

Idealistic Striving or Realistic Faith

Romans 10:6

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Let us pray. Dear Lord, we thank you that your life is a life of peace and rest and all who follow you have that peace and rest. We thank you, Lord, that although you will call us to external battle and external difficulties and problems, within will be constant peace and rest because your yoke is easy and your burden is light. Thank you. Amen.

Almost every Sunday I think there are some of us here for the first time and probably on television many of you are watching for the first time. I think it's good periodically to explain again what we do when we meet together like this on a Sunday. What we do is to study one sentence, or two at the most, of a letter that was written by Paul to a group of Christians in Rome in the year 57 A.D. We believe the words of this letter are actual statements of our Creator, the one who made us, to ourselves. That is why we study the letter so minutely and carefully.

The reason we believe that the words in this letter and other writings of this book are the words of our Creator to us is because of the man who led Paul and the other men who wrote some of the letters in this book. That man was Jesus of Nazareth. We believe that Jesus of Nazareth is different from any other man who lived in our world. First of all, his life is more carefully documented than any other life. The evidence that we have about him comes from contemporary writers who did not necessarily believe him. Writers like Pliny, Celsus and Porphyry. The actual evidence that we have that we possess the letter or the history as it was written comes from the multitude of evidence and of manuscript evidence far better than we have for any other piece of ancient history.

Secondly we believe that this man Jesus is different from anybody else because he not only healed sicknesses and had power over nature, but he is the one man among all of us men and women who has been attested by his contemporaries to be sinless and perfect. The factor that sets Jesus apart from even men like Muhammad and Buddha is that he died and came back to life for more than a month and then disappeared off the face of the earth. For those reasons we believe that Jesus is being truthful when he says "the person who made you, your Creator, I am his Son, and the men that follow me I have appointed to tell you what my Father thinks and what his plan for this world is. So you can trust what they write because what they have written is by inspiration of my Father." And so, loved ones, that's what we do. We spend our Sundays, now for eight years and hopefully for another fifty, studying carefully the words that our Creator has transmitted to us through this dear man Jesus, his son.

Now would you look therefore at the verse that we are studying today and then we will tackle it the way we always do, asking what does it mean. It's Romans 10:6. I could never make any sense of it for years. "But the righteousness based on faith says, Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is to bring Christ down)." What does that mean?

Actually it is the old cabin boy problem. I do not know if you know the old cabin boy problem. Yes, you can be a cabin boy if you have the experience at sea. How do I get experience at sea? By becoming a cabin boy. That's the cabin boy problem. You cannot get to sea unless you have had experience and the only way to get to sea is by being a cabin boy. So it's a dilemma. You are

caught. You cannot move. It is a complete prison. Do you want to be a secretary? Alright you can be a secretary if you have secretarial experience. How do you get secretarial experience? By being a secretary. So you cannot move. You are paralyzed. You cannot become a secretary unless you have secretarial experience and you cannot get secretarial experience unless you become a secretary.

Now many of us here are not budding cabin boys and we are not blossoming secretaries, but we still experience that vicious circle in our own personal lives. I will show you how it happens. Turn to Acts 5:32. "And we are witnesses to these things and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him..." The Holy Spirit is the actual life of God himself. It is the energy and the power that run through him and his son Jesus. That's what the Holy Spirit is and he enables us to live like God and to love like God and to share a day-to-day friendship with God. That verse says that God gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey him. Some of us say, "But it's not fair, God gives the Holy Spirit to me if I obey him but I cannot obey him unless I have the Holy Spirit." Now do you see that is why I say that it is the cabin boy problem?

There are many of us who feel that we are in that position. God gives the Holy Spirit to those that obey him but we say this is not fair. He is saying that he will give the Holy Spirit to me if I obey him but I cannot obey him until I get the Holy Spirit. So I am caught in an endless vicious circle out of which there is possibly no escape at all. I do think that many of us who hear about Christianity feel we are in that position. Yet it is interesting, there is something in us that cannot accept hopelessness. There is something in us that cannot accept hopelessness. There is something in us that says..."Well, I have to do something, I have to do something. I cannot just stand around and do nothing so I am going to try to obey him."

So that's exactly what we do. We TRY to obey him. We try to live up to the things that God has told us to do. We try somehow to live on the heights that he has described in his word. We try to obey the law he has given us and somehow we hope if we can only obey as much as possible and maybe, somehow, the Holy Spirit will come down to us. If we can only do enough things right God will give us the Holy Spirit. If we live obediently to him then maybe somehow Christ will come into our hearts and be real. Many of us are involved in that kind of thought -- let's try to do all that we can to please him and maybe somehow the Holy Spirit will come to us or maybe somehow Christ will come down to us.

In other words we are saying in our hearts if we can only ascend into heaven maybe we will be able to bring Christ down. Now that's what the verse means. "Do not say to yourselves who will ascend into heaven; who will live a heavenly life; who will do what they do in heaven; who will live as obediently as possible so that they can somehow try to bring Christ down into their hearts?"

Now loved ones, that kind of idealistic striving is the basis of every religion in the world. You know that Hinduism, Islam, Muhammadanism and every religion of the world holds that view. It is the basis of a perverted version of Christianity that tries to make Christianity into a religion rather than into reality. But that's the basis for ordinary religion around the world. That's the principle -- try to do everything possible to please God so that perhaps he will be willing to give you his spirit. So concentrate all your being on trying to obey as much as possible.

And the verse that we are studying says, "Do not say that. Do not say that kind of thing. The idealistic striving will get you nowhere." Look at it again in Romans 10:6: "But the righteousness based on faith says, do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven (that is, to bring Christ down).'"

Loved ones do not think that way. Stop thinking, "If by my own will power I can somehow live the right way God will give me his Spirit." Do not think that way. Do not act that way. It's a way of hopelessness. It's a way of failure and guilt, a way of sin and death. It's a way of continual eternal striving and frustration. Do not think that way.

And who says that? You see it in the verse: "the righteousness that is based on faith" says that. Now what does it mean? Let's break it down into pieces. First of all the righteousness that is based on faith says you are right in your feelings about yourself. You are not doing what God wants you to do. You are right about that. You are right in that you are not doing what God wants you to do and the reason for that is your own crooked nature. There is something in you that is antagonistic towards God. You are right that is the problem. There is something in you that really does not like God, that doesn't want to be like him, and does not want to do what he tells you.

The reason for it is you are not like God inside whereas the law is. You might want to look at the verse that says that. It is Romans 7:14: "We know that the law is spiritual but I am carnal, sold under sin..." Spiritual is depending on God; carnal is depending upon people and things. So you have trouble loving those who criticize you because you live depending on other people's approval. You get really deeply concerned when somebody disapproves of you and when some think negatively of you. You feel real antagonism towards them. So the righteousness based on faith says you have trouble loving those who criticize you because of the kind of person you are. You have a personality who for years has depended on your peers' respect. That keeps operating when it comes to somebody criticizing you. You immediately get concerned about what they think. The righteousness that is based on faith says that is you. Just face it. That is the kind of person you are. You are that kind of person dependent on people's opinions. You have had it built into your mind since the first time you ever saw a curve, since the first time anybody ever gave out grades.

No, loved ones, you will have to look at the English tenses and you will have to recognize them. Do you see that "I hammered" is a past tense? "Am hammering" or "I hammer" is a present tense; "I hammered" with "ed" on the end is a past tense. Now the Bible says our old crooked, miserable selves are being crucified ... no, no WAS crucified with Christ. Has been. It is a fact. In eternity it is a fact. In God it is a fact. That's the way God talks about it. Look at it in Ephesians and you will see it again. It is startling when you begin to see, and you see it again that the infinite God who sees all as one great, present moment sees this has all taken place.

Do you realize that time is just one big bluff? Do you know that? Have you gotten as far as Albert Einstein? Time is just a bluff. If your hair did not grow gray you would not know that time was really passing. It is the deterioration that God has built into the world to show us that time is passing and there is a need for us to decide. It is that that makes us aware of time. But time itself is nonexistent. This is just one, great, eternal moment. That's why this is possible -- Ephesians 2:1: "and you he made alive when you were dead through the trespasses and sins..." "Made" is a past tense. "Were dead" is a past tense. Then you see what follows. If we have been put into Christ and been completely destroyed and recreated in him then where he is at this moment, there we are also. Do you see that? I put the sheet of paper into the Bible and wherever the Bible goes the paper goes also. And so with you. Once God has put you into Jesus, wherever Jesus is that is the place you are too. You see it in Ephesians 2:6: "and raised us up with him and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus...". In other words the new you. The you which God has created in Jesus is at this moment seated at the right hand of God with all his approval. So you

have all his approval and sense of love in your heart. It doesn't matter what other people think or what other people say. The righteousness based on faith says that is fact, that is true.

Now how does it work out in our day-to-day lives? Do you have trouble loving those who criticize you? Do you? Will you stop idealistic striving? Here is what idealistic striving is. "Well, yeah, I do care a lot about what people say. That's my problem; I just care a lot about what people say. But boy I am trying to love them. I am trying to find the good things about my critics. I read books that tell me how to see the good things in a person. I am trying to see all the good things about my critics so that I can love them. I am going to do my best." That's idealistic striving. That's like crying up to heaven, "I wasn't crucified with Christ. I like people's praise; I like people to like me. I was not crucified with Christ." That's the old you that cares. But there is a new you that is independent of people's opinions as Jesus is, and that new you is the real you. Stop the idealistic striving and start exercising realistic faith.

Now what is realistic faith? Faith is belief and action that is based on reality. The reality is that your old self that is all concerned about what people think of you has been crucified with Christ. And it is stated all through this book, the Bible. It has been done and you have been changed. There is a new you available simply by you exercising self to choose at this moment. That is reality. Reality is that you have been destroyed with Christ. All that old personality that sneakily loves people's praise and for people to look up to them -- that has been destroyed.

Now faith is believing that and acting on that. Submitting your will to the consequences of that. To the fact that the old self deserves far more criticism than those critics are giving it. But it is dead now so why beat a dead horse? "So, alright I will let it go and it doesn't need defending. It just does not need any defending." Submit the will to that.

Loved ones, that is the way out of the vicious circle. Not, "I cannot obey because of the kind of person that I am" -- because you are dead right there. But, "I have been changed in Jesus. God has put me into Christ and has changed me. He has rerouted my whole personality and with that personality I can obey."

Now I am thinking about the old sinner in the back row, who is saying it's a kind of power of positive thinking deal. No. It is reality. Reality is that you have been crucified with Christ. You may say, "I just cannot understand it." You do not have to understand it. You do not need to understand it. You do not understand the Theory of Relativity. How could you understand that the eternal, infinite God can destroy us all and yet give us the freedom to live in that old life at present? Because there is no present and there is no future. But how can you understand all that? Reality is that you have been changed.

It is like learning to swim. Do you remember learning to swim? I remember learning in Belfast. We went to the indoor pool and my dad held my chin and all that stuff and I had to kick. You know the basis of anything happening at all is that you believe that the water will hold you up. If you do not believe that the water will hold you up you are not going to indulge in any of those actions. You are no fool. You are going to arrange a hoist across the top of the ceiling or you are going to have a portable boat and you are going to paddle across the water. You are not going to go through all this stuff. Not unless you believe that the water is going to hold you up. It is basic that you first of all believe that it is going to hold you up and then you involve yourself in strange actions that are based on that. The corny thing is that it works! You don't know how it works but

it works. It is based on the fact that the water will hold you up. You see, those actions are totally different than the actions you would engage in if either there was no water or if you did not believe the water would hold you. The actions would be totally different. Do you see the difference between idealistic striving and realistic faith? The actions are totally different, depending on what you believe.

If you believe that that old personality that loves people's praise has been crucified with Christ there is a totally different response in you. Suddenly you realize, "I am with you Lord Jesus, I am at God's right hand. It doesn't matter what happens to my life. Actually it doesn't matter who likes me and who doesn't like me. You like me and that's all that matters. Lord, thank you." And then there is a whole love that comes forth because you have set your whole being in the light of reality, and on the light of fact.

So loved ones, do you see there is a great difference? There is a great difference between idealistic striving, trying to get into Jesus. Do you see there is a great difference? If I could just jump higher and higher... that kind of attitude. There is a great difference between that and the attitude of realistic faith: "Lord, I believe what your word says -- Christ died for all therefore all have died -- Lord I believe that. I believe that my old self was crucified with Christ. Thank you, Lord. Thank you that now this new self that I have is free from the slavery of people's opinions and it thrives on your approval, and Lord with that new self I am going to love this dear person trying to run me down." It is a totally different response.

I do not know which one you are involved in, but I do think a number of us are involved in crying up to heaven continually day after day, "I have not been crucified with Christ. I am trying to overcome this miserable personality that has not been crucified with Christ." The victory is by faith. Faith is believing you have been changed in Jesus, and acting in the light of that fact. The amazing thing is you find the water holds you up. Isn't that the exciting thing? Suddenly you find there is a power inside of you enabling you to do these things and that is the power of the Holy Spirit whom God gives to them who obey.

Let us pray.

Dear Father, I pray that you will in your loving way reveal this to each one of us here this morning -- to each dear brother and sister here. Lord will you enable them to see through the mystery and to understand what you have done for us. And that it is possible to obey because we are changed and we have been changed in the twinkling of an eye. We thank you Lord. I pray that you will reveal that to each one of this morning so that we will stop the endless striving and begin the rest of faith for your glory. Amen.