

Gathered to His People

by Roger Ellsworth

The sermon highlights the significance of being 'gathered to one's people' and the importance of understanding God's plan of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Duration: 30:52

Scripture: Genesis 25:8, Matthew 6:33, Romans 10:9, Ephesians 2:8

Topics: "Abraham"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the death of Abraham and highlights a glimmer of hope found in the phrase 'gathered to his people.' The sermon emphasizes the inevitability of death and the need for everyone to face this reality. The speaker urges listeners to receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior in order to be gathered to their people in heaven. The sermon concludes with the assurance that God will forgive sins and receive believers into the realms of glory.

Transcript

Please find, again, Genesis chapter 25. Genesis chapter 25, and today we're looking at verses 7 and 8. And we're looking today at the death of a great, great saint of God. We're talking, of course, about none other than Abraham.

Abraham was one of the greatest of all the men of God who ever lived. I oftentimes say that there are three, well, for lack of a better term, three mountain peak men in the Old Testament. There is Moses, and there's David, and then there's this man, Abraham.

These men tower over all of the other Old Testament characters. Abraham, yes, was one of the greatest men to ever occupy the human stage. But you notice, ladies and gentlemen, that Abraham died.

We're face to face here with the awesome reality of death. Abraham lived 175 years. He lived so long that some may very well have thought, well, Abraham will never die.

But he died. Abraham was what I've already called him, this great man of God. But he died.

And this reminds us that we all have an appointment with death. If we do not happen to be living on this earth when the Lord Jesus Christ returns to take his people home, we're going to face the awesome reality of death. The Bible says it's appointed unto man once to die.

And we see that all around us. Death is always present with us. We drive down the road, and we come upon a cemetery.

We open the newspaper, and we don't turn many pages until we come to the obituaries. We turn on the news, and we hear about crime, and we hear about war, and we hear about starvation. We're constantly confronted with the reality of death.

So here we have what might be called on this sunny day a rather gray account. A gray account. We've had some gray, bleak days here lately, weather-wise.

And this seems to be a rather gray, bleak passage of Scripture. Abraham dies. His loved ones gather.

They, we assume, conducted some kind of service of praise to God for the life that he had lived. They carry him to the grave. They bury him, and then they walk away.

When Abraham died, this whole ritual had been repeated many, many times. Many had lived before Abraham, and they all died. And now it's repeated in Abraham's case.

And it has been repeated countless times since Abraham. We read there in that one verse of Scripture, I'm trying to find it now, there it is, verse 8. Abraham breathed his last and died. And we think about this ritual that I have just described.

This has been repeated countless times. Someone breathes his last. He dies.

And the loved ones gather. And they have a service. And they carry that loved one to the grave.

And then they trudge wearily away. It's been repeated over and over in human history. And yet, ladies and gentlemen, in this what I've already called gray, bleak account of Abraham's death, there is a shining, glimmering little jewel.

There is, we might say, a ray of sunshine in this gray sky that we have here in these verses. You may be saying, well, where's the ray of sunshine? I don't see any ray of sunshine. Well, that's the reason you need a pastor, you see, is to point these things out.

Well, there it is in that 8th verse. I wonder if you've noticed this. He was gathered to his people.

Abraham was gathered to his people. Yes, he breathed his last and he died. And he was gathered to his people.

Now, I have to admit that for a very long time I didn't think very much about that phrase, gathered to his people. It is, by the way, a phrase that you find from time to time in scripture. Gathered to his people.

I don't know when I began reading the Bible. It was when I was very young. My parents were God-honoring, Christ-centered, Bible-believing, and church-going parents.

I have to tell you, I was so very blessed to have the parents. I must say, I chose them with care. I did very well in choosing them.

I had wonderful, wonderful parents. May I just simply say to you that if you have been blessed with God-honoring, Christ-centered, Christ-exalting, Bible-believing, church-going parents, you have been given one of the greatest blessings that you could possibly enjoy in this life. And with parents like that, it

won't surprise you to learn that I began reading the Bible at a very early age.

And began trying to read the Bible through each year, very early in life. Sometimes I succeeded, and sometimes I didn't. And I have to tell you that when I first read this phrase, gathered to his people, it really didn't register with me.

I didn't think much about it. I can tell you what I thought when I read that phrase, gathered to his people. Well, Abraham died and they put him out here in the cemetery along with the rest of his people.

And then it occurred to me one day that that's not what that phrase refers to at all. Abraham gathered to his people. It's not talking about Abraham being carted off to the cemetery and put out there with the rest of his loved ones.

It's not talking about that at all. There is in that phrase what I've already called a glimmer of hope. And I want to, a bright ray of sunshine.

And I want to talk with you today about this bright ray of sunshine in this gray sky. And I have two points to my sermon today. I want you to think with me, first of all, about the sense, the sense in which Abraham was gathered to his people.

In other words, I want to talk about what that means for Abraham to have been gathered to his people. And I'm going to say to you as we delve into that a little bit that my, my, there's tremendous, tremendous blessing in that phrase. Gathered to his people.

And so that will lead us then to the second point of the sermon. The first point of the sermon is the sense in which Abraham was gathered to his people. And the second point of the sermon is the way in which Abraham came to possess this great blessing.

I told you there's blessing in that phrase, gathered to his people. And we want to try to understand that blessing. But then we also want to try to understand how Abraham came to possess that blessing.

So are you with me as we, as we go into this a little bit, as we think about this phrase, gathered to his people? Now think with me about the first point. In what sense was Abraham gathered to his people? Well, I, I want to put it negatively and then positively. I want to tell you that when we read here that Abraham was gathered to his people, we must not think what I thought years ago.

And that is that Abraham's body was taken out here and put in the cemetery along with the rest of his family members. I can tell you that's not what it means. It's not referring to Abraham's body being carried off to the cemetery and putting, and being put there with all of his family members.

I, I say that because Abraham had been called away from his family years ago. And he had been brought over by, by God to this land of Canaan. And he, he didn't have any family members in the grave except one.

And that was his wife, Sarah. And so when we read Abraham was gathered to his people, we're not talking about Abraham being put over here in a grave next to Sarah because Sarah wasn't a people. She was a person.

Okay. She wasn't plural. She was singular.

So I'm telling you that when Abraham was gathered to his people, we're not talking here about Abraham being put off over here in the grave next to Sarah. That's not what it means. It's not talking about his body.

And so that raises the question. And now we come to the positive thing. We've talked about what it does not mean.

So what does it mean? I hope you came today to church expecting maybe just a little blessing, if not a big blessing. It's okay to have little blessings. Maybe you'll get a little blessing out of this.

And maybe if your heart's kind of singing today with the things of God, you'll get a big blessing out of, out of this. Here's what it means to say Abraham was gathered to his people. It means that his soul went to heaven when he died, gathered to his people.

He didn't have a lot of people out there in the cemetery when his body was put out there. But Abraham had lots of people in heaven. He had a family there in heaven.

And I'm telling you, when Abraham died and he was gathered to his people, his soul went to heaven. Now, true, his body was carried out here and put in the grave. But, oh, my friends, before his body was ever put in the grave, his soul was already present with the Lord.

You, you recall, don't you, what the Apostle Paul said, said over there in 2 Corinthians chapter 5? Paul talked about physical death in that passage of Scripture. And he, he really makes plain there what physical death is. Physical death is the separation of the body and the soul.

And when a believer in Jesus dies, a separation takes place. Now, it takes place when an unbeliever dies, too. But there's a difference.

When the believer dies, his soul is separated from the body. The body goes out here in the grave. But the soul goes immediately into the presence of God in heaven.

And that's the reason you have the Apostle Paul saying there in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, to be absent, absent from the flesh, is to be present with the Lord. And, oh, here's part of the blessing of being a Christian. Before a doctor or a nurse can lay a stethoscope on your chest and say he's absent or she's absent, you're already present if you're a child of God.

Absent from the flesh, present with the Lord. What a blessing. Now, when an unbeliever dies, the same separation takes place.

Separation of soul and body. But there's a different destination. Luke chapter 16 makes that clear.

The rich man died and in hell, and in hell he lifted up his eyes. Yes, same separation. Soul separated from body, but different destination.

The believer goes immediately into the presence of God. The unbeliever, oh, what a terrible, terrible, frightening thing. The unbeliever doesn't go into the presence of God.

In hell, Jesus said. Jesus said. Jesus said.

We need to underscore that because there's so many who say, well, now, I don't like all this business about judgment and God's wrath. Give me the loving religion of Jesus. Okay, there's the loving religion of

Jesus.

In hell, he lifted up his eyes, being in torments. But we're back to Abraham now, gathered to his people. And when Abraham breathed his last, before somebody could say, well, I do believe good old Abraham has died.

Abraham was already present with the Lord, present with the Lord. I want to tell you, my friends, I'm saying to you, there is a place, a place called heaven. And I'm telling you that before Abraham died, many people had already gone to heaven.

Heaven was well populated before Abraham ever even got there. I preached to you a sermon back several months ago on a Sunday night about Abel. And I called him Mr. First Man in heaven.

Abel wasn't the first man to live on this earth. That was, of course, his father's distinction. Adam was the first man to, and I think I called Adam Mr. First Man on earth.

But Abel was the first man to die. And because Abel was a child of God, when he died, his soul went immediately into the presence of God. And then Adam and Eve went to heaven.

And there was Enoch and Seth and Methuselah and Noah and so many others. Well, you see, back there, my friends, even before Abraham died and went to heaven, there were many others who died and went to heaven. And when Abraham died and went to heaven, he found those multitudes who were there before him.

He found people there, great numbers of people there. And so he was gathered to his people in that sense, in that sense. Why, I remember the controversy that the Lord Jesus got engaged in when he was engaged in his, when he was conducting his earthly ministry.

You remember how the Sadducees, they were the theological liberals of the day. And the Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection from the body, a resurrection of the body. And so they loved to confound the Pharisees who did believe in a resurrection of the body.

And the Sadducees would confound the Pharisees by posing these, what we might call, resurrection riddles. And they found out that Jesus believed in a resurrection of the body, so they constructed a resurrection riddle for Jesus. You remember the resurrection riddle they came up with? They said, now here's this man, he had a wife and he died.

And in keeping the law of Moses, she became the wife of his brother and he died. And so in keeping the law of Moses, she then became the wife of the third brother and he died. And there were seven brothers who had her as wife, and they all died.

And then here was their question. Whose wife will she be in the resurrection? And they were so proud of themselves. They thought they had blown the whole thing, the whole possibility of a resurrection, right out of the water.

And Jesus answered them by saying, you fellows really don't get it, do you? I'm paraphrasing. You fellows really don't get it, do you? You don't understand the power of God. And neither do you understand your scriptures.

Your scriptures. You see, a resurrection, ladies and gentlemen, requires power. And Jesus was saying the power of God is sufficient to raise the body from the grave.

And the power of God is also sufficient to handle all of these mysteries that you're posing here. You're talking about a woman who's married to seven different brothers. And the power of God is sufficient to overcome such mysteries and such seeming contradictions.

But he also appealed to scripture. And listen. He said, have you not read in your scriptures where God said, I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? And he used the present tense.

And that scripture was written long after Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had died. And so here was Jesus' argument. God, God, long, long after Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had died, God said, I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

And Jesus essentially said, what does that tell you? It tells you this. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still alive. And in what sense are they still alive? They're alive in heaven with God because their souls went to be with God when they died.

And because God's the God of the whole man, the fact that the souls of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are with God is also guarantee that their bodies would eventually be raised from the grave as well. And so we're looking here today at something, ladies and gentlemen, that, oh, I hope you could shake yourself a little bit. I tell you, the trouble in our churches today is we've heard these things for so long that they seem small to us.

And it's a blessing that we've heard them so long, but we should never allow our hearing of them so often to make them seem small to us. This is something huge. When a child of God dies, he's gathered to his people.

And that means his soul goes to heaven, which is already well populated with the saints of God. That's the sense in which Abraham was gathered to his people. His soul, his soul went to be with the Lord.

And if you're a Christian today, if you were to, well, if you were to do as we read of Abraham here in this eighth verse, Abraham breathed his last and died. And if you were to take your last breath today, brother in Christ, sister in Christ, may I simply tell you, you'll be gathered to your people. Your soul will go into the presence of God today.

What a glory that is. What a glory awaits the children of God. But we must inquire about this a little bit further.

I have shown you in what sense Abraham was gathered to his people. No, no, no, no. Not his body going out here into the cemetery.

Well, there's aunt so-and-so and there's uncle so-and-so and there's grandpa and there's grandma and there's cousin Fred and all of that. No, that's not the sense in which Abraham was gathered to his people. The sense in which he was gathered to his people is this.

He breathed his last. His soul went to be with the Lord. And there was Adam and there was Eve and there was Abel and there was Noah and Enoch and Methuselah and all the other great people of faith who had gone off into heaven.

Their souls were there. Abraham's soul joined them in heaven. He was gathered to his people.

But that brings us now to a very important and vital matter. This is a great blessing, don't you think, for Abraham to be gathered to his people? This is a great blessing, don't you think, for Abraham to go to heaven when he died? I should say so. I want to tell you, there's nothing more important to me than this.

I don't care what the latest opinion poll says. I'm unashamed to say this morning that the most important thing in all this world to me is this. I want to go to heaven when I die.

I want to go to heaven when I die. I want that more than anything. I hope that you do as well.

This is a great blessing. It's the greatest blessing that any human being can ever enjoy. Won't you join me today in saying, yes, I want to go to heaven when I die.

But that brings us to the second point of the sermon. How did Abraham come to possess this great, great blessing? He went to heaven when he died. His soul went to be with the Lord.

How did Abraham come to possess this great blessing? Well, my friends, I want to tell you, he possessed it because he, by the grace of God, embraced God's plan of salvation. God's plan of salvation. He, by the grace of God, embraced God's plan of salvation.

Now, some people, oh, the violence they do to the Old Testament scriptures. There are some people who have this, they have this notion, well, you know, God, he was trying to find a plan of salvation back in the Old Testament. And he tried this for a while, and people were saved back there for a while in this way.

And that didn't work so well, so God ditched that. And then he tried another plan of salvation, and people were saved for a while by that plan of salvation. And that didn't work so very well, so God ditched that.

Will you today, will you today ditch all of that and rest here? God has always had one plan of salvation. Only one. Only one.

We've been talking about Christian doctrine on Sunday evenings here at Parkview. I want you to know that you're invited to come. You don't have to be some part of an exclusive group to come on Sunday evening and learn about Christian doctrine.

We'll let you come. Just walk right in. We welcome you.

And we covered this ground back some weeks ago on Sunday evening. How that there after Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, God came in and he announced, he announced the coming of the Messiah. Listen, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, God has always had one plan of salvation.

And that one plan of salvation has always, has always been Jesus. That's God's plan of salvation. Jesus.

That was God's plan of salvation before there was a human race. Don't you remember your scriptures saying Jesus is the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world? The cross of Christ was in the mind and the heart of God even before the world began. And there in the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve sinned, God announced the coming of Jesus.

We saw that when we looked at Genesis chapter 3 and verse 15, the first preaching of the gospel. And people in the Old Testament were saved as they looked forward in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ who was

promised to come. They looked forward in faith.

And Abraham was saved from his sins as he looked forward in faith to the coming of the Messiah, Jesus. And what Jesus would do. And Abraham got a picture of that whenever he took his son Isaac, you remember, up the mountain.

And there God provided a substitute for Isaac so that Abraham did not have to sacrifice Isaac. My friends, that was God painting a beautiful picture for Abraham of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Which has at its very heart and core Jesus going to the cross of Calvary as the substitute for sinners.

And the Bible tells us that Abraham saw. You can find this in John chapter 8. Jesus said Abraham saw my day. And he rejoiced in it.

He rejoiced in it. And so this is how Abraham went to heaven when he died. He looked forward in faith by the grace of God to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And he received what the Lord Jesus Christ would do when he came and when he went there to the cross of Calvary. I've often put it to you like this. You'll never hear this conversation in heaven.

You'll never hear somebody say, well, how did you get here? Because everybody in heaven will know how everybody else got there. And everybody in heaven will be there by the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ. You and I today are saved in the same way that Abraham was saved.

We're saved by the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on behalf of sinners. The only difference is that while Abraham looked forward to it in faith, we look backward to it in faith. But we're all saved by the Lord Jesus Christ.

And here's the point that I want so urgently to make today. If you want what we have read here in Genesis chapter 25 about Abraham. If you want to be gathered home to heaven where the people of God are, where their souls are.

If you want to be part of that happy company of people, then you must receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your Lord and your Savior. And if you will this day recognize your sinfulness before this holy God. And if you will renounce your sins.

And if you will lay hold of the Lord Jesus Christ and what he did for sinners. Oh, what a happy thing this is. God will forgive you of your sins.

God will forgive you of your sins. And when you die, when you breathe your last, God will receive you into realms of glory. You will be gathered home to your people.

Home is where your people are. And if you're a child of God, your people are the people of God. Your home then is heaven.

And that's where you're bound. That's where you'll go. That's where you'll be gathered.

If you'll receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. And God's people said. Let's bow together for prayer.

Father, we thank you today that we could explore for a while. The happy good news of this phrase gathered to his people. Father, we who have been saved want to bless your name today.

Thank you, Father. Thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ. Thank you for the grace that sent him.

Thank you, Father, that we have the confidence now. That when we leave this world. It's not the end of us.

We'll be gathered home to the people of God. And, Father, we thank you that that's not even the end. Because there's a day when Jesus will come.

And he'll bring the souls of all those who believe with him. And even our bodies will be raised from their graves. And we'll be forever in the presence of God.

Body and soul. Thank you, Father, for such a glorious, glorious thing. Cheer the hearts of your people today with these truths.

Father, speak a powerful word to the heart of that one who has not come to faith in Jesus. We pray, Lord, that you would help that person above all other things. To desire this to be true of him.

To desire, Father, that when he dies he'll be gathered to his people. And, Lord, help him to see. Help her to see.

That that can only be true of the person who lays hold of Jesus. And, Father, enable that person, oh God, by your grace. To lay hold of Jesus even today.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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