

The Gift

Romans 6:23

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Shall we pray? Lord Jesus, we thank you for the real relationship you've brought us all into. We thank you for all the brothers and sisters in our body here who really give and give lots of things to you and don't ask anything because you have given everything to them. So Lord, we thank you for our brother and sister and trust you to anoint them with the Holy Spirit so that they will always really set you forth and that all the beauty of the music, beauty of the harmony will set forth your own beauty and your own harmony in their lives and that you'll do the same in each one of us for your glory. Amen.

Once upon a time, there was a very wealthy man. I hope you enjoy the story because I made it up yesterday. There was a very wealthy man who had a large estate in the Virgin Islands in the Caribbean and he had plenty of lakes, plenty of trees, rivers, beautiful meadows and valleys. He had planes and boats and cars and everything really that you could want to enjoy life and he had a dear son that he loved a great deal and he wanted the very best for the son.

He wanted the son to have the things that really lasted forever. He wanted the son to have just the security of someone's love and friendship so that he'd have that all the time. He'd just know that somebody loved him and accepted him and he'd have the security that that brings. He wanted the son really to have the enjoyment of somebody's love – oh, the deepest thing in the world is a personal relationship with somebody that you can really trust -- and he wanted the son to enjoy that kind of loving relationship with himself.

He wanted the son to have complete confidence as far as the provision of all his physical needs was concerned and he planned to give him whatever he needed. The son, however, as the years passed, became more and more attached to the estate, became more and more involved in the things that his father owned. And he set out more and more to live a life that was just independent of his father and set out to meet all his needs without his father's friendship at all. So he tried to satisfy the old enjoyment business just by getting more and more powerboats, and faster and faster planes; he tried to get all the emotional enjoyment he could through that kind of thing. He decided that he could fill his own needs and anyway, they were greater than obviously what his father wanted him to have, so he began to sell the produce of the vineyards and the fields and to take all the income himself so that he could buy all the clothes and all the food and all the friends that he needed.

He tried to get satisfaction for his own need for acceptance and recognition through the people that gradually surrounded him and lionized him because of his money and so he tried to live off their adulation and their admiration. Of course as the years passed, he himself grew more and more frustrated about these things and the more he had, the more meaningless the whole thing became.

The more he began to feel he was God and he could do what he wanted, it seemed the more purpose he lost in life. And life became more and more meaningless and purposeless day-after-day and I presume he felt something like people like Marilyn Monroe [a movie star actress] must feel eventually when all they do is try to enjoy themselves or try to get other people's acknowledgement and admiration day-after-day, and his own life became more and more meaningless.

He became more and more frustrated as there is a limit to how far a plane can fly or how fast a boat can go and he became more and more frustrated with that. Of course as he saw the fans that surrounded him and gave him such a very passing transitory kind of acknowledgment and recognition, he began to feel that there was no point in his life any longer. His body became more and more dissipated and eventually he died in loneliness and frustration.

Now, dear ones that is what the last verse of this present chapter says. He lived independent of his father, tried to fill all his needs apart from the way his father planned, that's sin. The wages of sin is death, but if he had listened to his father and had really followed out his father's plan, the gift of God would have been eternal life in Christ Jesus. That's really what the verse says and the story is not at all worthy of Eugene O'Neill or of O'Casey but it does give you an analogy or an illustration or an allegory of our own situation because it's the same deal, really.

We have a dear loving Father. Here's a beautiful place. Except that he has hundreds and thousands of them in one galaxy and he has hundreds of thousands of galaxies in the whole universe and he wanted the same thing. He wanted us really to have the security of knowing someone, really the most important person in the whole place -- who loved us and accepted us. He wanted us to have that security. And he really wanted us to have the enjoyment of somebody's love that was continual and the same, day after day after day. He wanted us to enjoy that and he really wanted us to feel confident that he would really supply all our needs, that there's nothing that we'd have to do without. That as he looked after the sparrows and the birds and the violets and the flowers and the trees, so he would look after us. And he wanted us to feel that way but in fact, what most of us have done, is we've taken the estate and we've decided, "Look, we can do it without you."

"We can get recognition from our friends and our peers by being extremely good at our job or extremely good at a particular talent. We can get all the acknowledgment and the recognition that we need that way. We don't need your acknowledgment or recognition. We can get all the enjoyment from this place you've given us. We can fly through the air faster than ever and it will give us a thrill. We can go through the water faster than ever and it'll give us enjoyment. We can even use each other to get enjoyment and we'll get emotional thrills that way, and as for our own physical needs, we'll fill our own physical needs as we need and by our own effort." Really what has happened, dear ones, is we've ended up just as dissipated physically as the fellow in the story. Many of us have ended up in real frustration. Many of us have ended up really feeling that there's nobody we can trust, that there's nobody who really accepts us or really loves us.

It is amazing, isn't it, if you look at us all in this theater and you know how much we've tried to get people to love us enough to satisfy us, how many of us still feel people don't love us enough. It would be interesting if we went round and asked each one of us, probably all of us would kind of answer, "Yeah, well I do feel a bit unloved at times. Yeah, I do feel that people don't give me the attention that I really ought to have."

It is incredible, isn't it, that when you go at it, apart from the dear Father who loves us and has a plan for us, the whole thing seems to go dead. Of course, we've been studying the only way out of that mess. The only way is to live as if the estate doesn't exist. That's really the only way out -- to live as if the estate doesn't exist. To live as if there aren't planes and cars to give you thrills. To live as if there aren't crops and vineyards that you can exploit for your own purposes to fill your own needs. To live as if there aren't peers around you and other people who will give you a sense of recognition and a sense of prestige and a sense of position. To live as if those things don't exist. In other words, really to live as if you're dead. To live as if you're not alive

in this world with all of us around you, and that's what we've been saying in Romans 6.

The whole thing that God was saying to us is, "Listen, you lot were such a mess that I had to put the will inside you that has become enslaved to that kind of life, I had to put it in my son Jesus and destroy it. So really you have been destroyed with Jesus and when you recognize that, then you'll begin to come free of all that stuff and you'll begin to be able to receive My gift which I've wanted to give you for years," and dear ones, that's it. God can only give you the gift of his approval and his recognition, the gift of his love and his warm friendship -- He can only make all those things real to you as a gift if you live as if you're dead to all the other things, that's really it.

Now, maybe you'd like to look at it, it's Romans 6 and you know we've often looked at the verse. Romans 6:6-7, "We know that our old self was crucified with him (with Jesus) so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and you might no longer be enslaved to sin." And sin, you see, is living like the fellow did, utterly dependent on the estate for recognition, for enjoyment and for getting what he needed physically instead of his father; it's just independence. Verse 7, "For he who has died is freed from that sin." And that's really the only way to go about.

What is the gift? Well, some people asked Peter on the day of Pentecost, "How do we please this Father whose son we killed?" and Peter said, "I want you to be baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of your sins and you'll receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." The gift that God can give you and me to meet all those needs that we're trying to get from the world and from each other, is the gift of the Holy Spirit. If you say, "What is the Holy Spirit?" God likened it to the water of life -- and water is colorless and tasteless but it still gives you life. And the Holy Spirit -- you can't feel where he is or where he's going and you can't see him -- but he is uncreated power that God can infuse into your life that will make the friendship that Jesus has with his Father, real in your life. You'll suddenly come into a friendship with God that you have never experienced before because Jesus had that friendship and has it at this moment and the Holy Spirit is able to make that real to you.

You saw how little Jesus lived on and you saw how little he cared for what people thought of him. He obviously was able to be looked upon as the dirt under people's feet and yet he seemed to be happy and at peace. He obviously was absolutely satisfied with the recognition that his Father gave him. He had really got free of slavery to man fear and slavery to reputation. Now the Holy Spirit is able to take that in Jesus and make it real in you miraculously. Jesus obviously trusted his Father completely. I don't know how many robes he had, it seems to us he hadn't much more than one robe because they only talk about one robe of Jesus and there never seems to be any talk about the other clothes that he had. It seems he had only probably what he stood up in and yet he obviously always had enough to keep him alive.

He had an absolute confidence and trust that his Father would give him all the physical needs that he required. Now the Holy Spirit is able to give you that same confidence miraculously. He is able to make it real inside you. That's the gift, dear ones. You can't work yourself into those things. No, you can't. That's what you try with mysticism. You see that? I mean I tried it with mysticism and I think that dear ones in Zen Buddhism try it and the Transcendental Meditation people try it and the Spiritualists try it. We try to get an immediate sense of God's presence, so that we can somehow enjoy his presence. We've tried all kinds of ways to work ourselves into that. It's not possible; it's a gift. The Holy Spirit makes real to you the closeness that Jesus has with his Father. It's a gift; it's a miraculous gift. If you're willing to die to the need of other people's

friendship and other people's recognition and other people's acknowledgment and adulation, God is able to make that real to you.

Lots of us tried this business of trying to get reputation, you know it. And one of the things that the brothers and sisters face every time they come up here to sing is, "Will they think I am a good singer? I hope they do." And one of the things we have to die to if God is going to use us at all is to come up here and say, "I don't care how the song goes. I don't care what anybody thinks. I don't care if I am never required to sing anywhere else. I am doing this for you, Lord." But you know loved ones, we all face it, don't we, and such corny things? You can crochet better than she can or you can knit better than she can or you can talk faster than he can or -- it doesn't matter, but we're wild people, you know it. We want to get some little thing that makes us a little different from everybody else to get ourselves recognized and acknowledged and maybe praised.

Loved ones, only when you die to that and you're ready to do without it, is the Holy Spirit able to make real to you the sense of recognition and the sense of acknowledgment that the Creator has for you. And loved ones, when you have that, you don't care what anybody thinks of you -- but that's a gift from the Holy Spirit, you see. It's the same with the physical needs. You know the whole business with what job are you going to get? "Medicine for mankind, well I don't know, maybe, maybe." But you know it's the old battle -- are we going into it for ourselves, or are we going into it for God and for the world? And so often it's difficult.

So often we're trying to scheme how will we make sure we have enough clothes and enough food to last us throughout our lives. And the miracle is that if you die to your need of all those things, if you'll say, "Father, I don't want any more clothes than you want me to have. I don't want any more automobiles than you want me to have. I don't want any more stereos than you want me to have. If you want me to have none of those, okay, I am with you. I'll go that way," then the Holy Spirit miraculously begins to provide those things for you as you seek first God and try to enter into that relationship with him that the Father planned for the son in the estate in the Virgin Islands.

Now it's the Holy Spirit that makes that all real, dear ones. That's what we shared last day. It's the Holy Spirit that miraculously makes those things real in you. And every attempt of transcendental meditation, every attempt of our desire to make ourselves of some reputation among each other, every attempt we have to try to make enough money to provide all the needs we have, all those attempts are choosing the estate rather than the Father. We are choosing our own strength rather than the power of this miraculous Holy Spirit to make these things real in us.

The truth is, dear ones, the Holy Spirit can make them real. And there's no point in your sitting there and saying, "Oh brother, I know, maybe when you're past a certain age and all that, you can get what's necessary or make do with what little God gives you." No, loved ones, it's real. The Holy Spirit can give you as much a sense of love as you have with a girl or a fellow, really. Truly, I really mean it -- because you all know that the physical anyway isn't much apart from the sense that the other person really has some emotional attachment to you. I mean the physical becomes kind of dead if the other person hasn't an attitude of love and care for you.

You see, that's what the Holy Spirit is able to make real to you. He is able really to give you a sense that the God of the whole universe really loves you and you're able to feel that and sense it. And I am with you if you're sitting there and saying, "Brother, I can't go on that old ascetic stuff where I don't feel love at all or I don't feel anybody loves me", no, loved ones, it's not that. You die to the need for other people's love and then the Holy Spirit begins to give you the love of God.

If you sit there and say, "Oh, you mean we don't need to love each other", of course you do, but not for your own benefit. For each other's benefit. You need to love each other because the other person is an expression of God's life.

If you say, "Oh, you mean we don't need each other?" Well, you need each other so that you have somebody to show love to, you need each other that way. But you don't actually need each other in the sense that you have to have the love that the other person gives you -- you don't, loved ones, you really don't. The Father can make his love real to you so that suddenly -- oh, a husband-wife relationship becomes beautiful because they love each other just because they love each other not because they need each other. Then it's really unselfish and the Holy Spirit is able to make that real in you. It's just a miracle.

Lots of us have real trouble with keeping on keeping on. You know, "keep on keeping on", and your father says, "Yeah, you must finish the course. If you start the degree you must finish it. Whatever you start, you must finish." And all of us have the same trouble. All of us have the same trouble keeping on day after day after day. Old Housman (an English poet) you remember, "Oh, often have I washed and dressed and what's to show for all my pain? Let me lye a bed and rest. Ten thousand times I've done my best and alls to do again." You know how often we feel like that.

It just feels, "I can't keep on. The life is boring. It's unexciting. I can't keep on." Dear ones, it's incredible. The Holy Spirit takes the persistence and the ability to keep going that Jesus has and he makes it real to you. So I think before we stop, let's look at it, a man that experienced it. You'll find it in II Corinthians 12, just a hideous situation. II Corinthians 12:7-10, "And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; but he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

So he was even ready to boast of the things that he was facing, "For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong." And the boy really seemed to almost just live off it, and no, he wasn't a masochist ; he was a very healthy kind of person, really. But you can get it again in II Corinthians 4 if you look at it, and he is describing the kind of things that are backed up in the classical historians' accounts of the Christians in those days, if you look up Philo or Tacitus or any of the others, you'll find that yes, the Christians, this is what they were facing.

II Corinthians 4:8, "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed", and just continual shipwrecks, and continual tortures and continual jailings and yet just strength all through it. Now the Holy Spirit takes of the strength of Jesus and enables you to keep on going through things that you wouldn't dream you could keep going on at all. It is a miraculous strength, dear ones. It really is. The Holy Spirit gives you power to keep going when all the rest of the body is rebelling and just giving up. Now, God is able to give you the gift of the Holy Spirit that will do that kind of thing in you.

You remember last Sunday we talked about the Holy Spirit as a kind of oil. The Old Testament talks about oil as the type of the Holy Spirit. An athlete you know rubs oil in his limbs to make them nimble and supple and to eliminate any friction and when the Holy Spirit is given to you, that's the

kind of reaction he produces in you. Without the Holy Spirit, it's a burden to do this, it's a burden to do that, it's a responsibility to face this, the thought of next week just is killing, and everything is just heavy upon you. When God gives you the gift of the Holy Spirit, suddenly you're free, really free as a bird -- and your spirit is continually light and continually airy and you're continually looking forward to the next day. Really, I really mean it -- because I know the other business. I am with you in it, and I know what it is like. But when the Holy Spirit comes to you, he gives you that strength of Jesus that enables you to look forward to every day and go through everything in complete victory, really.

I often sat there where you are sitting and thought, "Oh, the fellow is full of hyperboles and full of exaggeration", but it is really true, dear ones. The same situation is the father with the real estate in the Virgin Islands. Our Father has a way of enabling us to live in complete peace and complete contentment, if we'll only die to our own corny little ways of meeting our needs and begin to look to him to give us the fulfillment of them and then God miraculously does it.

If you're sitting there and saying, "Brother, how can the Holy Spirit become money?" I just didn't believe it either. I didn't believe he could. I believed that I had to solve that myself but I found that the Holy Spirit becomes money when you need the money. If you say to me, "What happens with a tension headache? Does the Holy Spirit become peace?" Yeah, yeah, if you'll die to the aspirin. Yeah, if you'll die to the Vanquish [a brand of medicine] and you'll really look up to the Father and ask him to give you the gift of the Holy Spirit, yeah, he will become peace.

So that's really the plan, dear ones. You can see in that way what a beautiful world we would have because -- you'd have a world that was being filled with plenty instead of being emptied and exploited by a lot of people trying to fulfill their needs. Well, this is what the Holy Spirit does and it is true, dear ones. We're at the end of Romans 6, this is a big day today. We have been going for seven and a half years and only six times have I finished a chapter and this is the sixth time. So Romans 6 does tell about the need to die to self and the need to die to other people's needs but the beauty of it is that if you do that, God gives you the Holy Spirit who fulfills all those needs. So I trust that some of you will begin to grasp that it is really true and that you will begin to expect this Holy Spirit to fulfill these needs for you.

God is no fool, he can read you. He knows when you're turning off one and turning on to another. He knows and you may make all kinds of noises but the Father knows when you've stopped depending on your peers for reputation and for recognition and fulfillment of all those psychological needs that the psychiatrists tells us we must have fulfilled. The Father knows when you've stopped doing that and he knows when to begin to give you the Holy Spirit in that sense. I pray that some of us will get into it this week. Let's pray.

Dear Father, it's really hard to doubt that you exist. Evolution can explain how it might have progressed, but Father we know fine well that it must have all started somewhere and even if there was an explosion at the beginning there must have been something to explode. So Father we know that you're there. We know that there must be behind the universe, a mind that is intelligent and a mind that can think and plan and Father when we study Jesus' history, we become more and more convinced that there is a Person who is like the Father of this man Jesus.

Father we know that you must have some attitude to each of us this morning; otherwise you wouldn't have put us here. Father, will you somehow come through to us and show us where we're disappointing you as much as the son disappointed his father, and show us where you want us to begin to trust you

to give us the Holy Spirit, whether it be in our own relationships and our reputation or in our emotional satisfaction or in the fulfillment of our physical needs of food and shelter and clothing.

Father, will you show us where we need to experience more of what you have to make real to us miraculously through the Holy Spirit and where we need to stop depending on the world and on each other. Father we trust you to show us that this coming week so that we can be filled with this Holy Spirit and begin to experience the miraculous things that Jesus received from you, yourself. We ask this in His name. Amen.