

. There is an excerpt from a Jonathan Edwards sermon which had a lot of different punctuation that I kept from original. I hope that's OK. It's still very understandable.

## Short-Circuiting Death

Romans 12:1d

Sermon Transcript by Ernest O'Neill

I am fairly sure that some of you this morning don't feel really converted. I'm fairly sure that at least one person is sitting here this morning and thinking, "Well, no, I don't really think of myself as born again. I would like to know that I was forgiven by my God, but I don't. I couldn't say that I'm really sure of it." Now why is that? Why are some of us inclined to look at others and say, "Boy, I wish I had the joy of their salvation?" Why do some of us take the attitude, "I guess I am just not the type to get emotionally wrought up about religion? I am not the kind that gets wild about whether I'm going to heaven or whether I'm going to hell. That is the kind of person I am" Why is that?

Loved ones, I think that for many of us--maybe not for all of us--but for many of us, it is because we have a kind of "let's pretend" attitude to religion. I think it is because many of us have a "let's pretend" attitude to this whole business of salvation. And so we are involved in a second-hand experience of religion. That is why our experience is so uncertain - "comme ci, comme ca." You are not sure it is there; you are not sure it is not there.

You remember when we were kids we used to play all kinds of games. In Ireland we played Cowboys and Indians eternally. You remember it is a highly formalized and stylized ritual because if somebody shoots you, you have to die. I remember my brother and I having all kinds of arguments. He would say, "Pretend you are dead, pretend you are dead!" and I wouldn't pretend I was dead. It was very tricky to know when he was supposed to have got you and when it seemed quite obvious that he didn't get you. It is very tricky to work that out. But the vital part of it is that you have to pretend you are dead. If you don't pretend you are dead, the game just can't go on. I think some of us have a shallow experience of Jesus and a very shallow experience of God because we pretend we are dead. Maybe it would be better to say we pretend we have to die. I think there is a lot of superficial, easy-believism among us because we pretend that we have to die.

You know what sin is. Sin is the center letter of that word; it is "I". It is me, my, mine, myself, my rights, my will, my way, my position, my reputation, my importance, my elevation, my pleasure, my happiness, my comfort. It is thinking of yourself as the center of the universe. Everybody revolves around you and you are really a kind of god. That is what sin is. Of course, that produces sinful acts and sinful thoughts and sinful words, because you aren't God. Believe it or not, you are not God! We all know you are not God, and we don't like the idea of elevating you to the position of God and letting you have your way all the time and dedicating our lives to making you happy. We don't like that and you know that. So you get irritated with us because we are not treating you as God. You get resentful against us because of that and you work all kinds of ways to try to make yourself God in our eyes. You browbeat us and resent us and flatter us and criticize us and do all kinds of things that suddenly begin to fill your life with sin-full acts and sin-full thoughts and sin-full words. Gradually all that resentment and criticism begins to affect your whole personality and it

begins to become more and more twisted. You begin to find yourself doing things that you don't want to do at all. Worst of all, you find that your personality becomes the plaything of everybody else. Your personality become the plaything of every odd word that people speak, whether a word of praise or a word of criticism, until your personality becomes utterly perverted and twisted.

Now, that is sin; that is the personality of a sinner, and God has a remedy for that. But we like to pretend that that isn't the remedy. The remedy is in Genesis 7:23. "He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the ground." He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the ground--that is God's remedy. Many of us have a shallow experience of God because we like to pretend that death isn't the remedy, and we are short-circuiting death in our own experience with God. That is why our experience is shallow; we are short-circuiting death. We are trying to get through to God without the business of death. The fact is that death is the only remedy for sin. Now we say, "No, no that is punishment that is not a remedy.

No, you have it wrong. God blotted out everybody on the earth because they were sinning, because he was punishing them." Loved ones, I do think we have to start waking up about our God's character. I think we have to stop playing this game with him. Deep down in our minds when we say, "That's a punishment" we are saying, "The sins need to be forgiven. The outward acts and words and thoughts of sin need to be forgiven. We ourselves involve ourselves in this day after day. The only reason we are able to live with each other is because we are constantly overlooking the things we are doing against each other and forgetting the things we are doing against each other. To tell you the truth, I don't see why God can't do the same thing. Why can't he forgive and forget? He seems to have this mean, miserable streak in him that wants to kill everybody as well." We are really saying, "We enlightened, sophisticated Westerners have learned to forgive and forget. That is the way life goes on. We don't want to chop people's heads off, but this God seems to have to kill us or murder us all. Why can't he just forgive and forget? He has this sense of justice and honor that has to be satisfied." That is why we say that the verse is "punishment". We constantly have this idea that God is exerting the penalty of death upon those of us who sin against him because he wants to take his wrath out on us, or he has some sense of honor that has to be satisfied.

Now loved ones, that is not it at all. God blotted out every creature because that was the only way to deal with lives that had become utterly perverted and twisted. It was the only way. Do you realize the pitiful attempts we make at dealing with this in our own society? You know fine well you can forgive and forget; that is no problem. You can forgive what somebody does against you, you can forget eventually what somebody said to you, but how do you deal with the crazy, mixed-up personality that produced it? That is the issue. How do you deal with that? That is why death is God's remedy. Death isn't God's punishment--a slap on the hands for the things you said or did--death is God's method of dealing with the crazy, twisted personality that produced that thing.

You know how we deal with it at home when there is a battle, an argument, or a fight. Everybody is arguing with everybody else. Then everybody grows tired and weary. At last, you decide to forgive and forget. But the person has not really changed inside, and we know they haven't. We know they will still do what they did to offend us again. In fact, a lot of conversations at home are that, aren't they? We say, "We have been over all this before; we have been through this already. You said you would change and you didn't change." You know what happens. Actually you establish a kind of detente, a kind of standoff. The tragedy is that as the years pass you stand off more and more; you keep backing off from each other. You decide, "Well, that is the way he is in that area and he won't change, so I'll back off that area." Then "That is the way he is in this other area, so I'll back off here." That is how people draw apart. We are ready to forgive and forget the things we do, but

we cannot change the person.

It is the same with our legal system. We try to make justice remedial. We know the problem is not the things that they do or say, or the crimes that they commit. The problem is the person. How do you change the person? We try to make our legal system remedial rather than just retributive. We try productive work in our prisons, we try social workers and probation workers, and we try all kinds of methods of curing the criminal. Our legal system is weighed down under the increasing burden of--what? Repeaters. People are in prison for two months, out on the streets, are back in for six months, are back on the streets, and are back again. That is how difficult we find it is to change the sinner. It is the same in our social system, isn't it? Our whole social system is filled with psychiatrists, psychologists, analysts, "Pop" book psychology and endless conferences on fulfillment and motivation in your life.

There is only one remedy for a sinner, and that is God's remedy. It is death. If we would begin to look at death in that sense, as a friend and not an enemy, we would be nearer the truth of God's Word. The only way to clean us out is to wipe us out and remake us. You find that running right through the whole Bible. Maybe you would look at it. The first sin that was ever committed was dealt with by God in that way. After Adam decided he would find out what was good and evil for himself and not depend on God's opinion, God said in Genesis 3:19: "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return." Then in verse 22: "Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of us knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever..." then in verse 24: "He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life."

God said that death is the only remedy for the kind of monster you have become. Then after fifteen years of Judaism he was saying the same thing in Leviticus 20:9-14: "For everyone who curses his father or his mother shall be put to death; he has cursed his father or his mother, his blood is upon him. If a man commit adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death. The man who lies with his father's wife has uncovered his father's nakedness; both of them shall be put to death, their blood is upon them. If a man lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall be put to death; they have committed incest, their blood is upon them. 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. If a man takes a wife and her mother also, it is wickedness; they shall be burned with fire, both he and they, that there may be no wickedness among you."

Now, loved ones, that continued right through the times of Judaism. At that time God was dealing with Israel as a nation and that was his way of curing the nation; he destroyed that which was evil in it. But even after he began to deal with people as individuals, the same was true. Ezekiel wrote during the times of the exile, when God began to deal with us as individuals and no longer as nations. Ezekiel 18:1: "The word of the Lord came to me again: 'What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge?" As I live, says the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sins shall die.'" And in verse 20: "The soul that sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffers for the iniquity of the son." God kept on saying sin could only be cured by death. Even after Jesus came, Paul said it in Romans 6:23. First of all,

"we had all sinned" and then "the wages of sin is death."

Do you know the most famous sermon that was ever preached in America? If you ask an English literature teacher, a minister or a theologian what is the most famous sermon ever preached in America, they will all take you to a little church in Northampton in New England on July 8, 1741. They take you to that sermon, because it is the mainstream of the Christian gospel; the heart of the Christian gospel. It speaks the very heart of God's answer to sin. It is that sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," by Jonathan Edwards. This sermon has remained the most famous sermon ever preached in America not because it is way out there in left field--we need to see that--but because it is the heart of the Christian gospel.

"The wrath of God is like great waters that are dammed for the present; they increase more and more and rise higher and higher, till an outlet is given; and the longer the stream is stopped, the more rapid and mighty is its course when once it is let loose. 'Tis true, that judgment against your evil works has not been executed hitherto; the floods of God's vengeance have been with-held; but your guilt in the meantime is constantly increasing, and you are every day treasuring up more wrath; the waters are continually rising and waxing more and more mighty; and there is nothing but the mere pleasure of God that holds the waters back that are unwilling to be stopped, and press hard to go forward; if God should only withdraw his hand from the floodgate, it would immediately fly open, and the fiery floods of the fierceness and wrath of God would rush forth with inconceivable fury, and would come upon you with omnipotent power; and if your strength were ten thousand times greater than it is, yea, ten thousand times greater than the strength of the stoutest, sturdiest devil in hell, it would be nothing to withstand or endure it."

"The bow of God's wrath is bent, and the arrow made ready on the string, and justice bends the arrow at your heart and strains the bow, and it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, and that of an angry God, without any promise or obligation at all that keeps the arrow one moment from being made drunk with your blood."

"Thus are all you that never passed under a great change of heart by the mighty power of the Spirit of God upon your souls; all that were never born again and made new creatures, and raised from being dead in sin to a state of new, and before altogether unexperienced light and life (however you may have reformed your life in many things, and may have had religious affections, and may keep up a form of religion in your families and closets and in the house of God, and may be strict in it), you are thus in the hands of an angry God; 'tis nothing but his mere pleasure that keeps you from being this moment swallowed up in everlasting destruction."

"However unconvinced you may now be of the truth of what you hear, by and by you will be fully convinced of it. Those that are gone from being in the like circumstances with you, see that it was so with them; for destruction came suddenly upon most of them; when they expected nothing of it, and while they were saying, Peace and Safety. Now they see, that those things that they depended on for peace and safety were nothing but thin air and empty shadows."

"The God that holds you over the pit of hell much as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked; his wrath toward you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times so abominable in his eyes as the most hateful and venomous serpent in ours. You have offended him infinitely more than ever a stubborn

rebel did his prince: and yet 'tis nothing but his hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment. 'Tis to be ascribed to nothing else, that you did not go to hell last night; that you were suffered to awake again in this world, after you closed your eyes to sleep: and there is no other reason to be given why you have not dropped into hell since you arose in the morning, but that God's hand has held you up. There is no other reason to be given why you have not gone to hell since you sat here in the house of God, provoking his pure eyes by your sinful wicked manner of attending his solemn worship. Yea, there is nothing else that is to be given as a reason why you don't this very moment drop down into hell."

Until a person has seen that that is what we deserve, no person will seek the Savior in truth. That is it. Until you see that is all you or I deserve and that that is the only cure for the miserable, sinful people that we are, until we see that and take that seriously, all dealing with Jesus is play acting. It is not suing for forgiveness to a dear Savior; it is playing a game; it is pretending that we deserve death. Loved ones, God's Word is true—the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God in Christ Jesus is life eternal. Why? Because all of us who want to be right with God are to be baptized into the name of Jesus for the remission of our sins, and we shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. What is it to be baptized into Christ Jesus? "Do you not know that those of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." "Because we judge that if Christ died for all, then all died, therefore reckon ye yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." That is the only way. Death in actuality and hell after, or death by faith with Jesus. That is it, loved ones.

The remedy for a sinner is still death, and it will always be death, but it can be death by faith with our Savior Jesus. The truth is, God put us into his Son and destroyed us there. If we just pretend and say we don't have to die, then we enter into a play-acting Christianity. This is why this verse we are studying in Romans 12:1 says, "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service," "Logiken latreian" is the Greek. It means your reasonable service or your appropriate service. It is the right thing to do to God. Why? Why is it right for you to take that life of yours with all its hopes and ambitions, to take that body of yours with all its vigor and strength, to take that mind of yours with all its ideas and plans, to take those emotions of yours with all their happiness and dump them like a carcass on the altar before Jesus and to regard them as dead and destroyed forever? Why? Because you are shot through with the cancer of sin and self. Your God sees that, and he has already condemned them to death. Sooner or later they are going to be destroyed and disappear forever from the universe, unless you see that God has actually already destroyed them in his Son Jesus. You can go to his Son and say, "Lord, here is my life. It needs to be completely renewed and completely changed. It needs the only remedy that God has ever devised for a sinner--it needs to be destroyed. Lord, here it is. Give me back what you want, cleansed and ready for God's use." That is it, loved ones. That is what our reasonable service is--the thing we owe to our God, first of all because of gratitude because of what he has given us, and secondly, because we are under his condemnation because of the people we are and have been towards him. We owe him our whole lives as a living sacrifice for him to do what he wants with.

Here is the truth. Those of us who have seen that, those of us who have seen that all we deserve is death, have presented ourselves to Jesus and said, "Lord, I know that you died for me and I died with you. Now tell me what I can have back." Those of us who have done that have found that the sacrifice has lived and become more blessed and freer than any personality we ever had before we

went to the altar. I would ask you about yourself. Have you really ever faced those facts or have you been short-circuiting death, saying, "What I need is forgiveness"? God gives you forgiveness day and night. Stop play-acting. God gives you forgiveness day and night; otherwise you wouldn't still be alive. What we each need is that death with Jesus that cleanses us and completely fits us for God's presence.

Let us pray.

Dear Father, we thank you that in these soft days we can still hear what your servants preached down through the years. We certainly do not want to lack courage to face the truths of the gospel. So, Lord, we see because of our rebellion against you and because of our own independence and lack of trust in you, we can only expect one thing from you and that is death and destruction. Lord, we thank you that you have given us the opportunity to experience that by faith in your Son. By that means to be delivered from that second death and lake of fire.

Lord, we would come to you this morning and say whatever you see that needs to be destroyed in me, I present my body a living sacrifice which is my reasonable service. I ask you to go through it and give me back whatever you want for me to be made fit for your plans for my life.

Lord Jesus, thank you for bearing the unbearable and facing a death that we could never have survived. Lord Jesus we put ourselves in your hands, tell us what you had destroyed in you for us, just tell us and give us back what you want. We'll thank you and give our lives to you for your glory.

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