

What Were We Made For?

Romans 9:23

Sermon Transcript by Reverend Ernest O'Neill

Why did God let Hitler live? That question most of us would categorize under the general theme of the problem of evil. Another similar question would be: Why does God allow little innocent children to die in wars and in persecutions and of incurable diseases? We all know that the general thrust of the question is this: How can a good God allow evil like that to continue in his world? Surely, either he must not exist, or he must have made the evil and therefore wants it, or he must not be able to do anything about it. That is the problem of evil. I want to speak to all of us here who keep on thinking, "Oh, I could believe in God, except for the problem of evil."

Well, loved ones, there is no problem in the problem of evil. The problem of evil is easily and clearly and repeatedly explained in this dear book. Let's look at the verse that explains all of those questions and problems. It is Romans 9:22: "What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the vessels of wrath made for destruction." The vessels of wrath are things, for the purpose of our discussion, like disease, persecution, Hitlers or Sons of Sam or Stalins or Pharaohs; anyone who is an instrument of evil and pain and hurt to others.

Does God cause evil? Well, it is obvious from that verse that he doesn't. You see the words, "What if God...has endured with much patience the vessels of wrath"? You don't make something that opposes your will and then talk of enduring that something with much patience. So obviously if God is talked about as enduring with much patience persecution, wars, and Stalins and Pharaohs and Hitlers, then he obviously hasn't made them. It makes nonsense of the language. You don't make something that opposes your will and then say that you are enduring it with much patience. So, the first obvious fact is that God doesn't cause evil. He doesn't create evil. He didn't make Hitler with special qualities that would enable him to slaughter millions of people. God did not create evil, and He did not create men and women evil. What causes these things? Look back at that verse. It is "vessels of wrath made for destruction," The Greek word is "katertismena" and it means "having been fitted", "having fitted themselves" for destruction. And it is the vessels of wrath that cause the evil.

Hitler killed because he wanted to kill. Somebody destroys some of the things that are happening in your life because they want to do it. They exercise their free will which they have been given by God, and they do what they want to do. It is the vessels of wrath that do the things themselves. Doesn't God want to stop them? Look at Romans 9:22: "What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power..." Yes, he does. The Father's heart bled more for the first little baby that was killed in the Holocaust than any of our hearts bled. God wants to show his wrath, and he wants to make known his power. He wants to stop Hitler from killing, he wants to stop disease destroying, and he wants to stop persecution and maiming. He wants to stop those things.

Isn't he able to? Yes, sure he is. Around 1500 B.C. in Egypt when Pharaoh was oppressing the Israelites and using them as slave labor, God turned all the drinking water throughout Egypt into blood. He sent plagues of flies and lice and gnats and then finally killed all the first born children of the Egyptians. Yes, God has all the power that is needed to stop these things. You and I know the power of nature each spring, we know the mighty destruction that has been wrought by the powers of nature. Yes, God has plenty of power; He can stop these things. Why then doesn't God

supernaturally direct the powers of nature to stop a Hitler after he has killed? The first person, to stop a murderer after he has taken away the first life? Why doesn't God step in?

Last Sunday we said there were two great reasons. One was, to preserve free will. God's plan for all of us here is that we would spend these seventy years deciding whether we want to become like him and his Son and whether we wanted to spend the rest of our existence sharing the love of him and the Trinity family. That is why we have been given these seventy years, to decide if we want to do that, to either become like him so that we can do it, or to remain as we are. God has given us free will for that purpose. He wants a family of love. Pure love is only possible in people who have free wills. So God had to give us free wills, so that we could choose to do what we want and decide whom we were going to live with forever. That is the whole purpose God gave us free will.

Now do you see that the moment God steps in and kills a Hitler the very same hour he conceives of the SS, God has actually ended free will in the world? If every time a baby is hurt by cruel parents, God sends an angel down and destroys those parents, then it isn't long after that free will ceases in this earth. Because we are all so frightened when we do a thing that we no longer choose or reject, we just are for our own self preservation.

Moreover, I would say to you, when would you step in? When would you step in to prevent these things? Do you step in the moment Hitler was born? Would you step in the moment he conceived of the whole plan of the master German race? Would you step in the moment he began to organize the SS? Would you step in the moment he organized the first gas chamber? When would you step in? Do you see that the moment you step in, the moment that you intervene in that way by the sheer power that you have, that moment you cease to have free will in the earth? Don't you think that is why Patty Hearst had to go to jail?

Don't you think that our only hope is that personal accountability and personal responsibility will develop as people see the consequences of their own choices? Don't you think that is the only hope we have of a free society? Do you think that is why, we all feel we don't want the rich man's daughter to get off? Don't you think we also feel that she had to go to prison for the sake of the girl's sake or any people that are brought up in wealthy homes, so that they will see that there are consequences that follow the choices they make? If those consequences are not allowed to follow, they will never learn; they will never become any different. That is why God has to allow free will to exercise itself and even to produce consequences that we don't agree with. That is the only hope he has of us ever learning and ever becoming the kind of people that he wants us to be--freely, because we want to.

Another reason is that God endures the vessels of wrath that are made and fitted for destruction so that they will have a chance to repent. To us this is unthinkable. We would often go right in there and destroy the Hitlers, destroy the Stalins. The Father's heart, even as it bleeds for the millions that died in the concentration camps, at the same time, right up to the very last moment of Hitler's death, God is beseeching him and commanding him to repent. So God endures with much patience these vessels of wrath. He lets evil continue in the world, not only to preserve the principle of free will, but secondly to try to bring those loved ones to repentance, because he loves them as well as he loves each of us.

Now today I ask you to consider a third reason why God allows those people to hurt you financially by their dishonesty. Because that is what "vessels of wrath" comes down to in our personal lives, doesn't it? It comes down to petty little inconveniences that other people do to us, and so to us

they are vessels of wrath. There is another reason why God allows that person in your home to spoil your living situation by their own insensitivity and cruelty.

There is another reason why God has allowed others to destroy and frustrate your vocational hopes by their own injustice and prejudice. It is in Romans 9:23: "In order to make known the riches of his glory for the vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory." This reason for the continued existence of evil in this world, in your life and my life, isn't so much connected with the vessels of wrath as were those other reasons, to bring them to repentance or allow free will to continue, but this reason is connected with us whom we like to think of as the vessels of mercy.

This reason is connected with the victims of the powers of evil. It is connected with those of us who feel others are destroying our lives, with those of us who feel other people are spoiling our happiness by their own sinfulness. This reason is connected up with us. And paradoxical though it may seem, the reason God allows that unjust employer to treat you in the unfair way that he is; the reason that God allows that loved one in your home to continue to destroy your peace and harmony by his insensitivity and cruelty; the reason God has allowed those people who are in charge of your promotion to frustrate your vocational hopes by their own injustice and unfairness and prejudice, is for your sake. It is for your sake.

Now loved ones, if you can receive this and grasp it, I know this will change and transform your attitude to vicissitudes and trials, as it changed my attitude. In other words, it is a bit like Joseph's situation with his brothers. His brothers sold him into slavery. They hated him; they were fed up with this Joseph who was the favorite of the family, so they sold him into slavery. You remember God used his imprisonment in Egypt to bring him to the awareness of the Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. Eventually Joseph was elevated to the position of the governor of Egypt. Then you remember what Joseph said to his brothers. He said, "You meant it for evil, but God had another plan completely. He meant it for my good. That is why he allowed it to happen." That is the situation. The reason God allows evil to have certain effects on your life and mine is because God has a plan for us that is bigger than what we ourselves know about. That plan is stated in Romans 9:23: "The vessels of mercy which he has prepared beforehand for glory."

God actually designed every one of us and prepared and created us carefully for glory. That is what we were made for. For glory! Now there is a tendency for some of us to think that glory is a cross between a Democratic and a Republican political convention with you up there on the platform and everybody chanting, "Glory to him, glory to him, how- wonderful he is!" and Jesus crowning you with a great crown of jewels. Well, that isn't glory at all! That is our childish idea of what glory is. Glory is something deeper than that, loved ones, and you will understand it if you look at 2 Corinthians 3:18: "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another."

Now the glory of the Lord is God as he is. It is not something else that is silly. It is God as he is. It is God as absolute truth, absolute love, and absolute purity. He is the truth. If you and I were to see him now as he really is now, we would be blinded forever by the sight. We could not bear the sight of undiluted honesty such as his.

So, at the moment, we cannot even see him as he is. But God's plan is that we will be able to look at him with unveiled face, that is, without these veils that we have on. We will be able to see him as he really is, and then we will be changed from glory to glory into his likeness. When we look at him and see him as he is, we ourselves will become like him and will share his nature. That is what

"we are made for glory" means. We are made to be joyfully free like God. We are made to be graciously loving like God. We are made to be magnanimously forgiving and merciful like God. God's plan is that we will see what he is like and then that is what comes into our own lives. No, how does that come about?

Well, first of all, we are not like that at all. We are pretty miserable little creatures. We are selfish, petty, and narrow-minded. We have small vision, we are discouraging to others when we should be encouraging; we are resentful when we should be helping another person; we are cowardly when we should be daring; we are very much like the Israelites in Egypt.

We grind under our burdens, utterly preoccupied with them. Here on this shoulder I have a mortgage payment, on that shoulder I have the rent payment, on my back I have the installment payments, further down I have the taxes to pay, and I have the worries about my life during this coming week. Most of us are pretty burdened little creatures, pretty miserable-looking little souls.

It is interesting that we are like the Israelites in another way, and maybe it would be good to look at what they are like and you will recognize yourself. Exodus 16:1-3: "They set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the people of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. And the whole congregation of the people of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and said to them, 'Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.'"

We are much the same; we are miserable under our burdens, but at least we know what those burdens are. We know what our income tax is; we know what our installments are. We are miserable and burdened with them, but at least we know what we have to face. It is strange, when anybody wants to move us into a new environment, we don't want to go, because at least we know the problems we have to cope with here, and we can try to cope with them with our own ability. In other words, even though we are miserable, we love to think we are self-sufficient. We love to think, "Well, at least these things I can carry; I am not carrying them very victoriously, but at least I am carrying them."

Do you see that God would never have gotten the Israelites out into the wilderness? He would never have gotten them out into an environment that was full of unknown dangers -- an environment and a world that they could not cope with through their own power and ability -- an environment and an experience that was beyond what they had before and that they could not manage by their own powers--God would never have gotten them into the wilderness, because they didn't want to go there. They hated the wilderness, just the way we do. We hate being thrown into situations or experiences that are beyond our own abilities to cope with, that are beyond our own resources. We hate that. Even though we are not doing very well with the problems that we have, at least we know them and we have adjusted our ability and life to them, but we hate the wilderness, God would never have gotten them out into the wilderness if he had destroyed Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Do you see that?

If God had come right down and destroyed the vessels of wrath the moment Pharaoh opposed the people, if God had struck Pharaoh dead as he was able to, if he had just destroyed all the Egyptians, not just the first-born, do you see the Israelites would never have been driven out into the wilderness? They would presumably have sat in the fleshpots of Egypt and lived there in their own miserable

self-sufficiency the rest of their lives, achieving small aims with little power to achieve them, but achieving them. God had to endure with much patience the vessels of wrath, Pharaoh and the Egyptians, not simply for their sake, but in order to make known the riches of his glory to the vessels of mercy which he had prepared beforehand for glory.

So God suffered Pharaoh to continue in existence so that he could use Pharaoh to drive the Israelites out into the wilderness, and there they saw God's glory. Exodus 16:6-7: "So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, 'At evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your murmurings against the Lord. For what are we that you murmur against us?'" They told the Israelites, "In the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord." Then in verse 13: "In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning dew lay round about the camp. And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as hoarfrost on the ground. When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, 'What is it?' For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, 'It is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat.'"

That was the glory of the Lord. The glory of the Lord is not only God as he really is, but it is God's reality and his power made manifest in a touchable and see-able thing or event here in this world. The Israelites would never have seen God's power and glory if they hadn't been driven beyond their own resources. God's will was for them to see his glory and his nature as it really is, filled with love and power, able to affect things here in this world; and then to begin to share that nature themselves. So that as they saw God's power and nature, they would begin to let that nature and power come into themselves and would actually be made like him through the experience.

You see, you know the truth. When have you been closest to God? Every one of us will answer the same way: when our dad died, when our mom died, when our husband or wife died, when our child died, when somebody died. I remember in Ireland when my old grandmother died. She was 85 and gloriously in Jesus. I remember going back to her house with Dad because I didn't want him sleeping there on his own. The coffin was kept in the home in those days. I was about thirteen and I slept with him there in the house. I remember that night, because we were in touch with something that was beyond us. This dear lady that we had known alive was somewhere else and we didn't know where that was, but we knew it was in the hands of God.

You know when you are closest to God: when you have lost your job, when the bottom has dropped out of the finances, when all your vocational hopes have gone, when you failed the exam, when some terrible tragedy has occurred in your personal life. Do you see, loved ones, those are not unpleasant interludes in an otherwise cloudless sky of happiness. Those are dear gifts from God to us.

In those moments we have not the resources or the power or the ability to face that thing, and we in desperation grab out for God and draw his power and grace into us, and we lean upon him heavily. And before we know it, we begin to see the forbearance of his own Spirit coming into our spirits, and we begin to sense his rest coming into us. Haven't we all experienced more rest in the middle of those tragedies and vicissitudes and trials than we have at any other time in our lives? Why then do we fight them? Why do we rail against the trials that come upon us, when those are the very things that God uses to drive us beyond our resources?

Loved ones, here is the truth. You were never meant to tackle this life by your own life force. The

little things that you and I can do by our own abilities aren't worth doing. We never were meant to live this life by our own life force. Otherwise, we will die our own death. We were meant to live here in cooperation with the power of God's life. God wants us to achieve things that are beyond us.

That is why he puts you into situations where your patience is not enough. That is why he puts you into situations where you can't see your way through. That is why he puts you in situations where you can't call forth any more love; there is no more love left down in your heart. God does it because he knows that your little supply of love is hopeless, and his whole plan is that you would share his nature and love and take to yourself his supernatural personality and become like him, so that you will be at home with the spiritual giants that will surround him forever. That is why the Father lovingly allows us to come into these things.

God endures with much patience the vessels of wrath made for destruction, not only to bring them to repentance, not only to preserve free will, but in order that he might show forth the riches of his glory to the vessels of mercy who have been made for glory. Because unless you are driven beyond your own abilities, you will never draw into yourself by desire and faith the very nature and power of God. Therefore you will never become like God with all your intellectualism. You will never become like him unless you are drawing him into yourself. That is why Paul said, "That I may know him and the power of his resurrection." [Philippians 3:10] How do you know the power of his resurrection? I know how you know his resurrection; it is a historical fact. But how do you know the power of his resurrection? We know by experiencing the power.

There will come a day when we will all experience the actual power of Jesus raising us from the dead, but in this present life God graciously allows many trials and vicissitudes to come upon us so that we will grab out and know by experience the power of his resurrection, because there is no one else to go to. We should greet it as pure joy when we enter into various trials because through those trials we are going to grab out to God, and he is going to give you his own power and nature and you will come out of that trial more like God than you went in. That is his plan.

I wish you could sense what I sensed when God showed me that we should not be frustrated when we come into these situations that go beyond us. We should not be frustrated because of these vessels of wrath and the way they treat us in our lives. We should look to the Father and say, "Lord, you know this has come about. You know you have a plan to give me something of yourself in this, that I could not otherwise receive. Lord, I'm willing and waiting."

Then before you know it, there comes a supernatural strength that produces a love and a patience that you never knew you had. This will come to you if you will see that your dear Father is trying to drive you into the wilderness. So stop yearning for the old fleshpots; stop yearning for the little problems that you were once able to tackle by your own strength, and move victoriously and valiantly forward into a new world where we can attempt great things for God and be great people for God and expect great things from God.

Let us pray.

Father, thank you that you have such a great plan for us. Thank you that you have such a plan of glory for us. Thank you, Lord, that you want to drive us out of these little petty selves and drive us into a place where we share the life of our Creator. Where we can live not by our own power but by the power of him who made us. Lord, thank you for that.

Now the grace of our Lord Jesus, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us throughout this week.