

Praying People Down

Romans 11:2b

Sermon transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

I don't know if you have had my experience. I decided to put an underground sprinkling system in our garden. I buried the pipes, and all that kind of thing. I have worked hard at it for about three years, and it's dead right now! It goes on at seven o' clock in the morning without me bothering to do anything.

But this summer we don't need it, as it's been one of the wettest summers we have ever had. It is also interesting that last winter was one of the coldest winters we have ever had. And yet, the amazing fact is, we knew they were coming. We knew that the winter was going to be very cold. That's what they said. We knew the summer was going to be very wet, for that is what they said.

It's all due to this new technique, called long-range weather forecasting, which is just unbelievably accurate. I don't know how they do it, but I suppose it's partly because we understand weather patterns better than we did before. That enables us to do even seven-year forecasts.

I suppose also that our use of space satellites must help. Those satellites give us the pictures we see on the television forecasts. I suppose we are able to get further back from the earth, and can then see more of the global air currents that affect our climate -- so, we are able to give forecasts that are further ahead than before.

I would think that computers also help. The observations that we have had for years past, and all the present observations, are fed into a computer. I suppose the computers produce probability curves that are more accurate than anything our human minds could produce.

It is interesting to think on this: What if you could get even further back from the earth -- further even than our space satellites? In fact, what if you could get way back from the whole universe, and could look at it from a great distance? The amazing thing is, Einstein pointed out that if you could get far enough back like that, future and past would all melt into one great eternal present. You would see everything -- what was to come in the future and what had been in the past. You would see it all in one great present moment.

If you could do that, then you would be able to see the air currents of all the solar systems. You would be able to see how all those affect our particular atmosphere. Then if you had a mind more refined than any of our computers -- it would be so complex, that it could process all these observations and facts perfectly. And if you knew the inner essence of wind and sun and air currents, and the movement of the stars, and you knew how they all affected each other -- then you could probably forecast the weather for the whole of the universe for all of its history.

Is there anyone in that position? Well, there's only one in that position. Our Creator fulfills all those conditions, and is in exactly that position in regard to the universe and to all our lives. That's why we said in an earlier talk that God is able to foreknow all of our lives. Even though he does not make them happen, in a certain way, he is able to foreknow them -- even though he has built free will into the whole of the universe.

A few of us may still have trouble with the whole idea of foreknowledge. It might be good just to look at that in the light of what we puny human beings can do with our relatively crude equipment. It would be good to see to what extent we can foreknow things, and to what extent people like Einstein are able to show us what we could do if we got far enough away. It is much more reasonable to believe it, than not to believe it, that somebody in God's position could certainly foreknow the events in our lives and of the nations.

Look at today's verse: "God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew." (Romans 11:2) You get mention here of God's foreknowledge -- that even though he has not made things happen, not foreordained them, he can read us like a book. He can foreknow and extrapolate from the present facts all that is going to happen and what we are most likely to do.

Now look at an incredible fact that is very powerful in the second half of the verse: "Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel?" There is a great truth here that you will see in a few minutes.

Maybe the best way to approach it is like this: Do you all know what is happening at this moment? Well, back there, in that hole in the wall, there is a TV camera. At this moment it is videotaping what I am saying. The amazing thing is that even though it is videotaping at this moment, the sermon will probably not be seen by people on our Channel 5 (here in Minneapolis-St. Paul) for about another four weeks. Even though the camera is filming this all now (11:43 AM, July 29, 1979), it will not be seen on Channel 5 for another four weeks. For viewers in California and the Virgin Islands, it will probably not be seen for another six or seven weeks.

Now, another thing you might not know: We have an editing machine. That is needed because it is very difficult for me to talk naturally and spontaneously and make it last just exactly 27 minutes and 30 seconds. That's what it has to be for the half-hour TV slot. It's difficult to do that! We have an editing machine by which we cut some of the sentences out of the sermon, so that we can get the time right for the telecasts.

The editing machine is so accurate that it can freeze me in the middle of a word. So of course, if John Spaulding or Betty Jo or some of the other television crew members had the time, they could actually take out every mistake and every error in all my sermons. So, I could sit home in about four weeks time and watch myself on television giving a flawless sermon!

It is incredible, isn't it, that even we can produce a version of life that has all the errors and flaws taken out? You would be fascinated to see the TV technicians sitting at this editing console. They have the original videotape showing on the one screen. Just by hitting buttons they can put together a perfect video sermon on the other screen, with all the errors and flaws taken out. It is fascinating to watch them doing it. It is as though they were creating a perfect version of life just by pushing buttons.

Yet, why do we doubt for a moment God's ability to do something similar, when we consider that, and when we consider the miracle of "instant replay"? You run a live telecast with a five second delay. You can actually telecast the thing live, but it is a few seconds later than it's actually happening in the studio. You can make corrections just as the thing happens.

We ourselves, at this relatively early stage of scientific development, can produce a perfect version of life almost simultaneously with life itself. Why do we doubt for a moment that God, who

can forecast the whole of the universe's weather for its whole existence – that he can foreknow and has foreknown the whole course of each of our lives in this room? Those lives have been lived apart from him, with all the errors and ingrained and incorrigible habits. He has put them into his Son Jesus, in the timeless sphere of eternity, and has destroyed that old error-filled and fault-filled version of our lives. He has recreated in Jesus' resurrection a version of us that is perfect.

Why do we doubt it? Why do we even hesitate on it? We treat that as some kind of unbelievable miracle, even though we can do something very close to it with our scientific devices and electronic marvels. We can show the whole world a version of life about five seconds after it takes place, virtually error free. Why do we doubt for a moment that God himself has done this same thing?

In other words, that God has previewed all our lives and has pre-edited a version in Jesus that is absolutely perfect and victorious. You and I, at this moment, have the privilege of sitting before an editing machine, and using our free wills to determine which version of our lives the world will see.

Loved ones, that's the only thing that makes sense of those mysterious verses that I have often quoted to you. What other sense can you make of, "If Christ died for all, then all have died"? {Paraphrase of 2 Corinthians 5:14} It only makes sense -- if in timeless eternity, where all things exist in God's mind before they actually take place here, God foreknew what we would each do with our free wills -- and he put them into Jesus, and they died with him.

What other sense can you make of that mysterious verse: "Even when we were dead through our trespasses, {God} made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus"? (Ephesians 2:5-6) What other sense can you make of that -- except that there is a version of your life and mine that has been pre-edited by God, that has been corrected in Jesus' death, and has been raised up and resurrected with him, and that is flawless and perfect. It's a perfect life that trusts in our father perfectly.

So really, what it means is: There is a selfish version of your life and mine. A life produced by Satan and the powers of darkness. There is also a version of your life, a life that has been produced by the resurrection power and purity of Jesus' life. Each of us is able to decide which version will be manifested in our life today.

If you say to me, "Well, how do you operate the editing machine in that situation? How do you determine which version?" It's easy. Jesus settled the principle. He said, "Be it unto you according to your faith." It is according to whether you believe or disbelieve that you were destroyed in Jesus' death and recreated new in his resurrection. According to whether you believe or disbelieve that, at each moment and in each event of your life, so you determine which version of your life others see. And you determine which power you receive. You determine whether you receive the power from the old uncrucified life, or the power from the crucified and raised life.

Now, loved ones, if you have grasped that, I will ask you to take just one more big step – the step that comes up in this verse, "Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel?"

Really only you can determine which version of your life is manifested in this physical life. That's true. You have the free will to do that, and nobody can force you what to choose. The incredible

thing we get from this verse is that other people can release powerful beneficial influences and forces upon your life by their own faith about you -- by whether they believe the resurrected version of you in Jesus, or whether they believe the absolutely uncrucifieds, filled-with-fault version outside Jesus.

People can actually influence your life in miraculous ways. They can never make you a child of God, nor can they determine your eternal destiny. They can, though, tremendously affect you by releasing the beneficial forces and influences that come from the version of your life that has been crucified and raised in Jesus, by releasing that upon your life.

Of course, the opposite is also true. In today's verse we have Elijah pleading with God against Israel. You can release on others' lives all the power and force of what Satan has done in their lives. You can release all the death of their uncrucified lives upon them -- by praying them down. You can. If you see another person not in Christ, you are really rejecting reality -- because reality is that God has put them in Christ.

The only reason they are going to miss heaven is because they reject that reality, not because that he has not put them in Christ. Every time you see a person as not in Christ, you are rejecting reality, and you are driving that person more and more into the unreal world of darkness that stands apart from Jesus.

Loved ones, you can actually pray people down. That's what this verse says: "Elijah pleaded with God against Israel."

Every time you say to a loved one, "You're a miserable failure." Every time you say to a loved one, "I wish you were dead" -- or strangely, every time you even wish it. Because the old hymn says, "Prayer is the soul's sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed." Every time you desire evil against another person; every time you want another person to experience pain; every time you wish harm against another person; every time you reveal resentment against another person; every time you say to another person, "You'll never get the money! You're a failure. And everybody sees you as a failure!" Every time you either say that kind of thing to a person, or every time you resent a person so much that you want harm done to them, and that you hate them and dislike them -- you are praying that person down -- because prayer is the soul's sincere desire. The spiritual world hears that prayer.

Forget that stuff about "psychic" forces. Forget that silliness that when people in India make effigies of their enemies and stick pins in them, that it's psychic forces that are at work. You are not simply releasing psychic forces upon them. You are not simply releasing the power of auto-suggestion upon a person. Loved ones, you are releasing this dark side of Calvary, with all its death, failure, inadequacy, and hopelessness upon a person -- instead of releasing upon them the resurrection side of Calvary, the side where they have been made new and whole in Jesus, resurrected with power and full adequacy with him.

Do you see? It is possible to pray a person down, or it is possible to pray a person up. It has nothing to do with "positive thinking". Positive thinking has no power at all. But it has to do with believing and acting on the basis of the great reality that we have all been crucified with Christ and raised with him -- or disbelieving it. It has to do with acting toward a person on the basis of it, or apart from the basis of it. It releases great spiritual power -- either from God's act or from the unredeemed act of Satan.

It makes a great difference the way you act towards each other, and the way we act towards events and circumstances. If you see a wayward daughter in Jesus, made whole and clean and living the way God wanted her to live, you release upon that loved one beneficial rays of resurrection life. It will draw her more and more to what God wants for her. Every time you see her as she appears to the world, in the midst of fornication, selfishness, greed, and rebellion, and that's how you deal with her all the time, you release upon that loved one all the powers of what Satan has done to human beings. You release the powers of darkness and despair.

For a financial situation concerning your family or your friends, where things are going bad? Every time you deal with that financial situation as not being in Jesus, as not having been dealt with by God and transformed in Jesus -- every time you see the knots that bind financial supply as not having been untied and resolved in Jesus -- every time you see that financial circumstance on the dark side of Calvary, and you are pessimistic about finances, and every time you are depressed and say that you will never get out of this and we can't do that, every time you do these things -- you release the power of the dark satanic side of Calvary into that situation.

On the other hand -- every time you look at the financial situation and cannot see even a chink of light, and you look up to God and say, "Lord, I thank you that you have put us all into Jesus. You put all the frustrations of our life into him and you've destroyed them there. You have recreated us anew and we have been raised with him and sit with him at your right hand, looking down over every rule and dominion and power, and we have everything resolved by the power of Jesus' resurrection life." Every time you look at it that way, you release into that financial situation and the bankers and the people you deal with, the resurrection power of Calvary.

Maybe sometimes you say, "I've done that at times and nothing has happened!" It's not our right to determine how God distributes the benefits of Jesus' death and resurrection. Our responsibility is -- when Jesus comes to our village -- to believe that he can do any great work. It is up to him how he distributes the benefits of those great works. If he thinks, in a certain cancer situation, he can save the children of that family by allowing a dear dad to go to be with him, then that is his right. It is not for us to question how God distributes the benefits of Jesus' resurrection.

But loved ones, it is our right to do one thing, and one thing only: That's to see life in Jesus, crucified, destroyed, resurrected, and recreated anew. It's our responsibility to see constantly everything in our lives and all our loved ones in that upbeat and optimistic way -- that accords with good psychology? No! That's a game. Rather, it accords with the reality that all of us have been crucified with Christ and have been renewed. There is a perfect version of our lives that is available to us at this moment.

I don't care where you are in your own faith at this moment. You know fine well that you can start this today. You know that. I don't care if you are a happy old agnostic who is not sure whether Jesus died or not. You can understand this. You can begin to act this way at this very moment. It is going to come up when you see that the gas tank is almost empty and the service stations are closed. If you get past that particular one, it is going to come up another way, before five o' clock this evening.

You know, loved ones, that you can change the course of your own history -- by whether you believe that you and I were crucified with Christ, with all our flaws, all our inadequacies, and our tangled complex lives with all their problems and difficulties. They were resolved in Jesus, and God edited

a new version of you, one that is perfect, filled with power, and runs according to his will. We can choose which version to believe. You can mightily affect your husbands, wives, sons, daughters, and friends, by what you wish upon them. Do you pray people up, or do you pray people down?

Dear Lord, we would certainly thank you for the truth you reveal to us each Sunday, and we would thank you for the mystery and the mighty power of this truth you have shown us today. Lord, we see looking back on our lives that it's no wonder why they have gone the way they have. Lord, often we've just walked by sight, telling ourselves that we were being practical and pragmatic and common-sensical.

But Lord, we've refused to walk with that optimistic faith that you had as you met the practical reality of the cross and of people's insults and opposition, and as you made tables and chairs to earn money for your mother and for the other brothers and sisters you had. Lord, we see that in the midst of all that pragmatism, you walked by faith and not by sight. You believed what our God has done for each one of us. And you walked on the assumption that all that was available to us today by faith.

So Lord, we ask you to help each one of us, from this very moment, to begin to pray people up, and to pray ourselves up, and to pray our circumstances up, and to begin to see things in Jesus – renewed and recreated, whole and perfect, and from this day forward to treat each other in the light of that. We thank you Lord, that love is always eager to believe the best, and we would love as you have loved – for your glory. Amen.