

Genesis 25:1–18

Covenant Blessing, Now and Forever

Main idea: When we live by faith in Christ, we see life on earth as saturated with covenant blessings that are dwarfed by God's blessing at our death, and then again at our resurrection.

¹ Abraham again took a wife, and her name was Keturah. ² And she bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. ³ Jokshan begot Sheba and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim, and Leummim. ⁴ And the sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoah, Abidah, and Eldaah. 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 maidservant, 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, Nebajoth; then Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, ¹⁴ Mishma, Dumah, Massa, ¹⁵ Hadar, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. 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.

Introduction

Earthly prosperity can be a curse. Jesus grieves that it is especially difficult for the wealthy to enter the kingdom (Luke 18:23–25) and urges us not to store up treasures on earth but in heaven (Mat 6:19–21).

The apostle Paul warns that the love of wealth is a root of all kinds of evil (1Tim 6:9–10), urging us to hold loosely to the blessings of this world (1Cor 7:30–31), and to use whatever we have to be wealthy in good works instead. 1Timothy 6:17–19, *“Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.”*

Generalizing from the majority of the wealthy, James 5:1 tells the rich to weep and howl for the misery that is about to come upon them.

But earthly prosperity can also be a great blessing. Abraham here has great riches to bestow, he dies “old and full” (not just of years!). David. Many in the Reformation who did much good, and most of whom gladly lost everything, some even their lives.

What makes the difference? How can you, this week, be blessed by the providence of God in your life, and respond rightly to Him, serving Him with it all? By a hope that is stronger than death, a hope that points you to Christ then, a hope that makes you to walk in fellowship with Christ now.

In this passage, the Lord is teaching us the lesson of Psalm 73. He brings us here and shows us Abraham's burial v.s. Ishmael's burial v.s. Rebekah's barrenness. Do not despise the day of small things. Do not overestimate the value of earthly things. Christ is the treasure of glory. Christ is your treasure now. Walk with Christ!

In particular, this morning, we will focus upon a four-event series in vv8–9 and again in vv17–18. Physical decease (breathed his last, expired), departure of the soul (he died, cf. 35:18), arrival of the soul (gathered to his people), physical burial.

Death is the great equalizer. When we number our days, we get a heart of wisdom. If we live merely in the light of what is under the sun, then all will be vanity. To live rightly, to enjoy anything well, to do anything useful, to remember our Creator, we must live before the face of Him who is above the sun.

So, this passage presents this four event series, drawing our attention to what happens after this life both to our souls (the intermediate state) and to our bodies (burial and resurrection).

It is especially the twin hopes of the intermediate state and the resurrection of the body that enable us to live by faith in Christ. Then, we will see life on earth as saturated with covenant blessings that are dwarfed by God's blessing at our death, and then again at our resurrection.

1. The blessings of believers at their death: the intermediate state

- a. **“Gathered to his people.”** This is covenantal language for the destination of their departed souls. In Scripture, it is only used of these two, and then later of Isaac (35:29), of Jacob (49:33), and finally Aaron (Num 20:26) and his brother Moses (Num 27:13). The promise of Genesis 17:18 is kept! Ishmael is not “cut off from his people” (as Scripture says of the souls of the wicked at their death, when they go into torment), but “gathered to his people.” Ishmael has died, hoping in the promised Christ, who would come from his brother Isaac.
- b. **Who are these people?**
 - i. Gen 15:15 and 4:25–5:32. God is not God of the dead but of the living (Luk 20:37–38).
 - ii. Jesus Himself refers to this intermediate state as “Abraham’s bosom” (cf. Luk 16:22). Cf. Judges 2:10 and the generation that knew the Lord. David says that his covenant child has gone there in 2Sam 12:23.
 - iii. But Abraham is no longer the one with whom the intermediate state is most identified. For, our bodily resurrected Redeemer has ascended into glory, where He now receives us. “Today you will be with Me in paradise” (Luk 23:43; cf. 2Cor 12:2–4 and the third heaven)! Paul rejoices in the wonderful, post-ascension truth that what had been called “Abraham’s bosom” is now the presence of the resurrected Lord (2Cor 5:6–8). The place that Jesus prayed that we would go (John 17:24). The place where are the souls of the just made perfect (Heb 12:23), which has more to do with the resurrected souls of Rev 20:4 than any supposedly utopian period on earth before the resurrection.
- c. **Who are “your people”?** Those who have the same hobby? Those who have the same background? Those in the same age group? Or is it those who belong to the same Lord of the same grace, who walk with Him now and will go to Him at death and be raised with Him at the resurrection (cf. Gen 17:1, 7)? If you say, “Yahweh, You are the portion of my inheritance and my cup... the lines have fallen to me in pleasant places,” then say “the godly ones on the earth are the excellent ones in whom are all my delight” (Psalm 16:1–6).

2. The blessings of believers in the last day: the resurrection

- a. **Resurrection hope and burial:** drawing a line from the cave of Machpelah to the empty tomb. We are not to be careless with our body now “because God can use them anyway.” We are not to be careless with our body then “because God can resurrect it anyway.” We are to live with our bodies now as those who have been entrusted with a stewardship for a purpose. We are to treat our bodies then as something that we are not yet done with, something that is still united to Christ, something that will be transformed into the likeness of Christ’s glorious body (cf. Phil 3:20–21).
- b. **Resurrection hope is directly tied to the hope of a New Earth.** It is not just a New Heavens. It is a New Heavens and a New Earth, and 1Cor 15:50–58 emphasize that the resurrection is necessary because this new type of incorruptible earth requires us to have a new type of incorruptible body in which to inherit it. *“Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”*
- c. **Resurrection hope is the key to vigorous living on earth**
 - i. Rescuing Lot. What difficult tasks are you attempting and attacking in service to Christ and His church?
 - ii. Offering Isaac. What sacrifices are you having to make, or perhaps do you know that you ought to be making but are finding yourself unwilling?
 - iii. Leaving to Isaac all that he had. Sure, the sons of wives Keturah (25:1) and Hagar (16:3) were more numerous and perhaps even prosperous. But the son of Sarah was the son of promise. By comparison to the others, Sarah is the only wife. By comparison to the others, Isaac is the only son. Sarah alone is in the cave of Machpelah. Through Sarah, the death-defeater would come.
- d. **Resurrection hope comes from faith in Jesus Christ, the promised death-defeater.** *Genesis 15:1–6, “After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.’ But Abram said, ‘Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?’ Then Abram said, ‘Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!’ And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, ‘This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.’ Then He brought him outside and said, ‘Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.’ And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.” ... Rom 4:17–19 tells us resurrection hope enabled him to believe the Isaac promise at the age of 100*

3. The blessings of believers now: fellowship with Christ most of all

- a. **“To die is gain” is only true if “to live is Christ”!** He is worth the loss of everything, and beautifies even suffering and death. If you say, “Whom have I in heaven but you” then say “and there is nothing else I desire on earth. My flesh and my heart will fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Ps 73:20–28).
- b. **The place of family worship.** At least once a day. Twice or more if possible. At least pray many times. Come together before the face of God; come together into the fellowship with Christ that you have in His means. Let your private spiritual life mutually reinforce your family spiritual life.
- c. **And worship with your greater family.** Your church family, your brothers and sisters in the congregation in which Christ has placed you. But even more than that, your greater church family. That cloud of witnesses, as Heb 11 calls them; or the assembly of the firstborn, as Heb 12 calls them. The whole family in heaven and on earth (Eph 3:14–15). Indeed, Hebrews 11:39–40 tells us that the reason that they are still in the intermediate state and not yet resurrected to our final inheritance is so that they would not be perfected/completed without us!
- d. If our hope at our death is that we will be “gathered to our people” at that time, then let us be gathering with our people in those ways and times that our Elder Brother, the Lord Jesus, has given unto us to do so now!

Conclusion: walking by faith rather than sight

Illusionists depend upon distracting you. The cares of this world, and the troubles of this world, are a distraction that Jesus warns can choke out the Word. “Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity” (Luk 8:14). The fear of death is not only a distraction but a bondage (Heb 2:14–15).

But to have your heart and mind in heaven, where Christ is, enables you to receive rightly every good thing as both a blessing from Him and an assignment from Him. For, each of these blessings are but the beginning of a whisper of the blessings that are to come.

Christ Himself is the greatest blessing in the resurrection at the last. Christ Himself is the greatest blessing when we pass into glory. Christ Himself is the greatest blessing even now. And suddenly, fellowship with Christ in His sufferings is a greater blessing than great economic prosperity. And being conformed to Christ’s death is a greater blessing than perfect civil liberty.

But these blessings are ours only if in our death and in our life, in our suffering and in our prosperity, we may have that greatest of all blessedness both now and forever: fellowship with Christ! Amen.