

Salvation From Sin

Romans 11:27

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Imagine this scene: It is a summer evening and you are sitting by a lake enjoying the blessed quietness and peace. You feel the grass underneath your hand. Suddenly it comes to you that this grass was made by Jesus. Then you begin to realize that your dear Father and his Son are looking at you at that moment. Both of them are glad that you are glad. You have a great sense of how rich you are and how well cared for you are, that such a Father and Son are your nearest and dearest relatives.

It is not so much even the grass and the shining of the sunset and the gleaming of the lake that fills your heart at that moment as a sense of the presence of your Father all around you. You sit there enjoying the world the way you were meant to enjoy it -- living the way you were meant to live. You are living at that moment in absolute dependence on your dear Father and receiving from him the things that he has made for your enjoyment and through them receiving his love.

Loved ones, I think every one of us have had that kind of experience at some time. However far away from God you may think you are, it only proves that deep down in the very heart of your personality there is still something in you that is normal and that responds to your Creator the way you were made to respond. There is still something good inside you that does enjoy God and can sense the peace and quiet of dependence upon him. That is really the way we are meant to live.

Then at that moment, I want you to examine carefully the responses that you know would take place in your heart when I mentioned these things, as you are sensing that dependence upon God and the peace of receiving his world as he gives it to you, just at that moment a girl in a bikini walks by (I apologize, ladies, but I have to use something that will bring it home to us guys). Or just at that moment, a funnel cloud appears on the horizon, or some friend calls down to us that it is time to eat. It is interesting at that moment we all respond the same way. We shift right into overdrive for all kinds of reasons. In fact, we hardly shift the gears; it's almost as if other things shift the gears. It's as if some powers come in and almost strip the gear-box, and you shift right up into overdrive. That overdrive tramples over the sense that you had of quiet peace and calm confidence that your Father was looking at you and the deep sense that you are receiving all that you needed from him. Suddenly it is as if something alien enters into your heart. If you think back to that situation -- those are pretty neutral events -- but the moment they occur it is as if something alien enters into your heart and jars you out of the sense of peace and quiet enjoyment of God that you were experiencing. It's as if something destroys the sense of God's presence that you were feeling. Suddenly you are no longer preoccupied with God. And somehow the Father and the Son fade into the background, and into the foreground comes you with all your needs and wants. You find yourself utterly preoccupied with you.

It is interesting that the dear Holy Spirit that gave you those feelings at the beginning is still inside you struggling to say, "That dear girl in the bikini is somebody's little baby. Somebody thought the world of her as a dear little innocent baby. She is part of God's kindness, who makes everything beautiful in its own way." The Holy Spirit is still struggling inside you to make you feel that, so that you can continue that sense of receiving something from God. But somehow you are preoccupied with what you want or can get from that girl. The Holy Spirit is doing the same

with the funnelcloud. He is struggling to say to you, "Look, the funnel cloud is a part of God's natural creation. It has been dislocated by the fall of man from God's fellowship, but it is still part of God's creation and he is able to show you how to avoid it if you will rest in him and not shake with fear."

But you have difficulty getting hold of that. The Holy Spirit is struggling inside you to enable you to continue to give God thanks that he made the grain and the meat as you munch on the old hamburger. But somehow that Holy Spirit gets trampled underneath by a Pandora's box of evils and passions that rise up inside you. Everything from fight, flight, fright to the desire to avoid the tornado at all costs, the desire to get what enjoyment you can from supper. Somehow those things overwhelm you and you become utterly preoccupied with them. The girl disappears into breasts and thighs, and the dear child that God made disappears into all the things that you want to break her up into. The tornado ceases to be something that is under God's control, that he can protect and guard you from as his dear child. Instead you begin to give yourself over completely to seeing that it is the most powerful thing that affects your destiny at that moment. It isn't God, it is the tornado, and you have to get away from it. It is the same with the call for supper; you give yourself over wholly to looking forward to what you are going to get for supper.

Now loved ones, that is what sin is. It is nothing more evil than that. It's as apparently innocent as that. It's really practical atheism -- believing that there is a God or that there may be a God and that you should give him some thought from time to time, but when the pressing events and opportunities of ordinary life come along -- you are on your own. It's that belief that there is a God whom you can think about when you have the time, but when practical life has to be taken care of, you had better watch out for yourself. That's really what sin is. It's actually living independent of God. The interesting thing is that that is only the negative side. The negative side is your refusal to continue to rest in the feelings, sitting by the lake that you had begun to feel from God. That is the negative side. It is your rejection of trusting God for whatever comes along and continuing to live in that peace. That's the negative side -- refusing to depend on God himself whatever is coming along.

Actually there is a positive side to sin, because you can't not depend on somebody. That's the interesting thing. You have to depend on somebody. If you don't depend on God, then you have to start depending on the girl in the bikini or what you can get from a girl for your enjoyment. Or you have to start depending on the cleverness of your own mind to work out a way to avoid the tornado -- you have to depend on the enjoyment that you are going to get from whatever you are going to eat for supper. That's exactly what we do. We begin to depend on those things and those people and we become fettered to them.

Of course, the frustrating thing about that is that those things--the girl, the hamburger, safety from the tornado--those things are only expressions of God's love. You and I were made to be satisfied with nothing less than God's love. They are only an expression of God's love. They are related to God's love as a handshake or a kiss is, and if you become preoccupied with the handshake or the kiss it is unsatisfying. It's frustrating because it is only an expression of the love, and what you need is the love. So the first frustrating result of living independent of God is that even the things that you depend on, that are expressions of his love, do not satisfy you. You know that and you try to get more and more of them, but they still do not satisfy. It is very frustrating.

There is another frustration of course. You have to manage those things once you take over yourself -- once you shift into overdrive for yourself. Once you let fly out of your mind that this is the Father's funnel cloud, even though it is an errant part of the creation, it is still the Father's.

He is still able to work all things together for good to them that love him, [Romans 8:28] you let that thought out of your mind and you have to start managing this funnel cloud yourself. You have to manage through the cleverness of your mind how to get away from it. You have to manage this girl so that you can enjoy what you want to enjoy; you have to bring about the right kind of supper so that you will be happy. The interesting thing is once you start trying to manage things and people to give you the peace that God would bring you, you get into the God business, for which none of us were fitted. So we face incredible frustration as we begin to see that things and people will not do what we want them to do. We begin to produce all those disease generating feelings that come with self-assertion such as pride, resentment and anger. That is an effect of sin.

The third frustration is even worse because four billion other happy little souls are trying to do the same thing. We are only one in four billion. All the others are trying to manipulate the girls, the funnel clouds, and the hamburgers the same way. The competition is fierce. That gets you into all kinds of feelings of envy, jealousy and selfish ambition to manage them as well as everybody else is doing. Loved ones, that is where we get into sinful acts and thoughts and words -- what we call "sins." Sin is really the basic problem -- the apparently innocent independence of God or parting from the sense that he is there with his arms round about us. That attitude is the heart of the problem. But that produces sinful acts and thoughts and words. Really, they are just acts and thoughts and words that are full of "sin", or independence of God. That brings us to the verse that we are studying today.

It's Romans 11:27: "And this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins." That's God's promise. God can take away those sins of yours and mine. The Greek verb doesn't mean "forgive" or "cover". It means "take them away." The Greek verb is *athelomai*. It means "send them away." God can take away those sins of yours. He can remove that whole attitude and that whole experience out of your life.

Let's go back to the lake. Look again for the moment at your responses when you saw the girl or the funnel cloud, or when your friend called you to that supper was ready. Look at your responses. Do you remember that we said it was as if some other thing changed the gears? You hardly had control of it yourself. It was as if you heard the voice calling to you, and immediately everything went out of your head. It was as if you saw the funnel cloud and fear took over. It was as if you saw the girl and suddenly all your thoughts were going one way. It's as if you weren't in control -- the thing took over from you. It's as if your whole personality actually began to run on its own, isn't it?

In fact, some of us would say, "Look, the things that you told us the Holy Spirit was trying to do in us, they do seem the right and holy things. I agree with you. It does seem right that the Holy Spirit was striving inside to point out to us that this was still God's funnel cloud -- that this was still God's little child -- this was still God's supper. And whatever he wanted us to have would be best for us. That is true. Those seem the holy things. But I'll tell you the other things that I felt seemed the natural things to me. Those are the things that come naturally to me. All those other feelings that you described seem nature to me too." I think most of us would say it is almost as if the deck is stacked against us when we are in that situation. It seems that the quietness by the lake was an interlude in an otherwise chaotic life that seems normal and natural to us.

Loved ones, you are exactly right. Do you realize that your human nature, your personality is the final product of a 4000 year (maybe 10,000 year, or some would say 1 billion years) production line? That's it. Your personality that responds that way has been in production for thousands of years. You've inherited the personality from your fore-fathers and their fore-fathers that responds the

wrong way. That's right. You have a personality that almost sins itself; it is bred for sinning. It is bred to depend on itself and others to help it rather than to depend on God. That's it. You are right.

In that way you are in a sense the victim of it. The original attitude is yours. You can choose at that crucial moment way at the beginning whether to turn to God and continue to depend on Him or not. But once you have done it the personality takes over and rushes you over the cliff. So you say, "What hope is there? I do want to live that way. I have had those experiences. I have known peace. Often when things were at their very end, I've known peace when I just seemed to live a primitive life of realizing that God was right there on the other side of that cloud. I've sensed that he does love me and does have me in his arms. I do want to live that way in the chaos of the office on Monday morning. I do! But how can I if that personality is the kind of perverted thing that you say?"

How can you get rid of that body of death that is hanging around you? It's interesting; there is actually a verse that comes immediately after that question in the Bible. [Romans 7:25] It runs, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" That personality of yours was crucified with Jesus. That is the gospel. That personality of yours was destroyed by God with his Son Jesus in a cosmic miracle, and you were recreated with a new personality which swings into action immediately you believe that and begin to live that way. The moment you reject the idea and the lie that the only personality that you have is one that just rushes away from God at every opportunity -- the moment you believe that old self was crucified with Christ as Romans 6:6 says, and turn from the funnel cloud or the irritating boss or the guy that has just been dishonest with you in business. The moment you turn from that and say, "Lord, the old personality that I had would tear this guy apart. The old personality that I had would criticize that boss, but Lord, thank you that it's at the bottom of that pit in that tomb at Calvary. Thank you, Father that you gave me a new personality in Jesus. Lord, I intend to trust you whatever. If they cut me apart as they did you, Jesus, I'll be with you in heaven, but I'm going that way." The moment you believe like that and live like that, the whole new personality that God has ready for you is actualized in your life and made effective. It is! It's a miracle!

Dear brothers, there is a delight and a joy and exhilaration beyond what any bikini could give you. There is a safety and a security beyond our best resources from funnel clouds, sicknesses and financial tragedies. There is a quiet peace; a satisfaction even of physical strength beyond what any supper or feast could give you. Loved ones, that's it. It's a miracle! That's how God will take away your sins. He will take away the part in you that prevents you at this moment from depending wholly upon him. So, I would encourage you--don't get cynical. Don't listen to what others say that the moment by the lake is one rare moment. NO! That's the way we were meant to live, and the way you can live in the midst of your dad's death, in the midst of your own cancer, in the midst of losing a job, in the midst of kids screaming, in the midst of the boss telling you off. That's the way you can live. I'd encourage you if you hear this and sense it is possibly true, to start now, this moment. Settle it now in your own heart. Live that way. Live in peace as God made you to live.

Let us pray.

Dear Father, I would pray for any loved one here this morning that these things we've talked about are true. Father, help each one of us to see that it all comes real by faith. It comes real by us believing that -- that the old 'fight, flight, fright' personality has been crucified with Jesus. It no longer exists. We have a new house, not made with hands, but it is eternal in the heavens.

We have a new body, a new mind and new emotions that have been raised with Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. This Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead is able to give life to these mortal bodies. He is able to make us new creations this morning if we are prepared to believe him and to live like that.

Lord, we would quietly in these moments respond to your covenant that you will take away our sins. And we would say to you Lord, if you will do your part, we will do ours. Now, Lord we will believe that you have done this and we will walk in peace and in continued recollection from this day forward. This we do so that the world may experience the trust in God through us.

Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now and throughout this week.