

Works Righteousness

Romans 9:32

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Some of you are Baptists, some are Presbyterians, others are Lutherans, others are Catholics, and others of us are nothing; but most of us feel together because of one desire we have and that is we want to enter into whatever reality Jesus has brought to the world. Being non-denominational as we are has great advantages because it does tend to make you want to respect the other person's faith and want to understand the truths that they have come to understand. And it also makes you more willing to question your own beliefs and your own faith. It makes you willing to combine your faith with other truths that other people see. And that is what has happened with many of us here as the years have gone by.

It has happened with lots of truths, but you remember, one of them has certainly been that truth which some of us had that has some element of reality in it. It is the idea that Jesus has fulfilled the whole law. Many of us were brought up in the tradition that says, He has fulfilled it so I don't have to fulfil it. Many of us had that kind of background. Oh, yeah, Jesus fulfilled the law so now I don't have to obey it. That's the way we regarded Jesus' life and death for us. We get it from Matthew 5:17. There are many of us who think this way and many of us who are brought up with it. "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them." So many of us were taught from earliest years, therefore, it doesn't matter if you fulfil it or not, you see. You see, Jesus has fulfilled it for you so it doesn't matter if you disobey God's law throughout your life. Jesus has fulfilled it for you.

What we have seen, of course, is that isn't the whole truth at all. The whole point of Jesus' coming was to enable us to fulfil the law. That you will find in verses such as Romans 8, verses 3 and 4. "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do; sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us".... not by Jesus. Of course the whole point of Jesus' death is not to present a bribe to God so he won't look at our transgressions of his law. No, the whole purpose of his death was so God could destroy the selfish, untrusting streak in us that prevents us obeying his law. That was the purpose of Jesus' coming.

Many of us think, oh no, Jesus' death is a bribe to God to persuade him to close his eyes to the transgressions of his law in our lives. No! Jesus died to wipe out the selfish, untrusting streak in us that prevents from obeying God's law. That is the whole point of that verse in Romans 6:6. "... our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might not no longer be enslaved to sin." So we would no longer disobey God's law but we could obey it. The question is, of course, how do you enter into that cosmic miracle. If God did indeed destroy the selfish, untrusting streak in you that makes you disobey God's law, if he did that in a cosmic miracle in his Son, how does that become real in your own life.

Of course we all know the answer, we have been taught it for years. We all raise our hands and say, "Faith, faith!". Some of us say it proudly and then to emphasize it, we use the old illustration which many of us know here, at least all of us who aren't Catholic know it. We all point our finger at the members of the dear body of which Pope John Paul is the head, and we say - "not by works - as the Catholics believe - but by faith." And all of us who are Catholics feel, well that's put us in

our place. We are an example of what Christians shouldn't be and the Protestants are examples of what Christians should be. Of course, it's always the same when you point your finger; every time you point your finger at somebody and say, "Look what you are doing", that's the very thing you are guilty of in your own life. Those of us who say most zealously, "Not like the Catholics, it's not works-righteousness, you know, it's faith-righteousness" -- we are the very people who are filled with works-righteousness ourselves. Except ours is our prayers, our quiet times, our Bible studies, our church attendance, even our apparent right beliefs. Loved ones, that is the tragedy of the situation in these days. That there are many of us who think we are entering into the miraculous crucifixion by faith and we are in reality filled with as much works-righteousness as anybody else. We are trying to enter into it by works. Now it is because God knew we were open to that kind of error and deception that he prompted Paul to state the mistake of the Jews once more. Will you look at it, loved ones? Romans 9:32. Verse 31 says "that Israel who pursued the righteousness which is based on the law did not succeed in fulfilling that law." Verse 32, "Why? Because they did not pursue it through faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone." Because they pursued it on works, not on faith.

So, how does God plan to realise this miracle He wrought in Jesus in our present lives? Well, obviously by faith -- but what is faith? Do you see faith is not just an opinion, not just an assent to certain truths? In the English language we have words like "think" and "hold" and "conceive" for that kind of mental activity.

Faith is not simply a mental assent to certain truths. Have you faith in Excedrin? You know what I mean, do you personally take Excedrin when you have a headache? I don't mean that Excedrin is a great tablet to take, I mean, do you take it, do you have faith in Excedrin? In the English language when we use faith, we normally mean the commitment of the whole personality to something, the involvement of the whole life. Have you faith in Bob Short or in some other politician means: will you vote for him? It doesn't simply mean what do you think of him or do you believe he'll be a good senator. When we use faith in the English language we mean the same as the Greek word for belief, it is the word 'pistos'. It means not just mental concept or belief or mental assent, it means an action based on that belief. It means a life lived on the basis of certain beliefs. It means action taken in full confidence and trust that certain things are true.

Have you faith in Chevrolets really means -- do you buy Chevrolets? Do you actually follow up with your opinion with your own life's action? Loved ones, do you see that in our ordinary English language faith never means a belief that is mental or an assent that is intellectual? It always means a life lived on the basis of certain beliefs. It means the commitment of the whole personality to something you have full confidence and trust in. Now that's the kind of attitude God requires in us in order to make real the miraculous destruction of that selfish streak in us which took place on Calvary in Jesus. It is that kind of attitude, that's what real faith is.

I'll put it to you this way. We human beings are all involved from our birth in living by artificial life-support systems. We are, we are all involved. We're like bodies that continue to exist by man-made inventions. Here is the drip-feed to provide the strength that ordinary, natural food should provide. Here is the pace-maker that keeps the heart going that can't keep going itself. Here are the blood transfusions that provide us with the blood we should manufacture with our own body. Except, that our drip-feed is our jobs, our salaries, and our possessions. Our pace-maker is our human relationships, interesting experiences, congenial circumstances that supply us with happiness. Our blood-transfusions are the praise and approval of our peers, the recognition of men, from which we get our sense of significance and importance.

And you may say, take away those and we would die. And that is true. If you took away those from your present, old dying, deteriorating personality, you would die. You would die without the approval of your friends, without this stimulation of circumstances and events to make you happy. But, do you see, once you died, you wouldn't need those? Isn't that right? I mean around a dying body the activity is frenetic, keeping the blood transfusions going, keeping the drip feed going, keeping the heart going and then, when the person dies peace comes. Absolute peace. You don't need those once you die, isn't that right?

That's exactly what has happened in Jesus! That's what has happened in Jesus to you. Look at it in Colossians 3:3. "For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God." That's the truth. The old personality of yours that through the centuries has deteriorated to such a point that it cannot exist without all those artificial life support systems was destroyed in Jesus. It was! All those life support systems of your peer's approval, your salary for security and other people's praise for significance is no longer necessary. But you know what happens as soon as the dear Holy Spirit of God puts his hands on your drip feed, you know what you do. You protest, "No, no, don't, I'll die if you take it away, I'll die without financial security." The Holy Spirit is lovingly saying, "You would have died, if that weak personality that needed this artificial support had not been destroyed in Jesus. But it has been destroyed and before when you tried to do without that financial security, you tried to do by your own efforts. Now you have a new body not made with hands that is eternal in the heavens and that personality is able to live without this drip feed. Just believe me, it is able to live without the drip feed."

Loved ones, daily faith is possible only if God has actually destroyed that old, deteriorating weak personality that used to need those things. But if he has, then all you have to do is what the paralysed man did when Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." You simply have to get up and you'll find your muscles and bones strong enough to bear your weight. That's the miracle of it. The moment you exercise an act of faith, to no longer depend on people's opinions and people's approval for your importance, to no longer depend on how many material possessions you have for your sense of security, no longer depend on circumstances and events for your happiness. If you exercise faith and determine I will no longer do that, suddenly in a moment, God is able to make real in your life the miracle that he wrought in Jesus on Calvary. It happens like that. Do you see though, that you have to exercise faith and faith is action? Faith is not saying I believe it; faith is action. It's believing, yes you have been changed radically at Calvary and there is a version of you available to you by an act of faith that does not need all these things.

Now, many of you I think try what thousands of others try. There are thousands today who do not believe that in Jesus God radically changed their personality. They do not believe that. They do not believe that God destroyed the old deteriorating selfish, weak, parasitical personality on Calvary. They don't believe that. So what they try to do is run a Christ like life with the drip feed on one side and the pace maker in here and the blood transfusions on the other side. Then they find these artificial life support systems don't make the body go right. It doesn't go right. They read God's laws and God's laws describe a healthy body that has been crucified and raised with Jesus. They don't see this old function of the weak body parallels the function of a healthy body so they get irritated. They do. They don't get from the drip feed the real security that God alone can give them. They don't get from the blood transfusions the real happiness that God alone can give them. They don't get from their pace maker the sense of significance that God alone can give them.

So, they get irritated and they look at their relatives and their friends and try to get from them the approval, recognition and praise and happiness and contentment that they should get from God. And the people aren't giving it to them. So they catch hold of the drip feed and shake it saying, "Give me more, give me more." The poor souls who make up that drip feed, the employer or employees, bear all the irritability and impatience and critical attitude because they are trying to get from the artificial support system something they can only get from God. Of course, you know what they do. They find their life filled with irritability towards their relatives, or with a critical attitude of these people towards their employer or employees, or sarcasm towards their friends and colleagues. Then they reduce Jesus' death from the miraculous destruction of that old selfish personality that could enable them to rise with him and live a new life. They reduce it to a bribe to God to cover up their irritability or their impatience or sarcasm towards their friends and colleagues. You see what a tragic misconception of Jesus' death such people have. Except that aren't some of us doing that? Aren't some of us here trying to live this Christ like life without any entering into the miracle of Jesus' death on Calvary? Then, we are using Jesus' death as a bribe to God to cover up the failures to live the way he wants us to live. Of course, the tragedy is that you can only live that way if you die with Jesus. That's the only time you won't need the life support systems any longer. The moment you commit yourselves to that you'll find you are able to depend on God alone and that he alone is able to sustain you completely.

Of course the tragedy of it, of loved ones who believe that Jesus' death is a bribe, is that they find that they have no basis of salvation at all. Because here they are offering Jesus' death as a bribe day after day but day after day they are committing the same sins. So they have to find some righteousness and what they do is say, "I'm not believing Jesus' death intensely enough." The problem is they're not committing themselves to Jesus' death in their own whole lives. But they say, "I'm not believing it intensely enough so I must believe it more intensely." Then they fall into works-righteousness because they make the intensity of the belief a work. They begin to laud people who believe that more strongly and they spread that attitude into everything that they do -- into their service of God, into their church attendance, into their prayers day by day, into their Bible study -- until it all becomes a proof to them that they are worthy of God's salvation and his forgiveness. They get twisted up into such a works righteousness system that I'm sure Pope John Paul at the Vatican hasn't invented anything like this. There, loved ones, many of us Protestants live in misery and sadness -- continuing trying to prove to ourselves that we are worthy of God's salvation and yet refusing to enter into the miracle he wrought in Jesus.

Of course, God's way is so simple. He says this: I destroyed your old deteriorated personality in my Son -- you don't need those artificial support systems. Go and live depending on me and not them." That's all you have to do. That's all you have to do. It is so simple. Stop depending on the approval of peers, on the praise of your superiors for your sense of importance and significance. Stop depending on your possession and your clothes and your home for your sense of security. Stop depending on circumstances and pleasant events and thrills for your happiness. Depend on God for what he is willing to give you. Just do that. You who say I've tried before have tried it without allowing God's miracle of replacing your old personality with a new one before that was done and without having that done in your life. That's how you have tried. Now try in the light of the fact that God has given you a complete transplant.

God has given you a complete new personality that is in fact satisfied with him if you give it a chance. Now will you? That's my question--will you give it a chance today? Because each one of you will go home today and there will be some loved one who does not have the lunch made just as you want it -- really. Or throughout the rest of this day there's going to be someone who does not do

just what you expect them to do. If you are still clinging on to that old drip feed, you are going to get irritated with them and you're going to get angry with them. But if you would die this very moment to anything they can give you or not give you and resolve this moment to depend on your Father alone for everything you need, you will find there is a love that is fragrant and sweet that will rise up from your heart towards those loved ones this day, that will bring peace and harmony into their life as well as your own. Really---and you can do it this moment. By faith you can stand up this moment and you'll find that your anklebones and your muscles and your whole personality is able to bear the weight. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we would say to you, will you heal us? And then you say, "I will, rise up and walk." Lord, we see that we can if we want. We can this very moment accept our death with you to people and things and events for the rest of our lives. We can receive the renewed personality that God has given us in you. That personality is well satisfied with what you give it. Lord, we see we can do that. Lord Jesus, we would do it now. We would say yes by faith, Lord Jesus, I accept my place with you. Dear Father in heaven, I will trust you for all my needs from this moment on and no longer depend on others or get despondent or discontented with others. Lord, I believe. Amen.