

McLEAN BIBLE CHURCH
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>> PASTOR SOLOMON: Now, what exactly does it mean to be a Christian? Well, the Bible says it means that six primary things. Number one, it means that we've been born again by the spirit of God. Number two, that we've had our sins forgiven by God. Number three, that we have the absolute assurance of eternal life. It means, number four, that we have a personal relationship with God. Number five, it means that God, the Holy Spirit, in-dwells us. And, number six, it means we live a transformed earthly life. And it is number six that I really want us to talk about today. Jesus said in John, Chapter 10, Verse 10, I came that they, that is Christians, might have life and that they might have it abundantly. And so as Christians, if Jesus came to give us life abundantly, then why do so many of us live such defeated and powerless Christian lives?

Well, this is the issue that we want to talk about today as we continue in our verse-by-verse study of the book of Genesis. Are we ready? (Yes.) Here we go. Genesis 21 but a little bit of background first. In Genesis Chapter 18, the Lord Jesus appeared to Abraham in human form and promised Abraham that his wife Sarah would have a son within the next 12 months. Now, remember, Sarah was childless up to this point. And, remember, also, that there were a couple of obstacles to this.

Obstacle Number 1 is that Sarah was 90 years old. And as Romans 4:19 says, her womb was dead. Obstacle Number 2 is also in Romans 4:19, Abraham's body was also as good as dead, the Bible says, since he was 100 years old. And, yet, despite all of these obstacles, God promised them a son anyway.

Now that's a little bit of background. Let's pick up in Genesis Chapter 21. Now, the Lord took note of Sarah, just as he has said, and the Lord did for Sarah just as he promised. So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age at the appointed time that God had promised them.

Folks, how cool is this? I mean, I don't care how big the obstacles. I don't think care how impossible things look. When God makes you and me a promise, God has the power to keep it. How cool is that? Huh? Amen? (Amen.)

All right. Now, Verse 3, and Abraham called the name of his son who Sarah bore Isaac. And when Isaac was 8 days old Abraham circumcised him as God had commanded. Abraham was 100 years old as Isaac was born to him. Sarah said God has brought laughter, that's what Isaac means, laughter to me for everyone who hears about this will laugh with me. For who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? And yet I

have borne him a son in his old age.

Okay. So far so good. But there's trouble a-brewing, watch. Verse 8, now the child, Isaac, grew and was weaned and Abraham held a great feast on that day. But Sarah saw Hagar's son Ishmael who is now 16 years old mocking Isaac. Let's go back and make sure we know who Ishmael and Hagar are. Genesis 16:1 Sarah had an Egyptian handmaiden whose name was Hagar. So Sarah said to Abraham, the Lord has kept me from having children so please go sleep with my handmaiden, Hagar so perhaps I can obtain children through her.

So Abraham slept with Hagar and she conceived and had a son name Ishmael. Okay. Let's go back to Genesis 21 now, Verse 10.

So Sarah said to Abraham, throw this bondwoman and her son out, for the son of this bondwoman shall never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac. Poor, Abraham, all he is trying to do is have a nice a little party and all of a sudden it is like mount Vesuvius erupts.

And the matter distressed Abraham greatly because of his son, Ishmael. Certainly part of the reason Abraham was distressed is because over 16 years he'd grown to love Ishmael but there was a lot more going on here than just that.

You see, what Sarah was asking Abraham to do was -- we will show you a map. It is in northern Mesopotamia it is in the area where Abraham and Sarah originally came before they went to the Promised land. In these tablets we learn about the laws that were in effect at the time of Abraham and Sarah. And these tablets tell us that in Abraham and Sarah's time, it was legal for a barren wife like Sarah to give her bondservant, like Hagar, to her husband for the purpose of having children.

However, if the wife later went on to have natural children of her own, it was illegal for her to disenfranchise the handmaiden's son and throw him out. And yet this was exactly what Sarah was asking Abraham to do.

Merrill Unger in his book "Archeology and the Old Testament" says, and I quote, "it is clear in light of the data from Nuzi why Abraham was reluctant to agree to Sarah's demand: It was breaking the law! And there is no doubt that Abraham would have refused to do it, had not God commanded him to."End of quote.

Watch, Verse 12. But God said to Abraham: Do not be distressed about the boy and the bondwoman. Listen to what Sarah tells you, because it will be through Isaac that your descendants will be called.

Now, we need to stop and make sure we understand what just happened here. What just happened here in Genesis 21 is that God just limited the group of people that were going to inherit the promises of Abraham, the group of people from whom the

messiah was going to come, the group of people who were going to inherit the Promised land. He just limited them to only the descendants of Isaac, only the Jewish people. It may surprise you to know that in his life time Abraham actually fathered eight sons, not just two, not just Isaac and Ishmael. And, yet, out of all of these eight, God says it is only Abraham's descendants through Isaac, the Jewish people, that get my promises, that get the messiah and that get the Promised land. Everybody understand that? What just happened here? You got it? Okay.

Verse 13. God says, and, yet, I will make the son of the bondwoman, Ishmael, into a great nation, too, because he also is your offspring. So Abraham rose early the next morning and took bread a skin of water and put it on Hagar's shoulder and then he sent her away from the boy. So she went on her way and wandered in the desert around Beersheba, even more into the desert than they already were.

When the water was used up, Hagar put Ishmael under some shrubs. Then she went and sat down nearby, about a bowshot away, for she said: I cannot bear to watch the boy die. And she began to sob. And God heard the boy crying. An angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her: What is ailing you, Hagar? Do not fear for God has heard the voice of the lad. Lift the boy up and him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation.

Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. And God was with Ishmael as he grew up and he lived in the desert and became an archer. And his mother took a wife from him from the land of Egypt.

And as we all know, Ishmael went on to become the father of the hundreds of millions of Arab peoples that are alive today. So didn't God keep his word to make Ishmael into a great nation, too? Yes, slightly did.

Now, that's the end of our passage. And normally we would just move right on. But the New Testament tells us that there is a deeper spiritual lesson here in Genesis 21 than is obvious at first glance. And so we want to look and see what that is. It's found in Galatians Chapter 4.

Now, to understand Paul's letter to the Galatians, we have to first understand what the problem was, what the issue is. The issue is that the Christians then were relying on human works, not to get saved but to live the Christian life once they were saved.

You see, false teachers there were telling the Galatian Christians, yes, we get saved by faith in Jesus Christ alone completely apart from human works. But these false teachers

were then saying, however, once we are saved, living the abundant Christian life is based on doing religious human works. And some of them that they were telling people they had to do are mentioned right in the Bible, keeping kosher, celebrating the Sabbath, celebrating the other Jewish holidays, being circumcised and all kinds of other religious works.

In other words, these false teachers were saying we get saved by faith but we live the Christian life by works. So Paul writes the Book of Galatians to tell these Christians that this approach to Christian life is totally bogus. Watch what he says. Galatians 4, Verse 9. Paul says: Now that you have come to know God by faith, you have gotten saved. You have been born again by the Holy Spirit. How is it, Paul says, that you are turning back to those weak and worthless things? He's talking about human works, to which you were once enslaved? Paul says, fellows, didn't I tell you that trying to please God by our own human works and effort, it's slavery. It's bondage. Paul says you observed special days, the Sabbath and weeks, the festivals, and months and years, I fear for you. Lest I have labored for you in vain, for in Christ Jesus, near circumcision or uncircumcision has any value, when it comes to living the abundant Christian life, does like singing in the choir, or praying the rosary, or putting money in the plate or being baptized or fasting for lent or teaching Sunday school. There is nothing wrong with any of these things, but they're all human works. And human works cannot and do not produce the abundant Christian life that Jesus is talking about in John 10:10.

Paul says the only thing that counts in that regard is faith. Paul says what produces abundant Christian life is living in faith. Relying on God, the Holy Spirit's power, and not our own power and Paul goes on to say in Chapter 4, when I was there, I told this to you guys. You were running well when I left town. Who has hindered you from obeying the truth? Because -- this is key -- this approach to Christian living by human works, look, did not come from him who calls you. This is not how God told you to do it. This doesn't come from God.

Now, to reinforce his point, the apostle Paul takes us a back to the events of Genesis 21 that we just studied. Watch. Galatians 4:22: For it is written, Paul says -- where is it written? In Genesis 21, yeah, it is written that Abraham had two sons. One by the slave woman, Hagar, and one by the free woman, Sarah.

Paul goes on, Abraham's son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh. It was just a result of natural, human energy and works. But his son by the free woman, Isaac, was born in accordance with God's promise. It was born in a miracle birth. And Sarah and Abraham had to trust God's promise by

faith, not their own natural ability to take a child. Now, these things in Genesis 21 contain an allegory for the two women represent God's two covenants.

By this means Hagar and Ishmael stand for the Mosaic Covenant at Mt. Sinai, a covenant solely based on human works and natural performance. That covenant says: If we perform correctly, we earn our way into heaven. If we perform incorrectly, we miss heaven. And since none of us as sinners can possibly perform correctly, this cold front is a covenant of slavery and of bondage. It is a death trap.

Sarah and Isaac stand for the covenant that Jesus established on the cross, on relying on Christ by faith. It is a covenant of freedom. Romans 8:3, Paul says: For what the Mosaic law could not do because it was based on human works God did by sending his own son, he, the Lord Jesus made me -- what's the next word? (Free.) Free from the law of sin and death. Now, watch Paul's conclusion, Verse 30: What does the scripture say in Genesis 21? It says cast out the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will not share in the inheritance of the free woman's son. The point that Paul's trying to get across here is that God has always rejected human works systems. This is why he cast out Hagar. And the only systems God has ever accepted are systems that rely on Him by faith.

Now, if you're a follower of Christ here today, you're born again, you understand this concept when it comes to salvation, right? That God only accepts trusting what Jesus did for us on the cross.

But, folks, this is what I want you to walk away with. What God is teaching us in Galatians 4 is not only has God rejected human works as the way to be saved, He's also rejected it as the way we're supposed to live once we are saved.

To summarize, human works has no place whatsoever in God's spiritual operating system and "casting Hagar out" in Genesis 21 is meant allegorically, symbolically, to make sure we understand this. Everybody still with me? (Yes.) Okay. Now, you know what time it is now, right? You say, yeah, it is time to go home. No, no. (laughter).

It is not yet. We got one important question we've got to ask before it is time to go home. Are you ready to ask our important question? All you guys at Loudoun and Bethesda and Prince William and in the Edge and around the world, are you ready? Here we go. Nice and loud. One, two, three! (So what?!?!) Yeah. You say, you know, Lon, I that was some pretty heavy theological stuff that you gave us. I think I got it but I still don't quite kind of get how it relates to me. Let's talk about that and we're done.

Folks, it is my observation that most Christians feel that

their Christian life is pretty much a failure, that most Christians experience very little of the supernatural peace, the supernatural joy, the supernatural power over sin, the spiritual victory in their lives. They don't experience the abundant Christian life that Jesus says he came to give us.

And as a result of that, after years of struggling and losing, a lot of, we just give up and we just assume there's something wrong with us. And we can't make the Christian life work. And we come to church and we see everybody going: Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord for you, too. And we think it's working for all those people but it's just not working for me. Something must be wrong with me.

What you don't know is they are all looking at you and thinking it works for you and there is something wrong with them. When we pull all that plastic off, what we realize, it is not working for a lot of people. Let me tell you, in most cases the problem is not us. We're trying hard. In most cases, the problem is that we were taught to live the Christian life incorrectly. We were taught to live it by religious human works, just like the Galatians were trying to do.

Just listen to us talk. We say, well, you know, if I read my Bible enough and I pray enough and I fellowship enough and I witness enough and I teach Sunday School enough and I go to church enough and put enough money in the offering plate, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, it will produce abundant Christian living in my life. But it doesn't. And let me tell you why because the Christian life lived correctly is a supernatural life. It cannot be produced by natural human effort, even religious natural human effort.

I have a fan here. And it is a great illustration of how to live the Christian life. You say really? Yeah. Because this is how the Galatians were trying to live it and how many so many of us were trying to live it. Basketball, prayer, witnessing, fellowship, going to church, being a church member, getting baptized, going to Bible study, leading a small group. (Making noise). Now, electricity. Ah. Now, this is, as my father said, cooking is gas except we are using electricity. But you see, what am I doing to drive that fan? Nothing. You understand what I'm saying?

This is how we live the Christian life. You say with electricity? No, not with electricity. No! No! What I'm trying to tell you is the electricity represents the power of the Holy Spirit flowing through our life, like the electricity is flowing through this fan. The Christian life is lived by the Holy Spirit living his life through us. All our job is to do is not to grieve him and not to agrieve much him so he can keep flowing. Are you understanding what I'm saying to you? (Yes.)

Do you got that? (Yes.)

All right. Now, there is another way I can explain it. Let me explain it this way, maybe it will help. How did the Christian life begin for you and me? Well, the Christian life began by you and me trusting God to do something for us we couldn't do for ourselves, right? Lord, Jesus, I can't save myself, I can't forgive my own sins. You are going to have to do it for me.

Now, how's the Christian life going to end? Well, it's going to end by my trusting God to do something for me that I can't do for myself. Lord, I don't know where heaven is. If I knew where it was, I couldn't get myself there anyway. If you want me to get to heaven, you are going to have to get me there. Uh-huh? Okay.

Now, if the Christian life begins and ends the very same way, by us trusting God to do for us what we can't do for ourself, why would God change systems in the middle? Well, the answer is he doesn't! Listen to me. God has to do it all for us in salvation. God has to do it all for us in going to heaven. And God has to do it all for us in living the abundant Christian life. It's all about God doing for us what we can't do for ourself from start to finish. You got me? You say, well, Lon, put some handles on this. How does this really work? What do you mean by relying on the Holy Spirit to work through me and be my electricity?

What I mean is walking out of our house every day going, Lord, the patience I need today, the self-control I need today, the power to forgive I need today, the peace of mind in the middle of trouble that I need today, the love for others I need today, the contentment I need today, the victory over sensuality I need today, the boldness to share Christ I need today, I don't have it. And I can't gin it up in myself.

So what I'm going to do today, Lord, is I'm going to trust that you will do for me what I can't do for myself. You produce these things in me supernaturally by the Holy Spirit who indwells me. You be the electricity. And all I'm going to try to do today is keep from quenching you and keep from grieving you with my behavior. And if I behave wrong, I will confess it quickly and we will get back to where we need to be. You live the Christian life through me.

Even if it takes 50 times a day of turning to the Lord and saying, Lord, you got to do this for me. You got to do this for me. I don't have it. Then it takes 50 times a day. Praise the Lord. No problem with that. It's about trusting the Holy Spirit's power every moment of every day to give us victory and then believing and expecting that power's going to be there.

Now, for some of us, this is an entirely new approach to

Christian living. It is an entirely new concept. But it is a Biblical concept. It is a Biblical approach to Christian living. And it is an approach that will free you from your imprisonment to a stale, insipid, powerless Christian life.

You are saying, I don't know, Lon. It all sounds way too simple for me, way too easy. Electric the electricity flow through me, I don't know. Friends, why would God want to make it hard? Hmm? God wants to make the Christian life so easy that a child can live it and children can live it. You tell them to live it this way, they do it. You tell adults to live it this way, and they say, that's too simple. Do not be educated beyond your intelligence, my friends. Don't do that. (laughter).

This is simple because God wants it to be simple. He doesn't want it to be hard. And, you know, there is something exciting that happens when we live like this. The beauty of living the Christian life by faith is that your Bible study and your prayer and your witnessing and your fellowship and your serving the Lord, it will all take on an exciting new energy. It will all take on an exciting new effervescence. Why? Because it will now become an overflow of a spirited life instead of a futile attempt on your part to produce the spirit-empowered life. If the spirit is moving in your heart, you sit down to study the word of God, it is not drudgery and it is not obligation. It's exciting. And you get on your knees to talk to the Lord. It's exciting because the spirit of God's moving in your life.

So let me end with a suggestion. Here's my suggestion, is that this week you take one area of your life where you have been struggling to obey God. You say, oh, I got a lot of them. Okay. Just take one. Just one. And stop trying this week to gut it out. Stop trying to beat it into energy of your own flesh. Stop walking out of your house every day saying I'm not going to do this, I'm not going to do this, I'm not going to do this. (laughter).

You will lose every time. Walk out of your house and say, Lord, I am going to do this unless the Holy Spirit controls and subjugates and mortifies and I am trusting you to do this in my life. When the woman walks by in the street, you go, oh, help me, Jesus. Oh, help me, Lord. Oh, help me, Lord, give me the power to not even look over there. (laughter). And when they pass the éclairs. Help me, Jesus. Lord, I got to let those babies go right on by. When you are at work and you see people standing around the water cooler gossiping and committing character assassination against people and your flesh wants to go over there and be a part of that, you just need to say, oh, help me, Jesus, I have no business in that conversation. Just

shut that down and let me keep on walking.

When those little people in your house are ready to make you literally just jump out the window, say, oh, Lord, Jesus, help me love them. Yeah, Lord, give me the patience I need not to just jack them up, Lord. (laughter) Please. Calm me down. Are you understanding what I'm saying to you? This is real life. And the spirit of God is right there. That's why he lives inside of you, is to help you. But we get so caught up in things, we forget to turn to him. And He's standing there go (knocking), hello, I can help with this. But we're so used to doing it on our own we don't give Him a chance. Friends, we got to learn a new habit pattern here.

After you try it with one area of your life this week and you see how much better you do in that area of your life, then the idea is we go to another area and another area and we add another area until eventually this becomes the habitual way we live. Got it? (Yes.) Got it? (Yes.)

All right. Listen, folks, the abundant Christian life is possible or Jesus wouldn't have said it is. So don't give up on trying to get there. Just give up and trying to get there using the wrong way. You with me? And you'll find if you do it the way the Lord Jesus tells us, he will get you there. Now, you won't be perfect. None of us are. But, boy, I will tell you why, you will sure be a whole lot more consistent. Let's pray together.

Lord, Jesus, thanks for talking to us today about right down where we live because all of us struggle to live in obedience to you and to live that abundant Christian experience. Thank you, Lord, you've made a way for us to do as we depend on the electricity of the Holy Spirit to flow through our lives. Lord, grant that in the battle every day that we don't forget how to live the Christian life and just resort back to the way we've always done it in the energy of the flesh. Teach us a new way of living, a powerful way of living, a Biblical way of living. And thanks that we could be here to study the word of God today. Use it to change our lives. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. And what do God's people say? (Amen.)

Amen. Hey, have a good week. Bless you. (applause).

(Music)

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