

## Your Vocation

Romans 9:12

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Turn to Romans 9:12 You'll see the words that God inspired. "... she was told, 'The elder will serve the younger.'" So, what are YOU going to be when you grow up? I don't know about the girls here but I know we guys used to say we were going to be engine drivers, train drivers or we're going to drive fire engines. Probably now we'd say at seven or eight years of age, we wanted to be astronauts or the R2D2 robot in "Star Wars" -- something like that. The question was fun then. When we were seven or eight all the future seemed limitless. It was fun when somebody asked you, "What are you going to be when you grow up?" You shared all your dreams.

Then you remember coming up to the SAT and the ACT tests. The old question began to assume a more irksome form because people began to say not, "What are you going to be when you grow up?" -- but, "What are you going to major in?" You thrashed around wildly for some idea of what to major in. You picked out a number from a hat. You felt, "Well, I've settled that for four years." Then you got lost in school and college and courses. The questions came up again but you dealt with it in a more sophisticated way this time. You calmly decided which graduate school you were going to attend. You decided where you were going to get your master's degree or your doctorate. So you put off the question for a little while longer.

By that time you had found two good rationalizations to explain why you were in the job you were in. One, it was good experience. Now the thought occurred to you year by year, "When is this great life going to begin for which I'm getting all this experience?" Still, it put people off when they asked, "What are you going to be?" You'd say, "Well, this job has given me good experience." The second rationalization you used was, "Well, that's not important. It's not important what I do with my eight-hour day. What's really important in life is family, friends, leisure time and activities." As the years passed, we became more and more concerned about the whole question.

There are many of us here that don't fit into that pattern -- but great numbers of us probably fit into that pattern to some degree. The real difficulty is that vocation is a problem to us. It's a problem that we often would prefer not to talk about. We just don't quite know what to do with our lives. We keep on keeping on, hoping that something sometime will turn up. We don't know how to decide what to do with our lives. We don't know how to find what our vocation is. The answer to it is in this verse: "The elder will serve the younger" (Romans 9:12). The first truth that all of us need to see here is that God is showing us that your vocation is not your choice. It's not your choice. It's not a matter of you making an arbitrary decision sometime in your life as to what job you're going to do. That's not the way your vocation is settled. It's good to hold on to that.

You know the experience I had -- and presumably you have had it -- it seems nice to look at a list of job opportunities at school or to look at the want-ad column in the newspaper and think, "Oh, I can choose any job here and make an application." In a way, that sounds exciting. Wouldn't you agree that often there is a kind of emptiness and bewilderment about it? You kind of think, "Here I am looking at these jobs and there are hundreds and thousands of people looking at this same list of jobs. Any of them could do the jobs just as well as I could. I'm going to spend 40 hours of my week doing some job that everybody else is just as fitted for as I am." We get the feeling that we're

just one of thousands of interchangeable spare parts that lie around the country. Anybody else could do what we're going to do. This verse says, "No -- that's a lie. Your vocation is not a matter of an arbitrary decision by you. Your vocation is something that is more definite than that."

You remember, Jacob and Esau were two brothers. They were twins. Esau was older than Jacob. He made it from his mother's womb just a moment ahead of Jacob. So strictly speaking, he was the older brother. He was the one who should have led Israel, the nation God chose from whom his unique Son, Jesus, should have been born. It should have been Esau. But this verse says, "The older, Esau, will serve the younger." In other words, God said, "Jacob is going to be the third patriarch after Abraham and Isaac and will lead the nation of Israel." God said that before Jacob was even born.

Some weeks ago we said that what God was concerned with here was not picking one for salvation and one for damnation. This choice had nothing to do with salvation. This was concerned with vocation -- with what these men would do throughout their lifetime on earth. That's proved in the wording in Romans 9:12. "The elder will serve the younger." God was choosing Jacob for service. He wasn't choosing Jacob to go to heaven and Esau to hell. He was choosing Jacob to be the leader of the Israelite nation. It was for service.

In other words, God uniquely qualified Jacob to do a certain job that only he could do. He chose him for it before he was born. It's the same with you and me. You and I have a tendency to say, "No, it's not the same for me. I mean, this man Jacob was very important to God. He was to head up the Israelites. That's a special task. Obviously, our Creator would take great care to ensure that the right man was in that position. But me? What does he care about me, whether I'm a secretary or a teacher?"

Look at Job 31:15, "Did not he [God] who made me in the womb make him? And did not one fashion us in the womb?" This applies to you. The same God who made Jacob made you. Your Creator made you to do a specific job here on earth. Our Creator knows when a sparrow falls to the ground. Our Creator has counted the hairs on your head. He knows every detail of your personality. He has planned every detail of the universe. He knows where every proton and every neutron is and where every planet is. He knows where every plant grows.

Now, do you think that he would send all four billion of us into the world and say, "Okay, sort it out yourselves!" Obviously, no! Obviously, he knows exactly what job each of us is to do and he's fitted us uniquely for it. You know you can't contradict me on this. There is no one like you in the whole world. Even those of us here who are identical twins, we know that our mom knows the difference. There is a vast difference -- there is a unique combination of qualities and attributes that only we possess. There's nobody like you in the world.

God has sent you into this world to do a unique job that he has planned for you. It's not just a matter of looking down the "Opportunities Vacant" column with a pin, closing your eyes and spotting one. Your Creator has planned you with great care. He knew you before your mom knew you. He knew you intimately before your dad ever saw you. He has perfectly molded you to do a job in his world that only you can do. Loved ones, I have to stress that to you. I know where you are all coming from in this massive society. We're all fighting like mad the feeling that we're just ciphers. Loved ones, you're not a cipher! You're unique! There's nobody like you in the world. If you fail, the Father has a failure in his universe. No, there's not somebody else who can substitute for you. There's not somebody else who can slot in your position. No, that position will never be filled in the way God meant it to be. There is a job that God has designated you for and he will be faithful. As he

has fitted you for it, he will be faithful in leading you to it.

That's the attitude you need to have -- not thrashing around fretfully and anxiously to find out what your vocation should be, but relaxed back. Relaxed back in faith that your Father made you to do a job that only you can do. He is going to lead you to it as you continue to do what comes naturally -- what you are led to by your own particular abilities, or what you're led to by your own particular interests. God is going to be leading you into the position that he has reserved for you. He wants you to relax back.

You're never going to get anywhere if you're going to get fretful and anxious about it: "What am I going to do with my life?" No, it's not what you're going to do with your life. It's a matter of letting God lead you into what he has planned to do with your life -- not listening to all kinds of opinions from people but just simply relaxing in faith that your God made you carefully the way you are, uniquely different from every other person of the four billion of us in the world because he has made a spot that only you can fill.

Now some of you may say, "Well, what if I'm in a job now that I DID get by my own fretful, anxious ways?" You're in the same situation that Jacob was in. He was in a human situation that could not result in him leading the Israelite nation. He was the younger of the twins. He was in a situation that was humanly impossible. It was impossible from a human point of view for him to become the elder son that would lead the Israelite nation. Yet you saw that God did it. So God will do it with you. God will take you in the situation that you are in and will lead you into the position that he has planned. And honestly, if you're the same as me -- after college or during college -- you know the hours we lie awake or the hours we spend thinking and planning our future: "What am I going to do with my life?" It's so much lost time. That isn't the way to find out the position that God has for you.

What is the way? The key is plain and it's in Ecclesiastes 9:10: "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might." That's the key. Don't get back into the old study and say, "Ah. I'm going to discover my whole life: from 20 to 25 I'll do this, from 25 to 30 I'll do that. What will I do from 30 to 35? I'll get married!" It's dumb! And there are so many of us here who have tried it and will tell you that it's not the way you arrive at God's will for your life. The way you arrive at his will for your life is that you do what you're doing with all your heart. Whatever you are doing this moment, you do it with all your heart. You don't spend the time brooding that you should be working. You work with all your heart. You do it with all your ability. You don't think, "Is this worthy of my life?" You do it with all your heart, trusting all the time that your Creator knows where you are to be; that he will as surely get you to that spot as he got Jacob to the right position.

Many of us here have had all kinds of dreams. That's what we do -- we have dreams, "I'm going to be a doctor. I'm going to be a lawyer." I was going to be a professor of the Old Testament and spend all of my time with old manuscripts at Oxford University. All of us have had mad dreams that we had in our minds and loved ones, we'd have been miserable if we'd ever realized them. God saved us from those dreams by getting us pre-occupied with things that he gave us to do.

Don't spend time looking away from the obvious fact that whatever you're doing at the moment is what God has permitted you to do. The issue is not whether it's his ideal will for you or not. He's permitted you to do it at this time, so he wants you to rest in that, to do it with all your heart in complete faith and trust that he is going to lead you to the place that he has reserved for you.

So that's what God wants us to see. Our vocation is not a matter of our choosing. Our vocation is God's choice. We can afford to rest back and enjoy doing what we're doing at this moment knowing that he will lead us into his plan for us.

There is something else that we get from this verse that is important: your job is not man-service. You may be in a position like Esau where it says he will serve his brother Jacob. You may be a waitress or a waiter in a restaurant and you may actually serve people, but the truth is that your job is not the service of people. Your job is God-service. You're in the position that you're in at the moment because God wanted you there, and you're responsible to the one who has fitted you for it. Incidentally, you may end up serving people as well, but you're primarily serving God.

A lot of us get into all kinds of bondage because we don't see this. The boss becomes bigger and bigger in our minds. It's not the boss we serve. Look at Romans 1:9, "For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son." Paul says people who are children of God do not serve people. They serve God. Your job, whatever it is at the moment, is serving God. You may incidentally be responsible to other people, but your primary responsibility is God. You are in that position for two reasons. It's the same two reasons that I am in this position.

There are two great commissions that God gave to us men and women. One is in Genesis 1:28. It's that great commission that is mentioned soon after the record of the creation. "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.'" So first of all, you're in the job you're in to bring a little piece more of God's world into the order of his will and his peace. That's the first purpose of your job.

The boss may think that your job is to keep his papers in order. The manager may think your job is to keep track of the inventory. With somebody else, the principal of the school may think that your job is to keep the school and the children under discipline. That's not it. The purpose of your job is to bring some more of this dear old world into order under God's will. You're directly responsible to your Creator for that. It isn't a matter of keeping the papers in order. The papers could be burned up in a matter of weeks. The whole office will be demolished in a matter of 10 or 20 years. It isn't worth concentrating on that. God wants you to bring order into his world. That's why you keep the papers in order, that's why you keep the children in order, that's why you keep track of the inventory. It is to bring a piece more of God's world into the order of his will. You are missing the point of your job if you don't see that. You are missing completely why God has you in that position if you don't see that it's fulfilling that great first commission that we were given by God – to bring his world into order under his will.

The second is the commission that all of us normally think of when we mention the word commission – it's Mark 16:15, "And Jesus said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation.'" That's the second purpose of your job -- to transmit the love and peace of Jesus to your colleagues and to other people that you meet. It's in that order -- because unless you're bringing the job and the responsibilities of it under God's will, no one will be able to sense any of the life of Jesus. That's what is so false in a Christian who prays at his desk all day as the papers amass in front of him. Nobody can see the order and the beauty of Jesus' life within him because they see the chaos of the external world around him. You're in that job to transmit the love and peace of Jesus to your boss and to your colleagues and to those who work under you.

Some of you may say, "That's a good theory but I know who fires me and I know who hires me. I know

that I am responsible to them." There is a great verse in the Bible that settles that. It's also in a statement that Jesus made when Pilate said to him, "Do you not know that I have power to release you and power to execute you?" and Jesus said, "You have no power unless it was given to you from above." Proverbs 21:1 makes that same statement, "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hands of the Lord, he turns it wherever he will." So the heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord.

It's like a stream that God can turn either way. Your boss is in the hand of the Lord. He cannot do anything to you that the Father does not know that he can fit into his pattern for your life. Never fret at night and be anxious about what he will do to you because it's not reality. He has no power except that which is given him by God. Your boss can only do to you what the Father can work into his plan for your life. Never lose sleep at night wondering, "What does my boss think – or what will he do to me?" You are in the employ of God your Creator. It is him that made you for this position. It is important to see that it is God-service and not man-service.

The last thing is, and it's pretty plain from the verse, your status depends on whether you're fulfilling God's will for your life. It doesn't depend on whether society thinks your job is a good job -- or worthy of your abilities -- or your birth; or whether it's an appropriate job. Your status depends on whether your job is fulfilling the purpose for which God made you. For instance, it was obviously inappropriate that Jacob should become the elder son and should have the leadership of the Israelite nation. That was inappropriate, but God regarded them both equally and set them both a status that was worthy of respect, simply because they were fulfilling the purpose God had for their lives.

And it's the same for you. Forget about the business of whether your parents think that your job is a great job or that your peers think that your job is a great job. Loved ones, you are not valuable just because of the job you do. You are valuable because you're God's child and you're doing what he has given you to do. So, if you're cleaning restrooms for him that is glorious and, in his eyes, has the greatest status that you could have. Whatever you're doing, if it's in the Father's will for your life, then that's all the status you ever need. God's ideas of status have always differed from us men and women. He's always said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." And we've said, "Blessed are the haughty and the proud and the driving." He said, "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." We say, "Blessed are those who are domineering and who are victorious -- they will inherit the earth."

In Luke 22:24, "A dispute also arose among them, which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And he [Jesus] said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader is one who serves. For which is the greater, one who sits at table, or one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at table? But I am among you as one who serves'". Your status of your job is dependent only on the fact that it is fulfilling the purpose that God gave you to fulfil.

You know that this status thing has wrought havoc into the vocational world -- economically and in corporations. It's brought about Parkinson's Law: that everybody is promoted to his own level of inability or inefficiency. And that's what has happened. You have a cartoonist who is really good at animation. He is so good that the bosses decide that he ought to direct all the other artists in the studio. So, they make him the administrator. And the poor fellow, even though he was taken out of the thing God had given him a gift for, he began to learn

how to administer and became quite a good administrator. Then, because he is such a good administrator, they promote him again because obviously, anybody who is doing a job well wants to go higher and higher. That's what status and job competency is about. So, they took him and made him the salesman for the company. He was a hopeless salesman. They left him there because he did it in such a wonderful mediocrity that they couldn't find an excuse for promoting him further. That's Parkinson's Law and it governs most of the corporations of the world.

The whole business of tying status to job success has wrought havoc in our corporations and socially. It's wrought havoc personally. How many mathematicians have gone into medicine because there is more status there, or there is more money, or there is more respect from our fellows? How many nurses have gone into business for the same reasons? There are many of us whom God made to be carpenters, plumbers, painters, teachers, and lawyers -- but because of status, because of what our parents think we should be in and what our peers think we should be in, or what society looks up to, we have gone into all kinds of other jobs. We have perverted, misused and abused and left unused the gifts that God gave us to share with his world.

Loved ones, do you see that vocation is not your choice? It is God's choice. It is not man-service -- it is God-service. It is not society's idea of status. It is God's idea of status. If you would once grasp that and begin to operate on that level, you would begin to come into freedom and liberty in regard to your future. There are all kinds of you dear brothers and sisters who have special gifts that God has given you and a special combination of qualities that only you have. He knows where he wants them and he will bring you there if you will relax back, stop being fretful, stop being concerned about whether you are pleasing men or not, stop being concerned whether this is a status position or not, and instead do what comes naturally to you. Do it with all your heart.

Questions from the congregation:

Question #1: "What kind of feeling do you think an unemployed person is having to what you are saying?"

Pastor O'Neill:

Regardless of the poor economic situation, the Father can guide you to do something – even if you go out and sell Fuller brushes – there is somewhere that you can begin and do something you CAN do. If a person could get nothing that was paying at all, then obviously, they do have to take unemployment benefits, but then it's important for them to give themselves fully to doing things for neighbors or doing things for friends, or being occupied. I think the worst thing is for them to sit and brood and think that, "This is unfair and doesn't apply to me." I sympathise and I'm with you, but I do think that many of us who are unemployed are still caught in the dilemma that there is some job that we could do if we would be willing just to change our idea of status. I think a lot of us carry our degrees and our qualifications on our back instead of it being something that lifts us – and we refuse to do whatever in any situation.

Question #2: "In connection to doing what you are doing with all your heart, is there any place for looking ahead and having a vision of what God would eventually want you to do?"

Pastor O'Neill:

I think so. I think many of us have had the experience that we preferred to dream and to imagine

the vision, than to do the job now that we have now with all our hearts. That's the weakness. There is no harm in us having thoughts, "Yes, God would probably like me to be in this" – and even entering into training for that position, as long as we will be utterly faithful and whole-hearted in what he is giving us now. But, I've seen so many of us over the years half-hearted in the job that we had, and therefore, putting ourselves into a position where God could not lead us on because we were frankly, being disobedient in that job. We were not doing it with all of our hearts. We were not being faithful to our employer or being faithful to our colleagues. We were being disobedient to God in that situation. And yet, we were telling him, "Look, if you tell us what to do next, we'll obey you on that." So, often the Father was faced with the situation, "Well, you are not obeying me now, why should you obey me if I tell you what I eventually want to put you into?" It follows the pattern that Jesus laid down, "If you are faithful in little things, I'll make you master of great things." (Luke 19:17)

Question #3: "Are you saying, don't try to change jobs?"

Pastor O'Neill:

Loved ones, I would say that there is a great difference between reading the newspaper ads, looking around, keeping your eyes open and yet doing your present job with all your heart enthusiastically with absolute contentment that this is where God has you at this time -- and what you say – not seeking to change. There is every opportunity for us to keep our eyes open for other positions – but what is bad, loved ones, is where you get yourself into this situation where you are living for tomorrow. There are many of us that have passed through those years. We've thrown years away because we have lived for tomorrow. We live for the beautiful job that will come around the corner. And really, we've been preventing God from bringing it about because we haven't been living in our present situation with full faith and confidence. By all means, be open to changing our jobs, but don't let today drift away, day after day, trickle away and be wasted because you are always dreaming of the future. C.S. Lewis said, "The problem with Christians is not that they are living in the past. The problem with them is that too many of them are living in the future." Today is the day of salvation. This is the day you have. You can be sure of the day – tomorrow, who knows? But TODAY you have. And you can live it with all your heart. As you do that, with all your heart, God will open the way into the future.

Question #4: "What about those social professions where people get burnt out by their jobs and the emotional expenditure of energy?"

Pastor O'Neill:

I'd like to share that I, too, have come through that kind of experience. I know that you are off-balance when your job is burning you out. The problem is not the job. The problem is your attitude towards the job. You're becoming too involved with the people that you are dealing with and not sufficiently involved with Jesus who has continual peace and love – however many people he is trying to help or empathise with. The problem when you are burnt out by your job is usually your own lack of adjustment to God and the proper adjustment to people. Many of us have tried the old game of withdrawing and trying to think through the thing. Where we end up is in an unreal situation. It's an unreal situation to be unoccupied. It's artificial. You always find that you have to eventually get back into the ordinary stream of life to begin to readjust. I'd say, wouldn't you rather stay in the position and seek God and seek the light of his Holy Spirit to show you in what way you are becoming over-involved with people? That's why I shared that your job is

God-service not people-service. Usually we get burnt out when we are pre-occupied with people.

Question #5: "Can you be moved from a job through failure or through frustration?"

Pastor O'Neill:

Especially as many of you are college age and post college age, be very careful before you identify failure with God's guidance. Normally the Father wants you to come into victory in positions. On occasion, we get into such a mess that eventually he almost has to just root us out of the job by failure and frustration. That is the abnormal situation rather than the normal. The Father normally wants us to use those jobs to sharpen our teeth on. He normally wants us to come into victory in the position that we are in and then he can lead us into peace and another situation.

Question #6: "What about the slavish dedication to the corporations that some companies demand from us?"

Pastor O'Neill:

It's important that we allow the Holy Spirit to maintain balance in us so that our job and our company does not become our god. President Jimmy Carter said to his own staff when they first began, the home would come before the job. Their relationships with their wives and their children would come before their dedication to the company. There is where the world's view and God's view would come into collision. We need to constantly allow the Holy Spirit to show us what is whole-hearted involvement.

I'll try to talk a little more about vocation next Sunday.

Let us pray:

Dear Father, we thank you that you have given us guidance. We thank you that no man can fully make that guidance clear – but YOU can. You alone know why you put us here on earth. But, you DO know and we are confident, our Father, you will do with us what you did with Jacob. Whatever the human difficulties, you will lead us into a place that you have reserved for us. We thank you, Lord, that we are not just a cipher. We thank you that we are a special, unique person that is like nobody else on earth and that can do a job that you have created us for. Lord, we thank you for that. Thank you for your individual care for us. Thank you for loving us. Amen.