

## The Two Seeds

*Is it written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise.*

GALATIANS 4:22-23

Abraham had two sons. Ishmael and Isaac were beyond all dispute veritable sons of Abraham. Yet one of them inherited the covenant blessing, and the other was simply a prosperous man of the world. *See how close these two were together!* They were born in the same society, called the same great patriarch 'father,' and sojourned in the same encampment with him. Yet Ishmael was a stranger to the covenant, while Isaac was the heir of the promise. How little is there in blood and birth! A more remarkable instance than this happened a little afterwards; for Esau and Jacob were born of the same mother, at the same birth, yet is it written, 'Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated.' One became gracious, and the other profane. So closely may two come together, and yet so widely may they be separated! Verily, it is not only that two shall be in one bed, and the one shall be taken, and the other left; but, two shall come into the world at the same moment, and yet one of them will take up his inheritance with God, and the other will for a morsel of meat sell his birthright. We may be in the same church, baptised in the same water, seated at the same communion table, singing the same psalm, and offering the same prayer; and yet we may be of two races as opposed as the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent.

*Malachi 1:2-3*

*Matthew 24:40*

Abraham's two sons are declared by Paul to be the types of two races of men, who are much alike, and yet widely differ, *They are unlike in their origin.* They were both sons of Abraham; but Ishmael, the child of Hagar, was the offspring of Abraham upon ordinary conditions: he was born after the flesh. Isaac, the son of Sarah, was not born by the strength of nature; for his father was more than a hundred years old, and his mother was long past age. He was given to his parents by the Lord, and was born according to the promise through faith. This is a grave distinction, and it marks off the true child of God from him who is only so by profession. The promise lies at the bottom of the distinction, and the power which goes to accomplish the promise creates and maintains the difference. Hence the promise, which is our inheritance, is also our test and touchstone.

Let us use the test at once by seeing whether we have been wrought upon by the power which fulfils the promise. Let me ask a few questions

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— How were you converted? Was it by yourself, by the persuasion of men, by carnal excitement; or was it by the operation of the Spirit of God? You profess to have been born again. Whence came that new birth? Did it come from God in consequence of his eternal purpose and promise, or did it come out of yourself? Was it your old nature trying to do better, and working itself up to its best form? If so, you are Ishmael. Or was it that you, being spiritually dead, and having no strength whatever to rise out of your lost estate, were visited by the Spirit of God, who put forth his divine energy, and caused life from heaven to enter into you? Then you are Isaac. All will depend upon the commencement of your spiritual life, and the source from which that life first proceeded. If you began in the flesh, you have gone on in the flesh, and in the flesh you will die.

*John 3:6* Have you never read, 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh'? Before long the flesh will perish, and from it you will reap corruption. Only 'that which is born of the Spirit is spirit'; the joy is that the spirit will live, and of it you will reap life everlasting. Whether you are a professor of religion or not, I beseech you, ask yourself — *Have I felt the power of the Spirit of God?*

Is the life that is within you the result of the fermentation of your own natural desires? Or is it a new element, infused, imparted, implanted from above? Is your spiritual life a heavenly creation? Have you been created anew in Christ Jesus? Have you been born again by divine power?

Ordinary religion is nature gilded over with a thin layer of what is thought to be grace. Sinners have polished themselves up, and brushed off the worst of the rust and the filth, and they think their old nature is as good as new. This touching up and repairing of the old man is all very well, but it falls short of what is needed. You may wash the face and hands of Ishmael as much as you please, but you cannot make him into Isaac. You may improve nature, and the more you do the better for certain temporary purposes; but you cannot raise it into grace. There is a distinction at the very fountain-head between the stream which rises in the bog of fallen humanity, and the river which proceeds from the throne of God.

*John 3:7* Do not forget that our Lord himself said, 'Ye must be born again.' If you have not been born again from above, all your church-going, or your chapel-going, stands for nothing. Your prayers and your tears, your Bible readings, and all that have come from yourself only, can only lead to yourself. Water will naturally rise as high as its source, but no higher: that which begins with human nature will rise to human nature; but to the divine nature it cannot reach. Was your new birth natural or supernatural?

Was it of the will of man or of God? Much will depend upon your answer to that question.

Between the child of God and the mere professor there is a distinction as to origin of the most serious sort. Isaac was born *according to promise*. Ishmael was not of promise, but of the course of nature. Where nature's strength suffices there is no promise: but when human energy fails, the word of the LORD comes in. God had said that Abraham should have a son of Sarah; Abraham believed it, and rejoiced therein, and Isaac was born as the result of the divine promise, by the power of God. There could have been no Isaac if there had been no promise, and there can be no true believer apart from the promise of grace, and the grace of the promise.

Gentle reader, here let me inquire as to your salvation. Are you saved by what you have done? Is your religion the product of your own natural strength? Do you feel equal to all that salvation may require? Do you conclude yourself to be in a safe and happy condition because of your natural excellence and moral ability? Then you are after the manner of Ishmael, and to you the inheritance will not come; for it is not an inheritance according to the flesh, but according to promise.

If, on the other hand, you say — *'My hope lies only in the promise of God. He has set forth that promise in the person of his Son Jesus to every sinner that believeth in him, and I do believe in him; therefore I trust and believe that the LORD will fulfil his promise and bless me. I look for heavenly blessedness, not as the result of my own efforts, but as the gift of God's free favour. My hope is fixed alone upon the free and gratuitous love of God to guilty men, by the which he has given his Son Jesus Christ to put away sin, and to bring in everlasting righteousness to those who deserve it not,'* — then this is another sort of language from that of the Ishmaelites, who say 'We have Abraham to our father.' You have now learned to speak as Isaac speaks. The difference may seem small to the careless, but it is great indeed. Hagar, the slave-mother, is a very different person from Sarah, the princess. To the one there is no covenant promise, to the other the blessing belongs for evermore. Salvation by works is one thing; salvation by grace is another. Salvation by human strength is far removed from salvation by divine power: and salvation by our own resolve is the opposite of salvation by the promise of God.

Matthew 3:9

Put yourself under this inquiry, and see to which family you belong. Are you of Ishmael or of Isaac? If you find that you are like Isaac, born according to the promise, remember that your name is 'Laughter'; for that is the interpretation of the Hebrew name Isaac. Take care that you rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Your new birth is a wonderful

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thing. If both Abraham and Sarah laughed at the thought of Isaac, you may certainly do so concerning yourself. There are times when, if I sit alone and think of the grace of God to me, the most undeserving of all his creatures, I am ready to laugh and cry at the same time for joy that ever the LORD should have looked in love and favour upon me. Yes, and every child of God must have felt the working of that Isaac nature within his soul, filling his mouth with laughter, because the LORD hath done great things for him.

Mark well the difference between the two seeds, from their very beginning.

Ishmael comes of man, and by man. Isaac comes *by God's promise*. Ishmael is the child of Abraham's flesh. Isaac is Abraham's child, too; but then the power of God comes in, and from the weakness of his parents it is made clear that he is of the LORD — a gift according to promise. True faith is assuredly the act of the man who believes; true repentance is the act of the man who repents; yet both faith and repentance may with unquestionable correctness be described the work of God, even as Isaac is the son of Abraham and Sarah, and yet he is still more the gift of God. The LORD our God, who bids us believe, also enables us to believe. All that we do acceptably the LORD worketh in us; yea, the very will to do it is of his working. No religion is worth a farthing which is not essentially the outflow of the man's own heart; and yet it must beyond question be the work of the Holy Ghost who dwells within him.

O friend, if what you have within you is natural, and only natural, it will not save you! The inward work must be supernatural; it must come of God or it will miss the covenant blessing. A gracious life will be your own, even as Isaac was truly the child of Abraham; but still more it will be of God; for 'Salvation is of the Lord.' We must be born from above. Concerning all our religious feelings and actions, we must be able to say, 'Lord, thou hast wrought all our works in us.'

*Jonah 2:9*

*Isaiah 26:12*