

Questioning God' Love

Romans 11:34

Sermon Transcript by Reverend Ernest O'Neill

We are studying a letter that God inspired Paul to write to the followers of Jesus in Rome about 57 A.D. We are studying it because it is the clearest and fullest explanation of the purpose of our lives. It is the clearest and fullest explanation of reality that we human beings have. But, you remember, in the ninth chapter Paul hit a rock. This is the rock or the obstacle that Paul hit: "I am speaking the truth in Christ, I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race. They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ. God who is over all be blessed forever. Amen." [Romans 9:1-5]

That is an obstacle because Paul, in explaining to us what God our Creator is like, said that the first people that he ever showed himself to as a dear loving Father whom we could trust for love and care were the Israelites, and yet they are the people that have not only through the years refused to trust him as their dear Father and chosen to trust in themselves, but when Jesus came they rejected him completely.

That's the rock. Paul says, "Does this mean that God's whole plan for the world has come apart? Does this mean that God's will then is frustrated by us men?" He says, "No! God did not allow this stray thread to destroy his plan for the universe. He in fact, wove it into the pattern."

Then Paul spends chapters nine, ten and eleven pointing out how over the past four thousand years of their history, the Israelites have first of all been a standing testimony to what happens to a people who do not trust God as their father, but trust in themselves.

Secondly, he says that even as there has always been a remnant of the Jews that have trusted God, so when Jesus returns to establish his kingdom on earth, there will be a remnant of Jews who will also trust him. So, he says, you can trust God. God works all things into the pattern of his will and according to the counsel of his purposes. God is not caught out by anything that happens. That's where he ends up saying what he does in the verse we are studying today: Romans 11:34: "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" Paul is saying that God is beyond all of us here. He has the thing organized, and whatever happens, he is still in control. "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?"

W.H. Auden, a modern poet, has a few powerful lines that just send you right to the bottom of the pit, yet they are an expression of modern life. "In headaches and in worry vaguely life leaks away." Loved ones, we get sweaty palms at times, we toss about in bed unable to get to sleep, we get headaches from anxiety, we have knots in our tummy that turn into ulcers because we miss the most wonderful truth that exists and that is expressed in these verses---you, thank God, are not God.

God is God; you are not God. I am not God; God is God! As far as you and I are concerned, God is the self-existent being in this whole universe. All of us have been made, but he is the self-existent being. He may be able to

explain where he came from, Jesus may be able to explain, but you and I cannot explain where he came from. As far as we are concerned, God is beyond us. We have never been in his mind; we cannot get into his mind. We cannot be his counselor; he is wiser than we are.

Do you realize how much worry you escape from the moment you actually recognize that, the moment you recognize the fact that God is someone who is beyond us and sees things that we cannot see and we cannot counsel him? There are things that we cannot question about his doing.

I am going to make a man. It won't be a very great man, but I'll make him out of this paper. Now that I've made him, I'm going to ask him some questions. "Could you tell me what's in my mind? Tell me! Could you tell me what business we should go into in Amsterdam? Come on, tell me." You say to me, "Don't be dumb, he's made of paper! He can't speak." If he were alive, would it be different? It wouldn't, actually, because you made him. You are bound to be greater than him. You can't make something greater than yourself. He can't tell you what's in your mind or what business you should go into in Amsterdam, because you have made him and he is bound to be less than you. So are we. All of us.

Whether you like it or not, we are less than God; we are less than our Creator. You may feel the way I did at times that my mind can think anything, it can do anything, it can be anything, but it can't be greater than our Creator. He is beyond us. Have you any advice to give him about Saturn's rings? Now that you have seen the photographs, have you any ideas how you can improve the design? You say, "No, I'm the same as everybody else, I can't interpret the photographs. I can hardly tell what the rings are made of, let alone how they are designed or how they stay there around Saturn. No, I can't." Do you realize our Creator, our dear God, not only knows what they are made of, he knows why they stay in those formations? Moreover, he knows thousands of millions of planets like Saturn that you and I have never seen.

If you can't counsel him about how to improve the design of Saturn's rings, how can you counsel him about the way he has allowed those fourteen little children to be murdered in Atlanta? How can you judge him about the way he allows wars to ravage the youth of a nation? How can you debate with him or question him about the way he allows cancer to destroy innocent people? You say, "Well, because I know what's fair and just, that's why." Who put the idea of fairness and justice into your head? "God". So you are going to teach God what fairness and justice is? "No."

Then you are going to point out to him where he is being inconsistent with his own ideas of fairness and justice, is that it? "Well, I just think he is missing something. I just think he doesn't realize the effect of some of his actions on the rest of us." Do you see how ridiculous that is? We with our little pea brains are going to tell God how he is not living up to the wisdom and standards of wisdom that he himself put in our brain. Do you see the silliness? "You are not living up to the way you made my head." "Ok, I'll tear your head off!"

It's just silly, loved ones, yet we live in all kinds of anxiety and worry because we fail to face that fact. Could it not be that instead of God having failed to rise to the level of our wisdom and insight into fairness and justice that we have not yet entered into the depths of God's wisdom? It is the wisdom that is needed to deal with the complexities and the consequences of giving a group of people free will. Could it not be that instead of him failing to rise to our level of understanding and wisdom, we actually have a little ways to go ourselves?

Don't you think that people who look at Jesus and decide that God's heart is like Jesus' heart,

believe in God and really do believe in his wisdom and love, and they trust him? However it appears whatever difficulties others may bring up in the world's existence, they believe in that. But then don't you think there are other people who don't really believe in God, and they in fact create an idol in place of God out of their own debates and thought about right and wrong in the world? Then they subtly deceive the true believers into thinking it is perfectly reasonable to debate with God about his wisdom and his justice. Don't you think that happens?

Some of us have been drawn into that. We have been drawn into what is a foolish game--questioning God, suggesting that we who are mere creatures can somehow outthink him or be fairer or more loving or wiser than he himself is. Don't you think we get caught up in that? It leads us into all kinds of sorrows and anxieties in our lives.

Loved ones, would you just look at Romans 11:34 again? "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" Then would you look at the way that God puts it so plainly in Job 38:1? This is God's answer to us in our presumption: "Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind; 'Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins like a man. I will question you, and you shall declare to me. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements--surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Or who shut in the sea with doors, when it burst forth from the womb; when I made clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band, and prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors, and said, "Thus far you shall come, and no farther and here shall your proud waves be stayed?"

Now turn to Job 40:1-5: "And the Lord said to Job: 'Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He, who argues with God, let him answer it.' Then Job answered the Lord: 'Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer thee? I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further.'" Do you realize the relief and the peace that we miss because we do not see that and live that way?

Former president Lyndon Johnson was asked by a newspaper reporter what his feelings were on the day he handed over the presidency to Nixon, and Johnson replied very quickly, "When I realized that no longer would that military aide be following me with that little phone by which I could start a third world war, and no longer would thousands of men's lives depend on my decision, and no longer would the future of world peace depend on me, night and day, it was like the weight of the whole world being lifted off my shoulders and being placed on another's."

Do you realize that that's what needs to happen to you? You are carrying a whole lot of things on your shoulders that you can't carry for one simple reason--you are not God. You weren't destined to carry it. Do you realize why you have anxiety about things?

Anxiety is God's sign to you that you are getting into the God business. That's right. Each of us here can argue our corner, and I'm sure we all will, because we are all perfectly justified in worry. The truth is anxiety is God's sign to you that you are getting into his business that you are trying to do something that he alone can do. You are trying to take care of something that he alone can take care of. Will your daughter ever accept Jesus? Will your husband ever change? Will Russia attack Poland? Will the interest rate go down before you are destroyed financially? Is your life going to carry on the same way as it has for the past four years? How on earth are you going to avoid that catastrophe that you know is coming up at the end of this month?

"The answer, my friends, is blowing in the wind" His wind. Those aren't your concerns. You can't do anything about those. You don't know the mind of the Lord; you can't counsel him. You aren't at that place. You may die before those things ever come about. Those are not your concerns; those are God's concerns. Has he not said he would work all things according to the counsel of his will? Have you not found repeatedly in your life that things have turned out far better than you ever could have hoped? Does he not say that he in fact will work all things according to the counsel of his will and that you are not to be anxious about tomorrow, because tomorrow will take care of itself? Rather, he will take care of tomorrow?

Loved ones, every time we are anxious we can be assured that we are anxious because we can't act. That's it. Things can be tough, but at least if you can do something, we feel better. However bad the thing is, we feel we are doing something. Do you see? As long as you can act, that's what you can do; that's your job as a creature. Where you can't act, where all you can do is worry, you are trying to be a Creator. That's it, without exception. Whether it is the daughter or the husband, whether it is our jobs or our friends, whether it is our vacation or Christmas time or what we are going to do about the car, it doesn't matter. "Who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" Nobody, because there are a million things like that that He is in control of, and he is operating for the best in your life.

Do you realize what God said about the things that you couldn't act upon? He said, "Act, wash the dishes if you are to wash the dishes, do what lies to your hand. Do your job with all your heart, and then do not be anxious about anything." He said, "Do not be anxious about anything." He didn't give it as advice, but as a downright command of a Creator to a little creature. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything--in everything--by prayer and supplication let your request be made known on to God, and the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." That's it. That is the joyful, carefree life that God our Creator, our dear Father, has called us to.

Loved ones, when you walk worried and anxious, trying to decide, "Is my life going the right way? What is going to happen next week?" you are trying to be God and you are not God, and the effort will kill you. Stop it! Our God is God. He is greater than you and me. He didn't bring you here to torture you. His Son throughout his life spent his days alleviating misery and sadness. God did not bring you here to torture you. He brought you here to make you like himself.

So all the things in your life that you cannot control, all the things in life that cause you anxiety, they are his business. They are not your business. If you say, "Are we just to do nothing?" No, do what you are doing with all your heart. You have to work hard, you have to do what lies to your hand with all your heart and with all enthusiasm but when you have done all, you are to lay your head on your pillow and commit your way unto the Lord and trust in him and he will act. That's his business.

How do I know that he will work it out the way I will like? That depends on whether you like what he likes, isn't that it? Shakespeare has a line, "Aye, that's the rub." That's the heart of it, isn't it? Is he, God, and therefore does he really know you better than you know yourself? Does he really know whether you should be married and who you should be married to? Does he really know how long you should bear this difficult situation in your job? Does he really know what you can take or does he not? You know there is only one answer. Of course, he knows. Who am I who doesn't even know how to improve Saturn's rings, who am I to try to outthink him? I know he knows. Doesn't he know what's

best for you? He knows what you can like for a week or two weeks, but does he really know what you will like forever?

Doesn't he really know what your nature is? Of course he does. You can trust him. He thinks way beyond us. So why not relax -- why not be at peace -- why not see that this is stupid, this habit of questioning God, of trying to debate with him and trying to show him how he could run our lives better?

Why not stop being silly little paper dolls with no heads? Stop it and say, "Lord God, you are our God; your wisdom is way beyond ours. Who are we? We don't know the mind of the Lord, we have never been in your mind, and we can't counsel you. Lord, we bow down before you and we will do what lies to our hand, and for the other things that we can't affect, we will trust you and let you work them out for us."

Loved ones, that's the joy and delight to which God has called us. It really is. C.S. Lewis [British apologist and author, 1898-1963] said, "The greatest problem of Christians is not that they live in the past but that they live eighty percent in the future." That's it. How about regarding today as the last day on earth for you, the last day of your life? How about thinking that you have just to see through to darkness tonight, and that everything beyond tonight is God's concern? I pray especially for those of you who have lived trying to do God's job for him. I pray that you will let those things go out of your hands and that you will live joyfully a moment at a time. Let God be God.