

Righteousness through Faith or Law

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Would you imagine that you had a friend whose father owned a service station and you'd known the friend for years but you never met his father. And your friend got a scholarship to an out-of-state college, and before he left he introduced you to his father explaining that it would be good, since you were just starting out on your own job life, you could get your car serviced there. And you could open an account with his dad at the service station.

And so you did that but you were just starting out on your own job life and it was the first time you had had your own money to manage for yourself, and so you began to find those old difficulties. You over scraped yourself financially, and you were always intending to pay that account that you had at the service station. But week would go by, and week would go by, and you'd keep getting gas and oil at the service station, yet you wouldn't pay the monthly account. And they'd just pile up in your apartment.

And more and more you'd feel worse and worse about your relationship with your friend's dad. This was a man that you didn't want to be alienated from, you wanted to have a good relationship with him for the sake of your friend but really, you got more and more concerned and more and more embarrassed when you went to the station each day for gas. Until eventually you decided the easiest thing is to avoid the problem all together. And you just stopped going. And the whole thing lies heavily on your conscience because you've a massive bill there and yet you couldn't do anything about it.

And then the summertime came and your friend came home from school. And you explained the whole miserable story to him. And he said, "That's okay I'll make it right with my dad." And you said to him, "No, no I've just blown the whole thing. I've just spoiled the whole relationship completely."

But the next day your friend came to see you and he said, "Its okay, everything is alright. I've made things right with my dad. You can go back and you can get your gas there."

And you were hesitant at the beginning. You didn't feel really that anything could have made that mess right, the bills were so big and yet two or three days later you decided, "Well, I'll go back and I'll get my gas there." And you drove into the station and the dad came out and he saw you and he said, "Really good to see you. Really good to see you. Boy, for a while I didn't know what to think of you, but my son, he paid all your bills, and if my son trusts you that much then I trust you. Now I hope you'll come back and get all you want here." And suddenly the whole thing is right.

Now, do you see that you had only confidence to come back to the service station because you really believed what your friend said? You believed that he had made everything right even though it had seemed impossible for anybody to make it right. You believed that he had made things right with his father.

Now do you see it's the same with us? It's the same with us. You are right with the Creator of the world when you believe what Jesus has said. And Jesus has said, "Listen, I have made things right. I've made things right with my Father and you can go to him and get all that you need from him and you need not fear."

And brothers and sisters, that's what we mean by saying that a person is made right with God by faith. Simply that by believing, by having faith that Jesus has actually made everything right with your Father, everything is right, and then going to your Father with complete confidence and receiving from him whatever you need.

Now that's being justified by faith. And the kind of faith, you remember -- it's described, if you'd like to look at it there in Romans 4:18. We've been talking about it over a couple of months anyway, but Romans 4:18 describes it. It's the kind of faith that old Abraham had in God. "In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations; as he had been told, 'So shall your descendants be.' He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead because he was about a hundred years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was 'reckoned to him as righteousness.'" And that's that 4:22: just he believes that God would rejuvenate Sarah's body and would enable her, even though she was 90 years of age to have a baby; just the way we would go to the service station. And even though everything seemed impossible, and it seemed impossible that this man should deal with us at all generously, yet we would go back in complete confidence that the son had made everything right with the father. And we would go expecting to receive. So old Abraham went to God expecting him to rejuvenate Sarah's body and to give life to the old dead body.

Now do you see that the problem was not Abraham's inability to believe that God could do it? That was no problem. Abraham knew that God was the one who raised people from the dead. He knew that God was the one that stretched the galaxy and the stars across the heavens. He knew that God could do it. Abraham's difficulty was 'would' God do it? Would God give supernatural uncreated life to his wife? And why didn't he have any problem believing that? Because he knew that in the old ancient days the old father of mankind Adam had defied God and had refused God's uncreated life away at the beginning of the world. He knew that Adam had said to God, "No, I'll live on my own resources and my own way for my own purposes."

And Abraham knew through what his predecessors had told him that because of that God had pulled back this eternal uncreated life from mankind and from any opportunity of him receiving it. And so Abraham knew that that was man's situation.

He remembered, you see, what you and I read in Genesis 3, if you'd like to look at it. Genesis 3:24, Abraham knew that this would happen. That mankind had defied God and had said we'll do without your life and because of that God had withdrawn his life from them as it says in Genesis 3:24, "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." And old Abraham knew that.

He knew that there was no reason on earth why this man should extend anymore credit to him. He knew there was no reason on earth why this Creator should give him uncreated life, why he should turn back the process of death in his wife's womb, because he along with all the rest had defied God.

Abraham knew the stories of the flood. He knew how God had proved to man again and again, "Look, I'm finished with you." God had mowed them all down in the flood and had said, "Look, you've defied me! I am not giving you eternal life! Look at this life that is dying now in the midst of the

flood. This isn't eternal uncreated life, this is dying life." And Abraham knew that. He knew the great judgments of God that had come upon mankind by which God had impressed upon man again and again, "Look, the life you have is not uncreated spiritual life that can turn a woman's womb of 90 into a womb of 35. It isn't that kind of life that you have. It's a death life that you have now because you've defied me."

And yet you see, Abraham was faced with one problem and you might like to look at it. It's in Genesis 6:17. You see this is the way God treated mankind after they defied him. And Abraham knew that, "For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall die." But this is what baffled Abraham, Verse 18, "But I will establish my covenant with you." And God was speaking to Noah, "And you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you." And Abraham was faced with the problem that God hadn't destroyed Noah.

And dear ones, I don't know how Abraham knew it because there was no cross raised on Calvary at that time. But somehow Abraham knew that there had been a lamb slain from the foundation of the world in place of Noah and because of that lamb that had been slain from the foundation of the world, instead of Noah, God had been able to give his life to those people who believed that. And it was because Abraham grasped that through the revelation of the Holy Spirit in his spirit that someone had already died in his place and that God was therefore free to make available his life to any man that believes that; it was because of that that Abraham was able to believe that God would rejuvenate Sarah his wife.

Do you see that that's what is needed by us? Do you see there are thousands of us in this world who feel alienated from the being behind the universe and feel alienated from each other? And so many of us are trying to remove this sense of alienation by proving that we're good, or proving that it's worth God's while by giving us all the things that we need, or proving that it's other people's worthwhile. It's worth their while to give us the respect that we ought to have.

But do you see that that's why Christianity has turned out so many moral do-gooders?

There are so many people trying to prove, "Look, we're good enough to receive your life, God. We're good enough. We're good enough." Do you see that it's not a matter of being good enough; it's believing that some son has made things right between you and his father. It's believing that some Son has died for the things, the defiance that you have shown to God and because that Son has died for that, that the Father no longer treats you as a rebel. He no longer treats you as somebody who is defiant; he treats you as somebody that he has no reason to withhold his life from.

You see this morning loved ones, the Father is bending over you and me and saying, "Look my children, I really love you. I know you've done things that should make me condemn you to death, but don't you see that my Son has died that death for you and I have no reason to withhold anything that you need from you. I'm willing to give you anything you need." And you see, we're sort of crouching down and saying, "But I'm not good enough." But do you see that Abraham wasn't good enough? Abraham continued in dishonest ways even after God dealt with him but Abraham did believe that there had been a lamb slain from the foundation of the world who had died in his place and had made it possible for God to remain a just God and yet forgive people who had rebelled against him. And that's our situation. And there are thousands of voices from our parents up through our school teachers, to our professors at university. Everybody is trying to say the same thing, "You're not good enough. You're not good enough."

Loved ones, it isn't a case of being good enough. Do you see that? Christianity isn't first and foremost a case of being moral and goodie, goodie. Christianity is first and foremost seeing that you deserve death. You don't deserve a thing from God's hands, but because his Son has died for you the Father has changed everything. He's willing to give you anything you want.

Now do you see, going back to the service station, that there would have been no relationship between you and your friend's father if you had not sooner or later gone back to that station for gas? You see that? It was no use you saying, "Oh yeah Tom," or, John, or whatever his name was, "I believe you've made things right with your father; still I'll deal with Fish Skelly [a different gas station operated by the business ministry]." (That's the advantage you can do commercials half way through.) It was no use you saying you see, "No, I believe you've made things right but I'm not going back to that station."

The only way a relationship was possible between you and the Father was when you actually drove that car back into the station and went there for gas.

Now do you see that's what's wrong with so many of us? There's so many of us saying, "Oh, I believe in Jesus. I believe that Jesus has done something that enables his Father to be my friend. I believe that Jesus has done something that enables God to give me anything I need." But, we never go to him. We never go to him. We keep saying every Sunday, "Yeah, I believe Jesus died so that God could give me the tree of life. I believe that Jesus died so God could give me health. I believe that Jesus died so that God could meet my financial needs." But, we never go to God for those and so we never have a relationship with him.

Now loved ones, being justified by faith is not only believing that something has happened on the cross and Calvary to enable God to be open and generous to you, but it's a business of trusting God, treating God as a dear loving Father. See, it's as if God is behind that curtain there and he's trying to get through to you, and he's trying to say, "Look, look my hands are open to you," and you're saying, "Okay, stay there, stay there. I'll believe that. I'll believe that but I'm not going to treat you like that." Now do you see the Father wants you to treat him as a dear loving Father? Now that means you see that you begin to turn from your own resources. That's part of being justified by faith that you turn from your own resources.

Now, would you look at a record of Abraham's life that would illustrate it? Genesis 13:2-9, "Now Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. And he journeyed on from the Negeb as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place where he had made an altar at the first; and there Abram called on the name of the Lord. And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, so that the land could not support both of them dwelling together." That was the problem. "For their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together, and there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle. At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites dwelt in the land. Then Abram said to Lot, 'Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen; for we are kinsmen. Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left.'"

Now that's treating God as your loving father. Not grabbing at everything that you can but trusting God to give you what you need. In other words, if you're really treating God as a dear loving

father this morning you'll stop being covetous. You see? You'll stop grabbing at everything that you can get hold of either in your job or from your roommate. You'll really believe that this dear loving Father will give you whatever you need and therefore you won't have any need to grab, and be greedy, and be covetous. And loved ones, then you don't have to worry about your financial resources.

You don't have to be troubled about, "Will I get this or will he get that?" But you're willing to do what Abram said, "Okay, you take the best land and I'll take this land. Okay, you take the stuff to your right; I'll take the stuff to my left." But do you see Abraham treated God as a dear loving Father who would give him whatever he needed and that's being justified by faith.

Now loved ones, you see it's the same with us. It means, turning from our own resources. Okay, so you need energy so you turn from the caffeine. That's it; you just turn from the caffeine. You don't have four cups so that you'll have enough energy for the day; you turn from your own resources and you trust God, your dear loving Father to give you all the energy you need so you don't need to drink all that coffee to produce all that energy. You don't need to depend on your own resources. You don't need to depend on the old tranquilizers for peace. You turn from your own resources.

Loved ones, that's proof that you're trusting your Father you see. There's no point in going to Fish Skelly if you really trust your loving Father. If you trust this Son to have made things right with his Father then you'll go to his service station. Now do you see that going to tranquilizers is going to another service station? And if God is a dear loving Father who will give you whatever you need, then he'll give you peace when you need it. He'll give you peace and he expects you to turn from your own resources of peace and to turn to him for his peace.

It's the same with the whole business of sex and lust, you know. Is the Father not able to give us a sense of eternity? Is he not able to give us a sense of exhilaration through his Spirit? Or, does the Father expect us to go to some other service station to get those things? You see, God expects us to show that we trust him as a dear loving father by turning from our own resources for getting exhilaration or getting a sense of eternity and going to him and trusting him for that.

And it's the same with the old heroin, it's the same for that desire, for that sense of transcendence or going to the eastern religions for that sense of transcendence to try to get away from this creeping pedestrian world. Is the Father not able to give you that sense of transcendence himself through his Spirit?

Well, do you see that if you really believe that Jesus has done something that enables your creator to give you whatever you need, you'll prove that by turning from your own resources and going to his? And you know it means not only turning from your own resources in that way but turning from your own resources as far as defending your own life is concerned. There's a peace in Abraham's life that brings it out if you look at Genesis 14:21.

In Genesis 14:21, Abraham had just won a battle, you remember. "And the king of Sodom said to Abram, 'Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself.' But Abram said to the king of Sodom, 'I have sworn to the Lord God Most High, maker of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal-thong or anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.' I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me; let Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre take their share.'" Abram was justified in taking his share of the spoils but do you see when you trust God as your dear loving father you don't even need to take what is your

right.

So you don't even need to get indignant to defend yourself. You don't need to get that old indignation when somebody takes advantage of you. You say, "No, I trust my Father to guard me. I trust my Father to defend me." You don't need to get angry to ensure they give you the respect that is your due, "No, I trust my Father to give me whatever I need." You don't need to get selfish to try to protect yourself in this weird world, you trust the Father to give you whatever you need. You see, it means turning from all your own resources and turning to the Father and trusting him to give you what you need. Not taking anything from anybody else which you can get from him.

And then it means doing what Abram did. It means, putting yourself into positions that are only reasonable if God is a dear loving Father. It means that. It means putting yourself into positions and situations that are only reasonable, even half reasonable if God is a dear loving Father who will come through every time. And there's an instance in Abram's life. Genesis 12:1-4, "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves.'" That was what God was asking Abraham to trust him for. And Verse 4, "So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran." And you remember, went out not knowing whither he went.

Now do you see, God is asking you and me to go out onto that kind of life? It means committing yourself to a Christian Corps [CCI = Christian Corps International], to something, to some outreach for God. To something that is way beyond anything that your own resources can face, and trusting your God to come through with all that you need. Now that's what justifying faith is about.

Loved ones, it is not – it is not – I have great respect for Bloomington [suburb of Minneapolis where Campus Church was located]. Bloomington is a lovely place, but it is not getting a little house in Bloomington, getting enough life insurance and social security to protect you, and your children, and the dog, and staying there for 50 long years. That is not it. It is trusting the Father. It is going out into situations that are only half reasonable if God is a dear loving Father who will give you whatever you need. That is what it means to be justified by faith, you see.

And then God looks down and he sees not a bunch of people singing hymns and saying, "We believe you Lord. We believe you Lord." But he sees a group of heroes and heroines who are going out into situations that require his supplies and his resources, and require him to prove to all the world that he has nothing against them, and that he will give them whatever they need because of Jesus.

Now where do you stand yourself? I think what we need to do is be sensible. If you see some areas of your life this morning where you have been turning to your own resources and therefore where it cannot be said of you, "That's why his faith was counted to him as righteousness," then you should say that this morning to God, you see. You should say, "Father, I see I've been talking big but I've been acting small. So Father, I'm turning from my own resources there from this day on and I'm going to trust you for these resources." And really, that's what God wants today.

But he doesn't want a whole lot of high and mighty resolves and beautiful aspirations and holy intentions. He wants us to settle some things with him today. If you've been going to the old

caffeine for energy, more energy to face the day or the old tranquilizers just to “steady my nerves, to steady my nerves,” well then if you’ve been doing that, then go to the Father. If you’ve been trying to defend yourself all the time instead of trusting him to defend you, then God wants you to put a stake in the ground today about that.

But you see that’s the kind of faith that is counted as righteousness. That’s the kind of faith that makes us right with God, where you actually go to the right service station and you receive what he is willing to give you. And that’s God’s wish for us. And you’ll find him the same as we found him: he is a dear loving Father and he will give you whatever you need, and he will provide every need of yours. He knows your needs. You know your luxuries, he knows your needs. But he will supply all our needs and really he has nothing against us because of Jesus.

So, I really pray that someone, anyway, this morning will begin to see that there’s a higher way to go, and will begin to go that way, and trust God as their Father.