

The Cure for an Evil Heart

Genesis 6 & 7

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

I think it is possible to come each Sunday and still feel in your heart: But what does God want of me? What does God want of me? What really is the heart of this gospel that we're talking about and what is the response God wants from me to it? So that's what today's verse explains, loved ones.

Before talking about the gospel, it might be good to establish clearly what the basic problem is in God's eyes. It's important to do that because it's very different from the basic problem that is so often discussed or highlighted by sociologists, by magazine and newspaper writers, even by the authors of inspirational books. Most of them seem to zero in on "mankind's greatest problem is guilt -- a sense of guilt". Or "the twentieth century's greatest difficulty is loneliness." Or "man's great problem today is a loss of self-esteem."

Well really God alone can see what mankind's greatest problem is because he alone is not part of that problem and his diagnosis is very different from all of those, loved ones, so would you look at it with me. It's in Genesis 6:5. Genesis 6:5, "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." That's what our maker says is our greatest problem. "The wickedness of man is great on the earth and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually" and then if you want to find the solution that God had for that just look about two verses down to verse 7. "So the Lord said, 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground, man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.'" You know us with our soft hearts; we like to think they are and in our woolly mindedness we say there has to be some other solution besides that. Of course our error today is that we think there are all kinds of other solutions you know, besides the one that God found. God saw that the evil in our hearts was continual and he determined he would blot it out, he would destroy us.

Our error today is we think we can find some other answer. Just hold it, give me time, give me time and I'll find another answer. Now, if we have some encouragement from our peers that will kind of do it. Or if we can tame this evil or we can train it, or we can treat it in some way. Loved ones, that's why we end up with such a mixture of grays in our society today. You know that. We don't have any blacks or whites. We don't have any rights or wrongs. It's interesting -- as a result we don't actually have any reliable hearts that are trustworthy, isn't that so? That's the funny thing. We're so easy on the evil that is here and we attempt to ameliorate it in so many unsatisfactory ways that we end up with a world where it's very hard to find a trustworthy heart or a reliable heart. Now, of course, God kept on saying the same thing for two thousand years. He kept on saying, look there's only one answer to this. There is only one answer.

Jeremiah said it you know; he said "the sinful soul it must die." Paul said it years later when he said, "the wages of sin is death." The only way to get rid of this stuff is to destroy it. You cannot separate the sinner from his sin. You have to destroy both to get rid of it. Really, years later it was one of his prophets that said the same thing. "The real evil in the world is, the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it?" That's it, loved ones.

For two thousand years, God kept on saying that through his prophets. The basic problem of mankind is that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it? The only answer to it is to destroy, to destroy. You remember that's exactly what God did if you look at Genesis 7:19. "And the waters prevailed so mightily upon the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered; the waters prevailed above the mountains covering them fifteen cubits deep. And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, birds, cattle, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm upon the earth, and every man; everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the air; they were blotted out from the earth."

The reason was that immediately we began to try to live without trusting our creator to show us why he put us here. The moment we did that, the moment we decided we are not going to trust him to tell us that. We're not going to depend upon him. We're going to depend upon ourselves, that moment we became overwhelmingly fearful. We did loved ones. There was no other way; there was no way, which could have avoided it. Suddenly we realized I'm one of billions of people spinning through space on a sphere that has no visible means of support. This is madness. No wonder we were filled with a neurosis of insecurity and fearfulness. You know immediately that happened, we began to try to deal with our insecurity and we started to grab everything we could as fast as we could. At the same time trying to prevent anybody from knowing that that's what we were doing. So of course we were all doing that.

We were all like fearful neurotic little kids grabbing everything we could, grabbing all the money we could, all the possessions we could and at the same time trying to let nobody else know that we were doing it. So the whole relationships of the whole world were filled with dishonesty and deception and greed and avarice. Actually there wasn't a part of our personalities that was left untainted by that. Really, the theologians call it total depravity. It means, that while there was still a little life from God in the center of our beings, there was not one part of our personalities, not one part of our bodies, not one part of our minds, our emotions, or our wills that were not tainted with selfishness. This great disease that we developed within us once we stopped depending upon God, that's what total depravity means. It means that there isn't one part of you or one part of me that is not touched in some way with selfishness. So our hearts were filled with envy and hatred and anger and violence and resentment and criticism. God looked at that mess and he determined there is only one way to deal with it, "I will destroy it" and that's what he did.

Now is that the gospel? No, it's part of the gospel. The gospel actually begins in that verse that we were reading if you look at it. It's Genesis 7:23. The Bible runs, "He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the air; they were blotted out from the earth." Then the second half of the verse is the beginning of the gospel, "Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark." That's the beginning of the gospel.

It continues in Genesis 9:8, "Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 'Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.' And God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations; I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and

the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.' God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth.'"

That's the gospel. That God determined he would never again destroy us all like that. Why? Because he thought that there was some other way to destroy sin? Loved ones, there is only one way to destroy guilt and that's destroy sin. There is only one way to destroy the sin and that's to destroy the sinner. But God found another way to destroy the sinner. He found a way to free us from our evil hearts that are so desperately wicked and deceitful without destroying us physically. How did he do it? Christ died for us. Christ was the flood. God put our hearts into the flood and destroyed them there. That's it. When he cried out, it was because he had your heart in himself and he was feeling the pain of its destruction. That's it.

You remember the way Paul put it? He said in Galatians 2:20 you remember, "I have been crucified with Christ and this is no longer I that live but Christ that lives within me." That's it. God took your heart and my heart and put it into his son and instead of flooding us out physically as he had done originally, he put us into the flood of Christ and he destroyed our evil deceitful wicked hearts in his son Jesus. That's what baptism meant in the first century. When a person was immersed, that's what the Greek word means, it means to be immersed in Christ. When you were immersed in the water as you went down you realized that you were being cut off from the world that you knew. As far as you were concerned when you were under that water there was no world and you were cut off from it. You were dead. When you came up out of the water, you then were given a Christian name. A new name because you were being raised in Jesus as a new creation and that's what God did instead of sending a flood. He destroyed our evil hearts in Jesus and recreated us with new hearts in his resurrection.

There's an interesting verse, I don't know if you've ever noticed it in Peter that makes that truth clear. It's 1 Peter 3:20. It's talking about what Jesus did when he was raised or between his death and resurrection. Then in verse 20, "to the spirits in prison, who formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this," you see to the ark and the flood "now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Jesus is the flood.

What does God want us to do? Well loved ones, it's Romans 12:1. It's really simple. "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God." To do what? "To present your bodies as a living sacrifice", that's it. As if you had gone to a specialist with some pains in your abdomen and he had diagnosed cancer, cancer throughout the whole of your body. There isn't an organ in your body that is not touched with cancer. So you have at the most six weeks to live. That's what God says about our sin and our selfishness and the evil within us. You know what you say to the doctor. You say, "can you do anything?" He says the only hope is radiation, massive doses of radiation. You know what you say. You say, "what do you want me to do?"

He says you come here, you lie on that table and you allow us to give you massive doses of radiation. You don't cavil. You don't hesitate. You don't debate. You don't say would exercise do it instead? If I eat a little more or take a little more care of myself or if I obey certain rules and

laws, will that do it? Or would it be enough if I just put my arm under the radiation? You know what you do. You present your body. You just say, "whatever you say. Whatever you want, you do. I'm going to be dead in six weeks anyway. If you can do anything for me, you do what you want." That's what God says except that it is a bit more poignant -- his appeal to us -- because Jesus has already borne the radiation. That's it. He has already borne the death destroying rays of God's wrath that were leveled upon you and me in him. When he cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It was because he felt all the destruction of that burning wrath of God destroying your selfish heart in him. So actually Christ has already borne that for you.

That's what that verse you remember in Corinthians means, "God made him to be sin who knew no sin." God made Christ what you are or what you were and then he destroyed that in his own son. So when you plead, well is there some other way? There is a dear person who has already borne the pain for you. Here you are saying, well maybe I don't need to put that arm into the flood. Maybe I don't need to put this mind or this part of my brain or this part of my life into the flood. Maybe I can get away without that part being destroyed. It's pitiful, isn't it?

Hamlet once said, "Oh what a rogue and peasant slave am I" when he saw the agony of an actor over the imagined death of his father and he thought my father is really dead and I feel none of that. Oh what a rogue and peasant slave are we if we stand back now and say is there some way in which I can get away from presenting my body, my whole body, my whole personality, my whole life for God to make this real in me. Well, it's after the fact, isn't it? The dear guy has already died.

He's already borne the pain. Here we are, wanting to know can we hold onto something of what he died to destroy. Present as a sacrifice, that is, to regard yourself, your life in reality as slaughtered, already slaughtered in Jesus. That was the only thing God could do with you or me. That was the only thing we were worth. Slaughtering us. Regard our lives as slaughtered and destroyed so that only the smoke now is rising up to God. That's what it means to present your bodies as a living sacrifice. You put it on there, you say Lord you did this for me. Here I am. You make it real, see the fruits of your work and suffering and be satisfied, wherever you want. Do whatever you want with me. Here I am. I regard myself as already a dead man, already somebody who has been destroyed. I present myself to you and you raise up what you want because radioactivity destroys good cells as well as bad as you probably know. In order to be healed you have to be willing. Lord, you make the judgment. You decide what has to be taken from my life. You decide it. I'm not going to argue. You raise up what you want. That's why it means present your bodies as a living sacrifice. A sacrifice that has already been destroyed and that God will make alive again according to his own best judgment. That's what God wants of us loved ones. That's it.

"Parastaisai" is the verb, present. It is what is called in Greek the aorist, and the aorist is the part of the verb that expresses an instantaneous complete act. That's it, you do it, it's done. That's what it means. To present your bodies means not bit by bit not struggle by struggle, but now you present it. I see what you've done Lord. You've destroyed me in Christ, he is the flood, and here I am. There, that's only reality. Here I am. Make this real in whatever way you please. It's a definite act. That's why for many of us a decision for Christ has been a momentary instantaneous action, you see, that we've done at a service like this. We've just done it because it can be to present; to present your bodies that way is the final admission that there is no other way. That's what it means to actually become a child of God.

It's an admission that everything has to be changed in my life. Not just the things that I see wrong everything. It's an admission that you are willing to let everything be changed. That's what real

repentance is. Real repentance is stating everything has to be destroyed and the whole thing has to be created anew. That's what presenting your body as a living sacrifice is. That's what God requires loved ones. That's what He wants of us. Not our efforts you know. Not our endless attempts at cooperation. Not all our trying but just our recognition that He destroyed us and remade us in His Son. That we've to mirror that and reflect that by presenting ourselves as people who have been destroyed, who only deserve to be destroyed and Lord you raise up in me whatever you want.

That's what God requires of us. A bit like the man who owned an old shack on the edge of town that a developer wanted to buy. The developer came to this man and the man of course thought the shack was worth maybe two thousand dollars at the most and the developer said I'll offer you twenty-five thousand for that. The man was overwhelmed. It was arranged that in a month's time he would move out and the developer would take over.

The man began to think to himself, this is ridiculous giving me twenty-five thousand for this place, it's not worth it. Well, I better take some of that money and at least make it look reasonable and so he began to go down to the hardware stores and he began to buy new windows and new nails and he began to work on the shack. He began to get paint and painted up and all that kind of thing so that in a month's time the shack was really a transformation as far as he was concerned.

Then the developer came that day and the guy of course couldn't make out what he was doing with that massive bulldozer on the road and he said to him, "Look isn't the house beautiful?" and the developer said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah it is thank you. Here's the twenty-five thousand" and the guy said, "What are you going to do with it?" He said, "Oh that bulldozer, I am going to bulldoze it right off the site. I just want the site you see I don't need the house." That's it. God doesn't need your house. He doesn't need your life. He doesn't. You may think - and I mean I think you're lovely -- and I think we're all great. Really it's nothing to God. God doesn't want that.

God has already determined there is nothing I can do with you as you are. I have to destroy you, bulldoze you right off the site and start again. That's what conversion is, you see. That's what faith in Christ's death is. That's what being baptized into Jesus is. That's it. It's a total and absolute admission: Lord I agree with your diagnosis of the problem. My heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. There is only one way to fix me up and that is do what You did in Noah's day, just destroy me absolutely and start again and make me what you want me to be.

That's what God wants from us, loved ones. Now you can do it this morning. I did it one day in Sunday school in Ireland one afternoon. It doesn't require a special evangelistic service. You can do it at this moment. You can and I would suggest that if you've never done that, if you've never given your life to God like that, for Him to do whatever He wants with and to make real in you the mighty destruction and salvation that He worked in you in Jesus. The miracle is already done you see. That's the miracle, it's already done. All you're doing this morning is saying, "Lord, that's what I want. What you have already done in me, that's what I want. Will you begin by your Holy Spirit to make it real from this day forward?" If you say that, honestly, loved ones, and are willing for him to touch whatever needs to be touched in your life, and to burn out whatever of cancer there is there, then this will be the beginning of eternal life for you. It's the beginning of your life. Let us pray.

Dear God, I would ask you to listen to my brothers and sisters as they pray to you. Lord I know you will take us at our word. Thank you. Lord we would give you everything you see needs to be liberated. Everything that you see you have to destroy in Christ, we would give you it all. Now as

you point the things out to us Lord we would not hold back. We would see that everything we give to you will be cleansed and will be made worthwhile and will be able to be used in this life. So Lord, we lay ourselves before you until you do with us what you want. We present our bodies to you as a living sacrifice, as something as far as we are concerned is no longer ours to use but is now done with. We no longer hope for anything from it. It is now burned on the altar. It is something that is finished with. Now Lord you do what you want with it. If you do care to raise any of it up, that is up to you. If you care to make any use of any of it, that is up to you. If meanwhile any happiness or peace should come to us, we'll be grateful but we will not at all demand it. We'll present our bodies as a living sacrifice to you this day and yield them to you forever.

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 ever more. Amen.