

IT IS POSSIBLE!!!

WHEN WE LEAVE THE TABLE, WE ARE FULL

EAT UNTIL YOU ARE FULL!

THE BANQUET OF LIFE



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IT IS POSSIBLE!

THE DEATH OF ABRAHAM

Genesis 25:8

"Then Abraham GAVE UP THE GHOST, AND DIED IN A GOOD OLD AGE, AN OLD MAN, AND FULL OF YEARS, AND WAS GATHERED TO HIS PEOPLE."

Full of years does not seem to me to be a synonym for longevity. If then we would have the same thing repeated three times over in this passage, "an old man," "in a good old age," and "full of years." There must be some other idea than old age in these words "full of years."

If you notice that the expression is by no means a usual one, that is it is only applied to one or two of the Old Testament characters and those selected characters I think you will see that there must be some other significance in it than merely to point to the length of days, old age. Let us notice the instances where it is used in Scripture.

In addition to our text, we find it employed first in reference to Isaac in Genesis 25:29, where the words are repeated almost verbatim. That calm, contemplative life, so unlike the active, varied career of his father, also attained to this blessing at its close. "And Isaac gave up the ghost, and died, and was gathered unto his people, being old and FULL OF DAYS, and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him."

Then we find that the stormy and adventurous course of the great king David, with its wonderful alternations both of moral character and of fortune, is represented as being closed at last with this tranquil evening glory. "He died in a good old age, FULL OF DAYS, riches and honor."

Once more we read of the great high priest Jehoiada, whose history had been crowded with peril, change, brave resistance and strenuous effort, that with all the storms behind him, he died at last, "full of days."

The only other instance of the occurrence of the phrase is at the close of the

book of Job, the typical record of the good man suffering, and of the abundant compensations given by a loving God. The fair pictures of returning prosperity and family joy, like the calm morning sunshine after a night of storm and wreck, with which that wonderful book ends, has this for its last touch. Evidently it is intended to deepen the impression of peace which is breathed over it. "So Job died, being old and FULL OF DAYS."

These are all the instances of the occurrence of this phrase. And I think we may say that in all it is meant to suggest not merely length of days, but some characteristic of the long life over and above its mere length. I think if we get a more literal translation of the phrase and instead of reading, "full of years," we read "satisfied with years." These men were satisfied with life. That means having exhausted all of its possibilities, having drunk, as it were, a full cup, having nothing more left to wish for.

And this word points to a calm close, with all desires gratified, with all our hot wishes stilled, with no desperate clinging to life, but a willingness to let it go, because all which it could give had been attained. So much for this remarkable expression in this verse.

There is another stated here. "He was gathered to his people." We note for the present the peculiarity, and it does suggest some hint of a future life, and some glimmer of some of the profoundest thoughts about it.

We have two main things to consider here:

1. THE TRANQUIL CLOSE OF A LIFE. "It is possible!" then, at the end of life to feel that it has satisfied all our wishes. Whether it does or not will depend mostly on ourselves, and very slightly on our circumstances. **Length of days, competence, health, and friends are important, but neither these**

nor any other externals will make the difference between a life which, in the retrospect, will seem to have been sufficient for our desires, and one which leaves a hunger to the heart.

"It is possible" for us to make our lives of such a sort, that whether they run on to the apparent maturity of old age, or whether they are cut short in the midst of our days, we may rise from the table feeling that it has satisfied our desires, met our anticipation and been all very good.

Possibly, that is not the way in which most of us look at life. That is not the way in which a great many of us seem to think that it is an eminent part of Christian and spiritual character to look at life, but it is the way in which the highest type of devotion and the truest goodness always look at life.

There are people, old and young, who, whenever they look back, whether it be over a long tract of years, or over a short one, have nothing to say about it except, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity and vexation of spirit," a retrospect of weary disappointments and thwarted plans.

How different with some of us the forward and the backward look. Are there shadows, over their future, and who can only cherish hopes for tomorrow, by giving the lie to and forgetting the whole of their yesterdays? It is hard to paint the regions before us in which lie the garden of the Lord, when we know that the locusts of our own godless desires have made all the land behind us desolate. If your past has been a selfish past, a godless past, in which passion, inclination, whim, anything but conscience and Christ have ruled, your remembrances can scarcely be tranquil, nor your hopes bright. If you have only "prospect dear" when you look "backward and cast your eye," is it not wonderful if, forwards though you cannot see, you will guess and fear.

Such lives, when they come towards an end, are wont to be full of discontent and bitterness. We have all seen godless old men cynical and sour, pleased with nothing, grumbling, or feebly complaining, about everything, dissatisfied with all which life has thus far yielded to them, and yet clinging desperately to it and afraid to go.

Put by the side of such an end this calm picture of the old man going down into his grave, and looking back over all those days since he came away from his father's house, and became a pilgrim and a stranger. How all the hot anxieties, desires, occupations, of youth have quieted themselves down. How far away now seem the warlike days when he fought the invading kings. How far away the heaviness of the heart when he journeyed to Mount Moriah with his boy, and whetted the knife to slay his son. His love had all been buried in Sarah's grave. He has been a lonely man for many years, and yet he looks back, as God looked back over His creative week, and feels that all has been good.

"It was all for the best, the great procession of my life has been ordered from the beginning to its end, by the hand that shapes beauty everywhere, and has made all things blessed and sweet. I have drunk a full cup, I have had enough, I bless the Giver of the feast, and push my chair back, and get up and go away." He died an old man, and satisfied with life.

And what a contrast that makes to another set of people. There is nothing more miserable than to see a man, as his years go by, gripping harder and tighter at this poor, fleeting world that is slipping away from him, nothing sadder than to see how, **as opportunities and capacities for the enjoyment of life dwindle, and dwindle, and dwindle, people become almost fierce in the desire to keep it.**

Why you can see on the face of many an old man and woman a hungry discontent, that has not come from the mere wrinkles of old age, or care, an eager acquisitiveness looking out of the dim old eye, tragical and awful. It is sad to see a man, as the world goes from him, grasping at its skirts as a beggar does at the retreating passer by, that refuses him an alms. Are there not some of us who feel that this is our case, that the less we have before us of life here on Earth, the more eagerly we grasp at the little which still remains, trying to get some last drops out of the broken cistern which we know can hold no water? **How different this blessed acquiescence in the fleeting away of the fleeting, and this contented satisfaction**

with the portion that has been given him, which this man had who died willingly, being satisfied with life.

Sometimes, too, there is satiety, weariness of life which is not satisfaction, though it looks like it. Its language is, "Man delights me not, nor woman neither. I am tired of it all." Those who feel thus sit at the table without an appetite. They think that they have seen to the bottom of everything, and they have found everything a cheat. They expect nothing new under the sun, that which is to be had already been, and it is all vanity and striving after the wind. They are at once satiated and dissatisfied. Nothing keeps the power to charm.

How different from this all is the temper expressed in this text, rightly understood. Abraham had had a richly varied life. It has brought him all he wished. He had drunk a full cup and needs no more. He is satisfied, but that does not mean loss of interest in present duties, occupations, or enjoyments. "It is possible" to keep ourselves fully alive to all these till the end, and to preserve something of the keen edge of youth even in old age, by the magic of communion with the Lord. Purity of conduct, and a habitual contemplation of all events as sent by our Father.

When Paul felt himself very near his end, he yet had interest enough to the common things to tell Timothy all about their mutual friends, occupations, and to wish to have his books and parchments.

So, calmly, satisfied, and yet not sickened, keenly appreciating all the good and pleasantness of life and yet quite willing to let it go, Abraham died. So may it be with us too, if we will, no matter what the duration or the externals of our life. If we too are His children by faith in Jesus Christ as personal Saviour, we shall be "Blessed with faithful Abraham."

I beseech you to ask yourselves whether the course of your life is such as that, if at this moment God's great knife were to come down and cut it in two, you would be able to say, "Well, I have had enough, and now contentedly I go."

Again, "It is possible" at the end of life to feel that it is complete, because the days have accomplished for us the highest purpose of life. Scaffoldings are for buildings, and the moments and days and years of our earthly lives are scaffolding. What are you building inside the scaffold? What kind of a structure will be disclosed when the scaffolding is knocked away? What is the end for which days and years are given? **That they may give us what eternity cannot take away, a character built upon the love of God, in Christ, and molded into His likeness.**

Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever. Has your life helped you to do that? If it has not, though your hair is whitened with the snows of the nineties, you are yet incomplete and immature. **The great end of life is to make us like Christ, and pleasing to Christ.** If life has done that for us, we have got the best out of it, and our life is completed, whatever may be the number of days.

Quality, not quantity, is the thing that determines the perfectness of a life. And like as in the northern lands, where there is only a week or two from the melting of the snow to the cutting of the hay, the whole harvest of a life may be gathered in a very little space, and all be done which is needed to make the life complete. Has your life this completeness? Can you be satisfied with it, because the river of the flowing hours has borne down some grains of gold amidst the mass of mud, and, notwithstanding many sins and failures you have thus far fulfilled the end of your being, that you are in some measure trusting and serving the Lord Jesus Christ?

Again, "It is possible," at the end of the life, to be willing to go as satisfied. Most men cling to life in grim desperation, like a climber to a cliff giving way, or a drowning man clutching at any straw. **How beautiful the contrast of the placid, tranquil acquiescence expressed in that phrase of our text.** No doubt there will always be the shrinking of the bodily nature from death. But that may be overcome. There is no passion so weak but in some case it has "mated and mastered the fear of death," and "It is possible" for us all to come

to that temper in which we shall be ready for either fortune, to live and serve the Lord, here, or to die and enjoy Him there. Or to return to an earlier illustration, "It is possible" to be like a man sitting at a table, who has had his meal, and is quite contented to stay on there, restful and cheerful, but is not unwilling to push back his chair, to get up and to go away, thanking the Giver for what he has received. The Banquet of Life.

Now that is the way to face the end, Christians, and how is it to be done? Such a temper need not be the exclusive possession of the old. **It may belong to us at all stages of life.** How is it won? **By a life of communion with the Lord. The secret of it lies in obeying the commandment and realizing the Truth which Abraham realized and obeyed.**

"I am the almighty God. Walk before Me and be thou perfect." "Fear not, Abram, I am thy Shield and thine exceeding great reward." **That is to say, a simple communion with the Lord, realizing His presence and feeling that He is near, will sweeten disappointments, will draw from it its hidden blessedness, will make us victors over its pains and its woes.** Such a faith will MAKE IT POSSIBLE to look back and see only blessing, to look forward and see a great light of hope burning in the darkness. Such a faith will check weariness, avert satiety, promote satisfaction and will help us to feel that life and the great hereafter are but the outer and inner mansions of the Father's house, and death the short, though dark corridor between. So shall we be ready for life or for death.

Secondly, we turn to consider more briefly the glimpse of the joyful society beyond, which is given us in that other remarkable expression of our text, "He was gathered to His people." That phrase is only used in the earlier Old Testament books, and there only in reference to a few people. It is used of Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and Aaron, and once in Judges 2:10, of a whole generation. If you will weigh the words, I think you will see that there is in them a dim intimation of something beyond this present life.

"He was gathered to His people," is not the same thing as "He died," for in the earlier part of the verse we read, "Abraham gave up the ghost and died. AND WAS GATHERED TO HIS PEOPLE." It is not the same as being buried. For we read in the following verse, "And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron, the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre." It is then the equivalent neither of death nor of burial.

It conveys dimly and veiledly that Abraham was buried, and yet that was not all that happened to him. He was buried, but also, "HE WAS GATHERED TO HIS PEOPLE." Why? His own "people" were buried in Mesopotamia, and his grave was far away from theirs.

What is the meaning of the expression "who were the people he was gathered to?" In death or in burial, the dust returns to the Earth, as it was. **What was it that was gathered to his people?** Dimly, vaguely, veiledly, but unmistakably, as it seems to me, is here expressed at least a premonition and feeling after the thought of an immortal self in Abraham, that was not there in what his sons Isaac and Ishmael laid in the cave at Machpelah, but was somewhere else and was for ever. That is the first thing hinted at here, the continuance of the personal being after death.

Is there anything more? I think there is. Now, remember Abraham's whole life was shaped by that commandment, "Get thee out from thy father's house, and from thy kindred, and from thy country." He never dwelt with his kindred all his days. He was a pilgrim and a sojourner, a stranger in a strange land. And though he was living in the midst of a civilization which possessed great cities whose walls reached to heaven, he pitched his tent beneath the terebinth tree at Mamre, and would have nothing to do with the order of things around him, but remained an exotic, a waif, an outcast in the midst of Canaan all his life. Why? Because he "looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God."

And now he has gone to it. He is gathered to his people. The life of isolation is over. The true social life is begun. He is no

longer separated from those around him, or flung amidst those that are uncongenial to him. "He is gathered to his people," he dwells with his own tribe. He is at home, he is in the city.

And so believers, life for every Christian man must be lonely. After all communion we dwell as upon islands dotted over a great archipelago, each upon his little rock, with the sea dashing between us. But the time comes when, if our hearts are set upon that great Lord, whose presence makes us one, there shall be no more sea, and all the isolated rocks shall be parts of a great continent. Death sets the solitary in families. We are here like travelers plodding lonely through the night and the storm. But soon to cross the threshold into the lighted hall, full of friends.

If we cultivate that sense of detachment from the present, and of having our true affinities in the unseen, if we dwell here as strangers because our citizenship is in Heaven, then death will not drag us away from our associates nor hunt us into a lonely land, but will bring us where closer bonds shall knit the "sweet societies" together, because all are gathered round the one Shepherd. Then many a broken tie shall be re-woven and the solitary wanderer meet again the dear ones whom he "loved long since, and lost awhile."

Further, the expression suggests that in the future men shall be associated according to affinity and character. "He was gathered to his people," whom he was like and who were like him, the people with whom he had sympathy, the people whose lives were shaped after the fashion of his own.

Men will be sorted there. Gravitation will come into play undisturbed, and the pebbles will be ranged according to their weights on the great shore where the sea has cast them up, as they are upon the beach, and many coasts, all the big ones together, and sized off to the smaller ones, regularly and steadily laid out. Like draws to like. Our spiritual af-

finities, our Christian and moral character, will settle where we shall be, and who are companions will be when we get home. Some of us would not altogether like to live with the people that are like ourselves, and some of us would not find the result of this sorting to be very delightful.

Men in the dantesque circles were only made more miserable because all around them were of the same sort as, and some of them worse than themselves. And an ordered hell, with no company for the liar but liars, and none for the thief but thieves, and none for impure men but the impure, and none for the godless but the godless would be a hell indeed.

"He was gathered to his people." And you and I will be gathered likewise. What is the conclusion of the whole matter? Let us follow with our thoughts and in our lives, those who have gone into the light, and cultivate in heart and character those graces and excellences which are congruous with the inheritance of the saints in light.

Above all, let us give our hearts to Jesus Christ, by simple faith in Him, to be shaped and sanctified by Him. Then our country will be where He is, and our people will be the people in whom His love abides and the tribe to which we belong will be the tribe of which He is Chieftain.

So when our turn comes, we may rise thankfully from the table in the wilderness, which He has spread for us, having eaten as much as we desired, and quietly follow the dark-robed Messenger whom His love sends to bring us to the happy multitudes that throng the streets of the city. There we shall find our true home, our kindred, our King.

"So shall we ever be with the Lord."

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