

Is Jesus Your Personal Savior?

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

The most important thing we can do for each other this morning is to help each other to get into heaven. Really, that's it. Everything else we do for each other is kind of temporary but the most important thing is that you yourself would get to heaven and so I'd like to spend the half hour trying to help you get to heaven. You might say, "Well, that's silly the way you describe God it's pretty obvious that he's loving and he wants us all to get to heaven, and we're all going to go to heaven. It seems to me that there's no reason why any of us would go anywhere else. I mean, it's pretty obvious that that old hellfire and brimstone stuff is old fashion religion of yesteryear and so we're all going to go to heaven anyway so really you have no great problem this morning."

Well loved ones, there is a problem because the most perfect purist man that ever lived, the one who has given us the most detailed information about our Creator that we human beings possess, he said some things that just blow away that lovey dovey universalist idea that we're all going to end up in heaven any way, whatever we do in this life. And it's very important for us to see that.

The dear man who gave us the best information that we have about the beyond because he, in fact, went into the beyond and came back and told us, "It's what I say. It's all that I told you about my Father." He made it very plain that there is a place other than heaven and it's important for us to see it, you know, just to be honest and intellectually consistent this morning.

So, would you look at Matthew 5:22? Matthew 5:22, they're words of course of Jesus because he is the man that I mentioned. Matthew 5:22, "But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire." And I know we have a tendency to say, "But that was Jesus speaking to the Jews, you know, accommodating himself to the ideas that were then prevalent among them, but he himself always spoke of love and kindness and he did not normally use that kind of language.

Well loved ones, look at what Mark reported in his ninth chapter. Just if you flick over a few pages to Mark 9:43 Mark 9:43, "And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell."

Now, I don't know if you're like me but it was popular in our seminary to say, "Well, hell you know, it's the word Johanna, it really means a garbage dump of some kind, and really it kind of means a kind of purgatory maybe at the worst, you know. A place where you'll go and you'll be purged of the sin that's in you and then it will come to an end and then we'll all end up in heaven. And some of us go through our purgatory here on earth and some of us have to go through it then." Well brothers and sisters, it's just hard you know. Greek scholar, Hebrew scholar, it doesn't matter what you are, you can't get around those words in Mark 9:48. Mark 9:48, "Where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched." Hell, "Where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched."

Actually, we did our best, we modern scholars to get rid of that because you could look at the footnote N at the bottom of the RSV, and do you see it's the third footnote down there N, "Verses 44

and 46 which are identical with Verse 48 are omitted by the best ancient authorities.” So actually, King James Version still has 44 and 46, but we got rid of two of them, but you couldn’t get rid of 48 because 44 and 46 are exactly the same as 48, “Where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.”

So brothers and sisters, you know, let’s keep away from the old general philosophizing, “Well, that isn’t my God, you know. That isn’t a God I know.” Forget it, the God you know is the God that’s presented here. There’s nowhere else to get a God except from the Bible and from Jesus. And the fact is, that our dear Savior who showed such love to the woman caught in adultery said, “Listen, it’s better to cut your hands off than to have two hands to go into hell where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.” And loved ones, we need to see that, you know.

We need to see that hell is not really something that God has created, it’s something that we have created. And this may all sound very strange to us modernists, but do you know that the existentialists John Paul Sartre, one of the most modern thinkers that we have had, he says exactly the same thing. Would you believe it? From his virtually agnostic atheistic position he says exactly the same thing. He says that there is a hell that goes on forever, and ever. You know the existentialists philosophy that Sartre espoused. He said, “What you do day-by-day declares what you are.” He put it this way, he said, “You authentic yourself by your experience.”

In other words, every time you say a word, every time you do an act, you declare who you are. Moreover, you become more what you are. So every time you do something the existentialists say you become more what you really are. And of course Sartre said that the more you do those things and the more you say those things, the more you become a character out of whom there is no exit. And so he wrote a play which he called no exit where he described what he thought eternity was going to be. And he put in one room, those of you who know the play will remember it, he put in one room a lesbian, a card, and a murderer. And they talked for a while and wondered where the torturers were and laughed and joked and then as they began to bicker, and argue, and criticize one another, and tease one another, and joke with one another, and kept on and on, and began to fornicate, and began to criticize, they gradually realized that they were each other’s torturers. And then they looked up at the electric light bulb, one light bulb in the room and they suddenly realized that it would never go off. It would never go out. And they were stuck in that room with these other two people forever and there was no relief. They would continue being what they had become in this life.

There’s an almost nightmarish lines in it you know, the man says, he’s speaking to the person who brought them here, “He says, your eyelids, we move ours up and down, blinking we call it. It’s like a small black shutter that clicks down and makes a break. Everything goes black, one’s eyes are moistened. You can’t imagine how restful refreshing it is 4,000 little rests per hour, 4,000 little respites, just think. So that’s the idea and to live without eyelids. “Don’t act a fool, you know what I mean, no eyelids no sleep. It follows doesn’t it? I shall never sleep again. But then how shall I endure my own company? Try to understand, you see, I’m fond of teasing, it’s a second nature with me and I’m used to teasing myself, plaguing myself if you prefer. I don’t tease nicely but I can’t go on doing that without a break. Down there I had my nights, I slept, I always had good nights by way of compensation I suppose, and happy little dreams. There was a green field, just an ordinary field, I used to stroll in it. Is it daytime now?” “Can’t you see the lights are on?” “Ah yes, I’ve got it it’s your daytime. And outside?” “Outside?” “Damn it you know what I mean beyond that wall there’s a passage, and at the end of the passage there’s more rooms, more passages and stairs.” “And what lays beyond them?” “That’s all.”

But it is interesting isn't it that an agnostic existentialist would actually present the same picture of hell as something that goes on forever, and ever as Jesus has presented to us in this book. And loved ones, that's it hell is not something created by some terrible cruel God. Hell is simply a dear Father giving us free will and allowing us to choose what we want, and giving us even breath, and heartbeat, and blood circulation, and food to eat, and continuing to reign his reign upon us and give us the sunshine even as we exercise our free wills to curse him, and to oppose him, and to destroy him. And hell is a dear Father giving us the free will to continue to choose this, to decide that, until we gradually become the kind of character and person we want to become. And then, at that point the Bible says, "Then comes the judgment. Death and after that the judgment."

Then God does take it as his right to separate those of us who have lived for ourselves and not for him throughout our lives from those of us who have chosen to live for him and not for ourselves. Only at that point does God separate the one from the other. But we determine what we are day-by-day. And so it's happening with us, you know, here. It's happening with you. Every day you're making decisions, decision-by-decision, choice-by-choice, word-by-word, thought-by-thought, act-by-act, you're becoming a certain kind of person out of whom there is no exit. And you will live with that person forever, and ever, and ever. And you may say, "Well, it's unthinkable. It's nightmarish. But I know human nature well enough to realize that we're a self-deceiving crew and I may think I'm alright and yet I may be doing the very thing you say. I may becoming a monster and I don't realize it because we are a self-deceiving group and how do I know? How can I know which way I am going?"

Well loved ones, Jesus did give us the right story on that. He did tell us, he told us what way we were going, and he explained it to his disciples and Paul who was one of his disciples or his apostles you remember, wrote it in a letter to people at Rome and he said this, "All of us, every one of us, all of us, have sinned. Every one of us so stop philosophizing, stop rationalizing, stop wondering whether you're going the right way or not. At this point in such a relativistic business as judging where you are in regard to God, what you need is an object of judgment of some kind." And Jesus said that. Every one of us here in this room have sinned.

Not every one of us are criminals. Many of us haven't committed any crimes. Not every one of us are immoral. Many of us are not immoral. Not every one of us have filled our lives with vices. Many of us have few vices, no crimes, very few immoralities. But what Jesus is saying is every one of us have sinned. That is in the normal sense of the word sinned. James 4:17 says, "Whosoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it for him it is sin." That is sin. And Jesus says every one of us in this room has known what was right to do at some point in our lives and has not done it. And you see the first time you or I ever did that we were setting ourselves up against God.

See, I know the way you think, you think the way I think. I think, "Wait a minute, one little thing, doing one little thing wrong, that's not bad. Why if I do one little thing that I know is wrong, that's not a biggie. All of us are like that, we're all in the same boat. We all do lots of things that are wrong." But do you see that's the blindness of sin? These three dear people ended up in this room with the electric light bulb in it and they couldn't understand why they got there. They'd never done anything wrong they thought. And that's the subtlety of sin, it is a blinding thing loved ones.

It makes us feel, "It's no big thing to do once what you know is wrong. It's no big thing." But that sin comes in and it blinds you, and it prevents you from seeing that when you choose that one little thing that you knew God didn't want you to do, you actually elevated your will above his.

You did loved ones, you know. There's no way around that. I mean you and I can play it down and make it a small thing, but you know that's what we did. We actually said, "My will is more important to me at this time than the will of the maker of the whole universe." We elevated our judgment above his. We did. I mean, actually isn't it true to say we said we are going to be God in this situation. We're going to decide this is right for us. And at that moment, a whole vast ocean of greyness and mist came between you and your God. That's it.

You husbands and wives, or you know mums and dads, or sons and daughter, you know how at home you suddenly discover after weeks, and months, that you don't even know the other person, you know that? You know how it starts off with a little niggly things and you just get a little distant, a little more distant, a little more distant, and whether it's your dad, or your mum, or your husband, or your wife, or your son, or your daughter, suddenly you get down the line about six months or a year and you realize, "I'm miles from this person. I don't even know the way they think. I don't know the way they think. I don't even feel what they are feeling." And the other person is saying to you, "But you don't understand me. You don't know what I am thinking. You don't feel the way I feel." And suddenly you realize, "Yeah, that's right I don't. Yeah, we are we're miles apart. I don't know what's happened but we are."

Now that's what it is loved ones. That's the little sin, the little doing something wrong, that begins the huge separation that begins to open between you and God. That's why Jesus said through Paul, "The wages of sin is death," you see. Not kind of something, you do something and the great God clunks you and kills you. Not that. But as you disagree with him, as you do what you think again, and again, little decision by little decision, little choice by little choice, gradually death comes about and great separation opens up between you and your God until you no longer feel with his heart. You no longer sense the pain that you're inflicting on him by your running your own life whatever way you want.

Until you get more and more insensitive to him to the point where you can no longer sense his presence in your life at all and that's the beginning of hell. That's the beginning of hell in your life. And whether it's Sartre or whether it's Jesus Christ, what you are is what you will be. You will continue to be that forever, and ever, and ever. So loved ones, it applies, you know, if you have an unclean mind you'll live in that garbage for the rest of eternity. If you have a resentful heart that resents people, and criticizes people, you'll live in that for the rest of eternity. You'll live in that. If you are one who is always looking out for yourself, whatever it costs anybody else, that's what you will be for the rest of eternity. And so will all the other people around you be doing the same thing.

Now that's our situation, you see. The worse thing about sins are not the sins, the outward acts, and the words, and the thoughts, the worse thing about the sins is the sin inside. That's the plague. That's the plague. That emptiness in your heart, that feeling I can't quite get through to God, I can't quite know where he is, I can't sense what he wants. That's the plague, that's the tragedy. The sins, you can sometimes stop them, you can sometimes avoid them but the sin is the personality that you are becoming day-by-day that cannot change.

Now the gospel is that God took your personality as it is with all those unchangeable traits of yours and asked his Son to take it through the experience of hell and the destruction of hell. And when he came out the other side, because of his own righteousness, God asked him to recreate you fresh and new. And that's what was done and that's the only way to be changed, and that's the only way to heaven. And it's all meaningless to you if you have never thanked Jesus for that. He is

your personal Savior, in that you contributed something to the pain and agony of hell in his heart that none of the rest of us did.

Some of that agony that he bore was for you, wasn't for me, wasn't for any the rest of us in the room. There's something of his death that you contributed pain to that none of the rest of us did. There's a piece of his sin that you bore that he didn't bear for any of the rest of us. He is your personal Savior but it's meaningless and you'll be untouched by it, and you'll go to hell unless you thank him personally for what he has done for you. That's it.

Unless you go to him this morning and say, "Jesus, I have things in my life that will take me into hell in this life and hell hereafter. Lord, thank you that you bore these things for me. I confess them, I want rid of them Lord." And you confess those sins whatever they are. And then you turn to him and well, I needn't tell you, what do you tell you don't need instruction you either believe this, if you believe it you know what to do. You know there's only one thing you can say to him, "Jesus that's what I would have had to go through except I wouldn't have come out the other side. I'd be living forever in a hell burning against myself, and selfishness, and resentment. Lord Jesus, thank you. I turn from this mess. I turn from it this day and I turn to you and Jesus, I ask you to come in and now live your life again inside me."

That's how you make him your personal Savior, you see. Because the moment you acknowledge that he has done what he has done then there's a bridge built between you and he begins to be able to get through to you, and you begin to receive words from beyond, and messages from your God. And you begin slowly to build again a sensitive relationship between you and your dear Creator that was his intention for you from the beginning.

So I'd just ask you, is Jesus your personal Savior? Is Jesus your personal Savior? Have you acknowledged him personally? He already knows you intimately because he has born every one of your sins in his own heart and born the pain for them. Have you acknowledged him. Have you made a friendship with Jesus? That's what it means loved ones, to be a Christian. It's a personal relationship with Jesus who has born the unbearable for you. Let us pray.

Dear Jesus, we would thank you for going to hell for us. And Jesus, we see it goes beyond us here if we don't thank you and confess to you the things that we know you died for in our lives. Savior, we'd confess them to you personally and we'd repent of them personally to you. Jesus, we're sorry that we caused your death. We're sorry that the dirt, and the monstrosity that we have created within ourselves brought about your agony and pain. Jesus, we apologize and we repent. And Jesus Christ, we ask you now to acknowledge us as we acknowledge you and Jesus, will you take over our lives now?

Give us your spirit, and enable us now to live free from this personality that we have been forming down through the years. Jesus, we believe that it was changed, we believe that you destroyed it in yourself, and Savior, we ask you now to come into our hearts and to take over our lives, and to live your life in us from this day forward so that we may live no longer for ourselves, but for you and for our dear Father in heaven. And oh Lord God, we ask you to save us from the hell that we have created and that we have made necessary by all of our self deification.

Savior, we thank you, thank you, thank you that there is heaven and thank you that we can be there today with you and we can live there forever. Thank you Lord. 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.

