

Judge of All

Romans 14:11

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Why does God allow a mass murderer like the disaster at McDonalds in San Diego this past week? Why does God allow that? Why does God allow that man to take the guns into the restaurant and then just to keep on shooting until he eventually shot himself? Why would he mow down 40 people and innocent children and bystanders?

Why does God allow that? Because to prevent it, he would have to force the man to do what God wanted him to. That's why. He would have to force that man to do something that God wanted him to do but that that man didn't want to do himself. That's it. I mean, the fellow, as far as we can see, was cruel to his wife and to his little daughter. He hated minorities. He was boiling with resentment about losing the welding job and so his whole nature was bent on getting back on society for what it had done to him. And to prevent them doing that, God would have had to break in sovereignly and wipe out that man's free will and make him do what God wanted him to do. God will not do that. He will not do it.

You may say, "Well, couldn't he have done it when you see what happened? Wouldn't that have been better than what happened? Look at the deaths of the innocent children. Wouldn't anything have been better rather than that disaster? Surely nothing could be worse than the disaster that took place."

Yes, yes there is something that could be worse. A heaven full of robots who did what a dictator made them do whether they wanted to or not, yes that would be worse. That wouldn't be a heaven. That would be a hell filled with robots who could no longer love and in a fact, could no longer hate. They just had to do what they were forced to do and made to do.

You may say, "Couldn't he have at least stopped him doing that thing and then given him back his free will?" Well, where would you draw the line on God's interference then? Where would you draw the line? Would you draw the line where he first slapped his little daughter across the face? Would you say, "God ought to come in there and stop his hand"? Or would you draw the line the first time he worked up in anger or in hatred for some minority?

Where would you draw the line on where God should intervene? Not only that but where would you draw the line then on where God should intervene in everybody else's life, in our lives, in your life, in my life? Where would we say to God, "You ought to interfere there, stop us doing it even if you work against our free will and here you should.....". You can see it's impossible.

I mean it's a task. It's a decision that is too complex. There is only one way to go and that is to give men and women their free will. Of course, how, loved ones, would men and women ever see what their attitude is towards the Creator of the universe if God kept on stepping in every time the natural consequences of that attitude showed itself? Do you see that?

How would men and women ever realize that they weren't right with God? How would they ever realize that the world was wrong? How would they realize that the world was not going the way God originally intended it if God, at every point -- where that rebellion in that independence and that hatred showed itself -- stepped in and ameliorated that situation or changed it or smoothed it over or

modified it. Do you see that in that way God would become the accomplice of evil? Do you see that?

He would become the one who covers over the symptoms of cancer so that the person won't see their ill. He would be the one that covers over all the signs that men and women are wrong in their relationship to a Creator. He would be the one that covers over that men and women are heading one way after this life is over.

The only way that God can allow us to see what is wrong in our attitude to him and to each other, is to allow the natural consequences of our attitudes to work themselves out in ruthless logic. Really until we are brought to a stop and say to ourselves, "We've become animals. There's something wrong inside us. There's something that we can't understand."

I would ask anyone here, even those of us who aren't dads and moms, all of us have had experience of trying to get somebody to freely do something of their own free will. But especially those of you who have sons and daughters, how do you do it? How do you get a son or a daughter or any other human being to begin to do something of their own free will?

You know, you can tell them and you can teach them, and you can explain to them, and you can illustrate to them, but finally they have to attend one school above all others. That's the school of hard knocks. That's the school of experience -- and until they begin to attend that school, they won't change inside at all.

This 70 years that you and I have here on earth is the school of hard knocks. It's the school of experience. It's a probationary period. It's a time of respite when God is allowing us to see what we are really like inside in our hearts. He puts inside this world enough signals of what is right and what is wrong to let those of us who want to know that and who want to change see that clearly and make the change.

But do you see there's no way in which this world and this life of ours here on earth, can work that kind of change in you and me of our own free wills unless God lets the thing run it's own course. Loved ones, we cannot imagine what the horror would be of masses of us drawn together in something that we would call heaven and yet we would have lost our free will. We would be being nice to each other or loving or kind, simply because we were scared of the man who was in charge. That would be hell itself.

Now, the only possibility of a heaven is that we, ourselves, will become like God and will want to be with him and will want to be with each other. You may say, "But the world is filled with these things. This San Diego thing is just one. It wasn't long before that some other fellow was shooting from a high building. This world is filled with these things."

It's filled with terrible murders. This same week, you heard about those other two men that had gone on a spree right across the country. The world is filled with wars and fighting and murders and famine. It seems to be filled with injustices. It seems to be filled with people who are taking the law into their own hands. This world is continually becoming more and more like this and loved ones, that's it. It will and we have to face it.

This world will continue to carry on like that and we need to start seeing that that will be the case. It's simply bringing out what we men and women are like and I suppose part of the miracle of it is that as it continues and as it goes on, so more and more of us will begin to stand back from

the thing and say, "Wait a minute, this isn't even like the world my parents lived in. This isn't like the world as I imagined it was going to be. This world is a world gone mad and crazy."

There's something radically wrong here and as it gets worse and worse, so it's incredible but more and more of us will begin to stop and question. We will begin to look into our own hearts. So the irony of it and the paradox of it is that as the thing goes from bad to worse, so actually more of us will begin to be sobered by the situation and will begin to see there is something wrong in our relationship with each other. There has to be something wrong with our relationship with the one who made this place.

Yet loved ones, that's what God says will happen. If you look at it, there are many references to this development in the world. II Timothy 3:1-5, "But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of stress. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, fierce, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding the form of religion but denying the power of it. Avoid such people."

II Timothy 3:13, "While evil men and imposters will go on from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived." That's it. God says, "Look, it'll go from bad to worse. The people will get worse, the deceivers, the imposters, it'll just go on and on and get worse and worse." Some of us like to think, "No, surely it'll get better." Well, it won't.

There won't be fewer murders; there'll be more murders. There won't be fewer mass murders; there'll be more mass murders. There won't be fewer wars; there'll be more wars. There won't be fewer diseases; there'll be more diseases. The thing will just go on from bad to worse, from bad to worse.

Why is it important to say these things? Why it's important to see that God has told us this is, we can't save the world. You can't save the world. You can't. Now if you say, "But we aren't to be passive, are we?" No, no, we're to vote and we're to do the things that God has called us to do. If we're policemen we are to exercise our powers. If we are politicians, we would exercise our powers. But we must not get our eyes off God and off Jesus and our relationship to him to try to save a world that God has already told us plainly is going one way. And we aren't meant to make the saving of the world in the sense of saving the whole society.

We're to evangelize the world but in the sense of trying to save the whole world from this terrible destruction, we're bent on trying to break scripture and you cannot break scripture. So it's very important that realists -- and that's what Christians really are, they are realists -- it's very important that as realists we see this thing is going from bad to worse. And we've certainly to do our duty and we've to vote and we've to respect authority where we find it, but we cannot save this place from eventual destruction because God himself has said that's the way it's moving.

You know you get it in that verse that I think we've looked at once before in II Thessalonians where God through Paul talked about the end times and the things that would happen. II Thessalonians 2:3-8, "Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exults himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you this?"

And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, and the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming."

Really, loved ones, you may say it's bad now but we are in a restrained period. I know it sounds strange but this is a period of restraint when there is still a legitimate authority and there is still a kind of respect for some authorities. But this is a restrained time and there'll come a time when men and women will become so lawless, and everybody will do what is right in their own eyes in what they judge to be right. Eventually the Holy Spirit will not any longer be able to hold back the stream of lawlessness and it will take over completely among us.

Then there will rise an anti-Christ figure who will claim by world governments that he can bring the place into order. Then they will become available and before our eyes, the destruction and the famine and the murders, such as we have never witnessed and never imagined.

Now if you say to me, "Well, how will it end? Will it ever end?" Yes, yes it will end. It will end and that's what this verse that we're studying today says. It's Romans 14 and we need to see it and we need to have confidence and see the certainty of it. Romans 14:11, "For it is written, 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.'" You see it says, "For it is written". God made Paul write that because it is written in the Old Testament and that's what Paul is really paraphrasing. If you look, you see down in the footnotes, you can see it says Isaiah 45:23. So turn back to that. That's where it is written.

God always assured us of that down through the years of the Old Testament He was saying the same thing. They're in the context of the universal Messiahship. Isaiah 45:23, "By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness; a word that shall not return." That's what Paul paraphrases, you see, by the words "as I live." But you can see how much is in that, "By myself I have sworn." Our God says, "From my mouth has gone forth in righteousness; a word that shall not return." In other words, this you can be in no doubt of. This is irrevocable. This is a statement that will come true. This will happen no other way but exactly as I have said. "To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear." [Isaiah 45:23b] And Paul paraphrases that as, "As long as I live, as I live, says the Lord, to me, every knee shall bow, every tongues shall swear."

Paul says, "God is saying, "As I at this moment live, as I am alive, as I am the one who keeps your hearts beating even those of you who oppose me, I keep your hearts beating because I love you. As I am holding together the protons and the neutrons of matter here in this universe and as I am holding together this society that wants to fall apart, as I am keeping the birds singing and the birds flying and the fish swimming, as I keep this whole planet in its orbit. As I live and I am in the position where at any moment I could cut it all off. As I live and have absolute control over all that's happening at this moment, so I tell you, to me, there'll come a time when to me, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess."

God assures us that that time will come, that there'll come a time when all of us will bow before him. Before that, this chaos will get worse. The chaos will become worse. We'll splinter more and more, we'll have more and more difficulty finding the unity that even the old Democrats managed to find this week. [USA Democratic convention] We'll have more and more difficulty finding that kind of unity. We'll have more and more difficulty living together.

As more and more of the wilder dictators get control of the nuclear weapons, so it'll become impossible. It will be a blackmail situation more and more. Until eventually we will do anything to keep these various individuals from pressing the wrong buttons and sending the weapons over. So we'll bow to this man that will come forward as the anti-Christ and will say, "I am the Christ." He will have many marks of Christ, much of the kindness of Christ's eyes, but he will claim that he will bring us unity and he will integrate all things. He will organize international trade. If you give him our weapons then he will bring peace and of course, we pitiful people will be at such a point then, having rebelled so often against Christ and against his representatives, we will be at the point where we have nothing we can do except bow before this one will of this man.

He will claim, of course as you know, to be the friend of Israel and then once he gets into a position of power, there will burst forth persecution and war and famine and cruelty such as we have never seen, known as the great period of tribulation. Then he will turn against Israel himself and will move against her until there is no hope for any man or woman in the world for peace in their lives. And then, at that time, Jesus will return in bodily form and at the great battle of Armageddon he will defeat these mighty forces of evil. And John describes what will happen, if you look at it. It's Revelation 20.

Revelation 20:1-15, "Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years were ended. After that he must be loose for a little while."

"Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom judgment was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life, and reigned with Christ a thousand years."

"The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years. And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be loosed from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations which are at the four corners of the earth, that is, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad earth and surrounded the camp of the saints in that beloved city; but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."

"Then I saw a great white throne and him who sat upon it; from his presence, earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done."

"And the sea gave up the dead in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead in them, and all were judged by what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; and if any one's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." This dear Book says that every knee will bow and all the Hitlers and

the Stalins and all the murderers and the oppressors and all the hypocrites and all the deceivers and all the whisperers will bow their knee before Jesus. And all will bow their knee.

Some of us who love him in this life and have bowed our knees and our wills and our lives before him because he is our king and we love him, we will bow our knee. But also we will bow to him as our King. So glad that he has come to his throne, but all men will bow their knee. Those who have never bowed it in this life will bow it as to a conqueror and a victor who now has all power. Then as this gentle presence of this Dear One with the pierced hands walks among us, we will fall to the right and to left as those books are opened and all things will be rectified. The little guys and the little girls who died this last week, they'll be vindicated and Jesus will treat them as they ought to be treated. And all those of you who have suffered maybe from the others, you too will be vindicated. And it's right to see that, to see it in love, not to see it in gladness but to see it in love and to see it in mercy for them. On that day God will set all things right.

That's why Emanuel Kant, the great German philosopher said, "There has to be a heaven, if only to rectify all the wrongs and injustices that operate in this present world." That is God's beloved sign. To give us this time of probation, to see ourselves as we really are, because he knows that this 70 years is a drop in the bucket. There is an eternity of peace and love and joy and understanding and meekness and kindness, that he will set up on that day when he comes. Then you remember the last part of the verse, Romans 14:11, "And every tongue shall give praise to God." You can see the little footnote 'U' underneath and you go down to the bottom of the page and you see it says "confess". Actually the Greek word is not "give praise". It is the word that means among other things confess. It's "ex homologueo". And "homo" is homogenous, you know, "the same", to make a thing same. Homogenous is the same kind and "homologueo" is to say the same thing.

So it says, "Everybody will say the same thing. They will all agree." Then "tou theo" are the next two Greek words and it's dative of respect. It means they will all agree in respect to God. That's what that verse means. It's not universalism. Some people have thought, "Oh, it means everybody will give praise to God, whether they have obeyed God in this life or not. They'll all see him and they'll all give praise to him." No. You do not change like that. What you are now, you will be then. As now, so then. As you're living your life now, so you will live it then. No, there will be no change in the twinkling of an eye in that sense. There'll be a change in the twinkling of an eye in our bodily form but not in the sense of suddenly changing our characters, no. That's why God left that man do that in McDonalds. That was his character. That was his nature. That's what he chose to become and so it will be here.

What this verse says is, "Every tongue shall agree in respect to God." Everybody will see -- the Stalins, the Maos, the Hitlers, the murderers, the fornicators -- they will all see this is God. This is God, obviously this is God, we can see this. We're wrong but this we have to acknowledge. This is God and they will all agree in respect to God. We will all agree that this is God and that he has given the judgment to his Son Jesus and that this Jesus is now going to judge their lives. That's what all of us will face.

There was a man in the first World War called Studdert Kennedy. He was a Chaplain in the trenches and was well known in those days. He wrote some poems and he was always trying to bring home to the dear guys that were dying in that squalid condition in those trenches, in that coarse kind of atmosphere, what we were all going to face at the end of this life. Of course, you'd think, "Well, to break those men, to break their wills, you had to impress upon them that this would be a wrathful judge filled with anger in his eyes coming down upon him." It's interesting to hear how Studdert

Kennedy describes it. He says,

"There ain't no throne,
and there ain't no books,

It's 'Im you've got to see,

It's 'Im, just 'Im, that is the Judge

Of blokes like you and me.

And boys I'd sooner frizzle up,

I' the flames of a burning 'Ell,

Than stand and look into 'Is face,

And 'ear 'Is voice say – 'Well?"

[Taken from the poem "Well?" by Geoffrey Anketell Studdert Kennedy]

That's it. The One that you and I face will have holes in his hands. He'll be the lamb that was dumb before shearers and didn't open his mouth. He'll be the meek and lowly one who was struck across the face and told to prophecy and instead prayed and loved them.

He'll be the one against whom people whispered and talked and he then turned around and died for them. That's the one that will judge you and me and that's the one into whose eyes you and I will look. We won't need any word from him to pronounce our judgment. Our spirits will either be like his or they'll be condemned by us. "Every knee will bow to him and every tongue confess that he is Lord."

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us, now and until we see Him face-to-face. Amen.