

## The Fall of Creation

Romans 8:20

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

One of the criticisms of the revelation of God as the father of Jesus that we've all met is this one. If God is omnipotent, if God is omnipotent and if he is good, then why does he allow a little baby to suffer? Why does he allow innocent people to die of incurable diseases, if God is good and omnipotent? The real answer is that God is not omnipotent in a certain sense. "Omnis potens" in Latin is "able to do anything" and omnipotent really means able to do anything. And the truth is, loved ones, God is not able to do anything. God is only able to do what it is his own nature to do. So God can't do anything in the sense that he can't tell lies. It is against his nature to lie so God cannot lie. He cannot be cruel. It is against his nature to be cruel. So if you say "God can do anything" you're not really being honest because God cannot do anything. He can simply do anything that it is his nature to do.

Now you may say, "Well how does that explain suffering?" Well, suffering is a result of free will. God gave us herbs, and marijuana, and opium and they all have their place in medicinal purposes in our lives. But, God has given us free will so that we can if we want misuse those or treat them abusively to try to destroy the perception of reality in our own minds. Now, if we do that certain mental and emotional disorientation follows and that is a result of the exercise of our free wills and God cannot prevent those consequences. Otherwise, he would in fact be constricting the free exercise of our free wills. So you see, the consequences of the exercises of our free wills are part of our free wills, and if God restrained those consequences then he is in effect restraining our free will.

So you might say that free will and its consequences are a packaged deal and you can't separate them. And of course, suffering you can see as a result, therefore, of the exercise of our free wills. In other words, God has made us in his own image, and he is a self determining being. That is, he can determine what he wants to do. He is free. He can determine really what his nature is in a sense. And he has made us in that image, and he has made us free to do what we would want to do. And so he has to hold himself back from leaping down out of heaven every time a couple contract venereal disease or gonorrhea and beget a little deformed child. God cannot leap down from heaven every time that consequence follows that exercise of the free will. Otherwise, do you see, our free will would be just a mirage? It would be just an illusion. We would in fact not be in charge of our own destiny.

We would be able to say, "Do whatever you want because it doesn't matter what you do. God will correct the results of it and he will make it go his way anyway." So loved ones, God cannot leap down from heaven every time some evil result comes from the exercise of our free wills. Indeed, it is in a sense vital that he doesn't because it's those painful consequences that remain as a daily witness for us that everything is not right in our world. So in a sense those consequences are essential because they keep reminding us there's something rotten in the state of Denmark, there's something that isn't quite right in the fabric of this universe. And so it's vital that God doesn't keep leaping down correcting the results of the free exercise of our will each time we undertake it. It's vital that he leaves it there.

Now loved ones, that's part of the meaning of this verse that we're studying today so would you look

at it now in the light of just that little bit of sharing and I think it will mean something to you.

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." Maybe you can glimpse a wee bit of the meaning of that last phrase there, or clause, "Not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope." One of the hopes that God has is that we will see the futility that we have produced in our own creation and that we will see that there's something not right and that we'll want to find out what that is. And so that's part of what that verse means.

So let's just look at one obvious kind of suffering: sickness and disease. Is all sickness and disease due to sin? Yes, it is loved ones, really. God didn't make sickness or disease and all sickness or disease is due to sin. That is due to us men and woman wanting to live life our own way, on our own terms for our own satisfaction. And all sickness is due to that. Now, it's not necessarily due to your personal sin. It's good to see that; it's in John 9:3. You remember the man who was born blind. You remember the disciples asked in verse two, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents." So your sickness and my sickness are not necessarily due to our own personal sin nor are they necessarily due to our parents' sin, though they could be due to either or. But, they are not necessarily due to our personal sin or our parents' sin.

Much sickness has come down on the principle that is set forth in Numbers 14:18. And a great deal if not most of the sickness and disease in our world has come into it on the basis of this principle. Numbers 14:18, "The LORD is slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but he will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of fathers upon children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation." In other words, God has built into the universe certain patterns of human behavior that will continue to intensify evil consequences as they go on if we don't live the way he wants us to. And that is out of love so that we'll see we're going the wrong way.

So you get a little instability in a family, a little mental instability and then against God's guidance and will that family begins to inbreed. And the mental instability and the genes that carry it become the predominate genes until maybe even centuries later, but certain generations later you have a full blown case of schizophrenia that just is almost untreatable. Now that happens repeatedly loved ones; the disease intensifies and intensifies as we continue generation after generation to live apart from God's plan for us. And the whole purpose of it is that he subjects it in hope that we might see that we're living the wrong way. So it is out of love that he does it.

One easy example of it is that God really intends that we should live without worry at all. He really intends that we should live without any worry, that we should live a day at a time. And you remember he started to teach that when mankind was in its childhood to the Israelites themselves or the Hebrews. Would you look with me to the spot? It's Exodus 16. And God began there to teach the Hebrew people that he wanted them to depend on him absolutely for tomorrow and not to bother about tomorrow but simply to trust him. And of course, he set it forth in way that they in their childhood would understand and it was that manna you remember, that he made available to them from heaven miraculously.

Exodus 16:19. And Moses received this command you see and this direction about the manna, "And Moses said to them, 'Let no man leave any of it till the morning.' But they did not listen to Moses; some left part of it till the morning, and it bred worms and became foul; and Moses was angry with them." So God said to Moses, I'll make this manna available for all the people in the

wilderness but they must gather just enough for today and believe me, tomorrow morning it will be there again. If you trust me and trust me to take care of tomorrow the manna will be there. Let nobody gather any of it to keep it for tomorrow. And of course, some of them did it and they gathered some for tomorrow and it was spoiled and fouled the next day.

That was God's way of giving them a pretty obvious consequence of them failing to trust him. It was him showing them, "Look, every time you act on that principle of trying to depend on yourself alone for the future, things are going to spoil." And so it's the same with us. God says to us, "Don't worry about tomorrow; just don't worry." And you know every time we worry that old meal sits on the table spoiled and the old adrenaline has pumped into our stomachs so much that we're unable to eat the meal and there it sits, spoiled manna, a testimony to the fact that we're not living the way our Creator meant us to live.

And really you know that the old brain was made to pump adrenaline into us for action and that was the way that creation was made. But when we begin to worry instead of to act that creation is subjected to futility. And the very act of the brain being able to affect the release of adrenaline inside us for action, that very creation is subjected to futility every time we worry, because it's really that old acid that comes in that creates the ulcers and creates the sickness and disease. And so you know, we're lying there in bed and the old adrenaline is saying, "Go! Go! Go!" And that's what it's there for. And we're saying, "No, no, no I just want to lay in bed and worry without acting. Just let me worry. I don't want to do anything. I don't know what to do, but I just want to worry." And God of course is letting the creation of the adrenaline be subjected to absolute futility so we'll see that's not the way to go.

So loved ones it is the same right down through the whole scale of diseases you know. All the ulcers, and the arteriosclerosis, and the headaches, and the heart disease, and the kidney disease, all those sicknesses come originally from the buildup of tension in our world through all those fruits of the flesh. The envy, and the jealousy, and the pride, and the anger, and the worry, and the anxiety, and the distrust, and all those attitudes inside us are apart from God's will for us and he has so planned our personal beings that we will produce diseases such as we talked of. And so loved ones, that's one way in which God has subjected the creation to futility. But he has subjected it in hope that we would say, "There's something not right here. There's some way in which we're not living right."

It is interesting that we make that as a kind of casual joke, don't we at times? And somebody asks us why things go so well with us and we say, "Oh, we just live right." It's a joke now because we've lost the connection, but really in a deep way it's true. It's just that God often blesses many of us beyond what we deserve. But it is true that when we begin to live wrong we see the consequences eventually in our own lives. Some of you may say, "Well yeah, that's sickness and disease, I can see that. I can see how a good God who is able to do what it is his nature to do cannot step in there, I can see that. I can see that we with our own free will have created a lot of the disease and the sickness we have down through the years. I can see that. But what about suffering that is due to what we call in the insurance business "acts of God"? What about that suffering that is due to natural disasters? What about all those people who died because that plane was caught by the wind shear as it landed at Kennedy airport a couple of months ago? What about the people who have died down through the years in the earth quakes in California? What about the great suffering that has come to young and old alike in tornados and hurricanes? What about the countless men and woman who have died at sea because of storms? What about all the suffering that is due to natural disasters?

And really loved ones I think many of us have difficulty at times seeing that because we read, do you remember, in Genesis 1:31 that God had looked at all that he had made and behold it was very good. And we tend to say to ourselves, "Well then, was he looking at rainstorms, and hurricanes, and tornados, and earthquakes and tidal waves and saying, 'I have made all of these and behold they're very good.'? How could he say that when he knew the agony and the pain that those things would bring to people?" Now loved ones there's an easy immediate answer to that question. It's the same answer as we give to those who say, "Did God make disease?"

I'd show you the answer, it's in Mark 4:39. You remember, it's Jesus in the boat with the disciples. Maybe you could read verse 38. It gives the context a little. "But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care if we perish?' And he awoke and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm." If God's son spent the few years of his life healing diseases then probably God didn't make disease. Otherwise, they were working against each other. And it's so with the storm, if God's son calmed the storm it's probable that God does not make storms.

But let's go a step further, why do storms result? Loved ones, I think you get a little bit of a clue when I mention ozone to you and you immediately think of your old deodorant. You know that we're already beginning to be concerned about the ozone layer that filters the sun's rays to us because we're beginning to destroy that ozone layer with so many spray cans. Or, if I ask you to tell me the difference between fog and smog you haven't much trouble. It is incredible the way we human beings are able to darken a city. We're able to actually block out the sun with the exhaust fumes. In other words, it is possible for us, isn't it, to even influence the climatic conditions that we experience. Indeed, that's part of the argument, isn't it, in international affairs whether we are right in affecting the climate of our enemies in order to assist us in a war because we are now at that point where we believe we can change the climate of the universe. And loved ones, it's incredible but that's the explanation of natural disasters.

God put a virgin earth under our control. He put it into our keeping. He gave it to us as our responsibility. Now, you might like to look at that. It's Genesis 1:28. "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 gave us the earth to develop according to his will. He knew that in the doing of that we ourselves would develop into his likeness, and so he put the world under our control. And, you remember Adam began to exercise that control. You find that in Genesis 2:19, "So out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name." And that was God's plan, that we men and woman would begin to develop his earth in accordance with his plan and will. And really, it was put under our control.

Now, we decided of course we didn't want to rule the earth. We decided we didn't want to be ruled by God. We decided we wanted to rule ourselves and we wanted to rule everybody else. So immediately we took ourselves out of God's control, loved ones, the earth itself was left without someone to control and develop it. And even though God still maintains enough common and general grace to hold it in orbit and to enable the seasons to keep coming -- yet immediately we rebelled against him, we took from him the intermediary that he intended to use to restrain and control the water, and the air, and the other powers in the universe. And immediately we came out of God's control ourselves. We pulled the earth out of God's control also and the whole earth was taken out of that close union

with the Father's will that it was meant to have at the beginning.

In other words, there is a mystical, spiritual connection between us and our world. Of course, all of the animist religions would testify to that, wouldn't they? All the naturalists would testify to that. But of course there is a link between us and nature. But, loved ones, because there is a mystical, spiritual connection between us and our world when we rebelled out of God's control we took our earth out of that same control. You know, you get that teaching very plainly there if you look at Genesis 3:17-18 that we read. "And to Adam he said, 'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, "You shall not eat of it", cursed is the ground because of you.'" And you see those words, "because of you". "In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you." In other words, "I didn't intend it to have thorns and thistles but because of you I have withdrawn the restraining grace that was to be operated through you and it will bring forth thorns and thistles."

And loved ones, there is plenty of evidence in our geology that a massive catastrophe took place at one time in the natural history of the world. And of course, God has told us what that natural catastrophe is and that it was an incredible probably year-long deluge that affected not only the world and the rocks and brought about faults and slidings of the mountain masses but brought about a change even in our own atmosphere because there is evidence from the Bible account that it involved some change in the atmosphere surrounding our world. Now loved ones, this is all part of what Romans 8:20 means when it says, "God subjected the creation to futility and subjected in hope, hoping that we men and women would see this isn't paradise. There's something wrong here. There's something that isn't running the way it was meant to run."

Loved ones, it affected the whole world. It affected the animal kingdom. You can see that if you look at Genesis 3:14. There came about a transformation even in the attitude of animals to us and our attitude to animals. "The LORD God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, cursed are you above all cattle, and above all wild animals; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.'" Obviously, the serpent wasn't meant originally to travel that way. And if you look at the teachings that are given in Isaiah about the renewed earth when Jesus returns where the lion and lamb will lay down together, obviously the animals were not meant to go in fear of us or us in fear of them.

Obviously, it was never God's plan that we would be able to make a mint [fortune] out of "Jaws" [a horror movie about sharks]. It was never his plan. It was his plan that we would look upon those dear fish and those dear animals as friends. It was never his will that we should make a mint of money out of placarding the fear in which we should stand towards his creatures. So there was a tremendous change came about because we ourselves rebelled against God. The whole natural world that had been originally under our control also fell out of God's control. You can see it affected the plant kingdom by which we read and we wouldn't have the trouble with the weeds that we have now. We wouldn't have the battle against the jungles that we have if we had not rebelled against God and the world of nature had not been pulled out of his control.

Man himself -- if you look at Genesis 3:16 -- it wasn't his will that you dear sisters should bear your babies in agony and in pain. "To the woman he said, 'I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children.'" So that you'll see that things are not right in the world. That in some ways these things are able to be reversed and this was not My original plan.

Genesis 5:29, for those of us who don't like work. Genesis 5:29, it is Lamech talking about Noah. Genesis 5:29, "And called his name Noah, saying, 'Out of the ground which the LORD has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands.'" In other words, originally we were meant to work with freedom and with liberty. We were not meant to be involved in frustrating work and work that tired us and wearied us because of our emotional dissatisfaction with it.

And so loved ones, the whole natural world was subjected to futility and most of all maybe that that is described in Genesis 7:11. This tremendous deluge -- it took something like this to lay down the clay that is at the moment in the Mississippi basin, or the sedimentary rocks in Wisconsin. You know, it had to be some tremendous catastrophe that was sudden and took place in a moment. "In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth." And you see there's an indication that some kind of layer of water vapor was involved above the earth, "And the windows of the heavens were opened." And then it goes on in Verse 17, "The flood continued forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased, and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. The waters prevailed and increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark floated on the face of the waters. And the waters prevailed so mightily upon the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered."

In other words it was a universal thing and not just a local flood. "The waters prevailed above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep. And all flesh died that moved upon the earth." Loved ones, it is from that kind of chaos that the earthquakes, and the storms, and the tidal waves, and the disharmony and the disorder in our natural world began. So when we look at those things let's see them as things that are alien to God's plan. And what we'll try to share over the next few Sundays is the extent to which we, as sons and daughters of God, can bring things back to what God meant them to be.

So loved ones I pray, that at least this morning, you'll see that the things that are bad in our world and in our universe are not God's plan and they have been brought about by ourselves and by the consequences of our rebellion against him. So I hope that maybe you'll be able to answer other people a little yourselves but that most of all you'll see that this is not the way it was meant to be. And that in the coming Sundays we'll try to find out some of the ways in which we will try to make it what it used to be.

Let us pray. Dear Father we thank you that you have called us to be sons and daughters of yours to begin to bring about the renovation of this dear fallen creation. And Father we would thank you for your justice that allows this kind of suffering and this kind of disease to continue as a sign to us that things are not right. Father we thank you for being so real with us as that. And we trust you our Father, that you will work in us the kind of wisdom and the kind of transformation that will enable us to begin, even now, to work towards the renovation of this universe and this world. A renovation that we know will only be completed when Jesus comes again. Amen.