sarah's Isaac so that the covenant and the promise and the seed of the Messiah would not be compromised. But whatever the case may be for that and perhaps there are things we don't know about that, it must have been a great joy for Abraham. Don't you think in his old age that he could receive six sons and circumcise them and bring them up in the fear of God. And later when they went into various directions, he was passing on to them a spiritual heritage and one of the lessons in all of this for us, that we, too, are to be faithful

to God and believe that God will be faithful to his word to us. What God has spoken, he shall fulfill.

You can trust his word, congregation, as impossible as it may sometimes seem to be. You can trust his word, seniors, even if you live to 140. He's faithful. He's true. And the Lord can bless you in your senior years in an unexpected manner. He can undertake for you to the very end, to your dying breath, as he has promised to do.

So Abraham did the busy life. He had a calm life, a life in the fear of God in his last 35 years. But then we're told something remarkable in verses 5 and 6. We read, "And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac. But unto the sons of the concubines, which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, unto the east country." What's going on here? Well, Abraham is preparing to die. He's setting his house in order. He's making arrangements. We saw him doing that already at the beginning of chapter 23, didn't we? Remember how chapter 24 begins, "Abraham was old, and well stricken in age," and then he gets very concerned about Isaac. So really when you take 24 and 25 combined, what happens is that Abraham to get his house in order, takes a double action approach. He first looks after Isaac and then he looks after his own sons, the sons of Keturah.

Now, what happens is that Abraham gives them all very generous gifts. He makes provision for them all so there would be no disharmony in his family after he dies. He doesn't want any quarrels and hostility. He doesn't want an argument over who's going to inherit his money and his possession. So he gives them all a generous provision while he has his mental health and strength. Then he makes arrangements for all of them to go away. He removes them from the vicinity of Isaac so that Isaac will receive the inheritance, the promised inheritance, peacefully and no secondary heirs will be listed in Abraham's will. This was a special situation because of the promise given to Isaac and, therefore, Abraham here is not acting unfairly. He's acting prudently and wisely. None of the sons of Keturah can complain, they all received generous provision, but he's safeguarding the inheritance of his son and he's avoiding at the same time future disharmony.

What does that say to us today? Well, I think it says this. You see, the Bible is very practical. It's saying we should make out a will and we should make it clear who receives what. We should have things ready also financially for the day of our death. Not just spiritually, we should have our houses set in order also in practical ways. Great unhappiness has been caused and an opportunity given to the devil to divide a family when this has not been prepared. As a pastor, I've been called into those situations three or four times in my ministry and they're messy. But you see, Abraham doesn't want that. He wants everything settled and how that applies to us today too in all kinds of areas. It applies in church life at all levels: financially, physically, especially spiritually, of course. All our works as ministers and elders and deacons and members, we have to think of generations to come. We have to think what will happen to the church when we pass on. Are we passing on the torch of a sound, reformed, biblical, stable congregation and

denomination in which our future generations may witness to the precious heritage of Reformed, Puritan, experiential truth. That's our responsibility.

So what Abraham is setting as an example here has ramifications in all kinds of areas of our lives. We have to prepare for our death. Our house has to be set in order. Are you prepared? Are you now if it were to happen today? Someone once asked Martin Luther, "What would you do if you knew you were going to die tonight?" It was early in the morning. "What would you do if you knew you were going to die tonight?" And Luther said something that at first sounds irreverent, he said, "I'd plant an apple tree." You say, "What? What is he talking about?" What he really was saying, you see, I go on with my normal routines of daily life because I'm ready to die every day. I'm living by faith. My house is set in order. I'm ready to go. That's what he's saying.

John Newton put it this way, "I am packed, sealed and waiting for the post." Isaac Watts said this, "I lie down in comfort at night, not being anxious whether I awake in this world or in the next." Martyn Lloyd-Jones said this, "Death is my coronation day. I've been looking forward to it for years." George Whitefield, "Lord, keep me from a sinful and too eager desire for death. I wish quietly to wait until my blessed change comes." These are people ready to die. Looking forward to death. It's amazing. Their houses are set in order. John Calvin once said, "If you're not looking forward to death, you have made very little progress in the Christian faith."

So Abraham gets everything ready. Spiritually he's ready. Physically he gets everything ready. He readies himself for transition to that city which has a foundation whose builder and maker is God. Then the Bible says he dies in a full old age. That brings us to our third thought. For 100 years Abraham lives as a stranger, an exile. In chapter 23, verse 4 when he tried to buy a burial plot for Sarah he says to the Hittites, "I am a stranger and a sojourner with you." Abraham was born of another kingdom. He was an alien and that's the theme that the New Testament picks up on when it summarizes the life of Abraham. He lived by promise in a strange country, dwelling in tents. He saw himself as a foreigner, not at home, and yet in the land of promise but living with no sense of permanency, not putting down roots in this world yet living in the midst of the world, looking forward to the city with foundations whose builder and maker is God. His only real estate was the cemetery.

What a life. Genesis 12, 13, 15, 17, they all convey to us that he lived really by promises rather than by possessions, the promises of God that reach beyond himself and beyond his family even through a renewed cosmos. Then we're told at the end of this chapter that all those Old Testament saints lived this way. They lived by faith in the promises of God, promises they did not yet receive. They saw them from a distance and welcomed them and believed them, but they were aliens and strangers and pilgrims on this earth.

What a lesson that is for us today. What a delicate balance is involved, don't you think, between engaging with the world into which God has set us and yet living as an alien and a stranger in this world. This world is not our home. If we're believers, it's not our home. We're just passing through and we're looking forward, I trust, to a better city, a city which

has foundations whose builder and maker is God. A city eternal in the heavens of whom God puts down his signature, "I am the architect. I am the builder."

So how are we, then, to behave in this world? We're not to behave like the Amish and go hide away in our communes. We're to be salt in the earth and light on the hill. We're to live in the world but we're to be strangers, passing through strangers headed for the eternal city in the heavens not made with hands. We're in a transitional journey to life eternal. That's how Abraham lived and that's how Jesus said we should live. "Do not lay up treasures for yourselves on earth but lay up treasures in heaven." There is your home, your real home, where Christ is King and Priest and Prophet forever.

So don't disengage from this world. Don't retreat from this world but go out and proclaim to the ends of the world Jesus Christ and him crucified, but as you do so, be careful that the world doesn't influence you rather than you it. Be careful to remain unstained from the world's entertainment and the world's enticements. Be careful to remain an alien in this world, that your home is in the next. Be careful not to be absorbed by what is temporary instead of having our hearts taken up with what is enduring and eternal.

John Calvin put it this way, "Let those be ashamed who find it difficult to bear the disquietude of one or of a few years. Since Abraham the father, the faithful was not merely a stranger during 100 years but was also often cast off into exile." Calvin is referring to many who were under persecution in his day and what he's saying is this, "What do you have to be discouraged about if you're being hounded for one or two years? Look at Abraham, he was in exile for 100 years." Are you willing to be in exile for Christ's sake?

Sometimes when I'm in foreign countries, I must confess a wave of loneliness sweeps over me, especially at night after the day of conference meetings are done. I feel like a stranger. Far from home. Far from family. Far from church and seminary. I long to be home again. That's how a Christian should feel about God in this life. We're in a foreign country all the time and like Abraham who lived 100 years as an alien pining, if we understand Hebrews 11 correctly, to be home where his Father and his Savior were. "Abraham rejoiced to see my day," said the Lord Jesus. So we should be pining to be at home with the Father and the Son and the Spirit in that glorious everlasting day of heaven.

And yet there is a battle sometimes, isn't there? Part of us wants to depart and be with Christ and part of us wants to stay here and be useful. One of our dear members who recently passed away shared that battle with me on her deathbed. She said, "I have a desire to depart to be with Christ. For me to live is Christ and to die is gain but I love my children. Is it sinful for me to have desires to remain?" she asked.

Well, Paul had that same battle and Abraham, no doubt, had that as well. I'm sure he struggled. He wanted to live, yet he wanted to die to be with Christ. But as our friend said to me only weeks ago, "But deep down I know that I really love Christ most of all, and I do want to be with him." So Abraham could say and that's why our text says so

beautifully in verse 8, "Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man," and notice, "and full." An old man and full, and you say in English, "Full of what?" So the King James translators added these two words in italic which aren't in the original, just to finish off the meaning, "full of years." But that's only part of it. The text obviously means something much more. Abraham died in a good old age, an old man and full. Full of what? Oh yes, full of days. He lived long enough to see Jacob and Esau born. In fact, when he died Jacob and Esau were already teenagers so he got to see his grandchildren. But he died full of faith. Not just full of days, he died full of faith, trusting in the Lord. He died full of patience. He had waited so often for the Lord. He died content with the Lord's time. He died full of blessing. He had Jesus in his arms, the Messiah. He had the Simeon dismissal blessing. He could say, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace. I am full." Full of Christ. Full of faith in the Messiah to come. Full of believing in the promises of God when I see no evidence of their fulfillment. Oh, Abraham was ready to die. By faith he had that good life that fears neither life nor death. By faith he knew that dying proved he was mortal, but that after he died, he would be immortal.

You see, when you're ready to die, you're full of faith and faith builds a bridge across the gulf of death, and when it does, the sting of death is taken away. Then our last day is our best day, for then we die to die no more. Satan may chase us all the way, nibbling at our heels all the way to the day of death, to the last breath, but he cannot pursue us once we go through those gates of death. By death, we escape all our enemies, including pain and death itself. Death is the funeral of all our sorrows and struggles. At death we escape death through the death of Christ.

So death is our waiting room that clothes us for immortality. We exchange robes for rags. Yes, this is the Christian faith and the Christian faith, death is not a hopeless cul-de-sac but it's an open road into the eternal presence of our loving, welcoming, heavenly Father. In death, we leave the land of the dying to enter the land of the living if we're true believers. Then we can say with Thomas Goodwin on his deathbed, "Ah, is this dying? How have I dreaded as an enemy this smiling friend?" Or with William Gurnal, "Let thy hope of heaven master thy fear of death. Why shouldst thou be afraid to die who hopest to live by dying?"

He died full. He died in peace. He died in Christ and if we die in Christ, dear congregation, we have everything for this life and for a better. If we have by faith welcomed Christ, we may welcome death. And though as Thomas Watson said, "The wheels of death's chariot may rattle and make some noise, but they will only carry us to Jesus." And Richard Sibbs said, "Through death Christ becomes exceedingly friendly to me." Oh, I love what Mathew Henry says, "He whose head is in heaven need not fear to put his feet into the grave."

Oh, to die full is to die as God's call from exile back home. It's God's call, "Welcome home, friend. Welcome home to your real fatherland. Welcome home to be with me, the Triune God, and the souls of the redeemed made perfect and one day their bodies as well, and all the millions of angels. Welcome home forever. Welcome home to glorious

mansions," as we heard last week, "to the eternal place prepared for you." One of the Puritans said it this way, "Death is but a temporary grim porter who lets us into a stately palace."

Abraham died full. Don't you love that? He died full. We think of death as something that empties us. We think of death as something that shames us and humiliates us and apart from faith it does, but by faith with Christ in our arms, death lifts us up to glory. Death is our wheelchair to roll us into the presence of the King of kings. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" In Christ, you can die full if you learn to live by faith and to live full.

Then there is one more wonderful thing here: he died full and was gathered, says our text, was gathered to his people. Do those words every strike you? To his people, what people? He was buried in Machpelah. There was just Sarah's bones. What's this, his people? What does that mean? You notice it doesn't say he was gathered unto Sarah's bones or he was gathered to the cave of Machpelah. He was gathered to his people. Well here, of course, what we have is one of those early Old Testament hints of the afterlife; of a fellowship, a people, a family, a covenant community which outlasts death. Abraham wasn't gathered into nothingness. He wasn't gathered into a land of mere bones. He was gathered to his people, to a reunion, to a re-acquaintance with those who by God's grace were the children of God. He is gathered to the living, redeemed fellowship and glory. Like the poor beggar dies in Christ's parable is said to be gathered unto Abraham's bosom.

Now, in one sense this is true of everyone, everyone who dies. Everyone is gathered to his own people but for some it is gloriously true and for some it is horribly true. My friend, boys and girls, seniors, middle-aged, we will all die if Christ tarries and be gathered unto our own people. But what a comfort for God's people, to be gathered to that people who love to embrace Christ. To have an appointment in heaven with a Triune God and the saints made perfect by the blood of Jesus. To meet again the loved ones we lost that we came to cherish in Christ here in this world. Oh, to have reunion in Immanuel's land, what a happy day that will be, gathered to the people of God.

Do you ever long for that? Gathered to the people of God? What if you're not a child of God? You'll be gathered to your own people if you die unconverted, and that's the land of loneliness. The land of lovelessness. The land of despair. The land of eternal dying and yet never dead. Oh, how much better to be prepared for this transition.

My friend, I ask you tonight: are you ready to die? Are you looking for a city whose builder and maker is God? Do you view your death, your coming death as a better day than the day of your birth?

This week I had a wonderful conversation with someone over the phone and that person then sent me an email. I want to just read this one paragraph to you. "It is good to be reminded of the urgency, necessity and holy desire to be in a sinless oneness with Christ, holy intimacy with Christ. To sense his loving touch. To feel his warm embrace. To

commune with him as with a friend. To wash his feet with our tears. To sing his praises with our lips. To be totally consumed with his love. Ah, but here so many distractions. So much love lost, spent in the cares of this life. As long as we have life, of course, we have a purpose here. We must work diligently onward but our desire is and should be to just live in his presence bathing in the sunshine of his love for our soul. Many brothers and sisters in the Lord know a lot about Christ but few bathe in his love. That pitcher of his love can be poured out and poured out and it will never run dry. And as the tears stream down my cheeks even now as I write, I know he is collecting those tears in a bottle because they are precious to him. He loves us more than we can even begin to imagine. There is nothing here that can separate us from that love, but I cannot wait until that day when I shall behold him in his righteousness and I shall be like him. I shall see him as he is, incomprehensible glory. I love my husband. I love my family. I love my brothers and sisters in the Lord dearly. My husband has very specific instructions that when the Lord calls me home, no defibs, no respirators, anything like that because he is my first love and I long to be with him. Forgive me for bearing my heart. I'm just one of those simple Christians who has by the grace of God picked up the simple Gospel when it was simply preached to me and I simply cling to the old rugged cross."

That's it. That's the way Abraham died, full, longing to be with the promised Savior.

Then we read, "his sons Isaac and Ishmael," verse 9, "buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre; The field which Abraham purchased of the sons of Heth." Ishmael came back home finally to bury his dad. But notice the order: Isaac and Ishmael. The second born is mentioned first. Unnatural. Why? Because he's the firstborn in the eyes of God and among his covenant people. His bones to Machpelah but one day the Lord Jesus will return and raise up Abraham's body now thought to be buried under a famous Muslim mosque, but then the soul and body, Abraham together with his people, all redeemed shall praise their God through whom all blessings flow forever and forever. And that day, Abraham and all the redeemed shall enjoy knowing God and seeing him and loving him and praising him and communing with him, forever basking in his smile and bathing in his glory.

Yes, Abraham was full when he died, but how much fuller he will be when Christ comes again in the clouds and soul and body together will be able to praise God perfectly forever and ever. Oh, what a future awaits the children of God. Happy is he who has the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, for his God and his Savior.

Well, I close this sermon tonight by summing up the history of Abraham with five quick things that teach us what we should treasure about God's grace, and I ask you to treasure these things in your own life.

First is this: God's grace enabled Abraham to believe. In Genesis 15 and Romans makes so much of that, that God imputes it to Abraham for righteousness. Faith is absolutely essential but God gave Abraham the faith and so he gives it to us. So we must praise him for that.

Secondly, we must praise God's grace because with Abraham despite his erratic faith. Many times Abraham didn't measure up but the Lord would come back and come back and restore and restore and restore. So he does with us. Why does he do that? Because he's more full of grace than we are of sin and because his righteousness exceeds our unrighteousness. You see, his grace is everything. His grace is everything in our theological vocabulary but it's often too small in the practice of our lives. Let us seek to be more amazed at amazing grace.

Then third, God's grace included Abraham's son Isaac in his one-sided covenant provision. That is a staggering thing, that God should continue his covenant among us and in our families when we made so many mistakes as parents. Let us praise God for that grace too. Let us be overwhelmed at his covenant faithfulness to us in our families and let us not be content until every one of our children are gathered in, into the internal essence of that covenant.

Fourth, let us like Abraham praise God's grace for the obedience Abraham is enabled to give in response to God's covenant. You see, covenant blessings go hand-in-hand with covenant obedience and covenant responsibility, and it's amazing that God gives us the grace not only to believe but also to obey, and then are we called to obey. Ask for grace to do that better and more consistently.

And finally, let's praise God's grace which is sufficient even for death. Abraham died full. God declared he's not ashamed to be Abraham's God for he has prepared for him a city. There are two cities prepared by God. God is in control of both of them. One of them we call heaven, and one we call hell. For God to come today in your life, what city would you go to? If you're in Christ by faith, you will go to the heavenly city. If you're out of Christ in unbelief, you will go to the city called hell. But still tonight, the gates of heaven are open. The way of faith is open. If you are alive, still tonight the God of Abraham still lives, the God of Abraham is still sufficient, and the God of Abraham is still our only comfort in life and death through Jesus Christ. Oh, flee to him and say with the poet, Thomas Oliver,

"The God of Abraham praise,
Who reigns enthroned above;
Ancient of everlasting days,
And God of love:
Jehovah, the Great I Am!
By earth and heaven confess:
I bow and bless the sacred Name,
For ever blest."

Amen.