

***Foundations: A Satisfied Man***  
***By Jason Huff***  
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***Psalm 105:1-9; Romans 4:13-25; Genesis 25:1-18***

Our final Scripture reading today comes from Genesis 25:1-18. May God bless the reading of His holy, sacred, and perfect Word. “Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak and Shuah. Jokshan was the father of Sheba and Dedan; the descendants of Dedan were the Asshurites, the Letushites and the Leummites. The sons of Midian were Ephah, Ephher, Hanoah, Abida and Eldaah. All these were descendants of Keturah. Abraham left everything he owned to Isaac. But while he was still living, he gave gifts to the sons of his concubines and sent them away from his son Isaac to the land of the east. Altogether, Abraham lived a hundred and seventy-five years. Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people. His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah near Mamre, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite, the field Abraham had bought from the Hittites. There Abraham was buried with his wife Sarah. After Abraham's death, God blessed his son Isaac, who then lived near Beer Lahai Roi. This is the account of Abraham's son Ishmael, whom Sarah's maidservant, Hagar the Egyptian, bore to Abraham. These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, listed in the order of their birth: Nebaioth the firstborn of Ishmael, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish and Kedemah. These were the sons of Ishmael, and these are the names of the twelve tribal rulers according to their settlements and camps. Altogether, Ishmael lived a hundred and thirty-seven years. He breathed his last and died, and he was gathered to his people. His descendants settled in the area from Havilah to Shur, near the border of Egypt, as you go toward Asshur. And they lived in hostility toward all their brothers.”

Sometimes the ending of a story surprises us. Many films I've seen, the ending fundamentally changes how you watch the movie. All of us who've seen the original *Planet of the Apes* or *The Sixth Sense* knows a twist in the final reel can change your perspective. The *Lord of the Rings* films were criticized when the final film had nearly a half-hour of endings, but after we'd spent twelve hours with these characters, they deserved their final send-offs. A great ending saves a mediocre movie, and a bad ending can ruin the couple of hours that came before.

Today's Scripture reading is a surprising post-script to Abraham's life. In some ways it's fulfilling, and in others, it's feels...off. But it turns out when we do some digging, the foundations that are laid here are paid off in history and Scripture far more than we might expect. And moreover, we want to wrestle with what the end of Abraham's life might mean for us.

When we reach the end of Abraham's life, we get a brief story that comes out of nowhere – Abraham marries again, this time to a woman named Keturah. Her name means “spices” in Arabic, and so people have speculated that maybe Abraham's later sons were the men who started the spice trade that became so famous throughout the ancient Near East. Maybe.

But what so amazing is that Abraham takes a new wife in his old age and has not one, not two, but six boys with her! This bit has confounded scholars for generations. Ancient Jewish scholars well before the time of Christ tried to explain Keturah as another name for Hagar, Sarah's maidservant that bore Ishmael and was sent away due to Sarah's jealousy. There was no basis for it, but they thought it would improve Abraham's reputation if he brought her back.

Other scholars have thought that the story had things out of order. Surely Abraham married Keturah while Sarah was still alive, because the basis of the blessing of Isaac is that Abraham and Sarah have Isaac when they are both "as good as dead." Surely this family must have come earlier when Abraham was vigorous. But this doesn't make sense to me. If Sarah was upset enough that she had Hagar sent away twice, I cannot imagine that she would have taken to Abraham having an entire other family right under her nose!

What the great church father Augustine suggested and I agree with is that Abraham's strength was renewed by the LORD after his faith was proven. When Abraham trusted Isaac's life completely to God, willing to give Isaac up believing in God's promises, God radically blessed Abraham. Abraham was no longer the tired old man that God approached at age 75 to go to Canaan. God blessed Abraham with a renewed life. Abraham had 75 years before meeting the LORD, and God granted him 100 more as he trusted in God. And I can't think that God would have blessed Abraham by giving him 100 years of complete decrepitude.

For some, this is hard to bear. John Calvin, the man whose theology started the Presbyterian and Reformed churches, said that Abraham marrying again was an act "unworthy of his gravity." In fact, Calvin, who is very poetic most of the time, wrote, "If Abraham took a wife after this, what was he thinking?" Calvin, in his own day and time, could not imagine a man of Abraham's age taking a wife because he thought it was undignified.

But my thought allies with Augustine. Abraham and Isaac deeply mourned Rebekah's passing; we know that from our previous study. They were bachelors together for three years. Abraham saw that Rebekah brought Isaac great joy when they married. He rightfully let Isaac enjoy the company of his wife. I think he thought to himself, "God has given me more life; why should I not share my life with another companion?" And that's what happened.

And there's no sense that these later children were an evil or not ultimately part of God's plan. They were not the children of the promise, but they were loved, and they were sent away with a portion of Abraham's wealth to start lives of their own at the proper time. They were not Abraham trying to help God out, like with Hagar and Ishmael, but this second family was a welcome addition for the final years of his life. From history we know that Abraham's later children grew into great peoples themselves. We really know next to nothing about the last 30-some years of Abraham's life, but we know they were spent raising his family.

And so the first thought I have is this: *the later days of a saint's life can be even more blessed than the early days when those days are spent in the grace of the LORD.* Most of us throughout time have thought of growing older as a necessary evil. When I was young, I thought 40 was old. Now that I'm much closer to 50 than 40, I'm not sure what I think is old. 90, maybe? But I've started to learn the nasty quirks of growing old.

I've learned recently about trying to track down where mysterious pains have come from. I've learned the joy of needing trifocals though my equilibrium can only manage bifocals. From those of you who are older, I know that the list of tests and failing body parts just gets longer and longer. But while we may not have the rejuvenation of Abraham, old age does not have to be a curse. With it may come great trials of new kinds, new fears and worries. But there is also the sense that we do not need to be waiting around to die. Abraham surely didn't. Abraham was blessed that he had another family in his old age. He continued to serve God and praise Him and be blessed by Him.

In many ways, aging gives us opportunities we may not have had during our working days. There are always plenty of things to do, but there is more time to pursue the things of God. Volunteering to serve others, helping out in various ways, spending more time in prayer, learning more about God and praising Him...the habits you start to develop in your younger life can increase as the time to do them increases. And I really do encourage you, whatever age you are, to start those habits now so that when there is more time to practice them, it's already something you do regularly.

Nor do we need to think our lives are over if something truly difficult or tragic or traumatic happens. Abraham lost his wife of many, many years and was greatly grieved. But he didn't let that grief overcome him. He did not let the loss of previous blessings stop him from experiencing the later blessings God would have for him. With age comes grief as we lose loved ones, as we lose some abilities.

But we aren't bound by what some like John Calvin would have called the "gravity" or "dignity" of age. Within the boundaries of God's design, within the boundaries of marriage and godly morality, we can enjoy the blessings God gives us as we get older. We do not need to act like children, but we do not need to sit around waiting for the end to come either. That doesn't respect God as the one who gave us life so we could serve Him and enjoy Him forever.

Now some of us don't have the vigor of Abraham in his old age. Some of us get worn out, some of us earlier, some of us later. God's hand is in it all. But there is always something you can be doing for the Kingdom. One of the most wonderful things I've ever experienced was when retirees come in and pray for a ministry. I've been in a few different ministries where there was a dedicated group who would pray for the staff and volunteers, who would spend a portion of a day a week just asking God for His hand of blessing and protection over what we were doing. That was incredibly meaningful because I knew that what we were doing was not in our own hands but God's hands.

When one can't drive someone else to church any more or repair a leaky ceiling or box up a set of groceries for a neighbor in need, we can still pray. Prayer is the first work of the church, and the prayers of the wise saints who have spent their lives pursuing the LORD are powerful and effective. Most of us would consider it amazing to get to live half the lifespan Abraham lived. Yet we can still live in the blessing of God throughout our lives.

Now I want to move on to another idea in this passage that we have to dig deep to see but has great meaning for us. Let's hear again the final description of Abraham: "Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people." What I love in this passage is the final phrase "full of years." Now that's how a lot of translations have it, and it's a fine translation. Perfectly acceptable.

But it's a single word in Hebrew: *sabea*. The word means satisfied or satiated. It's literally when you've had a wonderful meal and you feel great and you push back from the table and say, "I'm done." The passage already says he died at a good old age as an old man; the Hebrew language emphasizes things by making use of repetition through minor changes, but I don't think the point is that Abraham was old, old, old. The point is that not only was he truly old, but he was also truly satisfied with life. God had blessed Abraham's banquet of life, and Abraham could say with honesty, "That was so good, and I'm done now."

That raises a key question for us: *are we finding our satisfaction from life in Christ?* Because that's the only place we will find it. There are so many people, many of them claiming to be Christians, who are deeply dissatisfied with life. Now I'm not speaking of people who are pleading for justice to be done, who have genuinely been wronged and deserve to have their case heard. I'm not speaking of people who are in genuine need and are crying out for help. There are times that we should be righteously dissatisfied because we are dissatisfied with the world's status quo, that we want the righteousness of the Kingdom of God to be brought about.

But in general, when times are relatively normal, are you finding your life's satisfaction in Christ? So many people who like Jesus also want to find their satisfaction somewhere else. And I know there are plenty of ways to try, some more sinful than others, some actually helpful to society and not harmful. Yet all of them come up short. I mentioned *The Lord of the Rings* films at the start of my sermon. I think they're wonderful. They're among the best movies I've ever seen. The story was written by a Christian and Christian themes are there if you're willing to look for them. The extended versions are 12 hours of bliss to me. But that's half a day. Satisfying as a story and as movies? Sure. But half a day in the whole of your life isn't much.

Hobbies...we have hobbies. I enjoy my hobbies a lot. They aren't what define me as a person. Because if that's all I had, it would be an unsatisfying life. I wrote reviews about Japanese animation for 17 years. I haven't written a review in nearly 8 years because my boys were growing up, I didn't have the time, and I had frankly grown tired of it. If that's where I'd found my life's satisfaction, I would be in big trouble now. And many of us know of family, friends, maybe even ourselves at some point in time, who chased after satisfaction in life in a lot of selfish, sinful, and ultimately harmful ways.

But nothing truly satisfies but a relationship with God. We were made to be dissatisfied with anything less. Augustine famously wrote, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in You." A life spent without God is like a car spending its life unused, rusting away in a driveway. It was made for so much more than just sitting there! Yes, there are temporary joys, but nothing that compares to the joy of knowing that the God of the universe loves you, that He is looking out for you, that He sets angels in charge over you, that your life is meant for His glory and your joy in Him.

And like Abraham, when you know the joy of the LORD in your life, you can appreciate all of God's blessings all the more, not just for themselves but for how they remind you that God is gracious to you and has been with you. The greatest reminders of God's love for us are often found in the faces of family and friends and loved ones and church companions who have stood by us over the years.

As we mentioned earlier, Abraham faced a lot of hardships in His life. He wandered for years only on God's leading and promise. He and Sarah faced infertility. He had troubles with Lot, then wound up having to rescue Lot. He had a lot of heartache over the situation with Hagar and Ishmael. He was devastated at the loss of Sarah. He faced many of the kind of difficulties all of us face when we sometimes wonder where God is and what He is up to. And yet Abraham held on to God's promises and when he died, he died satisfied. May that be true for us too, that the hardships of life do not keep us from recognizing all the good things God has given us too.

As we move to the ending, I'll try to keep this short, but I'm fascinated with what's here. The children and some of the grandchildren of Abraham by Keturah and Hagar are listed. True to God's declaration, Ishmael had very little to do with the rest of the family. He did a noble thing in that he stood beside Isaac when it was time to bury Abraham, and he made sure Abraham was buried in the family tomb. But otherwise, it's just a genealogy. Maybe it is.

But I'm also fascinated at where these names pop up in Scripture again. Look at Isaiah 60 with me. This passage was written to comfort Israel during the exile in Babylon. It talks about future days when the nation and people of Israel will be restored. And it's not just about that, but how the faithful from other nations will be gathered to Israel too. Listen specifically to verses 6-7 – "Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah; all from Sheba will come. They will bear gold and frankincense, proclaiming the praise of the LORD. All Kedar's flocks will be gathered to you, the rams of Nebaioth will serve you; they will be accepted as offerings on my altar, and I will adorn my glorious temple."

Now I don't know about you, but in the month of December we hear a lot about gifts of gold and frankincense, don't we? We have no idea what country the wise men came from. We have no idea what led them to be looking for the star that announced Jesus' birth. What we do know is they came from the East. When I look at the prophecy in Isaiah 60 and then see the gifts the peoples bring – these peoples that come from Abraham's line through Ishmael and the sons of Keturah – I think that the only thing we do know about Abraham's other children is that he sent them east, away from Isaac and the potential of disrupting God's promise to Him.

Could it be that the wise men known only by the designation "from the east" that visited Jesus at His birth are representatives of the long-lost children of Abraham, who knew through Abraham long ago that one day a savior would come? It would make sense. In Jesus, Scripture says, all of God's children, the spiritual children of Abraham no matter how related or not they are to the physical Abraham, return to the fold. Through Jesus, all the far-off children of Abraham are rescued and restored, made whole and given eternal life through faith in Him.

Are the wise men the descendants of Abraham's second family? I'd like to think so. I'd like to think that way on down the line, the faithful seeds Abraham planted long ago come to sprout in Christ. And it's proof that God is not just faithful to His chosen group through Isaac, but to all who would come to Him. It should also serve as a reminder to us that in Jesus, all who believe and trust in Him have a place at His great banquet – no matter where we came from or what we've been through, whether we were once rejected or left out. In Christ, even the least and the last have been saved a seat at the feast.

My prayer today for us is that whether we are young or old, whether we are a new believer or a wizened saint, we would be satisfied in Christ, and that we would come to Him in faith and trust as Abraham did.