

The Life of Faith 3

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Loved ones, what we're trying to do Sunday by Sunday is to talk about the Old Testament with a view to helping each other to live in trust of God -- to live by faith in God. If you're like me, especially in these days, you have plenty of things that create in you a sense of angst. In fact the whole world seems to be in a sense of angst, a great sense of anxiety. And if it's not anxiety about finances, it's anxiety about domestic matters. If it's not anxiety about domestic matters, it's anxiety about international matters. But it seems, doesn't it, that so often we walk in a society that is filled with a sense of angst and it seems to press in on you at every moment. If it's not fear of losing your job it's fear of us all losing our lives. Or if you watched the news this morning you saw the fear of even the nuclear power station proliferation and you heard the guy say, "People on the east coast are afraid; afraid of today afraid for tomorrow." And it does seem that there is great fear, and great lack of faith, and great lack of peace in our day. So we as God's children need to see there is a beautiful way of peace to walk.

There is a place where you can walk in peace about your marriage, you can walk in peace about your future marriage, you can walk in peace about your job, and you can walk in peace about the things that are happening to you day-by-day and you don't need to be knocked off balance. You don't need to be up and down, up and down, up and down, one time worried, another time anxious. First you pop the Alka-Seltzer then you pop the tranquilizer, then you try to go on a vacation and then you try to get over it. It doesn't need to be like that; God is a good God, he's our dear Father, it is possible to live in continual unbroken faith in him. And the best way to see that is for us to begin to see how great and how faithful he is, and to pray that during these times when we study the Old Testament we'll be able to see through the Holy Spirit that he is our Father, he's your Father, and that you can tackle things differently tomorrow because of him.

It does make a difference the way you tackle things -- you know that. I won't go too long on this but the guys will sympathize with me. I was joking I had the stigmata because I pinned myself with a screwdriver last night. We have a well and I decided I had to put a wood burning furnace in so I had to move the 60 gallon tank of the well over to the other side of my furnace. And I put it off several times because you men know I had to sweat about 12 joints and I am not good at sweating joints of copper piping, and I had to move a lot of the black piping, and it was just a miserable job. I've been putting it off for about two weeks.

Then Jesus seemed to rise up inside me and say, "I have overcome the world so we go to this and you believe me to move in it and to work it and you tackle it expecting that it will go right." And I went out and got two wrenches from my neighbor and got started into it. I think about five o'clock -- I had the sermon organized, so got into it about five o'clock last night and about eight o'clock came the terrible moment; I had all the joints sweated and all the piping and I turned her up to 60 pound pressure and not a leak anywhere. So I saw again that there's a vast difference between tackling this miserable intractable world on your own, or tackling it through faith in God having overcome it in Jesus.

And brothers, I think that's it, for us. Sisters no doubt you face the same thing; the soufflé that won't rise -- the soufflé is supposed to rise, I think -- or you face other things with the children

at home. But it does seem that it makes a difference if you tackle the thing with faith, somehow the resources of the God head are released into the situation and undoubtedly there's a difference between tackling things through faith in God and tackling them just with a vague hope of "Somehow I'll get through this and maybe work something out."

So loved ones, that's why we're studying the Old Testament. We've been studying the first couple of chapters in Genesis and I'll try to bring you a little up to date with what we've said so far. You may remember that when we were talking about Genesis 1 we dealt with the creation of the universe. Verses 1-13 talked about the work of dividing that God did -- how on the first day he divided the light from the darkness. Then on the second day he divided the air from the water and then divided the land from the sea on the third day. And then you remember how in verses 14-25 we read how then God did a work of filling and so the fourth day corresponds to the first day.

You see the first day divided the light from the darkness, and then he filled the light with the sun and the darkness with the stars. And then you see the second day corresponds to the fifth, he divided on the second day the earth and the water then he filled the air with birds and the water with fish. And then the third day he divided the land from the sea and on the sixth day he filled the land with plants and animals. And so you get the beautiful order that God brings to the doctrine of creation. And so often we don't realize that the Father knew us men and women better than we knew ourselves -- he did not bother us with those most important details like, was the earth 10,000 years old or 10,000,000 years old?

He knew what little idiots we were and he just didn't give a date; he didn't allow us to get ourselves messed up with unimportant details like that because when you think of it, it is an unimportant detail. It makes no difference to our lives at all whether the world is 10,000 years old or 10,000,000 years old. And yet it is incredible, isn't it, how we men and women, despite the fact that God gives us no excuse for that, gives us no dates in Genesis -- there are no dates and there is no idea of time there -- of how old it is and yet despite that we all get ourselves wound up on those big details. They're not big details at all, they're unimportant nuisances really. But God zeroed in on the things that were important, showing us the relationship between one thing and another.

Then you remember he began to show us the creation of man himself and showed us that he created us men to rule over the earth. It ties up with a funny little story about the plumbing, because God did create us to rule over the earth. He did not create us to be overwhelmed by it. I know some of you are hitting marriage things and problems in jobs. We weren't created to be beaten. We weren't. We were not created to be beaten. We weren't. We were not created to be defeated. We were not created to be ruled over or dominated by our circumstances. We were created to rule over the earth. That's why God made us, to rule over the earth.

And then when you go to Genesis 2, we talked about how the Sabbath, first dealt with here, was really the day when we remembered the new creation in Jesus when the sun rose. Then in verses 4-17 God talked about man and the Garden of Eden that he had created. And then in the last part of Genesis 2 God began to deal with the relationship of man and woman and began to talk about how he made woman to aid man in the work that God had given him to do.

Now that's as far as we got last time. When we come to Genesis 3 tonight, we deal with the fall. Maybe it would help you if I explained to you that it is the failure to realize the meaning of Genesis 3 that made way for [Dr. Benjamin] Spock. It's the failure to realize Genesis 3 that still

gives people trouble with evil and suffering. Now those of you who haven't yet seen it remember that Spock and the whole psychology that taught us that we were born inherently good comes because modern theology threw out Genesis 3. They said, "Now wait a minute: God made the world and he made man, and he said, 'Behold it is very good.' Now surely that means that we're all good and we're all inherently good, and all we have to do in education is allow the good inside each little child to come out." And of course many of us got caught in that, and we kept seeing other stuff coming out of the little child, but we kept believing, "Oh well, they say he's good and I shouldn't chastise him, and I shouldn't tell him off and I shouldn't discipline him because he's really good inside."

Well of course loved ones, it's a failure to see that after man was made by God and put on the earth to rule over it, man rebelled against God and determined to be God himself. He said, "Get out of my way; I'm going to use this world as I want." And the fall took place when God dropped out of fellowship with man and man dropped out of God's plan for his life. So the whole teaching that man is inherently good comes from that failure to see the meaning of the fall, as does of course, those who say, "Why is there cancer? Why is there cancer?" And yet it is really so naïve, but we keep on asking it and even some of us say it too. We join in, although we believe Genesis 3, but we join in with those people who have ignored Genesis 3 and we say, "Yeah, yeah, why is there cancer? Why are there earthquakes? If God is really a good God and he's really omnipotent why is there disease and why is there sickness?"

Well, because of the fall. God didn't make the world with sickness, he didn't make the world with earthquakes, he didn't make the world with cancer and disease, and he didn't make the world with tragedies and disasters, and floods. God made the world perfectly but when man rebelled against God the whole world of nature suffered that fall. So loved ones the fall explains a lot that people say they don't really understand today.

Now maybe we could deal for a short time with Genesis 3. If you take your Bible and open it to Genesis 3:1, I think God can show us something of the nature of the fall and why it took place and can explain to us a few things about our own walk with him, because really our problem comes from repeating the fall in our own lives. Genesis 3:1, "Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creation that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'" The question in Hebrew can be translated, "Did God actually say you couldn't eat all the trees that you wanted? I mean, did your God who loves you, did he actually suggest that some of the trees you might not be able to eat? Is your God really loving? Does he really care about you if he allowed that to come upon you?" And that's the way the thing starts.

The serpent, Satan, took hold of an ordinary serpent and from that time on the serpent has always stood for Satan. But it was Satan, the spirit from outside, and he is still walking about roaring as a lion to see whom he can devour and he's always licking around your life and your heart and your mind. He can't get in if you don't let him, but he can shoot thoughts through your mind -- thoughts of temptation saying, "Now, surely God would not let you go through this miserable experience that you're about to head into." And of course, he wants you to say, "That's right; if God really loved me he wouldn't want me to endure this. He would want me to get out of this marriage fast. He would want me to get out of this job fast. He would want me to get out of this difficult situation fast. Yes, I don't see that God would do this to me. Surely, he'd let me eat of any tree of the garden." And Satan's approach to you is always to get you to doubt God's real love for you and to get you to justify yourself in beginning to move outside what God has told you to do.

Now loved ones, that doubt is actually the very beginning of the problem in walking in faith in God.

It's like Peter walking on the water and then putting his little toe underneath the wave a little to see, "Could I actually get my toe underneath the surface? Here I am walking on it but could I get my toe underneath the surface?" The moment you look at that, doubt begins to come into your mind. There's only one thing to do when that kind of thought comes and that is look away from it and look straight to Jesus. Look straight to God and forget that thing completely.

It's the same with evil temptation or unclean thoughts, the moment the thing begins to approach you in your mind, look away from it the first time. That's the way to walk in faith. You see, we get into problems where we think, "Well, I can dip my toe in a little more. I can think a little more around that thought." Satan gets in and says, "You really think you're ever going to marry? Do you? Do you ever think you will? I mean, who would marry you?" And we dumb-dumbs we go right out after it. There's no sense in it at all, absolutely none and he has no interest in us anyway. He has no desire to see us married. He has no interest in what will really happen, he's just anxious to get us weaving our mind around that thought.

Now loved ones, that's it: don't give your mind to it. Don't give your thought to Satan's doubt. Don't be kind of brave and courageous and say, "Oh, I'm strong in Jesus so now let me think that thought out. Okay, will I ever get married? Hmm, will I ever get married? Will I ever get married?" Don't. Don't. Look up to Jesus, look up to God say, "Father, I don't know what your plans are for me but I know you love me, and I know you know me well, and I know you're going to give me the thing that will fulfill me best in this life. So Lord, I'm trusting you -- let's get on." But that's it. Look away from the thought, don't deal with the thought.

I got into real trouble because I thought, "Now wait a minute, it's just an intellectual game and you ought to be able to let your mind grasp these things. It's purely an intellectual experiment." It's not. It's not, you see Satan makes it look like, "Now listen, here's a simple little question, did God say you shall not eat of any tree of the garden? A harmless little question. Ponder it over; let it haunt you a little." No, don't -- just don't do it. If there's any thought that comes into your mind that is not glorifying and up building and loving and filled with faith, then let it go. That's it. Let any thought go that is not witnessing to you of God, just let it go. If you say to me, "Oh but we have to think through these things otherwise we won't know how to travel through life." God is guiding you. You've to think what he gives you to think, you have to deal with what he has given you to deal with and that's enough. You have plenty on your plate, just drive that car, keep clear of the other cars, get through the traffic lights properly, and get to work. That's it. Just do that and praise him as you go and loved ones, you'll find that as you tend to the things that he's given to you to attend to in your mind, he will work out all those other things.

Satan is the one that brings in, under a guise of a simple question, some beginnings of doubt. You see, Eve really answered well at the beginning, almost a bit like Jesus. Jesus, you remember, quoted God's word to Satan when Satan approached him in the temptation, "And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden.'" And she was going well, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden, God is a good God." But of course, she did let her mind go round, "But God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden.'" And God did say that, but then she added a little, which suggested that her mind was beginning to question too. She added, "Neither shall you touch it. In fact, he wouldn't even let me touch it. He said I can't eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden and I can't even touch it lest I die." And she began to side with Satan.

Brothers and sisters don't do it -- just don't do it. The thought comes -- you shouldn't even bother with the thought; never take the second step, never side with Satan. Never give the least question about whether God knows, "Now does he really know? Maybe he doesn't know just what my situation is career wise. Maybe he doesn't and maybe I better think this thing through. Maybe God doesn't quite know the trouble I'm having at home so maybe I better get in here with my sleeves up and get this sorted out." Don't touch it, just don't touch it. Don't side with Satan against God. Don't ever question that God is God, that he can see everything you're doing. He knows everything, he's omniscient, he knows exactly where you are, he has the whole thing organized and he wants you to praise him and thank him even when you cannot see. So don't hesitate.

It's the hesitating you see: all Satan's after is to destroy your faith. All these are lies. He doesn't know nothing from nothing, but he's trying to get you to step back from a position of absolute confidence and faith and peace in God. The same when you're going to sleep at night. Going to sleep at night, Satan gets the thought in; you think "Nope, I'm going to sleep." But the thought is still there so you think, "Well, I'll just give it a little tickle before I go to sleep." Then you give it a little tickle and then he begins to suggest that maybe God doesn't quite understand the situation so you decide, "Well, that's right I better just review it in my own mind." Two hours later you're still trying to work out the problem. Don't touch it. Stay clear of suggestions from Satan that get you either to doubt God's love or to doubt God's faithfulness or omnipotence. God has everything under control. God has you in his arms. He will not drop you; he knows exactly what's happening. He wants you to rejoice in him now.

That's what he says, "Rejoice in the Lord always and again I will say rejoice. Let your forbearance be known to all men the Lord is at hand." If you say to me, "Rejoice and the things falling apart?" That's what God says; I'd believe him if I were you. At least when it falls apart he'll be right there waiting to catch you. But rejoice, that's the safe thing to do, rejoice that God is in control. Don't be led out by Satan into thinking he isn't.

Then you see how it goes in verse 3, "But God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.' But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die.'" That's the next stage -- unbelief. First doubt and then unbelief, "You won't die." Direct contradiction and that's what happens if you begin to follow Satan out in your thought life like this. You'll begin to contradict God; you'll begin to say, "No, that is not right. God's normal order for a person like me in this situation is not right. I am facing an exception in this situation. This is an exception. I won't die here." And of course, the whole world is busy persuading itself that it will not die.

It's incredible, isn't it? You have dear guys on death row pleading for execution. There's something inside them that says, "You should die for murdering another person." Something inside them says, "I want some reality, some punishment, something should happen to me." And nobody will execute them because the whole society is involved in persuading us that we can fornicate without destroying our marriages, that we can whip ourselves up on drugs and alcohol without destroying our minds and our emotions, that we can do whatever we want and not suffer the consequences. And isn't that why we don't arrest the little guy that has stolen the car but we arrest the guy that has left his keys in the ignition. And it's just an extension of it, we're trying to persuade ourselves that we can even commit crime and we won't suffer for it -- "We'll put you in a psyche ward, and we'll get you organized and get you out again. We'll rehabilitate you."

But the whole society is involved in persuading itself that it will not die despite the fact that it

goes its own way and does what it wants rather than what God wants. Well, that's what Satan wants to persuade us to do you see. "Sure, jump into bed; it won't have the effect on you that it has on the other person. Edge a little here on the income taxes and it won't affect you; you're in a slightly different situation here. You won't die if you do this."

Loved ones, you will die. You will. If you do any sin at all there's a bit of you inside dies. There's a bit of your relationship with God that fades. Yes, you will die. And just because you're still alive, and just because you still feel kind of happy, it's still true there's something that has died inside every time you work against what God has told you to do. There's something that dies inside despite Satan's pleading, "You will not die." You do. You die and you feel the lack of peace weeks or months later.

Then in verse 5, pride: first doubt, then unbelief, then pride, "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." And that's it, "If you do this you'll be like God. This will make you like God. Knowing what is right and what is wrong, deciding what is right and what is wrong for yourself, that'll make you like God." And of course, that's what we want to be when we get on into the depths of temptations -- we want to run our own lives, we want to do it our way. We want to have our own judgments and exercise our own will, and have our own rights, and we want to be like God himself. And I don't know brothers and sisters, if you've really thought about that one. I do think there's some truth in it.

If the ladies -- I apologize to the ladies, I don't apologize to us men because I think it's true of us -- that a man envies God's power and a woman envies God's worship. It's interesting, isn't it? Maybe it's not altogether true and I'm sure it crosses over because some of us are in some ways more like what we think of as an ordinary woman and what we think of as an ordinary man while we are all, in some way, a mixture of those two. But it probably has some truth in it that we all want to be like God, except the man often envies God's power. You know brothers, the way we want to achieve things. We want to achieve something and we want to be somebody, and we want to make a niche for ourselves in the hall of fame. And you ladies, I don't know to what extent it's true, but you envy the worship of God. You want worship, and admiration, and adulation.

But whatever it is, and maybe it's the other way around, but it does seem we have a great desire to take God's place and doubt is the beginning of the move into unbelief, which moves you then, eventually, into pride where you take over completely. And presumably we tend to look at a man like DeLorean and think, "Oh well, he's an extreme example." But we are all capable of going exactly that way and going quite as far as that in our own lives.

So that's the way the fall took place loved ones, and you see in verse 6 what the nature of it was, "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food," because she had turned her back on God, you see, and you only turn your back on God when you have an alternative -- we need to remember that. We're not dummies; God has put within us a self-preservation instinct and we only turn our back on God if we can see that there's another solution. So she saw that the tree was good for food. She saw, "Now, I can use this world to get the security that I was depending on God for so I can use this world directly myself. I can get money from it; I can get security for myself from it." When she saw, "That it was a delight to the eyes," [she thought] "I can get the happiness that I've had with God as my friend. I can get it; I can surround myself with good circumstances, nice homes, nice cars, good friends. I can get the happiness I need from the world. "And that the tree was to be desired to make one wise," "I can make myself important. I can use my cleverness to establish my importance in other people's eyes and I can draw all men unto me by my own cleverness and wisdom."

I don't know how much you use your cleverness and wisdom. The Holy Spirit has just shown me again what showoffs we are. You know -- how we show off our little clevernesses, or our little wisdom. And I don't know how much you've found yourself tempted but we lose the peace of God's presence when we do that, when we show off our cleverness or our wisdom, or we think we're getting the upper hand of someone, or we think we're taking a clever shortcut that no one else can see, or we think we're outdoing the other one. It seems as if we have a deep pride inside ourselves. We had an author in Britain who wrote about one up-man-ship, and the idea of always being one up on the other person and it seems that that is constantly seeping through us -- that desire to be just a little more clever, or a little one up on the other person. And of course, that fills our minds and our minds clang with the noise of that, and we lose the peace and the rest and the gentleness of being a little person -- a little something, or a little nothing in the Father's hands.

And so loved ones, those were the steps by which man came into the fall. And it might be good, I do sense -- I don't know what you sense, but I sense I should stop there even though I'm sorry I'm not through chapter 3. But it does seem that there's a lot of stuff there, isn't there? We just need to ask the Father for light, you know. Let us pray.

Dear Father, we come before you because we see ourselves naturally in our forefather Adam. And Father, we see how often we have engaged in just these very practices. And oh Lord, we ask you to give us light through the Holy Spirit so that as we read this again tonight, maybe before we go to bed, you will enable us to see these temptations and these steps of decline whenever they occur in our lives this week. Lord, we pray for light so that at the very moment when we're about to yield, we will know it and see it.

Lord, we know that we do not need to walk in this fear, this uncertainty, and this anxiety. We know Father that it's your plan that we should walk as little children who have a millionaire Father who is watching over them every minute. And oh Father, we know it's possible to walk that way so we ask you Holy Spirit, to give us wisdom and light and life so that we may deal with the evil one when he approaches us. Lord, we ask for grace to say no to the word of doubt when we wonder if you know, when we wonder if you're in control, when we wonder if you see us, when Satan somehow moves you out of our minds and we begin to think, "We're on our own. We're on our own. We have to do something here." And we haven't these hymns and songs around us, or these other people and we don't realize that you're right at hand. You're right at our right hand there, closer than breathing. Holy Spirit, will you remind us of that so that we will not doubt that God of course, has given us to eat of all the trees of the garden that it's good for us to eat of and he has everything under control, and he will not drop us.

Lord, when unbelief comes in and we begin to think, "Well, we can do this and not die," oh Father, present yourself before us. Present yourself as a great judge if necessary, do whatever is needed Lord, to keep us back from that defiant will where we bluff ourselves that we can do this and not suffer; we can do this, disobey you, and not lose your presence. Oh Father, help us to see disobedience and sin as the plague itself and as absolute death. And then Lord, deal with us if ever we get into pride and begin to think that we're God. Oh Father forgive us, we're such puny silly little creatures that Lord, Satan seems to make us feel we're so important in our little universe. Oh, help us to see that we're not fit to be God and that's what brings the worry and the anxiety. Father, that the money thing is not ours to look after, it's ours to do the best we can with, but it's yours. You've promised that you will provide all other things unto us.

Lord, whenever we get into the midst of the job problem, or the home situation, Father, help us to step down from our throne. Help us to see, "Wait a minute, this isn't ours. Our Father is in control here. He's placed us here. This may not come out in what the world may say are successful ways, but it will come out in God's way so my place is to stay in here and do what he tells me." Lord, help us, help us to do that. Help us to keep off the throne of trying to run the world. Lord, we don't rule it, we can't rule it, and we can't run it but you have it in control and you will work all things according to the counsel of your will.

Dear Holy Spirit, we pray for each other, for each dear brother and sister in this room here with us tonight, and we pray for each of us that you, Holy Spirit, will quiet in our hearts at the moment of temptation this week so that we may walk in faith unbroken faith, and trust, and rest in the Father, so that we may rule the earth and bring it into submission this week. Lord, we thank you for this evening, for your own dear presence, and we thank you that at this moment if we died we'd be right in your arms, right there in the brightness of heaven. Thank you Lord that we're there all the time even though we can't see it.

Now the grace of our Lord Jesus, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and evermore.