

INTRODUCTION

The term “who’s your daddy?” has become a part of our cultural vernacular. My golf buddy, Dean Cagle, yells it every time he makes a long putt, which is more often than I like. In fact, the guys who know Dean know him by that phrase. So, a couple of years ago when I officiated at the wedding of Catherine, Dean and Brenda’s daughter, we pulled a little joke on Dean. I knew Dean would be emotional, and sure enough, when he walked her down the aisle he was blubbering like most of us who have given our daughters away in marriage. Catherine was sniffing, and I was on the verge too. So instead of saying, “Who gives this woman to be married to this man, I said, ‘Catherine, I have one question for you. ‘Who’s your daddy?’” She said, “Deano’s my daddy!” It got a good laugh and everyone breathed a little easier and we were able to complete that beautiful wedding ceremony without crying like babies.

One of my top five sports movies is “Remember the Titans” where Denzel Washington plays a high school football coach. When they leave for camp one of the white players starts giving him orders. Denzel gets in his face and asks, “Once we get on that bus there’s only one daddy on this team, now answer me this, ‘Who’s your daddy?’ Say it, ‘Who’s your daddy?’ the player finally says, ‘You are.’” Great movie!

Our passage today talks about two mothers, so I’m changing that question, “Who’s your daddy?” to “Who’s your Mama?” But I’m not talking about your birth mama; I’m talking about your spiritual mama. You know I like humor and you might think I’m about to tell some “your mama” jokes. You know, they all start, “Your mama is so fat ... your mama is so dumb ... your mama is so ugly.” As much as I love humor, I’m not going to go there, because they are really more of “mama insults” than “mama jokes.” So out of love and respect of mothers everywhere, there won’t be any “your mama” jokes. But if I WAS going to tell a “your mama” joke, I’d say, “Your mama is ... so wonderful that she brought you into this world.” And that’s no joke.

We are in a section in Galatians where Paul pleads with the Christians to resist the false teachers who had infiltrated the churches. These Jewish teachers demanded the Gentiles had to become good Jews before they could become Christians. Sure Jesus died on the cross for their sins; but that wasn’t enough. If they wanted to make sure they went to heaven they had to be circumcised, obey the Sabbath rules, refrain from eating non-kosher foods...and the list went on *ad naseum*.

Since these Jewish teachers were proud of being “sons of Abraham,” Paul uses part of his letter to take a sarcastic poke at their pride. He reminds them that Abraham had *two* wives, Sarah and Hagar, the Egyptian slave. And he had two sons: Ishmael and Isaac. Paul really digs the needle in by saying that by forcing Christians back into the bondage of legalism, these teachers were proving Hagar was their mama, not Sarah. And spiritually speaking, we all need to answer the question, “Who’s your mama?”

Galatians 4:21-31. “Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman [Hagar] and the other by the free woman [Sarah]. His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise. These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One

covenant is from Mount Sinai [the law] and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written: ‘Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband.’ Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. But what does the Scripture say? ‘Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman’s son.’ Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.”

Jesus loved to use parables, analogies, and metaphors. Paul was a great teacher, but he seldom included stories or parables. He was a spiritual straight-shooter, and he usually just stated the unvarnished truth. But this is one of the occasions where Paul employed an allegory. The story of Sarah and Hagar is one of the juiciest stories in the Bible. It has all the elements of a modern soap opera. So first let’s get the skinny on the actual story and then we’ll extract the literal truth that Paul is communicating.

I. THE 411 ON SARAH AND HAGAR

In order to understand the point Paul is trying to make, you must understand the background of the story between Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar. It all started when God entered into a covenant relationship with Abraham and all of his descendants. God promised to bless Abraham and his descendants so they would be a blessing to all nations. One evening, God told Abraham to look up into the star-filled sky. He said, “Abraham, do you see those stars? You can’t even count them. Well, you’re going to have more descendants than the number of those stars!” That was God’s promise to Abraham and to his wife Sarah.

So Abraham got excited, because he knew that meant Sarah was going to get pregnant soon. But it didn’t happen. They waited years—no child. They waited decades—no child. By this time Abraham was about 85 years old, and Sarah was around 75. At that point, Sarah came up with a plan to help God out. She had a younger handmaiden, Hagar, who was her slave. She hatched a plan that I call “The Hagar Solution.” She said, “Hey Abe. God isn’t giving us children, and yet He promised that we’d have kids and grandkids. I’ve got an idea. Why don’t you sleep with Hagar, my maid, and maybe she can get pregnant?”

In the mid-1600s, Dutch painter Matthias Stom, a student of Caravaggio’s style, painted a picture entitled “Sarah leading Hagar to Abraham.” I like Stom’s treatment, because he captures the advanced ages of both Sarah and Abraham.

As the Father of faith, Abraham should have been strong enough to reject Sarah’s suggestion. He should have said, “Let’s wait on God. He promised us a child and I believe Him!” But instead, he looked at Sarah and looked at Hagar and said, “Well, if you insist, dear.”



Sarah Leading Hagar to Abraham
Matthias Stom
c. 1637-1639
oil on canvas

That was one of the biggest mistakes made in human history and you’ll see why in a minute. Now, what Sarah did was logical; she thought she couldn’t have kids, and it made sense to use Hagar as her substitute. However, just because it was logical didn’t mean it was right.

Hagar did become pregnant and there were three terrible consequences of the “Hagar Solution.”

Two jealous women

First, there were two jealous women. From that point onward, Sarah and Hagar became enemies. Hagar must have gloated over the fact she was carrying Abraham’s baby, because Sarah started treating her harshly. They continued to squabble. Only a few verses describe their hatred and jealousy, but you can imagine how they were at each other’s throats for much of Hagar’s pregnancy. We read in Genesis 16:6 that Sarah “abused” Hagar, a word meaning she literally whipped her. Hagar ran away, and she returned only when God told her to go back and have the baby.

Two competing sons

The next terrible consequence of the Hagar Solution was the two competing sons. Hagar gave

birth to a son and Abraham named him Ishmael, which means, “God is listening” or “God is paying attention.” For thirteen years, Ishmael was the only son of Abraham, and you can only imagine the seething and hostility between Sarah and Hagar. But then God kept His promise to Abraham and Sarah gave birth to a son. When the angels told Sarah she would have a baby when she was almost 90 years old, she did what most 90-year-old women would do—she laughed. She probably cackled at the notion she would be a mother. But God has a sense of humor so He told Abraham to name the baby “Laughter” which is the meaning of the name “Isaac.” So every time Sarah called Isaac to breakfast, she’d be saying, “Laughter, come get your breakfast!” And she would be reminded of how she laughed at God’s promise.

When Isaac was three years old, seventeen-year-old Ishmael, began tormenting him. Ishmael had assumed for all these years he would receive his daddy’s inheritance. Suddenly, he saw a rival, so Ishmael mocked little Isaac—he laughed at Laughter.

When Sarah saw it she blew her stack. She said to Abe, “That’s it! I’ve had it with that Egyptian woman, Hagar, and her smart aleck son. Kick them both out, and do it today!” It broke Abraham’s heart, but once again he said, “Yes, dear, if you insist.”

Two hostile races

That leads to the final terrible consequence of the Hagar Solution because it resulted in two hostile races. The descendants of Ishmael became the Arab people. And of course, the descendants of Isaac became the Israelites—the Jews. And from that day until today, these two races have been enemies. The Arabians gave birth to Islam, and radical Muslims hate Israel. And now you know why. All of the turmoil in the Middle East is a family feud!

When Ishmael was born, God made this prediction about him and his descendants, the Arab people. “He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone’s hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers.” (Genesis 16:12)

I’m not making a racial slur when I say the Arab people are some of the most violent people on the planet. Open your newspaper and watch the news; they aren’t just hostile toward Israel; they are constantly killing each other. Look at what continues to happen in Iraq, even after our troops have left. Look at what’s happening in Syria today. God predicted that Ishmael’s descendants would live in hostility toward ALL his brothers, not just Isaac’s people.

The reason all these nations are committed to the destruction of Israel goes all the way back to the story of Sarah and Hagar. That’s the background story to the passage that Paul wrote to the Christians in Galatia. So what was his point? Next, let’s talk about

II. HISTORY LESSONS FOR US

This is the story Paul cited when he wrote this letter. But he wasn’t talking literally about the story of Sarah and Hagar; he was talking about how it applied to the two ways of salvation: works or grace. He compared it to the two covenants: The covenant of the Law and the New Covenant of grace. Here’s the lesson for us:

A. Ishmael (“God is paying attention”) is frustrating performance-based religion. Isaac (“Laughter”) is joyful living under grace.

Ishmael represents the belief that you can make yourself more attractive or lovable before God by doing certain good things, or by abstaining from bad things. His name implies that God is always watching, like a cop sitting beside the road with the radar gun pointed at you. You’d better make sure you keep your speed down or else the cop will come after you. Legalism believes that you’d better be good and do well or else God is going to come down and punish you on the spot. What a miserable way to live!

On the other hand, Isaac was born supernaturally—there’s no way a 90-year-old woman could give birth. The thought of that was laughable. Exactly. It was a miracle birth that had to be the divine intervention of God. That’s what grace is. Grace is knowing that it is humanly impossible for me to be good enough for God, so instead God must intervene supernaturally at the cross to perform a miracle. Jesus became sin for me so that I may become the righteousness of God.

Ishmael was PROUD of being the first-born son, and he ridiculed little Isaac. Legalism can produce pride. Isaac knew he didn’t deserve the blessing as the second son, but he accepted it as a gift.

In Luke 18, Jesus told the story of two men who went to the Temple to pray. One was a legalistic Pharisee, and the other was a tax collector, considered to be the worst of the worst sinners. The Pharisee prayed, “God I thank you that I’m not like other men, especially this tax collector. I fast. I tithe. I’m a good person!” But the tax collector bowed down and said, “Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Jesus asked, “Which one do you think went home justified?”

Which of those two attitudes are most like you today? Legalism lets you brag about how good you are. Grace humbles you to realize that only God’s mercy can save you.

B. Ishmael (legalism) and Isaac (grace) can’t live in the same tent. Tell your legalistic leanings to take a hike!

Ishmael and Hagar lived with Abraham for 17 years. But when Isaac came along, there wasn’t room for two wives and two sons. So Ishmael was kicked out. That may seem harsh, but the point is that law and grace cannot co-exist. Either believe there are things you can DO to make God happy, or you fall on your knees every day and say, “Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

Is there any legalism in your heart? The theme song of a legalist is: “Jesus paid it some; So I must pay the rest; My sin still leaves a crimson stain; So I must do my best.”

I’ve often mentioned that I’m a recovering legalist. I hope you are too. One of my friends suggested we start an organization called LA, Legalists Anonymous. “Hi, my name is David, and I’m a legalist.” The first step in any recovery is admitting that you have a problem. Of course, we need to have LA meetings and if you want to be in LA you MUST attend every meeting and be

on time, and you MUST have filled out your LA notebook to participate... wait! All those things reflect legalism.

What would it be like this week if you kicked out every legalistic thought you had? What would it be like if you lived this week enjoying the fact that God loves you in spite of how you sometimes goof up and fail? Go ahead, kick Ishmael out of your tent—and all you'll have left is Laughter.

III. PERSONAL POWERPOINTS

Here are three personal applications we can learn from the Hagar Solution.

A. God always keeps His promises

God promised Abraham that he would have thousands of descendants. Abraham and Sarah showed a lack of faith when they launched the Hagar Solution.

God has made promises to you as well. He has promised that if you come to Him He will give you rest for your soul. He has promised He will never leave you nor forsake you. He has promised you that you don't have to worry about what you're going to eat, or the clothes you wear; He will take care of you the way He takes care of the birds and the flowers.

Worry is a sin, because it basically says, "God you are a liar. I don't believe you." Abraham and Sarah started worrying that God wouldn't keep His word, so they thought God needed their help. Don't make the same mistake. God WILL keep His promises.

B. God isn't in a hurry

We try to take short cuts. We're an instant download culture. We want instant gratification. We're in a hurry, but God isn't.

When I was growing up, fried chicken was my favorite food. I'd watch my mother cut up the chicken and roll it in the batter. Once the Crisco started popping in the old black cast iron skillet she'd add the chicken. I loved the smell and the sound. After I watched for a few minutes it would look done to me and I'd say, "Take it out, mama! I'm ready to eat." She would say, "Not yet. It looks cooked on the outside, but it hasn't cooked on the inside, so just be patient." At least two more times I'd run back in and say, "Is it done yet? I'm starving!" And she'd say, "Not yet. Be patient." And she'd keep cooking it a lot longer than I thought it needed, but it was always perfect.

We want God to do things NOW! It's like the person who prayed, "God, give me patience, and give it to me NOW!" Just remember that with God timing is more important than time. And His timing is impeccable. Is there something you've been praying for and trusting God for a long time? Don't give up on God. Keep on praying; keep on trusting. God isn't in a hurry.

C. When I replace God's plan with mine, there are always unpleasant consequences

God had a plan for Abraham and Sarah, but they substituted their plan for God’s plan, and we’re still suffering the consequences of their mistake. The Hagar Solution is the perfect example of how dangerous it is to believe that “God helps those who help themselves.” No, God helps the helpless. And He doesn’t need our help!

God has a plan for your life. According to Jeremiah 29:11, His plan is to help you and to give you a hope for the future. The best way to find God’s plan for your life is to spend time with Him in prayer. The best planning meetings are prayer meetings.

Paul Anka wrote a song that became the theme song of Frank Sinatra. It was entitled, “My Way.” The song ends with these words: “For what is a man, what has he got? If not himself, then he has naught. To say the things he truly feels; And not the words of one who kneels. The record shows; I took the blows—and did it my way. I did it my way!”

I read recently that this song is often played at the funerals of people who intentionally rejected faith in Jesus. Even in death, some people are proud that they chose their way instead of God’s way.

CONCLUSION

It was exactly 100 years ago today when the Titanic sank in the icy waters of the North Atlantic. It struck an iceberg just before midnight on April 14, and sank in the early hours of August 15, 1912. Before it sailed many people thought it was an unsinkable ship because it had a double hull and sixteen watertight compartments. One person for the White Star line was quoted, “Even God couldn’t sink her.” Well, the only thing the Titanic did was sink.

For many years, experts assumed the iceberg tore a 300-foot gash in the side of the 900-foot long ship. But since the wreckage was located and photographed in 1985, the experts changed their theories. Submersibles using sonar discovered that as the ship scraped along the iceberg, only six small slits were torn into the hull. But these six small rips were in six of the watertight compartments and the water gushed in and caused the ship to sink slowly as the front flooded.

Little things can have large consequences. That night 1,522 people lost their lives in icy waters. Abraham and Sarah probably thought it would not be a big deal to father a child through Hagar, but the consequences have been colossal. Four thousand years after the Hagar Solution, people are still dying because of this decision.

There were many famous people on the Titanic. You probably recognize the names John Jacob Astor and the unsinkable Molly Brown. If you’ve seen the movie, you know the main storyline, but there was one hero on the Titanic Hollywood never mentioned. Onboard the Titanic was a Baptist pastor from Scotland named John Harper. He was 39 and he and his 6-year old daughter, Nana, were traveling to America for John to preach at the famous Moody Church in Chicago. John’s wife had died a few years earlier so he was raising his daughter as a single dad.

As the ship was sinking, John placed Nana into a lifeboat, but he made no effort to follow her. Instead he turned and ran through the sinking ship yelling, "Women, children and unsaved into the life-boats!" He continued to pass through the crowd, imploring people to place their faith in Jesus Christ. He gave his lifejacket to a man who said he wasn't a Christian. John said, "Here, you need this more than I do."

As the ship slipped beneath the surface, the water was filled with people clinging to pieces of debris. Of the hundreds of people floating in the icy water, only six were rescued. One of them was a man who met John Harper in the water. Four years after the Titanic sank; this man shared his testimony at a church in Hamilton, Canada: "I am a survivor of the Titanic. When I was drifting alone on a spar that awful night, the tide brought John Harper, also on a piece of wreck, near me. 'Man,' he said, 'Are you saved?' 'No,' I said. 'I am not.' He replied, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.' The waves bore him away, but brought him back a little later. 'Are you saved now?' he asked. 'No,' I said, 'I cannot honestly say that I am. 'He said again, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.' A short while later he went down, and there, alone in the night with two miles of water under me I believed. I am John Harper's last convert." (Moody Adams, *The Titanic's Last Hero*)

And if you ever visit Glasgow, Scotland, be sure to visit Harper Memorial Baptist Church, named after Pastor John Harper. His body was never recovered but near the church is a tombstone for him that is inscribed, "Greater love hath no man than this; that a man lay down his life for his friends."

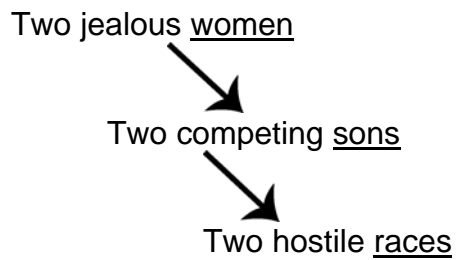
So, who's your mama? If your spiritual mama is Hagar, then you are in bondage to religion. Religion dictates that you have to DO something to be saved. If your spiritual mama is Sarah, then you've been set free by God's grace. Grace invites you to simply believe and receive God's free gift of eternal life. When you're in icy water hanging onto a piece of wood facing the prospect of death, there are no religious acts you can perform. But you can believe.

After the tragic news of the sinking of the Titanic reached both shores, family and friends wondered about the fate of their loved ones. After a few days every major newspaper in the U.S. and England published the names of the passengers. There were only two columns. One column was entitled, "Saved" and the other column was entitled "Lost." At the end of time, when the Lamb's book of life is opened, there will only be two categories: "Saved and Lost." Under which column is your name today?

Thankfully, you aren't hanging onto a piece of wood in freezing water. But the words John Harper spoke to that man apply to you: Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved!

OUTLINE

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II. HISTORY LESSONS FOR US

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B. God isn’t in a hurry

C. When I replace God’s plan with mine, there are always unpleasant consequences

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes