

Eden-in-Wilderness

Romans 7:22

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

One of the reasons we've gathered together like this for four years, is because we really are anxious to know what our Creator is like. I am sure some of us here are not too sure whether there is a Creator or not. If that's the situation then do try to come to something like the seminar on the rationality of Christianity at 9:30 a.m. that meets here every Sunday morning. And do try to read some of the books by Clark Pinnock [author of "Set Forth Your Case"} and Paul Little, "Know Why You Believe". But the majority of us have examined the record of Jesus' life in Galilee and are convinced that it's true and that it's reliable history.

We've become convinced that he really lived, did and said the things that they say he did and said. We believe that he is really God's Son and because of him and because of the other revelations of God throughout history -- because of the order and design of universe itself -- there are many of us here, maybe not the majority, who do believe there's a God. And we're concerned not with whether there's a God or not, but what this God is like so that we can respond to him in a way that pleases him. So that we can respond in a way that is consistent with reality. That's why really we've been meeting together for four years.

The title of the study this morning sets forth a principle upon which God himself operates. It seems to me it's a principle upon which many of us do not operate. And it's because we don't operate on that principle and see the importance of that principle, that many of us end up in the situation that is described in that verse in Romans 7:22 that we're studying today. Maybe you'd look at it.

Romans 7:22, "For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost-self." I think a lot of us end up in that position because we don't live by this other principle. We don't really understand that God operates by it. "For I delight in the law of God in my inmost-self." Most of us would probably say, "Yeah, yeah, that's right. Yeah, if you tell something good to do, yeah, if there's something inside me says, yeah, I just want to do it, I want to do it." We have no trouble with that. It's the whole problem of getting that out that we have trouble with.

Really the reason we have trouble with it, loved ones, is we don't really see that this "Eden in wilderness" principle is a basic one that God works on and he works on no other. Now maybe you'd just look at it as it's an instance of the creation there, the record of his creation. If you look at it Genesis 1:2, you can see how it progressed.

If you've real troubles with the scientific interpretation of Genesis then you ought to look at some of Henry Morris's book, you remember, he is a professor of hydraulics in one of the southern universities and has written a number of books on creation and evolution. But Genesis 1:2, "The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters." So, that was it, without form and void.

Then God begins the beginnings of this old principle, brings a little bit of order, increasing order. Verse 3: "Let there be light; and there was light." Cosmic light, first of all he introduced his cosmic light, doesn't necessitate the sun, it's cosmic light. Then verse 6, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters..." He makes a distinction between space and the planet. That's

really what that means, a distinction between space and the planet in verse 6. Then he goes on and makes a distinction between sea and land on the planet in verse 9, a little more order, "Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear."

Then he begins to bring more order and take each of those areas, vegetation for the land, in verse 11. "Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seeds, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed." Then he begins to fill up the space, verse 14, light reflectors, that's what the Hebrew means. "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens." He means bearers of the cosmic light and firmament of the heavens. Then he begins to fill up the sea in verse 20, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures." Then he creates creatures for the land, in verse 24. God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds." So you know, real chaos, just a kind of crude piece of matter at the beginning and then more and more order. That's part of the principle, not entirely the principles but that's part of it. God brings more and more order, increasing order in his universe.

You see, there was one limitation in what he had created so far. I mean the sheer symmetry of the sunrise or the sunset, certainly sets forth part of the Creator's glory. The sheer beauty of a Dahlia flower certainly sets forth some of the graciousness and the delicacy of God's conception. But did you see that it was limited in so far as it could set forth God's glory for one big reason? Could a tree be anything but a tree? No. Could a river ever flow up a mountain? No. Could they ever be other than what they were made to be? No. That was the limitation of these inanimate objects as far as setting forth God's glory is concerned. Because the special glory of God is that he is a free person, that's his special glory. He doesn't have to flow up a mountain if he doesn't want to, he can flow down it. He doesn't have to be a tree if he doesn't want to. He doesn't have to be a God if he doesn't want to. He is what he is because he wants to. He doesn't have to love us, he doesn't have to make us, he just wants to. The glory of God is that he's a free personality with a free will and that's what makes it so great that he has chosen to do what he has done.

Now do you see that all the things that he made up to that point could not reflect that freedom of will. They all had to do what they were made to do. That's why God at this point took a massive leap in creation in the next verse. In Genesis 1:26, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him. God made a free person, a person like himself. He entrusted to that free person the completion of his work of creation. You see that in verse 28, "And God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'"

In other words, God didn't just make a mindless machine that he like some moron creator could look at, and be satisfied that it was doing what it was made for and nothing else. But he made a free person and said, "Alright, you have to complete the creation. I give this whole place and you have to bring it into my dominion and under my will. Suddenly the mindless machine was changed from a creation of a moron into a beautiful, living creation that would come into harmony under God only if these human beings exercised their free will in the same way as God exercised his. Suddenly full glory could come to God because it would come from free willed human beings who did what he asked them to do because they wanted to.

Loved ones, that's a massive leap. How would they do it? That's what really takes us into

tonight's topic on the Eden principle. You can see it in Genesis 2:15. He gave us a world that had not yet come under his will. Verse 15, "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it." If you look at verse 8 of this chapter in Genesis, "And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east and there he put the man whom he had formed." God said the world isn't perfect as it stands but here's a pattern for my world. Here's a little bit of it that we will call Eden. This is where I want you also to come and I'm putting you in here so you can spread Eden throughout the world.

So he said, "You have to keep Eden." If you look back at verse 15, he said you have to keep it. You have to keep it like this. Keep it in order. But believe me the only way you are going to keep it in order is by doing what I told you to do in verse 28. "And God blessed them and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'" The only way to keep Eden is to fill the wilderness with Eden. If you don't fill the whole world with Eden, the whole clock will turn back, the whole process will run down and wilderness will fill Eden. That's the principle, loved ones.

If you don't fill the wilderness with Eden, then Eden will be filled with wilderness. You know we didn't do that. We just rebelled against the whole concept. We refused to believe the whole creation could be brought into order by receiving the uncreated life of God's Holy Spirit and allowing it to spread throughout the place. But we thought we could do it on our own. We attempted to do a superhuman task with our own human and finite abilities. As soon as we began to do that we recognized our own inadequacies. We didn't know what to do with the water, we didn't know what to do with the trees. We didn't know what to do with the sky or the oxygen and hydrogen. And as we began to come into more and more failures in our efforts, we felt more and more of our own inadequacies -- we experienced more and more of our own insecurities and we began to realize we were more and more lost in this endeavor.

Of course with that came all kinds of feelings of inferiority, coupled with feelings of "we can do it, we can do it!" Yet we weren't able to do it. Then we entered into all those complexes where we started to think we could do it and we were worth something even though we were making a miserable mess of it. Yet we were worth something. So you know what we did -- we began to chop down trees, not to bring order to the world but to show other people how well we chopped down trees. And they would give us the approval we should be receiving from our Creator. We began to grow fruit trees, not to make the world beautiful but to make food, make food, we needed food. And bit by bit we began to come into a totally self centered approach of bringing order into this world. We began to bring it into order for ourselves, not for God at all!

Now loved ones, as soon as that happened we died inside. We no longer knew God at all and we no longer knew why we were here. We lost all sense of identity and all sense of anybody's approval. And yet we were scrambling over each other to get others to respect us and give us approval. Do you see the important truth is this -- God began at that point to work with us on the Eden in Wilderness principle. God still works with us personally on that Eden in Wilderness principle.

So at the very heart of each of us, if you think of that spirit, soul and body situation in our personalities, God started with a little bit of the Eden in wilderness principle in our innermost self. Instead of working as he wanted us to work, receiving from the Holy Spirit and then extending that Holy Spirit right throughout the world, we began to look to the world for all the things we should be receiving from the Holy Spirit. We began to try get from the world the approval which

actually God would have given us if we followed his plan for us. We began to get from the world the enjoyment that we would have received from the Holy Spirit if we had only received it into ourselves. We began to get from the world all the food and necessities that God would have provided for us if we simply obeyed him. We began to work our whole personality in the opposite direction. Instead of giving joy, we began to try to enjoy other people. Instead of giving people a sense of their approval, we tried to get other people to approve us. So we tried to obey our bosses not because we want to be a good clerk or a good driller but because we want their approval. Instead of filling the world, we began to drain the world.

Now here's the amazing thing, loved ones, as that whole part of us went dead, as that spirit died and we lost our connection with God -- the dear Father started with the Eden in Wilderness principle. So that even when a little baby grabbed a toy from his brother because he wanted that toy, there was still something inside that baby that wanted to share candy with his Dad at times. So even in a little baby you get the Eden beginning. God left part of Eden inside each one of us. It doesn't matter how selfish or fretful a child is -- you know its eyes will be filled with fret and moodiness and irritability at times -- and yet it will also be filled with gentleness and a simplicity we would love to experience ourselves.

So the Father started all over again. He planted the conscience inside us that kept calling us back to what we were originally meant to be in his plan. Inside each one of us there is something that wants to realize we were not meant to drain the world the way we are doing, we weren't made to be parasites on our friends the way we are, we are made to fill them, we are made to give to them. So repeatedly we will come into guilt when we begin to be selfish or when we become resentful. There is an Eden inside us that wants to get out. It's constantly saying the movement of your life should be outward, the movement of your life should be outward. You should be receiving from the Creator what you need for your mind, emotions, your will and your body and then you should be giving that out to the world. That's the way it's meant to work.

So the little Eden begins. That's probably what the verse means in John 1:9, "There was the true light, even the light which enlightens every man, coming into the world." That's what he is talking about. It doesn't matter whether you are Lutheran, or Baptist, or Methodist, or Presbyterian. All of us believe that there is something inside each person that God is able to touch. Those of you who do a little Theology know that if you don't hold to that then you make God's renewal of individuals an absolutely arbitrary affair of God's sovereign will, i.e. he suddenly decides that this person should be renewed. In fact, it isn't that way, loved ones. There is in each one of us something that is part of God's Eden.

Now what happens when we become Christians is, we respond to that part of conscience inside us and we allow our wills to constrain our minds and emotions to do what our conscience tells us to do. In response to that, God does what he wanted to do in the very beginning -- he really puts his Spirit inside us. Not only do you have a little bit of conscience which is Eden but you begin to have God's Spirit renewing and regenerating your spirit.

Loved ones, here's the important thing. I think a lot of us have come to that place and I think a lot of you are born of the Spirit. You can tell that because you can sense so often the same desires that Jesus had. You see verses such as Philippians 2:3, "Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves." And each of us who have received God's Spirit feel, yes that's what we want to do. I know in my inmost self, I delight in the laws of God in my inmost self. Yeah! Because I know there is an Eden in there. And you know what happens. We begin to

try to let that Eden get out. We begin to try to put others before ourselves.... and somebody, a friend of ours sings and we think, I can sing better than that. Or somebody praises our friend and we want to praise them too but do you see for years and years our personality has been working the other way. For years we have been learning how to get compliments from our friends. For years we have been working angles to bring up in conversation something that we were quite brilliant at. And then everyone would be forced to praise us and approve of us. For years we've been tossing those things off the cuff, "Yeah, I can sing, yeah I can do it."

For years we've been living that way and that is what the Bible calls "carnal". It's that wrong direction of the personality. For years we have been doing that. Loved ones, the movement of Eden out comes up against the best. That's why Paul says in Romans 7:22, "For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self." But do you see, it is the Eden principle? If you don't let Eden get out and take over that wilderness, then the wilderness takes over Eden.

Dear ones, that's the only alternative. I think there are too many of us who feel as long as Jesus is inside of me, that's the big or main thing. I agree with what you said about dying with Christ and having this wrong direction in my personality transformed and renewed. Yeah, I'd like to do that sometime but the big thing is to have Jesus inside me. Loved ones, do you see that cannot continue unless you give Jesus his way inside you? You cannot keep Eden inside the wilderness. That's what we tried to do at the beginning of the world. You have to either let Eden take over the wilderness or the wilderness takes over Eden.

That's why the death of Jesus, and some of you might be here for the first time, is the way God transforms this wrong direction in our personalities and fills our whole being with the Holy Spirit. It comes from our readiness to be what Jesus was. Specifically to die with him to ourselves and die to our rights for people's approval and our rights to the things we are getting from the world. Loved ones, too often we think our death with Jesus is an optional extra. Do you see it isn't? Unless that wrong direction in our personalities is reversed and transformed by being filled with the Holy Spirit, Eden will not survive.

But then you know this yourself. You know fine well that you shouldn't lose your temper, you know it is wrong to lose your temper. But for years you have used your temper to bring everyone to heel and to get them to listen to you. Your whole personality has been used to that for years and so you keep on trying not to lose your temper but you lose it. You know what the next step is. You rationalize bad temper. You say it was because somebody stole your pet rabbit when you were young. Or because your father had a very bad temper and you inherited it! The next step is you rationalize the sin. You keep pretending that for me it isn't sin, it's just a human shortcoming.

Loved ones, you know that is the beginning of the move of the wilderness toward Eden. That's just the beginning. And you keep moving in that direction and eventually the wilderness will be taking over Eden. So, loved ones, what I am really bringing before you is, I don't think there is a choice. I don't think you can be born of the Spirit and not baptized with the Spirit. Or I don't think you can receive Jesus' Spirit into you and then not remain in him as he hangs on the cross and be crucified with him. I think with the Father it is all or nothing. With God it is all or nothing. Either Eden spreads to the wilderness or the wilderness destroys Eden. So loved ones, will you pray about that? Will you think about it in the specific areas where you are in difficulty? We all know here that the Father will forgive you unto seventy times seven. The Father will pour his love out on you as you seek him. But you do see that what he wants you to do is seek, don't you? He has given into your hands the completion of the creation of you in his image. He has handed that into your

hands. It is your responsibility.

Can you get into heaven resentful or filled with self pity? It's going to make it pretty much hell for the rest of us, isn't it, if you do that? It just stands to reason, it's really all or nothing. Alright it takes a little while getting there but loved ones, we should set our faces steadfastly towards Jerusalem and say, "Father, Eden will fill the wilderness in my life, of that I am determined, no matter how long it takes and no matter how much you have to deal with in me. That's the way I am heading." Loved ones, I'd really encourage you to do it. I believe God is creating a family here who believe it is possible to live like that. Really, what we need to do is get into it ourselves individually. Let us pray.