

The Sons of God

Romans 8:19

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

For the past two weeks we've been talking about suffering. And it's really a difficult concept for those of us who live in America because most of us have been brought up to adopt the same attitude to suffering as the early Old Testament writers had. That is, we've been brought up to regard suffering as something that indicated God's displeasure with us. And so we tend to have adopted the attitude that those who serve God ought never to suffer and if anyone is suffering, then it's probably because they're not serving God the way they should.

And you remember, that was the attitude of the early Old Testament writers. They had the attitude that God always prospered materially those who obeyed him. And he cursed materially those who disobeyed him. You remember, that was the way God had to deal in the early Old Testament days. You remember, that after the first man decided to live independent of God and created the amoral chaos that existed for centuries in those days, the first step God had to take was to make a clear distinction between good and evil. It was amorality that was the problem. It was the fact that we didn't know what was right and what was wrong that was our problem. And so God's first step was to make it absolutely plain what was good and what was bad and the plainest way to do that was to make it obviously advantageous to be good and obviously disadvantageous to be wrong, or to be evil, or to be bad.

And you remember we do the same with children. God was dealing with mankind in his childhood and we do the same with children. If they do their homework we promise them candy and if they don't do their homework well, they don't get any candy. And if they take care of their chores they get Saturday afternoon off and if they don't they have to work Saturday afternoon as well. And we were all treated that way ourselves when we were children because it helped us to see plainly what was good and what was evil, and that it was good to be good and it was bad to be evil.

I think the tragedy is that we here in America still often feel that way. In other words, we live not simply as if we were Old Testament people but we live as if we were early Old Testament people. We live really as if we were in Genesis and you remember, that was the kind of attitude in Genesis 17. If you look at it you'll find it laid out there. Genesis 17:1, "When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.' Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, 'Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant to be God to you and to your descendants after you.'"

And we have tended to live as if God was still dealing with his people in that way. "You follow me and I'll prosper your business. You follow me and I'll keep you safe from all physical suffering." And yet loved ones, it has been a willful deception on our part here in America you know. It has been a willful deception. We have willfully said, "That's the way we're going to believe." And you know we have made trouble for other Christians because of it. We have said to them, "Oh, look where

your belief has got you.” Oh, we have got into all kinds of difficulties when somebody like Evy [Dutch lady associated with hotel outreach in Holland] came into a situation such as we have in Amsterdam this morning and we have been in difficulties making any sense out of it primarily because we have lived in the attitude that mankind had in his childhood towards God.

Even the Old Testament got beyond that. Even the Old Testament got beyond the idea that if you do good you'll prosper materially and if you do evil you'll suffer materially. I'd point it out to you in Psalms 73, loved ones. It's just one of the many parts of the Old Testament that show that the brothers and sisters in those days were beginning to see a deeper truth.

“Truly God is good to the upright, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For they have no pangs; their bodies are sound and sleek. They are not in trouble as other men are; they are not stricken like other men. Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them as a garment. Their eyes swell out with fatness, their hearts overflow with follies. They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression. They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth. Therefore the people turn and praise them; and find no fault in them. And they say, 'How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?'

Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches. All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. For all the day long I have been stricken, and chastened every morning. If I had said, 'I will speak thus,' I would have been untrue to the generation of thy children. But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I perceived their end. Truly thou dost set them in slippery places; thou dost make them fall to ruin. How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors! They are like a dream when one awakes, on awaking you despise their phantoms. When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, I was stupid and ignorant, I was like a beast toward thee.

Nevertheless I am continually with thee; thou dost hold my right hand. Thou dost guide me with thy counsel, and afterward thou wilt receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is nothing upon earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever. For lo, those who are far from thee shall perish; thou dost put an end to those who are false to thee. But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, that I may tell of all thy works.”

I'm going to love you whatever happens. And I believe you love me whatever I'm suffering. And I believe that in the long run these people will eventually come to a sudden end. Even the Old Testament people got that far. That as far as they're concerned suffering is really kind of a neutral thing; it doesn't mean that God is for you or he is against you, it's something that happens to all people.

Now loved ones, many of us in America have not even caught up with that purely neutral attitude to suffering and that's why we have such difficulty with suffering when it comes to our own lives. But I'd remind you that even the Old Testament went further than that. The Old Testament went further than just a neutral attitude towards suffering. They saw something positive in suffering. You remember old Job, if you look at that Book loved ones. Job 2, they weren't content just to regard suffering as something that was irrelevant to whether you served God or not but they saw it as

something positive that God used.

Job 2:1-10, “Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD. And the LORD said to Satan, ‘Whence have you come?’ Satan answered the LORD, ‘From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.’ And the LORD said to Satan, ‘Have you considered by servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? He still holds fast his integrity, although you moved me against him, to destroy him without cause.’ Then Satan answered the LORD, ‘Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. But put forth thy hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face.’ And the LORD said to Satan, ‘Behold, he is in your power; only spare his life.’ So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD, and afflicted Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. And he took a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and sat among the ashes. Then his wife said to him, ‘Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God, and die.’ But he said to her, ‘You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?’ In all this Job did not sin with his lips.”

It’s a further step. God is saying, “Okay Satan, I’ll let you test what I have done in this man. I’ll let you test the dependence on me that he has and I’ll use the suffering that you bring upon him to strengthen that dependence upon me that he has.” And loved ones, that further stage the Old Testament even arrived at. You remember, that’s what we have been saying, that God uses suffering. He doesn’t send it to us. It’s a work of Satan. But he allows suffering to come to us to test and strengthen and intensify the work that he has done in our own hearts. And the dependence on him that he has already brought about in us, God uses suffering to strengthen that. In other words, he uses suffering to make us more like himself.

Now maybe it would be good at that point for those of us who haven’t been here before to go back over a few definitions. We all seem to be much the same kind of being here in this auditorium. We all have two ears, more or less, and they’re usually the same size, and we have lips, and we have teeth, and arms, and hands. Most of us are the same kinds of beings, at least to look at. We have bodies that are made up of blood, and flesh, and bones and we have minds and emotions that the Bible calls our “psyche” [Greek word that means soul, from which English “psychology” comes] or our psychological part, or our soul. Most of us have those things and we can identify them.

If you think a thought this moment you know you thought it with your mind. And if you uttered that thought, all of us could probably think it. All of us can feel, if there’s a love goes through us for Evy [Dutch lady mentioned earlier] all of us can feel that love. We can feel a peace among us. So most of us have bodies and souls, or bodies and the inside part of us: minds and emotions. But wouldn’t you agree that all of us have another part that seems at times deeper than our bodies or our souls? It’s a part of us that seems to operate at times against our bodies and souls. You see somebody drowning, your body says to itself, “Don’t risk it. Don’t jump in.” And your soul or your mind says, “Now, they’re part of the human family I should help them.” But there’s some other signal that comes up deep from inside you that looks at those two instincts and judges between them and really we call it our conscience.

And the conscience baffles us at times because it often goes beyond what our upbringing was. It often judges more highly than our parents even encouraged us to judge. And so most of us I think would agree that there seems to be a part of us deep down underneath the psychological life that we

experience that seems to send up yeses and no's from deep down. In fact, in that area some of us would say there are elements that almost seem to be religious. We seem to have a spirit inside us that is able at times to sense awe when we look up in the heavens that seems a greater awe than just an emotional awe. And so all of us, I think, would agree that yes, we have bodies and we have souls, but all of us seem to have something underneath the soul or the psychological part of us that seems to be able to be designated by spirit. The liveliest part of that spirit is our conscience. But, there seems to be other parts of it that enable us to commune with the Spirit that lies behind the universe.

Now, some of us here of course, have spirits that are asleep. They're virtually dead. Besides the activity of conscience we have no other contact through our spirits with the Person behind the universe. In fact, there are some of us here that don't act according to our spirits at all, we act according just to our minds and our bodies. We meet our personality needs from the powers that we have in our souls and our bodies. We need security, so we use our bodies to earn the food, shelter, and clothing that we need for security. We need significance and so we use our minds to manipulate ourselves into a position where people give us significance. We'll do anything for that. We use our talents to get people to look up to us. We'll buy a pink Cadillac to get people to think we're different. We'll do anything to make ourselves significant in some way and say, "We're different, we're different, we're different. We are significant."

But many of us just use our minds to establish that significance. Many of us just use our emotions to derive thrills and excitement so that we have happiness. So there are many of us here in this auditorium who use the powers of our bodies and our souls to meet the needs of our personalities which you remember, we said before are security, and significance, and happiness. But there are others of us here, loved ones, who have experienced an enlivening and an energizing of our spirits through the reception of a supernatural spirit that has come from outside. And we found that our spirits have become more alive than our minds and emotions, more alive even than our bodies, and that through these spirits we can sense a closeness with the Creator of the universe, the same kind of closeness that Jesus who said he was the son of the Creator of the universe felt.

And so many of us here have begun to sense a closeness to the Creator of the universe that we did not know before through this enlivening that has come into our spirits. It's described, loved ones, in Galatians 4, if you wanted to look at it because that's the experience that many of us have had, the one that Paul describes in Galatians 4:6. "And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" And so through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir."

And many of us here have found that our spirits seem to be able to contact the Creator of the universe and we have begun to feel towards him as Jesus felt towards him. We have begun to feel he is really our Father. And that bit about being an heir too, you know, we've found that that's true.

At this moment, Jesus is with his Father sitting at his right hand and he is utterly secure in the adequacy of all the power that his Father has given him. And he is completely satisfied with his Father's love and happy with his Father's love. And he's utterly confident of his own significance because he's sitting there right beside his Father.

Now we've found loved ones, that Jesus is able to give us all of that confidence about our significance, all of that satisfaction about our security, all of that enjoyment of the Father's love towards us. Jesus has sent his Spirit into our spirits and we feel all that he feels. And so we've stopped depending on a pink Cadillac for our significance. We've stopped depending on doing

our hair slightly differently than everybody else to try to be different. We've begun to sense inside our spirits a sense of significance before the Creator of the whole universe because we know that he's our Father and he thinks of us as his sons and his daughters.

And so we've stopped trying to get satisfaction for our personality needs through our bodies, and our minds, and our emotions and we've begun to experience that satisfaction from inside directly from Jesus through the Holy Spirit. And so really we begin to find that we do sense we're significant, we do feel we're important. Whether anybody else treats us as important or not, we feel we're important because of this sense of significance we feel we have before God. This sense of oneness that we have with him ever since the Spirit of Jesus has come into our spirits. And so we have begun to experience a real happiness inside just because of the love our Father has towards us and we've stopped trying to find substitute happinesses from other people's affections.

And that's what it means to be a son or daughter of God. That's what it means to be children of God. That you're no longer looking to the world or to others for the satisfaction of your personality needs, but you're receiving them from God himself and his attitude to you. Now, you remember what we said last day, that we human beings are miserably incorrigible wretches. And we are always the slaves of custom and usage. And if we were little birds in the nest we would never, never, never stretch our miserable little wings and fly if we could possibly avoid it. And unless that old mother bird really kicked us out of the nest, we would stay on in that nest.

Loved ones, that's the situation with even sons and daughters of God. For years, we've been depending on being elected Captain of the team. For years in our childhood we were taught to excel at sports so we'd gain some significance at school. For years since then we've been taught that unless we make our own bread, unless we make our own food, unless we make money and earn our own shelter and clothing nobody is going to get it for us. We've been operating that way so long that God has a tremendous task to get us to live in the full supply that he gives us through the Holy Spirit.

And so loved ones, He can see at times that we've now had this job for 25 years, if we just hang on a little longer we're going to get that gold watch. And we've had this job for 25 years and the house is almost paid for, the children are through school, and our dear Father sees that we're beginning to slip slightly into depending on these trinkets for our security. And he knows that none of them will last even as long as one of his weakest oak trees that he's ever made and so he lovingly will allow a recession to come along. And he'll lovingly and gently allow the job to be taken away. That through the suffering he may strengthen and intensify our dependence on him that began when we received the spirit of Jesus in to us.

It's the same loved ones, with the happiness thing. He gradually notices that the joy in prayer is being outmatched a little by the joy we have water skiing or motorcycling, or the joy we have in somebody else's company. And he knows that dear one is not going to last beyond seventy years and the water skis probably won't last beyond 10 years, and he knows that it's ridiculous and humiliating for one of his princes and princesses to depend on trinkets that will not last beyond the decade. And he lovingly allows some of those things, some of those friendships to be removed so that he can strengthen, and intensify, and increase that dependence on him that we already have for the fulfillment of our personality needs.

He sees that we're getting popular and that people are beginning to appreciate our talents, and our abilities. And he sees that our peers are beginning to look up to us and people are beginning to

know us and beginning to be able to separate us out from the crowd, and we're beginning to get a little significance that we didn't have before. And he knows that it is an insult to his princes and princesses to depend on the fickle and passing praise of men and women and he lovingly withholds that from us. And we suddenly find that we aren't as popular as we were. Or, some event takes place that makes people misunderstand us, or criticize us unjustifiably.

Loved ones, it is the loving hand of our Father. It is his dear hand trying to withdraw us gently from the trinkets and the toys from which we're trying to fulfill our personality needs and he's saying, "Back to me my son, back to me my daughter. I am behind all these gifts. It's not the gifts that give you your sense of significance or happiness, or your sense of security. It's me. Come and depend on me." And loved ones, that's really the purpose of suffering. And you remember we shared that the purpose of suffering is to increase in us that dependence upon God.

And so gradually our Father is maturing his children and gradually he's making us grow up. And so instead of politicians, and executives, and teachers, and doctors who will do anything to preserve their own security, who will say anything, who will practice any kind of unprofessional conduct in order to establish their own security. Instead of people who will live like that, God is preparing a great group of sons and daughters for himself who will be revealed when Jesus comes at his second coming and will come upon the earth free from the desire to achieve their own security. Free at last to do what God wants them to do on principle and not lest they lose their jobs.

So instead of international short term gains on weak deals and detente, in order to gain kind of quick significance in the polls, God is preparing a group of sons and daughters who will act on principle. Not in order to establish their own significance in the polls but because they believe this is the best way to administer the new heavens and the new earth. And God is maturing sons and daughters, bringing them free of that need for significance so they can at last act on principle.

Instead of a society that is prepared to pursue happiness at the loss of liberty and at the loss of life, instead of a society that is prepared to do anything so that it doesn't make waves or rock the boat, instead of a society that is prepared to be soft on crime or anything as long as you don't disturb the kind of peace that we have at this moment, God is maturing a mass of sons and daughters who will come back to the new heavens and the new earth when Jesus returns and they will administer the new heaven and the new earth apart from the security, apart from the significance, apart from their own happiness.

And loved ones, that is what God is about with those of you who are sons and daughters. He's preparing a great group of you who will return with Jesus and will administer the world in justice, and in purity, and in love. And that's why the suffering and that's why Paul says, "I don't think the suffering that we're having at the moment is worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed finally."

And now would you look at today's verse and we'll start. No, no, just look at today's verse and we'll end. Romans 8:19, "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God." And the Greek word is "apokaradokia" and it means the creation waits with its head stretched out leaning forward to catch a first glimpse of this thing that is going to take place. And there's another verb that is used "apekdechetai" and it means it waits and is prepared to wait without ceasing, or without getting tired, until this group of people appear.

And we saw a little of it, you know, at the Watergate [scandal during Richard Nixon's USA

presidency] thing. We saw a little of the society and the creation waiting with heads stretched out to see if we could find an honest man. And you know some of the hope even that we had immediately after Watergate, even some of that has deteriorated a little and yet still wouldn't you say, that society is in agony for a group of princes and princesses who will act on principle? Who will do things because they believe they're right or because they believe they ought to be done. Who will act apart from their own desire for security, apart from their own happiness, apart from their own sense of significance.

And that's why old Paul is speaking the truth, you know, when he says under the inspiration of God, "That the creation waits with its head stretched out forward to catch the first glimpse of these sons and daughters of God that are going to come back with Jesus." And loved ones, such are you. Such are you that God is preparing. That's why the suffering. He has to get out all the dross, all the cheap motives, all the selfishness. That's why the suffering, to get you to depend on him alone. So the Watergates will continue and the Vietnams will continue, and the recessions will continue, and the earthquakes will continue and through them all people will yearn more and more for men and women of principle who are free themselves to act on the basis of principle.

And as those things increase, and as the situation gets worse -- and it will get worse, won't it? It's not going to get better. You can look at it now. But, as the whole situation deteriorates more and more, so God is preparing some of you to return with Jesus his son, to renew the heavens and the earth and to administer those new heavens and that new earth. And that's the purpose of it all, you know. It isn't just so that we can have a little service here, or sing hymns, or be happy in this present life. God has a far bigger plan than that and he's going to come and renew the whole miserable mess and at that time he'll need sons and daughters whom he can trust and that's what he's working in you and me.

It really is glorious isn't it, that you're not here to be a great doctor, or a great dentist, or a great teacher, or a great custodian because all that's going to go past very fast. But, you're here to be a son and daughter of God whom he'll be able to use when he remakes the earth and the heavens. So will you remember that during the suffering times, you know, and see what God's after in you.

Let us pray. Dear Father, we've observed it ourselves that the creation is waiting with eager longing for the revelation of somebody who will act honestly and purely. And Lord, we know there'll come a time when a great figure will arise who claims to be able to do that. And we know that great antichrist figure will promise to bring unity to the world, or promise to bring unity to the churches and to the governments, will promise to feed all of India and all of China. And Lord we know that that will be the antichrist.

But we know our Father too now, that your son himself will come himself, even Jesus our Savior. And we know that with him will come a great band of saints, of sons and daughters of God who have accepted the suffering that you have allowed to come to them creatively and joyfully, and allowed it to work in them that total dependence upon you that will be essential in those days. Father, we thank you. We thank you that you are even now preparing us for that time so we would greet it as pure joy when we enter into various trials knowing that through them you are strengthening our dependence upon you alone and our independence of the world and of each other for Jesus' sake.

And now 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 until Jesus comes. Amen.

