

Relentless

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[0:00] Turn to Genesis 25. Abraham took another wife whose name was Keturah.! She bore him Zimran, Jaxan, Midan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shua.

! Jaxan was the father of Sheba and Dedan. The descendants of Dedan were the Asherites, the Ledeshites, and the Luamites. The sons of Midian were Ephah, Ephor, Hanuk, Abida, and Eldah. All these were the 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 175 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.

[1:23] There Abraham was buried with his wife Sarah. After Abraham's death, God blessed his son Isaac, who then lived near Bir Lahoy Roy.

The key word tonight is relentless. When you're relentless about something, you mean business. You don't take no for an answer. People might try to steer you away from your goal, but you have eyes only for the prize. And those people are just going to have to get out of your way.

If you're a relentless student, you might stay up all night studying your vocabulary because there might be a test or quiz in the morning.

If you're a relentless athlete, you keep practicing. You keep perfecting your skills, even when it's apparent that you are better than everyone that you are playing.

[2:25] And all true Christians are relentless people. They're relentless about believing God. They have their ups and their downs, but they keep believing.

They keep following him. They press onward to claim the prize for which Christ called them heavenward. And God is relentless too.

He's relentless about keeping his promises. His steadfast love endures forever. Amen. You'll meet it tomorrow, brothers and sisters.

You'll meet it every day afterward. What he says he will do, and those two realities, the Christian's relentless faith and God's relentless faithfulness, are the two distinguishing marks of the entire Christian life, all the way up to death.

And that's what we see in this last passage on Abraham tonight. We've made it to the end, Abraham's last years, his last acts, and his death.

[3:30] And we see those two things in this passage. And so we first see Abraham as relentless in believing God. Now we read the passage.

Pastor John read the passage. Abraham married Keturah. He had lots of sons. But he left everything he owned to Isaac. And he sent his other sons away to the east.

Now, there is an interpretive question that we have to sort of ask at the beginning. In the NIV, there's an option. It's in the footnote. That it should be read, Abraham had taken another wife.

With the possibility that he had taken another wife while Sarah was still alive. Or another concubine while Sarah was still alive. It does mention in verse 6 that he sent away the sons of his concubines. Now, the one concubine that we know of before this was Hagar. And so it is a possibility that Keturah was a concubine who, after Sarah's death, was raised from the position of concubine to the position of a wife.

[4:37] And many good men, many intelligent men, many godly men have thought that. And if you read the passage like that, then what we have in Genesis 25 is a summary, is wrapping up Abraham's life.

And if you read it this way, this passage is not necessarily in chronological order. Not in order by time. And that happens sometimes in Scripture.

Now, if you interpret it that way, then this is a recording, a record of Abraham's bigamy. And the result from it.

Abraham and his sexual immorality. Even though it was common for his day to have more than one wife. It's still not God's will. Not God's purpose.

So Abraham and his sexual immorality produced these people and these groups that eventually opposed God. You see in verse 2 there, Midian.

[5:38] Midian is probably the name that you're most familiar with. In the time of the judges, in the time of Gideon, Midian was the country, was the nation that oppressed God's people.

And so, if you read it like that, then what you have here is a subtle critique of Abraham's bigamy. And yet, God's faithfulness to him.

Now, that's one way to read this passage. There is another way, and it's the way I feel more comfortable with. And it is a chronological telling of events. After Sarah died, after Isaac was married, Abraham took another wife, and God blessed him with children and grandchildren. He was very fruitful. He enjoyed a large family in his last years. And I prefer to read it that way. I guess essentially because love hopes all things.

It hopes all things. And it puts the best possible interpretation on events. And Abraham is our brother. And I thought, someday I'm going to meet him.

[6:49] And if that is the case, then it's best until we know for sure. I would rather think that what we have here is a good thing and not a bad thing.

Well, either way you interpret it, the main point comes across. And I think we don't want to get sidetracked by these possible options.

But the main point of the passage still stands out clearly. In the middle of all this productivity, in the middle of all this fruitfulness, in the middle of all these children, Abraham, nevertheless, is relentless.

He's persistent in believing God's promises. And he shows it by what he does. He leaves everything to Isaac. And he sends the sons of his concubines away.

He sent all of his other sons away. Abraham wasn't distracted. He wasn't diverted. He was relentless in believing God, even in the face of all these other possible options.

[7:51] All these other possible options. He had set his eye on God's promise. And he was faithful. And he was going to believe it. Isaac is the promised one. Isaac stays.

And the rest have to go. And so we see that when he was believing God's promise, it affected how he lived. It affected how he lived.

It determined how he ordered his family. How he lived in his family. Isaac stays. The rest have to go. Those are family decisions. And so I would just ask, if you have a family, which most of us all do, does your faith in God, in God's promises, shape the way that you do family?

How is your relationship with your family? How is your relationship with your wife or your husband or your children different? Because you believe God's promises. You say things.

You say things. You do things. You don't do things. You don't say things. For the very reason that you believe God's promises.

[8:57] That you believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. Now for many of you, I commend you. I know by God's grace, your faith is working itself out in your families.

And so just the word would be, keep it up. Finish strong. Abraham, finish strong. That's what you see here. This is the last lap. He's finishing well.

He's putting one foot in front of the other all the way to the end. So his faith determined how he would order his family. And it also determined what he would do with his money.

He gave gifts to his sons and he sent them away. But he left everything else to his son Isaac. Those are not only family decisions. Those are financial decisions. What he did with the wealth that God gave him.

His faith shaped his finances. Now this world and this selfish heart are going to want to have a word.

[9:54] When you're at the table deciding your budget. When you're determining how you're going to spend your money. And so my question is, does God's word, does God's promises, do God's promises, have a place at your table when you are doing your budget?

Do God's promises affect your checkbook? Just think about the gospels. Think about what Jesus said. How much of Jesus' teaching had to do with faith and finances?

Do not worry. Store up treasures in heaven. Use unrighteous wealth to win friends for yourself. That in heaven they might welcome you.

Your faith should shape how you spend your money and what you do with it. And so your pocketbook will reflect your faith. Whether you have much or little.

And so I would just press you to examine yourself. You're the only one here besides your spouse that has access to see how you're doing in that area.

[11:00] Examine yourself. God has promised you. God has promised you many great and amazing things. He's promised you eternal rewards that this world cannot match.

Are those great eternal realities funneling down and working themselves into how you spend your money? Are you believing him?

Abraham was relentless in his faith all the way to the end. And it showed in his family. And it showed in his finances. And then it showed where he was buried. Notice again Moses' detail. And we've seen this. That Moses is so detailed when he's describing where Abraham is to be buried. You see it there in verse 9. It was 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. Now if you remember a couple chapters ago when Abraham bought this piece of property. Again and again it was this detailed record of this piece of property.

[12:05] It was legally his. And so now Abraham has died and he has not received the land. He hasn't received all that God has promised him.

And yet he dies believing, receiving this small down payment. This just this one place where he was going to be buried. But he believed that God would do all that he said.

And give him and his descendants that land. And that was his faith was symbolized in his burial. In the place where he was buried. Abraham was relentless in believing God's promises.

And it determined and decided even the place where he was going to be buried. Faith works itself out in how we arrange those last.

The way that we'll be buried and taken care of. Secondly, so we've seen that God, that Abraham is relentless in believing God's promises.

[13:07] He believed all the way to the end. Now secondly, God is relentless in keeping his promises. And you might say, well, I don't see how God is being faithful in this passage.

Well, let me just point to you to verse 8. Look at it with me again. And we see how Abraham died and what happened after he died. Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age. An old man full of years. And he was gathered to his people. And that's exactly what God promised him would happen.

Back in Genesis 15, 15. You remember, that's the passage where the Lord walked through the pieces of the animal. Remember, it was dark and a heavy sleep fell on Abraham.

And the Lord promised, he swore this covenant to Abraham. And as part of that covenant, he promised him this. You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age.

[14:14] God kept his promises to Abraham down to the last day. Every promise. He did what he said he would do. He gave him a long life.

Abraham lived 175 years. And then he let Abraham die in peace. A good death, if such a thing could be. In the Old Testament, a long life and a good death, like the one he died, is a blessing from God.

It's a sign of his favor and his love. It's the reward for obedience. Children, the fifth commandment, honor your father and your mother, is the very first commandment with a promise.

That you might live long in the land that the Lord gives you. A long life. A life blessed. A life under God's smile is the promised reward for obedience.

And so Abraham has lived this long life. Under God's smile. But then he was gathered to his people.

[15:23] Just as God said. He said you would go to your fathers. And Abraham was gathered to his people. Just as God said. Now, that's more than just a way of saying that he died.

He died. Because in the Bible, there's this pattern that you see. And we're not going to turn it up. You can look at it. But the pattern is this.

The person dies. He is gathered to his people. And then he is buried. It's these three steps. And you'll notice that order that it's in.

He died. And then he was gathered to his people. And then he was buried. It's interesting. In the Bible, it's always in that order. We die.

And even before you are buried, you are gathered to your people. What a hope for Christians. What a hope for Christians to have.

[16 : 26] We don't know. I don't know very much about the life between death and resurrection. The Bible doesn't say very much about it.

But I think there is something here. When we die, even before we are buried, we go to be with our people. Who are your people?

Who are your people? One of the questions we always ask those who profess Christ when we interview them is, do you feel like these people are your people?

Do you feel like these people are your people? And you'd be surprised, or maybe you wouldn't, but how many people answer in the same exact way? They say, this is my family.

This is where I belong. I love these people. This is my home. Outside, not my home. When I come here, I'm with my people. And so who are your people?

[17 : 25] Who are you going to be gathered with upon your death? Down in verse 17, Ishmael died, and he was gathered to his people as well.

He went to be with the people that were like him. Opposers of God. At enmity with God and with his brethren. And so many people think, so many people think that they can live at enmity with God. They can live with enmity with Christians, not love his church, not love his people, not care about them, and then go and live in their home after they die.

Don't be deceived. As a tree falls, there it lies. You remember the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

They both died, and they were both gathered to their people. Abraham, or Lazarus, went to Abraham's bosom.

[18 : 29] The rich man went to the lake of fire. And there was a great gulf between them. A gulf that could not be crossed.

Where a tree lies, where a tree falls, there it lies. Death is gathering time. It's gathering time. It's harvesting time. And so we'd be brought into the barn, or into the fire.

Abraham died at a good old age. He was gathered to his people. He was ready to die. Ready to depart. It was a peaceful death.

No regrets. No anger. No fear. And that is the gift of God to his people. It's often said that the old Methodists knew how to die well.

They knew how to die well. And if you can do that, then I imagine that they lived pretty well. What a glorious thing to be said.

[19 : 46] It's a lesson we need to learn, because we all have a scheduled seat at that test. John Wesley wrote one time about visiting a woman on her deathbed.

And this is what he said. Here I found ER, whoever this woman is, weaker and happier than ever. Her life seemed spun out to the last thread.

I spent half an hour with her to teach her at once and learn of her to die. Why did the old Methodists die so well?

Well, they didn't ignore death. They didn't ignore death. Death is a reality, and they weren't afraid to face that reality, to think about it.

Now, death is taboo in our culture. We'll talk about all sorts of things. We talk about sex, but we don't talk about death. I worked with a man who said, I just don't do funerals.

[20 : 49] Just don't do it. We pretend like it's not there. We're like children with our hands over our heads, our eyes saying, you can't see me.

You can't see me. Death is the lot of every man. The wise take it to heart.

So listen to Wesley's words when he wrote an address entitled, A Word to an Unhappy Woman. And this is going to sound like strange advice.

So different from what we would write to an unhappy woman, but this is what he says. Do you never think about death? Why do you not?

Are you never to die? Nay, it is appointed for all men to die. And what comes after?

[21 : 44] Only heaven or hell. Will the not thinking of death put it farther off? No, not a day.

Not one hour. Death is the great journey that we all have to take. We wouldn't go on vacation without planning.

You wouldn't go on a long trip without thinking about what it's going to be like, where you're going to go, and preparing for it. But so many people, so many people launch out into this great undiscovered country from which no man ever returns without a thought.

Without a thought. Dying well means that you're going to have to think about it. Then dying well is the fruit that hangs on a life well lived.

It's the fruit that hangs on the tree of a life well lived. Listen again to Wesley. You have no time to lose. See that you redeem every moment that remains.

[22:54] Remove everything out of the way. Be it ever so small that might always, that might anyways obstruct your lowliness and meekness, your seriousness of spirit, your single intention to glorify God in all your thoughts and words and actions.

Do you want to die well? Then live for God. Then live for God. Do you hear the relentlessness of Wesley's words?

Remove everything. Redeem every moment, all your thoughts, your words, and your actions. Live for God in all that you do, and then you will be ready to die well.

Do you want to die well? Then believe in Jesus Christ. Christ. Only knowing and living in Christ will give you victory over death.

There have only been, there's only been two people who have ever conquered death. It's been Jesus Christ and every man who has lived in faith on him.

[24:04] And that's why we sing, my hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness when I shall launch in worlds unseen. Oh, may I then be found in him, dressed in his righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne.

Do you want to die well? Do you want to die with hope and expectation? Then you must believe in Jesus Christ. If you have his righteousness, then you can not only cross the river, but you stand before the throne confident, with great hope because of Jesus.

So I ask you, are you believing in him now? Are you rejoicing and exalting in him now? Because faith is a muscle. And it must be worked. It's not going to, don't think it's going to be like a switch to flip.

That it will just come to you at that moment. It's a muscle that must be worked. And the greatest test is coming at the end.

So we've seen Abraham's relentless faith. We've seen God's relentless promise keeping. He promised Abraham a long life. This kind of death gathered to his people.

[25:21] And God did all that he said he would do. Now, in our remaining time, I want to look at four final lessons.

Going over, going back, four final lessons from Abraham's life and his death. So first, first lesson, is that no one is indispensable.

No one is indispensable. No one is, no, God doesn't just have to have you, is what I'm trying to say, that he doesn't absolutely need you.

Abraham died. And verse 11 says, God blessed his son Isaac. The story goes on. Abraham dies. And God's plan didn't miss a beat.

And if you think about it, that's a relief. That is a relief. God's plan, his ways, his methods, his power, it's beyond you. Jesus Christ is the only indispensable one.

[26:32] The only one that we can't be without. He is the Savior. We are those who are being saved. Abraham died, and someday you will too. And the work will go on.

God's kingdom will continue. And I say that's a relief. Sometimes we think, we feel, that it is all up to us. And so brothers and sisters, let's do the work that God has given to us.

This is not in any way an encouragement to be lazy. Let's do the work God has given us, but let's not forget that God says, it's not by might, it's not by strength, it's by my spirit.

So rest in that. Secondly, and this is more a broader theme. Secondly, Abraham was justified by faith.

There is nothing more vital that you will ever hear from the life of Abraham than this. When Abraham died and he came before God's throne, he could sing, nothing in my hands I bring, simply to thy cross I cling.

[27:44] Abraham died, a desperate man grabbing onto Christ and his cross. Naked, come to thee for dress. Helpless, look to thee for grace. Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.

The only way any of us will be declared righteous in God's sight. And that is the most important question.

how can I be right with God? The only way that we can measure up to God's eternal, righteous standard is through faith in Jesus.

Jesus' righteousness must become yours. It must be yours. It's the righteousness of God that comes through faith. It comes through believing, not by doing.

It comes by looking and clinging to Christ, throwing yourself on time, not resting in anything you've done or will do. If you learn nothing else from Abraham and his life, then learn this.

[28:56] Abraham was justified by faith and you must be justified in the same way. Third, Abraham lived by faith.

He lived by faith. The just shall live by faith. They shall have eternal life. Life with God by faith.

Everlasting life comes to sinners when they believe. They repent and they believe. But that phrase, the just shall live by faith, can be, and it probably should be, taken another way.

And it's that their very life shall be worked out of the principle of faith. So not only does eternal life come to sinners through faith, but once it comes to them, it works itself out by faith, in faith.

The life of faith looks very different from this world, brothers and sisters. The world boasts about what it has and what it's done. And faith boasts in Jesus Christ.

[30:10] And those two principles work themselves out in two very different ways. It's a different tree. It produces different fruit. And by their fruit, you shall know them.

Abraham lived by faith and he produced the works of faith. He kept on. He left Haran. He left his father's family. He wandered in this world as an alien and a stranger.

That's how he identified himself because he believed God's promises. By faith, Abraham, even though he was past age and Sarah herself was barren, was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise.

By faith, supernatural things happened in Abraham's life. Brothers and sisters, is there something of the supernatural, of the divine in your life?

Things that could not and were not are now because of God. Are there things in your life that can only be explained because of God?

[31:16] So, are you bearing the fruit of the Spirit? Love, joy, peace, patience, etc. Where once you bore the fruit of the flesh and all its rottenness.

And so you look at your life and you say, I'm not what I used to be. Abraham lived by faith and it worked itself out in his life.

A faith that is dead. A faith that does not work is a dead faith and a dead faith is no faith at all that will save.

It's not good enough to say, I believe. I want to believe. I hope I'm saved. On the last day, Jesus will say, he says, I will say to many, to many, I never knew you.

Away from me, you evil doers. Abraham's faith worked and it produced a life of obedience.

[32:20] He lived by faith. Now to the end, finally. God calls you in the same way that he called Abraham.

He calls you. So, cast your mind back think about where this all started. Abraham started off in the Ur of the Chaldees.

And Joshua says that he was there and he and his family and his fathers, they worshipped idols. They worshipped the moon and the sun and gods of their own making.

He worshipped other gods. So, let's fast forward. That's how this picture started. That's how this story started. And so, now we should ask the question, how did an idolater come to this place?

Living under God's blessing, dying well, expecting and hoping, coming to the end of his life with all of his very best things still in front of him. How did he get from there to here?

[33:31] How did he get here? And we will search high and low for an explanation with no satisfaction until we find it here. Until we find the answer in God's sovereign grace.

God's omnipotent, free grace. Abraham's story is your story, brothers and sisters. Or it needs to be your story, my lost friend.

The thread of grace runs through it all. It begins with grace and it ends with grace. God set his love upon Abraham and he was relentless in loving him.

And even now, Abraham is with God and God is loving him. Listen to how the Puritan John Aerosmith said it.

Election, having once pitched upon a man, it will find him out and call him home wherever he be.

[34 : 41] It called Zacchaeus out of a cursed Jericho, Abraham out of idolatrous Ur of the Chaldees, Nicodemus and Paul from the college of the Pharisees, Christ's sworn enemies, Dionysus and Damaris out of superstitious Athens.

It called a thief off of a cross. In whatsoever dunghills, God's elect are hid. Election will find them and bring them home.

Now, God's grace calls men out of all sorts of situations, out of all sorts of, all kinds of dunghills, and those he calls, he justifies.

And those he justifies, he also glorifies. This is the heart of the gospel. God saves sinners.

He finds men in the dunghill of sin and he brings them home. Now, does that mean that you sit back and you do nothing?

[35 : 53] Waiting around for God to act. Not at all. Not at all. Do you want to be fetched out of the dunghill? Then come to Christ.

Jesus' words are, come to me. And if you will believe it, it's not leave the dunghill and then come to me. It's come to me to leave the dunghill. Only Jesus can wash us of the filth and the excrement of sin.

Only Christ can give you that new record and that new heart. And so it's not leave it and then come to me. It's come to me so that you will leave it.

Christ calls to sinners where they are at and only he can wash sin off. Only he can make you clean. He died to wash sinners clean.

And so who can come? Jesus' words are, whosoever wills. Whosoever wills.

[36 : 57] Let's pray. Let's pray. Lord, I thank you. Thank you for this grace that is at work in our lives.

Thank you for the grace that is at work in us to change us, to renew us. Thank you that you are our Savior. And your arms and your hands are underneath us.

And no one can pluck you, pluck us from your hands. Thank you that once you've pitched upon a man, once you've set your love upon him and you've called him, you will bring him home.

Father, I pray for my brothers and sisters that we would rest and we would rejoice in that. And out of faith that we would work. Abraham did mighty and great things by faith.

Help us to walk in his footsteps. Help us to be strong in the strength that Christ has for his people. Thank you that he is the fruitful vine.

[38 : 08] I pray that we would abide in him and that he would abide in us and that his word would abide in us and that we would be careful to obey it. We would produce the works of faith.

We thank you that Jesus Christ is the Savior from first to last and that he is now offered to sinners. Lord Jesus, come in power and in grace and call your people to yourself.

Lord, I pray that you would teach us the lesson of dying well, of living well, living by faith, so that when we come to that place, to that gate, to that river, that we all must come to, that we will not dishonor you, but we will glorify you by believing in the face of death.

We thank you that our Lord Jesus conquered, he took away the sting of death, and he has risen, and he has risen to give his people new life.

thank you that one day we will see and experience that in its fullness. Pray that you would bring us all to that day safe and sound with praise on our lips and in our hearts for all that you've done for us.

[39 : 30] Help us to go further up, further in, into your grace. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.