

What Does God Want of You?

Romans 12:1c

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

I think it is possible to come each Sunday and still feel in your heart, "But what does God want of me? What is the heart of this gospel that we are talking about, and what is the response God wants from me to it?" That's what today's verse explains.

Before talking about the gospel, it might be good to establish clearly what the basic problem is in God's eyes. It is important to do that, because it is very different from the basic problem that is so often discussed or highlighted by the sociologists, by magazine and newspaper writers, even by the authors of inspirational books. Most of them seem to zero in on mankind's greatest problem as a sense of guilt, or that the twentieth century's greatest difficulty is loneliness, or man's great problem today is a loss of self-esteem. Well, God alone can see what man's greatest problem is because He alone is not part of that problem. His diagnosis is very different from all these, loved ones. Would you look at it with me?

It is in Genesis 6:5: "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." That is what our Maker says is our greatest problem. The wickedness of man is great on the earth, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually. If you want to find the solution that God had for that, just look about two verses down to verse 7: "So the Lord said, 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground, man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.'"

With our soft hearts and our woolly-mindedness we say, "There has to be some other solution beside the one that God found." God saw that the evil in our hearts was continual, and He determined He would blot it out; He would destroy us. Our error today is we think we can find some other answer, "Just hold it; give me time and I'll find another answer." Now if we have some encouragement from our peers, or if we tame this evil, or if we can train it, or we can treat it some way we think that will kind of do it. Loved ones, that is why we end up with such a mixture of grays in our society today. We don't have any blacks and whites, we don't have any rights and wrongs, and it is interesting -- as a result, we don't actually have any reliable hearts that are trustworthy. Isn't that so? We are so easy on the evil that is here and we attempt to ameliorate it in so many unsatisfactory ways, but we end up with a world where it is very hard to find a trustworthy or a reliable heart.

Of course, God kept on saying the same thing for 2,000 years. He kept on saying that there was only one answer. Jeremiah said, "The sinful soul, it must die." Paul, years later, said, "The wages of sin is death." The only way to get rid of this stuff is to destroy it; you can't separate the sinner from his sin. You have to destroy both to get rid of it. One of his prophets said that the real evil in the world is that "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it?" That is it, loved ones. For 2,000 years God kept on saying that through His prophets. The basic problem of mankind is that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. The only answer is to destroy it. You remember that is exactly what God did. Look at Genesis 7:19. "And the waters prevailed so mightily upon the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered; the waters prevailed above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep. And all flesh

died that moved upon the earth, birds, cattle, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm upon the earth, and every man; everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the air; they were blotted out from the earth."

Immediately we began to try to live without trusting our Creator to show us why He put us here, the moment we decided we were not going to trust Him or depend on Him but we were going to depend on ourselves, that moment we become overwhelmingly fearful. Suddenly we realized, "I am one of billions of people spinning through space on a sphere that has no visible means of support. This is madness!" No wonder we were filled with a neurosis of insecurity and fearfulness! Immediately we began to try to deal with our insecurity and we started to grab everything we could as fast as we could, at the same time trying to prevent anybody from knowing that was what we were doing. Of course, we were all doing that. We were all like fearful, neurotic little kids, grabbing everything we could, grabbing all the money we could, all the possessions we could, and at the same time trying to let nobody else know we were doing it. All the relationships of the whole world were filled with dishonesty, deception, greed, and avarice and there wasn't a part of our personalities that was left untainted by that. The theologians call it "total depravity," and it means that while there was still a little light from God in the center of our beings, there was not one part of our personalities, not one part of our bodies, not one part of our minds, our emotions or our wills that was not tainted with selfishness; our hearts were filled with envy, hatred, anger, violence, resentment and criticism. God looked at that mess and determined there was only one way to deal with it -- to destroy it -- and that is what He did.

Now, is that the gospel? No, it is part of the gospel. The gospel actually begins in that verse we were reading -- Genesis 7:23. "He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the air; they were blotted out from the earth." The second half of the verse is the beginning of the gospel. "Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark." It continues in Genesis 9:8. "Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 'Behold, I establish my covenant with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.' And God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations; I set my bow in the clouds and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth. God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth.'" That is the gospel. God determined that He would never again destroy us all like that. Why? Because He thought that there was some other way to destroy sin.

Loved ones, there is only one way to destroy guilt, and that is to destroy sin. There is only one way to destroy the sin, and that is to destroy the sinner. But God found another way to destroy the sinner. He found a way to free us from our evil hearts that are so desperately wicked and deceitful without destroying us physically. How did He do it? Christ died for us. Christ was the flood. God put our hearts into the flood and destroyed them there. When He cried out, it was because He had your heart in Himself and He was feeling the pain of its destruction. Paul said in Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." That is

it. God took your heart and my heart and put them into His Son, and instead of flooding us out physically as He had done originally, He put us into the flood of Christ and destroyed our evil,, deceitful, wicked hearts in His Son Jesus.

That is what baptism meant in the first century. When a person was immersed (the Greek word means "to be immersed") in the water, as you went down you realized that you were being cut off from the world that you knew. As far as you were concerned, when you were under the water there was no world and you were dead. When you came up out of the water you then were given a Christian name, a new name, because you were being raised in Jesus as a new creation. That is what God did instead of sending a flood. He destroyed our evil hearts in Jesus and recreated us with new hearts in His resurrection. There is an interesting verse in I Peter 3:20 that makes that truth clear. It is talking about what Jesus did between his death and resurrection: "... to the spirits in prison, who formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is eight persons, were saved through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this" (to the ark and the flood) "now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Jesus is the flood.

What does God want us to do? Loved ones, it is in Romans 12:1. It is really simple. "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice." That is it. You go to a specialist with some pains in your abdomen and he diagnoses cancer throughout your whole body. There isn't an organ in your body that isn't touched with cancer, and so you have at the most six weeks to live. That is what God says about our sin and selfishness and the evil in us. You say to the doctor, "Can you do anything?" and he says, "The only hope is radiation, massive doses of radiation." You say, "What do you want me to do?" He says, "Come here and lie on the table and allow us to give you massive doses of radiation." You don't cavil, you don't hesitate, you don't debate. You don't say, "Would exercise do it instead?" or "If I eat a little more, or take more care of myself?" or "If I obey certain laws or rules, will that do it?" or "Would it be enough if I put my arm under the radiation?" You know what you do-you present your body. You say, "Whatever you say, whatever you want. I'm going to be dead in six weeks anyway. If you can do anything for me, do what you want."

That is what God says, except that His appeal to us is a bit more poignant --because Jesus has already borne the radiation. He has already borne the death-destroying rays of God's wrath that were leveled upon you and me in Him. When He cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" it was because He felt all the destruction of that burning wrath of God destroying your selfish heart in Him. So, actually, Christ has already borne that for you. That is what II Corinthians 5:21 means. "God made him to be sin who knew no sin." God made Christ what you are and what you were, and then He destroyed that in His own Son. So when you plead, "Is there some other way?", there is a dear Person who has already borne the pain for you. When you say, "Maybe I don't need to put that arm into the flood, maybe I don't need to put my mind or this part of my brain or this part of my life into the flood; maybe I can get away without that part being destroyed" -- it is pitiful, isn't it? Hamlet once said, "Oh, what a rogue and peasant slave am I" when he saw the agony of an actor over the imagined death of his father. He thought, "My father is really dead, and I feel none of that." Oh, what a "rogue and peasant slave" are we, if we stand back now and say, "Is there some way in which I can get away from presenting my body, my whole body, my whole personality, my whole life for God to make this real in me?" Well, it is after the fact, isn't it? The dear guy has already died; He has already borne the pain, and here we are wanting to know if we can hold on to something that He died to destroy.

"Present as a sacrifice" means to regard yourself, your life, in reality as slaughtered in Jesus. That was the only thing that God could do with you or me, that was the only thing we were worth. We regard our lives as slaughtered and destroyed so that only the smoke now is rising up to God. That is what it means to present your bodies as a living sacrifice. You say, "Lord, you did this for me. Here I am. Make this real. See the fruits of your work and suffering. Do whatever you want with me. Here I am. I regard myself as already a dead man, somebody who has been destroyed. I present myself to you. Raise up what you want." That is what it means to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, a sacrifice that has already been destroyed and that God will make alive again according to his own best judgment. That is what God wants of us, loved ones.

"Paristemi" is the verb "present". It is in what is called in Greek the aorist tense, and the aorist tense is the part of the verb that expresses an instantaneous, complete act. You do -- it is done. "To present" your bodies means not bit by bit, not struggle by struggle, but now you present it. "I see what you have done, Lord. You have destroyed me in Christ; He is the flood. Here am I. That is the only reality. Make this real in whatever way You please." It is a definite act. For many of us the decision for Christ has been a momentary, instantaneous action that we have done at a service like this. To present your bodies that way is the final admission that there is no other way. That is what it means to become a child of God. It is an admission that everything has to be changed in my life. Not just the things that I see wrong, but everything. It is an admission that I'm willing to let everything be changed. Real repentance is stating that everything has to be destroyed and the whole thing has to be created anew. That is what presenting your body as a living sacrifice is, and that is what God requires, loved ones. He doesn't want our efforts or our endless attempts at cooperation, not all our trying, but just a recognition that He destroyed us and remade us in His Son, and that we have to mirror that and reflect that by presenting ourselves as people who have been destroyed, who only deserve to be destroyed. "Lord, you raise up in me whatever you want." That is what God requires of us.

It is a bit like a man who owned an old shack on the edge of town that a developer wanted to buy. The man thought the shack was worth maybe \$2,000 at the most. The developer said, "I'll offer you \$25,000 for it." The man was overwhelmed. It was arranged that in a month's time he would move out and the developer would take the place. The man began to think to himself, "This is ridiculous, giving \$25,000 for this place. It is not worth it. I had better take some of the money and at least make it look reasonable." So he went down to the hardware store to buy new windows and began to work on the shack. He began to paint it up and all that kind of thing, so that in a month's time the shack was really a transformation as far as he was concerned. The developer came that day and the guy couldn't make out what he was doing with the massive bulldozer. He said to him, "Look, isn't the house beautiful?" and the developer said, "Yes, it is. Thank you. Here is your \$25,000." The guy said, "What are you going to do with it?" and he said, "I'm going to bulldoze it right off the site. I just want the site, I don't need the house."

That is it. God doesn't need your house; He doesn't need your life. I think you are lovely and I think we are all great, but really, it is nothing to God. God doesn't want it. God has already determined, "There is nothing I can do with you as you are, I have to destroy you, bulldoze you right off the site and start again." That is what conversion is. That is what faith in Christ's death is. That is what being baptized in Jesus is. It is a total and absolute admission, "Lord, I agree with your diagnosis of the problem. My heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, and there is only one way to fix me up. That is to do what you did in Noah's day, just destroy me absolutely, start again and make me what You want me to be." That is that God wants from us.

Now, you can do it this morning. I did it one day in Sunday School in Ireland. It doesn't require a special evangelistic service. You can do it this moment. I would suggest that if you have never done it, if you have never given your life to God for Him to do whatever He wants with it and to make real in you the mighty destruction and salvation that He worked in you in Jesus, that you do it today. The miracle is already done. All you are doing this morning is saying, "Lord, that is what I want. What You have already done in me, that is what I want. Will You begin by your Holy Spirit to make it real from this day forward?" If you say that honestly, loved ones, and are willing for Him to touch whatever needs to be touched in your life and to burn out whatever of cancer is there, then this will be the beginning of eternal life for you.