

Wrath Or Mercy?

Romans 11:30

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Could you imagine that you have a little four year old girl? Let's say it is your sister. Your house is situated on a four-lane highway and your little sister plays in the front yard. One day the ball runs out on the four-lane highway and you just stand there paralyzed as she runs out after it. After you have recovered from the heart attack and she has come back in, you point out to her that if she does that again, a car will run over her. You make it clear that she is not to go out on the highway. The next day you glance out the window and there she is again, out after the ball, and back she comes. You go straight for her and let her have it on the hand and tell her, "Look, you are not to do that again!" You make it very plain that you are displeased and angry with her. The next day the same thing happens again. Now you say, "No more playing in the yard. You will suffer far more inconvenience and pain if some car hits you. So that is the end." She tells you that you are the cruelest, most unkind brother that she has ever met and she will never speak to you again.

Now, were you being kind to her? You know she doesn't think for a minute that you were, but you know fine well you were. Were you showing concern for her? You know you were. The inconvenience of not playing in the front yard or the little bit of pain that she suffered from the smack on the hand was nothing to the inconvenience and pain that a car would cost her. There is no question you were being kind and compassionate and concerned.

In fact you could say you are showing her mercy. It is a mercy to her for you to show her what she should do and shouldn't do, because it will protect her. In that sense, do you see that wrath is right? Wrath is a mercy. Wrath is not really anger as we know it. Anger is a selfish, uncontrolled reaction because somebody is hurting you, but wrath is a controlled reaction against anyone who is going to hurt themselves or other people. In that sense wrath is a mercy that has enabled us to be here today.

Think of the numerous things that we would have done to destroy ourselves if somebody had not shown us that kind of wrath.

Fourteen years later your little sister is now eighteen. You see her going out to get into a car to go out for the evening, and she takes something out of her bag and smokes. You go over and ask her what it is. It is a marijuana cigarette and you say, "Why do you smoke that?", and she says, "Well, it just gives me a high; it gives me a sense of freedom and lightness in my emotions. That's why I do it." So you explain to her what it does to her lungs first of all, and then you explain to her the excitement and the exhilaration that there is in this world as it has been created. You begin to share with her some of the ways you yourself live above the cramping, pedestrian narrowness that our daily responsibilities bring upon us. You share with her how you have found it possible to live above yourself and to fly free above your anxieties just ordinarily enjoying the world and its excitement.

Then you begin to take her with you to share with her some of the excitement of skiing and flying. You take her to Paris and the Louvre and you show her some of the beauties that God's world has. All the time you share with her the joy that you have found in the heart of the Person who made the white water in Colorado and the breakers at Daytona Beach. You begin to share with her the ways in

which we are meant to get exhilaration and lightness and excitement in this world itself.

Are you being kind to her? Are you being compassionate? Are you showing her mercy? Yes, you know you are. Especially if you do it in such a way that you are presenting a positive alternative and not just shutting down her only escape route. There is in some ways some negativeness involved in it, in telling the person the way we were meant to live and the way we were not meant to live. In a sense that is a mercy. Loved ones, without that kind of mercy you and I would not be alive. Our sons and daughters and our friends would not be alive.

That's the kind of debt that you and I owe to the Jewish nation. Do you know that? The kind of debt that the little four-year-old girl owes to you -- the kind of debt that the eighteen-year-old owes you -- that's the kind of debt we owe to the Jewish nation. That's what Paul is saying in Romans 11:30. "Just as you were once disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience." That's the debt we owe to the Israelite nation. We have received mercy because of their disobedience.

I remember six years ago a young lady came up to me and said that she was living with a guy that she met three weeks ago. Then to make me feel much better about it, she said she didn't sleep with him every night, because she just sacked out with whomever she met at whatever party she happened to be at. I thought, "This girl is just on a shock tactic, playing to the gallery here." Then gradually as I talked with her, I realized that she didn't really have a suspicion that there was anything wrong with living with a guy without any kind of agreement before God, or that there was anything wrong with sacking out with whomever you happened to meet at whichever party you happened to be. It was hard, in a way, to believe.

That was six years ago; you know what it is like now. It is not better. You and I know there are thousands and thousands of people who have that kind of life as a normal way of life. There are professional people who are apparently respectable in our society, probably someone living next door to you, who regard wife-swapping and everything that goes with it as just a normal practice of life.

Do you see that the first mercy our dear old society needs is the mercy that that little four-year-old girl received? What way did God intend us to live? What way did he make us to operate? What is right and what is wrong? You know as you watch the media that it has become incredibly and unbelievably difficult for many loved ones to know what is right and what is wrong.

Loved ones that is one thing the Jewish people did for us. In God's dealings with the Jewish nation down through two thousand years of history he made it plain the way he intended us to live, the way our bodies would live best and the way our emotions would enjoy themselves best. That's the first mercy that we have received through the Jewish nation. You will find it in Leviticus 20:10: "If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death." Presumably there were hundreds of Jewish men and women who were put to death because they were fornicators or they were adulterers. Every dear Jewish man or woman who was put to death (presumably by stoning) because they disobeyed that law of God. Every one of them is a mercy to you and me. A mercy to us, because it is God telling us, "That isn't the way I made you to live. You are putting yourself to death when you live that way. You are destroying yourself. You think you are enjoying yourself but believe me, this graphic business of putting people to death in the Old Testament is only a physical expression of what is happening to you spiritually and emotionally when you live like that." Loved ones, the people who did that in the Jewish nation are a mercy to you and

me. It is a plain message to us.

I would encourage anyone who is here today living in fornication or adultery. Stop! I am not calling you any greater sinner than I am or than the rest of us. I am just telling you it is as wrong as lying is wrong. It destroys you spiritually and emotionally and physically. God has made it plain that that is not the way to live. It is like running out on a four-lane highway.

It is the same with homosexuality and lesbianism. The truth is you can't help the way you were born; you can't help the character or the personality that you were born with. The personality is not a sin. We all have tendencies in our personalities towards certain attitudes and actions, but we do not have to yield to those actions and express them in our bodies outwardly as a way of life. God has made that plain. Look down a few verses to Leviticus 20:13: "If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them." Every dear homosexual and lesbian in the Jewish nation that was put to death for that sin is a mercy to you and me. It is God writing into the very death of the human being that that is wrong. Don't live that way. That is killing you inside. You are withering up inside.

Your love is being perverted into a self-love when you do that. God just makes it plain. Don't get all uppity because you are not a homosexual. Don't get all superior because you are not a lesbian, but see that that is as wrong as lying and sarcasm and gossip. It is just as destructive as it was to the actual physical bodies of those Jews years ago. Now in that way they are a mercy to us.

You know some of us are apt to think, "Those things we can see. They are a mercy and we are glad we are clear of those!" Would you look at another verse in Numbers 12:1-3? "Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman; and they said, 'Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?' And the Lord heard it. Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth." Miriam and Aaron began that old murmuring stuff, that old gossip stuff, that old whispering stuff. Verses 9-10: "And the anger of the Lord was kindled against them, and he departed; and when the cloud removed from over the tent, behold, Miriam was leprous, as white as snow." That's God's mercy to us.

"Now did you hear this about Oral Roberts?" "Did you hear this about Jerry Falwell?" "Did you hear what Jimmy Carter did?" "Reagan -- did you hear what he did?" "So and so across the way in our office, did you hear this about them?" Loved ones, you are becoming leprous even as you do it. We walk out after the bit of gossip and we say, "Oh, I'm okay. That's all right to do that." There is leprosy inside you. There is a whole dirtiness that has come into your heart the moment you let that bit of gossip and murmuring escape your lips.

You think everybody complains but something dies inside you every time you complain. A barrier is put up between you and the loved one that you talk about. There is leprosy that has come into your aliveness towards them. Actually, you know that, don't you? You know the furtiveness that comes to you the next time you meet that person. You feel there is something not open; there is a petty, beggarly spirit about it that you feel is kind of sick, but you just say, "Everybody does it."

Loved ones, it is a mercy from God that Miriam was made leprous because she murmured and gossiped and complained about Moses. It is God saying to us, "You are dying every time you do that. You are stepping away from trusting me for the politics of this nation; you are stepping away from trusting me for the evangelization of the world, and you are beginning to depend on men and women to put them

right or show that they are wrong. You are living in faith in princes and in your own ability to make your way through the relationships of your office instead of me." Loved ones, that is the first mercy God has shown us through the dear Jewish nation.

There is another mercy he has shown us. Look at it in Psalm 78:13: "He divided the sea and let them pass through it, and made the waters stand like a heap. In the daytime he led them with a cloud, and all the night with a fiery light. He cleft rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink abundantly as from the deep. He made streams come out of the rock, and caused waters to flow down like rivers. Yet they sinned still more against him, rebelling against the Most High in the desert. They tested God in their heart by demanding the food they craved. They spoke against God, saying 'Can God spread a table in the wilderness? He smote the rock so that water gushed out and streams overflowed. Can he also give bread, or provide meat for his people?' Therefore, when the Lord heard, he was full of wrath; a fire was kindled against Jacob, his anger mounted against Israel; because they had no faith in God, and did not trust his saving power. Yet he commanded the skies above, and opened the doors of heaven; and he rained down upon them manna to eat."

Then in verse 32-41: "In spite of all this they still sinned; despite his wonders they did not believe. So he made their days vanish like a breath, and their years in terror. When he slew them, they sought for him; they repented and sought God earnestly. They remembered that God was their rock, the Most High God their redeemer. But they flattered him with their mouths; they lied to him with their tongues. Their heart was not steadfast toward him; they were not true to his covenant. Yet he, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them; he restrained his anger often, and did not stir up all his wrath. He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passes and comes not again. How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness and grieved him in the desert! They tested him again and again, and provoked the Holy One of Israel." Yet God kept on being compassionate.

That is the second mercy to us. To this incorrigible people that kept rebelling against God he showed them the same attitude that Jesus said when he was explaining how often we should forgive our neighbors--to seventy times seven. So will God do that to you. As our God has been infinitely forgiving and merciful to the rebellious Jewish nation down through the centuries, so he will be to you and me. He has not changed. There is a tendency for some of us to say, "Yes, but if you knew the depth of my sin! If you knew the heinous nature of my sin you would not say that God would forgive me."

Loved ones, let me allow you such a sinner in 2 Samuel 11:2. "It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking upon the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful. And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, 'Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?' So David sent messengers, and took her and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she was purifying herself from her uncleanness.) Then she returned to her house. And the woman conceived; and she sent and told David, 'I am with child.'"

Then verse 14: "In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. In the letter he wrote, 'Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down, and die.'" That is David. He stole a man's wife, committed adultery with her and then arranged for the man to be put in the forefront of the fighting so that he would be killed.

Here is what David writes: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit is no guile. When I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said I will confess my transgressions to the Lord; and thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin." [Psalm 32:1-5]

By the disobedience of the Jewish nation you and I have received mercy because we have seen the very heart of our God. What he has done for the Jewish people, he will do for you and me. That's God's heart. It is eternally compassionate and forever merciful even to the worst of us here this morning.

I don't know what your life is like, but if God has spoken to you today and shown you plainly that some of the things in your life are wrong, do you see that if you turn to him, he forgives you? He will forgive you. It is blasphemy for us ever to say, "Can God possibly forgive me?" He destroyed your evil heart in Jesus on Calvary. God has forgiven you every sin you have ever committed. The only question is not whether God will forgive you, but will you accept his forgiveness and give him the right to be your Father and run your life? That's the only question.

So loved ones, would you think about it today? We need to be honest with God today and to see that the heart of the eternal Father is most wonderfully kind. He will show us mercy if we will be real with him this day.