

Sarah and Hagar: Evidence of the True Gospel

Passage: Galatians 4:21-31 | Speaker: Steve Grothoff | Date: 261018

SUMMARY

Paul's allegory of Sarah and Hagar sets two covenants side by side. Hagar and Ishmael stand for the law, works and self-effort, born when Abraham and Sarah rushed God's promise. Sarah and Isaac stand for grace through faith, born free by promise. Every other religion, and some that carry the Christian name, tells people to work for a salvation they can never be sure of, while the gospel rests on what Christ has already done. Scripture shows God delivering in ways only he can explain, and sometimes asking us to wait. Trusting his timing means working alongside him, not forcing his hand.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- There are only two kinds of religion: one built on what Christ has done, and every other kind built on what we must do.
- Ishmael stands for law, works and self-effort, born when Abraham and Sarah took God's promise into their own hands.
- Isaac stands for grace through faith, born free by God's promise, means, timing and terms. New Testament believers live under that covenant of promise.
- Pushing ahead of God's timing brings chaos, while God often delivers in ways we cannot explain or take credit for, so that they point to him alone.
- Trusting God is a process: wait on his timing, work alongside him, and stand firm, because our labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Introduction

All right, I gotta figure out this Bible's so darn big, I can't get everything up here right, so I gotta all right. If you guys like to stand with me again, sorry, we're gonna get your workout in this morning. Up and down, up and down. We're gonna be in Galatians 4, verses 21 through 31.

Scripture Reading: Galatians 4:21-31

Paul writes, he says, "Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, she is for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written, 'Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; who does not bear break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor; for the children of the desolate one will be more than the those of the one who has a husband.' Now you brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. But what does the Scripture say? 'Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.' So brothers, we are not children of slaves but of the free woman." Father, thank you for your word. Father, we, we as we

Opening Prayer

go through this, Father, we just, we thank you that, that we were, that, that when we were born again, Father, that we were born free, that we were born of promise, as we're gonna unpack and talk about today. Father, that, that, that, that is the greatest gift that we have is, is Father, just the freedom that we get when, when it comes to our salvation, and as the the last song saying, Father, that, that not of what I bring, just the blood of Jesus. So Father, we thank you for that gift. Father, we thank you for your Son. Father, we, we just, we thank you for the time that we get to come together and just worship you and and go through your word and Father sing songs to you and Father just enjoy our time that we get to spend in the Spirit with you and in community with others as well. So Father, be with us as we go through your Word, Father, help us to to understand and Father just help it to be applicable and edifying to each and every one of us as we as we go through our week this week. Father, we love you and we thank you for your Son and we ask all these things in his name. Amen.

Where We Are in Galatians

All right, we are almost we are on the the verge of getting out of the doctrine of of of the beginnings of here of Galatians and we're going to get more into the the application and what it looks like to live to live as a Christian now. Um, he has gone through and done all of this explaining his personal prefer his personal story who I am why I have authority and then hitting on the the doctrine of this is why we don't do this this is why we don't go back to the law and here and this week what we have is we we see that I feel like this particular message was written towards those Jewish people that were trying to push bringing the law back in. The Galatian people were Gentiles they didn't know the Old Testament but he's bringing up Old Testament stories so I'm assuming this would probably be towards that group of people and he makes this analogy of Isaac and Sarah and Ishmael and Hagar and how to explain to these formerly Jewish believers and the ones that were trying to push the law on them that they don't need to try and do that anymore. There's a reason and I have a he's like he says, "I'm going to interpret this allegorically. I'm going to give you guys a story and I'm going to explain to you what God wanted from the beginning." And what we see in this is not only were there two covenants but really and truly at the end of the day if we just if we want to put a sweeping generalization on this there are two kinds of religions in the world. There are only two kinds of religion in the world.

Two Kinds of Religion

There is true Christianity and it is based solely on the work that Christ has done. That is it. That's the last song we sang, "Nothing but the Blood of Jesus." Everything we do is never going to add up to what we need to win our salvation. Christ already did that for us. Our faith in him and in his work is our salvation and then there's every other religion that there is out there.

Every Other Religion Says Work for It

Every other religion in some way shape or form tells you that you need to work to your salvation. It is going to be up to you to get your to receive your salvation. You need to continue to work and labor. Your entire life, and if you do good enough, maybe just maybe you'll be saved. But what we don't see there is you don't know whether you're going to be saved or not until it's too late. You don't know. You're not going to, you're never going to know when you're going to be, if you're going to be saved or not, till you're in in your pre or post-life judgment, whatever that may be. In those religions, you don't know if you're going to be saved. You don't know if you have salvation. We have salvation and we know we have salvation, and it is a beautiful thing. We'll give you guys a couple of ideas or a couple of examples of other religions and the things that they require. So for Buddhism, in order to achieve nirvana, which is their idea of salvation, you need to follow the eightfold path your whole life. I don't

have, I'm not going to give you guys, we could go into this the entire sermon and I don't want to do that. Um, um, so if you guys are interested in any of these things, let me know. I will point you in the right directions if you're interested in looking some of these things up. Hinduism, they believe that in order to achieve moksha, as they call it, which is escaping reincarnation, they believe that if you aren't good enough, you're going to be reincarnated. And if you were a terrible person, you're going to be reincarnated as something other than a person. You may end up getting reincarnated as a goat or you may end up getting reincarnated as a bug. The you have to do and live in a way that eventually you can escape that that system, that that that endless cycle otherwise of of living and following spiritual practices and devotions that they want you to follow constantly to the letter all the time for the rest of your life if you want to be saved. Islam tells you that you need to follow the five pillars of Islam and do good deeds. That also they've got a whole lot of more stuff, and if you, you know, if you, if you are in a period of jihad, which let's be, let's be real, if you've seen anything about current events, that is the place we are in now. Um, they are trying to take over all sorts of places and all sorts of places and countries and things and things like that. And part of jihad, part of part of their salvation when they are in a moment of jihad, when they're in a period of jihad, is to die with honor. Um, to die with honor to them is to take as many infidels with you as you can when you die. That's we we see the downsides of a lot of these Religions, we see the the the where none of these add up to what we believe and how we believe in the the the how the the simplicity really of what the gospel is. And then you've got quote-unquote Christian religions that also follow this same pattern, and you've got like the Catholics that believe that in order to be saved you must be baptized. You have to be baptized. If you did, if you got saved and you, if you, if you gave your life to Christ and you didn't get baptized, guess what? You're probably not going to heaven. You also need to be good. You need to do good things. You need to go to confession with a priest. You need to partake in the sacraments. You need to pray to dead people. You need to give large amounts of money to your church, and maybe, just maybe, maybe, maybe at the end of the day you'll be good enough to just squeak into purgatory, and you can hang out in purgatory for a while to purge your sins to eventually get into heaven. That sounds like a lot of work, guys.

A Salvation That Keeps Moving

That sounds like something even after you die you're not done. Like, and then I, I had a, I, I when I was um in the military, I was in the military with a guy who was um a Mormon. He was from Latter-day Saints, and he said that salvation, well, I remember him telling me salvation had multiple meanings. He said, "I just," he said, "it could be you being saved from this specifically," or he said salvation had a ton of different meanings, and each and every one of them was conditional on how you lived your life. He said, and I, I distinctly remember him when we were talking about it because I was asking him questions about, I was genuinely curious, and he said the goalpost of salvation was always moving. As soon as you thought you were getting there, they would tell you, "Well, yeah, but," and

they would move it and change it. How freeing is it to know that this book is truth, and that when we read this book and we know this book, that we see that our life in Christ and our faith in Him and putting our faith in His work is all it takes for salvation for us? That's it. We'll get into next week talking about how Christ has set us free. We no longer, don't mishear me here, but we no longer have to follow a lot of rules. We don't have to follow the law that was given in the Old Testament. We'll get into that next week. Don't hear me and think, "Well, I can go do what I want because Pastor Steve said so." No, that's not what I'm saying. We'll get into it next week though.

Two Sons, Two Covenants

So here we see in this, as we get into these, we see that Paul is giving two very distinct and he's, he's talking about two very distinct things, and he gives it from the allegory of Sarah and Hagar and Ishmael and and Isaac. And we see throughout these verses that when he's talking, he's, he, he, he gives one and then the other, and then he gives one and then the other. And I'm going to give you guys all of what Ishmael stood for and all of what Isaac was, was an allegory for. So Ishmael was stood for the what that what he was getting at with them was: Ishmael is the law and works. This is the Old Testament covenant. This is legalism and self-effort. This is trying to work towards your own salvation. This is the what he is trying to explain to the Galatians: "Guys, you don't need this anymore. This is not what your life is. You do not need to be a slave to the law."

Hagar and Ishmael: Born of Self-Effort

And then he describes Hagar and he says that Hagar was a slave woman and that Ishmael was born in an ordinary natural way. It's like he says in verse 23, "According to the flesh," he was, Ishmael was born the, the same way everybody else is born, the same, same steps, everything to it. And what we see in this is that Ishmael was a product of rejecting God's promise, God's means, God's timing, and God's terms. God told Abraham, "I'm going to give you a son, and I'm going to bless you with a son, and he is going to be as numerous; his descendants are going to be as numerous as the stars in the sky." And well, Abraham waited a few years and was like, "Well, I guess it's up to me to make this son." So him and Sarah agree. Sarah says, "Well, Hagar is a young woman, go, go, go have a child with my young slave woman Hagar because she is able to have a child. I am not obviously that's what God wanted because I, if I can't have a kid, then how are we going to have a kid?" They were trusting in their own means. They were trusting in their own actions to make these things happen. They were taking God's will into their own hands. Ishmael was born of self-effort and he was born a slave because his mother was a slave. He was born into slavery. He was born to be enslaved. And as Paul keeps telling the Galatians, "You guys are enslaved to the law." He's giving, he's making a very good point with the the Jewish people here too of like, "Guys, I'm trying to explain." "To you that you guys

are living wrong, here's how you need to be living." And then there in verse 25 he says that that Hagar was Mount Sinai, which is where the law was given, and we see that what he's saying is he says, "And she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, the earthly Jerusalem." The law is for temporal living. The law is for here on earth, the earthly Jerusalem.

Sarah and Isaac: Born of Promise

Now we're going to get to the other side of that. We're going to look at Isaac and we see that Isaac is the the the example of grace through faith. Isaac was an undeserving gift that was given through faith. It's showing the trust in God's will and work for salvation. Sarah was a free woman. Isaac was born in an extraordinary supernatural way. He wasn't supposed to, it wasn't supposed to happen. Sarah was 90 years old. Twyla, could you imagine having a kid right now at 90 years old? Sarah was 90. She had a she and she and she's like, "I there's there's no way I'm having a kid," and God says, "Sure there is." Yep, it's gonna happen. There in verse 23 we see that Isaac was born according to the spirit or it's like it says here, "born through promise." Isaac was a product of embracing God's promise, God's means, God's timing and God's terms. God says, "I'm gonna do it, just trust me." It may not be exactly when you think it's gonna happen, but you know what? If I told you I'm gonna do it, I'm gonna do it. God is not a liar. If God promises something, God is going to fulfill that promise. We see that when Isaac was born, it was him being born and and Abraham and Sarah allowing God's will to be done, stepping back and trusting. God says that he was born of promise. He was born free. He was born to a free woman. He was born free from the law. The covenant of promise is the covenant that we as New Testament Christians live through and live under. There in verse 26 he says that this is talking about the heavenly new Jerusalem, eternal living. We don't live for the world. We don't live to be, you know, we don't live for the world. We live looking forward to what heaven is going to hold for us. That is the difference between Ishmael and Isaac. That is what that's the whole point that Paul is trying to get here.

Application: Forcing God's Hand

Now we're going to have a little bit of an extended version of application today because I want us to take a step back from this verse, from these, and I want us to think back on the times that maybe we knew God was wanting to do something for us, knew that God was doing something, and we decided to rush it. We decided to go about it our own way, to, to, to push God along a little bit: "Well, God's not doing it the way that I want to do it," or "God's not doing it as fast as I think He needs to do it." Well, I want to do... well, we see how that happened. We see what worked, what happened here. Abraham doubted God's promise of having children through his wife, so he first had an illegitimate child with a servant girl, Hagar. He turned his focus from the promise of God and instead looked at

his own means to fulfill God's promise. Have we ever done that? Anybody in here ever tried to force God's hand, or, or, or think, "Well, God, you're just... it's not quite as fast as I want to do it, so I'm gonna, I'm gonna, I'm gonna figure it out, and we're, we're gonna do it my way." We read in Genesis that when Hagar had Ishmael, that, that her and Sarah immediately had contempt for one another. They immediately had contempt for one another. It was as soon as Ishmael was born, it says that, that Hagar had contempt for Sarah and Sarah had contempt for Hagar. Us trying to, to go about things and do things by our own means and our own power outside of the timing and will of God causes nothing but chaos. That's why He says there, that toward the end, He, He talks about Scripture says, "Now cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit." We talked about inheriting the light a couple weeks ago. "Shall not inherit with the son of the free woman." And then He says there in verse 31, "So brothers, you are not children of the slave but of the free woman." He says. All of this that you used to think, all of this trying to do in your own power, get rid of that. That is not going to do you any good. All that is going to do is cause you disappointment and chaos in your life.

When We Doubt What God Says

Then we see the other son Isaac. We see Isaac is born, Sarah who Abraham had doubted could have a child. Sometimes we doubt, you know. God says, god God explains to us or reveals to us, He says, "You know what, this is what I want to do in your life," and you're like, "I don't believe you guys." I, I'm a product of that. I'm standing up here right now as a, as a pastor, and I'm telling you guys, I have talked to numerous of my friends that I grew up with, and I even had a conversation the other night with another pastor, and, and, and he and I were talking about how, how fun it is sometimes when people that we used to know are like, and you say, "Hey, well I'm a pastor now," and they're like, "You do what?" Like, "Yeah, that's, that's me. That's what I do." Like, "That's, that's where I'm at," and they're like, "I would have never seen that." Well, guess what? Here we are. Abraham was like, "I just, I don't see God telling me I'm gonna have a son through Sarah. I just don't see that. I don't understand how that could be." But what did God do? God miraculously delivered on His promise through Abraham's actual wife, where it was intended originally.

God Delivers in Ways We Cannot Explain

We see numerous times throughout Scripture, numerous times throughout Scripture, where God thing, God does things in a miraculous way, ways that we can't explain, ways that we can't take credit for, and ways that ultimately are just only going to point to Him. You can't get take credit for it or put point at any other place. It's only God. It was only God. That's the only way. And we see a lot of times, we, we went through Daniel a couple months ago, and we talked about Shadrach, Meshach, and

Abednego, and how God could have delivered him before, delivered them before He threw him in the furnace. He could have changed Nebuchadnezzar's heart right there and said, "You know what, I'm gonna, I'm not gonna throw them in there," or He could have thrown them in there and put the fire out, or there's a million different ways that could have happened. But what happened? He threw them in to the fire, and we see in that verse that He says, "I thought you threw three people in there. How come there's four of them in there?" We see that a lot of times what it takes is us getting thrown into the fire to realize that Christ has been with us the whole time, to realize that Jesus is there. We don't always see that. We don't always see Him with us. Sometimes in the midst of that fire is when we see Jesus with us. There's also Daniel in the lion's den a couple chapters later. Dare you say that had a change of heart? He could have said, "You know what, I understand that this is what I've decreed and this is that, but you guys tricked me and I'm going to punish you guys instead," which is what he ultimately did at the end of it. But he could have saved Daniel from the lion's den, and he did, but not in a way that probably Daniel preferred. I'm sure Daniel didn't want to spend the night in there in a cold dark cave with hungry lions, but God took care of him. We see Jesus calming the storm in the New Testament. We see in the New Testament there that Jesus was asleep in the bottom of the boat. Jesus trusted that God was taking care of Him. The rest of the disciples are up topside freaking out. The storm's coming and there's the boat's taking on water and and all this and and starting to sink, and they're like, "Jesus, you you've got to save us," and he's like, "Guys, you just woke me up from my nap. Why are you doing this? All right, fine." And he speaks and he calms the wind and the waves. It was only at a point where it could have been they were trusting that God was going to take care of them there in that moment that's why they called on Jesus. They trusted God's gonna take care of us, but guess what? Storm didn't settle down on its own. And it was immediate. It was immediate. There was no way that they could say, "Oh well, it blew through" or anything. No, there was the only thing they could do is point it to God. Last example I want to give you guys is twice and Peter was both these times. Twice the disciples had been fishing all night, caught nothing. This is the very very beginning of Jesus calling His disciples and one of the very last things that He does with His disciples and one of the first things He does after He has risen from the dead. He he's standing there and these guys have been out there fishing all night, haven't caught anything. They've been casting, pulling it in, cannot catching. Anything. Both times Jesus says, the first time and both times they didn't know who Jesus was when he, when he first told them this, they didn't know who Jesus was because the first time because they had maybe heard about this guy but they hadn't seen him or met him or anything yet, and the second time it says that they couldn't recognize who it was from the shore or on the shore from the boat. But both times Jesus says, "Cast your net out on the right side of the boat," and they're like, "We've been doing this all night and it's not done and it's any good. We have done this for hours and it has done us no good." And then they cast their nets out on the right side. They're like, "You know what, fine, throw their nets out." Both times when they pull their nets back up, they're at the point of breaking or capsizing the boat because God has provided for them over and above what they could have ever imagined.

When God Makes Us Wait

And we see that sometimes in all of these examples, and when the example of Abraham and Sarah, sometimes when we ask in faith, God's going to make us wait. Sometimes when we ask for something in faith, knowing that God will fulfill it, He says, "All right, well you're gonna wait." Maybe that means we weren't ready for our answer. Maybe He wants to test our faith and let us see how serious we are about it, how faithful we know that we can be about it. Or maybe just maybe sometimes He makes us wait because He's got something better in store, and He answers our prayer in a completely different way, and He says, "You know what? You think this is what you want, but you're gonna wait, and I'm gonna give you something so much better. I'm gonna provide for you in a way that you won't even be able to comprehend right now."

Learning to Trust His Plan

Now here comes the fun part, comes the difficult part. It's up to us to learn how to trust His plan for our lives. It's up to us to understand His timing and understand that His timing is always perfect. We need to learn how to not doubt God's plan but instead how to help work towards His will along with God, hand in hand with Him, not trying to take matters into our own hands.

Look at the Birds: Wait and Work

Matthew 6 26 Jesus says, "Look at the birds of the air." They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. God provides always. God was providing them food, but what it doesn't say is God's door dashing food right to their nests. No, they've got to go out and collect; they've got to work. There is labor that has to happen; they still have to work for it even though God provides. God provides, but that doesn't mean that God just says, "Go be lazy. I'm gonna take care of you." It requires work on our part. I've told you guys before; I've said it before, and it's one of my favorite sayings: You can pray for God to move mountains, but sometimes that requires you to pick up pick up a shovel and move it bit by bit with God by your side. We need to learn how to wait for God's will, but at the same time how to work for God's will. We can't fight it; we can't argue with it. What we need to do is learn how to trust it, and sometimes that's difficult. Sometimes it's difficult to say, "Well, I trust You, God, but man, I'm kind of kind of getting impatient here." How often do we sit? I don't do it; I have before, but how often have you seen like in movies where people sit in traffic and there's just gridlock traffic and people are honking their horn? What good is that doing? It's not doing any good. You're just adding to the chaos of the situation. We don't need to be like that. We need to be more willing to say, "All right, God, where we're going it might be slow going, but you know what, where we're going I know You are guiding, and I'm gonna let You guide." It's difficult; it's not easy. We're not

patient people. We're we're not by nature; we are we are not patient people, and and our lifestyles now are are have have made that even worse. we We can microwave food and have it in a minute what would have taken hours to prepare some other place. We just we we don't understand the the pleasure of waiting for something anymore.

Trusting God Is a Process

Trusting God is Is a process. Trusting God is something that that takes time. Trusting God is not something that comes easy. Sometimes it when you learn how to just fully trust God, usually that is on the other side of trying to go at it your own way, kicking against the goads as as the Bible says, doing things that are not productive. We need to trust God's will and we need to spend time here and spend time in prayer because that is how we will know how God is working in our lives. That is the best way.

Closing Verse: 1 Corinthians 15:58

I'm gonna leave you guys with one verse and then we will pray, have our doxology and go about our week. First Corinthians 15 58 Paul tells the Corinthian church he says, "Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Stand firm. Stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." Work for the glory of God. Do things, labor for the Lord. Don't push against Him. Don't try to do something against His will. If you trust Him, let Him do the work and let you join Him in that work.

Closing Prayer

Father, we thank You for Your word. Father, we just we love You. We love just how perfect You perfectly You take care of us. Father, thank You for always providing for us. Father, thank You for for making us able to work, able to be to labor along with You for Your will. Father, we love You. Father, we just again thank You for Your word. Thank You for the privilege that it is to come together as a body of believers, Father, and worship You. Lord, we just we ask all these things through Your Son's name. Amen.

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