

Faith-Righteousness

Romans 9:30

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Could you explain a paradox that all of us have experienced here, who have ever worked at all? All of us here have had jobs where the workload was heavy, the hours were ridiculous, the pay was very low, and the conditions were most unpleasant. Yet we enjoyed going to work every day. And that enjoyment and happiness that we had in our work, expressed itself in what other people would call the virtues of industriousness and consistency and honesty about our employer's time.

So in every way, our attitude of happiness in the work expressed itself in a life that many would say was a righteous life as regards to our employer. Yet all of us here have had the opposite experience. We have had a job that had great working hours, had beautiful conditions and provided all the salary that we wanted and yet we were miserable in the job.

We hated going to work each day and we expressed our unhappiness and our discontent with all the vices of bad workers. We were easy going about the way we spent our lunch times, we cut corners on our employer when we were able. We were tired and therefore lazy in our work habits and our general attitude to our work expressed itself in what people would call the vices of bad workers.

I think probably all of us here have experienced one or other or maybe both of those situations. How would you explain it? Well, it's dead easy. Where that has occurred in our lives, a change has been due to the people we worked with in that time. Isn't that true? The people we worked with or the people we worked for, that seemed to change everything. It didn't seem to matter about the long hours, it didn't seem to matter about the poor salary, it didn't seem to matter about anything, the people we worked with or the people we worked for, changed our whole attitude to our job.

You must admit, what wears you out at work? Is it the workload? Is it the poor pay? No, you know it isn't. It's the personality conflicts. It's the tension in the office. It's the feeling that your colleagues don't appreciate you or don't really understand you. It's the feeling that going to work is just a miserable experience of tension and argument and strain between you and somebody else.

What makes you find it hard to get up in the morning for work? What is it? Is it the physical exertion that you have to put out at the job? Is it that this job is harder than the last job you had? No, it's not. It's the people you have to confront. It's the secretary with the chip on her shoulder that you have to walk around carefully every day. Or, it's the boss who doesn't trust you or respect you. Or, it's the person that seems to have his knife in you and seems to be trying to lever you out of your position.

Isn't that what wears you out everyday? They could give you all the money in the world. They could give you the most beautiful working conditions imaginable but still you hate to lever yourself out of bed to go to work because the old strain is there all the time. But really the opposite is gloriously true.

The opposite is gloriously true. If you have a finance director or a secretary or a manager or a boss with whom you have a really good relationship, then you just look forward to going to work. It's just so good to be together. In fact work is a kind of detail that allows you an excuse to

cooperate and to communicate with each other. You don't think of the work at all.

It's so good to look forward to being with those people again the next day. You have a real freedom from feeling paranoid or feeling that they're criticizing you or that they're judging you. You have just a confidence in them and they have a confidence in you and there's just a trust between you. You really feel they'll be out routing for you. They'll be defending you wherever they are and you look forward to meeting them each day. You look forward to being with them and life is just enjoyable. Of course, your work habits show it because you're enthusiastic about going, you're enthusiastic about doing the work, you get it done faster, you come home and you aren't tired. You're ready to do it all over again that evening because of the attitude and the relationship that you have with your colleagues and with the people you work with.

In other words, where there's a freedom from tension between you and another person, that shows itself in the way you act and the way you talk. It affects every detail of your work life. If the relationship between you and your boss or you and your colleagues is right, then right acts and words and thoughts seem to flow from that right relationship. You know that that's just down-to-earth fact.

Anybody could tell us that that's right whether they believe in God or believe in Christianity or not, that's just a fact. If you've good relationships with the people that you work with, you yourself are a good worker. If you have bad, tense relationships with your colleagues and the people you work with, you in turn are a bad worker and it shows up. That is righteousness through faith. That's right.

That's righteousness through faith. In that situation, it's a faith in each other. It's a faith in one another. In your office there's just a sense of togetherness. In your restaurant, there's a sense of togetherness. In the factory that you work in, there's a sense of togetherness and you feel you can trust each other and you care about each other and you respect each other and you love each other in some sense and so there's a faith in each other. There's a sense of confidence and trust in each other and that produces, if you like, righteousness. It produces attitudes and actions and behavior that are right. That's righteousness through faith or faith righteousness.

Loved ones, that's what we're talking about today, so would you like to look at the verse where it's mentioned? It's Romans 9:30, "What shall we say then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness, have attained it, that is, righteousness through faith." Supposing this, how do you explain that there are more Gentiles who are rightly related to God than there are Jews? He says God chose the Jews as the first nation to whom He would reveal Himself and to whom He would explain the kind of life that He wanted them to live.

Now how come fewer of them are like Him than the Gentiles, to whom He did not explain these things at all, and he answers, "Oh, because the Gentiles concentrated on being right with God and the Jews concentrated on trying to be like God." Now, do you hear that? The Gentiles concentrated on being right in their personal relationship of dependence upon God. They concentrated on that. They concentrated in coming into a relationship of faithful trust in God.

The Jews concentrated on trying to be like God by their own independent efforts and he says the only way to become like God is to be right in your relationship with Him. It's interesting that the Greek word for "righteousness" is "dikaiousune". It means "whatever is right, whatever is meet, whatever is just, and whatever is appropriate." Now what's appropriate for your attitude to your

maker? What is an appropriate attitude for all of us here in our attitude to our maker?

Well, it's dead obvious if you think of it. Here you are, all breathing merrily. We are breathing, some of us deeper, some of us shallow, but we're all breathing. Yeah, we are, and yet none of us really know what keeps our breath going. None of us really know what keeps our lungs going in and out. Your heart is beating madly along and yet nobody really knows what starts that beat that comes from the bottom of the heart and goes right through and comes back again.

The medics call it the 'SNA node' or something like that but it doesn't really mean anything, it just describes an area of the heart where they know this beat comes from but they don't know why it comes. You all look pretty steady and yet you're all hurtling through space at thousands of miles an hour and some of us down in Australia are doing it upside down. You know we glibly mumble, "Oh the law of gravity, the law of gravity" and that's it, you know.

We all know the sun is going to come up tomorrow morning but none of us know what power is going to lift it, none of us really know who sets the schedule or how it's set. None of us know why it rises or appears to rise and yet we know it will. And again we glibly mumble, "Oh yeah, the law of gravity, the law of gravity", and it explains nothing because we know that all the law of gravity is doing is trying to describe the power that does all these things and we are absolutely dependent upon that power. We're dependent on the reliability and the consistency of that power to keep on doing these things. Do you realize if that power withdraws a little finger from you, your heart stops beating at this moment?

In other words, we are all existing here on the basis of a mystery, on the basis of a power that we cannot explain. We exist because of a power on which we're absolutely and utterly dependent. In other words, we're all dependent on this power anyways so the only appropriate attitude we can have towards this power is trust, faith. A trust because we're dependent on it anyway for all these things. So the only attitude that is appropriate for us is trust and dependence and faith and that, loved ones, is what is appropriate for creatures to feel towards their creator, that's the right thing to feel. That's how to be right with your creator. It's how to be real with your creator, to live in absolute trust in him and absolute faith in him.

Now, that's what Abraham did, you remember. Maybe you'd look back at that piece that we read earlier. It's Romans 4:17-22: God gave Abraham a promise, "I have made you the father of many nations-- in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations; as he had been told, 'So shall your descendants be'. He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead because he was about 100 years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waiver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised. That is why his faith was 'reckoned to him as righteousness.'"

So Abraham was absolutely convinced that God would continue to be a faithful father and a faithful provider to him. He was convinced he would be able to do things that Abraham himself could not understand. He couldn't understand why his old wife would have a baby at this advanced stage. He couldn't understand why he as a 100 year old man could have a son but he was utterly convinced and depended on God to do what He had promised. He depended on God continuing to be the loving, kindly father that He had been before and God regarded that as right.

God looked down and said, "Yeah, that's right because after all, your hair you got from me, your hands you got from me. You're sticking on that earth there flying through space at thousands of miles an hour because of my power, that's right. You're right when you have an attitude of trust and dependence in me. That's right." God regarded that as right and He regarded Abraham as being right with him. That's what he means "he counted it for righteousness", you see.

Being righteous is being right with God. I know we've cluttered the whole thing up by saying being righteous is you don't this, you don't do that, you do that and you... but it isn't. When God says the man is righteous before him, it means he is right with him. He has the right attitude to him, the attitude that any creature ought to have to his creator, that any child ought to have to his father.

As a result of that trust that God would continue to do what He had promised, what was the result in Abraham's life? It's obvious. He didn't jump into bed with his wife's maid. He had already done that once you remember, to try to ensure that he have an heir. He didn't do it because he trusted God to bring about whatever was needed in his life.

So you see, being right with God resulted in acts that were right. That's how it works, loved ones. Just as when we have a right relationship with our colleagues at work; it ends up in right actions outwardly in our work lives, so it is with our God. The first necessity is to be right in your attitude to your maker, to live your life in an attitude of faith in him and trust in him and confidence in him. Then, from that, flows right acts.

Now I agree with you that we ourselves, of course, find it easier to be independent of God and depend on ourselves than to depend on God himself. That's our problem. If we look at Jesus, of course, he found it easier to depend on God. I mean even in the midst of all the bearing of the distrust of the world at Calvary, he still was able to survive in his trust in his father. You remember, he finally said, "Into Thy hands, I commit My Spirit"; in spite of the fact that all around him looked like hell itself.

Obviously his trust and his dependence on his father continued. Now the only way our distrustful attitudes towards God can be changed is by being joined to Jesus, you see that. I don't know if you know that there's a remarkable verse, I think it's in Galatians that says, "This life I live by the faith of the son of God", and the idea is that it's Jesus inside you exercising his complete faith in His Father and that's how you live.

You live by the faith of Jesus being exercised in you. Now the only way for our distrustful attitude to be changed and transformed is for us to actually enter into Jesus and allow Him to enter into us and to accept His loving invitation. Here it is, "Come My dear child. I have already borne in an eternal pre-creation death your distrustful attitude towards my father. I have already borne the pain of having that destroyed in me but now, will you come up beside me here on the cross and will you take the same attitude towards what men and women can do to you as I take? Will you take the same attitude of absolute trust in my father that I have? Will you do that?"

Loved ones, if you will take that attitude to Jesus then there will flow from that right relationship, actions and words and thoughts that are right also. That's how a righteous life comes about. I'll just give you two clear instances. Why do you lie? Why do you tell lies? Why do you tell a lie? To cover up the mistake or to cover up something that we've done wrong and we know it's wrong?

Well, why do you want to cover it up? Well, because it'll affect the way somebody thinks about me. It'll spoil their opinion of me. Well, why is that important? You know, I can carry on this conversation because we all answer these questions the same way. We're all the same, that's the beautiful thing. God has made us all in his image.

We're all the same. We feel the same things, we think the same things and you know your answer is, "Well, because it would affect either their friendship for me, so it would spoil my social life, or it could even affect their approval of me and it could spoil my job or profession or work life."

Now do you see, if you come into a right relationship with God in regard to those things, you'll never need to lie. Do you see that? If you join Jesus on the cross and die to what men or women can do to you and trust your father not only to overrule their actions but even to work your own mistakes and your own errors into the counsel of His will for your life -- do you see that all tension between him and you will fade? And you'll be able to relax in trust in him and have confidence that He'll work the thing out and you won't need to lie? You'll be free from ever having to lie.

Why do you and I manipulate each other emotionally and physically? Why do we? Because I think most of us have experience of that in all kinds of nice, gentle little ways, but we do it. We pressure each other emotionally or we manipulate each other physically. You know how you answer. We do it because there are certain things we think should happen and we think they won't happen if these people will not behave in a certain way, doesn't matter whether it's husband-wife, colleague, friend, fellow student, that's how we answer, isn't it?

Well, we pressure them; we manipulate them because there are certain things we want to happen. We believe they won't happen unless these people, even though they are our friends, won't behave in a certain way. So we feel we have to manipulate them and pressure them. Now do you see what would happen if you trusted God with those things? Do you see what would happen if you put your faith in your father, who after all is the one who enables you to be alive at this moment? If you put your faith in your father and you died to your right to have things happen as you want them to happen? Because after all, who are you to know how things should happen? He is the one who knows how things should happen. Now will you give him his rightful place in your life and will you die to your right to have them happen that way? Then, will you trust him to bring about whatever needs to be brought about, whatever these friends or these people do? Will you?

Do you see what happens if you do that? All tension is released. There's a great sense of rightness between yourself and your dear father, a great sense of peace and relaxation. You're able to love your friends and your loved ones, as God intends. So there flows forth from this right attitude to your father a life that is righteous and that is filled with love and filled with relaxation and peace and faith. That's what faith righteousness is, loved ones.

In other words, all unrighteousness and sin comes from our doubting our father's love or doubting our father's faithfulness and all righteousness comes from trusting in our father's love and trusting in our father's faithfulness. That's what makes you right with God. So you can tell right this moment, are you right with your maker? Are you right with your father? Do you trust him in every area of your life that he brings to your mind at this moment? Do you trust him?

If you're not trusting him, be sure that your life is filled with unrighteousness. You know it, you

don't need me to tell you but if you trust him, you know that there flows from your life righteousness and acts of love and words of kindness. Well, it's no mystery being a Christian. That's what it's about. Let us pray.

Dear Father, thank You that it's so simple to be your child. Thank You that being righteous through faith is not a great mystery, it's just plain and obvious that when we have a right attitude of trust and confidence in You about our lives, then our lives themselves are right and they strike other people as righteous lives. Father, we thank You for that and Lord I would pray for my brothers and sisters here this morning.

I would pray that You would reveal to each one of us where there is tension in our lives, where there is strain, where we're still trying to bring things about ourselves and where we need to relax and admit that we depend on you for everything anyway. So we ought to exercise that consciously in our day-to-day relationships.

So, Father, we would give ourselves to You now so that we may be righteous through faith for Your glory. Amen.