

Jesus' Death Reconciles – Jesus' Life Saves

Romans 5:10

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

The verse that we're studying this morning states the heart of the truth God has shown us over the past years here on campus, at the University of Minnesota. It might be good brothers and sisters if you'd look at that verse. It's Romans 5:10. "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life." And what we've said in our churches was that we believed in the first part of the verse, you see the bit, "While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." But we have very little experience of the second part of the verse in our own lives -- of being saved by Jesus' life.

So many of us have felt we were children of God but we weren't like children of God inside in our own lives. Maybe the simplest way to express it is to tell you how it worked in my own life. I was brought up in an ordinary Methodist church in Belfast, Ireland. They shared again and again the truth that Jesus had died for us. When I was about 13, at Sunday school, I thought I'd give my life to God.

What I did was become a believer in God. I began to believe that there was a God and I would ask him to help me when things were difficult. Belfast was a shipyard city and during the war the Germans got as far as Belfast because of the oil tankers that were being built there. When the bombs would come over and my father (an electrician) would be down in the shipyard taking care of his job, I would pray that God would help him. I would pray that God would help me in my classes and in my school work. When my mother was sick I would pray that God would heal her.

I believed in God but that was really about it. That's the way it went through high school until I was 17. I really felt I was a Christian but all I was, was a believer. I believed that there was a God, and that he was a loving and a kind God. Then at 17, I began to come up against some of the old problems of sex that many of us come into guilt over. I began to feel that I was not fit to stand before God at all and I had real trouble fitting Jesus into my Christian life. I really couldn't quite see how important Jesus was.

I saw that he showed us what God was like but he was not vitally important or precious to me. I remember a fellow that was training in the Presbyterian seminary saying to me, "Do you really believe that Jesus has died for you? And if you were the only person in the whole world, do you believe he would have died for you?"

Well, loved ones, I really didn't believe that. I believed that Jesus had died for the whole world to make it a better world, but I didn't feel a personal obligation at all to Jesus. Although I acted in many ways like a Christian (because I was brought up in a kind of Christian environment) inside my own heart I hadn't a real burning love of Jesus. There was guilt because the moral failings were lying heavy on my heart. I saw quite plainly that if you sin, the wages of sin was death. I saw that God, a holy God, was committed to destroy all people that weren't holy.

That began to weigh on me. I began to realize that I wasn't fit to stand before God at all. Each time I'd fail, the guilt would come in more and more until the guilt became debilitating itself. I began to lack even the motivation to be good. I began to realize that there must be something better

in Christianity than this.

So I began to do what many Catholics do. I began to dwell on the fact of Jesus' death. I stopped my prayer times where I prayed for all the missionaries all over the world and I started just to concentrate on Jesus' death. I began to try and settle in my mind, "Had this really taken place? Was there really a spot in Palestine somewhere where the cross had actually been stuck in the ground?" I started to read the historical documents that are behind the New Testament. I began to think, "Had Jesus, this man who says he was the Son of God, at one time hung on a cross – had he actually thought of me at that moment?"

Brothers and sisters, after nights and nights of doing that in my prayer times, gradually it came home to my own spirit. I don't know how when Jesus looked down at the Roman soldiers and said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do," he was actually looking right down the centuries at me and he was saying, "Father forgive him for he doesn't know what he is doing." Now it was after that, that I began to see that it was because Jesus bore the death penalty that the just and holy God was then free to forgive an unholy person like me.

At that particular moment, all I sensed was that Jesus was actually miraculously interested in me at the moment he died and that he actually died in my place. God was not demanding my death from me but he was willing to receive me as a child of his own. So, there and then, faith sprang up in my heart to receive Jesus into my life. I reckon I really became a Christian when I was 17. I entered into the first part of that verse.

I really felt I was reconciled to God. If you'd asked me, "Are you afraid of dying?" I would say, "No, I am not afraid of dying." If you said to me, "Is God really your Father?" I would say, "Yes, he is really my Father." If you would ask me, "Do you know Jesus personally?" I would say, "Yes, I know Jesus personally." And so I went to university in Ireland for three or four years. I trained as an English teacher and then felt God calling me into the Methodist ministry. I taught for two years at my old high school and then went into seminary for three years.

During all that time leading up to age 26 when I was ordained in the Irish Methodist ministry, I had one particular problem in my life. I could pray to Jesus and sense he was there in my room with me, but then I could deliberately sin. Now that was it. I could actually see him, sense his presence and then turn around and sin -- either an act or in thought or in word. That developed more and more in my life from the years 17 to 26.

I just found it more and more impossible to live the way a Christian was supposed to live. At the beginning it took place deep down inside me. It was a kind of inward sin that nobody else would have seen. It was present in my motives. You know the way churches try to encourage us bright young Christians. They ask you to read the lesson or to do something in the service and you do it for God's glory. Then people would come up and praise you and doubt would creep in. "Well, for God's glory?" "Well, yes, 75 percent for his glory and 25 percent for mine." As the years went on, it didn't get easier, it seemed to get worse.

The double motive life began to get worse inside me and it would show itself in attitudes. I knew that a Christian shouldn't worry. I knew that you shouldn't worry, but you should cast your care completely on the Father. You should walk joyful and peaceful and in utter contentment whatever your circumstances were like. But brothers and sisters, I spent hours and hours worrying about the

examination the next day or worrying about what was going to happen to my finances six months from then, worrying what I was going to do when I grew up, what I was going to do for a career or worrying what I was going to do when tomorrow's problem came up. I found that in my attitudes I did not have the attitude of a Christian.

I would want to love people because Christians are supposed to love people but I would come up against somebody who had criticized me and there would come up from inside me a sharp, satirical, caustic attitude of hostility towards them that I couldn't control. It showed itself in responses.

I was okay when I was all prepared and prayed up to meet somebody but if the wrong person came along or if something happened that I wasn't ready for....like the motorbike I had in Ireland. It was the bane of my life. I'd be changing the oil or couldn't get the bolt on properly and there would be a mixture of blood and oil flowing down and at those moments I was not a Christian at all.

My reaction was out, the irritability was out, and the bad temper was out immediately. Outside I was the preacher, the budding Methodist minister but when I'd go home with my parents, I was just a miserable little person that caused continual fighting and disagreement in the home. That was the problem.

Outwardly, I knew that Jesus had died for me. You couldn't have shaken me in that. I knew I was a Christian but inside, I was an absolute mess. I had no experience of being saved by Jesus' life. I was just the same miserable old person inside that I had been before I ever met Jesus. Now that's how it worked out in my life. I walked like that through ordination, and served Methodist churches in Ireland. I had a church in London, then came to Minneapolis and had Methodist churches here. But all the time I still had that problem inside. It was just a hypocritical, double life.

I tried on the outside to be like Jesus but inside I was not like Jesus at all. That continued until I was 31 and came to the States. I was about 6 months here when I began to see I could not continue in the ministry with this kind of bluff in my life. It was about then, (God is so good to us you know, he arranges you to come to this service this morning or....) God arranged for me to go to a little place in North Minneapolis where they asked me to speak. I spoke and talked of what I thought a victorious life could be.

John Wesley founded Methodism and Wesley preached that you could live a victorious life above irritability and above sin and above impatience and anger. I used to read those flowing sermons of his and wonder how you got up there. I shared the kind of victory that I thought was possible. A fellow at the back, who must have been about 42 at that time, came up to me afterwards. He was a pastor of the church and he explained, "I was in Bolivia for four years as a missionary and I lived the same kind of miserable life as you lived. A year ago, God delivered me from it." That was the first time I had ever met anybody who claimed to live inside the way they appeared to live outside.

It was the first time I had met anybody that suggested that the life could actually be utterly victorious. He told me what had happened to him. Then he gave me an old book by a Methodist Bishop called "Possibilities of Grace". I read it and got to work. By that time I had been on the Christian way for 14 years. I was fed up, ready for suicide, fed up with the whole thing.

So I began to work and this is the way it worked, dear ones. I began to see that all my introspection had taken me as deep as didn't matter. I saw some of the bad things that were inside me but I didn't see what the cause of all that evil inside was. I gave up the introspection. I gave

up examining my own mind and attitude. Instead, I started to speak to the Holy Spirit.

Now you may say, "You were a fool. You were ordained; you had two degrees and theology training so you must know the Holy Spirit as a person." Yes, I knew it in my head but I never treated the Holy Spirit as a real counselor in my life. So I began to speak to the Holy Spirit and say, "Holy Spirit, will you show me why I am in this mess that I am in? Will you show me why I am not like Jesus inside and why it's beginning to burst out into my outer life?" I just began to pray to the Holy Spirit and that seemed heretical to me.

I was brought up as an ordinary Methodist. I knew nothing about the Holy Spirit and it seemed heretical to pray to anybody but God the Father or God the Son. But I started to ask the Holy Spirit to do what Jesus said he ought to do. He said, "The Holy Spirit will counsel you and will lead you into all truth." The Holy Spirit began to counsel me and he began to show me that there was a degree of egotism inside me that I had never dreamed of before.

He began to show me verses like, "We were crucified with Christ." He began to show me, "You aren't crucified with Christ. You're ready to be born of the Spirit and to come alive with God but you're not ready to die. That's why you're not saved by Jesus' life." Because Jesus died we can live, but unless we die, he cannot live. I had never died.

I had come alive all right, but I had taken with me all the dirt and the egotism that was still inside. The Holy Spirit started to show me, "Look, you must be willing to die with Christ." I asked the Holy Spirit, "What do you mean?" He said, "When you get angry, you get angry because you want to keep things under your control."

Now Jesus, as he was walking down the Calvary road, sensed that things were no longer in his control. They were in the control of God, his Father and he couldn't change anything. It was only God that could change it. That's what it means to die with Jesus. It means to be willing for him to let things run as he wants them to run and for you not to call "uncle" before God wants to stop it. It means letting him stop things when he wants to. Dying to self means giving up the right to control your own life. Loved ones, I felt that it was every educated man's right to control his own life, to control his career, control the amount of money he made, control his circumstances and his vacations. It was new to me that I was expected to die with Jesus to controlling my own circumstances and my own life.

Then the Holy Spirit would show me that there was incredible pride in my life -- a great selfish ambition and great desire. We men seem to all have it, don't we? We seem to have to achieve things. We're brought up with the idea, "Now, you're going out in the world. You are the son; you have to achieve something great." We lie under that burden of achieving something great -- it drives us and hounds us.

You know the way it makes us walk over other people just to achieve something worthwhile and establish our own significance in the world. The Holy Spirit began to show me, "You must be willing to die an insignificant nothing, to die as Jesus died if it is his will for you." Bit-by-bit, the Holy Spirit started to show me, in what way I had never been willing to die to self and be crucified with Jesus.

He went into the whole area of lust and he began to show me, "The lust is there because you own your own body. You think you have the right to do with your body whatever you want. You think you have

the right to get whatever satisfaction you want for it. Now, you must die to your right to controlling your own body. You must die to the right to any physical satisfaction or any emotional satisfaction."

Brothers and sisters, do you see it's because we have not died that we're parasites on everybody else. With our girl friends, we're trying to draw enough affection from them to satisfy us. With our husbands we're trying to draw enough attention from them to give us a sense of value and well being. With our friends, we are trying to trample over enough of them to get to the top of the heap to persuade ourselves that we've succeeded. It's because we really have never died and never accepted that we were crucified 1900 years ago and that there's no self to succeed. It's because we haven't accepted that that we are filled with so much self and so much self-assertiveness and so much self-defensiveness.

Gradually, the Holy Spirit began to take me deep down into areas that I had never known before -- areas that had never been revealed to me before in my life. I began to go down into a place that I had never seen existed. There I saw a massive ego, a great, giant of a monster that demanded to be God not only in my little world but actually wanted to be God over other people's world as well.

Loved ones, don't you see that's why we get irritable with people? We get irritable with people because we think we alone know the way they should behave. We think that they're opposing us, who know the way they should behave. Loved ones, it may be that the way they behave is the right way. Maybe our timing is not the right timing. We get impatient with people because we think we have the right for everything to go our way.

Brothers and sisters, it's impossible to get life going like that, do you see that? You're not going to get everything going your way and God's plan is that we should accept our position as Jesus accepted his -- a real position where we give the control of our lives completely over to him. Gradually the Holy Spirit took me down and down. It didn't get better, it got worse. I got harder to live with, more and more irritable, more and more bad tempered and that's the way it goes. It gets worse before it gets better.

The Holy Spirit brings you into more and more situations until you see, "Unless I go through with this, I can find no deliverance at all." Several times I thought, "No, I don't need to die. I can go along with a little more of a Holy Spirit and do better than I've been doing." The Holy Spirit would allow me to come into a situation where I would go to pieces again and inside would be a mess.

Gradually he wore me down and pointed out to me, "Now listen, you are crucified with Jesus. Are you willing to accept that? Are you willing, really willing to die to yourself, to die to your desire for success? Are you willing to be nothing for me if I want you to be?" One Saturday morning in a parsonage in North Minneapolis, I at last came to the place where I said, "Yes". It was a miracle. I didn't stand up and dance and I didn't have a whole lot of emotional effusiveness. I just had a quiet assurance that the Holy Spirit had come into my life and filled me. I felt no more envy or anger or jealousy inside.

Brothers and sisters, it was a transformation. Later on the Holy Spirit gave me experience of gifts of the Spirit and of ministry and power but at that point it was a deliverance from that inward defeat I had suffered for years. I at last began to experience what it meant to be "saved" by Jesus' life. Jesus' life was actually able to replace mine completely if I was willing to give up and let God. That's really the big change that came in my life about seven years ago. It just changed

everything.

It is only then that you began to get outward conflicts. You thought your life was hard until it came to that point. But when the Holy Spirit really fills you with himself, then he leads us into difficulties, trials, problems and conflicts. What was amazing was to walk through them with absolute peace and contentment because at last I hadn't that old thing on my shoulder saying, "Are you going to succeed? Are you going to succeed?"

At last I had a real willingness to be whatever God wanted me to be. Now it seems to me that that's what we mean by being not only born of the Spirit or reconciled to God by the death of Jesus but actually being saved by Jesus' life. The Christian life doesn't really begin in fullness until you come into that deliverance.

Now you may come into it differently from me and I have to walk in it. If I don't keep my position in Jesus on the Cross, all that miserable pettiness and selfishness just bursts out again. It's not a work that is done once and forever and then you never have to have it done again. It is done day-by-day by the Holy Spirit. It is maintained in you day-by-day but you have to enter into it initially in one definite time of consecration.

If you're in a Baptist church, you'll probably call it consecration rather than being filled with the Spirit. But it is a point where you are really willing to die to yourself and to your own life and really willing to let Jesus live his life through you. When that moment comes, the Holy Spirit fills you and delivers you from that inward sin.

Now that's really what we mean when we say, "If we have been reconciled to God by the death of his Son, now that we are reconciled, how much more shall we be saved by his life?" Brothers and sisters, you can actually be saved from today's envy, jealousy, anger, worry and depression by the life of Jesus. You can be saved from those things by the life of Jesus flowing through you today. It's not true that the Christian life is one of defeat. It's not true that it's an up and down life as mine used to be.

It's not true that it's a life fighting anger and fighting envy and fighting jealousy. It's not true that it's a life continually confessing old sins that you've been committing for years. The Christian life when it's being saved by Jesus' life is a life of real victory inside and that's what God has started to show us here on the campus. That's really what the world wants to see.

The world for years has seen a body of people who call themselves the church. They talk a lot and do nothing. The world for years has seen people who preach but don't live as they preach. Now the world needs to see people who live like they say they live. Loved ones, it can only come through that being saved by Jesus' life.

I'd ask you to be honest with yourselves. Stop all this pretending that a Christian who gets angry, gets jealous, gets envious, lies under depression and worry for hours and hours, and runs cold wars with his wife or his family, that that kind of person is the kind of person that God is pleased with and wants.

God wants you to be different from that. He is patient with you while you're like that but he has a deliverance from that that he can provide for you. It's found in that experience of being ready to die with Christ to yourself and allowing him to fill you completely with his Holy Spirit. Then he

takes you on into the other things -- into the ministry of the gifts, into healings, and into tongues and into other things. But basically he has to get first of all, your inside, your heart. He wants a clean heart.

So would you be honest this morning? You know how often we've sat in churches and listened to the pastor preaching away and we've said, "Yes, yes, I agree, I agree", then we walk out and we're nothing like that. Would you be honest about your own life today? Do you have real trouble with the thought life? Do you brothers have problems with pride, and ambition that drives you relentlessly on? And you sisters, do you have trouble with the caddishness, sarcasm and tearing the other person down?

Well, do you see that all that comes from a person who really is not willing to share everything with her Lord or with his Lord? Loved ones, we cannot share heaven with Jesus, if we do not share death with him. There's no resurrection unless there's a death. Now it may not come the way mine came. It may come differently. It may come more gently for you. But it needs to come where you are delivered from those things and it is the Holy Spirit within you that motivates your life.

We'll try to share these truths during the next year because Romans 5 on through the next five chapters deals with the sanctified life -- the life that is changed by God's Spirit. We'll be sharing them Sunday-by-Sunday. You do need to begin to deal with God about it yourself. Let us pray.

Father, we trust you to draw us again to the close place with yourself at the foot of Jesus' Cross so that we can begin to see ourselves as we really are in comparison with Jesus. We need to see that the only way we can ever be like him is for him to come and live inside us freely, unrestrained, and uninhibited with all of our old selves crucified on the Cross and with his Spirit alone motivating us. So Father, we trust you now to begin to deal with each one of us during this coming year so that we may enter completely into this life that you have planned for us for Jesus' sake. Amen.