

Jesus Died for You at Your Worst

Romans 5:6

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

I think many of us have felt that our parents have dealt with us unfairly or that we haven't had a fair chance in this world because of the terrible parents we've been given. I think first of all it's important to share with you that I wish we really would all stop that kind of self-pitying attitude.

Brothers and sisters, none of us are perfect and none of us will be perfect parents. We ought to see for a start that all of us are in more or less the same boat. We've all had parents that have not been perfect saints every moment of their days. What I want to use is that kind of example just to begin thinking today about the verse we'll be studying.

If you feel that your parents have treated you unfairly, or you just had an unfair deal in this world because of the kind of parents you had or you haven't got, you know that often you can begin to bear a grudge and be resentful against them. I think the psychiatrists are right when they tell us that often these grudges run very deep in people's hearts. Often people destroy their own families because of this resentment and this grudge that they still feel towards their own parents.

Now, you know that if you're in that situation where your parents have treated you unfairly or have somehow dealt with you in a way that you think was wrong, you know when you feel that grudge and resentment inside. There are two opposing factors inside you operating at this time. One is the conscience. The conscience keeps on saying, "Listen, you ought not to feel this way. You ought not to be so petty over this kind of thing." And you know that there is in you a sense of guilt that spreads death in your own personality and spreads death in your relationship with your parents. There is something inside you that says, "No, you shouldn't be acting this way. Even though you feel this grudge, this somehow isn't right."

So there is something inside you that gives you a sense of guilt even though you feel in many ways this grudge very strongly in your heart. Then on the other side, there is a sense inside your will where you feel, "Well, I have every right to do this." There is defiance inside you that says, "No, they treated me this way, this is the way I ought to treat them." At times the feeling is so strong that it bursts out and is uncontrollable. You'll go home to visit your parents and be loving and kind to them but this thing inside you will burst out from the inside and will fill you with bitterness and coldness. You'll want to love your mother with all your heart but there will be a coldness and you hold back.

Now brothers and sisters, I think it might help if we see that all of us have come into that kind of experience. You're not alone in it. All of us have found that there is something inside us that seems to condemn our action. There's a conscience inside us that makes us feel we're wrong and yet there's another thing inside us, our own strong will that is defiant and that tries to justify it. You know with the first guilt, it doesn't matter what you do, you can't do anything with it. You try to rationalize it away as a kind of adolescence hangover.

You try to say, "Oh no, everybody feels a certain amount of this towards their parents and so I can feel it too." You try to rationalize away the guilt but it still stays. Some of us try to work it

out. We try to be kinder to our parents in other ways. Those of us who have some money from our job, try to give them presents. The bitterness still stays inside us but we try to give them presents to work over the guilt. We try to justify and make up for it.

Some of us try to be good parents ourselves. We decide, "I feel this towards my parents and I know it's wrong but I am going to be a good parent myself." We try to rationalize and work away the guilt. It's no use because your conscience keeps on reminding you that you've broken the fifth commandment of the Father in heaven. "Honor your father and your mother that your days may be long in the land which the Lord, your God gives you." Your own conscience keeps on reminding you, "You've broken God's law and God has committed himself to breaking you and to condemning you to death for that defiance against his will."

You just know it's impossible for you to get rid of that guilt unless somehow someone bears that death penalty for you and takes away the condemnation -- unless somebody enables God to receive you despite that thing that you've done. That's really why Jesus called out on the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me"? The answer to it is, "I have forsaken you because of the sins you bear in your own conscience that all the other men and women in my world have committed against Me. You are experiencing being forsaken from me, and eternal death and separation from me for their sake." If we begin to see that Jesus has borne that penalty for us, then we are justified in being allowed to live. Otherwise we really feel we're strangers in the world. We feel we have no right to be alive and we still keep trying to punish ourselves.

But when we see that Jesus has died that death for us then we feel justified in remaining alive. We see that God is justified in allowing us to remain alive. That's because already he has condemned someone for that sin. That's the experience of justification and that's what we need if we're to become children of God. That's what we need if we're to have that guilt dealt with in our consciences. But most of us, even after we've had the guilt dealt with in our consciences, even though we've had our sins forgiven, even though we've been born of the Spirit and have become children of God, most of us still have trouble with that independent defiant will inside. I think that's true.

Many of us go home as Christians. We know our guilt has been forgiven. We know we were wrong in the attitude we took towards our parents and yet we find something inside us continuing to break out against them. At a time when our father needs real gentleness and real love, we break out against him with sarcasm or with criticism. At a time when our mom needs real fellowship, company and understanding, we wipe out against her with some kind of caustic comment that hurts. Most of us find that still we have the problem of the independent will.

Most of us have found as Christians that we're clear of the guilt but that independent will is still there and it will not let us be like Jesus even if we want to be. We find we want to be like him but we cannot because of this strong defiant self-assertiveness inside. This self-deification continues to put God in the background of our lives and makes us more and more incapable of obeying him.

Now we begin to see that what we need is not just justification but what we need is to be changed inside in our attitudes, our motives, our reactions and our desires. What we need really is sanctification. That's what we've begun to discuss over the past few Sundays. There is a need for sons and daughters of God -- not only to be justified, not only to know that God accepts them because of Jesus' death -- but to be actually sanctified. We are to be made more and more like Jesus inside so that we will act like Christians and not only simply believe like Christians.

Now brothers and sisters, that explains the plan that God gave to Paul in the book of Romans. In the first four chapters he deals with justification and in the second four chapters he deals with sanctification. Maybe you'd like to look at that now if you turn to Romans chapter 1. The first four chapters of Romans deals with justification -- the need for us to be justified in God's eyes by God himself, by some arrangement he has made rather than trying to justify ourselves in his eyes.

You see Romans 1:28 deals with the predicament that we were in because we ignored God. Since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct. The whole of Romans chapter 1 deals with that -- i.e. the predicament that men have got into by living independent of God. Then chapter 2 deals with the fact that we know we rebelled against him. It's not something we're ignorant about.

Romans 2:15 for instance. "They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them." God deals with the truth that we know we have rebelled against him.

Chapter 3 deals with the fact that God justifies us because of our faith in Jesus' death and you get that there in Romans 3:24. "They are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."

Then chapter 4 deals with the fact that our faith is regarded by God as righteousness. We always think that we have to try to be righteous or moral for God to think well of us. But the fact is he counts our faith in Jesus' death for us as righteousness. You get that in Romans 4:22. "That is why his faith was reckoned to him as righteousness."

Then you see Paul changes to the great result in our lives of justification. In chapters 5,6,7 and 8, Paul begins to talk about sanctification. If you don't want to hear anything about sanctification, you shouldn't come to the theater for the next five years because it'll probably take us that long to get through the chapters. But chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 of Romans deal with the results of justification in our lives today.

You see that's why the church has so often failed before the world. It has not allowed God to change its life and its heart. So often it has stood in a place of justification but it has not allowed itself to be sanctified. So often we Christians have said, "Oh, we're accepted by God because of Jesus' death", but we have not allowed our lives to be changed. Our friends at school and our friends at work and our neighbors in the street see no change in us. And it's because there has been no change in us that they do not believe in God.

Chapter 5 deals with our reconciliation with God. You see it there in verse 1. "We have peace with God." Then chapter 6 deals with our freedom from sin, where God frees us from the power of sin. Chapter 7 deals with freedom from the law. So many of us live under the law even if it's the law of Freud or the law of our parents or the law of good social behavior. There are so many of us that live under laws and regulations. Then in chapter 8 it's the description of the life in the Spirit that results after we're justified.

Now brothers and sisters, those four chapters are summarized in chapter 5 verses 1-5. Those four chapters are all summarized in the first five verses of chapter 5. For instance our reconciliation with God is stated in the verse 1, "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." That's

one of the effects of being justified in God's eyes, we have real peace.

Then you see the result of this is a beautiful natural experience. I think we have to see that. Becoming like God is a beautiful natural consequence of justification and it is a lovely and a spontaneous and a joyous experience. That is described clearly for us there in those first five verses. For instance, look at verse 2. Romans 5:2: "Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God."

In other words, becoming like Jesus is not a grinding, working, striving business. It's a thing that you rejoice about. In fact the Greek is the subjunctive mood, and it means "let us rejoice". Let us rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. So, sanctification for a Christian is a joyous experience. It isn't a striving, straining one.

It goes on in Romans 5:3: "More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings." Even the trials that God allows to come to us to expose our own waywardness and our own inadequacies, even those we rejoice in. In fact the Greek mood is again subjunctive and it says, "let us rejoice in our sufferings". So you see that it is a joyous thing.

Then we see in verse 4 that these inadequacies within us eventually drive us to the only source of real hope which is Jesus. Romans 5:4, "and endurance produces character, and character produces hope." Then in verse 5 the answer to all our yearning and our hoping is the Holy Spirit. God's love is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.

Sanctification is a joyous thing. For most of us that isn't so. For most of us we give our lives to Jesus at the beginning and we receive him into our hearts. It's just a delight to serve him and to love him. For the first weeks the Bible study is great and the prayer is easy. We love to be with our Savior and witnessing is spontaneous. We love to talk about him and it's easy because he's changed our whole life. We walk like that for two or three weeks or two or three months. But then we begin to find a will within us that does not want to bend towards him.

He tells us to speak to somebody about himself and we begin to feel a fear that they will think the wrong thing about us. He tells us to witness at work and we begin to feel a fear that they will think we're wild, fanatical fundamentalists. We begin to hold back. He tells us to get up early one morning and we say, "Oh, just another few minutes in bed." We begin to negotiate our surrenders to Jesus and bit-by-bit we begin to discover a lion inside us that is growing stronger and stronger.

We want to do what Jesus wanted us to do and it was easy at the beginning of our lives but now it seems hard. We don't want to lose our temper but we lose our temper. We don't want to think unclean thoughts but we find ourselves thinking unclean thoughts. Then we make an effort to overcome these unclean thoughts. We pray about it for a number of weeks and we get victory over the unclean thoughts. Then the jealousy comes in and we start working on the jealousy. Then the unclean thoughts come up again when we work over the jealousy. Gradually we find that we're beset on all sides with strong desires and feelings in our hearts that are against God.

Now brothers and sisters I'm afraid most of us do not walk into sanctification in a glorious rejoicing way. At that point in our lives, many of us look into ourselves after years as Christians. We find that we're hypocrites. We have a double life. We have a life inside that is not like Jesus at all. And outside we're professing what we don't possess. Many of us at that point begin to look inside and say, "I can't be a child of God. Look what I feel." Then we look at a verse like

Galatians 5:19. We see ourselves described there and not at all as described in verse 22. The spirit has love and joy and peace and patience and kindness.

Galatians 5:19-21: "Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." We say, "That is what I'm like. I get angry at times and certainly I have envy, and I get jealous. In fact these things are so great and strong inside me that they're tearing me apart. I cannot be a child of God the way I am." So we look inside, we see the mess there and we say, "God cannot possibly accept me."

Now loved ones, that's how many of us try to tackle sanctification. Do you see the answer to that mess? The answer to that mess is your answer to this question. How good were you when Jesus died for you? Did you have no envy? Did you have no jealousy? Did you have no anger? Do you see that Jesus died for you when you weren't even trying to be like him? Jesus died for you when you were an absolute rebel. He won't cease to die for you because you've become a little more like him yet there's still a lot of uncleanness and satanic work inside you.

Many of us lose our sense of our justification before God because we look inside to see how well sanctification is going. If you look inside to see if you look like a child of God then you're trying to save yourself by your works. And you remember Romans says, "No man will be justified by works of law." So it wouldn't matter if you looked inside and saw yourself perfectly sanctified. You still wouldn't be acceptable to God. Sin is not a quantitative thing that if I have that much of it I need Jesus to die for me, but if I have only that much, I can make it on my own.

Sin is a qualitative thing. It's an inborn, independence and rebellion against God that made it necessary for him to condemn the whole world to death -- unless someone died that death for the world. Now you see Jesus died for you when you were a sinner. He still dies for you more especially as you're now beginning to want to enter into real sanctification. But the tragedy with many of us is that we try to start entering into sanctification and God begins to bring conviction of inward sin upon us. Then we start looking in and being preoccupied with our defeats and our inward sin. We do this instead of seeing that the only basis of our acceptance with God is Jesus' death for us -- not our sinlessness and not our sanctification.

Brothers and sisters, unless you retain an assurance that you're accepted by God whatever you're like, God cannot continue to work in you to sanctify you. That's the importance of this verse today and it's why Paul goes back to it in Romans 5:6. You can see that God has taught us how to see the connection between justification and sanctification by guiding Paul to write of it in this order. He finishes in the first five verses of Romans 5 telling us the kind of thing that God is going to try to do in us.

Then he says in Romans 5:6, "While we were yet helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly." Brothers and sisters, even though you have envy and jealousy in your heart, do you see Christ died for you when you were far worse than that? In fact, the Greek word is repeated twice, it's a word called "eti" and it means "still". A more correct translation would be "still even at that time", at that very time when we were incapable of doing anything to help ourselves, at that time Jesus died for us.

Jesus died for you when you were utterly unclean, when there was not even the beginnings of

sanctification inside you. Jesus died for you not because you were beginning to move towards his Father but because he loved you with all his heart. You see even the word that is used in that verse is not “unrighteous people who know what the standard of the law is but fail to live up to it”. It's not even for unrighteous people that Jesus died. The word there is the word that means ungodly. Jesus died for the ungodly.

So even when you were incapable of doing anything to save yourself or make yourself right with God, Jesus died for you and made it right for you. How much more is his death still effectual for you now as you are beginning to receive a new conviction of sin within? Do you see that this is why so many churches have turned against sanctification and have said it's responsible for neurotic introspection, it's responsible for a teaching of perfectionism that is not possible? For so many of us, as God has begun to deal with us in a deeper way about the inward sin, we've changed the ground of our justification. We've changed it from belief in Jesus' death to the attitude within ourselves.

Do you see there's a subtle pride there? We only begin to look inside of ourselves for some justification for God's accepting us because we really think there is still some good inside us. That's really why we lose the sense of our acceptance with God -- because we've looked inside and we're starting to hope that there's something good inside us.

Now brothers and sisters, a joyful, safe and victorious entrance into sanctification depends on our right attitude to two verses. I'll show you the two verses. One is Romans 7:18: “For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it.” While we have that attitude to ourselves then do you see we can go to only one place for our acceptance with God and that is Romans 5:9? It says, “Since therefore we are now justified by his blood.”

A right attitude involves a real belief in Romans 7:18. While you have no doubt that there is nothing good dwelling in you and nothing good that can persuade God to accept you as his own, you're driven to look to Jesus' blood and to say, “That's the only ground on which you can possibly accept me, Father.” But when you begin to doubt Romans 7:18, when you begin to think, “Yes, maybe there is something good inside me. God can look in and see how well I am doing -- victorious in sanctification”, then you begin to doubt Romans 5:9.

I remember a letter that a dear one wrote in this week's “Decision” magazine. She's just become a child of God and it says, “Dear God, I thank you for forgiving me my sins. I hope to walk in a way that makes me worthy of your salvation.” Do you see we can never become worthy of God's salvation. The entrance into sanctification depends on us hanging on to the fact that the only reason God accepts us is because of Jesus' death.

Jesus dies only for sinners. Jesus can't die for people who think they're saintly. God expects you to become saintly but he expects you all the time to have the attitude of Paul, “I am the greatest of all sinners.” You will be receiving more and more conviction of inward sin within you so that you will yearn and cleave all the more to Jesus and to his Spirit. It's a paradox to Christian life.

God expects you to enter into Christ likeness but he expects you inside yourself to see that none of that can come from you yourself. Jesus only dies for sinners. That's emphasized throughout the New Testament. But if you look at Matthew 9:13, there's a clear statement of it there. It is good for us to believe this fully as the Holy Spirit begins to convict us of sins like anger and jealousy. It's good to see that our acceptance with God depends on Jesus' blood.

Matthew 9:13, "Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." Jesus died for you when you had only sin in your life. He is still in the business of dying for that kind of person. You remember what it said in the verse that we read in the New Testament lesson, it's Luke 7:47 and it's the same truth.

Luke 7:47, "Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." It is God's will that each time the Holy Spirit brings us an awareness that we are not like Jesus, it is the Holy Spirit's will that we should immediately look to Jesus and thank God that he accepts us because of Jesus. Then allow the Holy Spirit to begin to deal with that spirit within. That is God's plan for us.

He wants us to walk joyfully into sanctification, not looking in and saying, "Oh, I failed again. I'll never be like Jesus." You should say that but then say, "That's right. I never will be like Jesus. I can never be like Jesus. I of myself can do no good thing. Father, I thank you that you accept me because of Jesus' death. Holy Spirit, I trust you to come in and fill me completely; be like Jesus yourself inside me."

That is the attitude God wants us to have. We are to remember constantly that Jesus died for us while we were yet sinners. At a time when we were absolutely ungodly, Jesus died for us. It's not because we looked as if we might be godly. It's not because we weren't as ungodly as the rest but because he loves us.

Jesus died for you because he loves you not because you looked as if you might be useful to the Father. It's not because you looked as if you might become a saintly person. It's not because you were trying hard. Jesus died for you because he loved you and he still loves you today. He is still willing to offer his blood to his Father on your behalf. He will do that as long as you're repentant enough to offer that blood.

When you start offering your own degree of sanctification to God and ask him to accept you because of your own worthiness then you'll begin to doubt. The ground will begin to rock and shake underneath you. Loved ones, do you see that it is the Father's will that we should walk joyously into this. I agree with you, it's a paradox.

The Holy Spirit wants to smack you right down every time you get angry. He wants to cut you right down every time you get jealous and bring it home to your heart that you are still on the throne of your own life. But he wants you at the same time to offer to Satan's accusation not a kind of self-justification, "Well, I am better than I was last week," or "I'll pray my way through this if you give me a couple of months." Rather we should say, "Father, I thank you that you accept me because of Jesus' death. I am justified by his blood whatever I am like inside. Holy Spirit, will you continue to cut me down until you cut all this out of me and you put me completely on the Cross with Jesus."

I am so anxious that you'll all begin to walk in this way. Because you know, I know, and our generation knows that what has put people off Jesus is Christians. That's what has put people off Jesus. It's so often because we have not gone into this Cross-experience with Jesus. We haven't gone into it because we've allowed the new conviction of sin to shatter our old confidence in Jesus' blood.

Now it shouldn't shatter it. It should emphasize it and stress it more and more. Every time the Holy Spirit shows me something of myself that is there I just thank God all the more for Jesus' blood. And that's what he wants. He wants us to walk that way so that we walk in continual peace, yet in a new conviction of sin each day so that we are really growing into his grace.

I pray that the Holy Spirit will show you it because I know it's difficult to understand. I pray that the Holy Spirit will interpret it to each of you. If you have questions, will you ask me? Or maybe it's better even to begin reading a book like "The Normal Christian Life" by Watchman Nee -- a book that would really begin to explain this to you. It is time brothers and sisters that we began to go on into sanctification as a body. Let us pray.