

Day 14 of “Through the Bible in 2016 with Pastor Don and the FBC Family”

Jan. 14, 2016

- Genesis 25 – The Death of Abraham.
- Matthew 18 – Humility and the Coming Kingdom.
- Ecclesiastes 5:12-18 – The Vanity of Living for Temporal Stuff.

Reflections:

1. Genesis 25. There are two points I would like to make in reference to Abraham’s death and death in general, one apologetic and one spiritual.
 - a. Apologetic. Critical scholars assert that the early Hebrews had a very rudimentary religion that over centuries would undergo great *evolutionary* development before ultimately arriving at a concept of life after death. However, in verse 8 of this chapter we are told that Abraham died and was gathered to his people. First of all, the premise of evolutionary development from animism and polytheism to monotheism is false. Recent archaeological findings at Ebla, for example, demonstrate that monotheism was a very early belief (even before 2000 BC). Secondly, we have the book of Job, probably the oldest book in the Bible, which indicates not only belief in life after death, but conviction of a future resurrection:

Job 19:25 "And as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, And at the last He will take His stand on the earth. 26 "Even after my skin is destroyed, Yet from my flesh I shall see God;

The archaeological and scriptural evidence demonstrates that the concept of life after death was a very early conviction. Moreover, the belief that the soul continued to live after the death of the body was held by many ancient people, including the Sumerians, the Babylonians, the Egyptians, and others. However, because of Scripture that the *people of God* also believed in the resurrection of the body.

- b. Spiritual. Genesis 25:8 tells us that “Abraham breathed his last and died in a ripe old age, an old man and *satisfied with life*; and he was gathered to his people.” I have chosen the NASB translation because it rightly captures the reality “satisfied with life,” which in the literal Hebrew says “full of years.” The point I want to make is that it is possible at the end of life to look back and be satisfied with what one has done with his life. The emphasis is not so much how long we live but what we have done with our lives. If you were to die today would you be satisfied with your accomplishments—what you have done with your life? What is more important is where would your mind go if you were told that you have a fatal illness and your life here will soon end? It is certainly possible for a person to make many failures in his spiritual life and still look back with satisfaction because of God and His grace: Abraham is a case in point. It really is more about right now and how we finish our lives than the many turns and missed opportunities we had to live for God through His grace and so become better

lovers of God and others. Abraham is a case in point: he has a sense of tranquility at the close of his life. He is not afraid of death because he knows his Maker. There really is no excuse for any believer being afraid of death. Christ has freed us from that fear—Hebrews 2:15, *and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives*—when a believer is afraid of death, he is acting like an unbeliever and betraying his own lack of trust in God. However, the believer who is living and growing in the Lord not only displays tranquility and confidence at death, he knows he will be gathered to his people, fellow believers. Abraham knew this before the Bible was written. We have so much more information than Abraham on death because we have the fuller revelation of the New Testament on death and the hereafter. We should have even more confidence than our father of the faith.

2. Matthew 18. In the first fourteen verses we have principles on humility and the Kingdom. The disciples had been squabbling about pre-eminence in the Kingdom. Remember, this is all in the context of them not really even getting it with regard to the impending crucifixion of the Messiah. Christ instructs them to become like children in modesty and humility. He is not saying that children are innocent; rather, He is pointing out key qualities in children that you do not find in arrogant adults fighting over their earthly kingdoms. Children have a sense of trust in parents to tell them what is right and wrong and to protect them. Children also have a desire to please their parents. This should be the attitude of every believer with respect to God and His Word. There are certain things that a child is unable to fully understand. The child will simply have to trust his parents. God has given us special revelation and the bottom line is that we are simply going to have to trust Him by trusting His Word. He knows best. Notice also in this reading that Christ does teach that there are different degrees in Heaven—some greater than others. But notice that the means is antithetical to the world in that God's way is to go down before one can go up—this was true of Jesus Christ as well, Philip. 2:5-11. In the first 14 verses of Matthew 18, Christ gives us examples of becoming like children by telling us to love fellow believers—those Christlike believers who have become children in sincerity and simplicity before God. He also shows the harsh consequences of putting stumbling blocks in their lives. He, of course, is addressing the squabbling disciples noted in the first verse. A modern example of placing stumbling blocks before spiritual children would be when a prosperity preacher takes a new believer, a believer in a state of childlike humility and dependence, and places stumbling blocks of arrogance and pride and mammonism that causes the believer to become arrogant and thus stumble as far as his spiritual life. Of course, the activity of pastors inculcating arrogance in sincere baby/humble believers causing them to stumble is a problem not exclusive to the prosperity movement.
3. Ecclesiastes 5:12-18. Those who just live for the temporal stuff of this world always lose it all, either by misfortune in this life or for all of eternity when they are taken to the next life at death. Think about it, day after day, getting up to go to work to make money to buy stuff, which only forces you to repeat the process day after day, decade after decade, for the rest of your life—over and over, work to make money to buy stuff, which requires one to go back to work to repeat the process again and again. Now, I am in no way

disparaging working hard, making money, and buying things. What I am disparaging is the working and hoarding of things as ends in themselves. The temporal perspective always loses in the end. What is especially deceptive is that one loses one's own life in the sense of losing capacity for life as one becomes more and more enslaved to stuff. Make no mistake, believers are warned about losing their faith due to living for the things of this world (1 Tim. 6:10). This is in contrast to the spiritual Christian who lives in light of eternity and so actually gains more and more capacity to love God, love others, love the temporal life, and even love work because he does his job as unto the Lord. Only the believer with the eternal perspective lives in the richness of the Christ-centered life, knowing and living in the reality of his eternal home:

Philippians 1:21 For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain.

Colossians 3:23 And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.

In 'Ehyeh,

Pastor Don