

## Man's Extremity - God's Opportunity

Romans 12:02f

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Loved ones, will you take your Bible for a minute and look at John chapter 19:31. "Since it was the day of Preparation, in order to prevent the bodies from remaining on the cross on the sabbath (for that sabbath was a high day) the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him; but when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water."

That's the most famous death in history and the most certain death because it was carried out by the military experts in death at that time, the Roman army. Actually it's the most unquestioned death in history because you and I count our years according to whether they came before Christ or after Christ. Moreover the record of that death does not depend only on historical documents that are found here in this collection. The record of that death is mentioned by classical historians who are often hostile but yet they still report that this Jesus of Nazareth died in Jerusalem in the first century.

So you have many like Celsus, Porphyry, Antonius and Pliny and Tacitus. All of whom confirm that this Jesus of Nazareth died in Jerusalem in the first century. Tacitus, he was the outstanding historian of imperial Rome, he writes this "The author of that name Christians was Christ who in the reign of Tiberius suffered punishment under his procreator Pontius Pilot."

Yet loved ones despite the certainty of that death would you look at what is recorded in history just on a page opposite of what you read a moment ago. John 20:26 "Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them and said 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas 'Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!'"

So Jesus, with the same body that he died in, with the holes in his hands that the nails had made, with the hole in his side that the Roman soldier's spear had made -- several days after his death lived again. And he said to one of his followers, "Here take your finger and put it into the hole in my hand. Put out your hand and place it in the hole in my side and see that I am not a ghost, that I am alive myself. This is my own body."

For the next month Jesus talked and ate and visited with his followers; at one time with more than 500 of them at once. He talked and showed himself, in order to demonstrate beyond all doubt that this was no hoax, it was no hallucination, it was no ghost, it was him, himself alive. Loved ones, so strong is the evidence for that not only in contemporary accounts and in the eyes of eyewitnesses but in the records that we have of that incredible event that a scholar well known in Cambridge has said this about the resurrection of Jesus. "Indeed taking all the evidence together it is not too much to say that there is no historic incident better or more variously supported than the resurrection of Christ."

So this man's heart stopped beating and his brain was utterly destroyed by the lack of blood. Yet at the very time when his body should have begun to putrefy he came alive and came alive in such a vivid way and with such a kind of life that somehow he was able to counteract the symptoms of death that he still had. He still had the holes in his hands. He still had open wounds. Yet he did not bleed to death. His body, even though it was solid, one of his followers could actually put his hand into the hole in his side and feel that the flesh was there and the veins and the arteries. Yet that

solid body was able to pass through solid walls and solid doors and cover great distances in very few minutes. So obviously it was a different kind of life.

You can see that it was a life that seemed to control and transform and transcend the normal natural laws of the body. Somehow this life was able to counteract the lack of air that his lungs had had. It was able to counteract the effect on his brain that came from lack of flow of blood. This life, whatever it was, was able to counteract the symptoms of death that he still had in his body. Indeed, isn't that the interesting thing? That this life was able to coexist with the actual created physical life that he possessed yet was somehow able to counteract it. So that you and I would say, "Oh listen, with open wounds and with lack of blood to the head and with lack of supply to the arteries and veins physical life cannot exist." Yet obviously with this kind of life that he had you have to say, no that isn't true any longer. With this kind of life you seem to be able to have open wounds. Yet you don't bleed to death. You seem to be able to have the symptoms that would normally destroy your brain. You have them right there and this life exists right along with them and counteracts them.

This life is different. You can see that. It is able to exist in the midst of natural life but it somehow enables us to live even if we haven't the normal signs and the normal activities of natural life operating within us. It's a kind of uncreated life. That's how you explain partially this man Jesus of Nazareth.

You and I were created. We were made much the way you create something at home. Or you make a shelf to set something on or you create a table out of nails and wood. You make it. That's the way we were made, but this man Jesus of Nazareth was begotten. He was begotten; the way you and I were begotten by our mom and our dad. He was begotten by our Creator. He came out from the heart of God, out from the center of God's own being. He was begotten by God. So that you and I, we say for life to continue you need air and blood. But he knows that you actually don't need either of those things. That he exists and we exist because of the uncreated life of God. That's what makes us exist.

Loved ones, I think you'd see it even more clearly if I say this. This world of ours is in a way like a great puppet theater. There's a way in which it's very different from that. But there is a way in which it's like a great puppet theater. All we puppets think we move -- why? Because of the strings, the strings -- that's what makes us move. Actually it's not the strings. Because you can see one of the puppets lying in a box at the side and there's no life in him and the strings are still attached. So it's not the strings that make the puppets move, it's the puppeteer. If the puppeteer didn't exist the puppets couldn't move.

Now we're very different from the puppet theater in this way: that though the great Creator has given us life he has given us free wills. We can do what we want. Do you know what we're doing? We're all getting up like this and we're saying, "Oh, do you know why I move? I move by the strings. That's what makes me live. Yeah, it's the air that I breathe. That's what makes me live. It's the blood circulating. It's the good food I eat. That's what makes me move." But it's not. We're dumb. It's not those things. You can spoon the food into a dead person like mad and what happens? Nothing, nothing! The old sinoauricular node that makes the heart beat and all the medics explain, "Oh yeah, that's why we're alive. That's why we're alive." You get the old jump cables onto that heart. You keep it going and keep starting it. If there's not something else in that body it doesn't matter how many shocks you give it -- you don't get that engine turning over. It's not the heart beating that makes us live. It's not the food that we eat that makes us live. It's not the blood that circulates around our veins and arteries. It's the Creator's life that makes us live. That's what makes us live, the Creator's life.

You know how we do, we say it's the food; it's the air especially the pure air in Edina, that's what makes us live. The best food we can get and the best exercise we can get. Let's belong to the best club we can to get the best exercise and it's good. Because in his wisdom, God loves order, and has

ordained that certain natural laws of life ought to be followed by us. Where we're dumb is, we think that's why we live because we follow those laws. Loved ones, those are the strings and that's what Jesus rose to tell us.

He wanted to show us, "Listen, here I am with open wounds and according to your laws my blood should all be pouring out of my body. According to your laws my brain should be damaged beyond renewal. According to your laws my body should either be an invisible ghost that passes through walls or the walls themselves have to be in some way immaterial." It's Jesus saying to us, "Don't you see that that's not the truth? Don't you see it isn't the strings that keep you alive? It isn't the air, it isn't the blood, it isn't the heart beat, it isn't the good food, it's my Father's life that enables a human being to live. You see me living by that life only." Loved ones, that's what our lives are all about. That is what explains your life and the things that happen to you these days. I'll show you that in just two verses. I'll show you what they mean. It's John 1:4 "In him," in Jesus, "was life, and the life was the light of men." So Jesus had this uncreated life within him that makes everything live. It's what makes primroses live. It's what makes you and I live. "In him was life, and the life was the light of men." Of which men, verse 9, "The true light that enlightens every man." Actually the Greek is just as well translated as the King James Version puts it. "There is a light that enlightens every man that comes into the world."

You came alive because Jesus in seed form exists in you. That's it. You are the same as the rest of us. The food didn't give you life any more than the blood gave you life, any more than the heartbeat gives you life. Loved ones, you are alive not simply because there is a principle of life within you but because there is a Person of life within you. It's that Spirit within you that initiated life and that keeps you alive today. That's what God is trying to get you to see. To acknowledge that all the evidence of medicine points to the fact that life is inexplicable. That after we've all described how we think the heart beats, we have to bow down and say we actually don't know why it beats. We don't actually know why the thing works like this. What God your Creator is trying to get you and me to see is that it's because of his Son within us that we are alive today.

Now how does that explain all the things that happen in our lives? You'll see it very clearly. When does the puppet become aware that it's not the strings that keep him moving? When? When does the puppet, if he could speak, if he had a free will, when would he become aware that it's not the strings that keep him moving? When the strings break, when the strings break and the puppeteer comes and picks him up in his own hand. Then most of all the puppet realizes that this One has the whole world in his hands and can pick him up too. That's why the strings break. That's why in your life and mine the strings break; the strings being the apparent things that keep us alive and keep us happy.

Do you know that marriage has the best possible chance of becoming real when the two people involved have at last come to the point where they think divorce is the only answer? That's true. Marriage has the best chance of becoming real when the two people involved have at last reached the conclusion that the only answer is divorce. That is, when they have come to the point that they say I have not an ounce of affection that I can drag out of the depths for this person. I have nothing in common with this person. I get no satisfaction physically or emotionally from this person. I get nothing from this person mentally. There is no point for me in carrying on this relationship. Then that marriage has at last a chance of coming into real birth because at last the two people are seeing that it's not the appreciation and the attention that makes the marriage possible. Those things may at times be an expression of Jesus' life and often they are not an expression of Jesus life. At last those two people see that the only thing that makes a marriage work is Jesus inside them being allowed to love the other person without hope of return. Now if that's true of marriage it's true of all the things that are happening in our lives. That's it.

You see how foolish we are? A string breaks and we resent it because we love our idolatries. We love to keep on thinking that it's the strings that keep us alive. What God is all the time trying to do

is to take away all our crutches so that at last we'll see the truth of reality that we're alive here today and we're able to do things only because the seed of Jesus' uncreated life and spirit is actually within us.

Loved ones that's true of you, that's there. Don't you see that's why the tragedies in your life are often the most real times? Don't you see that? Those tragedies when you lose a job. Those tragedies when you lose your mom or your dad. When you lose your home, when your educational plans fall flat, when a loved one disappears off the scene, when the romance absolutely breaks down, don't you see that those are the most real times in your life? Strangely enough after the unsteadiness they're the steadiest times, most stable times. You see why: because at last the strings are breaking. You are seeing that the final reality in life is this Spirit within you. That's what keeps you alive. That's what your whole life actually depends on.

Don't laugh at this. When you squeeze the tube of toothpaste in the morning and you get little pops it's the air bubbles coming out, right? The air bubbles wouldn't clean your teeth at all. When a plumber is trying to get the air out of a pipe system do you know what he calls it? He talks about purging the system, purging the system of all the unreal substance that actually shouldn't be there anyway. Do you know what an auto mechanic calls that when he's redoing the brakes on your car? He talks about bleeding the system. He bleeds out all the stuff, all the substance that isn't really doing anything there at all. That's what's happening with you and me in the hard things. That's it. That's why man's extremity is God's opportunity. That's why.

Every time you and I come into places where we're being bled a little or we're experiencing a purging or we think we're being squeezed to death that's our dear Creator allowing us to see that after the last tear has been shed and after the last drop of sweat has fallen on the ground and after we found ourselves lonely and desolate in our own room with no human being who loves us and comforts us -- after all that there is the dear One who rose out of death. There he is to meet you. It's him that keeps you alive.

That's true at this moment even though you're getting tangled up in your strings. You can see the agony in his dear heart as he knows fine well that you can actually live without all those strings. Some of them God has allowed to be necessary in this present life but none of them actually are what create your life. They are simply concomitant facts that God allows to dwell in your life along with his Spirit. That's it. The breathing air, the beating of the heart, the circulating of the blood are not the cause of life, they are simply concomitant facts that exist along with that spirit of Jesus' uncreated life within you that is the real source of your life. Everything that happens in our lives happens because of God's desire. Though he doesn't send the tragedies he allows them to happen and uses them to bleed the system of the air bubbles. To bleed out the unreal substance that we think is life; the friendships that actually aren't essential to life.

In fact loved ones, there's only one essential, for your life and mine, and that's the dear One whose resurrection we honor today. The Jesus who came into every man that ever came into the world and he's in you this very day. Let's pray.

Lord, as we think through the logic of it we know it is right, we know it is true. We know that with all our research and with all our computerized analysis we can't explain why the heart beats or what really causes life. Then we have the historical fact of you living in apparent contradiction of what we call the signs of death. We see, Lord, that life can exist without the blood circulating and life can exist without the heart beating. Those things can be recreated after several days because life lies underneath those things and is deeper than those things. Then, Lord we see the statement of your word that in you is life and that life is the light of men and that there is a light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. Then we see that we are alive for only one reason: because you, the author of life, exist within us.

Lord, we ask forgiveness for our independence of you, our refusal to acknowledge you and we see why our lives have become small and withered instead of growing, developing, and blossoming the way we

thought they would do when we were children. Lord Jesus, we see it's because we have created an idolatry out of these strings and these things and that you are within us and you will surge up from inside our hearts and you will blossom and develop our lives as they were meant to if we will acknowledge you and begin to depend on you alone and not all these other idolatrous things. So Lord we thank you for what it means for each one of us who have concluded that this marriage is impossible or that job can't work or we can't be happy because this set of circumstances are not right. Lord, we see that we can be happy and the marriage can work. We can live a full life without all these things simply because you are within us. You will produce all that we need. We thank you for that, Lord. We thank you for Easter life that is different from ordinary natural life and that depends on our faith and not our sight. We thank you Lord for that. Now Lord Jesus will you enable us to live that life today? We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.