

Self Dies Hard

by Alan Redpath

The sermon emphasizes the importance of trusting God's promise and letting go of the flesh in order to experience God's deliverance from sin in our lives.

Duration: 53:19

Scripture: Genesis 17:15, Genesis 17:17-18, Romans 6:11, Romans 6:13, Galatians 4:19, Galatians 5:1

Topics: "Death To Self"

Description

In this sermon, Dr. Ellen Redpath discusses the story of Abraham and Sarah and their journey of faith. She highlights how Abraham's decision to take Hagar as his wife represented a rejection of the principle of faith. This decision led to rebellion against God's purpose and a refusal of His plan. Dr. Redpath emphasizes the importance of reckoning ourselves dead to sin and alive to God through Jesus Christ, as stated in Romans 6:11. She encourages believers to learn from Abraham's mistakes and fully trust in God's plan for their lives.

Transcript

This address by Dr. Alan Redpath was entitled, Self Dies Hard. Perhaps it would do us all good if you were to stand for a word of prayer. Let's stand up and let's bow our heads in the presence of God.

And will you echo in your heart the prayer that I would offer in your name and mine. 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. Will you open your Bibles please for our reading of Scripture at Galatians chapter 4, the fourth chapter of Galatians, reading from verse 19.

My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you, I desire to be present with you now. I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice, for I stand in doubt of you. Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a free woman.

But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh, but he of the free woman was by promise. Which things are an allegory, for these are the two covenants, the one from the Mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agur. For this Agur is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem,

which now is, and is in bondage with her children.

But Jerusalem, which is above, is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not, break forth and cry, thou that travailest not. For the desolate hath many more children than she which hath a husband.

Now we brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then, he that was born after the flesh, persecuted him that was born after the spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless, what saith the scripture, Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman.

So then brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free. Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. And our text is in the book of Genesis, to which I invite you to turn.

The 17th chapter of Genesis, verse 15. And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarah thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shalt thou her name be. And I will bless her and give thee a son also of her.

Yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations, king of people, kings of people shall be of her. Then Abraham fell upon his face and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? And shall Sarah that is ninety years old bear? And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee. And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee.

Now that sounds a very devout, and a very humble, and a very right sort of prayer. How often similar prayers are on the lips of parents for their children. Surely they express the deepest longing of father and mother, and perhaps even more so if their child has drifted away from the things that matter.

O that Jack and Joan, O that Jean and John might live before thee. But I'm afraid this evening that we shall find that the meaning of these words as Abraham uttered them was not a devout prayer. Indeed, it wasn't a prayer at all, but it was a rebellion.

It was a complaint. It was a grumble. It was a deep-rooted resistance to the will of God.

Let me just refresh your memory a moment of the background of the story with which I imagine most of you will be quite familiar. Some twenty-five years previously, Abraham and Sarah had heard the call of God to come into a land which Abraham would possess. They had responded to the call, but no sooner did they enter it than they found famine in the land.

Abraham was unable to stand the test and went down to Egypt, and Sarah with him, and she was taken into the house of Pharaoh who gave Abraham oxen and asses and men and maidservants for her sake. God intervened to prevent a tragedy and plagued Pharaoh's house so that he was glad to get rid of both of them, and he sent them away. Among the possessions that they took with them from Egypt was Hagar, a slave girl.

God promised Abraham that he would be the father of a nation and that his seed would possess the land and through him all the families of the earth will be blessed. So he went on his way. He picked himself up from one of his first failures in the life of faith and obedience.

He raised an altar to God, he made his confession, and he started out again. And then you remember the 14th chapter of Genesis has the first record in the Bible of kings in the plural and wars in the plural. It is true in history as it is in personal experience that when kings are in the plural, war is constantly the experience.

There will be no more war when there is only one king. And when Jesus comes to reign, then this world will taste peace, not before. And that is true in your personal life.

When there are many kings, there is much warfare. When there are many rivals to the throne, to which alone Jesus Christ is entitled, there is warfare. But Abraham intervened.

And you remember how he rescued Lot, his wretched nephew, who had gone down to sorrow. And then God renewed to Abraham his promise, spoke to him again, and said, Fear not, Abraham, I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward. He had refused to share the spoils of victory.

And Abraham was beginning to discover that the way of earthly renunciation was the way of heaven's blessing. As the apostle Paul said, What things were gained to me? Those I counted lost for Christ. He, I count all things but lost, that they may have the excellence through the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.

I count all things but refuse that I might be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is after the law, but the righteousness which is of God by faith, Philippians 3.9. But ten years passed in Abraham's experience and there was no sign of the promise being fulfilled. Sarah was old and childless, yet God had promised. And Abraham had believed in the face of humanly impossible conditions that somehow God's word would not fail.

Abraham believed the Lord and it was counted to him for righteousness. We read in Genesis 15 and verse 6. But one day something happened in that home. Sarah herself came to him and made a proposal.

She was prepared to do violence to the deepest thing in womanhood, prepared to surrender her position, her integrity, because of her love to Abraham and her despair that she should ever have a child of her own. And the suggestion was made that Hagar, the slave girl, the bondwoman, should be the mother of the child whom God had promised. Now, this sin was rooted in a previous one.

If Abraham hadn't disobeyed God and gone down to Egypt, he'd never have known anything about Hagar. He might have had enough sense to be mighty careful of that slave girl. Beware of any relationship which you make when you're living out of God's will.

It can lead to disaster. But Abraham hearkened unto Sarah, and Ishmael was born. We read in Hebrews chapter 6 and verse 12, By faith and patience we inherit the promise.

Abraham knew something of faith, but nothing of patience. And sometimes the quality of your faith is tested by the amount of patience which you have. Abraham was attempting to force God's hand, attempting to accomplish something which would only come through faith and obedience.

Had he learned the lesson earlier, he would have graduated from the school of discipline a bit quicker. To wait on God is the greatest economy of time. But Ishmael was born.

And thirteen years passed. Notice that carefully, will you? The last verse of chapter 16 and the first verse of chapter 17 have a time lag of thirteen years between them. And from the time Ishmael was born and Abraham stepped out of the will of God, heaven was silent.

The man who knew what it was to be the friend of God, the man who by God's promises was to inherit so much, heaven became strangely silent. And those were thirteen desperately difficult years for Abraham. There was no word from God, no voice from heaven to assure him that Ishmael was indeed God's gift to him and the fulfillment of God's promise.

Jealousy sprung up in his home. Everything began to go wrong. Sarah and Hagar became jealous of each other.

Sarah blamed Abraham for all the trouble. It was her suggestion. That's the reverse of what happened in the Garden of Eden.

The woman whom thou hast given me, she's responsible. Sarah turned to her husband and said, you're responsible, but all good at parting the back. Sarah's pride was hurt.

Hagar despised her. Sarah drove Hagar from the house for a time until she returned and submitted to her. But often during those years, Abraham's home was disturbed by jealousy and quarreling.

He was hard put to it to keep the peace. No voice from God, jealousy in his home, constant trouble, oh unhappy man. There's no unhappier person here tonight than a Christian who stepped out of God's will.

I wonder if Abraham didn't begin to question whether after all this expedient of Ishmael wasn't God's plan. And one day, as if to confirm his doubts, the silence from God's angle was broken and God spoke to him. For 13 years, Ishmael had been living in Abraham's house.

He'd become the treasure of his father's heart. Then all at once comes the divine message, this is not the son of a covenant. This is not the child of promise.

Sarah shall yet have a child, and from him shall come the blessing that was already promised. And what does Abraham do? Fall down in thankfulness before God? Rejoice in his heart that at long last God's promise is to be fulfilled, not he? Oh, that Ishmael might live before thee. Why can't he do? Why can't he be there? Take him, Lord.

Abraham thinks he knows better than God, thinks his own plan is better than God's plan. Ishmael is the product of Abraham's attempt to help God to fulfill his promise. Ishmael is the result of Abraham's failure in faith and obedience and patience.

Ishmael is the product of the flesh and not of the spirit, the result of expediency and not of faith. Yet, oh, that Ishmael might live before thee. Just in passing let me say the New Testament is very kind to the Old Testament then.

The judgment of the word of God upon these men is much kinder than our judgment. One time when you have time to read this story, as I hope you will for yourself, read the New Testament commentary in Hebrews 11. There isn't a word about Abraham's failure.

By faith, Abraham staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief. The Holy Spirit graciously covered the tragic breakdown of Abraham's life. But to take this story to its conclusion, we find Isaac, the

child of promise, is born.

And immediately Ishmael begins to mock, for jealousy breaks out again. And the result is that Hagar and Ishmael are turned out of the home altogether. Ishmael and Isaac could never live in the same home together at the same time.

Now, if I am to apply the deep lesson of that story to your life and mine, I must take it into the floodlight of New Testament revelation and recall the use which Paul made of it in Galatians, that I read to you. For there is something very personal here for us in this wonderful story. Hagar, says Paul, is the covenant of the law which leads to bondage.

Sarah, the free woman, is the covenant of grace. Now, says the Apostle, there was no room for Hagar and Sarah with their children in Abraham's house if Ishmael is there. It's simply because Isaac wasn't born.

As soon as Isaac comes in, Ishmael goes out. In other words, you're listening carefully, the product of God's free grace cannot live with a product of human expediency and unbelief. Do you see that? It's the age-long story of the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit.

If Christ is to come into your heart and mine in all the fullness of His power, then the works of the flesh have got to go. Lock, stock, and barrel. There is no room for both.

Yet the cry of so many Christians is, Oh, that Ishmael may live before thee. When God offers us Isaac, we prefer Ishmael. We've set our hopes on him.

Why should I have to wrench him away? The road of my own engineering, the path of my expediency, the choice of self-will, the product of some fleshly desire, all this is good enough? No, says God. If Isaac, if Christ, is to come in, if my promise for your life is to be fulfilled, then Ishmael, the flesh, must die. They can't live together in the same heart, for they are antagonistic the one to the other.

And for the Holy Ghost to come in fullness, the flesh must pay the price of death. But still we rebel. And we pray for the survival of some darling product of the flesh.

And we try to coax God along the line of our own desire. So much of our praying is resistance to a clear dictate of God's will. We dare to make a prayer out of our rebellion to His will.

Oh, that Ishmael might live before thee. I thank God He can't answer a prayer like that. For His plan for each of us is full salvation in Christ.

And He will never rest content until that is being fulfilled in our experience. Yet, He pleads with us if we want the son of His promise, His well-beloved, then the product of our own selfishness and our own desire must die. The darling product of our imagination.

The idol of our heart. Ishmael is described in Genesis 16 and verse 12 as, He will be a wild man and His hand will be against every man and every man's hand against Him and He shall dwell in the presence of all His brethren. What a picture! Of the self-life of all of us.

Of the struggle which goes on in the Christian life when Ishmael is allowed to live. What was Hagar to Abraham? I suggest to you just simply three things. Three things which involve us all in a personal issue with God.

One, he represented to Abraham a rejection of the principle of faith. Two, he represented a rebellion against the purpose of God. And three, he represented a refusal of the plan of God.

A rejection of the principle of faith. A rebellion against the purpose of God. A refusal of the plan of God.

What is the answer to all of that mess of human experience that is alas too familiar in the lives of those who profess to belong to the Savior? There are three key words in the sixth chapter of Romans. I want to ask you please if you will look at them. I said to you that Hagar to Abraham represented a rejection of the principle of faith.

Verse 11, Likewise reckon ye yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. That's our first word. Reckon.

Paul has said in verse 6, knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. What does he mean? What does he mean by this phrase, the old man crucified with Him? What does he mean by the body of sin being destroyed? The body of sin, the body in which we live, this tent, this tabernacle, it hasn't been destroyed, it still lives. The word means that the body of sin might be made of no effect, might be rendered inoperative, that the sin principle might be put out of action.

You see, Jesus died on Calvary for our sin. But that was the act of a moment. A moment when He cried, It is finished.

And the great work of redemption was complete. The act of a moment. But, He died to the principle of sin.

When did He do that? Oh, from the very first moment when He counted it not a thing to be grasped after, to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation and humbled Himself, took upon Himself the form of a servant, was made in the likeness of man, and was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. All the time, all that time, He was dying to the principle of sin. For the root of the sin principle is rebellion, is arrogance, is my demand for my own way.

Sin is not what I do, but what I am. S-I-N-I in the middle. And Jesus, all the way through His life, died to that principle.

He refused to admit it. He was tempted in all points like as we are, driven out by the spirit into the wilderness, facing mortal combat with the devil. But all through His life, He emerged unstained.

He had died to sin. That's why His death for sin was effective. The substitutionary death of Christ for our sin would have been worthless if, first of all, He hadn't died to sin.

It was that perfect life, that sinless life, that life that lived every moment in dependence upon God, that never asserted His own rights or claimed His own way. That's what made Him our Savior. And, see, when He went to the cross, He didn't only die on our behalf, but He took to Calvary the sin principle.

Romans 8.3, He condemned sin in the flesh. He condemned it. He judged it by the way He lived.

And He went to the cross and nailed to the cross the whole principle of sin. So, when we receive Jesus Christ as our Savior, the Scripture tells us that we have been crucified with Him. The old principle which drove His body into sinful action.

The old principle that controlled our lives and resulted constantly in sinful action. Jesus took it to the tree that He might impart to us a new principle which would lead this body into holiness. He killed the one, then He might impart the other.

Reckon, therefore, yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God. Sin is never dead unto you, but you are dead to it in Jesus. And, my friend, the way of deliverance is not by struggle.

It's not by effort. It's not by trying. It's by dying.

One thing that the Lord calls upon all His children to do is to put their head on the block and die. Now that I simply be. The end of a reign of independence.

The end of a demand for sovereignty. The end of my claims upon my life. The end of a life of self-will.

I'm finished with that and I live unto God. Hagar was to Abraham a rejection of the principle of faith. And God, if you want to know His deliverance from sin in your life, God tonight is bringing you back to Calvary.

Not on to Pentecost. Not on to the Holy Spirit and power, but back to the cross. The cross of Jesus Christ spells two words.

Substitution. Christ for me. Identification.

I with Christ. You can't have the one without the other. Abraham.

Hagar. Spelt to Abraham. Rebellion against the purpose of God.

Romans chapter 6 and verse 11. Verse 13 rather. I'll read the 12th verse.

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body that you should obey it in the lust thereof. By the way, if the New Testament taught eradication of sin from our lives, these verses would not be in the Bible at all. Let not sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey it in the lust thereof.

Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto God, but yield yourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. Our second word, yield. First, the reckoning of faith.

I have died to sin in Christ. Second, I yield my members, my eyes, my hands, my feet, my brain, my body, with all its passion, I yield them as instruments unto righteousness. Have you done that? You've surrendered your heart.

Have you yielded your body? Friend, you can't live a life of victory with an unholy body. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and he that defiles that temple, him will God destroy. I spoke some years ago across my desk in Chicago at Moody Church to a pastor who came to see me.

His life had collapsed, and he said to me this amazing statement which I've never been able to forget. I'm living in constant adultery, but I'm preaching better sermons than ever. You can fool yourself, but you can't fool God.

Yield. Have you ever brought to God everything of your body, every member, and placed it at his disposal? Some years ago, I was in a town which my two brethren here will know very well. Actually, you will know it too by name if you have any Wedgwood china.

The real thing, I mean. You would find if you turned the plate upside down, it comes from Burslem or Stoke-on-Trent. And I was speaking at a youth rally at Stoke-on-Trent one night, and I shall never forget the testimony of a Salvation Army officer.

He had been converted at an open air meeting, and the following morning, he went to a holiness meeting, and he came back, and his wife met him, and he looked absolutely miserable. And she said, Goodness to me, what's the matter with you? I thought you were converted last night. Oh, he said, yes.

But he said, Everybody else had a red jersey on but me, and I felt so out of place. Oh, she said, That's easy, I'll knit you one. So she knitted him one.

Massive red jersey. He was a very big man. And he went out the next Sunday with his great big jersey on him, sweater on him, and he came back home looking just as miserable.

Well, she said, What's the matter with you now? Well, everybody else had white letters on their jersey, on their sweater. I hadn't any. I felt so miserable.

Poor soul. She couldn't read, and she couldn't write. She didn't quite know what to do about that.

She was thinking about it next day, and she was sitting beside a window in her bedroom, and she suddenly saw a man with a ladder. And he climbed up the shop front on the opposite side of the street, and he began to paint a sign across the shop. And she thought, I know.

I'll copy all he writes on my husband's sweater. So she did, and he went off to the next Salvation Army meeting, and he came back all smiles with a wonderful Salvation smile, and he said, My darling, everybody said I'd got the best sweater of the whole lot. Do you know what it had written on it? This business is under entirely new management.

Hagar was to Abraham rebellion. Bless the Lord, when I raise the white flag of surrender, and I acknowledge that I'm a sinner basically because I'm a rebel, and that rebellion has ceased, and I have yielded to God as instruments of righteousness all my methods. Have you done that? Hagar last day was to Abraham a refusal of God's plan, a refusal of the plan of God.

Romans 6 verse 16 Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, His servants you are whom you obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness. But God be thanked that you were the servants of sin, but you have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered unto you. Is there a Christian here who is eager for deliverance? Is there a Christian here who longs for it? Who's prepared to drop this prayer, this prayer that's praying, oh, that Ishmael may live before thee? If there? Well, three key words, the reckoning of faith, the yielding of your members, and thirdly, the obedience of your life.

Now, I'm not going to dwell upon this tonight, for tomorrow morning I want to speak about the subject of the place of obedience in Scripture, but I want to say this and emphasize it with all the authority that the Holy Spirit can give. The essence of salvation, the essence of sin, is arrogance. The essence of salvation is submission.

The ugly thing about sin is that I'm living in rebellion. The wonderful thing about salvation is that I begin to live in obedience. My dear man and lady, fellow and girl, listen to me.

You can choose your own master, God or the devil, Christ or yourself. Oh, make your own choice. It'll never be forced upon you.

We can't do it. The Lord doesn't do that. He has no conscripts.

Everybody is a volunteer in His service. You must choose your own master, but having chosen, you cannot wear the uniform of one and do the bidding of the other. That is not in the Bible.

To profess to be a believer, to attend your church, to sing in your choir, to teach in your Bible club, to do Christian service, to profess to do that, to wear the uniform of the Christian, but in your heart to be a rebel, that's a contradiction in terms. Do you remember that I said a few minutes ago, 13 years of silence between the time of Ishmael's birth and God's further intervention? Lovingly, tenderly, I would look into your faces. Because, you see, the preacher doesn't stand in a pulpit above you.

I stand alongside you, and I'm sorry to admit that I have known this in my life. How long is it since there has been a word from God to your heart? Since the Scripture has lived and flashed in your soul? Since prayer was a precious fellowship with heaven, how long is it since that ceased, the cause you demanded, Ishmael? Is it happening to you tonight? You can measure Abraham's spiritual progress and regress, his growth, and his backsliding by the altars he raised and didn't raise. No altar when he was in Egypt.

No altar when he was out of the will of God. No altar in those years when Ishmael was born and there was no Isaac. No altar.

No transaction with heaven. No encounter with the living God. How long is it since there has been an altar of thanksgiving and worship raised in your heart? How long since there's been a real encounter with the living God? How long since you've had dealings with Him and you've met Him and you've worshipped Him? How long is it since God has seen an altar? Would you like to raise one tonight? Would you like to start again the dearest idol I have known? Whatever that idol be, help me to tear it from thy throne and worship only thee.

Let us pray. We spend a moment in silence and God has perhaps put you in the corner, narrowed down the issue, and you've seen that basically the trouble in your life has been the product of self-will, of expediency, out of that. And God demands that that die, that the Holy Spirit may live in power.

Will you bring that to Him for cleansing in the blood? Will you tell Him, Yes Lord, you are right and I am wrong.

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