

## Are You Rejecting Christ?

Romans 10:19

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Do you know who Bismarck was? If you suffered reading a lot of European history, you would know that Bismarck was an iron-willed military leader who dominated the policies of Germany virtually up to the end of the 19th century. He had all kinds of flaws in his character, but he once made what I think is an inspired statement. He was talking with the Kaiser about "politicians" -- he meant statesmen. He said, "Politicians listen for the footsteps of God."

He really meant that great leaders, who govern the course of international affairs, realize that the only moves worth making are those that lead directly to the purpose of the Creator -- who works all things according to the counsel of his will. Any other moves that you make in international affairs finally lead nowhere.

That could be an interesting distinction between statesmen and politicians. Statesmen are great public servants and listen for the footsteps of God. They watch to see where the Creator is moving the history of the world. But politicians manipulate events and people for their own short-term gains.

You see fine well the same distinction applies in our own personal lives. You can either live your life listening for the footsteps of God -- that is, living each day watching for the hints and the promptings of his Holy Spirit about the way he wants you to go, and living your life against the backdrop of God's plan for the world. Or you can live your life as a miserable little political animal that is bent on manipulating people and things and circumstances for his own short-term goals and gains.

You can either live your life relaxed in the trust that your Creator is completely in control of your life and is governing its course. Or you can live as if everything depends on what you can do to manipulate others -- to make them do what needs to be done for your life to prosper.

You can either live as a miserable scared little political animal who is playing it by ear all the time, trying to turn this event or that event to your own profit. Or you can live as one who is more concerned with the plan that God has for your life -- and is listening for the footsteps of God.

And that, of course, explains irritability. You know the number of times we all have spoken irritably to each other -- to our friends, employees, employers, or our loved ones at home. We feel this is our little solar system, and we have to remain "god" in control of it. We have to govern everything so that it works right for us. How dare anyone speak a word that we did not plan to be spoken! How dare anyone do anything that we didn't expect to be done! How dare anyone do something that does not meet the high standards we have for them! So in irritability we speak to them.

It is so different from the love that flows from a dear heart that completely trusts God to take care of the way his life goes -- to be able to work every stray action and stray event into the counsel of his will and purpose for us. That results in such a relaxed magnanimous life.

Yet, it is difficult, isn't it? It is difficult to live your life listening for the footsteps of God, especially when you hear the deafening noise of the bombs falling all around you. It is so difficult to listen for the footsteps of God and to trust that he is in absolute control of everything -- when your dear friend has just blown all hope of a vacation by totaling your car.

You might say, "Difficult? It's impossible!" And with the personality equipment that you and I have, it IS impossible.

I'll tell you why. Have you ever watched a little rabbit eating a lettuce leaf in your vegetable garden? I watched one last week. You know the way it nibbles about like mad, and its eyes look up and dart around to see if there is any danger, and then it goes nibbling again. Its little head is always jerking around everywhere to see if there is anybody within attacking distance. So it nibbles away, its little eyes look up, and then it nibbles away again.

That's the way that dear little rabbit eats. It feels that if it doesn't see what is planning to attack it before that thing gets near to it, it is finished. It believes that it is on its own, and has to protect and defend itself from any stray action that anybody might produce.

Now you can imagine calling that rabbit into your study and saying, "Look, this is a dumb way to live. I'll protect you. Have your meal in peace. I'll watch out for any animal that dares to attack you." You know fine well, even if that dear little rabbit says, "Good deal" -- the little eyes, the little pricked-up ears, everything is so attached to the natural scene around it by invisible chains of responses and reflexes -- that it couldn't stop eating the way it does even if it wanted to.

It is as if the first swaying branch is immediately connected by an invisible electric wire to its little eyes, and its little eyes dart out. It is as if every movement of a blade of grass is connected directly to its little head so that it looks around as if it were a puppet on a string.

And even if that dear little rabbit wanted to trust you, it couldn't. Its whole set of motor responses is tied so inextricably to the nature around it -- as we know -- for a definite purpose. You know that there is no way in which that rabbit could just lie down there on the grass, have a little bit of lettuce and then have a little snooze. It couldn't.

And isn't it the same with us? It's not just that our motor responses -- our eyes and our ears -- are so attached to the natural world around us. It's even more serious than that. It is our whole mental and emotional makeup that is tied to the things, the people, and the circumstances around us -- so that they make us act like a puppet on a string.

We hear somebody praising us, and immediately the satisfaction in being praised and looked up to just flows out from us. The very same power that connects us with the world around us in that situation operates in us when somebody dents our car, or when somebody does something to us that we didn't expect. Immediately irritability flashes out from us.

The only way you could get the rabbit to trust you is if you could take its little eyes, its little ears, its head, and its nervous system and replace them with eyes and ears and a head and a nervous system that were designed to trust you and to depend upon you -- rather than upon the natural world around it. That would be a massive job! You couldn't even do it with one rabbit, let alone all the rabbits in the world!

Yet, that is what God has done for us. That is why he puts it like this: "Christ died for all, therefore all died." {Paraphrase of 2 Corinthians 5:14} When Jesus died in the great-eternal now of infinity -- where there is no present, no past, and no future, and where there is no time (since time is simply an illusion for our benefit here on earth) -- in that great eternal world of eternal now, God put us into his Son. In his Son he destroyed all that mental and emotional equipment that is so tied to people's opinions, to things, and to circumstances for its happiness.

That's what he means when he says, "Our old self was crucified with Christ." (Romans 6:6) Our old makeup was destroyed with him and has been replaced.

So there isn't one of us here in this room this morning who hasn't been renewed and changed completely and resurrected. We have a personality that can trust God and depend on him -- instead of being at the mercy of trusting people and depending on things. Loved ones, every one of us here has a personality that exists in eternity and is available to us at this moment -- if we just want it. We each have a personality that can, in fact, depend upon God and not on the world.

You remember we talked last Sunday about the question Paul raised in Romans 10:18 about the Jews: "Have they not heard that this is the case?" You remember he says, "Of course they have heard! His words have gone throughout all the earth and his voice has gone to the very ends of the world." {Paraphrase of Romans 10:18} You remember whose voice he was talking about. He was saying, "All of you know that you can in fact depend utterly upon your Creator. You can live your life listening for the footsteps of God if you want."

You know that he is absolutely reliable. You know that he is absolutely faithful. You know that every night that follows day and every day that follows night, the sun and the stars in the heaven, prove that God is absolutely reliable.

The whole world of commerce and business and social activity progresses on the assumption that the sun will rise tomorrow morning as it rose this morning, and that it will continue to rise for thousands of years, as long as God deigns that the earth should remain. Anyone can see that it is natural and sensible and logical to believe that God is absolutely faithful and consistent, that he can be relied upon, and is worth looking to for protection for our own personal lives.

At the same time anybody can see that men and events and circumstances can not be depended upon. As an example of this, many have seen a DC10 lose its engine. Many have seen thousands of Ford Pinto cars recalled because of gas tank problems. Many have seen the present nuclear disasters that we are facing. Many realize that one of our greatest technical achievements -- Skylab -- is about to plummet to earth and that we are not sure of either the time or the place.

Loved ones, anyone who sees these things knows that the norm is to depend on the Creator who made us, and not to depend on men, circumstances, and things. In other words, it is just downright sensible to live your life listening for the footsteps of God -- rather than playing the game of the political animal who is trying to manipulate all the people and the circumstances together in the right way.

The verse that we are studying today just goes one step further. In Romans 10:19, Paul says, "Again I ask, did Israel not understand?" He is talking about the Jews, and he is saying, "Did Israel not understand that they could live their lives dependent on God, and not on other things, other people,

or other idols?" His answer of course, is the answer that Moses gave: "I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry."

He is saying, "Of course they understood!" Because God through Moses said, "Listen, if you will not trust me and depend upon me, but continue to depend on other things and other idols -- then I will reject you. A nation that is non-Jewish, the nation of the Gentiles, will enter into all that you should have entered into, and they will receive what you have rejected." In other words, Paul says that if they rejected God and rejected dependence upon him, it had been made plain to the Jews what would follow.

What about us? Could it be that you know that you should live your life listening for the footsteps of God -- instead of trying to manipulate people and events for yourself? Could it be that you know that, but you don't really understand what will happen if you don't do it?

Loved ones, you can't claim that. The implications are all around us of what happens in our lives when we don't live listening for the footsteps of God -- when we live instead dependent on people, things, and circumstances for our security, our significance, and our happiness.

If you doubt whether you understand or not, ask yourself the question: "Did Elvis die happy?" I don't think even the blindest person would claim that Elvis Presley died in anything but a great sense of loneliness and misery, with a body that was pumped full of chemicals. Did he do it to try to maintain within himself the thrill and happiness that he used to get from listening for the footsteps of God and from the approval of God? NO! He did it to get the thrill he used to get from the approval, adulation, and admiration of the crowds that came to watch him.

So he who is probably the foremost person in our century to live his life dependent upon our approval, admiration, and respect -- he died a miserable death in great loneliness with no one's approval. Even on your death bed, your nearest and dearest are not close enough to give you their approval.

Of course we understand what happens when we don't depend on God and depend on other people. Did Howard Hughes die happy? Probably one of the richest men in our world, he died in a lonely, dark, sparsely furnished room from malnutrition. He was a man who more than most depended on his things and possessions for a sense of security -- and he died crazy with fears, insecurity, and paranoia.

Do we understand what happens when we live our lives not listening for the footsteps of God? When we live our lives not following God's plan for them -- but instead depend on what we can manipulate from people, things, and circumstances for our own needs? Of course loved ones -- we do. You know we understand it. The implications and the consequences are all around us.

The truth is this: The most serious implications of not living that way are in your own personality. Have you ever sat and looked back to some comment that you made to a friend or a loved one and suddenly realized, "I didn't speak to them like that! I couldn't have! Why did that harsh tone come into my voice? Where did that irritability come from? I couldn't speak to them like that!"

Suddenly you realized you were getting used to treating people as pawns who are to be manipulated in your little solar system so that you can be happy and you can remain god. Those tones of voice that you once thought were utterly repulsive were becoming normal for you.

Loved ones, if we are honest, we do understand. We do know that we are meant to live our lives dependent on God and trusting in him, and not trying to manipulate other people and other things for our own benefit. We do know that. Moreover, we understand the consequences that come from not doing that.

Really, the truth is this: Either you and I live our lives listening for the footsteps of God, knowing that he has a plan for us and watching for the hints of that plan as day follows day. Or some other people will be forced to live their lives listening for our footsteps, because we have taken the place of God. fsAll of us here in this room know that is truth.

I would ask you, loved ones, will you seriously look at your own life and see how you are living it? See if you are listening for the footsteps of God in your life, or if you have subtly usurped the place of God and have become god in your own life -- so that others have to listen for your footsteps.

There is a beautiful life that is so utterly different from that of a little scared rabbit watching and trying to protect himself from all the people who are out to destroy him. There is such a different life that Jesus described when he said, "Look at the lilies of the field; they toil not, neither do they spin, and yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Not a sparrow falls to the ground but that your heavenly Father knows about it. Are you not of much more value than many sparrows?"

Of course you are! He wants you to start watching out for the plan he has for your life and trusting him when things happen -- instead of immediately trying to take over your life yourself. Of course, that is the whole testimony of the world around us -- and of our own experience.

Let us pray. Dear Father, we're heartily ashamed when we look at some of the irritability in the tone of our voice. We're heartily ashamed when we look at some of the impatience and the unkindness in our comments. Lord, we see that we've become gods of our own lives. We regard ourselves as responsible for our own protection.

Lord, we see from the instances of failure in our technology in these past weeks, that we human beings couldn't protect ourselves from a little storm -- let alone from all the things that come upon us in this life. Lord, if you are not out for our good, we're finished anyway.

So Father, we see that you have given us ample evidence in the natural laws and regularity of the universe, to show us that you are trustworthy and reliable, and that you have not sent us into this world as stray meteorites, but you have sent us here with a careful plan that is designed specifically for us, and that you will reveal that to us day by day -- if we will begin to listen to your footsteps in our lives, and concentrate in living out your ideas for us -- instead of trying to improvise our own plan as we go along.

So Lord, we would give ourselves to you afresh this morning. We would trust you by your dear Holy Spirit to show us this coming week different ways in which this will work itself out in our life. We pray Lord, that fewer people this week than last week will have to listen in fear for our footsteps. We pray they will instead meet the spirit of the one who said, "Into thy hands I commit my spirit."

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.