

God's Use of Evil

Romans 11:11

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

In Ireland we used to have a very long morning service, and among other things the minister had to tell a story to the children. The good thing about that was that the children really didn't get so much out of it, but the adults loved the story. So I'm going to tell you a story.

Once upon a time there was a king who had immense possessions – and had lands that extended beyond where the eye could see. The most notable thing about this king was that he was always happy. He was always laughing and always joking. The only thing perhaps that was more obvious about him than his happiness and his joy was his kindliness.

He had a dear son. They lived together in absolute peace in the palace because they thought only of one another's well-being. So they spent their days in joy and peace and love, creating more and more animals and birds and rocks and all kinds of things that would express the happiness they themselves had and that in fact added to that happiness.

Now there came a day when they finished a project that they had been working on for years -- a great tract of land into which they had packed all the most beautiful things they had ever created. So the earth was filled with all kinds of precious metals, all kinds of precious stones, and the surface of the earth was filled with vegetation that would provide food and shelter for billions of years.

Then they initiated the plan that they had in mind for this tract of land. They invited into it thousands and thousands of their subjects so that their subjects would be able to enjoy this land and so that they would be able to get to know them personally. So they looked forward to the kind of experience they were going to have with these loved ones, as these people began to share the same happiness that they had. They stood at the gate, the king and his son, and watched the people rushing into this garden.

Unless you have ever been involved in the same kind of thing, you could not imagine the catastrophe that took place. Because the people came through the gates and momentarily nodded at the king and his son as they came in, but then they caught a glimpse of the trees and the fruit and the grain, and the rocks and the rivers and the mountains, and they were fascinated by them. They made a rush towards them and began to dig the soil.

One person dug up some shining metal, and another guy saw him and rushed over to see if he could get some. Then another fellow found more gold than the previous one. They began to compete with each other to see who could get the most gold. Then they began to express the same rivalry towards even the trees and the fruit, the grain and the vegetation, until eventually they began in a few days to build walls around the stuff that they had got themselves to keep the other people from getting at it.

The king and his son just looked in amazement! Then the king went over to one of the men and he said to him, "Look, I'm the king. I made this so that we could be friends, so that we could all get to know one another. In fact, my eventual plan is that all of you would come and live with me in my palace. Actually, you don't all need to rush at the ground like this. There are enough resources in

this garden to last all of us for billions of years if you just listen to me. I know where it all is! I placed it carefully. So just listen to me and follow my directions and you'll have plenty."

This man thanked the king for telling him that. He said, "Yes, that's what I'll do. I'll listen to you. Now what do you want me to do?" So the king and this man got to know one another as personal friends. This man followed the king's directions and began to learn some of the skills that were needed to develop this garden. He began to get special knowledge from the king about where to look for things. So that's the way their life went on until eventually of course this man died.

His children took over the piece of land that the king had set apart for this man. But his children were different. They began to live like the rest of the people that were grabbing for everything that they could and paid no attention to the king himself. This man's children began to do the same thing, except that there was one great difference between them and the other people. They had inherited the skills and the knowledge that the king had given their father. So they were able to do better than all the other people in the garden. They were able to prosper way beyond all the others.

Of course they also knew that the king had spoken to their father personally, and that became a source of pride for them, because they felt, "Well, he had spoken to them too through their father." So they began to pride themselves in their position and they began to lord it over the other people in the garden. Indeed, they began to wear special little marks (a kind of star) on their coats to distinguish them from all the rest.

After years and years of this, the king saw that they were getting further and further away from him, and he decided that because he loved them so much that he would send his own son to them. So he sent his son to them, who came to them and began to explain to them again what his father, the king, had explained to their father -- how he loved them and how he was really their father, and how they could trust him and they could follow his directions, and life would be perfect.

They listened to him for a short time. But they had become so hard and so independent of the king, and so independent of everybody else in the garden, that they just wanted rid of any other voice but their own. So they killed the king's son. It was then that the king left them and started to walk among the other people in the garden, and started to explain to them the things that he had already explained to this special group's father -- who wore the stars. Meanwhile he used the things that happened to this special group to make it plain to everybody that there was only one way to live in this garden, and that was by the friendship and the guidance of the king who had made it and had put them there.

There were many things that happened to this group. This was because as they became more and more proud of their own special position, and as they used their own skills and their special knowledge that they had from their father who got it from the king to develop their land -- so they became more and more prosperous. Gradually the other people in the garden began to envy them. As they saw their pride and their arrogance, the other people in the land began to dislike and detest them until eventually they began to be utterly contemptuous of them.

So this group found that they were facing not only the hatred of all the people in the garden but also the contempt of all the other people in the garden. Eventually they became so apprehensive of what the other people would do to them that they spent all the resources that they had building walls round themselves to try to keep themselves from being destroyed completely.

Loved ones, that's the situation in which the nation of Israel finds itself today. That's it! The nation of Israel. Though it has its own land and though many of us see signs that somehow some of the old prophecies are being fulfilled, yet it is amazing that the nation of Israel has down through the centuries shown such arrogance and pride that it faces the almost universal contempt of the world.

This nation that produces not only more comedians than any other nation, but produces probably the greatest artists in music and art and writing that the world has seen; this nation that produces more than its supply of business leaders in the world -- this nation faces the incredible situation where it can't earn enough to build enough walls and enough weapons to protect itself from extermination. It labors with bent back under a rate of inflation that's astronomical. {This presentation was given in 1980.}

Now, God is saying to us as we read this, two other important things about the situation Israel is in. I would just love to share them briefly with you and then ask us all to be open to what God is saying to us personally about them. They're found in the verse that we're studying today -- Romans 11:11. Paul asks, "So I ask, have they stumbled so as to fall?"

The word "stumbled" in the Greek is *epetaisan*, and it really means not just "to stumble", but "to crash against" something. Now, what have they crashed against? You find the same word used back in Romans 9:33 and you'll find the answer there. "As it is written, 'Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone that will make men stumble (or make men crash against it), a rock that will make them fall.'" The rock is defined clearly in the next verse: "'and he who believes in him will not be put to shame.'"

The rock is Jesus. And Paul says, "Has the Jewish nation then crashed against Jesus?" -- because that's what they have crashed against and that's what laid bare their attitude to God. "Have they crashed against Jesus so as to be completely useless?" Paul answers, "By no means!" The first reason -- you have to admit -- that they're not useless is, "But through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles." {The middle part of this verse Romans 11:11.}

We have to see that and be honest about it -- that that's a historical fact. When the Jewish nation rejected God as a dear Father whose Son was Jesus, then God turned to us Gentiles. That's a historical fact.

You can see it in Acts 13, because there is the moment in history when it took place. Acts 13:45: "But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with jealousy, and contradicted what was spoken by Paul, and reviled him. And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, 'It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us saying, "I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth.'" And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of God; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed."

So we need to see that the Jews' discomfiture, and the Jews' turning from God, is really the reason that you and I have been able to hear of this dear Father that we talked about earlier on.

The other important benefit that the Jewish nation is to us is that they show us clearly what

happens if we stand where they stand. That's right. They show us clearly what happens to a people who reject God as their Father and refuse to trust him. They show us, for instance, that if you're determined to establish your own position and your own reputation -- whatever God's plans for you are -- you will spend the rest of your life trying to prevent other people toppling you from that position.

For all of us who are so concerned about our position and our reputation among our peers -- and we spend so much of our lives trying to get the right cars or the right jobs to establish that position so that nobody can topple us -- the message of the Jewish nation is, "Don't do that -- because you'll spend the rest of your life trying futilely and vainly to defend yourself against the people who are out to topple you."

The only position that is ever peaceful for you is the one that God gives you. That's true! In our careers, and in our families and among our peers, no position is safe except the one God gives us. Any position that we grab for ourselves -- it will be agony to hold onto it.

The other thing that you see in Israel is that if you determine by your own shrewdness and cleverness to establish your own financial and material security whether God wants for you poverty or wealth -- if you do that -- you'll never have enough. I think some of us have experienced that. You'll never have enough.

If you are determined to get the salary that you think that you ought to have, to get the house you think you ought to have, to get the clothes you think you ought to have, without any reference to your God, without talking it over with your dear Father at all and asking him, "Look! What have you put me here for? Do you want me to be a wealthy man? Do you want me to be a poor man? What do you want me to do?" If you do that, loved ones, you'll end up never having enough -- however much you get! That's the strange thing. It works that way.

There's a law built into the world that's expressed clearly in the Jewish nation, that if you go for material prosperity yourself, independent of God, you may have more than everybody else but you'll never have enough. It'll drain out the bottom of a sieve and you'll never have enough. I think all of us have experienced a little of that just in our own private finances. The little that God gives to you seems to be enough for all your needs. But the masses that you grab for yourself are never enough. You're always needing more.

Then, it seems important especially for those of us who are concerned and burdened for the Jewish people, to see the other fact that God presents clearly to us in the last part of Romans 11:11: "But through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous." The last part is, "so as to make Israel jealous."

There are two ways in which you can be jealous. Neither of them are good, but one's slightly better than the other. The first way is that you detest and hate the thing you're jealous of because you don't have it. Israel as a nation is jealous in that way of the apparent intimacy with God that many Gentiles have entered into through Jesus. Israel as a nation is jealous in a hard and obnoxious way. They detest it. They hate it. They're bitter against it. Israel as a nation has that attitude towards Jesus. We need to see that. It's just a fact, and it's a fact that is stated in Scripture.

America as a nation accepts Jesus as God's Son. That doesn't mean all Americans do, but it means America as a nation is not averse to that belief. But Israel, as a nation, is averse to that belief.

Israel as a nation has hardened their heart against that and is jealous of it in a way that makes them detest it and hate it. Israel, as a nation, is reprobate. We need to see that.

It's stated in scripture. In Romans 10:21 God states it. It's not some miserable anti-semitic Gentile here that's stating it. "But of Israel he says, 'All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.'" Loved ones, that's God's judgment on Israel at the present time. Israel as a nation is a reprobate nation and will remain so until the Bible says Jesus will come again. Then Israel, it is said, as a nation will turn to Jesus.

It doesn't mean every individual will turn to Jesus -- because they'll be in the same boat as the rest of us. Just because America on the whole is favorable towards Jesus, it still requires every individual American to make their personal agreement with Jesus. But Israel as a nation today is a reprobate nation. It has rejected Jesus, and has an attitude of rejection to him as the only begotten Son of God.

There's another way to be jealous. You can be jealous in that you can want the thing that you see in other people. Thank God that his word has come true -- what Paul said -- that there is a remnant. That there is a remnant among the Jews in these days that see people living in Jesus, in close loving trust of God as their Father. Those dear loved ones of Jewish background see that, and they're jealous of it and they want it.

There are many individual Jews, especially here in the States, but really throughout the world, who are making the same approach to Jesus as many of us have. But there is a clear distinction between them and Israel as a nation, and we need to see it -- those of us who are burdened about those in the Jewish faith.

I was coming out of a restaurant three weeks ago and a gentleman introduced himself and said he was brought up in the Jewish faith. He referred to a sermon on television -- the one where we discussed Jesus as the unique Son of God, Jesus as being divine. He then began to outline the sermon to me and to remind me of some of the things that I had said, and he said, "You know, the logic is absolutely unanswerable." So we talked back and forward that it was! It was so plain that Jesus was the unique and only Son of God.

Then as we separated, this dear man said to me, "You know, I've at last come to the conclusion that Jesus was the greatest Jew that ever lived." And that's about it, isn't it? He's the greatest Jew that ever lived. Loved ones in the Jewish faith who honestly seek God find in him the fulfillment of all that they sought.

There are many loved ones who are doing that in these days. There are many brothers and sisters in the Jewish faith who examine Jesus as we have and who are beginning to see that being a Christian is simply being a completed Jew. We need to love them and to have an openness to them and to see them as our dear brothers and sisters who are yearning to get into the same close trust of our dear Father as their father Abraham had.

Then, loved ones, in so far as the Jewish nation is concerned, we need to love it also and pray for it. But we need to see that you cannot break Scripture, and that the Jewish nation itself will only turn to Jesus when Jesus Himself comes again. So I would ask you all just to have a sensible attitude to our brothers and sisters in the Jewish faith, and to see that there is a real sense in which God has made them really a scandal in the world, and you cannot change that. It's not due just

due to anti-semitic feelings. It's not due to people calling them the Christ crucifiers. It's due to their rejection of God and the fact that God has rejected them at this present time as a nation.

But meanwhile, then we should see that God wants to use us with those individual Jews who want the same thing as we want in Jesus. So loved ones, maybe it'll help to explain to some of us what is happening to the Jews today. Above all, maybe it will help us ourselves not to deal with groups, because none of us like to be dealt with as a group. We all like to be dealt with as individuals. I pray that we'll do that with our brothers and sisters.

Let us pray. Dear Father, we thank you for the plain lesson that is to be learned from this whole nation, over which there has been so much discussion and so much furor, and about which so many of us and so many of our politicians have thought so much. Lord we see that they are a witness to us of what happens when men determine to establish their own position and reputation independent of their God.

Lord, we would step back from any of that in our own lives, and we would see that the position that God gives us is unassailable. The position that we grab for ourselves is always like a "Fiddler on a Roof" – unstable, always about to collapse.

Then, Lord, we thank you for the clear lesson from Israel -- that if we go for our own material and financial prosperity, according to our own plans, we will never have enough money. But Lord, if we go to you, and see that you are their king, who planted all the gold in the soil and the earth, and who made the whole garden, and who knows where everything is and can lead us to the right resources -- then we'll always have plenty, even though in the eyes of the world it may seem so little.

Lord, we thank you for the way you have used the evil that the Jewish nation has brought upon itself for our own salvation, and we feel humbled and privileged Lord, by what we have received from you. We would pray for our dear brothers and sisters of Jewish background. We would pray that by your Holy Spirit you will make it easy for them to come into the position of completed Jews, with the greatest Jew that ever lived – even Jesus.

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 week. Amen.