

A New Start Romans 5:18 Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

When you come to an anniversary, you tend to look back on things. And so when you come to the last Sunday of a year, you tend to look back. This is the last Sunday of 1972. Some of you have been coming for a year and some for two years. Yet I know that some of you are in the position that if I ask you, "Are you still afraid of what people think of you?" You'd say, "Yes, a bit". If I push you and said, "Do you know that if you died tonight, your Creator would really accept you?" You would be tempted to say, "Well, yes I think so." If I pushed you and said, "Do you really know your Creator in a personal way?" many of you would say, "Well, yes I hope I do." Yet you know in your heart that even though you've listened to this message for one or two years, you still haven't the certainty of a real personal sense of God in your life. You're still trying to get at it. Now, why is that? Remember a few Sundays ago, we discovered one plain reason why many of us are in that position. Many of us think it's simply a case of believing it all and suddenly God makes himself real to you. We have the same trouble as the young businessman that met Jesus. You remember he is described there in Luke 18. Some of us have realized that the reason God isn't so real to us is because we have the same problem as this young businessman. Luke 18:18-23: "And a ruler asked him, 'Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' And Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, do not kill, do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.' And he said, 'All these I have observed from my youth.' And when Jesus heard it, he said to him, 'One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.' But when he heard this he became sad, for he was very rich." Many of us are in that kind of position. We don't realize that God will not make himself real to us unless we stop doing the things that our conscience tells us is wrong. We keep on pretending that we've stopped them but we haven't really. Or we stop them all but the ones that particularly come up against our own personal preferences. So we are ready to obey God everywhere but where his will cuts across our personal preferences. There we refuse to obey him, and because of that reconciliation with God is always an academic issue with us. It's always something that we go to listen to some man describing on Sunday but it's never real in our own lives. Now I think brothers and sisters, that's one reason why we said many of us do not enter into a real relationship with God at all. In other words, we never really repent. We're in the same position as Jesus described when he said, "I tell you, unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." You can listen to this explanation Sunday after Sunday for years and years, 1972, 73, 74, 86... (I am going to be still here in 2010 I think), but up to the year 2010 you can listen to this, agree with it and think it's good but unless you stop doing the things that God has told you destroyed his Son Jesus, you'll never have any experience of God in your life. You know that we've said that. Many of us are trying to substitute intellectual belief for repentance. We're trying to substitute an intellectual assent to the fact that Jesus has died for our sins, for actually stopping crucifying him in our own lives. Now what I'd like to talk about this morning is another thing that we substitute intellectual belief for. Many of us are in the position this morning that we've listened to this for two years or more and yet we still have no immediate sense of God in our lives. We're in that position because we're trying to substitute intellectual belief for actual receiving of Jesus. Now, you'd see that clearly dear ones if you just looked at the verse today, Romans 5:18. It appears as many of Paul's verses in Romans appear to do to repeat themselves. But God's word is so good and deep that he is always saying something different in the next verse. Romans 5:18: "Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men." Now this probably won't fascinate you anymore than it fascinated my wife when I told her. But many of us are in this difficulty in our relationship with God (and I hope all the Greek scholars will immediately say, "Yes, you're right" and all those persons who don't know Greek will be like my wife), because we don't understand the difference between the word "dikaiosness" and the word "dikaiosness", okay? We don't understand the

difference because that's the word that's used in that verse. We don't understand the difference between acquittal and reprieve. Many of us are in this position this morning where we have no real relationship with God and no experience of him in our lives because we don't really see the difference between those two Greek words. We don't see the difference between reprieve and acquittal. Now there is a difference. Reprieve, according to the dictionary, is delaying or suspending a penalty, just delaying it or suspending it. Acquittal is absolute removal of the penalty. It's completely pardoning the prisoner. Now many of us are in this position where God is not real to us because we still think we're acquitted when we're simply living in a state of reprieve. I think I could explain it if you would just be patient with me as I go through what happened at the beginning. You remember God made us because he wanted men and women to love and to share the fellowship that he had with his son Jesus. He wanted us to share that fellowship and to love him freely. He made us with free wills. He didn't make us people that were gentle, kind and loving. He didn't want a group of people who were gentle, kind and loving because he had made them that way -- so that they couldn't be anything else. Therefore, he didn't make us gentle, kind and loving. He made us like Himself with the same capacities as he had. And he made available to us the life that made him gentle, kind and loving. That is, the life of the Holy Spirit. He gave us the free will to choose that life so that we would become like him or to reject it. You can see the reason for that. He didn't want a bunch of robots that were gentle, kind and loving because they didn't know how to be unkind or unloving. He wanted a group of people that chose to be like him. And so he simply made that life of the Holy Spirit available to us. You remember in Genesis it's presented as the tree of life. You know what happened. Adam and Eve decided to go it alone. They decided they would do without this life. They would do without this life of the Holy Spirit. They would use their own native wit and by experience of trial and error, they would gather and collect the knowledge of good and evil. And so they decided to do it on their own. Now immediately when God saw them doing that, he knew that they would bring his universe into absolute disintegration. Without the life of his Holy Spirit they would become haters. They would become rebels. They would become people who consumed each other. So he knew that if he let them go, they would soon disintegrate and pollute his universe completely. So he withdrew the infinite life and power of the Holy Spirit from them. And he condemned them to the helpless strivings that have resulted in our present international, national and personal chaos. Now what was God's reaction to that? Well, let's not describe it as it occurred in his great infinite mind. You can see for God, the whole thing occurred in one moment. He conceived the problem and the solution all at once. Let's take it as it's described in Genesis. You can look at Genesis 6:5-7 and see what God's reaction was. He saw that we men and women without the life of his Holy Spirit were about to bring the universe down around our ears. They were just about to destroy the whole thing. God saw that. Genesis 6:5, "The LORD saw (and he determined of course that he had to end the chaos and the corruption) that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart." So he knew that as a God of order and a God of love, he was committed to destroying all disorder and all hatred. And so in Genesis 6:7 we read, "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.'" God, as it's outlined in Genesis, (obviously according to Einstein's theory of relativity), saw the whole thing take place in one great moment in the infinite mind of God. Genesis shows us that God saw the corruption and the chaos and resolved, "The only thing I can do as a God of justice and holiness is to destroy this. Otherwise it'll overwhelm me and anything that I love or that I respect." So God resolved to destroy the whole earth with the flood. Now then you see as Genesis described it, what he then saw. He determined in fact never to do that again. Genesis 9:8-11: "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."

Now how did this God of holiness and justice who was committed to punishing disorder, rebellion and sin, how was he able to determine never to destroy the earth again? It's because he destroyed Jesus in its place. Jesus was the lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world. God destroyed Jesus instead of destroying the earth. Now do you see what God did? He gave the earth reprieve, brothers and sisters. He gave us a reprieve. He did not acquit us. He simply agreed to let us continue to exist. He didn't say, "You're all okay because I have destroyed my Son in your place." He said, "You're back in the position that Adam and Eve were. You have the tree of life available; you're back in their position." Now that's the state in which all of us have existed since that day. All of us have been in a state of reprieve. Muslims, Buddhists, skeptics, agnostics; the only reason all of us are still alive and God has not destroyed the whole place and wiped it out is because he destroyed Jesus in our place to give us a reprieve -- to delay or suspend the sentence of death upon us to give us the opportunity to receive his life. But brothers and sisters, do you see it is a state of reprieve? We are back in the position that Adam and Eve were in. The only thing that will justify us in God's eyes is if we do what he asked Adam and Eve to do, "Eat of the tree of life". Now here's the position many of us are in. We listen to that gospel and we say, "You mean Jesus was crucified instead of us? Then God no longer has anything against the world." That's right, he hasn't. You say, "Well then, his arms are open to me." You're right; his arms are open to you. "Well then, 72 is not on my back?" You're right, 72 is not on your back. Anything that you've done in 1972 has already been borne by Jesus. God has destroyed Jesus for those things that you did. You're right; you will never be rejected by God because of your sins. As far as God is concerned, he has suspended and delayed all judgment. But do you see you still have to eat of the tree of life? Now many of us are trying to substitute a belief in our reprieve for a receiving of the Holy Spirit that alone brings acquittal. You see, God can really only justify us, he can only give us a sense that this is our right place on the earth, he can only give us a sense that he no longer rejects but accepts us and is fully pleased with us, if we do what he put us on the earth to do originally. And that is to eat of the tree of life. Now what many of us are doing is we're saying, "Oh, Jesus has died for us so that judgment is suspended. I don't need to eat of the tree of life. God justifies me because of Jesus' death." No, there's only one thing that will justify you in God's eyes and that is receiving of the tree of life into yourself. In other words, it is not a matter of simply believing that because of Jesus' death we're all still alive. We're all still alive only for a temporary period to give us a second chance to eat of the tree of life. Now do you see the difference, loved ones? Many of us think, "Jesus has died, so all I have to do is repent and believe that. Then God immediately acquits me." No, what you have to do is repent and then go back to the position of Adam and Eve (that we're all in) and receive of the Holy Spirit -- of the tree of life. In other words, unless you receive Jesus into yourself, you will never experience justification with God. You'll always find yourself trying to justify yourself in men's eyes by your grades, your job, your achievement, and by your protest. Unless you actually eat of the tree of life, unless you actually receive Jesus into your spirit by faith, you will never experience real justification of God. Now do you see brothers and sisters, the difference? I'd love to ask each one of you if you really understand it. It's not enough simply to repent of your sin and to believe that Jesus has died for you. You have to repent and Jesus' death brings you back into the Garden of Eden. Then you have to do what Adam and Eve were originally planned to do; you have to eat of the tree of life. You have to actually receive Jesus. That's why Jesus emphasized that, you see. In John 1:12, you remember, Jesus emphasized that it's not just a question of repenting. It's not just a question of believing but it's actually a question of receiving. John 1:12; "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power (or he gave the "right") to become children of God; who were

born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." You get it emphasized in Revelation 3:20, it's that verse that a lot of us know off by heart. Revelation 3:20; "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; (and this is the spirit of Jesus speaking), if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." I suppose I say it because so many of us are from an academic atmosphere. Many of you might have lived in the purely intellectual sphere in which I lived for a long time in regard to God. I think it's very easy brothers and sisters for you to see the sheer logic of the Gospel, (because it is very logical) and to see that you can't keep doing the things that crucify Jesus in your own life and expect him to deal with you. And so you need repentance and to stop doing the things that your conscience tells you are wrong. But I think a lot of us tend to take the immediate step and say, "Oh yes, well Jesus has died for us, so we're acquitted. We don't need to do anything else". So we go off each Sunday with no dynamic power within us to make us different. Now brothers and sisters, you are not justified by God unless you do what he put you on the earth originally to do. And that was to receive the life of his Holy Spirit from the tree of life that is Jesus. In other words, you need to receive Jesus into yourself. I think that strikes at the pride of the academic. It certainly struck at the pride in me. I was prepared to change my life when I saw that that was needed. Morally, you can see the sense in changing your life, improving it and becoming a better man or a better woman. But to actually do this business of "into my heart, into my heart, come into my heart Lord Jesus" and to actually go through what seemed a little childish exercise, that struck at my pride. Now brothers and sisters, unless you receive the Spirit of Jesus into you by faith, God cannot justify you. That's why many of you are still walking, trying to justify yourself. You'll repent of your sin, you'll believe that Jesus died for you but you won't receive Jesus by faith into yourself. Now this is the last Sunday in 1972. I am suggesting to you, if you have walked in an unsatisfying experience for a year, would you consider taking a step this morning on this business of receiving Jesus by faith? You say to me, "What is it like?" I know it's not like feeling. It's not like emotion. It's not that we sing an emotional hymn here and you try to feel the emotion of Jesus coming in. It's not a feeling. But you can see too, it's not an intellectual assent to truth. Receiving Jesus is you personally taking a step and saying, "Lord Jesus, I can't see you, I can't feel you, but I believe from what I have read in history that you are really God's Son, that you really overcame death. Therefore you must be alive this morning. Lord Jesus, I ask you in whatever way you think is appropriate for me, to come into my life. Will you live inside me?" Now dear ones, unless you take that step, you will not be justified in God's eyes. You will find yourself continually being afraid of people and trying to justify yourself by doing the job well, getting a good grade or satisfying your relatives. But, if you receive Jesus by faith, whether you have feeling or not, you'll begin to find God giving you a sense of peace with himself. You'll begin to sense that you are reconciled to God personally. Dear ones, is there any question anybody would want to ask about that? I feel for the men and women here who are trying to get into the thing intellectually but just can't make it and don't know what to do. How do you repent? You stop doing the things. That's the only answer. A lot of people say, "Oh I cry, I try to feel sorry, and I make resolutions." No, you stop doing the thing. If it's criticism, you stop criticizing. If you're selfish with your roommate, you stop being selfish and you say to God that you're determined to stop it. His Holy Spirit knows whether you really mean it or not. You see all of us think, "Oh I can't do it, but I want to do it." You can do it, if you really want to do it. The Holy Spirit will give you the grace to actually bring it about in your life. The Holy Spirit knows when a person is real and honest about the repentance. The heart of repentance is "metanoia" in Greek which means "changing your mind". You stop doing the thing. Satan has persuaded us for years that we can't do it because we've such poor, weak things. The psychologists have brainwashed us with that. You can't stop it so you evade the problem. No, you can stop it. Repentance is stopping. You're putting a sword into Jesus' side every time you criticize somebody. You stop it, you pull the sword out and

you don't put it in again. I know those are hard words, loved ones, but we need more backbone. We need the backbone that God has given us. We've had it undermined for years. We've become soft in our attitude to will. Receiving Jesus is just what I said, it's receiving by faith. If you ask me, "Did you have any great feeling?" No, I didn't. I had no great feeling and I didn't walk down the aisle when we were singing "Just as I Am". No, I just said, "Lord, I believe on the basis of the history in the New Testament that you're real, that you're God's Son. You blasted through death once, and so as far as I am concerned by my own logic, you can come through at any time. Therefore you must be here today. Lord Jesus, I ask you now to come into my life and I am receiving you by faith." Then brothers and sisters, the miracle begins. But until you take that step, no miracle can begin. You're purely an intellectual, academic spectator until you take that step. Let us pray. Dear Father, those of us who know you would pray now for our brothers and sisters here this morning, who are struggling with intellectual and emotional problems and never really coming into a spiritual transaction with you. Lord Jesus, from the historical evidence we believe you are real. We believe that you are different from Mohammad and Buddha because of the resurrection. Lord Jesus, if you're really God's Son, we would want to receive you into our own lives this morning. Father, if you put us here on earth in order to eat of the tree of life, you'll never be satisfied until we've done that. We do that this morning by faith. Father we know you don't ask us to do what we can't do. You don't ask us to do something that is impossible. But you do ask us to take a step of faith and act on the basis of the substantiating evidence. We would do that this morning. Lord Jesus, we would ask you as a Spirit to come into our spirit and to live inside us and be whatever you want to be in our lives. Father, we thank you that now, not only have you nothing against us for our past, but you are pleased with us now and you accept us as your own children because your Spirit of life is within us. We thank you for that and trust you now for this coming year of 1973. We trust you Lord Jesus, to be able to be yourself in us. We trust you Father God and Creator, to be satisfied and pleased with lives that have order and meaning during these next 12 months. We leave all that is past behind. We forget those things that are behind. Now we look forward to this year, to live it a day at a time for you, to be victorious just for today. We want to get to the end of 1973 and look back on a year of victory because of the Spirit that has come within us this day. We commit ourselves to you now Father. Use us for your purpose, for your world, to bring order and sense into it through our lives. We ask this for your glory and your pleasure. Amen.