

## Self Pity

Romans 11:3

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

I know that I have asked you the question before, but it seems such an important one that I'll ask it again, Do you know why you are here on earth? Do you know why you are alive? We have often said that the only real answer is that you would get to know your Maker, your God; that you would get to trust Him and to love Him, that the next world would be able to exist in peace and harmony; that your friendship with Him and your friendship with each other would be able to develop infinitely forever, That's really why we are here on earth, loved ones.

To provide a framework or a format for that to take place. God has put each of us here on this earth to do certain jobs. We are here with certain responsibilities that He has designed for each one of us here in this room, It is His desire that we would get up each morning and find out what He wants us to do in this set of responsibilities that He has put upon us. Then we are to trust Him for the wisdom and strength to do that, As we do that, we come into a closer and closer relationship with Him.

Some of the jobs that you have are terrible. At times some of them are good. Some of the jobs we have here seem meaningless and purposeless. Some of them seem to have great meaning and purpose. Some of them seem to be utterly unimportant and utterly trivial and others seem very important and very relevant. Actually, it doesn't matter. I know that is not what society teaches us, but it doesn't matter too much what they are, whether they are important or unimportant, trivial or relevant, meaningless or purposeless. They are only a framework that God has by which we will begin to come closer to Him and need Him more and more.

He has designed the world and the whole economic structure in conjunction with His own purposes, that if we simply take care of the responsibilities that He has given us, and do the jobs and fulfill the functions that He has put us here in His world to fulfill and to bring it under His will, then everything else will be given to us that we need. You don't need to be anxious about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will put on: Just look at the other creatures in creation that simply do what He placed them here to do! Look at the birds of the air; they don't sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. You are of much more value than they. So really, none of us here are to be taken up with what we are to eat or what we are to drink or what we are to put on. All the people who reject God's big plan for the world seek after those things. Our Father knows we have need of those things. All we need to do is, seek first His rule in our lives and His direction for our lives, and all these other things will be ours as well.

But if you once turn from that big picture of God's plan for us all, if you once turn away from that great enterprise that He is engaging us all in -- if you once stop living your life by faith that all of that is true -- that all you have to do is what God has given you the ability to do and He will add all the other things you need to keep alive -- if you once turn from that and begin to scabble in the dirt like a little squirrel, storing up enough nuts for yourself for the bad times, then you will lose your nerve. You will lose all ability to live in the grand picture that God has planned for you. You will sink into a life of self-gratification and eventually you will die in a paroxysm of despair and self-pity.

Loved ones, self-pity is the signal. Self-pity is the danger sign. It's the sign that you are beginning to draw back from this great enterprise of faith, where you take God at His word and you say, "Lord, you put me here first and foremost to do some job that will bring this world more into line with your will. In doing that I will get to know you and to love you, and Lord, you will take care of all the other things that society seems to be pre-occupied with getting." Once you step into self-pity, loved ones, you are stepping out of that kind of assurance. Self-pity is what a person ends up in, who concentrates on trying to preserve his life apart from God.

It's like a man who owns an orchard and says to you, "Your job is to prune the trees in this orchard. Enjoy doing that; I will tell you from time to time which ones to do, and we will get to know each other as we go along. Meanwhile the orchard will come into the plan I have for it. As you do that I'll make sure you have enough food, a good place to sleep, clothes to put on your back. You will have all you need to be happy." You do that for awhile, and then you begin to think, "Maybe I should start preparing for my retirement on my own. I'll fill every seventh sack with apples and I'll take them out to a little shed that I have at the back and I'll begin to sell them."

Loved ones, once you step back from the great enterprise of faith that you are working in together with your Father the Creator of the world, you slide the whole way down into self-pity. You become utterly pre-occupied with trying to preserve your own life and making provision for yourself, apart from your God.

Now, that is exactly what Elijah was doing when he spoke the words that Paul wrote in his letter to the church at Rome in the verse that we are studying today, Romans 11:3: "Lord, they have killed thy prophets, they have demolished thy altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life."

Actually, Elijah had been doing well before that. He had been utterly taken up with what God had put him here to do. And he had been doing magnificently. You see it if you turn to 1 Kings 18:36-40: "And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, 'O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that thou, O Lord, art God, and that thou hast turned their hearts back.' Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt offering, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, 'The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God.' And Elijah said to them, 'Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape.' And they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and killed them there." So Elijah really was doing what he was put here to do.

And then you see what happened in chapter 19:1: "Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, 'So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.' Then he was afraid, and he arose and went for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there."

When Elijah saw that his own life was in danger and that he could be hurt by this, this courageous man who was utterly taken up and living the heroic life that God has for all of us to live, just collapsed into self-pity. He was just a pathetic creature that God had to pry out of cave after cave for the next number of days. You always find Elijah hiding in a cave after that! 1 Kings 19:4: "But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree; and

he asked that he might die, saying, 'It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am no better than my fathers.'" Then he does what we all do in these self pity, carnal fits -- he goes to sleep. That's the key: Go to sleep, pull the bedclothes over your head, and trouble won't be there. "And he lay down and slept under a broom tree; and behold, an angel touched him, and said, 'Arise and eat.' And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank, and lay down again. And the angel of the lord came again a second time, and touched him, and said, 'Arise and eat, else the journey will be too great for you.' And he arose, and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. And there he came to a cave, and lodged there; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said to him, 'What are you doing here Elijah?'" Then in verse 13: "And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him, and said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'"

It is interesting, loved ones, the way Elijah was so paralyzed with self pity that he couldn't act. You can see how he came to that if you look at the words that he keeps repeating: "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the people of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thy altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away," (1 Kings 19:10,14) Really, he was preoccupied first of all with God and what he had to do for God -- that God's altars and His worship was being overthrown, and that they were killing God's prophets. And then bit by bit he began to realize that this was going to come close to him, too, and he began to lose his nerve and become preoccupied with himself. He stepped out of the real world, where God had seven thousand mere men that had not bowed the knee to Baal, and he stepped into a fantasy world, where he alone was left.

Who of us here have not stepped into that fantasy world, where you are so filled with self-pity, so preoccupied with yourself and with what men can do to you that everything becomes blank darkness and despair? You don't see things as they are at all. You don't see the real world as it exists. You have an absolutely perverted view of the outside world. You are right in the center, as the one who has to be protected and guarded at all costs. Loved ones, who of us have not said, "Look at the way they are treating me! What have I done to deserve this? Am I the only one that does anything here?" Or, we do it the stoical way; "I will bravely bear the cross. I have to do it. If I don't do it nobody will." Your legs are bent and your back is bent. You are not walking straight and joyous. You are very aware that you are carrying far more than your share of the world's ills on your shoulders, and you are doing it remarkably bravely, considering your background. You just want the Lord to know that, and it would be good if your wife or your roommate knew a little of it too, but on the whole you will keep a stiff upper lip and not let anybody know that you are suffering. But we all do know that you are suffering.

Our society has a strange way of dealing with the depression that self-pity brings. It brings a depression that absolutely paralyzes you, so that you cannot act on your own behalf, on God's behalf, or on others' behalf. It doesn't deal with the cause at all, but tends to deal with the symptoms -- the emotions that are depressed. And so with shock treatment and with drugs you try to cut the emotional symptoms off from the cause of those symptoms, which is self-pity. The symptoms disappear as long as the drugs last or the shock treatment lasts. Then you have to go back to the real world, and then you have to get back into your fantasy world.

Today it is very fashionable to treat it in a slightly more sophisticated fashion. We say, "Oh, you poor thing, your emotions need to be healed." And so we reckon that a person in that state of

self-pity and depression needs to be given a great deal of concern and regard, not realizing, of course, that the whole reason for their self-pity is that they see themselves as the center of the universe. That is their problem. That's why they are so depressed. They have put themselves in the position where they are judging everything according to how it affects them. They are not the center of the universe, God is. They are taking up a totally unrealistic position, and God is allowing those symptoms in their emotions to tell them, "Listen there is something wrong. You are putting yourself in the wrong spot." But we in our society with our own foolishness think they need their emotions healed; they need more affection, more love, more attention. What they need is less attention!

I'd point out to you, loved ones, that Jesus' method of dealing with self pity and depression is wholly different. Matthew 16:21-23: "From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying, 'God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you.'" How did Jesus deal with it? "But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men.'" Peter's words actually mean "Pity yourself, Lord. Don't let this happen to you!"

Loved ones, Jesus knew that He had lived for God and for His Father up to that very moment in His life, and now was the crucial time when He was breaking through to the fullness of what God had for Him in this life. This was the moment not to lose His nerve. This was the moment to go right through with God alone in His thoughts and nothing of Himself. This was the moment not to think of pitying himself, of being concerned with His own health or His own clothes or His own food. This was the moment to continue to live the way He had lived for those thirty-three years. Jesus knew that the last thing that He needed to do was to give that dragon - self pity -- the opportunity to preoccupy himself with his own thoughts and feelings. That's why he turned to Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on God's side with that 'pity yourself' stuff, you are on the side of men."

Then Jesus turned around to the disciples and said, "You know the way I'm living and dying. Any if you who want to be really my own Father's people and children, will have to live the same way. Any of you who want to follow me have to deny yourself and take up your cross and follow me. If you want to save your life and you want to preserve your emotional life as you want it, if you want to save yourself from hardship, you will actually end up losing your life in despair and self pity and anxiety. But, if you are willing to lose your life; if you are willing to forget about yourself and how these things are affecting you, and be concerned with only what my Father put you here on earth to do, then you will find your life."

And loved ones, that's it. If you will keep your nerve and will hold to what God has given you to do in this world, and do it with all your heart and enjoy it; if you will not allow your eyes to be deflected and distracted to how you are going to get along after all of this is over, or how you are going to see yourself through retirement, or how you are going to see yourself through life without a wife or a husband; if you refuse to be deflected into self-pity, God will take you on through. You will not only live heroically for Him, but He will add all other things unto you. But if you lose your nerve and begin to be concerned about yourself, to be taken up with how things are affecting you, you will lose everything.

One of the Gospel writers writes after this incident that from that day, many ceased to follow Him. Do you know that God's people are not those great crowds of us that decide to live for God while we can also have what we need ourselves. God's people are those people who are willing to live for God

and do what He has given them to do here, even if it means they won't have emotional satisfaction for themselves, or they won't have all the relatives and friends and wives and husbands and children that everybody else has. When they realize that it is going to cost them,, that they are going to have to trust their God to supply what everyone else is grabbing for themselves -- that's the moment when they decide if they are going to be God's real people or hypocrites who pretend to be His people. Every one of us has that opportunity. It's not just when you are left a wallflower at the dance and you sit there pretending that you don't care. It's moments after service today when some of us have to go home alone. Then there is an opportunity to say either, "I suppose it is what I have to do," or "Lord, this is a great life you have given me. What do you want me to do for you and for somebody else today?"

John Bunyan wrote "Pilgrim's Progress". He did magnificently what God wanted him to do in his life. But toward the end of his lifetime, he entered into very severe persecution. Some of his friends said, "What if they eventually kill you? What if they are actually right and you are wrong in your religious beliefs?" John Bunyan said, "I shall leap into death by blind faith, come heaven or hell!" That is it, loved ones. That's the life of Jesus. You keep on doing what God has given you to do here on earth, holding the faith and keeping the faith right up to the very end, refusing to listen to that great dragon of self pity who says to you, "Oh, you have just too much to bear. You really do. Nobody is treated the way you are treated. This is too much for any man or woman to bear." Right then say, "Get thee behind me, Satan! For you are on the side of men and not of God." Loved ones, that's the heroic life that God has for us. The opposite doesn't even end in fits of depression. It ends up in hell itself. I pray that you will begin to stand against self-pity. Let's not be a weeping, mourning, puny bunch of people who are always pitying ourselves. Let's be a group of soldiers -- princes and princesses of God -- who live for God, not for ourselves.