

Who Justifies Me?

Romans 8:33

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Now if you will turn, loved ones, to Romans 8:33 -- the first part of the verse is a question, "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?" A million people, a million things, a million circumstances. And you may say, "Ah, that's ridiculous. Nobody could bring a charge against God's elect. Nobody could bring anything that would shatter the peace and the sense of assurance that God's children have because they're his children." Now loved ones, I tell you a million things will, a million different people will, and a million different circumstances will.

Have you ever got a D? I know that some of us aren't such magnificent academics that a D is any big deal for us, but for those of us who think we are something in the academic world, have you ever got a D? You hand the paper in and then you get it back three weeks later and you walk home in a kind of daze -- it just seems as if the whole world has fallen because a D you did not expect. Or, have you ever lost a job? Maybe not your own fault at all, but you lost a job. And you know how you feel as you are going home -- you feel absolutely shattered and you wonder what you are going to do. You really have no idea how you are going to sort things out.

Or have you ever come to one of those milestones in your life -- 17. And you say, "What have I done? I'm 17 and what have I done?" And then you get to 21 and you say, "21 and what have I done?" And then you get to 26, "26 and what have I achieved?" And then you get to 30, "30, what have I done with my life?" "35, what have I done with my life?" "40, what have I achieved?" "45, what have I done with my life?" 50, 60, 65, 70 what have I done with my life? Or have you ever come to one of those terrible failures or defeats in your life when you just put your head in your hands and think, "There is no way out of this at all, this is hopeless. I am the most useless fool in the universe."

Loved ones, when you ask that question, "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?" I'd answer a million different things. A million different situations seem to be capable, for many of us, to shatter any sense of peace or any sense of assurance we have that we are the children of the maker of the universe and that he is in full control. I think all of us here would admit, "Sure, I've experienced one of those things," or, "I've experienced all of those things. All of those situations that you have described -- yes, I have come into them and yes, I do agree they have shattered my peace and they have spoiled the sense of assurance that I had about my life. And I must admit that the chaos they have brought into my life and the confusion and the panic they have sent to the bottom of my heart have governed my responses and my reactions far more than any peace that I had with God." And indeed probably all of you would agree that's one of most bewildering and irrational parts of that kind of a shattering experience.

It seems to be able not only to cause you temporary self doubt, but would you not agree that it seems in certain situations, to throw you into widespread panic. It seems capable of making you suddenly question the whole purpose and the whole direction of your life. I'm sure many of you have experienced something like that and that you've gone home and you've wondered, "Why am I even here? There's no point in me being here. I have no right to be on this earth." And we find that things that people say to us, a little D that some professor gives us, a critical comment that our boss makes to us, or a conflict that we have in the office can send us home with our whole certainty about our lives shattered and crumbling and we spend days, maybe a week, maybe weeks, maybe a couple

of months in certain situations, trying to gather the thing back together again.

Now loved ones, why should that happen? Why is it possible for almost anybody, it seems, to bring some kind of charge against God's elect and apparently destroy all the great peace and assurance that they have that their Father is in control of their lives. Why is it possible for that to happen? We can all see why it's possible to be a little put out by somebody's criticism of you. We can all see why it's possible for someone to be a little set back by a low grade on an assignment. We can all see why it's possible for a guy, especially who has a family depending on him, to have to take a little while to gather himself together to get out to that unemployment line and start looking for a job. But loved ones, why is it more than that? Why is it an apparent shattering of all our self-image, and all our assurance about ourselves, and all our certainty about our place in the world, and all our assurance that we have a right to be here -- why does it affect all that?

Loved ones, I think because it is connected up with a spiritual truth or an eternal fact that we ourselves have not completely dealt with in our own lives. And that fact is that we have no right to be alive on this earth the way we are. That's a fact you know. We actually have no right to be alive on this earth the way we are -- really. Now I could show you why, it's James 4:17 and it is the first part of the logic of it, "Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin." "Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin." I doubt if there is anybody here who has never been in that situation -- where you've known what was right to do and you've not done it. Now that is sin.

Now loved ones, go to Romans 6:23 and I think it'll begin to explain why we get into such a state of absolute hopelessness over little things, even though they are little tragedies. "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Our conscience keeps on testifying to the fact that all of us have sinned, we've all lived independent of the creator of the world and we're under condemnation to death and we have no right to be here on this earth; our conscience testifies to that. And we respond to that death sentence by saying, "We have a right to be here. We have, we have, we have. I know I've sinned but I have a right to be here and I'll prove it to you. I'll prove I have a right to be here. I'll prove by how good I am, I'll prove by how much I contribute to this world that I have a right to be here. I'll prove by the kind of brain that I have that I have a right to be here. I'll prove by the good things that I do that I have a right to be here. I'll prove by the good father I am that I have a right to be here."

Loved ones, we're like a group of prisoners on death row who are sentenced to death and we invent a little system of merit points for the most moral murderer among us and we play this little game. Our tragedy is that we treat the game for real. We really do think that if we can pile up enough merit points, somehow or other the law will not carry out the death sentence upon us. And so we keep on piling up these little merit points -- and underneath our conscience is testifying against the whole game and is saying, "You have no right to be here on this earth." And we're saying, "We have. See what we've done. See what a good job we've done. See how much money we can earn. See what good grades we get. See what everybody thinks of us. See how approved we are by the general populous. See how efficient and effective and useful to the world we are. We have a right to be here." And our conscience is continually testifying to the truth that all your system of merit points does not affect the fact that this death sentence is being enforced by the Creator of the world upon you and it's not part of your little game.

Now loved ones, that's why we get so cast down when suddenly our merit points seem to be falling behind. Whenever the boss criticizes us for the mess we have made of that last letter, it's because

we have linked our ability as a good blameless typist to our right to be here on this world, that we get so upset. Really loved ones, that's why all those irrational feelings come up within you when you get home, those irrational feelings that make you feel, "I have no right to be in this world." It's dumb. You know it's dumb. Just because you make a mistake in a letter, that doesn't mean you have no right to be in this world. But it's because we've linked up our performance in our job to these things. Loved ones, it's more obvious with us guys who have jobs and a family to support. You know the agony many of us were in over this last recession. Many of us who were good at our jobs and many of us who had good jobs found that even the very firms were collapsing and we found ourselves without a job. And suddenly many of us found ourselves wondering why we were even here. And we had real self-questioning and self-doubt.

Loved ones, it's because we link up our performance in all these areas to justifying our own existence here on the earth. And we're always crying out to the Father, "I really have a right to be here. I know you say I should die for my sins, but really -- aren't I worth something? Aren't I worth something?" Loved ones, that's why we all come home and regale our roommates with sterling stories of how we bested some other student in an argument. Or it's especially effective if you can tell a stirring story of how you bested a professor in an argument. And somehow it boosts you, it makes you feel, "You think I'm just an ordinary roommate, but really I am something of worth and value in myself."

And you know us husbands, I mean we're the worst aren't we -- we bore our poor wives with how the world turns in our office and we're always at the center of the world's turning. We're always the diplomatic, brilliant seer that makes everything go right and we always make sure we tell them of that part that we've done. And you know it all just comes out again and again, all of us are at this continually. We're all the time trying to bring out the best part of us for somebody else to hear about it. And loved ones, it isn't just pride, it isn't just boastfulness, but deep, deep down we keep thinking we have to prove ourselves.

I've never seen the TV series, and maybe you have, "Happy Days" I think it's called. No, you haven't seen Happy Days? The main star is called, "Fonzarelli", "The Fonz." There was an interview in "People" magazine. Now "Happy Days" was at the top of the ratings -- it just wiped them. And you know what he (the star) says? "I have a terrible need to continually prove myself." And you know what's so idiotic? A fellow who is at the top of fame as far as entertainment is concerned and is at the moment on American TV, it's ridiculous that he feels he has to prove himself. But loved ones don't you see that we're all in the same game. We're all involved in this desire to justify our being alive here on this earth. And so every little event that in any way impeaches our ability as a typist, or our ability as a housewife, or our ability as a father, or our ability as a teacher, or our ability as a student, throws us into a panic of self-doubt, of self-recrimination, of questioning whether we have a right to be here or not.

Now loved ones, what's the way out? That's very plain -- leave the justifying to the only one who can justify. Leave the justifying to the only one who can justify. Would you stop trying to justify yourself? Would you stop trying to prove that you're of great value, and of tremendous worth, and that all of us couldn't get along without you? Would you stop trying to prove that the world has found a tremendous little gem when it found you or found me? Would you stop trying to establish that you're worth something and that you are of value and would you see that you are good for nothing but to be destroyed? That's what God says. Because you've lived so independent of him, because you're such a selfish, miserable creature who wants your own way and wants to walk over everybody else, you're good only for being destroyed. And would you see that God destroyed you in

his son Jesus, and therefore justified your existence here on the earth.

Now loved ones that's it -- the one who enforces the death penalty is the only one who can lift the death penalty and that's what he's done. And not all the argument in the world will change it. Now if you doubt that in fact you were destroyed with Jesus, loved ones, I will show you a few of a hundred verses. Romans 6:6 is an obvious one. "We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed." Then Romans 6:4, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death." Then Colossians 3:3, "For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God." Colossians 2:12, "And you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead." Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives within me."

Loved ones, God destroyed you in his son Jesus, and the moment you believe that and submit to the Holy Spirit working the effects of that out in your life day-by-day, that moment you are justified in being here on the earth. Really, that's it. Romans 5:9 says, "We are justified by faith in Jesus." And you can never justify yourself however great a person you are, even if you do get on the "Happy Days" show, or even if you do become famous, or even if the whole world knows of you and approves of you and praises you, all of that will not lift the death sentence from you. That can only be lifted from you by the fact that God has executed it in Jesus and you have been crucified with him. And the moment you say, "Lord, I accept that. Now Holy Spirit will you begin to show me what the effects of this are to be in my life?" And the moment you begin to submit to that dear Holy Spirit, that moment you are justified.

And then loved ones, the boss cuts you down in front of everybody else in the office, or he tells you you're fired in front of all your colleagues, or you come home and you have to tell your wife, "I've lost another job," or you go home to your parents and you show them the C's and D's, or you come home after somebody else has just put you down in front of all your friends and you're able to say, "Father, I know I have a right to be here because of what you did to me in your son Jesus. I know you love me. I know you're glad I'm here and Lord that's all that counts."

And loved ones, the Holy Spirit will begin to bring in you a sense of balance and a sense of quiet peace so that you will be able to see these little failures for what they are -- your failure to jump over a temporary hurdle that society has decided to erect. And after you fail to jump over that hurdle, there will be other hurdles that God enables you to jump over. But your failure to jump over them says nothing about your right to be here in the world. Loved ones, you don't have to keep proving yourself, truly, really. You don't have to keep proving yourselves to yourselves, and to your relatives, and to your professors, and to your employers. You have a right to be here in this world because God destroyed you in his son. He has no desire to destroy you a second time, he wants you to be here, he's glad you're here and he's willing now to give you his Holy Spirit to begin to guide you into the kind of life that he wants you to live.

Loved ones, the moment you accept that, at that moment there comes a great sense of peace, a great sense of justification into your heart. And a great freedom from having a chip on your shoulder all the time and having to prove you're worth something. Who justifies me? Not you, not the way I do this job, not myself. I'm justified by God, my Father who saw I was so miserable that he had to destroy me and he did it in Jesus so that I could experience that by faith and now allow his Holy Spirit to make me the kind of person he wants me to be. And that's it -- God wants you to live in that kind of peace.

So I'd ask you, all of you sitting there, you know some area where this is happening in you. You know what a grind it is; you know how it throws you into absolute chaos when the little tragedy happens. Would you not settle the big question, that it's God who justifies you. And he justifies you by carrying out his death sentence upon you and his son. Why not thank him for it and ask him through his Holy Spirit to begin to work out the effects of that in your life. And why not enter into peace, real peace, because really there is a place of quiet rest near to the heart of God, a place where you do not need to be thrown into confusion by everybody who tosses a hard word at you. And so I pray that some of you as you sit there this moment will take a stand now. I pray that you'll take the stand now.

Don't say to yourself, "Well, yeah that's true and I'm going to go home and think about." Why not just do it now? You don't think about whether the sun is shining or not in this moment. You know it's shining and you know the sky is there. Now the same one that put the sky there and put the sun there has put you into his son Jesus and destroyed you there. Why not accept it and why not say, "Lord thank you. I knew I was not much good. I didn't know I was quite good for nothing, but now I know Lord and thank you. And now, Father, will you begin to make me over anew now that you have done what needed to be done."

And stop substituting, loved ones, the little merit points and disconnect your daily performance here from this big question of your right to be here. Sure, you have a right to be here the moment you accept what your Father has done.

Let's pray. Dear Father, we would pray for each other this morning, because Lord we know that if the other loved ones beside us are like ourselves, they're having their struggles with this. Even those who think they are Christians, Father, find themselves justifying themselves to their wives, and their parents, their loved ones, their professors, and their employers. And Lord we feel so stupid when we do it because we realize that we are responding in an irrational way and we're getting the whole thing out of perspective. And Lord we see that it's because we think our very worth and value as human beings is being impugned and Father we see that is not so. Lord we see that you condemned us to death for our rebellious willfulness and Lord we see that's what we have deserved when we see what we have done to other people.

And Father we accept that and we don't know what it means for us in detail, but Lord God will you show us by this Holy Spirit that you have? Will you send him into our lives and will you begin to show us how this will change our lives and how you want us to accept what you have done in Jesus? And Father we know that the Holy Spirit will give us a sense of peace with you and a sense of acceptance with the only one who finally matters -- the one who is the ultimate and final arbitrator in the whole universe. Lord if you accept us, what does it matter who rejects us? Father we thank you for that. We would pray for each other, our Father, this morning, that you'll enable us to walk in the joy of this through this coming week, through every eventuality, so that when we ask the question, "who shall bring any charge against God's elect" we will be able to answer, "no one. It is God who justifies." We thank you Father. 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 throughout this coming week. Amen.