

## ***“Who Is Your Mother?”***

**Christian Liberty**

The Rev. Ted Wood

Galatians 4:21-31

September 2, 2016

**Ted:** I notice that the tone of the conversation was fairly devalued recently. But I guess that's maybe because of Bruce's presence. Bruce brings a sobering sense to this gathering. So today we were getting a little woolly and wild. But that's okay. God forgive us. The Lord be with you.

**Men:** And also with you.

**Ted:** Let us pray. Lord God, we thank You for Your word and the way that it changes our lives and changes everything. We pray that we may never stray from what You've told us and the truth You've given us. Let that truth change our lives and change us from the inside out, and thereby we will change others and change the church in leading it to You. And we pray this in Your name. Amen.

**Men:** Amen.

**Ted:** Okay. Let me read this section. I've been given the task of finishing up Galatians four. Bruce is going to be working on Galatians five. That's where he's going to pick up. So I'm going to wrap up with Galatians four. And Don was good enough to take the easy part last Friday and leave me with the most difficult part today. So let me read it. I'm reading Galatians 4, verses 21-31.

*“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, 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! Break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than 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 the slave, but of the free woman.”* This is the word of the Lord.

**Men:** Thanks be to God.

**Ted:** This book of Galatians seems to express more personal turmoil by Paul than almost any of the other books he has written in the New Testament. He says a lot of very personal things that show that his heart is being wrenched by the situation he finds amongst the Galatian Christians. He says things like “I'm afraid I may have labored over you in vain.” That's a very strong statement. If you had a teacher or a coach say, “Ted, I

## ***“Who Is Your Mother?”***

just think all the work I’ve put into you has gone for nothing,” that would be a very distressing thing to hear.

“What has become of the blessing you felt?” he says in the fifteenth verse of the fourth chapter. *“Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?”* “What? Don’t you like what I’m saying, Galatians? I mean, what is the problem with you folks?” And *“my little children, I am again in anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.”*

As I said, I don’t know if there’s another book that Paul has written in which he talks so much about his distress. And his distress is over the issue of the influence of what we’ve called the Judaizers, and the influence they’ve had in the church after Paul preached the gospel and left. Then the Judaizers came in. And the Judaizers say that there are additional things you must do to be saved in addition to faith in Jesus Christ. And it’s hard for us, perhaps, to understand how all that fits together today.

But I would like to remind you. And I’m thinking right now of the teachings in the Mormon church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, because it’s not just a matter of faith. There’s faith, but there are other parts of the puzzle that lead you to salvation. And in the Mormon faith, depending on how many of those parts you can put together, you will either go to the terrestrial heaven, or the celestial heaven, or the telestial heaven. There are three levels of heaven. And depending on how many of the parts you can pull together, you advance in those different heavens.

And for the Mormons, they would say first of all that what is essential is faith in Jesus Christ, Jesus the Redeemer. If you go to visit their center in Salt Lake City, you’ll see a marble statue of Jesus, and it’s called “Jesus the Redeemer.” Mormons teach that Jesus died for our sins. But there are other things you need to do besides that. You need to receive the priesthood. And there are two levels of what they call the priesthood, the Aaronic and the Melchizedek priesthood. And there are special ceremonies.

But you also have to trust that Joseph Smith was a prophet sent by God in bringing the truth in revealing the Book of Mormon, and other holy books they have—The Doctrine and Covenants and The Pearl of Great Price. And you also have to do temple work. And temple work involves going to the temple. And temples in the Mormon faith are not places of worship. They are places of doing holy work. And in the temple you will get married for time and eternity. So that means that the woman you marry in this life you are married to forever. And of course that allows you then to become god and goddess of your own universe in time. That’s the only way that can happen, if you’re married forever and ever.

You do baptisms on behalf of the dead, because you have to be baptized to be saved. So what about those who have died and were not baptized as Mormons? They go in and do special baptisms in the temple. There’s a huge, huge basin. You step into it like a large Jacuzzi. And you get baptized for people who have already passed away. Usually you do relatives. In fact, it is expected of every good Mormon that they will do their genealogy back four generations to be sure that all these people get baptized at a special time in the temple.

## ***“Who Is Your Mother?”***

And also, another temple work you receive what would be called *secret knowledge*. There's all kinds of secret knowledge about what really happened in the Garden of Eden, special handshakes, these kinds of things. And those are all the things you need.

So it's just not enough to trust that Jesus Christ is the Savior in the Mormon faith. You also have to receive the priesthood, trust that Joseph Smith was the prophet sent by God, and do all this temple work—baptisms for the dead, marriage for time and eternity, secret knowledge, what they call temple endowments. So all these are different parts of the puzzle. So it's not just faith alone. But there are many other parts that have to be pulled together in order to be saved.

And the reason I talk about that is that this is a modern day example of what the Judaizers were doing, because they would say, “Oh yes. Jesus Christ is the Messiah.” In fact, the Judaizers might even say, “Yes, he was the Messiah. And He died as a sacrifice for sin.” But in addition to that, you also have to be circumcised as a mark. You have to follow *kosher*. That means there are certain things that you can eat or touch and other things you can't. And you have to observe holy days. And perhaps there were some other things.

So neither the Mormons nor the Judaizers had a sense of how all of these things that we've talked about, all of the necessary elements of obedience to God's law, are all wrapped up in Christ. And it's in Him that all of these things come together. For each one of these groups, there is Jesus and then there are all these other parts.

So Paul sees this and he's in great distress and turmoil in his heart about this situation. It's interesting that if this were rewritten for today's evangelical church, we might say that Paul was afraid that they were going to lose their salvation. Paul doesn't talk about it. The image here in Paul's mind is not one of salvation, but one of slavery and bondage. If you do not believe that Jesus Christ is the sum of all salvation, then you're going to be in bondage and slavery to the law, to the elemental spirits, to the world itself. He's not saying that if you don't believe these things, and you go out and drive away from this meeting today in a car and get into a car accident, you'll end up in hell if you haven't accepted Christ. He doesn't talk that way at all. But we hear a lot of preachers say these kinds of things.

Paul is coming from every angle so that the Galatians understand the depth of the danger that they are in. So he's trying to come at this as a Bible study. He has made his personal appeal. And now he's going to come at it from getting into these Old Testament Scriptures about Abraham and Sarah, Ishmael, Isaac and Hagar.

He begins his Bible study in verse 21. He says, “*Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law?*” So he's saying, “Okay. Let me ask you. Are you taking this seriously? If you say that you need all these other things besides faith in Christ to be saved, have you really looked at what the law says?” And this is where he begins to get into it.

In the Old Testament there are traditionally 613 commandments. In the New Testament folks have figured that there are about 1050 commandments. So if you think that you're going to be saved or grow in your faith by following the commandments, I

## ***“Who Is Your Mother?”***

would say, “How are you doing?” (*Laughter.*) How is it going for you? (*Laughter.*) I mean, how far have you come down the road?

I’ve told this story before. A couple of years ago I asked a person in this group who really felt that he was advancing in this area. I said, “Well, on a scale of zero to one hundred, where do you think you are in terms of achieving these commandments?”

He said, “Oh, about eighty per cent.”

And I said, “Well then, you must be a fool, because you don’t really assess your lost condition and what the task is in front of you.”

He goes on to say, *“For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of a slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through the promise.”*

Now to understand this we need to look and see what he’s talking about from the Old Testament. And I think, in my handout there, I’ve summarized and abbreviated the Scripture verses that have to do with this story of Abraham and Sarah and Hagar and their offspring. In Genesis 15 it says, *“The word of the LORD came to Abram. ‘Fear not, Abram. I am your shield and your reward shall be very great.’”*

Well that’s a great statement to start out with. “Abram, don’t worry. I’m going to take care of you. I’m going to be your strength. I’m going to be your shield. This is the promise.”

*“But Abram said, ‘You have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.’ And behold, the word of the LORD came to him. ‘This man shall not be your heir. Your very own son shall be your heir.’ And Abram believed the LORD, and He counted it to him as righteousness.”*

Now this is a great start in chapter fifteen. The great start is this. God comes to him and He says, “I will be your shield and your reward. I’m going to take care of the issues that you’re concerned about. You’re concerned about your progeny, your future, your descendants who are going to carry on your name. You’re concerned about the blessings that you’ve received now and into the future.” So He says, “Abram, don’t worry about it.”

And Abram says, “But I still have a problem not having any children.”

And it’s almost as if I were the Lord that I would have said, “Abram, I just told you that I am your shield and great reward.”

“I understand that, Lord. But I still don’t have any kids.”

What do you say? Let’s go back. (*Laughter.*) “Abram, I told you that I am your shield and great reward.”

“Yes, I understand. That’s very inspiring, Lord. I mean I’m very touched. My heart is warmed by that. But you know, I really don’t have any children yet.”

And then the Lord has to deal with him. He says, “The man you think is going to be your heir—the man in your household, the relative—is not. Your very own son will be your heir. I’m making you this promise.”

And then it says, *“Abram believed God, and He counted it to him as righteousness.”* This is one of the foundational statements of our own faith.

## ***“Who Is Your Mother?”***

Well you would think that would settle the problem, wouldn't you? Abram believed the Lord. “Okay, Lord. You are my shield and great reward. I believe You. Okay. I get it. I'm not going to worry anymore.”

Well, chapter 16. *“Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne no children. Sarai said to Abram, ‘Behold, now the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant. It may be that I shall obtain children by her.’*

*“So Abram took Hagar the Egyptian.”* He couldn't even get a good Jewish girl. *“And gave her to Abram.”*

So the Lord says, “Remember, Abram. I am your shield and great reward.”

“Okay. I believe it, Lord. And it was counted to me as righteousness. But I still have to solve the problem. And I'm going to solve the problem. And I'm going to solve it with an Egyptian slave.” It sounds like a good course of action.

*“And Hagar bore Abram a son. And Abram called the name of his son Ishmael. And Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.”*

Well this is his solution. This is Abram's solution, even though he said he trusted God. Maybe he really didn't.

Then we move on fourteen years later in chapter seventeen. *“God said to Abraham, ‘I will bless Sarah, and moreover I will give you a son by her.’ Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, ‘Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah who is ninety-nine years old bear a child?’”*

I mean, “I am your shield and great reward.” And you laugh in the face of God. I mean, should God not incinerate Abraham at that very instant? (*Laughter.*) I mean, think about it. And the clear audacity of Abraham at this point!—it's stunning!

*“And God said, ‘Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.’* I mean, aren't you glad that God ignores some of our outrageous ignorance and rebellion at this point? Aren't you glad? It's like we never even said it. We say something. We laugh in God's face. It's like it didn't happen. God kind of says, “I didn't hear that. I'm going to carry on with what I have to say.”

So then it's capped off in chapter twenty-one. The Lord visits Sarah as He had said. *“And the LORD did as He had promised. The LORD visited Sarah. The LORD did as He had said. And He did as He had promised.”* I mean that ought to be a motto written across every one of our chests or our foreheads or whatever. The Lord did what He had said and He did what He had promised. He did that for Sarah. So that's the way the Lord functions.

Now Paul takes this story and he says, *“Now this may be interpreted allegorically.”* He goes on in verse 24. *“These women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery. She is Hagar.”*

So as we begin to get Paul's description here, it gets a little labored. And so what I did is that I made a table to show the two sides of the equation. Out of one man, Abram, come two solutions to a problem. And one of the solutions is Hagar. And the other solution is through Sarah.

## ***“Who Is Your Mother?”***

So Hagar is a slave woman. Sarah is a free woman. Are you seeing the table there? Good.

Hagar becomes wife for a day. I know some of you are old enough to remember that show on TV, “Queen For a Day.”

**Participant:** Oh, yes.

**Ted:** That was an awful show. *(Laughter.)*

**Participant:** Jack Bailey.

**Ted:** Yes, Jack Bailey. See, Don remembers some stuff. Yes, “Queen For a Day.” But a wife is from this day forth and forevermore. Sarah is the wife forever.

Hagar’s child, Ishmael, is according to the flesh. But Isaac is according to the Spirit of promise. When Paul talks here about the child of the promise or the offspring of the promise, he’s also talking about by the Spirit.

There is no inheritance in Abraham’s possessions. I didn’t get that right there. But Hagar produces a child who has no inheritance. That child Ishmael gets nothing out of Abraham’s possessions, either what he has possessed materially, or what God has given him to possess as a spiritual gift for the future, Isaac, on the other hand, is an inheritor of all that Abraham possesses.

Mount Sinai, Paul says, represents this child who has no inheritance. It’s Mount Sinai in Jerusalem below. That is the fleshly Jerusalem.

So what does that mean? Is the law given at Mount Sinai? And Paul is saying that this, like Jerusalem where the law is kept through the sacrifices made at the temple, that this is the system, if you care to follow it, that you must do because it’s what God has given as the law at Sinai. Well the Jerusalem that is above is heavenly and spiritual. And that is where Christ sits at the right hand of God. Did you have a question, Jim?

**Jim:** I’m having trouble getting past the covenant with Abraham.

**Ted:** Yes.

**Jim:** I don’t see it. A covenant is an agreement with God.

**Ted:** Yes.

**Jim:** And how does that—

**Ted:** What verse are you looking at?

**Jim:** Well, I’m just looking at the general—

**Ted:** Well the agreement—and somebody can help me out here, because I struggled with this going through this whole thing,—but the covenant is basically the agreement that says,—and I’m going to get into this later,—“if you do this, then I’m going to do this. Now can you do this?” And that would be Hagar. That would be a human solution to the problem.

**Jim:** But it’s still an agreement with God.

**Ted:** Yes, it’s an agreement, right. Yes, thank you Jim for pulling me out of the fire.

**Jim:** We see at Mount Sinai that is where the law was given.

**Ted:** Yes. That’s right.

**Jim:** The Mosaic covenant is the example of the covenant of works, whereas the covenant of faith is with Abraham.

**Ted:** Right. Go ahead, Bishop.

## ***“Who Is Your Mother?”***

**Bishop Rodgers:** It’s the same point that was made earlier about the promise. The promise with Abraham comes first. And the law, which is Sinai, comes second and it does not cancel the first.

**Ted:** But it’s fulfilled—

**Bishop Rodgers:** But with Moses and the law, it’s a continuing sacrifice.

**Ted:** Good. Thanks, Bishop.

**Participant:** May I add one more question to the problem? The Bible says that we will not be husband and wife in eternity, but we will know and be known.

**Ted:** Yes. Okay. I’m not following you completely, Dale.

**Dale:** You said “wife forever.” You mean wife until death.

**Ted:** Yes, until death, from this day forth forevermore. I was being clever there and quoting from a marriage service, “to have and to hold from this day forth forevermore.” That’s right. So I apologize. It was not meant for eternity. *(Laughter.)* It was meant till the end of our days. You guys are off the hook. *(Laughter.)* “Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, I’m free at last!” *(Laughter.)*

**Participant:** That’s what your wife says.

**Ted:** That’s what my wife says. Diana says that us guys die five years earlier than women do. So she’s got a good start. *(Laughter.)*

**Participant:** Ted?

**Ted:** Yes?

**Participant:** I think that this whole section here underscores the importance of the New Testament explaining the Old. If you read Genesis 21, you would have no inkling of what Paul is talking about here—the symbolic nature of this.

**Ted:** Right. I agree. And finally, on that chart, the two relationships or covenants with God and the two experiences of God are these. Under Hagar she was bearing children of slavery. And the other, Sarah, was bearing children of promise. So those who come out of Sinai, who are Ishmael-like, are going to end up in slavery to the law. And those who are Isaac-like are going to be living by God’s promises.

The flesh, that is, the first birth—intelligence, strength, spirituality, education, power, prestige, etc.—says, which is represented by Hagar and Mount Sinai and the earthly Jerusalem—the flesh says, “give me an assignment and I can do it somehow.” I don’t know if you remember, but there was a commercial that ran about a guy making business reservations on various flights. And he says, “Can you be in Kalamazoo tomorrow, and the next day be in Seattle, and the next day be in Dallas?”

He says, “I can do it. I can do it!” And he gets up one morning and says, “How am I going to do that?” *(Laughter.)* He says that because then, of course, you go to this airline and they’ll fix you up on all these flights.

But basically the flesh says, “What are we born with?” Our intelligence that we’re born with, our strengths that we’re born with, our spirituality, our education, our power, our prestige, everything else—all that flesh says, “Give me the assignment and I can do it. Somehow I’m going to do it. I can do what you require.”

So at Mount Sinai Moses came down and told the people all of the words of the Lord and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, “*All the words of*

## ***“Who Is Your Mother?”***

*the LORD that He has spoken, we will do.*” I mean this is the human response to being challenged by God’s rules and His regulations and His commandments. “Lord, we hear what You’re saying.” Moses gave all the law and the rules and the commandments. And with one voice everybody said together, *“All the words that the LORD has spoken, we will do.”* That is the human response. I can do it.

We see this again not only at Sinai. Joshua, as he was about to enter into the Promised Land, as he gathered the people together, the people answered Joshua, *“Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods”*, because Joshua just said, “Now you’re going to go into another land and there are going to be lots of temptations and lots of other gods and lots of other beliefs. But you’ve got to remain faithful to God.”

And the people said, *“Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for He is our God.”*

*“But Joshua said to the people, ‘You are not able to serve the LORD, for He is a holy God.’”* “How can you reach God’s standard? I’m warning you. You’ve got to remain faithful to God.”

And the people said, “We’ll do it. We can do that,” just like they said at Sinai.

And Joshua says, “No, you will not be able.” And the Hebrew word that’s used there has to do with the power to do something. “You will not have the power to do it.”

*“Then Joshua said to the people, ‘You are witnesses against yourselves, that you have chosen the LORD to serve Him.’”*

*“And they said, ‘We are witnesses.’”*

So Basically God says, “Here are the regulations. Here are the rules.” The people say, “We can do it.” Joshua says, “No, you can’t do it.” And the people said, “No. We’re witnesses. Write it down. We said we would do it. Come back and see us ten years from now and see how we’re doing. We’re going to do just fine!”

And so in the same way the Judaizers are lying when they say, “You can do it. Just do it.” What is that, the Nike expression from Nike shoes? “Just do it.” I mean, it’s pretty simple. Just do it! And this is what the Judaizers have to offer.

Now John Piper, who is a great Reformed Baptist theologian and teacher, talks about the freedom to be able to do what God tells us to do. And I’m thankful to him because I drew quite a bit of what I’m teaching from a sermon he preached on these very verses.

And he talks about the four stages of freedom. And this would be worth just stepping into just briefly, to talk about our inability to do what God tells us to do. Piper describes this and I’m quoting him here.

“Full freedom is what you have when no lack of opportunity, no lack of ability, no lack of desire prevents you from doing what will make you happiest in a thousand years.” Now let me unpack that again, because when I first read it I said that I didn’t care for this definition. But the more I got into it the more I liked it. Piper says, “Full freedom is what you have when no lack of opportunity, no lack of ability, no lack of desire prevents you from doing what will make you happiest in a thousand years.”

Now Piper gives an analogy for this. I’m going to have to read it. It’s excellent and I can’t capture it unless I read it. So I apologize.



## ***“Who Is Your Mother?”***

He says, “What I’m saying is like this. Let’s take sky diving, for instance. Suppose you are on your way to the airport to go for your first jump. But your car hits a pot hole. You have a blowout and run into a telephone pole. You are no longer free to jump, whether you have the ability or not, because the opportunity passes while you wait for the tow truck.” So I don’t have the freedom to do a sky jump if I run into a telephone pole because I don’t have the opportunity to do it. So I don’t have the freedom of opportunity.

“You lack the freedom of opportunity. Or suppose you make it to the airport. But you have no ability at all. You have never studied sky jumping and never learned the first thing about how a parachute works. The opportunity is there, but you don’t have the freedom of ability. You are in bondage to your lack of know how.” So you have the opportunity, but you don’t have the—

**Participant:** Ability.

**Ted:** Ability. You don’t have the freedom of ability.

“But suppose that you make it to the airport. You’ve been to school and have been trained and have all the abilities that are needed. Then you take off for your first jump. But as soon as you look down, all of your desire vanishes,” (*laughter*), “and in its place comes tremendous fear. The opportunity is there. The ability and know how are there. But you don’t have the freedom of desire.” You’re free. You have the ability, but you don’t have the desire.

“The interesting thing about the freedom of desire is that you might be able to go ahead and jump without it. But it won’t be a free act. For example, you might feel so humiliated in front of your instructor or girlfriend that the desire not to be humiliated overcomes the desire not to jump. So you jump. But the emotional experience is not what we call freedom. You are acting under very uncomfortable external constraints.

“You are like Herod with his stepdaughter. When his stepdaughter asked for the head of John the Baptist, he didn’t want to kill John. But he wanted even less to be shamed before his guests. So he acted, but not with the freedom of desire. You have the freedom of desire when you do what you love to do.” Can I keep going?

**Participant:** Sure.

**Ted:** Do you find this modestly interesting?

**Participant:** Yes.

“That’s the way a lot of professing Christians try to keep the commandments of Christ. They don’t really delight to do them. But they feel some uncomfortable constraints like social pressures or fear of hell or a desire to impress someone. So they go through the outward motions of obedience. But the desire of their hearts is fixed somewhere else. They do not enjoy the freedom of desire which Christ gives when He is being formed in the heart.” That is, when Christ is being formed in the heart they don’t have the freedom of desire.

“But there is one last requirement for full freedom. Suppose you get to the airport with no obstacles and you have all the necessary know how. You look out the door at the tiny cluster of silos and barns and farmhouses, and you just can’t wait to jump. You have the freedom of opportunity, the freedom of ability and the freedom of desire. So you jump. And as you free fall, unbeknownst to you, your parachute malfunctions and will not open.

## ***“Who Is Your Mother?”***

“Are you free? Well, in three senses, yes.” (*Laughter.*) “But in the critical fourth sense, no.” (*Laughter.*) “What you are doing so happily, so freely, is going to kill you!” (*Laughter.*) “Whether you know it or not, you are in bondage to destruction. It would be a mockery to exalt in the freedom of an exhilarating free fall if you knew it was leading to destruction.

“In order to be fully free, it is not enough to have the opportunity, ability and desire to act. The acts you desire to perform have to lead to life, indeed eternal life, and not destruction.”

**Participant:** Amen.

**Ted:** I mean, as I thought about this, this is a very profound thought, because I think about this with a lot of our young adults and the millennials. I have a daughter myself. She may have the freedom of opportunity, the freedom of ability, the freedom of desire. But the things she desires are going to kill her. And we have a lot of the people who have three of the freedoms. But what they don’t have is they do not have the freedom of an eternal perspective.

I mean that one of the problems I have with tattoos, acknowledging that my ancestors two thousand years ago wore them all over their faces—Julius Caesar said that the Britons he met on the shores in Kent were covered with tattoos from head to foot—(*laughter.*) But the problem with tattoos is that tattoos are not done with an eternal perspective. The tattoo you put on your body puts a stake in the ground at some time in your life that you may want to forget.

When he was in the Marines, my son got tattoos. And he spent several thousands of dollars to have them laser removed, because that’s no longer where he was with what that tattoo said. And the problem with tattoos is that they take you from a temporal position, and they put a stake in the ground and identify you, wherever that tattoo is, from that time. And I would say that God saved me from the decisions that I made in my twenties and thirties. (*Laughter.*) I would be a much happier man today if all of those were removed, because I did not have the freedom of an eternal perspective.

I had opportunity. When I think about my sins, and you think about yours, you had the opportunity. You had the ability. You certainly had the desire. But what you did not have, and what I did not have, is the freedom of an eternal perspective on things. And when the parachute doesn’t open, you die.

The Spirit says that this is the way that men approach it. That is Hagar’s way. That is Abraham through Hagar’s way of meeting God’s requirements and being right in God’s eyes. But unlike the flesh, which says, “Give me the assignment; I can do it,” the Spirit says, “*With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.*” And that’s why we say, “*You must be born again.*”

I’ve told you that one of the things in reading George Whitfield, the great eighteenth century evangelist in England and in America that struck me again and again in his journal entries is that he talked about the necessity of the new birth. You must be born again. You must be made new in Christ, which includes being in Christ. To be born again means being placed into Christ. Otherwise, you’re simply in yourself. And all you have to rely on is what you bring to the table through your first birth. But the new birth puts you

## ***“Who Is Your Mother?”***

into Christ. And that means that it puts you into His crucifixion, His burial, His resurrection, and His seating in glory with Him. We have everything we need. We don't have bits and pieces of a salvation—that we have to do this, this and this. Everything is in Christ. And when we're born again, we're put into Him.

The Jerusalem that is above that Paul talks about in this letter, to be a child of the promise, to be in the Jerusalem above, is described in Colossians 3:1-3. Paul says, *“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on the things that are above, and not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”*

And again he explains this in Ephesians 2:5-6. *“Even when we were dead in our trespasses, He made us alive together with Christ—(by grace you have been saved)—and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”*

So the Judaizers, the Ishmael-type folks, the descendants of Hagar, what they say is “I'm starting here and I have to get up here somehow.” Or as the man from Brave Men said to me several years ago, “I'm eighty per cent of the way.”

But from the offspring of Sarah, from the heavenly Jerusalem, from those who are Isaac-like, they are already there because they have been placed into Christ. And Christ is there. And therefore what we do is that we begin to experience where we've already arrived. The person who is seeking to fulfill the law is trying to arrive unsuccessfully. The person who is in Christ by being born again and placed into Him, that person has already arrived and is beginning to experience what Christ has already provided for him.

The Judaizers say that it's all about self-improvement and getting better. You never get free. You're always in bondage to death. It's like you can never get good enough. Remember that song by Tennessee Ernie Ford?

“I owe my soul to the company store.”

**Participant:** “Sixteen Tons.”

**Ted:** How does it go?

“Sixteen tons and what do you get?

Another day older, and deeper in debt.

St. Peter, don't you call me, 'cause I can't go.

I owe my soul to the company store.”

Well, unless you're in Christ, unless you've been pulled into Him, and made to sit with Him in the heavenly places, you owe your soul to the company store. You can never get out of debt.

My wife's people were coal miners outside of Punxatawney. We can go to that town where they lived. It's called Rossiter. And you go down the main street, and every one of those coal miners' houses looks exactly the same. And in the middle of all of them is the company store. It's all abandoned now. But the company store is there.

Those coal miners did not own those houses. The coal company owned the houses. The coal miners owed the store because all the groceries, all the goods they needed, they bought from the store. And they could never get out of debt. As long as you are under the law, you can never get out of debt to God.

## ***“Who Is Your Mother?”***

The gospel says that it's all about being in Christ. The Judaizers say that it's all about self-improvement and getting better. The gospel says that it's all about being in Christ. Salvation, sanctification, glorification, all the steps are in Christ. The new creation is life in Him and you in Him.

And so therefore, I guess, I will summarize this and give the quick applications. What is the application? I think there are three applications for us.

#1. *The flesh is no help at all.* It's interesting that in the Greek it literally means “not useful; nothing.” It means a double negative. That means that the flesh—your abilities and your strength, your intelligence, your charm, your good looks, everything that you have is of no help at all, not only in terms of God but in terms of living your life.

I'm in business all the time. I'm tempted to use all my flesh to get my way. I've got clients. I need them to sign those contracts. They haven't signed the contracts yet. I've been thinking about fleshly ways to get them to sign those contracts. But you know, in the end, those are the very clients that I wish I had never seen, because they're more trouble than they're worth. More and more I just say, “Lord, okay. I'm going to wait and see what happens,” because the flesh is no help at all. That's the first thing.

The second thing is this. *“The LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did as He had promised.”* When we begin to panic with anxiety, fear, concerns about the future, how things are going to turn out, relationships, money, health, whatever it is, remember God's promises. “I'm your shield and great reward.” Can God be trusted, or is He just fooling around? I mean it really comes down to this. It gets quite simple at that point.

And finally, *“Let us therefore strive to enter that rest.”* There is that whole great concept in Hebrews about entering God's rest. Literally, let us strive. In Greek it literally means to move speedily with diligence. Let us go after it. Let's speedily go to rest. It means, okay, God. You've got all of this in control. And I'm going to be saved by Your work, not mine. Therefore, I'm just going to quit working at it. I'm going to rest. I'm going to enter into God's rest. And that's where He wants all of us to be.

How impressive is it, when everything is going to hell in a hand-basket all around us, and you've got rest? That is a powerful testimony. And people begin to say, “Whoa! What's going on here?”

It's the thing that got John and Charles Wesley's attention as they were headed back to England after they spent their time in Georgia, trying to convert the prisoners and the Indians, when they were outside of Savanna, Georgia with the great evangelists of the 1730s. As they were headed home in their ship, there was a group of Moravians, which was an evangelical group. The Wesley brothers had not been converted at that time.

And they got into a huge storm in the ship, and the ship was in danger of sinking. And what were the Moravians, this small prayer group, doing? They were in the hull of the ship having a prayer meeting while everybody else was losing their heads. They were down there praying and trusting God, and not moaning and wailing. And that's the thing that began to get John and Charles Wesley thinking. And they said, “Even though we're priests in the Church of England, we don't have it. We need it.” Yes, John?

**Bishop Rodgers:** Just to point out how personal this can get,--

## ***“Who Is Your Mother?”***

**Ted:** Yes.

**Bishop Rodgers:** He actually excommunicated one lady in his parish after taking Communion.

**Ted:** Was he in Oxford or Cambridge? Which one? I’m trying to remember.

**Bishop Rodgers:** No. It was in the States, at least when he was over here.

**Ted:** Correct. But when he was in Oxford he with his brother formed what they called the Holy Club, to be sure. And they thought that the purpose of the Christian faith was to be a better person, a more improved version of your original self. God’s not in the improvement business. He’s in the new creation business. And that’s what He wants.

You know, you may not be much better than you were prior to conversion. But you’re certainly new. So that’s what God’s work is all about.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank You that it is by this gift that You’ve given us of Your Son, that we can be found in Him, not having a righteousness of our own, but in Him alone. And we pray that we may rest in that knowledge that in Him we will have all that we will ever need. And we thank You for this great and marvelous gift. Make us always thankful for what You have done through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Men:** Thanks, Ted. (*Applause.*)