

Sorrow and Pain

Romans 9:2

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

There are, really, two ways to live life. There are two very different, distinct ways to live your life. You can live it strained, or you can live it relaxed. Strained means that you regard your existence here as the result of chance impersonal forces or as the action of a God who has neither the time nor the inclination to be interested in your everyday existence, but who will only interest Himself in you after this life is over. Now if that's your attitude, then you regard responsibility for your security, significance, and your happiness as resting completely on your shoulders and on no one else's. And as the result of that, you'll spend every day at work, every day at school, every day at home, trying to ensure your financial and material security, your social and professional significance, and your own personal happiness. And that is such a tremendous burden to assume for one miserable little human being like yourself, that you will end up intensifying your inborn selfishness to the point that you become a self-seeking monster (at least in your own eyes). Now that's the strained way to live life. I think that many of us live it that way; many of us who know better still live life like that.

The relaxed way means that you regard your existence here on earth as the result of the creation by a loving Father who knows you personally and who not only has a detailed plan for your life, but who knows each day, moment by moment, and how you're progressing along that plan. As a result, you see that He's going to provide for your security, your significance, and your happiness. You commit to miraculous destruction in Jesus that little cookie-eating monster you used to be, that little animal that is filled with self-defense and that prowls trying to make it feel safe. You'll commit to miraculous destruction in Jesus that selfish, self-concerned monster and you'll order your life by the directions that come from the Spirit of Jesus, and you'll live your life in relaxation.

Now those are the two ways, loved ones. Probably the truth is that all of us here could delineate the strained way in Technicolor. But many of us have real difficulty describing the detailed outworking of the relaxed way. The Bible is filled with descriptions of different men and women with very different personalities, in all kinds of social positions, and in all kinds of environments who lived life the relaxed way. One of these men is Paul. He describes in detail what it is like to live life the relaxed way. That's part of the reason why we're studying this letter to the Romans; he described in detail the outworking of living life in the relaxed way. As we read it, many of us become aware that we aren't living the relaxed life we thought we were. We see some new light, we step into it, and our life becomes freer.

Now would you look with me at the verse we're looking at today? Because in it Paul describes one of the characteristics of the person who lives life the relaxed way. It's Romans 9:2: "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart." Now some of you are probably saying, "You've got the wrong kind of life -- unceasing anguish and great sorrow -- that's my life. I can describe that to you!" Sorrow and pain, sorrow and pain -- that's what expresses the life of most people here on earth. Probably all of us here can look back to all kinds of situations where we've had great sorrow and unceasing anguish. Probably all of us can think of plans that didn't turn out the way we thought they would. All of us can think of relationships that didn't develop as we hoped they would. All of us can think of agony and pain that we've spent worrying anxiously over money situations, over jobs and exams. All of us here can think of circumstances that have pressed us to the point where we

thought we were being squeezed to death. All of us can think of environments that were so oppressive and so strong and so hostile that we thought we'd never live through another day. Probably all of us here can think of circumstances and situations and people whom we have experienced over the years -- and maybe some of us here this morning are experiencing them now -- that have caused us tremendous sorrow and continuous anguish and pain.

Now loved ones, that's not the sorrow and pain that Paul was talking about. He had that kind of sorrow and pain, too, but I want you to see that that kind of experience did not cause him sorrow and pain. He had those experiences, but it did not bring him sorrow and pain. 2 Corinthians 11:24 shows us that he had those kind of experiences: "Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches."

He also suffered sickness, as you see in chapter 12, verse 7: "And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated." So many of us think that if a man like Paul prayed, healing would come right away. But in verse 8 he says, "Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; but he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'"

And then, where is the sorrow and pain? "I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong." And then if you look, loved ones, at Philippians 4, he continues that kind of declaration, that whatever circumstances were like, he had no sorrow and pain about them. Philippians 4:10, "I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me; you were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I complain of want; for I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. I can do all things in him who strengthens me." Then in verse 4 of chapter 4 he says, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Really, not a shadow can rise, not a cloud in the skies, but a smile quickly drove it away in Paul's life. Not a doubt, nor a fear, not a sigh nor a tear, can abide while he trusted and obeyed. Paul was not suffering sorrow and pain, loved ones, because of external circumstances and the oppressions of his environment, he wasn't. He experienced all those things, but he experienced no sorrow and pain. The things that cause sorrow and pain in the strained life do not cause sorrow and pain in the relaxed life. The reason is that the basic condition for God to give a spirit of faith and relaxation to any man or woman, is that that man or woman absolutely rejects the world. He must reject this world around us, as a source of

security, of significance, and of happiness, and commit to death in Jesus all the self-gratifying, self-exalting, self-defensive tendencies of the personality. The person who lives a relaxed life takes that attitude to the world. They expect nothing from it, and therefore, they aren't disappointed when they get only pain or oppression from it.

The secret is, of course, what Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ, and it's not I that live, but Christ lives within me. And this present life I live by faith in the Son of God." Loved ones, those who live the relaxed life have accepted that they're crucified with Christ, that they need expect no happiness from this present world, and they regard things that happen to them as happening not to them, but to Jesus. When you think of it, all the sorrow and pain that we experience in that old life of strain comes from the fact that we regard our money, our possessions, our happiness, our enjoyment, our health, and our success as belonging to us. Now think, when you suddenly regard your happiness, enjoyment, success, money, possessions, job and reputation as belonging to Jesus and not to you, do you see that you're suddenly able to detach yourself from the catastrophes that come upon you? And you're able to deal with them as a skilled technician deals with a machine that is detached from him, rather than like a little cornered animal at bay that is overcome by panic and self-concern. You can begin to deal with the situations as someone who is detached. That is the miracle that takes place when you accept that all of us here in this auditorium have really been crucified with Christ. The things that we have are not our own. That good coat that you bought last winter is not yours. When you voluntarily hand it over to Jesus, you say, "Lord, I do not exist. I've been crucified with you. This is yours. Do whatever you want with it. If you want to tear it, if you want to give it away, if you want to make it last forever. It's yours, Lord. I give it to you."

Loved ones, suddenly when you begin to regard your life as ended in Jesus, you no longer enter into all those sorrows and pains that you experienced because we feel responsible for our own existence, we're responsible for your own continued life and no one will look after us if we don't look after ourselves. The relaxed life is entered when you really regard yourself as dead and no longer somebody to look after. We get ourselves into trouble and sorrow and pain by thinking that we're very much alive, that this life is very precious to us, and that we must prolong it at all costs.

Loved ones, it's dumb, dumb! The life will go like that (click of fingers). In a number of years, none of us will exist here; and yet we're holding on to this as if it's everything. God is asking us to enter into reality. This life is passing and transitory. God says, "Accept that I have already crucified you with all your selfishness in my Son. Accept that this is no longer your life to make what you want of it. It's mine to do what I want of it." That's the secret! That's why God has put you here and the reason why you have such strain is because you don't accept that. You want to make a little solar system of your own, placing yourself right in the center.

Where does the sorrow and pain come from then? Paul does talk about sorrow and pain. But if sorrow and pain doesn't come from adverse circumstances, or from the oppression of one's own environment, or from personal catastrophes -- what does it come from? Well, loved ones, it comes from the same place as Jesus' sorrow and pain. You can see it in Matthew 23:37-39: "Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Loved ones, I know it's hard for us to feel this. But do you see that we were really meant to feel

the same sorrow and pain as our dear Father does, when He sees us ignoring the life of the Holy Spirit, that limitless power that He has made available to us. It's the same sorrow and pain as when He sees loved ones in Zaire or Ireland or other countries tearing each other apart. It's the same sorrow and pain as when He thinks back to the moment when He created them in beauty and perfection, with such wonderful dreams for their happiness. The Father feels great sorrow and unceasing anguish when He sees them tearing each other apart, killing little babies, and spilling each other's blood. When we have died to protecting ourselves and feeling that selfish anguish and pain for our little difficulty, then the Holy Spirit begets in us an anguish that God Himself feels. That's the sorrow and pain we're meant to feel. That's the only agony that is really redemptive, do you know that?

I don't know how many of you make casual comments about non-Christians or people who don't know Jesus, or how many of us make little prayers that are just complimentary gestures to God for the salvation of the heathen, or how many of us here have preached to our brothers and sisters at home, or to our moms and dads, or to our sons and daughters; but we are always giving them tracts, or we are always getting them to listen to this broadcast or to watch that movie. Do you see that it's stupid?! Do you see that none of it has any power, except the power to offend people? Unless you have in your heart the same sorrow and pain that God has for the way they are living their lives, and for the pain they're causing themselves and others, the pain and agony they are causing God.

Because the truth is, Jesus on the cross, is just like what you find when you cut a great tree. When you cut across the trunk of a great tree, and you see the rings inside, you can gauge the age of the tree by the number of rings. But, the truth is that the rings occur not just at that point, but they occur right up through the tree. Wherever you cut that tree, you get those rings. Now, we cut open the heart of our Creator at Calvary, and we saw the pain and the agony as Jesus pleaded, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

But, loved ones, if you cut God's heart at any point in eternity you'd see the same pain, the same bleeding, the same disappointment in us miserable little creatures that are making hell out of His world. Now that is the sorrow and pain Paul is talking about.

And, loved ones, that's what is needed. Don't you see that? Those dear souls who come in here, or to a thousand other services, see a lot of us so-called evangelical Christians anxious to get them to know God. But instead, we come across to them as a group of ideologists who are determined to hang one more scalp on our belts, determined to prove that our way is the right way. Don't you see that there will be no change, no redemptive power of the Holy Spirit working in the lives of our relatives or colleagues, until we begin to experience the sorrow and pain that God feels?

That's why Paul said, "I labor that Christ may be fully formed in you." He uses the term that is used of a mother as she comes into the labor that brings her child to birth. Recalling all the agony, pain, straining, yearning, and the exercise of the body that birth brings, Paul said, "I labor that Christ may be fully formed in you." Loved ones, that's the kind of prayer and agonizing that God answers. Some of you say, "Ah, listen, brother. I pray for my son or my daughter. I've prayed for my mom. I've prayed for my dad. I've prayed for those people in that office where I work -- and nothing has happened!" Loved ones, don't you see why? Our prayers are so superficial, our care is so selfish.

Some of you here will even say, "But I do pray like that for my son or my daughter!" But you know that the sorrow and pain that Jesus experienced is not that mixed agony that we have. Ours is a

mixture of selfishness and unselfishness. We pray for our husband, partly because we want to see him converted, and partly because we realize the benefits and the great improvement we'd have in our life if he were converted. Or, we pray for a son or a daughter because we don't want to be disappointments as parents; or we don't want them to fail. It's not that kind of mixed agony that Paul is talking about, loved ones. It's the agony that comes when you've really put all your own things in God's hands, when you've committed them all into His hands, when you've committed your son, daughter, wife, friends, and your position. Then you begin to experience the agony and sorrow that is a grace from God, that which He gives to those who have stopped sorrowing and agonizing for themselves. And until that time comes, loved ones, you'll never experience that sorrow and that pain. And yet, that's the only sorrow and pain that will ever enable God to do a life-changing work in someone's heart. It is the only agony and pain that will enable God to change our world, and to change events in your life and the lives of others.

So, I think you can sense a complete difference between that and our little complimentary prayers that we offer up to God. Even our prayer times here in the service only have meaning if they are the tip of the iceberg, where underneath the ocean there is a huge mass of prayer that is offered up by you to God, hour after hour, day after day.

David Brainerd was a missionary who worked among the American Indians. Though he worked among them for years, yet he couldn't speak their language. The only interpreter he had was drunk most of the time. Brainerd spent ten or twelve hours a day on his knees in prayer and agony for the Indians. And that Indian tribe came to the highest level of sanctification and holy living that has been observed in that kind of situation; and it was obviously not through what they understood of his preaching.

Now, loved ones, don't get into that ten or twelve-hour stuff. That's not the issue. The issue is, you probably have three or four hours every evening. Even one hour in agony and prayer would bring about powerful results in your life and in the lives of others. If you say to me, "How do you produce the agony and pain?" Loved ones, you can't produce it. It is produced by the Holy Spirit in the life of a person who regards his own life as dead. It is produced in those who give their whole life and all their attention to God's purpose for His people.

Watchman Nee tells a story which helped me to see it, of a father and son working out in a garden one morning. The father said to the son "Will you come and help me with this thing here?" And the young son said, "Yes, in a minute, Dad, I've something in my hands." And Nee says that's the problem with us, that we have too many things of our own in our hands. We're too wrapped up with our own concerns. We're too taken up with our own security, significance, and happiness (which are the perks of being an intercessor for God); those are the things God gives you if you enter into the kind of sorrow and pain that He wants you to experience for the three and a half billion loved ones that don't yet know Him. Those are the other things that are added unto you. So many of us here are giving our whole lives to the ridiculous, unworthy object of trying to keep ourselves alive, trying to keep a coat on our back, trying to keep shoes on our feet, trying to keep food in our stomachs, and trying to keep ourselves important in everybody else's lives even though all that is going to end in a moment.

We spend all of our life taking care of those things which are extras; they are the perks of office, they are additional, they are expenses that God gives to those who really involve themselves in His concerns. In other words, if we would get all these things out of our hands and say "Lord, I'm concerned with what you're concerned with. I want to experience what you've experienced when you see a prostitute in Pigalle, Paris. Lord, I want to experience what you experience when you see somebody

murdering someone in New York. Lord, I want to experience what you experience when I see someone losing their temper with their roommate. Lord, I want to feel as you feel. I know that when I do that, you'll begin to use my prayers to change these situations."

Loved ones, that's it! If you have your own things in your hands you'll experience the wrong kind of sorrow and pain throughout your life. If your hands are full with your silly little bank account, if your hands are full with making sure your marriage is right, if your hands are full trying to get a better job than you've got -- then you're going to experience futile sorrow and pain for the rest of your life.

But, if you'll once get those things out and into God's hands and say, "Lord, as far as I'm concerned, I'm a dead person. Lord, I'm not my concern. You do what you want. Give me what you want. You say that you'll supply all my needs. What you give me I'll regard as my need. What you don't give me I'll regard as a luxury that I don't need. Lord, I give all that over to you. And, Lord God, now enable me to experience what you've experienced, to see my brothers and sisters through your eyes."

Do you realize that there would then be no rapes, no guys taking advantage of girls, no fathers taking advantage of their children, and no bosses lording it over others? There would be none of these things if we would see each other as God sees us. And you would begin to see the beauty in other people, you would begin to pray away the ugliness, and God would begin to answer. Honestly, it's the only sorrow and pain that would change the world.

Will you pray about it yourselves? God spoke to me in this verse and showed me that I need to enter into more of that sorrow and pain, and that if I did, more of you loved ones would be coming into complete peace and the relaxed way of life that God has for you. And I think that if it is true with me, it's true with you too.