

## The Jews' Agony and Ecstasy

Romans 11:12

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

You remember the violence that broke out in Ireland between the so-called Protestants and Catholics some years ago. Just about the beginning of that terror, my wife and I were in a store in London. She was in a store when a lady came up to her whom we obviously recognized by her accent as coming from Belfast where we were born.

They talked with one another and the lady then asked my wife, "Where do you live now?" -- because even though our accent may sound very different to you, to them it sounds American. So my wife said, "America." This lady had just come from downtown Belfast which had been ravaged and devastated by terrorist bombs, and I know she had just got on a plane with soldiers with machine guns lining the route. She looked at my wife in horror and said, "That America is a violent country!" It just seems so strange to us that she regarded America as a violent country and she was living in more violence than we ever touched here on Chicago streets or anywhere.

But it's interesting, isn't it? We all are very good at perceiving the dominating characteristics of another nation, but we're absolutely blind to the dominating characteristics of our own nation. I was surprised during the past seventeen years since I came to America. Many people have said to me, "Oh you're Irish. Have you got a bad temper?" Because everybody thinks the Irish are the "fighting Irish".

The first piece of common sense that I'd like us to start on this morning as we begin to study this verse is this: When people say to me, "Oh, you must have a bad temper," or, "Do you fight a lot?" I don't get all upset or resentful and all bitter and murmur "anti-Semitic, anti-Hibernian!" I don't. I just assume, "Sure! The Irish have made that kind of impact on the whole world. It doesn't mean that every Irishman goes home and beats his wife every night. It just means that that's the general reputation that the Irish have, rightly or wrongly, in our world.

It is very important, loved ones, to be just sensible about that and not to get all upset about it. Many of us are not like that. But the nation as a whole has that kind of reputation -- the fighting Irish. So it is with the Germans and their stubbornness. So it is with the Italians and their excitability. So it is with the Swedes and their vivacious talkativeness, {laughter} -- or their quiet incommunicativeness. It doesn't mean that every German is stubborn. It doesn't mean that every Swede is kind of quiet. It doesn't mean that every Italian is excitable. But it does mean that that's the kind of impression that the nation as a whole has made on our world.

So I would ask you to please be just sensible about the dear old Jewish nation and don't get all silly and all uptight about it when we say that the Jewish nation as a whole, whether rightly or wrongly, has made an impression on this world of being proud and of being financially shrewd. And that's it. It doesn't mean that every Jew is like that. It doesn't mean that every Jew is financially shrewd. But it does mean that the nation as a whole has made that kind of impact on our world. We need to see that and not get upset about it -- just see it.

That's not being anti-Semitic! Anti-Semitism is the kind of unanalytical prejudice and hatred that moved a Hitler to destroy the Jews just because they were Jews. That is being anti-Semitic. But

seeing that the dear Jews have characteristics just like the rest of us have – that's just common sense, and we ought to see it.

Yet is amazing, isn't it, that the Jewish nation itself seems so different in all our eyes to all other nations. It's interesting that even Japan, which is the only nation that has been devastated by a nuclear bomb, or Germany that has been twice defeated in world wars and is now divided {this presentation was given in 1980} – it's interesting that no other nation excites in us the same pity and the same sympathy as those little groups of shuffling people with the armbands on or the yellow stars, as they trail down those roads into the gas chambers. It's interesting that no nation so excites our sympathy and our pity as this Israel nation.

Maybe it's because they've been trailing down the world's roads since eternity. It almost seems that way, doesn't it? It seems that they have been a bundle of refugees trailing down one road or another since the world began. Abraham trailed from Haran to Canaan with his family. Jacob trailed with his family down to join Joseph in Egypt. Moses trailed with the rest of the Israelites out of the slavery in Egypt and wandered in the wilderness for forty years.

Then the Jews themselves came under the domination of the Assyrians and the Babylonians -- trailed into exile and trailed back to their own land. Then they came under the domination of the Greeks and Romans. Ever since those days, especially near the end of the first century, they've been a homeless people -- for almost two thousand years. Yet it's incredible that a people that has endured such unequal lostness still has such a sense of cohesiveness, isn't it? Probably no other people has been scattered so often throughout the world and still maintains its own identity so strongly, and indeed its own exclusiveness so strongly!

And yet isn't it true that all those facts do not explain the uniqueness that we feel the nation of Israel has in our world? Somehow we still feel that it is set apart from all the outstanding nations that have dominated the world scene down through the centuries. And is it not for this reason -- that we feel as we watch them -- we're watching a supernatural drama? Even those of us who don't have much belief in God feel we're watching something that is beyond ordinary human analysis to explain. We feel we're watching something that has been going on now for virtually four thousand years – that this strange people wander in and out of the historical and geographical movements that have taken place in our world, and somehow they seem to have some significance beyond time. That's when it started -- about four thousand years ago.

The incredible thing is we have an historical record of it. Genesis 12:1: "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves.'"

Isn't that what many of us feel? That this nation is a unique expression to all of us, a unique physical example of a people that refused to treat God in the way he wanted them to treat him -- as their loving Father. And that we are able to see outwardly in their physical and national experiences what happened to them when they refused to treat God as their loving Father and began to lead their own life as a nation by their own power and by their own guidance.

Really, we all feel that as we look at the things that happened to the Israelites -- that we're looking at something that is caused not simply by national movements of other peoples, but is caused

by the attitude that they have to the God that chose them as a special people through whom he would show himself. And that that's the real cause of all their misfortunes -- their persecutions, their exiles, their catastrophes, their domination – that all these things can actually be explained by one cause.

That's the cause that we read in Ezekiel. We should look at it, because I do think many of us are weak in our interpretation of why things like the Holocaust happen. I do think that at times it's good to blame the secondary causes. It's certainly good to blame the Germans or blame ourselves, but it is important to see what God's explanation is. Ezekiel 39:23: "And the nations shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity, because they dealt so treacherously with me that I hid my face from them and gave them into the hand of their adversaries, (See -- it was the adversaries that did the damage. It's suddenly the Germans or ourselves that did the damage, but God withdrew his protecting power.) and they all fell by the sword." And why did this happen? Verse 24: "I dealt with them according to their uncleanness and their transgressions, and hid my face from them."

In other words, loved ones, it's important to see that when you look at Israel you see a physical, graphic expression of what is often happening in our own lives because of our own attitude to God. Really! I think a lot of us here lose the job, and suddenly worry and anxiety fills our dear little hearts. We know what God said -- that there's no trial will come upon us beyond what we're able to bear, and with the trial will come a way of escape. We know all that stuff!

We know, "My God will supply every need of yours from his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." We know all that. But we lose the job and suddenly the heart is filled with anxiety and we have trouble sleeping at night. Then we get another job -- and all is calm. We don't think anything of it. We just thank God: "Thank you Lord, for the new job." But we never see what happened when we trusted the new job and got such peace and calmness from it, but did not trust our God and got no peace and calmness from the assurance that he was looking after us. We don't see what happened to us then.

I think you'll agree with that. Many of us take the little spiritual transactions with God that we have very casually. We feel, "O well, that's another incident in my life. Well, I didn't have the faith I should have had. But these things are sent to try us. I'll do better next time." We feel, "Oh -- it's just a little thing."

You look at Israel and you see her trusting Baal, the god of property, possessions, and money. You see her worshipping Baal in the land of Canaan and you see God's reaction. He allows them to be exiled and taken away by the Assyrians and then by the Babylonians from the Promised Land where God dwells. Then you and I begin to see that that's why we had trouble with our prayers after that. That's why we didn't sense the presence of God so strongly in our hearts, because actually over that little job loss we had worshipped the idol Baal.

Loved ones, that's one of the values of this dear nation of Israel. We need to see that every one of us has benefitted from not just those little stories that we heard in Sunday School – about David and Goliath and how you ought to have more faith. But actually the whole of Israel's national pilgrimage is an expression to us of what happens spiritually when we fail to trust God as our loving Father.

Loved ones, that's why many of us are actually in exile! We're actually in exile. We're actually in exile from the promised land of God's presence. We just don't realize it because it isn't happening

to us physically. But that's what God is often saying to us through Israel.

That's what this verse says that we're studying this morning. Romans 11:12: "Now if their trespass means riches for the world..." You see, it does. It's from their trespasses and the way that God has dealt with them in response to their trespasses that you and I have the riches of this knowledge that this is what God is like with us, too. This is what is happening in our lives -- it's just happening inside us spiritually. So we owe the Jewish nation a lot in just their sufferings.

But you remember that the prophets warned Israel repeatedly -- warned her again and again not to seek property and possessions and security through Baal, not to seek happiness through the thrills and excitement of Ashtaroth, not to seek significance and importance and a sense of identity through the god Moloch, by dominating other people. The prophets repeatedly said that to Israel, and Israel kept on-- kept on doing it. It was as if she was enslaved to those gods.

Of course it's the same story with us. We find that we don't want to trust the new job. We don't want to trust just money. We don't want to trust just excitement and thrills for happiness -- but we find we keep on doing it. That's what the Israelites found.

That's why, you remember, God promised them, "I will give you a new heart. This old heart that you have can do nothing but trust these idols. But I will give you a new heart. And I will put a new spirit within you."

Then God provided a cosmic decompression chamber into which they could pass and enclosed in which they could be delivered from the perversion that had taken place because of the pressures that they got from self and the depths of self that they sank into. That decompression chamber was Jesus. God provided that for them -- an experience through which they could pass and be delivered from the perverted natures that they had.

Of course you know that the Jewish nation rejected that. They actually destroyed this Jesus. And then it was that God turned to all of us Gentiles and he offered to us this Jesus. Loved ones, in that sense we owe a debt also to the Jews. Because they refused Jesus, all of us here in this room can have that Jesus. There is a cosmic miracle wrought in him that can deliver each one of us here from the powers and forces of self that bind us to money and people and things. So we owe them, in a way, a double debt because their trespass has brought riches to the world and their failure or rejection of Jesus has brought riches to us Gentiles.

That's what that verse says. Romans 11:12: "Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles (and certainly they have meant that), how much more will their full inclusion mean!"

The Greek word is *pleroma*. It means "fulfillment" or "completion." So Paul is saying, "If we've got so much from the Jews in this, their time of disobedience -- how much more will we get from them and how much more will the world be enriched from their completion!"

In what sense will there be a completion of the Jews? Well, I think loved ones, in the sense explained in Romans 11:5: "So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace." There are individual Jews who are getting serious with Jesus. Then you find in verse 7: "What then? Israel failed to obtain what it sought. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened." Though the Jewish nation at the moment is hard, there are individual Jews who are serious with Jesus.

In London we were looking for a fireplace for the new house and we went to Camden Town in North London. We went into a store there with beautiful Victorian fireplaces, heavy wrought-iron things and special grates that were copies of old designs. We began to talk to this English guy and at last settled the purchase.

When Myron who is the elder there brought out the Christian Corps checkbook, the man's eyes lit up and he said, "Are you Christians?" and we said, "Yes." Then it was like a prayer meeting for the rest of the time. He was a Jew. About two months ago, a man walked into his store to buy a fireplace, and he said the man's face shone with the light of God. The man was another Jew who received Jesus some years ago.

What happened there in that little store in London is happening all over the world, and there is, I think, in all of us who know Jesus a sense of completion when a man or woman from Jewish background is completed in Jesus. It just is a seal or a kind of confirmation to us that this was the way God meant it to work. So for all of us there's a sense of fullness there.

There's a sense of fullness in another way, and I'd like you to turn to Zechariah 12:8-10. There's a sense of fullness here, a sense of completeness that will take place. "On that day the Lord will put a shield about the inhabitants of Jerusalem so that the feeblest among them on that day shall be like David, and the house of David shall be like God, like the angel of the Lord, at their head. And on that day I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of compassion and supplication, so that, when they look on him whom they have pierced (and we know who that obviously is), they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a first-born."

So there will come a time when Israel as a nation will look to Jesus as the real Messiah. Now -- could I just share this with those of you who are so enthusiastic about the Jews and about Israel? Don't be an anachronism. "Ana" is a Greek prefix meaning "not" and "chronis" means "time." Don't be "out of time". Don't be untimely. This will occur between the coming of anti-Christ and the Second Coming of Jesus. That's when the Jewish nation will fully return to their land.

There have been partial returns, and this present one is only a partial return. This present return to Israel is one that is stuck together with American money and with some alliances. But it's a shadow of what the complete return to Israel will be, and that will take place between the time of anti-Christ and the time of the Second Coming of Jesus.

Now at that time God will pour out his Spirit on the Jewish nation. It won't be any longer just individuals, but the Jewish nation will respect Jesus. Presumably they can't all accept him unless they individually accept him, but as a nation they'll acknowledge him and respect him and he will become the religion of the Jewish nation. Presumably they will still as individuals have to deal with Jesus, as that's the only way into God's presence and God's family. But that will all happen at that time, loved ones. It's not now. It isn't now!

I would plead with you dear ones who are so enthusiastic about the nation of Israel. Would you please see that Golda Meir was a dear, brave, courageous lady -- but she was an atheist! -- she did not believe in God. That Moshe Dayan may remind us of the mighty generals that fought in Old Testament times -- but Moshe Dayan is an agnostic -- he does not believe in God.

I would plead with you that many of the loved ones who are enthusiastic at the present time about Israel as a nation are enthusiastic about it purely on a political level, and that this is not the great return that is talked about here when God says, "I will gather all Jews from the nations." Now at the moment there is a great Diaspora of Jews. There are Jews in Israel, but there are Jews in every nation. This is only one of the many partial returns. At the present time Israel as a nation is reprobate. You'll misunderstand all of Scripture and many of you will throw away your own lives if you think that this is Israel as she is when she becomes the Bride of Christ. It isn't.

When will that take place? Many of the experts in prophecy think and calculate that it will occur 2520 years after a certain date back in Old Testament times, which makes it more beyond the year 2000 than in this present time. {This presentation was given in 1980.} So I would just encourage your dear hearts that this is not a time for panic.

It's not a time for throwing up our hands. It's not a time for rushing to Jerusalem. It's not a time for rushing to the mountains. It's not a time for saying the end of the world is at hand. Jesus described all these events that are coming about now and he said they're but the beginning of the birth pangs. Of all people we're the people to be stable, we who say we know God as our Father.

Our dear friends and colleagues in school, at work, and in other nations -- they need our stability at this time. They don't need us rushing to the mountains because the end of the world is just around the corner. These are terrifying and fearful times, but they're nowhere near the times that are described clearly in God's word as bringing us to the time of anti-Christ. Loved ones, until the anti-Christ comes, even if the spirit of anti-Christ is in the world at the present time, until the anti-Christ comes we are not getting into those very last days.

So I would encourage you in regard to Israel and the Jews, please don't think a person is being anti-Semitic when they stand on God's word and say the nation of Israel is at the moment a reprobate nation. She is an example to all of us by her suffering of what happens in our lives if we neglect so great a salvation. So while we love individual Jews like many of them that we know, let us learn from the nation of Israel that all the things that happen physically to her happen spiritually to us when we fail to trust God as our loving Father.

So I would ask us to learn from Israel's sufferings, and learn for ourselves not to neglect so great a salvation, but at the same time to abide by what Paul says: "When these things are come upon you, when people say, 'Here is the Christ, here is the Christ', be calm and be found doing what Jesus wants you to be doing -- bearing witness of him to everybody else."

Loved ones, what we want when Jesus comes is, we want to be there talking to somebody about Jesus -- so that when he comes, we say, "Oh -- yes Lord. OK. We'll come." We don't want to be camped around on a mountain praising and alleluia-ing and waiting for the coming of Jesus. No! We want to be found doing what he's given us to do in this present dispensation, the clear commission -- "Go and preach the gospel to all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Let us pray. Dear Father, we thank you for your dear word that makes all things so plain for us. We thank you for the fruit of that word, the fruit of that Holy Spirit, who always brings peace to us and calmness, always brings a sense of stability and balance to us.

And Father, we thank you that that is what you want us to have towards our brothers and sisters who are brought up in the great Jewish tradition. Lord, you want us to love them with all our hearts, and pray for them, and be a blessing to them. And you want us to learn from the nation of Israel, so that we will not despise so great a salvation in our own experience. And now the grace of the Lord Jesus, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us, now and evermore. Amen.