

## How to be Changed

Romans 10:9

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Sometimes it is good just to stop and think why we do certain things or feel certain ways. I would ask you, when you worry about money, why do you worry? What makes you worry about money? Or, maybe you are young enough so that you do not particularly worry about money.

Well then, I would ask you, why do you worry about what people think about you? You are concerned because someone has criticized you. Why do you get all concerned about those things? Many of us would probably say, "Well, if you don't have money, you can't buy food, you can't buy clothes, so you will starve or freeze and you will die. And if you don't have friends who like you, you will be lonely and you may as well be dead."

That is kind of the bottom line for most of us. Most of us do not actually live on the bottom line. Isn't it interesting, though, how many of us live with the fear that some time we will fall through the bottom of it? Even though we do not live there, it is amazing how that fear nags away at the back somewhere.

Most of us live a little above that. We would answer, "Well, I worry about money and I worry about friends because my happiness depends to some extent on these things. In fact, in this present life, the more you have of money and friends, usually the happier you are."

Yet wouldn't you agree, if God really loves you, he will make sure that you have enough money and friends? So doesn't your happiness depend on his life, rather than on those secondary gifts of money and friends?

You would probably say as I would, "Well, sure, philosophically and ideally I believe that. I believe that God does really love me and he will provide me with enough money and friends. I sure try to live like that. I really do. But I find it difficult. When the bank balance begins to go close to zero, I find that I get tense and anxious and worried. It's the same when somebody criticizes me, or when I hear that somebody doesn't like me. I try in those crises to trust that God will make sure I have all of the money and friends I need. But it is very difficult."

"I find that there is something in my nature that really depends upon what you call secondary gifts. I know that I should depend on God alone. I should relax and trust him to provide all the money and friends that I need, but I find that my nature somehow doesn't respond that way."

I think many of us would say that, wouldn't we? Many of us live right there. We would say, "Yes, we know that we should depend on God to provide those things, but we don't live there. I'm afraid that's where we are, just tending to live depending upon the things themselves."

Isn't it kind of ironic? Any rational mind finds it fairly easy to believe that we were all made by a personal intelligent being. Our rational minds tend toward believing that he knows why he put us here. We know that he has so arranged the economy of the world that if we do what he wants us to do, we will probably have enough food, shelter, and clothing to see our lives through.

Yet somehow, we have developed personalities that do not respond to those realities. Isn't that right? Even though we see the reason and the logic of it, we have somehow developed personalities that do not live in that reality. We have developed personalities that scramble and scrounge fretfully with the other three and a half billion people, trying to grab as much money and as many friends as we can, as if they were going out of style tomorrow.

It is hard to know why we do it, but we do. Faced with this paradox, the religions of the world tell us that we should be different. We know we should be different. We know that we should not be so enslaved to those things. We know we should relax and depend on our loving Father -- but we cannot.

Some Christian teachers have told us that God will forgive us even if we are not different. Yet we are crying out, "How can we get personalities that respond to those realities? How can we be changed to relax and trust God for the money and friends we may need? How can we be changed?"

When our forefathers scrambled and scrounged fretfully to get all the money and friends that they needed, it produced only wild violence. God had only one alternative. Let's look at that alternative.

It was in our primeval history, which is described at the beginning of Genesis (Genesis 6:5-7): "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground, man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.'"

That is what God did with the universal flood. It was the only thing he could see to do -- start all over again. But even that universal flood was just a symbolic expression that God produced in our history to indicate the final solution he had found to the problem. The final solution was, of course, that which was set forth in his Son's death in 28 A.D. of our era.

Here was the final solution. God foresaw what you would be like. He foresaw that you would refuse to trust him for all that you needed. He foresaw that you would develop a twisted personality that was enslaved to money and friends for its happiness. He saw that this twisted personality would never again be able to trust him. So he took the mental and emotional and physical equipment of that old personality of yours, that personality that was twisted in that way, and he transplanted it into his Son Jesus. He destroyed it there.

When Jesus rose from the dead, his physical resurrection expressed a mastery over death and the forces of evil that had taken place in eternity. When Jesus rose from the dead, God also recreated you with a new personality -- one that is free to relax and trust God as Jesus himself does at this moment.

Now that is what God has done for us. You can be changed. You can be changed right now because that is reality. There's available to you a new personality that was made by God -- recreated by him -- there in his Son. That new personality is filled with the intimacy that Jesus has in his Father. It can be exercised by you.

Now, how do you actualize that cosmic reality in your life here and now? How do you make that real

in yourself, in your own day-to-day life? Frankly, it is all very commonsensical. It is done in the same way that you enter into all the other realities that surround your life.

The response that you and I have to make in order to experience that cosmic reality is, BE WILLING TO LIVE IN IT. Would you be willing to live in that reality -- of that old money-and-friend-depending personality being destroyed, and having a new clean personality that is able to relax and trust God for all that you need? Would you be willing to live in that reality? That is the first step.

Do you know that  $E=mc^2$ ? Of course you do believe Einstein's equation on the theory of relativity. It is no big deal for you to believe that, or to say that you do, because it is not going to have an immediate effect on your life. It is easy to give intellectual assent to it.

That sort of intellectual assent is not the first step that is necessary in order to enter into the cosmic reality of being raised with Jesus and being changed. The essential first step is this -- being willing to live in that reality.

$E = mc^2$  is a purely academic belief. Consider a more immediate statement such as, "The air around you is poisoned!" Do you know that? You would not just casually say that you knew that. You know that if you believe that -- then it will affect your life. You will immediately have to stop breathing, or decide to continue breathing and risk it. It is a matter of your will as well as of your mind.

Now this is the first step, loved ones, to experience the deliverance that God has wrought for you in Jesus -- would you be willing to live in that reality? That is what belief is when Jesus talks about belief. It is: are you willing to "be in accordance with" the thing that you believe? (This is the meaning of "belief" in Greek.) And you say, "Yes, I do believe that this old money-and-friend-dependent personality was destroyed in Jesus, and I was raised up in him. Now I can feel that same way toward his Father as he does."

The issue is not whether you are willing to believe that in your head, but, are you willing to live in the reality of that? The language of Jesus has always a volitional content, not just an intellectual content. Volition is "to be willing".

Loved ones, would you look at the verse we are studying today, so that you may be aware of where that occurs? It is Romans 10:9: "Because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

Note the phrase, "believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead." That is not believing it just as an intellectual concept, but: are you willing to believe in your heart -- and therefore to "be in accordance with" that belief? Are you willing to be raised with Jesus from the dead? That is really it. Are you willing to live in that reality?

Many of us believe that cigarette smoking causes cancer. Many of us believe that eating beef clogs the old arteries. Many of us believe that exercising enables the heart to last longer. We don't live in the light of those realities, and furthermore, we are not willing to live in the light of those realities. We then never receive the benefits of those realities in our lives. So then, do you see that in order to receive the benefit of any reality, be it breathing clean air or exercising so that the heart lasts longer, you need to be willing to live in the reality itself?

In other words, are you willing to live in the state of Jesus at this moment at God's right hand? That is what you have to face: are you willing to live as he lives, satisfied with only God's approval and with only God's love?

I think a lot of us tend to say, "Yes," because we like the positive aspect of that. But do you see that the negative aspect of it is: are you willing to live apart from peer approval?

That means: are you willing to live with peer criticism? Are you willing to live even if your friends put you down or tear you apart? That's what it means, loved ones, to be willing to live in the reality of your place in Jesus at God's right hand.

If you are not willing to live in that reality, you will never receive the benefits of that reality. It is the same with your money, your clothes, your ambitions, your future, and all the other things. Are you willing to live in Jesus -- to be satisfied with what he is satisfied with? Now, the moment you are willing to live in that reality -- there will burst upon you the love of God. You will begin to sense his love.

The second step is -- live in that reality. The first step is real belief -- a real willingness to live in that reality. The second step is, action -- live in that reality. You'll find that in the other part of Romans 10:9. "Because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord" and the word "confess" is "homologeō" and it means, "say the same as God." It means, "Make your life and your lips and your behavior and your actions match the reality."

Do you believe in the Binaca Blast? {that is, taking a squirt of a popular breath freshener}. If you take a shot in the mouth, your breath will smell sweet and fresh, right? And so, of course, you believe it. And how do you experience the reality of it? Well, I ask you first: are you willing to live in the reality of it? And you think of the sweetness and the freshness of breath, and you say, "Yeah."

But are you willing to live in the negative aspects too? Are you willing to bear the bitterness of the taste when it first hits you in the back of your throat? So are you willing to live in the reality of it? You say, "Yeah, sure. I am. Now, I believe that it will give me sweet, fresh breath and I am willing to live in the reality of it. Now, my breath doesn't smell sweet." And I say to you, "Yes, you have to act in the light of that reality. You have to act. You have to actually take the shot in the mouth."

And you say, "No. I want to smell my breath fresh and sweet without taking the shot in the mouth." And it's impossible. It doesn't matter how willing you are to have fresh, sweet breath. It doesn't matter how much you believe it until you actually -- Aaah. {He squirts breath freshener into his mouth.} (Laughter) Until you actually do it, you'll never be overcome by fragrance. You'll never be able to kiss your wife.

But you see the difference, loved ones. You can believe. You can be willing. But unless you act on that reality -- the reality will not begin to be made real in your life. So, the Red Sea was rearranged -- the forces that held the Red Sea in its place -- those forces were rearranged in Jesus' pre-creation death. The forces were all rearranged so that the sea could be split at any moment. But, all of that reality could only be actualized in this world when Moses took his rod and stretched it right across the sea. Unless you act on the basis of the reality, the reality will

never become real in you.

That's how it was with the beggar that was at the Gate Beautiful of the temple, who was lame from birth. His ankle bones had been strengthened and made whole when he was recreated in Jesus' resurrection. But those ankle bones could never be strengthened and actualized in this present physical world until Peter took him by the hand and raised him up.

In other words, unless you act on the basis of the reality, the reality will never be made real in you. So -- are you willing to live with only God's approval? That means: stop those furtive little glances at your friends' faces to see signs of approval in their eyes. You just stop doing it. I think some of us feel it will work the other way. We feel we will get the sweet fresh breath without acting. No, part of faith is belief. But the other part of faith is action on the basis of that belief. So, you have to act first -- only then does God believe that you are serious and only then is he able to make real the miracle that he worked in Jesus, in your life.

It's the same with the money. So many of us think, "Well, I am willing to depend on God for as little money as he wants me to have, or as much money as he wants me to have." And we see that the bank balance is going down and a thought comes into our mind that says, "Oh! What am I going to do?" And so many of us think, "Lord! Drive this thought out of my mind. Drive the worry out of my mind."

And God is saying, "No. If you believe that I will supply everything, you cast that thought out yourself. You can. You can reject the thought. You can either follow that worry right down the lane, right down to the end of depression. Or you can stop thinking the thought this very moment -- because you believe that the reality is that I will supply all your needs."

But loved ones, you have to act. Do you see that? It's the same with the whole boy-girl relationship thing. If you are willing to live in the reality that God will choose your partner for you, then you must act on the basis of that. And you must act in the sure faith that he has chosen that partner and that you don't need to look around for one.

So, immediately you stop looking out to see where that person is, immediately you are freed from that enslaving and undignified process of always looking out for the person who is supposed to live with you forever. Do you see the key? The reality is that all us in this room have been recreated in Jesus with personalities like him that are able to trust our Father for all the money and friends that we need. That's reality.

You have to decide -- are you willing to live in that reality? And then -- live in that reality. That's the exciting part of faith. I think a lot of you miss it. But it is exciting to actually act on the basis of what God has said. It's exciting. And then God himself acts.

In other words, the Maker has done his bit. Now -- the next move is yours. But the Maker has done what he had to do and the reality is all there. But now you have to make your move. But so often we are saying, "No, Lord. You make your move again." And God says, "No. I have done all that is needed to change you and enable you to trust me and love me and relax in me forever. It's you that has to move into that reality, and if you do it you will see that all that I said has actually been done. And you will experience a freedom and liberty."

Here's just one last thing. If you find difficulty in the acting part -- acting on the basis of

that reality -- believe me, it's probably because you haven't really settled the first step -- the willingness. In other words, if you have trouble with a real sense of jealousy when somebody is praised over you, it's probably because you haven't really settled whether you are willing to have only God's approval on your life or not. In other words, you're not really settled in your willingness to be crucified and raised with Jesus and to enjoy only what he enjoys.

The difficulty with most of us is not usually the faith thing -- in the sense of belief. The difficulty is usually the willingness -- the willingness to live that way. Now, you have to decide -- because it's really enjoyable to be together here Sunday by Sunday and you can see the effects that that reality that God has wrought for us brings into our lives. But it's another thing completely to live in it. And you sooner or later have to decide, "Am I willing to live in this reality?" And then live in it.

Otherwise, eventually you become a hypocrite, and eventually you contribute to the unreality of us as a body of Christ, and we'll eventually become just a byword among people. So, it is important for you to decide, "Am I going to listen to this stuff forever? Or am I going to be willing to live in this reality -- and then live in it?" Now, I tell you, it is exciting -- honestly! It's a great way to live. But the reality will only be made real, if you are willing to live in the reality -- and then if you start living in it. Then it will be made real in you. Let's pray.

Dear Father, thank you for such a clear word. If you have belief in your heart that Jesus is Lord and if you confess him with your lips, then you will be saved. Thank you Lord, that we've only to be willing to believe that we were recreated in Jesus and we have to be willing to live in that. Then we are simply to go out of here this morning and act that way. Then the whole reality of it will burst upon us, and we will find our hearts filled with your love and filled with a new peace and a new power. Thank you, Lord. Thank you that your word is always sure. If you confess with your lips that Jesus Christ is Lord and believe in your heart that he was raised from the dead, then you will be saved. Thank you, that we can all do that if we choose, this day. And now the grace of our Lord Jesus, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us, now and throughout this coming week. Amen.