

How the Offspring of Isaac Blesses the Sons of Ishmael

by John Piper

This sermon emphasizes the importance of missions and global focus, calling individuals to consider crossing cultures to spread the gospel long term. It delves into the biblical narrative of Ishmael, Isaac, Esau, and Jacob to illustrate God's unconditional calling and the universal scope of salvation through Jesus Christ. The message highlights the invitation for all nations, including Muslims, to partake in the blessings of Abraham through faith in Jesus.

Scripture: Genesis 17:20, Genesis 25:12, Romans 9:6, Galatians 3:16, Romans 10:13, Revelation 5:9, Galatians 3:8, Matthew 28:19, Romans 11:33

Topics: "Missions", "Universal Salvation"

Description

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Transcript

For many years now, we have come to the second and last Sunday of missions focus, or global focus. And at the end of this service on all the campuses, we have invited a group of people to come to the front for prayer with a view to clarifying and confirming, empowering a calling on their lives to cross a culture and take the gospel to a people long term. And we'll do that again.

And I'm telling you up front so that as I speak, you can be praying that God would make plain to you whether you're in that group, whether you should walk to the front at the end on whatever campus you are and be prayed for by the leader on that campus. Now, you all know, most of you anyway, what we believe. We believe that everybody is a goer or a sender or is disobedient.

God considers goers and senders as very precious and both as essential to accomplishing the mission of the church. There has to be both. In fact, in view of the fact that our culture is so broken here and our families are so lost and our neighbors are so lost, the challenges for senders are huge as they stay behind and send in a manner worthy of God, living here in this lost and broken culture.

But today we're focusing on the goers. I'm praying that what God has been doing in your lives and what he will do now in the next 35 minutes or so will be to coalesce, to distill maybe a lifetime of factors that are coming together for you in your 60s, 50s, 40s, 30s, 20s, teens, child, so that you know it has reached a level of compulsion. It's reached a level of, if he doesn't intervene to change my mind, I'm on my way to the nation's long term.

That's what I'm praying God will use this moment in the life of our church to do, to bring all that he's been doing to a crystallization so that by the end of this service you say, OK, I don't have all the questions answered, but unless he does something, I'm moving toward the nation's long term. And that's the group I'm going to invite to come forward at the end. So you be praying about whether in your 60s, or 40s, or 30s, or 20s, or teens, that's who you are.

Let's pray. Father, this is a sober moment and a sacred moment. It's a moment where you move beyond what any human can do.

I have no idea how all things considered you call people into particular Christian ministries. People are so diverse. Experiences are infinitely diverse.

And yet you do it. And you use people to do it. You use worship services to do it.

You use the Bible to do it. You use books to do it. You use pain to do it.

You use need to do it. You have 1,000 things at your disposal, one of which is my voice for the next few minutes. And so I'm asking that you would come and help me to be your voice in the lives of some.

Not everyone will hear this the same way. But some will hear you saying, it's over. This struggle is over.

This is the path. Walk in. That's a sober thing.

Don't take it lightly. It could cost someone their lives. And so I ask that you would speak in Jesus' name.

Amen. This is not an exposition of Romans 9, 1 to 13. I've done that before.

It's available. This is a thematic study of how Romans 9, 1 to 13 came to be by going to the book of Genesis to see where did all that come from? Where did those verses come from? Where did all that talk about Isaac and Jacob come from? The Jews, the word not falling, the call of God, the unconditionality of his movement, where did Paul get all that? That's what we're going to talk about. The title of the message is Unusual This Year.

More unusual, I think, than usual. How the offspring of Isaac blesses the sons of Ishmael. And so I want to begin explaining that.

Where did that come from? What does that mean? As I speak, perhaps, only God knows, the population of this planet may cross the seven billion point. Somewhere in these days, right here, it's supposed to happen. Over a billion of those seven billion are Muslims, well over a billion.

And as you know, tens of thousands of them have moved into our neighborhoods. The downtown campus, very close. And I just want to say publicly how glad we are that that has happened, aren't we? Christians, true biblical Christians are not parochial.

Christians don't have a parochial mindset that wants to protect the neighborhood, the nearness, from unbelievers. We have a kingdom mindset, so that when King Jesus arranges it so that unbelievers who once had no access to the gospel suddenly live in our midst, we're glad. Or we're not Christian.

Islam is a massive reality in our day. And the crucified, risen, reigning Lord Jesus, who has all authority in heaven and on earth, is ready and more than able to empower his people in reaching the Muslim peoples of the world near and far. Even though we're naming Muslims in this sermon as a feature, don't get the idea this sermon has only to do with Muslim peoples.

The point of Romans 9, 6 to 13 and its background in Genesis is that God calls unconditionally. Jewishness, Muslim identity, or any other ethnic or religious identity neither prevents or constrains the Almighty in his electing and his calling. It is free.

That's the point of this text. So even though I highlight Islam, I'm not limiting this message to the effect on Islam. In fact, I'm praying that God will put a fire in your furnace, the furnace of your dream, so that you feel empowered to touch the people that you are called to touch.

Reach the people. Speak to the people boldly that you're called to speak to. So back to the title.

How the offspring of Isaac blesses the sons of Ishmael. Historically, some of you know this, historically, the original Muslims, Muhammad and his followers, traced their own line back through the Arab peoples to the princes that were born to Ishmael. Listen to Genesis 17.20. Now we're moving into the Genesis background.

Genesis 17.20. As for Ishmael, God says, I have heard you, Abraham, behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. And then those princes are named in Genesis 25.12-18. So, when I refer to the sons of Ishmael in this message, it's shorthand for Muslims.

I know that there is no automatic correlation between Arab and Muslim. You can be Arab and not Muslim. You can be Muslim and not Arab.

Nevertheless, historically and in general, Muslims have traced their line of blessing back through Ishmael to Abraham. It's very different with Jews and Christians. Very different.

The book of Genesis teaches that God did not see Ishmael as the heir through which the promise to Abraham would come true. He saw Isaac, not Ishmael, as the heir through which the promise made to Abraham would come true. The promise made to Abraham, you know, chapter 12, verse 3, second half of the verse, in you, Abraham, all the families of the earth will be blessed.

That's amazing. Take your breath and listen to it again. In you, one Semitic man on this vast planet, in you, all the families of the earth, no exceptions, all the tribes will be blessed.

And then it's unpacked in chapter 17, verses 7 and 8, like this. I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring, your offspring, after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant to be God to you and to your offspring after you. I will be their God.

So God promises to Abraham there's going to be an offspring. There's going to be an heir. And through this heir is going to be a people.

And through that people, I'm going to be their God. And eventually, I'm going to be the God of the families of the earth. And that's a saving relationship that I'm going to have with a people through this offspring because God is not the God of the dead.

He is the God of the living. That's the inference Jesus drew when he quoted, I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I'm not the God of the dead.

If I'm a person's God, they live forever. So in this line, there's going to be salvation for the world. That's going to happen to you, Abraham.

Here's how the fulfillment unfolds in Genesis. Chapter 15, Abraham complains to God, I am old, and I have no son. My wife is barren, and all I have in my household is a slave named Eliezer.

And if I don't have a son, which I can't have, he will be my heir, and this promise will not come true that I will have an offspring. God says in verse 4 of Genesis 15 to Abraham, your very own son will be your heir, not Eliezer, your slave, which was impossible. He's old, he's barren, it's not going to happen.

So what does he do? This is so absolutely human, and we do it all the time. He talked to his wife, and they figured out how they can make the promise happen. They can make it happen.

You can grow a church without the Holy Spirit, and you can have a baby without a promise. All you need is a handmaid named Hagar. And so that's what they did.

And the baby born to Hagar was Ishmael. And in chapter 17, Ishmael was born when Abraham was 86 years old. In chapter 17, he's now 99 years old.

Boy's 13 years old, roughly. Sarah is now 90. And God says, no.

No, I'm not going to go that way. Verse 18, Abraham cries out, oh, that Ishmael might live before you. He's the one, isn't he? Make him the one, I love Ishmael.

You can fulfill the promise this way. Verse 19, chapter 17, God says, no. But 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. This is really significant.

God is saying, I will not make the line of my covenant a line that represents human power, human wisdom, human manipulation, human control, human will. I won't do it that way. I will make my covenant flow through a miracle line, a supernatural line, a line of the Spirit, not a line of the flesh.

Watch me. This is the way everybody gets saved. You try to save yourself, Hagar-like, people get saved by miracles.

And so the covenant came to be through Isaac. Verse 12 of chapter 18, the boy was born against absolutely all human possibilities. The woman was barren.

He was 99 years old. 100 when the baby was born. And in verse 12 of Genesis 18, it says, through Isaac shall your offspring be named.

In other words, yes, Ishmael is your offspring. And I will bless him in many ways. But he is not the offspring.

He is not the one through whom I will bring the covenant and the promise to fulfillment. That will be this boy, Isaac, because I have caused the birth of Isaac. And that's the way I preserve my covenant always.

I don't depend on human ingenuity. And then, and this is what Paul saw in Romans 9. This is what makes Romans 9 so accurate and so powerful. What Paul saw was that God, in order to make really clear what he had done in choosing Isaac and not Ishmael, he did it again with Jacob and Esau.

He made it even clearer what he was doing. So what was the situation with Isaac now and Rebekah, his wife? So you have Isaac and Rebekah. She's barren.

You think that's an accident? It's not an accident. It's the way God makes babies, when he's making a point. So she's barren, according to Genesis 15, 21.

And Isaac prays that God would give him a seed, an offspring, because he's the child of promise. It's coming through him, and he has no fertile wife. And God answers.

And God causes her to conceive, and in her womb are twins. We know now that they were Esau and Jacob. And God, in order to make it crystal clear that he is choosing the line of the covenant, the line of promise, the line through which the covenant blessings to the world would come, he reverses all human custom.

And before they were born or had done anything good or evil to show that one was better than the other, he said the elder, the older one, will serve the younger, which is not supposed to happen. That's chapter 25, verse 23. The older shall serve the younger.

Now, do you see what God is doing to make things clearer than with Ishmael and Isaac? Here's the deal. Isaac and Ishmael had different mothers and the same dad, Abraham, Sarah, Hagar. Hagar's Egyptian.

So someone might read the story, missing the point, and say, oh, God chose Isaac as the line through which the covenant and the promise would come because Ishmael is contaminated with Egyptian blood. He's not a purebred Jew. Ishmael is a halfbreed.

And that misses the point entirely. That would say, oh, God really does base his election and his choices on human distinctives, like Egyptian-ness or non-Egyptian-ness. God, knowing that's a possible misunderstanding of that, avoids all those misunderstandings with Jacob and Esau.

So now what do we have? We have the same parents, not two moms, one mom, one dad, Rebecca, Isaac. And now we don't have two wombs. We have one womb.

And we don't have two separate times in the womb, same time in the womb. They're twins. All the possible elevation of one above the other because of different parents or different times or different wombs or anything different, gone.

And then to make it really clear, before they had done anything that could show the one preferable to the other, he reverses the normal role and says, we're going to choose the younger as the line through which the covenant comes against custom, which would make the older. So Esau is not chosen. It is remarkable.

And that's what Paul saw. That's what Romans 9, 6 to 13 is built on. So here's the promise.

Chapter 12, verse 3b, if in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Incredibly, globally, ethnically, sweeping. Somehow, the narrowing down, not Ishmael but Isaac, not Esau but Jacob, not all the nations but just the 12 tribes of Israel, somehow that electing, narrowing down is going to explode for all the nations of the world.

In you and your seed, this narrowing down seed is going to explode for all the families of the earth. And the question is, how did that happen? You're in this building because that happened. You are a product of that explosion.

At some point, it stopped going like this and went just like that for the nations. And here we are, 3,000 years later, heirs of Abraham, grafted into the rich root of the olive tree of the Abrahamic covenant, drinking of the promises made to Israel, Gentiles though we be. Something changed.

What happened? This is called missions. Where did this wild idea of going to all the nations of the world and inviting them to become children of Abraham, where did that come from? We know how it happened. The Bible is very clear how it happened.

Let me just describe it for you. That narrowing down was completed one day. So not Ishmael, Isaac, not Esau, Jacob, not all the nations, but the Jews, not the Jews, but the Jew, the God-man, the offspring, the offspring, Jesus Christ.

And the narrowing is done. Election is now narrowed down onto one man. And when that happened, when he came into the world, it was the fullness of time, the fullness of what? The fullness of the promise.

This is going to happen now. All the families of the earth are going to feel the force of this. And when he came, he bought for every tribe and tongue and people and nation, it says in Revelation 5 and 9, he bought, he purchased all the promises made to Abraham for the nations.

And he said, go, make disciples of all nations, and I'll be with you to the end of the age. Here's the way Paul describes it in Galatians. You need to see this for yourself.

I invite you to look there if you want. Galatians chapter 3, verse 16. Paul says in Galatians 3.16, now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring.

It does not say, and to offsprings, referring to many, but to offspring, referring to one, and to your offspring, who is Christ. Now be careful here. Don't, in your pride, think Paul is a grammatical simpleton, as though he didn't know offspring is a collective noun.

Duh. What Paul is doing, I think, is saying, I see what's happening in these Genesis stories. I see.

There were two offspring, Ishmael and Isaac, and God chose one. There were two offspring, Esau and Jacob. God chose one.

And he just carries the trajectory forward and says, I see what this is doing. I see what God is saying. It's not the children of the flesh who are the children of God.

It's miracle children who are made the heirs of the covenant. God chooses one, pointing to the one, the one offspring, Jesus Christ, in whom all the promises of God are yes for everybody who is in him. And so

Jesus came in you, Abraham, and in your offspring, Jesus.

All the families of the earth will be blessed. How will they be blessed? Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord Jesus will be saved. That's how sweeping it is.

Everyone. All the family of Ishmael, now, coming round. All the Edomites, children of Esau, all the Egyptians, all the Americans, Asians, Africans, who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

Look at Galatians 3. I'll piece together a few verses, 8, 9, and 29. Galatians 3.8, the scripture preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, in you shall all the nations be blessed. Verse 9, so then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

29, and if you are Christ's, you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise. There it is. That's just breathtaking.

If you belong to Christ, you are an heir of the promise made to Abraham. You're part of this line that in Jesus Christ is now a saving line. And it doesn't matter what your ethnicity was.

It doesn't matter what your religion was. It doesn't matter whether you came from Arabia or not from Arabia. It doesn't matter what you did at any point in your life up till now.

Amazing. What a message we have for the whole world. Such an absolutely globally relevant message.

And there is no other. Salvation is from the Jews only. You've got to be a Jew to be saved.

And not all Jews are saved. Belonging to the Jew, the offspring, makes you an heir of Abraham. And you belong to him by faith.

Ever since the day of Jesus Christ, that great atoning work that he performed in his resurrection, in his death, purchasing salvation for those who are in him, ever since that day, there's been a broadening out of what once had seemed to be a narrowing down. So not Ishmael, but Isaac. Not Esau, but Jacob.

Not the nations. He let the nations go their own way for 2,000 years. But the 12 tribes, the people of Israel, and not the people of Israel either, but the Israelite, the Jew, the offspring, the God-man, the Messiah, the Anointed One.

Everything comes together in him. And from that point, now, I have bought this promise of Abraham for the world. All the families of the earth will be blessed in him by being mine.

Go tell the world they can have this. All of them. You were slain.

And by your blood, you ransomed people for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, including the sons of Ishmael. He wasn't rejected in the end. It was just a strange roundabout way of reaching the world.

You may say, well, if I were God, I wouldn't have done it that way. I wouldn't have saved the world this way. I would have drawn the line a lot more straight between A and B than that.

Well, just read Romans 11 and put your hand over your mouth. Because after Romans 11 describes that circuitous way of saving the Gentiles by rejecting the Gentiles and saving the Jews by rejecting the Jews and saving Ishmaelites by rejecting Ishmaelites, Paul ends by saying, oh, the depth of the riches and the

wisdom and the knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable are his ways. Who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given a gift to him that he should be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things to him be glory.

He means to shut our mouths by doing it this way. You're God. You save the world whatever you want, whatever way you want.

I just know one thing. I am thankful the door is open to everybody. Tell the world, Bethlehem, tell the world to come.

The door is open. The banquet hall is bigger than you ever dreamed. Listen to these words of Jesus.

Go out quickly to the streets and the lanes and the city and bring in the poor and the crippled and the blind and the lame. And the servant said, sir, we commanded what you have done. It's been done.

And still there's room. And the master said to the servant, go out to the highways and to the hedges and compel them to come in that my house may be filled. The invitation goes to every people, every nation, every language, come.

Come, sons of Ishmael. Come, sons of Esau. Come, Egypt.

Come, newly liberated Libyans. Come, struggling Syrians. Come, agonizing Yemenis.

Come, what a message. An absolutely universal, global, compelling, sufficient, empowered message. Come, everyone who thirsts.

Come to the waters. You who have no money, come buy and eat. Come buy wine and milk without money, without price.

The spirit and the bride say, come. Let him who hears say, come. Let the one who is thirsty come and drink the water without price.

That's the message that goes out to every people on the planet. Come, Ishmael. Come, Esau.

Come, Jacob. Yes, Jacob must come or he will be lost. Come, Arab.

Come, Asian. Come, African. Come, American.

Which brings us now to you as we close. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Amazing.

This is our message. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus will be saved. And then Paul follows that sentence in Romans 10, 13 like this, and how will they call upon him whom they've not believed? And how shall they believe in him whom they haven't heard? And how shall they hear unless someone preaches? And how shall they preach unless someone sins? As it is written, how beautiful on the mountain are the feet of those who bring good news.

God is calling every one of us to have beautiful feet like this. Namely, tell everybody you know. All who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

Having a good time telling stories to my grandchildren who come over for babysitting. Tell a story, granddaddy. Tell us a story.

Tell us a Bible story. This is thrilling to me. You just fill them up with God's word.

Tell everybody. Tell every chance you have. Have beautiful feet.

But I'm focusing not on everybody now as we close. I'm focusing on a particular group of you. The group that God has been working in maybe a long time.

Maybe all your life God has been working to rumble in your heart, to move you toward the nations, to move you into missions, to move you across a culture, a different language, a different way of life, a different set of relationships, a different set of dangers, a different set of unknowns. God sent his Son to die and rise again to open the door to everyone to the blessing of Abraham. And he sends people.

This is where missions comes from. Mission comes from Genesis 12, three. Through the line of Isaac, through the line of Jacob, through the Jewish people, to the crucified and risen Messiah, spreading out to all who will believe in him and thus become with him the offspring inheriting the blessing of Abraham, which is salvation.

When I call you to the front, I don't mean that you're gonna have all the questions answered about your future. I'm gonna try to answer some of your questions right now before I call you. I don't mean that all your questions are answered.

I don't mean that you're absolutely certain you will go. I don't mean that you're certain about when you'll go or where you'll go. What I mean is this.

God has been at work and past and now to give you a strong, settled sense unless he changes something, I'm on my way to the nations. That's who I want to come. I cannot promise you that Bethlehem will support you.

Whether Bethlehem is able to support, we have over 100 people out from this church. Whether Bethlehem is able to support the goers will depend hugely on what he does among the senders and how radical the senders are. So there's no promise in this call that Bethlehem becomes your financial backer.

But here's what I can promise. I can promise that if you come in the name of Jesus and resolve to go in the name of Jesus as he leads, you will have power and you will have his presence because that's what he promised. All authority in heaven and on earth is mine.

Go make disciples of all nations. I'll be with you to the end of the age. That is a precious and incontrovertible promise.

May God use this message and this moment to solidify his leading in your life. Let me pray for you on all the campuses. We'll keep the cameras on until I'm done praying and then each campus will take over for itself.

Let's pray. So Father, there's the call. There's the foundation of how the offspring of Isaac becomes a blessing for the sons of Ishmael and everybody else.

I pray that the foundation would feel massively, gloriously, globally, powerfully sufficient. And that as we take our stand on this great historical work centering in Jesus Christ, the God-man who bought the promise of Abraham for the world and issues his command to go make disciples, I pray that there would be a solidifying in many lives on all the campuses right now. That unless you make it plain, we're on the way to the nations.

Unify husbands and wives around this, Lord. Do it for those in their 60s, 50s, 40s, 30s, 20s, teens, or even children. And I pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

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