

You Face God Alone

Romans 11:1

Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

I wonder if there is anyone here who does not know who Moshe Dayan is. You remember he is that famous general in Israel who is the hero of the Six-Day War. If you have been following the news, you know that he has had an operation for cancer. And it looks serious; but one never really knows right away how serious these illnesses are.

But it certainly makes you think of all the other great generals that Israel has had, doesn't it? You think of Gideon, Joshua, and David. Then you think of Dayan, and you think that if he ever does die, it will be a great moment when he walks into the presence of Israel's great heroes of the past, and is welcomed by them into God's presence.

And yet, the shattering fact is, that may never happen -- because Dayan is not a very religious man. In fact, there are incidents in his own personal life that suggest that he may not even have any great respect for the laws of Moses. It kind of shocks you, doesn't it?

It is the same with that great mother of the children of Israel, Golda Meier. We all know the tremendous respect and affection that the world has for her, and the feeling that the Israelis themselves have for her. You tend to think of what a great moment it will be when she is welcomed by Abraham and Enoch, and all the other great Jewish leaders, into that rank of the heroes of God's people.

And yet, you may know that she didn't believe in God! Golda Meier, in her autobiography, writes that she is really an agnostic. She also says that what she has done for the people of Israel she did for political reasons, so that the Jewish people would have a homeland.

It kind of sets you back, doesn't it? You feel that surely these heroes, who have done so much for the cause of chosen people -- surely they will be accepted into God's presence at the end of this life. It has to be! It could not be otherwise -- men and women like these who have done so much to forward the whole prophetic progress of Israel -- must surely be received into God's presence and live with him forever at the Last Day.

And yet, loved ones, the only information we have on that kind of thing is very clear, and it implies a negative answer. Look at Romans 10:12: "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and bestows his riches upon all who call upon him. For, 'every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.' But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed?"

With our old emotional and illogical minds, you and I may feel that surely Moshe Dayan and Golda Meier will live with our Creator forever. But God's word says clearly that those who call upon God's name will be saved; but how can people call upon him if they have not believed in him?

In actual fact, both Moshe Dayan and Golda Meier probably express very clearly the particular function that Israel has in the world today. That function may surprise you, loved ones. Look down that chapter to the last verse, Romans 10:21: "But of Israel he says, 'All day long I have held out

my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.”

Israel is a testimony to the truth of those words. That is still Israel's primary function in these days. And, however liberal you may want to be, and however enlightened and intellectual and liberated we may all appear to be -- we have to fact that fact that at this stage in history, and probably until Jesus comes, Israel is a testimony not so much to God's favor as it is to the ingratitude of humanity and its rejection of God's favor.

In actual fact, Israel is not anything else but a "contrary and disobedient people" in regard to the greatest gift that God has given us. That greatest gift is the one man who lived in our world, and was able to destroy death and was able to live again despite being buried. By his sinless life, his supernatural wisdom, and his power, he proved that he was the Son of the Creator of the world -- the Messiah.

And yet, we have to face the fact honestly. Israel still rejects that man. In regard to God's greatest, most beautiful, and clearest gift, Israel is still a contrary and disobedient people. This is not something that is said by anti-Semites. This is something said by one who himself was a Jew.

So, loved ones, it is important for us to see that Moshe Dayan and Golda Meier are right in line, unfortunately, with the function that Israel is fulfilling today. In our woolly-mindedness and mushy-evangelicalism, I sometimes think we are trying to move history beyond the point where it actually is. History has not yet reached the point where Israel will turn to Jesus. History is still at the point where Israel is expressing disobedience and a contrariness toward Jesus, as they have expressed to their Maker all through the years.

That brings us to the first verse of the next chapter of Romans. It puts a question that is relevant. Romans 11:1: "I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin."

Paul is stating the other side of the truth that we have already mentioned. That first truth we mentioned is that just because Moshe Dayan was a great general of Israel, and just because Golda Meier was a great leader of Israel, does not mean that they will automatically live forever in God's presence! They will not be received by God just because they are part of Israel.

You see, Paul is stating the corollary to that. Just because he is an Israelite, and just because he is a Jew, and because up to now the Jewish people have rejected the Messiah, does not mean that every individual Jew rejects him or would be lost.

You remember that Paul went to great lengths to express that his hope of salvation was not based upon his being a part of the Jewish nation. His hope of being received by the Creator after this life is over was not based on his having participated in the actions of God's chosen people. His hope was based on his own belief and his own readiness to be reconstituted and remade in Jesus' death and resurrection.

Now, he says that in writing to the church at Philippi -- Philippians 3:3: "For we are the true circumcision, who worship God in spirit, and glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh. Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If any other man thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people

of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law a Pharisee, as to zeal a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead."

Paul says, "No. I'm not depending on the fact that I'm a Jew, or that I'm part of a larger group that God has chosen for a special purpose. I'm not depending on that for my salvation. I'm not depending on that for God to accept me at the end of this life. I'm depending on my readiness to be destroyed and remade in Jesus' death and resurrection, and to be changed into the image of God in this life."

Though you and I grasp that intellectually, and though we know it makes sense – yet we ourselves still hanker back to the old "fright-fight-flight" animal instincts that we developed as little children. If I said to you, "Don't you know that the only basis for your dealing with God or your being accepted by your Creator, is your individual response to him and not that you are part of a larger group that is somehow going to be received by him?" -- you would agree. Yet, it is strange that in our actual life we hanker back to the old instincts we had as children.

And you remember them: The teacher came into the room, the classroom window had just been smashed, and you hoped that you would somehow sink into that anonymous sea of faces that formed the rest of the class. We all do that! It is like closing your eyes when the lion is attacking. You know he isn't there. He's gone -- that kind of thing. We feel we can sink into the group.

Or do you remember when the professor was about to choose the first person to give a speech in the public speaking class? And you know the way you wanted to sink into the background and hoped that something would happen, that he would see everybody else but you.

And it is the same in other things, whether it's a grizzly bear attacking the summer camp, or whether it's a tornado coming. We human beings somehow feel that if we are with a whole lot of other people, perhaps it will not get us! We are used to the idea that if we sink into the group, at least we will all die together -- whatever comfort that is! But we feel that if you are in a group, somehow you will be included in the group.

Now it is illogical, irrational, ridiculous, and childish. But we still tend to run our lives on the basis of those illogicalities. We know that it is illogical -- for we know that a tornado can kill five thousand as easily as it can kill one. We know that it is impossible for every member of the class to give their speech all at one time, and that we can't actually be lost in the group.

So in a sense the group does not protect us. And yet, the yearning to be in a city full of people when there is disaster coming does indicate that there is that primeval desire in each of us to be saved in a group. We somehow think that in being part of a group we will be included, in whatever it experiences.

And yet, loved ones, it really is not true. It does not matter what identification we have with

that group. We can never be saved by that.

The consequences of thinking that are serious enough in this life, because the tornado will kill all of us, or the grizzly bear can get every one of us. Though the consequences are serious in this life, the consequences of that kind of thinking in regard to our relationship with God are tragic and disastrous!

In other words, if you sit here this morning having the misunderstanding that just because you participate in a certain group, that God will take you with that group -- loved ones, you are in a desperate and perilous situation. Because of that I would ask us, just as good friends and people who love each other, to look at some of the false ways in which we human beings do tend to depend on a group for our salvation.

One of the first that comes to mind is the appeals that religious leaders make for finances. I can think of plenty of great reasons why you should never appeal for finances. If you have a God who is supposed to prosper you, why do you have to ask someone else?

But there are all kinds of other reasons why you should never appeal for money. One of the most powerful reasons is that it is possible for many of us to listen to some religious leader who has a real ring of authority in his explanation of reality. We believe all that he says. Then he begins to appeal for money even more vehemently and with even greater sincerity than he has used for all the other presentations he has made! Then something moves in our miserable, little, fearful minds that says, "Well, if I can give some money to that group that is obviously doing God's work -- then I don't think God will forget that gift when I meet him at the end of this life."

Loved ones, it is easy to fall into that deception, thinking that this group is doing God's work, or this man is doing God's work. We can be deceived into believing that God cannot be displeased with us if we give money to the group, or that it will not do any harm anyway -- or that he surely will not forget it when I meet him at the end of this life.

Now, loved ones, God gave a clear answer to that in the early church, in Acts 8:18: "Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, 'Give me also this power, that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.' But Peter said to him, 'Your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.' And Simon answered, 'Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.'"

Let us give money. Let's give it with joy. Let's give it as unto God -- because he has given freely to us. But, loved ones, let us be clear that gifts of money are given from a heart that is filled with love -- because it has received God's forgiveness. Gifts of money never obtain God's forgiveness.

Would you pray for all those loved ones who end up going to all those dinners to raise money for this college and that college? It is so easy, when you are sitting at one of those \$500-a-plate dinners, to sit there thinking that we are part of an elite giving money to God's cause.

Loved ones, we cannot get into heaven because we are part of the elite supporting God's work with money. If we give money, let us give it as a fruit of our salvation, not as a means of obtaining our salvation -- because we cannot obtain salvation that way.

Another way in which we are deceived into this idea that if we are identified with a group, we will be received by God as part of a group, no matter what we are like -- is found in the great happening that is taking place now (1987) in different countries of the world, as one man visits these various countries.

Do you know that even Northern Irish Protestants (I know of at least one Northern Irish Protestant -- myself!) would love to be a Polish Catholic? The reason is because of that dear man now visiting people all over the world-- Pope John Paul. I think he makes us all want to be Polish Catholics because he is such a bright and dear person. When you see him holding up a baby and smiling, and when you see him reaching out with a smile to touch all the people, you feel, "Ah, he is a godly man! Thank God for him!"

Yet, it is very easy for us to pervert that kind of thing. We think of Pope John Paul, or of Billy Graham, or of some other men of God. We think that they must certainly know God and God must certainly know them. Maybe if we can touch them or if we can be their friends, or if we can be close to them -- then maybe we will be received by God along with them.

Or, many of us apply that to a group. We look for a group that seems to have a spiritual integrity, and seems to do and act the way God's people are meant to. We become a part of that group, and we think that since we are a part of this group, we will not be left behind when they are received into God's presence.

Now, loved ones, human beings cannot help us in our salvation at all. God has no grandchildren. God has no friends of friends. God has only children and his own personal friends.

You have that expressed in 1 Corinthians 3:5: "What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are equal, and each shall receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building."

The last deception that many of us enter into is one that is perhaps the subtlest of all. Many of us feel that if we believe the same thing that this group believes -- then that will obtain salvation for us.

And that is very subtle -- because would you not agree that there is a great emphasis in orthodox Christianity on believing? You must believe! And we often think, "Ah, it's mental belief. I see. If I believe the same things that they believe then I will be saved."

And you think, "Yes, you are to believe in God as Creator. You are to believe in Jesus, his Son and our Savior. You are to believe in the forgiveness of sins. You are to believe in the life to come." And we say, "Yes, I believe all those things. So I'm all right with God."

Loved ones, there is a startling verse in the Bible, James 2:19: "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe -- and shudder." Do you hear that? Even the demons or devils

believe, and they shudder.

Many of us think that believing the same as the rest believe is the basis of salvation. No! The only basis for salvation is faith -- and faith is belief plus action. It is believing that God put us into his Son Jesus, destroyed us there, renewed us, and resurrected us. It is a willingness on our part to take our place in Jesus' death and resurrection. That is the only basis for salvation.

I would ask you to be very honest with yourself this morning. Ask yourself, "Am I day by day willing to be renewed and recreated completely in Jesus?" Have you an attitude in your heart that says, "Lord, I thank you for putting me into Jesus, for destroying all that I used to be there with my dependence on other people. Thank you for recreating me. Lord, I'm willing for that to be made real in me today."

Loved ones, that's what faith is. That is the only basis on which God will receive us at the end of this life.

And so I would ask you: have you some kind of misconception that if you are with the rest of us who seem to be serious about God, you'll be saved with the rest of us? Or, do you think that believing the same things as the rest of us will somehow cause you to be accepted by God? Or, do you maybe think that if you give money to God's cause, he'll somehow remember that on the Last Day? It is not true.

The only basis on which any of us here this morning will be received by our Creator, and be permitted to live with him forever in his new world, is if we are daily willing to be changed in Jesus -- to leave something more of our own ugliness in his grave, and to receive something more of his beauty into our own lives.

In other words, if we day by day are willing to be renewed in his image, only then will we even want to be in heaven. Only then will God be able to receive us to himself.

So, would you be real with yourself? I am trying to be real with myself -- because you know that one of the things you have to watch when you are up here is, are you preaching to yourself -- as forcefully as you are preaching to everybody else?

What I want to be sure of is: Is my hope of salvation based on my own individual response to Jesus, and my own readiness to be renewed and recreated in him day by day as I go through life? Or, is my hope of salvation based somehow on the fact that I am identified with Campus Church, or somehow identified with that O'Neill who preaches?

Loved ones, none of us can be saved by being part of a group, or part of an institution, or even part of some work of God! That is the amazing thing! That is why Paul said, "I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified." (I Corinthians 9:27)

None of us can hope even for identification with a work of God -- as the basis for our salvation. It has to be our own individual response to Jesus.

Now, does Jesus know you? And, do you know that Jesus knows you? Have you that kind of personal relationship with him? And, do you get up each day saying, "Lord Jesus, none of self, and all of thee. Today, Lord, I'll look forward to some events that will change me yet again, making me more

like yourself." That alone, loved ones, is faith. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing." (Ephesians 2:9)

Let us pray. Dear Lord, will you take away all the veils and all the deceptions, and help us see where we have false hopes of salvation? And save us, Lord, from thinking that because we are part of some group – be it Israel or some church – we will be received by you on the Last Day.

Lord, help us to see that we will all face you alone – not even with our dear wife or husband beside us. But we all must face our God alone. And help us to be realistic and to face you now in this present life alone, so that on that Final Day, we will not be seeing someone for the first time, who will have to judge us, but we will be seeing a dear Father who has been our friend for many years. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.