A Mighty Tree

A few days ago, my mother's last living sibling transitioned. October 26, 2025, at the age of 99 years old. Uncle Melvin Gilchrist, an Elder, a father, a brother. His transition brought to mind an oak tree in our backyard for about a couple months, I watched the leaves turn brown, and during a rainstorm the limbs begin to fall. I have no idea how old this tree was, but it had been there all my life. Giving shade in the hot North Carolina summers, I remember Uncle Melvin coming to visit my mother and some of her other brothers and sisters, and he came over to see our new home. He looked around and was pleased to see the progress, he would always have words of encouragement, He said that I should have a window on the side to be able to see Mom's house he was always thinking of others, this to me showed the love and caring he had for his family. He would travel to North Carolina to visit mainly in the summer when we would have family reunions and visit Mom. Her home would be the meeting place. I would listen to him and my father have conversations about church and the "Goodness of the Lord" they would be up half the night talking and cooking and eating. You may be wondering how Uncle Melvin and the massive Oak tree in my backyard relate to each other. Uncle Melvin was always to me this big man, but he was always kind. From my vantage point he was a provider for his family and loved them all, now to this tree the tree was there all my life as Uncle Melvin the tree represented strength and stability. I saw those same things in Uncle Melvin; the tree gave cover, and supplied needs, as did Uncle Melvin. This tree was huge towering in the sky. I saw Uncle Melvin in this way; he was Momma's Big brother, and he was a perfect fit for the role. He Uncle Preston, Aunt Sis, Aunt Marie, would get together and you could feel the love. The tree I noticed was changing it was still standing but in a span of three months the leaves started turning brown in June – July, I knew something was wrong. When I heard the news of Uncle Melvin's health issues and at that age, it seemed to come with the territory. I think of the last wind rainstorm we had, a lot of limbs fell from the tree. I was afraid that the tree would fall and damage our house or our neighbors. This tree had to be over one hundred years old or more and one hundred feet tall, it had been through countless storms and withstood many harsh winters and scorching summers. This tree has been through drought and possibly survived disease, but this time the tree must come down. From my vantage point Uncle Melvin lived a good life he spoke of different things that he had

accomplished and experienced in his life during some of our conversations. I would ask him questions about the family, and he could name most of his aunts and uncles. He once told me “If you see a Gilchrist your related”. We talked about his brothers and sisters, and his love for God and the church, but as life is at some point it comes to a close from our natural view. I believe that we transition, “from corruptible to incorruptible”. The tree was cut down but its existence was not in vain and even in its demise it can supply wood for a fireplace or building material the acorns have been food for squirrels, but there is a massive space where this tree stood. I miss that tree, when I look at where the tree stood there is an empty space. Thinking about the passing of Melvin Gilchrist, there is an empty space. We come to the world and surely one day we too will go. Uncle Melvin, I love you and I know you have achieved perfect peace, rest easy. You as the Mighty tree of the Gilchrist family have left a massive space in our lives, but we remember the cover you gave us while you were here. Just as the tree leaves seeds to grow new trees, you have left us with family that you have raised and taught the ways of life. We can take what you have left us and help to build our lives thank you Uncle Melvin, we will miss you, but we know you are safe in the hands of God.