

## Condemned or Justified?

Romans 5:16

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Would you support the death penalty? You remember during the elections they asked California to vote on the death penalty. I think at a ratio of 2:1 they demanded the death penalty. The nation really is split on the whole issue. I think there are 35 states that are required to rule on the Supreme Court's decision about the death penalty and perhaps 17 states have agreed with the Supreme Court that the death penalty is unconstitutional. But there are still about 18 states that have not made any decision. Some of them, like California, seem to be going in the other direction.

You know if we were to ask each of us here in the theater, we would differ very much. That's because Christians have finite minds. Some of them will interpret God's way one way and some of them another. Some of us will say, "Well, punishment should be remedial and therefore the death penalty is not right." Or some of us will say, "But punishment needs to be retributive and therefore the death penalty is right."

I think, whether we differ on the death penalty or not, we'd all agree on this: that it is a shame to inflict uncertainty like that on about 607 men on death row. We would agree upon that. It's terrible to keep men hanging, not knowing whether they're going to be executed or not, month after month after month. And yet do you see that it's that position that most of the world lives in itself?

Most of the world and most of the people in it have a sense that something terrible is going to happen to them. They're very unsure about whether they'll escape it or not. Most of the world really feels that it is condemned. People will try to laugh it off and pretend it isn't true but most people live under this terrible threat of condemnation or final execution. And this, dear ones, is the source of all our ills. It really is.

It's the source of all the neurotic behavior in the world. It's the source of all our lack of full, complete joy. This terrible uncertainty we have that something is wrong in the world and something bad is going to happen to it and to us too. You can see it right throughout the world of nature.

Lake Superior looks beautiful from the scenic drive. But the mud, the dirt and the destruction that came with the floods this year plus all the heartache that was caused by them reminded us that water can look very beautiful but like many things in our natural world, it has not been tamed. It can destroy. We see beauty in one part of nature but we see something wrong in the other part. We see a terrible trauma in nature that suggests that something is wrong in the world and that in some way it must be a world condemned.

Probably here in the States, we have more control of nature than any other nation. Yet you know there's no news forecast that goes by but we hear reports of flooding, hurricanes or tornados. We've done our very best to tame nature, to bring it into order and to make it a world that is good and happy. Yet there seems to be something in nature that brings about this trauma and strain that suggests to us that all is not as right as we think it is.

There are beautiful parts in the world. But there are also parts that are ugly and make us feel that

somehow the world is out of control and that's in the States here. If you go to the rest of the world, they're in no doubt. The rest of the world is in no doubt that we live in a sick world. If you go to India or Africa, they've never had a rainy season that hasn't flooded thousands out of their homes and destroyed thousands of their cattle. They've never had a dry season when the drought has not dried up the lives of many of their babies.

If you go anywhere in the world, you'll find that people in the world generally say, "Yes, there's something wrong with our world, that's obvious." Bombay and Calcutta have streets filled with people who live and sleep in the streets because the natural resources have never been sufficient to provide enough life for every man and woman in those countries. People there will have no doubt about it. They'll say, "Yes, there are beautiful things in our world but there's something wrong with it." Of course many of them will say, "There's no doubt in our minds that the displeasure of the gods is upon this world, otherwise why this?"

Of course brothers and sisters, we live in the midst of the San Andreas Fault. That's an outstanding example of the dolce vita being lived in the midst of what geologists say is going to be a tremendous disaster that's going to come upon us. It seems you have that combination. Many of us will say, "Oh no brother, the world is a beautiful place." Yes, but brothers and sisters, all around the world you can see that it is a world that is not at home with itself. There is a strain inside it that is filled with trauma, and seems to have the gods' displeasure upon it in many ways.

Now that's really what Paul says in Romans 8:22. If you look at it, it might help you to see the thinking that God has presented in the Bible as a whole and where the verses fit in.

Romans 8:22; "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now." And that's what God means when he says that through Paul. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now. There are actually parts of the world where you can almost hear the groaning, the crunching of the rocks and the falling apart of the tremendous pressures that are in it.

Now here's the strange thing. There isn't one primitive people in the whole world who do not tie this trauma that the world experiences to man's behavior. There isn't. There isn't a primitive people, however uneducated they are, however unsophisticated they are, that doesn't say, "This is coming upon the world because of us men and us women and the way we have acted." Whether you say they're right or wrong, they make sacrifices of all kinds to try to appease the gods that are obviously angry with them and trying to destroy their crops with storms and earthquakes.

All primitive people believe that the groaning of the natural creation is in some way tied to the way we men and women have behaved towards the Creator. We may say that's ridiculous. But even in our sophisticated western civilization we believe the same thing. We ourselves are at the moment involved in trying to do something about the way we're polluting our world. We tie much of the lung disease and much of the ill health and much of the problems we have with our food now to the way we men and women have polluted our natural world.

There's never a forecast that we don't come out now with a pollution index. Obviously we believe in some way that our behavior is almost about to destroy our world. We too, even though we are not primitive tribes and don't try to appease the gods, we do see that our behavior reacts upon our natural world. That's why we have arguments over supersonic airliners. We are now concerned about the worth of getting a person across the Atlantic in three and a half hours if it's going to cause

all the trauma and pain here to the people on the surface of the earth.

The Rand Corporation has come out with a report in California. They said that if they don't cut their electricity consumption by 60 percent over the next 25 years, there'll be tremendous electrical shortages in California. We're beginning to see that the way we men and women behave reacts upon the world itself. In some way, brothers and sisters, we are bound up with the world. That's what I mean by many of us feeling, "We're condemned with the world."

There are many men and women today who say, "Yes, you're right. That's the way the world's going. The world is condemned and we're condemned with it." There are many of us that live under that kind of pain and hopelessness as the years pass. Now it runs through all our literature. We no longer have that sort of bright eyed, open-eyed optimism. We no longer have that kind of naïveté that this is going to be a wonderful world. We had it but we gave that up 30 years ago.

No longer do we say with Swinburne, "Glory to man in the highest for man is the master of things." No longer do we feel man is the master of things. Our particular generation looks just a little sceptically even on the idea of the American dream. We no longer have that kind of happy-go-lucky naïve optimism that it's all going to be wonderful. Through our life and through our literature there runs the same kind of consciousness that we're a world condemned.

You know there's the loneliness of the condemned man on death row. And there's that about our lives today. Tennessee Williams said in the preface to "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof", "We all have been condemned to solitary confinement within our own skins." What he has said in writing, you and I have often felt.

It is true, isn't it, that as we squeeze together in cities to be closer to each other, we've locked more and more doors against each other. It's strange that we're a people that act like condemned people. We have the loneliness of condemned people. We part from each other like condemned people. We are alienated from one another like condemned people. It runs through even people like H.G. Wells.

He was really the prophet of that optimism at the beginning of the century. Wells was a man who believed the world was going to be perfect some day until near the end of his life when he wrote "The Fate of Homo Sapiens". He wrote this, "But quite apart from any bodily depression, the spectacle of evil in the world - the wanton destruction of homes, the ruthless hounding of decent folk into exile, the bombings of open cities, the cold-blooded massacres and mutilations of children and defenseless gentle folk, the rapes and filthy humiliations, and above all, the return of deliberate and organized torture, mental torment and fear, to a world from which such things had seemed well-nigh banished has come near to breaking my spirit altogether." That's the kind of atmosphere whether you're a Christian or not, that runs through our literature today.

Our philosophers share that same terrible hopelessness. Every psychologist knows that if he writes a book about psychology, he has to deal with the one great mark of a condemned world, guilt. That's what fills our psych wards today, people who have tremendous guilt that they can't get rid of. Guilt is so persistent that after electric shocks have worn off, the guilt still comes back. When the division between the memory and the conscience has been at last restored after the shock has worn off, the guilt is so persistent it comes back.

So whether you go to philosophers or psychologists, they all agree on that same thing. Winston

Churchill you remember talked to Billy Graham near the end of Churchill's life. He said, "Well, do you see any hope?" Billy Graham, of course, talked about Jesus. Churchill said, "Well, if that's the hope, that's the only hope because I see no hope. I see nothing but hopelessness and despair in international politics for the rest of our century."

Manow in France did the same thing. I heard him on a TV program in London, and he said, "Well, if there is no hope, there is no hope." That is the decision of even the foremost of our scientists. You get the same thing from Bertrand Russell. "All we can do is take up a position of unyielding despair."

Now that really is the situation if you live in this world without any other message. Why I shared it all with you today is that it seems to me there's a reason for it all. You see it in Romans 8:20 where that's indicated.

Romans 8:20; "For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope." You see what God tries to tell us? "I have subjected the creation to this kind of futility as a result of your actions and your independence of me. I have subjected it in hope." Now what's the hope? Well, brothers and sisters the hope is that we would see where Adam led us in rejecting the Holy Spirit of God's uncreated life.

God is hoping that you and I will look around this creation and see there's something rotten in this whole setup. We've missed something and God wants us to see that this is what happens when you live independent of his uncreated life. When you reject the Holy Spirit that was available in the tree of life, this is where it takes us. It takes us east of Eden. It takes us into all the marks of condemnation. Do you see what God is saying to us this morning?

The world itself cannot turn back. It's going on down. Even the Second Law of Thermodynamics says that every process has a tendency to run down. The world is going that way and you can't turn it back. But God has said, "You, each one individually, I do not condemn. That's because my Son has been condemned in your place. And you, each one individually, I am ready to deal with apart from this world. The world -- yes I have condemned it. But I condemned it so that you would see your own perilous state. You -- each one individually, I don't condemn you this morning. My Son was condemned in your place for all your independence and rebellion against me. I condemned my Son. You, I am willing to receive as if you had never sinned, if you will come and trust me." Loved ones, do you see each of us here this morning will not experience eternal death because we have been condemned with the rest of the world, we won't.

You and I are not condemned with the rest of the world. If we experience eternal death, it will be because you individually have refused to receive God's Holy Spirit. You'll die because of the lack of the eternal Holy Spirit. You won't die because God is out to condemn you this morning. You won't die because he is condemning you at this moment. In other words, you won't die because you're condemned. You'll die because you haven't taken this opportunity to receive his Holy Spirit into you.

So brothers and sisters, that's what it means if you look at Romans 5:16.

Romans 5:16; "And the free gift is not like the effect of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation." And that's what the world experiences at this moment. "But the free gift following many trespasses brings justification." But the free gift to bring justification in your own life has to be received. That's the heart of it.

You can agree with all that I said this morning, because it's pretty logical. You couldn't go much any other way in interpreting reality as we see it in the world today. But you could listen to it all and agree to it. Do you see that you are not justified until you actually take the step and receive this free gift of the Holy Spirit for yourself?

In other words, you are back in Adam's position. You're in the position that Adam was in. The Father is saying to you, "Look, I can give you my uncreated life of the Holy Spirit that will enable you to be like me. It's your choice. Will you take it or will you not?" Really that's the only thing that will bring you into eternal death and alienation from God -- your refusal of that gift. But you can see how important it is, loved ones, to be able to look at this miserable world and see that you are not condemned along with it. The real reason God has allowed this to take place in our world is to show you what happens if you continue to go with it.

You'll die in the midst of its pollution, its alienation and its loneliness. You would. I mean you'll just go down like that. What you see around you is a picture of your own future. I'll just refer again to that play by Sartre. Jean-Paul Sartre wrote the play "No Exit". You see the homosexual and the lesbian. Now I forget what the third person is but somebody in the same kind of psychotic situation. There's one electric light bulb burning in the room and gradually it dawns on them as they burn against each other, wear each other down and tear each other apart by their criticism and their hatred -- gradually it dawns on them that the light never goes out. The light is on all the time and gradually they begin to realize this is hell. Hell is being together like this forever with no possibility even of escape into darkness.

Now loved ones, that's why God has allowed these things to come -- to show you what it's like if we don't receive the life of his Holy Spirit. That's presumably something of what hell will be like. It will be a place more polluted than our world, in greater trauma than our world, in greater alienation and loneliness than our world.

But you still have a free will. That's why you can't say, "God's forcing me." No, you can still choose. You can still choose to your own disadvantage. Really that's what I am urging you to think about. Are you really moving in the direction of life in your own life or are you moving in the direction of death? Are you beginning to receive this Holy Spirit that Jesus sent? Is he beginning to influence your life? Is he beginning to make it like Jesus' life? Or are you in fact becoming more like the world of which you're a part?

That's part of what God meant when he said, "Save yourself from this untoward generation." Brothers and sisters, you have to step out of it in order to live. So will you think about it and pray about it? Which way are you moving in your own life? Are you moving towards the death that the world is going to experience or are you moving towards the life that is possible in the midst of death? Let us pray.

Father, we know these are important and vital things. Father, as we think over them and we pray about them, will you show us individually how we are responding to your gift of the Holy Spirit? Are we moving towards it ourselves or making the same choice as our forefather Adam did? Show us whether we're moving into the same kind of savage microcosm inside ourselves or whether we are in fact moving into the great macrocosm of love that exists in your Son Jesus.

Father, we would trust you to give us revelation about this so that we may take the action that is

necessary and the action that you want us to take -- that of receiving your Holy Spirit and allowing him to rule our lives and change them. We ask you to do this Lord, whatever it costs us and whatever it costs you to bring us to that place. We ask this in your Son's name. Amen.