We Think Too Much of Ourselves

Sermon Transcript by Ernest O'Neill

We think too much of ourselves so we think too little of ourselves. We think too much of ourselves so we think too little of ourselves. For all of us who might not understand what that means, another way to say it is -- we think too much about ourselves and we think too much of ourselves and so we end up thinking of ourselves as much weaker and much more unimportant than we are. So we think too much of ourselves and we end up thinking too little of ourselves.

We think too much of ourselves in that we loom too big in our own thinking each day. We’re too preoccupied with ourselves and our own things so our whole vision of life and reality becomes distorted so we end up, as Karl Barth would say, being stupid. We reject reality and we actually live in unreality with all its limitations. So that’s the heart of it.

Day-to-day we are far too big in our own minds, we’re preoccupied with our cars, our computers, our customers, the work we have to do in the office -- our minds are filled with ourselves and with those with whom we’re connected. Even when we think of our customers -- we’re so often thinking of our customers, and what we’re going to have for lunch, and what we’re going to do this evening, and how we’re feeling so that fills our minds all the time. We loom so big in our own minds and we’re thinking all the time about ourselves, and about our things, and about the things we have to do, and the things we have done, and the things we’ve said so that we’re thinking too much about ourselves.

And the paradox of it is that we end up thinking too little of ourselves, having very little confidence in ourselves, thinking of ourselves as very weak, and thinking of ourselves as very inadequate. And part of the reason is that we spend all our time thinking about ourselves and thinking about our own things and that is all unreality. That is all unreality. So we think almost every second about unreality. We think almost all the time about people that don’t exist. And we spend little or no time thinking about the one person who does exist and who gives us existence.

So it’s strange -- we live in a fantasy world. I understand what you’re all thinking, “But, Pastor that is the world. That’s the world around us.” Yes, but it’s unreality. It’s not real. And actually you and I will agree theoretically about that when we come upon certain verses such as Paul’s statement about the passing façade of this world where he says, “This is just a passing façade.”

It’s like the façade you remember, at Speaker’s Corner or Marble Arch in London where they’re redoing the British Museum where they’re cleaning the pillars and they’ve covered it all with canvas so there’s an outward façade there that isn’t the British Museum at all anymore. There’s the canvas façade in London which looks like a whole building and pillars but it’s painted on cloth and it’s just a façade. They’re going to take it down and the real thing is behind it. Well, even though you and I know theoretically “Yes, yes, I know what you say that all this around us -- the cars, the trees, the sky, all the events, the inauguration -- all that is a passing façade. I know that in my head.” Yet we spend almost every second thinking about that. That’s what fills our thoughts and fills our minds moment, after moment, hour after hour, day after day. So we think too much of ourselves.

And the strange result is we end up thinking too little of ourselves -- thinking of ourselves far
below what we are because we think of unreality. And in this unreality you are a speck of dust and so am I. In this unreality we are all part of something that has already been condemned to destruction and so no wonder that we think too little of ourselves because we think of ourselves in the context of this present world. We’re thinking of ourselves as just a little part of a huge thing that has already been destroyed and condemned to death and is thought of as nothing. And so when we think of ourselves in that context we’re bound to end up thinking of ourselves as nothing also.

And so often we walk through each day’s life thinking of our own inadequacies -- very unsure of ourselves, very uncertain, very critical of ourselves -- often putting ourselves down, thinking of ourselves as nothings. And the reason is we’re thinking of unreality all the time. What is reality? Well, you know it’s verses we’ve looked at already, Colossians 3:3, “For you have died,” you -- you all that you are, all that you have been, “You have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” That’s reality.

But that isn’t the reality we think about. We put that on the back burner and we say, “I know that’s theoretically true but I,” we don’t even say, “I like thinking about a corpse.” We don’t say that because we know we don’t like thinking about a corpse. We just say, “Well, I know I’ve died but I’m here and I’m thinking about myself.” And we think all the time about ourselves. We don’t think about the reality that we have actually died and that our life is hid with Christ in God. We don’t think that. We think about ourselves as very much alive, very much here, not hid with Christ in God at all, but revealed to everybody.

So we don’t think of ourselves as dead or as hid with Christ in God. If you say to me, “Oh well, I do kind of think that at times.” Yes, you know the way we think about it. We think, “Oh yeah, that’s true kind of -- its true -- in some realm that I can’t get at -- it’s true. It’s going to be true when we get to heaven -- but now? Now no -- I’m here and I better think about myself.” So we think about ourselves. We don’t think of reality. We don’t think, “Eh, forget it -- you’re dead and your life is hid with Christ in God.” We don’t think that way.

When somebody criticizes us or rejects us we don’t think, “You’re dead and you’re hid with Christ in God so what does it matter?” We think, “I’m here -- very much -- and they’ve overlooked me and they’ve put me down and it’s wrong.” There’s some truth that we’re missing when we think of ourselves as not dead and not hid with Christ in God. Ephesians 2:6 is in fact more reality. “And raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” “And raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” That’s more of the reality. You’ve died and your life is hid with Christ in God and you have been raised up with him and sit in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. That’s where we are, that’s reality.

But we kill ourselves. We kill ourselves during the day because we don’t fill our minds with that. We fill our minds with, “I’ve got to get or I’ve got to do that.” Now, if you say to me, “Yes, but we have to do these things.” Yes, yes -- but the doing is different from the thinking. If you say to me, “But I’ve got to think before I lift that book” to tell you the truth -- you don’t have to think very much about it, do you? I mean, it’s pretty automatic -- you have to get that book over there so you don’t have to think, “I’m thinking of that book, now how am I going to get that book?” We don’t actually – the thinking time that we have is not preoccupied with the doing of the things. Doing the things comes pretty easily -- but we spend 90 percent of our time thinking about this unreal situation in which we are, rather than thinking of the reality that we have died, that our life is hid with Christ in God and we have been raised up
with him and made to sit with him in the heavenly places. We don’t think of that as reality.

Look at it this way. When you go out to the car in the morning, as you’re going your mind is not preoccupied with putting this foot in front of that foot to get to the car, it’s not. It’s not -- you know you’re doing that naturally. It’s not preoccupied with “how am I going to get that car door open” unless it happens to be locked from the previous day and you couldn’t get it open, but normally if everything is working reasonably, you go over and you turn the key. What you’re thinking of is “what’s ahead of me this day? What’s the road going to be like up to New York, or up to Washington? What about that?”

In other words, if you reflect for a moment, your mind is 90 percent preoccupied with things that haven’t happened yet that you’re not doing at that moment, things that you maybe fear, or things you’re looking forward to in the future -- but that 90 percent is meant to be preoccupied with reality. In fact, it’s preoccupied with unreality. In fact, a double unreality -- the double unreality is because first of all it’s thinking about things concerned with yourself that are in this world. Secondly, it’s thinking of things that haven’t happened yet -- so it’s kind of a double unreality.

First of all it’s a reality, it’s a thing that has been crucified and destroyed in Jesus but secondly it’s a thing that hasn’t happened yet. And so we’re thinking not of the reality, “we have died and our life is hid with Christ in God” and “we’ve been raised to sit with him in heavenly places”, but we’re thinking of ourselves and all our own things.

Another part of reality is Ephesians 1:20. In Colossians 3:3 we are told we’ve been raised and made to sit with Christ in heavenly places and then that position is in Ephesians 1:20, “Which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”

That’s reality. We have died, our life is hid with Christ in God, we’ve been placed in Christ at God’s right hand above every rule and authority and dominion and power and all things have been put under our feet. That is real. But we don’t think of that position -- indeed, we kind of reject that position. In our own minds, it’s strange, but in our own minds we like our little life. We like our tiny life, our small life where we know what we’re capable of with our own efforts and what we’re not capable of. In a funny way we’re secure in our small life. In a strange way we like to put off the idea that we’re actually in the heavenly places far above all rule and authority and dominion and power and we’re in a wide expansive life.

In a strange way there’s something in us that likes the small life. “Okay, that’s alright and that (life in Christ) would be great and we’ll be able to fly from star to star and we’ll be able to move through great spaces, and we’ll probably have planets under our control. That’s great, that will be wonderful as long as you keep it far enough away. But, I like my little life. I like my small life. It’s small and secure, I know what I am capable of, I know what I’m not capable of. I know what my limitations are.”

In a strange way we reject the wonderful reality that God has given us in Christ far above all rule and authority and dominion and power. In a way we don’t like being elevated to this lordship that
he exercises over the universe because that's what he's doing -- he has exalted us into himself so that we are part of the lords of the universe.

That's why he has done that for us. It is his desire to exercise lordship over the universe through us, but in a way we don't like it. In a way we like our small life -- we want to hold onto it so we end up fiddling, fiddling, fiddling, fiddling, fiddling -- preoccupied with petty little things. We're being little slaves of all the mighty forces that are around us -- in a way we don't like the idea of being lords and being able to control things and have authority over the things that God has put under our feet.

And so in a sense we're excited by those people we kind of think of as interesting. That plumber (Smith Wigglesworth), he certainly was very sure of himself wasn't he? But it's not long before we get preoccupied with what we think are the extremes of him walking the lady with the sickness around the hall. Then we think, “That wasn't right.” And it's not long before we're nibbling at his feet, nibbling, nibbling, nibbling -- trying to bring him down to our level. And really what God is saying to us is, “You have died and your life is hid with Christ in me and I have raised you up and made you sit with me in the heavenly places and you are far above every rule and authority and dominion and power and I have put all things under your feet in my son Jesus and I have sent you, now, into my creation in order to bring it under my will and that is where you are and I want you to dwell in that place, in that reality.”

And that's what God has for us. Our sin consists not of just the things that we do but of our whole attitude to that and our whole attitude to that tends to be one of rejection. We -- who have been raised up and made to sit with Christ in the heavenly places -- in a funny way we don't like it, it's too spacious, it's too big, it's too exalted. In a way we like to bring our clothes around us and say, “No, no, I like my little life, I like my small life.” And that is sin, rejecting that truth. And so our little minds run every day in that very same pattern -- eternally preoccupied with what we're going to do, what our customers are going to say or do.

Think for a moment, just think for a moment, and just answer for a moment what Satan is saying inside you. Satan is saying inside you, “Oh yeah, you have to think of your customers because if you don't think of your customers there will be no sales of jewelry. If you don't think what you're going to have for lunch you'll starve.” Answer Satan -- answer Satan! You know you don't need to spend all that time thinking about those things. Often the time we spend actually getting the lunch is three or four minutes of actual effective action but what our minds are filled with are the things we haven't yet done, or the things that are ahead of us, or just things that we're dwelling upon, or things that have happened already. We're thinking of how that last person said this to us instead of thinking and dwelling in reality.

Here's the way Karl Barth puts it and I felt there was some truth in it. “We regard this life as unpractical and difficult, and in a way undesirable, this living in fellowship with God every second. A life which moves and circles around itself which is self orientated but also self directed seems to hold out far greater promise than one which is lived in this fellowship.” We like to say to ourselves, “Oh no, I love fellowship with Jesus. I mean it’s really what I look forward to.” But that's where you are -- you are in it every second, you can enjoy it every second. But is it not true that you choose not to live in that world? You choose to live in this “here and now.”

Well it's not the here and now. It's really the future of the here and now or the past of the here and now. The here and now, the actual present moment is lived in a flash. I did that (snapped my fingers) but I didn't spend time thinking about will I do that, what will be the effects of that, I
just did it. I didn’t think about when I am going to lift that book -- I just did it. I encourage
us to see that our life of action does not stem from the minutes and hours that we spend thinking
about it in our heads; our life of action is a very spontaneous thing that actually stems from where
we dwell.

He (Karl Barth) says, “It is for this reason that our brother Jesus is a stranger and his existence
among us is an unintolerable demand and the God who is his God is unacceptable. This is, in very
general terms, the deployment or rather the rigid front which human sin presents to him,” to Jesus,
“And then which it is actual and visible in the face of him in the form of human sloth.” And he
says, “Actually it’s our sloth makes us content to live in this small petty world of self that we
live in.” It’s our sloth.

We like to think, “Oh it would be wonderful to be in the spaces with Jesus above these things and to
rule and control, it would be wonderful.” But in reality we say, “No, I don’t like it. It’s
wonderful to think about but I’d rather live in my own tiny world here with my little things that I
have around me, and my little life, and my little achievements.”

“Why and to what extent is it sin? The reason is that as the rejection of the outstretched hand of
God, the refusal of his grace, all this means that man neglects his own calling, that he is untrue
to his own cause, that with his true reality he goes out into the unreal into the void where he
cannot stand and be what he wants to be, where he cannot be a man himself but only his own shadow.”
I think we end up thinking too much of ourselves and therefore too little of ourselves. We end up
being a shadow of what we were meant to be, a shadow of what we actually are. What are we actually?
You’re not some little girl fiddling around with your computer and trying to get your sales --
you’re part of Christ. You have died, your life is hid with him in God and you are part of Jesus at
the right hand of the Father and all things have been put under your feet and he has you here in the
world to bring the world under his will and under his Father’s will and you’re in that position of
rulership. And the Holy Spirit is able to exercise that through us if we are willing to think and
dwell in reality.

You don’t need to spend one moment to work out how you’re going to bring the world under his will,
you don’t. You don’t need to spend one second trying to think, “Oh, well I’m supposed to be ruling.
I see what you mean -- I’m supposed to be overcoming things, not being overcome. I see.” You
don’t need to spend one second thinking of that, all you need to do is dwell in reality in your own
mind as I need to in my mind. Dwell in the position we have been given in Jesus and then his Spirit
will begin to exercise authority over the things we do.

I don’t know about you but I can see in my own life one of the big difficulties is I cannot see the
wood for the trees and I think that’s so with all of us. We cannot see the wood for the trees. We
are so preoccupied with the individual trees -- getting from this place to the next store and
dealing with that person that we get utterly preoccupied with the trees and we cannot see the wood.
We cannot see what we are about here. We cannot see that God has given us victory over the world in
Jesus and we live there and that if we live there in that life of joy and delight, the powers of
evil will be overcome by Jesus’ Spirit.

You might say, “You mean all we have to do is rejoice and delight ourselves in the Lord?” That is
right. That is right. All we have to do is live in reality in Jesus at God’s right hand and
delight ourselves in him and he, through his Spirit, will overcome the powers of evil. Can you make
a company order $10,000? No. Can you get a customer to order another 40,000 badges? No. But we
are wonderful people, when one of them does order yes, we attribute it to God but we think also, “Well, we had a little to do with it.” And yet it isn’t us that bring those things about – it’s God’s Spirit that brings things about. We know how it came; it didn’t come from you calling on a customer day after day after day.

So God is actually the mover. He is the mover. But the fact is he will move more if we will dwell in our position in Jesus at God’s right hand. He will exercise power and rulership through us, but we have to decide if we are ready to live in that reality or do we want to draw our little clothes, our little rags around us and dwell in our little self contained and self limited life? That choice is ours. Really, there’s only one choice for us, to live in reality.

Let us pray. Lord Jesus, we see that the facts are plain, we have died and our life is hid with Christ in God. We see Lord, that every moment we spend thinking about what we are in our parents’ eyes, or what we have been in our parents’ eyes, or what we are in our peers’ eyes, or what we are in our friends’ eyes, or what we appear to be when we look in the mirror, all of that has died and our life is hid with you Lord Jesus, in God. And it cannot be seen that in you we have been raised up and made to sit with you in the heavenly places and we have been placed far above all rule and authority and dominion and power and you’ve put all things under our feet because all things are under Jesus and you have given us authority over all the powers and authorities and nothing can hurt us and that is reality.

And we see our Father that your words to us are plain -- that whatsoever things are true and lovely and of good report we would think on those things. That is our delight and our pleasure each day to think of those things, to fill our minds with that truth and that reality, to dwell in that reality and then your Holy Spirit begins to actualize in our lives the mighty powers that we posses at your right hand. And you begin to spread your power of influence so that suddenly our jewelry is being ordered in thousands of dollars. Suddenly jewelry is being ordered by your power and your might so that suddenly people are beginning to see the possibility of a life that is changed completely by your life and by your Spirit.

So Father, we see that you have called us to be rulers of the universe, rulers through you, Lord Jesus. Oh Father, we pray now for each of us; Lord, that our brother or our sister feels what we feel -- so we pray now for each other. We pray for each other Lord. We ask, Holy Spirit, that you will show us the unreality of continuing to think about our weaknesses and our failures, of continuing to think of the things we cannot do. We see Lord, that we can do all things through Christ our Lord who strengthens us.

Oh Father, show us that that is truth and reality-- not just a nice thought or an inspiring idea, but that is reality -- that we are now a part of you, Lord Jesus, and your power is our power and your abilities are our abilities. And as we dwell there in you rejoicing and delighting ourselves in you, so we will spontaneously do what you want done and you will magnificently come behind us and round about us, and under us, and over us, and through us and with your great power you will bring about the miracles.

Oh Lord, we pray now for each other that you would make that all reality for us so that we will go forward like Moses and we’ll do what you say. Stretch out our staff over the Red Sea and the Red Sea, by your mighty power, will be divided. Lord, we pray now for each other. We pray for each dear heart and we know Lord that it’s all unreal prayer unless we are willing for it to be answered in us. So Lord, we do not want this small self centered life, this self oriented life, this life
that is filled with just what we can do. Lord, we do not want this little, comfortable, secure life where we can tell what is going to happen. Lord, we want the wonderful unknown mysterious life of exaltation in you at God’s right hand where we rule over the universe and through you are able to bring about your Father’s will. Lord, we will give ourselves to that. We would now reject the unreality that has filled our thoughts for so many days. We will begin to dwell in reality.