

What Is Your Ishmael

by Alan Redpath

The church's lost enthusiasm and lack of spiritual maturity can be overcome by being mastered by the Holy Spirit and reacting supernaturally like Jesus.

Duration: 50:56

Scripture: Galatians 4:1

Topics: "Ishmael"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of having a genuine relationship with God through faith and obedience. He highlights the story of Abraham and Isaac to illustrate this point. The preacher explains that Abraham's friendship with God was based on his obedience, while sonship with God is dependent on faith. He also emphasizes the need for believers to demonstrate their faith through their actions and reactions, showing that they are truly followers of Jesus.

Transcript

Good evening, everyone. Good evening, everyone. That was an awkward moment.

I always like to know we're on speaking terms, at least before a start. Say, you folk are really having a loaded program of Englishmen. Three out of the four speakers come from Britain.

We are sorry about that. I hope you haven't any trouble with the British accent. It varies a bit.

Having lived in Chicago for about 10, 11 years, I hope it's got a bit brushed off, but you know. I was telling them up at Briarcrest, I think a week ago, that when I first came to Chicago, way back now, and just after I came there, I was showing a Nigerian national through the customs, and he couldn't speak any English, and he was coming over to learn the language and so on. And the customs officer at the airport looked at his passport and then said to me, what is he? So I said, he's a clerk.

I didn't know that in Chicago that word was pronounced clerk. So the man said, he's whack? I said, he's a clerk. He said, but what does he do? He said, I said, I've no idea at all, but all I know is he's a clerk.

So he said, you mean he just goes tick-tock, tick-tock? You see, well now, if I lapse into the King James version from time to time, you come and ask me what I mean, and I trust that you won't find it too difficult to understand. But seriously, it's a tremendous thrill. I think I'm right, Dr. Maxwell, in saying this is my fifth visit to this conference, and it's always a tremendous thrill.

I every, I thought last time would be the last one, but it's wonderful to be back again. 1969 I was here, the Lord has spared me, I'm so glad he has, for this privilege. And yet, somehow, you don't, may not believe this, it's a very terrifying experience.

Because really, when you face an audience like this, you face people who are, if I may say so, the cream of the crop. And I've just been talking to the Lord today, and you know, I was saying to him, Lord, I, there's not a thing I can say can bring anybody into blessing. They all know what I'm going to talk about, they know the truth, they know the doctrine, they have it all.

All we need is the Holy Spirit to break through. And often it's hardest for the Spirit of God to break through with truth with which you're familiar. Because it's so familiar that it wears off.

And you've heard it over and over again. And I've just been praying that things may happen in this week which just mean that God has intervened and taken this whole situation out of the preacher's hand. And things happen which have no explanation but a miracle.

And to that end, I want you to turn with me tonight to this passage of scripture. Galatians chapter 4, which was read to us earlier in the service. Galatians chapter 4, and let's just find the place.

And then bow our hearts and heads before the Lord and before his word. Speak Lord for thy servant heareth. Speak just now.

Some message to meet my need which thou only dost know. Speak now through thy holy word and make me see. Some wonderful truth thou hast to show to me.

For Jesus' sake. Amen. This morning at the Christian workers' hour, as I listened to God's servant speak to us, there came through to me his word that said to us that one day we shall stand before the Lord in his judgment seat and will be under a view.

And the question will be then, am I, are you among those who are on the role of honor or are we on the role of shame? And this word question just confirmed what was beginning to burn in my heart for the message of this evening. Because this church at Galatia was in a hopeless mess. It caused Paul more concern than any of the others.

Little children, I travail in birth till Christ be formed in you. Something tragic had gone wrong. If you notice in this chapter for instance, in verse 15 they'd lost their enthusiasm.

What has become of the satisfaction you felt? For I bear you witness that if possible you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me. If you are reading in the authorized I think it is where is the blessedness that once you knew? They'd lost the thrill of early days. Do you remember that hymn that William Carper wrote which says, oh for a closer walk with God, a calm and heavenly friend, a light to shine along the road that leads me to the Lamb.

And then one verse goes like this, where is the blessedness that once I knew when first I saw the Lord? Where's that so refreshing view of Jesus and his word? I wonder if he just didn't get that from this verse here. What has become of the satisfaction you once felt? What's happened? Why have you lost your enthusiasm and the thrill and glow of early days as Christian? Of course this always has immediate consequences. And this church had been sidetracked.

Because verse 9 and 10 tell us you are now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by him, how can you turn back again to weak and beggarly elemental spirits? Whose slaves you want to be once more. You observe days and months and seasons and years. I'm afraid I've labored over you in vain.

You see that exchange and intimate knowledge of Jesus for religious performance. They'd all assembled in all the ritual, no life. The whole situation was dead.

They'd become stilled observers of all sorts of ceremonies and all that kind of thing. They'd got religion without life. Lost their enthusiasm, soul, they couldn't live in a vacuum.

They'd filled it up with all sorts of religious output. And inevitably of course they'd stop growing. I travel in birth, birth till Christ be formed in you, says Paul.

You see, lost love, religion instead of Jesus, no growth. Now I don't want to be cynical or critical, except to myself. Nor do I want to be scathing or hit hard at anybody.

But I do want in these days, in the share of minister I have here, to be realistic and honest with God and with myself and with you. And I begin by asking, don't you think this is an example of the condition of the church by and large today? And don't you think it is an example of the condition of many of us, individualized Christians? Can you remember the early days of your conversion, the day you were saved? Can you think back to it? I can. It doesn't really matter if you can't, perhaps you don't know the day, can't remember the place.

I remember it because I was there at the time when it happened. I remember it well. But it may be you don't know the day, but you know now the thing that matters.

You know now you're converted. Yes, you know you're a Christian, but can you remember the thrill of early days? Oh, how wonderful it was. I remember the man who led me to Christ, gave me a new Bible.

I'd never read one before. I was about 21 years of age, and he gave me Romans 8.1. There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ. And I was so thrilled with that verse, I underlined that little word now so heavily, that it went right through to the epistle of the Philippians and ruined my Bible.

But it was worth it for the sheer thrill, the sheer thrill of knowing the reality of Christ and my life. Do I feel like that now? That was 40 years ago or more. What about now? What a tragic thing when Christians have lost their first love.

About two years ago I was in Australia at Christmas time, and I had an airmail letter from my daughter at home in England. And this letter began by saying, Daddy, I've got a boyfriend. That hit me because all previous applicants had received a brush of treatment.

And then she went to describe this boyfriend. She said he's fab. And that I think is fabulous.

And he's fantastic, and he's smashing and wizard. The American revised version on that is cool and neat and groovy and tough. And then having exhausted the vocabulary, I received another letter in another week's time.

I'm amazed it didn't burn up in the mail. It simply absolutely, she conveyed to me the glow and the warmth of it. Do you know, I could hardly wait to get home.

I knew the fellow well enough. He was quite a keen Christian. I knew him.

But him? Fab? Wizard? Smashing? Could it possibly be the same person? And I, I could hardly wait. At three months at home, I found it was the same person when I got there. What do you think made all the difference? Well, of course, you know, don't you? She loved him.

Oh, she thought she did. It's all over now. Thank, thank the Lord for that.

But, uh, excuse me. But I'm so thankful, yes. But you see, you see, at the time, at the time, she was absolutely madly in love.

I tell you, I find it exciting today to meet young Christian people who are in love with Jesus like that. I've met hundreds of them. Oh, I can't diverge tonight.

But if I could take you to Calvary Chapel in Los Angeles, to the Jesus Movement Church, there may be things that are wild, well, and you may think they're a bit wild. But I tell you, I've seen 3,000 people sitting, young people, in a tent, which is the church now, listening eagerly to the Word of God. Every night of the week, 2,000 of them, studying the Word.

No program, no program, but simply listening to the Word of Jesus, the Word of God. And I find that exciting. It's an absolutely appalling contradiction, when you're a Christian who never speaks about the Lord, he professes to love.

Well, now, this Galatian church has lost that early glow. And of course, when you do that, you get sidetracked, you see. You do your thing, hymn, prayer, hymn, reading, notices, offering, hymn, benediction, special number, sermon, all over.

Twice a week, twice a day, twice a Sunday, I mean, 52 weeks in the year, and, and nobody ever stops to wonder why on earth something doesn't really happen. Our churches churn it all out, week after week after week, and little evidence of the miraculous. Nothing that cannot be accounted for, except on the basis of good organization.

Sidetracked, doing our thing every Sunday, and people are just turned off to it. And of course, the result of that, there's no growth, no spiritual maturity. People don't grow in likeness to Christ, and the whole thing's tragic.

Well, now, what intrigues me is, what on earth had caused it all? Well, Paul leaves us in no doubt here. If you turn back to chapter 3, he tells us exactly, and let me read verse 2 and 3 to you. Let me ask you only this, did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? I don't know how many of you here might have the living Bible, but I think their paraphrase of it, of that verse in it, is wonderful.

Listen, it reads this way, have you gone completely crazy? If trying to obey the Jewish law never gave you spiritual life in the first place, why do you think that trying to obey it now will make you stronger Christians? You see, that's the whole argument of the Galatian letter. Just this, this somewhat explosive letter that Paul wrote. If, putting it in modern language, if, if, by trying to be good, you can't get right and keep right with God, and if it were possible to get right with God by trying to be good, by trying to keep good, then the cross of Christ was an absolute disaster.

Calvary was a huge mistake. But if it's impossible for me to be right with God, and keep right with God, except on the basis of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, why must I add something to that sacrifice of my own effort? Because, you see, no activity of the flesh can help the work of the Spirit. If I'm admitted to a relationship with God through commitment to Christ, how can I possibly produce the fruits of that relationship? By going back to attempting and trying and struggling to sweat it all out.

You see, it takes a crucified life to witness to a crucified Lord. Nothing that I can do in my own power can strengthen the life of God the Holy Spirit in me every day. Now, this is something that the Galatian church had never realized.

And they'd substituted for a life of faith and obedience, a life of works. And the whole thing was disillusioning. Now, if that was what was wrong in Galatia, and I'm afraid it's often what is wrong with us.

We begin in the Holy Spirit. We go on by trying. We begin by trusting, and we go on by hard work and effort.

If this is the reason for the disillusionment of so many, and for the defeat and bewilderment of so many Christian people, what's Paul's answer to it? Well, it's really rather thrilling. It takes the form of drawing their attention, reminding them of an Old Testament story, which we read in this portion. A story which centers around Abraham, and Isaac, and Sarah, and Hagar, and Ishmael.

Maybe you found this story a little bit difficult to understand. Let me just try and break it down very simply to you. And by the way, if you imagine that I'm using a sort of prehistoric story to emphasize my point, I just will remind you that Abraham became a friend of God.

The only man in the Old Testament who made that, not the only one anew, Jesus said, henceforth, I call you not servants, not servants, but friends. Ye are my friends, if you do whatsoever I command you. Sonship with God depends on faith.

Friendship with God depends on obedience. And unless my faith is backed by repentance, and followed by obedience, it isn't genuine. And here, Paul is going to ram home to them that the one thing that matters to God is not our orthodoxy, not our belief, but our obedience.

Now just look at this story a second with me. And I want to get out of it just three little couplets of words that appear in it. In matter of fact, if you had a piece of paper, I would suggest you draw a line down the middle, and you'll put these couplets, one on each side of the line.

Here's the first, the first couplet, verse 21. Abraham had two sons, one by a slave, one by a free woman. The son of the slave was born according to the flesh, the son of the free woman through promise.

My first word, couple of the words would be, natural and supernatural. Born naturally, born supernaturally, natural and supernatural. Now my second couple of the words, verse 25.

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. Bondage, freedom. That's our second couple, bondage, freedom.

And our third, verse 29. As at that time, he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the spirit, so it is now. Two more words, flesh, spirit.

Now on either side of those lines, that line, you should have these three words. On one side, natural, bondage, flesh. On the other side of the line, supernatural, free, spirit.

May I just read them, turn them around and read them slightly differently? Mastered by the flesh, by the way, I suppose we all know what that is. It's not this 200 pounds or so of stuff that I live in. That's not me, and that's not you either.

That's merely the body, that's not the flesh. The flesh, well, miss off the H and spell it backwards, there you have it, self. Mastered by self, in bondage, reacting naturally, in every situation.

And the other side of the line, mastered by the spirit, free, reacting supernaturally. Now listen, every one of us in this great auditorium tonight is living seven days a week on one or other of the sides of that line, and there's no neutral territory. If you are mastered by self, you're in bondage.

And in every situation which pops up, you react naturally. Nobody would ever know you're a Christian. You press the panic button, just like everybody else.

You blow your top, just as everybody else does. I don't know which church you belong to, doesn't really matter. But let me say this to you, if you have the archangel Gabriel as your pastor, and he preached every Sunday, you have no right to expect that anybody should ever come inside to hear him.

You should have every right to expect, however, that seven days a week everybody watches your reactions. How do I react? How do you react when the rod gets pulled out from under my feet? How do I react and you react when I'm going through sorrow, heartache, bitterness, trouble, problems? Does anybody know by my behavior and reactions that I belong to Jesus and have a supernatural power that controlled me then? See, mastered by self, I'm in bondage. And I react just like anybody else.

But mastered by the Holy Spirit, I'm free. And being free, I react supernaturally. May I say it? Like Jesus would.

Like Jesus would. Now, let's just ask ourselves which side of that line we're on. I mean, just don't try and pull the wool over anybody's eyes.

You can pull the wool over anybody's eyes, but you can't over God's. So let's come out and be open right before him. Now, which side of that line am I going to tell the Holy Spirit tonight I'm on? How do I react when pressures are on, when I'm up against it, when things are absolutely impossible to take? Are my reactions supernatural like Jesus? Do I always hit back? Do I want to prove myself right and the other man wrong? Do I hit back? Or have I learned that as a Christian, I'm no more than a stepping stone to Jesus? And stepping stones are for walking on.

And sometimes it hurts, especially if the man who walks on you is a friend. At our English Keswick convention three years ago, one of the speakers was John Scott, whose name I'm sure you've heard. Probably you know him well.

He's a great man. Speaking at the missionary meeting, when there are about a thousand missionaries present, he said, I want to speak to you about your greatest problem. And I literally saw a thousand people sit up on the edge of their seats and say, how does he know what my problem is? And he said, I'm speaking to you about your fellow missionary.

And he said, I want to give you the answer to it and support it for the Word of God. And this was the answer he gave. Treat every fellow missionary as though he or she were Jesus.

React to every fellow missionary as though you were Jesus. As though you were Jesus. Can you think what would happen in our churches today if we reacted supernaturally like that? But we don't, you see.

We've got a whole mass of doctrine. I mean with sound, absolutely dead sound. All terrific.

We've got our I's and cross our T's correct. Dispensationally accurate. In belief, tremendous.

But behavior, behavior in the kindergarten. Behavior. We've been 40 years, some of us, on the Christian life, and nobody would ever see the difference.

We're so mean, and so bitter, and often so unkind to people. Do I react like that? Am I mustered by myself and in bondage and react naturally? Or am I mustered by the Spirit? And do people see, because he's mustered in me, reactions of a man of God? Reactions of a man who's controlled by God the Holy Ghost. Now with that in your mind, just keep it there, hold it one minute.

Let me just remind you of the bones of this story that Paul was referring to here. You'll have to take what I say as the truth, but he wanted to confirm it. You could read in Genesis 13 through 19, you get it all there.

But I'll give you the red path paraphrase, which will be a very free one, but at least it'll have the punchline in it. The thrust of the story I want to get at. I can't go into the details.

Here it is, here it is. You remember it, most of you. A home, a family, in the Middle East.

Abram and his lovely wife, Sarah, head over heels in love with each other, and also in love with God. And God speaks to them and calls them out of their country, and they go at his command. And they go into a land that he'd promised them, and the first thing they find when they get there is that there's a famine, lack of food, food shortage.

So Abram can't take it. So he goes back and goes down to Egypt, where he knows he'll get some food. But on his way, he was doing a bit of thinking, a very serious thing.

So he opened his heart to his beloved, and said to her one day, Sarah, excuse me saying this to you, but you know, you're a very lovely woman. You're very beautiful. And honestly, I'm a bit scared what may happen to me.

Sarah, listen, do you mind telling everybody when we get to Egypt that you're my sister? So that it'll be okay with me? Say Abram, did I call you a friend of God? Oh yes, a friend of God, but in the making. Raw material, this rough, rugged stuff that need knocking in and knocking to shape, knocking about, and here is only beginning his life with God. So Sarah agreed to the bargain, because it was half the truth.

She was his half-sister, but it was a half-truth with a view to a lie. Didn't matter what happened to her, but what happened to him was the thing that concerned him. Sure enough, when they got into Egypt, Pharaoh noticed that she was very lovely.

Took her into his home, and gave to Abram. Made servants, men's servants, oxen, sheep, camels, cows, goats, everything, what have you, for Sarah's sake. God intervenes to prevent a tragedy, and they're all turned out.

So Abram and his wife get back to the land again, somewhat chagrined, I should imagine. And when they get back to the land, God appears to Abram and takes them out for an evening walk, and says to Abram, just have a look up at the stars, see them all? As many as there are stars in heaven, so will your seed be. And in you, every family of the earth will be blessed.

So Abram believed God, couldn't do anything else. And ten years went by. No sign of any fulfillment of God's promise, no sign of a child, that simply stumped him.

I mean, where's this child coming from? Sarah doesn't seem able to be a mother or a child. I don't know, what's God mean? What's he talking about? So after ten years had gone by, Sarah called him aside one day, and said, look here Abram, let's have a chat. And she said, you know, I'm sure that God loves us very much, but I'm afraid that he's got himself into a very difficult situation, because he's made to us a very wonderful promise, and frankly, I don't think he's got the power to see it through.

So Abram, we've got to do something to help him. We've really got to get on the ball and do something about it. So Abram, I suggest, I suggest that Hagar be the mother of the child that got it from, hold it, Hagar.

Where's she come from? Who's she? How's she gotten to home? Oh, she's just one of the maid servants that Abram collected in the time of his backsliding in Egypt. He should have been mighty careful what he did with her around in the house. Ten years later, this thing hits back at him.

Old-fashioned story, prehistoric, no fear, no fear. I suggest it's a very familiar ring about it to many of you right here, right today. Temptation, which we thought we'd finished with ten years ago, has often hit back, has taken us off guard.

Our defenses were down, and it's crushed us and tripped us up and broken us time and time again. Abram agreed with his wife's suggestion this time, and the due course, Ishmael came on the scene. And I tell you that a home which had been happy, God sent it.

There came literally a hell on earth. Two women in the home, nagging women at that. Hagar looking down her nose at Sarah and saying, see what I've done.

Sarah bitterly resentful, bitterly jealous, quarreling, bickering, squabbling all the time. One time Sarah tears Ishmael and Hagar out the house, but God sent them back again. And Abram was having to cope with a situation which his whole home was falling apart.

And the worst feature of it all was, listen, the friend of God had no communication with him. Thirteen years of unanswered prayer. Thirteen years when God did nothing.

When it seemed that prayer was hopeless and Abram couldn't get through. Thirteen years left on his own. Out of date story.

I find it becoming more and more personal. Preachers are not exempt from this principle, you know. I don't want to shock you, but I never preach at people, I want to be honest.

I've known what it is to have to stand up on Sunday morning, because it happened to be 11 o'clock. I had to go into pulpit and had to preach, but I knew my wings were clipped. Because I was demanding from the congregation an obedience which I wasn't giving myself.

Personal failure, personal breakdown, personal sin. Prayer seemed to be shattered. Bible study didn't seem to mean much.

Somehow, somehow, former disciplines had got crowded out through the busyness of a pastoral ministry. And oh, I had to stand up and preach, but as I got to, but somehow there wasn't anything in it. No utterance, no power, no answer, no Holy Ghost.

How long is it since God has answered your prayer? How long is it since you've had a personal talk with Jesus? How long is it since the Word has lived in your heart? Is it just a test book, textbook, just a theory book, just a book from which you get your sermons, from which you make notes? How long is it since it burnt like a fire in your body? You go through your Bible here, semester by semester you go through it, but how long is it since it really went through you? Burnt its way into your heart with authority. Oh no, you won't let it do that, because somewhere along the line, somewhere along the line, you've disobeyed God. And the price of disobedience in Abram's life, as it is in all of us, is broken fellowship.

Thirteen years, no talk with God, no fellowship with God. A home that had been happy, shattered. And he saw the fruit of it in his own life.

Thirteen years later, in his mercy, God spoke to him again, called him out and said, Abram, I'm going to renew my promise to you, renew my covenant, and I will make of you a great nation and a great people, and you'll fill the face of the earth, and in you every family will be blessed. And Abram said, thank you, Lord, that's so good of you, appreciate it, did he? Oh Lord, yeah, I'm all for it, that thrilling, I was like, no, no, he didn't, listen, listen, listen, listen. Abram laughed.

Me, a hundred, Sarah, ninety, nonsense, absolutely impossible. Oh Lord, that Ishmael might live before you. And the answer of heaven came like a thunderclap to him, no, Sarah will be the mother of the child I promised you, and this time next year, he'll give you the child of promise.

Abram clings to Ishmael and pleads with God, oh please Lord, not your way, my way. I want Ishmael, I've grown to love him, he's thirteen years old, such a nice little bright teenager, why won't he do? I've thought up his idea, this idea to help you along. No, and it comes into the story, the words that are quoted in Galatians 4, cast out the slave and her son, for the son of the slave shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.

Abram, Abram, as long as you have Ishmael in your home, Isaac can't come in. When you're prepared to let Ishmael go, Isaac will be born. Come back to my story.

Come back, see a piece of paper, and you're not, listen, reacting naturally in bondage, mustered by self, you are Ishmael. Reacting supernaturally free, mustered by Isaac, you're Jesus. See, which is it? Oh, that Ishmael might live before you, and though in the depths of your heart and my heart, we don't fall well that it takes a crucified man to preach a crucified Lord, we hang on to our Ishmael.

What's your Ishmael? What's your Ishmael in your church? You know how churches think up a project today? You know, it goes like this, a bit crude perhaps, but it's something along these lines. God doesn't seem to be doing much in our church nowadays. Don't see anything happen.

Congregations are getting a bit small. I know what we'll do, we'll help along. So we think up a tremendous idea, and then we form masses of committees, and we get together every man we can lay our hands on, especially those with a lot of money, and we mix the whole thing together with a little bit of prayer and

Bible study, and then we wait for it all to explode.

And what do you method? Remember Gideon? 32,000 men facing the Midianites, who kept them in dens and strongholds for a week, unable to move. And Gideon's got 32,000 men, and God says to him, send 22,000 home. They're scared.

Send 9,700 more home, but undisciplined. And poor Gideon finds himself left with 300 men, masses of food bags that the rest had left in a hurry to get home, and lots of trumpets. And then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon.

And a very ordinary man did a very ordinary thing, blow a trumpet. With extraordinary results, the enemy was absolutely overcome. God's method.

Miracle. On which side of the line are you on? What's the smallest meeting in your church calendar? Your prayer meeting? What room have you for God to work a miracle? Any? We've organized out the Holy Ghost in most of our churches today. No room for him.

Too busy, too busy. We don't need him anymore. Our superbly organized evangelical church, they'll do the job.

And it's as dead as a doorill. But listen, I want to ask you, as I close, something very personal. Tell me, what's your own Ishmael? I wonder.

What is it? That you've insisted on, that you know is not God's will. And, and secretly in your heart, there's a sort of half of you that really wants to get on the mission field, and really wants to go to town for the Lord, and be useful. But there's another half of you that hangs on to Ishmael, and he's dear and precious to you, and you love him.

There's a seat of conflict in your life. Listen, when Ishmael is taken to the cross, and you slam, oh you're willing for him to die. At that moment, the rest of your life becomes Holy Spirit activity.

Until Ishmael dies, it's your activity. That's why you're on the wrong side of the line. It's mastered by the flesh, and bondage reacting naturally, all your activity.

But let Ishmael go, it becomes mastered by the Spirit, free, and Holy Spirit activity. Again I say to you, watch your Ishmael. I want to be very blunt, very frank.

Is it sex? Is it boy trouble? Girl trouble? Now, now, don't just bluff that off, be honest about it. May not be something horrid, vulgar, rotten. May well be, but it may not be.

Two years ago, after morning service at my church in Edinburgh, a girl came up to me, and she held out her left hand. When a girl does that, there's only one thing you look at. And I looked at it, and there, sure enough, a lovely engagement ring.

So I congratulated her, I knew her fiancé. I said, great, I'm so glad, we fixed her wedding day. Three months later, she came back, came into my vestry, held out her hand again, no ring.

I said to her, Jean, what's happened? Oh, she said, nothing, nothing. I said, that's the understatement of the century. And then she broke down, had a little weep.

And after she's recovered, she said, well, really, it's mainly your fault. Well, I've been blamed for a lot in life, but I didn't know that anything would ever do with that. She said, you see, it's like this.

My fiancé and I have been listening for the past three months to you preach on Sunday mornings on missionary principles and the Acts of the Apostles. And as we've done so, he has been more and more convinced that God wants him in Edinburgh. And the Lord has made me convinced that he wants me in Thailand.

And that's the answer. Three months later than that, we had the wedding. I'm sorry, three months later than that, we had a valedictory service.

I'm going to move ahead of myself there. We had a valedictory service. You know, on that day, I tell you, I had a tear in one eye and twinkle in the other, because there was that dear girl going out to Thailand with a broken heart, but going there and telling the Lord and telling everybody else that she loved God and his will and the Lord Jesus more than anything else, the most precious thing in all the world.

Two years later, I saw her in Thailand and she was radiant. On the OMF field she was, actually. And she said to me, you know, I'd rather be unmarried here out of the will of God, in the will of God, than I would be home in Scotland out of it.

I have, you better watch it, I have rather a discerning eye for these situations. And after I'd been there a couple of weeks, I felt it highly improbable that this state of isolation would continue much longer. And sure enough, it didn't.

For three months after that, she wrote to me and had told me that she was engaged and married and getting married on the field, which she did, to the man of God's choice. Supposing she'd chosen God's second best, God wouldn't have stopped her. He could have done.

Supposing. Ishmael. What's your Ishmael? My friend, listen.

You want your life to continue by the activity and power of the indwelling Jesus? You want this to be real? How badly do you want it? Enough to discard that Ishmael? Enough to let him go, let her go, let that thing go, let habit go, whatever it is, at any cost, at any cost. That your life may be used by the risen Lord, in a sense, that's a costly road to travel. But the other one is much more costly.

Well, the Holy Spirit, I trust, has probed into your heart, and he's pointed out to you as clearly as anything, what is the Ishmael in your life? Every time you pray, it comes up to your mind. Every time you try and read your Bible, it does. But somehow the way through to heaven is blocked, and it goes on being blocked until I'm willing to let Ishmael go.

And the moment I'm ready for that, I tell you, heaven opens. And once again, I know the thrill and the joy of an ungrieved Holy Spirit in my heart, making Jesus a wonderful reality in my life. What's your Ishmael? You're going to tell the Lord tonight? You're ready? See, you're on the wrong side of that line, mustered by self in bondage and absolutely everything reacting naturally.

You want to move on to the other side? Well, you're mustered by the Spirit of God. And free and reacting supernaturally. Can I let you into a little secret, which I will develop on Friday evening? Do you know when a fellow or a girl are free? Do you know when? I'll tell you.

You are free when you're not free to be free of God. Got it? Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty that Christ has set us free. You are free when you're not free, when you're absolutely held and mustered by a risen Christ indwelling your life.

Then you're free. But as long as you're mustered by lots of Ishmaels, you're the slave of all of them, and you're not free. You want to enter into freedom and liberty and the joy of the Lord tonight? Oh my, the Holy Spirit might just right convict you at such a depth that it will be impossible for you to go out of this place disobeying God.

Let's pray.

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