

## No Condemnation

Romans 8:1

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

You remember that Adam had two sons, Cain and Abel. And then do you remember what happened when they grew up? Cain offered a gift to God with the wrong attitude. And God rejected the gift. And Abel offered a gift to God with the right attitude, and God accepted the gift.

You have that, dear ones, in Genesis 4:3, if you look at it. "In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard." And it seems that the reason was the attitude with which they offered the gifts. And you can see that it was the attitude God was interested in, if you look at Genesis 4:6, "The Lord said to Cain, 'Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.'" So it seems that God was concerned about the attitude that each of them had.

Old Cain of course, rejected God's judgment completely. And he decided that it was wrong, and that his judgment of himself was correct. And he resolved to defend his judgment of himself with his own efforts. And he ignored completely that there was a dear God who knew what was right and what was wrong, and he knew what was best for him. And he decided, "No, I know what's best for me."

And of course he had to defend that right. And he did it, you remember, in Genesis 4:8. "Cain said to Abel his brother, 'Let us go out to the field.' And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him." So Cain's attitude was utterly hostile to the Creator's judgment of the situation. And Cain's whole approach was, "I'll justify myself. I'll assert myself. I'll defend myself. My offering was as good as his. And I'll show you that it is as good as his. And if it's not, I'll make life bend so that my offering is proved to be as good as his." And his whole attitude was that old self-asserting, self-defending, self-justifying, independence of God that really is the mark of Cain. It's been the mark of Cain right down through the years.

The way it worked out in his relationship to other people is pretty obvious if you look at Genesis 4:9. "Then the Lord said to Cain, 'Where is Abel, your brother?' He said, 'I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?'" Once old Cain decided to live according to his own judgment of what was right and what was wrong for him, and decided to defend it and prosecute it, really by his own methods and his own efforts, he ended up being utterly indifferent to the people around him.

Loved ones, that's really the only alternative you have. There are probably about 900 of us here in this auditorium. Either God knows what he has in mind for all our lives, and we operate according to that, and therefore end up living in harmony with each other, or each one of the 900 of us decide what is right for us. In which case, which one of us can so manipulate all the rest of us, that none of us are hurt, and yet we get our own way? Not one of us, not one of us.

If you assume you are the only one that can see, and all the rest are blind, and you start trying to get out of this auditorium after the service, you can imagine -- Okay, you take over this mike and you start trying to direct this person, that person. "Move to your left a little. No... Move to your

right..." You'll never get out of the place.

Once you assume that you alone know what is right for your life, everybody else has to be subordinate to your wishes and your desires. And it is an impossible task. You may get 5 of us to move out of the way, so that you can get through. But you won't get 900 of us. And you won't certainly get two and a half billion of us to listen to you.

Yet that's what they were driven to in the ancient world at that time. Because immediately Cain and his successors began to decide they'll live their lives by their own judgment, they'll reject God's opinion of what their offering was, and what their attitude is, and they'll enforce their own attitude by their own efforts, the ancient world fell into chaos.

Then neighbors began to be indifferent to neighbors. Then people began to ignore each other. They began to say, "I am not my brother's keeper. I have no need to look after that fellow." They began to take advantage of their neighbors to enrich themselves. And the whole world just ended up in the chaos and anarchy that is described there in Genesis 6:11-12. The whole world became an armed camp, filled with fear and disgust, because everybody was trying to manipulate everybody else; because nobody would accept that there was a loving Father that actually did know what was right for all of them.

"Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth." And at that point, the Creator could only do one thing. The whole thing was a mess. So you read in Genesis 6:13 there. "And God said to Noah, 'I have determined to make an end of all flesh; for the earth is filled with violence through them; behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch.'"

Then if you look at Genesis 7:21, you see God carrying out what he said he would do. "And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, birds, cattle, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm upon the earth, and every man; everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the air; they were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark."

And that was the only way God could preserve the few people in the world that still did trust him and still were willing to accept his plan for them. The only way He could possibly save them from extermination was to destroy everything on the earth. And that's what he did.

And that was the flood, evidence of which is obvious in our geological formations and in the alluvial soils that we have.

It's amazing that at that point in history, God made a surprising commitment on his own part. At that point in history, he made a critical commitment of his own that he didn't really need to make. If you like to look at it, it's Genesis 9:11-13. "I establish my covenant with you..." He said to Noah, "'That never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.' And God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.'" God resolved never again to destroy the earth.

How then did he intend to deal with that attitude that was evident in Cain? How did he decide to deal with that self-asserting, self-defensive, self-justifying attitude that really ignores the life of others to such an extent that -- you know the Palestinians have destroyed one of the hostages in Tunis? It's that indifference to life that causes that, that indifference to life that enables the Israeli pilots to strafe the Lebanon borders. That same self-asserting, self-defending, self-justifying attitude that says, "It doesn't matter what it costs anybody else, I am right, and I am going to get my way." That same attitude loved ones -- I say it lovingly to us here in the States -- but that same attitude that enables us to consume five times the primary foods on the earth that any Indian consumes. That same attitude that we want our way and we have a right to it.

How did God intend to deal with that? The answer is, by providing another ark, by providing another ark. An ark that would not only save us from destruction by a flood that would become necessary otherwise, but an ark in which that part of us that is so self-assertive, and so self-defensive, and so self-justifying, could be destroyed. An ark in which that element in us that wants to destroy everybody else, could be rendered inoperative, could be neutralized, could be purged out of us, so that we ourselves could continue to live and God could afford to let us live. Because once we had entered into this ark that he provided, we would have the evil within us destroyed. And we would be fit to live with one another. And that's why God resolved never again to destroy the earth.

This is the only reason we're alive here actually, today. God would otherwise have had to send another flood, because it's only a couple of years before the thing was chaos again. And he would have had to keep destroying us generation after generation and starting anew. And the only reason, loved ones, we're still alive is that God provided this ark.

And this ark is Jesus. And in Jesus, God regarded the whole human race as being placed. And he regarded us all as being destroyed there. And he arranged it so that in that cosmic miracle, the self-assertive, self-defensive, self-justifying attitude that we share with Cain, that 'mark of Cain' attitude, would be destroyed utterly. And he would be able to let us continue to live. And that part of us that is hostile to him would be destroyed.

Do you see that we're only alive for the moment? We've only been given respite. Unless we enter into that ark, there is a personal flood by which God will have to destroy us at the end of this life. You see, if you have Cain's attitude or I have, God can't anymore let us continue to live forever than he could let Cain live forever. So if we don't enter into this ark of Jesus, we ourselves will have to be destroyed by some catastrophe of some kind, after these 70 years are up. And really all we have been given is a respite, loved ones.

It's a respite in order to enter into the ark of Jesus. That's why this verse that we're talking of this morning says, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," to those who are in the ark. But if you're not in the ark and if you don't allow God to deal with that self-asserting, self-defensive, self-justifying attitude that is the 'mark of Cain' in you, then you will have to face a personal flood at the end of this life.

You know a lot of us misunderstand this whole thing radically. A lot of us just do not believe that we've actually to get into the ark. A lot of us will say this morning, "Oh I know what you're saying. You're saying what you've said before, that God regards us as having been crucified with Christ. That's Romans 6:6, 'Our old self was crucified with Christ.' And so the moment we believe that, that moment, God forgives us and justifies us."

Loved ones, it's not so. It just isn't so. The Bible does not say that simply if you believe that God has placed you into Jesus and destroyed you there, then you're free, and you'll never have to be destroyed. You look at Romans 8 and you'll see it doesn't say that, loved ones. And you do have to read the verses where it talks about believing in the light of the rest of the Bible, and especially in the light of this first verse of Romans 8, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Not, "...for those who believe in Christ Jesus."

You see some of us this morning will say, "Yeah, yeah. But take my word for it. I mean, it really means that. It doesn't say that. But it really means it. It really means, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who believe in Christ Jesus."

But, loved ones, it is not as easy as that. It is not a matter of simply believing that God has put you into Jesus and destroyed you there, that therefore, you don't have to face destruction at the end of this life. The Bible says that you have to be in Christ Jesus -- actually in him; not just believing that if you got into him, you wouldn't be destroyed, but that you actually have to be in him.

Do you see that most of us have been brought up on a kind of 'easy believe-ism'? We've been encouraged to think that all you have to do is believe that God has placed you in Jesus. And if you believe that, that's it. God can't destroy you. He won't want to destroy you.

But it's not a matter of simply believing that that is so. It's a matter of actually being in the ark. Too many of us tend to say, "What a lovely idea! Ah, that we've been crucified with Christ. Ah, that's a beautiful metaphor. Really, I can see it. Yeah, 'we've been crucified with Christ' is a beautiful thought, isn't it? And it's just wonderful to think that God has kind of shown that he destroyed us in Jesus, and that enables him to appear as if he is a just and holy God -- even though he isn't, because he is destroying the wrong man obviously. But it's beautiful to think that God can appear to be just and holy because he has condemned us all in Jesus, and so he can appear to be consistently opposed to sin. It's a beautiful thought."

Loved ones, it isn't just a beautiful thought. And it isn't believing in that beautiful thought that will enable God to be free to let you live forever. It is actually entering into Jesus. "There is therefore no condemnation to those who are 'in Christ'."

Let's imagine the Mississippi basin is flooded, okay? The whole basin is flooded. And we're all on the top of the building. And you're wishing you were on the IDS Tower [tallest building in Minneapolis at that time]. But we're on the top of this one. And there's a massive kind of ark boat that has drawn up beside us. And we're all standing back there saying, "Oh isn't it just wonderful to believe that if we got into that boat, we wouldn't die? Isn't it just beautiful to believe that?" And the water is coming up and coming up. And we're saying, "Oh isn't it just beautiful, buh...buh...buh... [imitating someone talking under water]? And it is just beautiful to think that if we got into that ark, we would be delivered. We would be saved." And then the water is there and we're still saying it.

Do you see, loved ones, that it's not enough just to believe that if you got into the ark you'd be saved? You have to actually get into the ark. You have to actually get into Jesus. You will not be delivered from destruction just by believing that if you got in... All the believing in the world will not save us.

Some of us, of course, think, "Well I mean, do you not think God has withdrawn the whole idea of ever destroying us anyway? Do you not think now that Jesus has died, there are no signs that this world is under condemnation?"

Loved ones, the world is full of those signs. The earthquakes, the cancer, the tidal waves, the famines, the droughts -- all those are signs that this world is dying. You get that you know, just clearly stated. It's Romans 8:20. God has given us gracious signs that the rain is beginning to fall if we would only look at them. "For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope;" hoping, you see, that by these signs we would see that we were under condemnation. "Because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now."

There are signs everywhere we look that we are under condemnation as a world. You may say, "But are there signs that we are not in the ark?" Well, there's a clear sign that God shows us if you want to look at it. And it would have to be applied individually to each of us. It is 1 John 3:19. "By this we shall know that we are of the truth, and reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God."

We know we're not in the ark if our hearts ever condemn us. If our consciences ever convict us that we're not acting like Jesus, then we know we are not in Jesus. In other words, whenever we feel that rising of indignation when we are passed over by somebody, or whenever we sense that knotting of the stomach muscles when somebody just uses us as a doormat, whenever we sense that rising up within that wants to get back at somebody who has taken advantage of us, that's our hearts pointing out that there is a part of us that is not in Jesus. That's our heart saying there's a part of you that is reacting exactly like Cain. There's a part of you that is saying, "This is my right to do this. And I have every right to do it. And I am going to do it".

Loved ones, it's attitude that God is interested in. It's the attitude that God is trying to get at us. You know how often we've done -- I mean how many of us have trouble getting to sleep at night because we're worrying and tossing and fretting over some situation that we cannot change, but the old mark of Cain is in us and we're determined to change it. One thing we will not accept. We will not accept that God knows we're in this situation, and that it is conceivably his will that we're there. You know how we rebel against it. You know if we're dismissed from a job unfairly or unjustly -- and you know how that old 'Cain attitude' rises up inside and refuses to be treated like that. Really, refuses to be treated like Jesus, that's it. Refuses to be treated unjustly, like Jesus.

Now do you see? "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." But would Jesus be bitter to your colleague in the office because they took the best typewriter? Would Jesus be bitter towards your friend in the frat [fraternity] house because they took your revision books or your review books just before the examination? Would Jesus be bitter towards some friend because he got the girl you were interested in? Would Jesus himself be bitter against your parents who might require you to do something that you don't think you ought to be asked to do?

Loved ones, do you see that Cain would, but Jesus wouldn't? That Jesus' reaction is the exact opposite to Cain's? And there's no condemnation to those of us who are in Jesus? And if we're in Jesus, we react like Jesus?

If you say to me, "How do you get into Jesus?" I think the answer is in 1 Peter 3:20. Peter is talking about Jesus preaching to the spirits in prison. "...Who formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

You get into Jesus by baptism -- by sprinkling or by pouring on or by immersing? That's not the point. Baptism into Jesus is deeper than a physical experience. It doesn't matter whether you are immersed or whether you're sprinkled or whatever. No physical experience will cause you to be able to enter into Jesus. The heart of the Greek word 'baptizo' is to be utterly immersed, to be deeply sunk completely into something or someone. And the only way to enter into Jesus is to be immersed completely by Jesus, to be absolutely surrounded by Jesus.

And you remember the only way to do that. And I'll just quote the verses because you know them so well. "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." The only way really to enter into the ark of Jesus is to be willing to be baptized into his death.

Do you see His attitude on the Cross? Cain utterly rejected God's judgment; Jesus accepted God's judgment. Whatever you want me to face, Lord, that I will face. So the car has a flat. "Lord, thank you. You've allowed that to come to me. Not the old 'mark of Cain' and the knotting of the stomach muscles, but the Spirit of Jesus saying, "Lord, thank you. This is your judgment as the best thing for me at this moment." He accepted God's judgment.

He accepted God's timing, not Cain's attitude, "No, this isn't right. You're not being fair to me. This isn't a thing you should do at this moment." But Jesus' attitude, "Lord, I'm not even 35 years of age. But this is good. This is your time for me. I accept it."

He looked always to God's power and not to his own. Presumably he had enough power latent in himself to destroy all the people around the cross. But he said, "Lord, you use your power, I am not going to use mine to get my own way. You use yours." And right down the line, dear ones, Jesus on the cross, expresses the attitude that is absolutely opposite to Cain's. And being baptized into Jesus death means coming into that ourselves.

So I'd ask you about the people that you think have treated you unjustly? Or the people that are ignoring you at the moment? Or the people that seem to be using you as a doormat? Or the person who has been promoted ahead of you at work? Or the dear one with whom you live, who you feel treats you unfairly? Do you see that being in the ark of Jesus is being willing to respond as Jesus responded to those situations?

Now are you bigger than the Son of God? Are you more important than the Son of the maker of the universe? Are you such a great person that you have to take the law into your own hands like Cain and have your way?

Is there one of us here who hasn't experienced a fight at home that cannot be traced back to us feeling, "It's our right to say this, and it's our right to do this?" Is there one of us who hasn't

had a disagreement with the one we love or someone very close to us, who cannot trace it back to the 'mark of Cain'? "It's our right to have our way and we're going to have it?"

And loved ones, do you see the heart of the wrong in that is, you're ignoring that God made you, and he knows what you're facing? It's ignoring completely that your Father knows what you're facing and he has already worked out a way of deliverance for you. It's you ignoring him, taking the law into your own hands and saying, "Lord, I am going to save myself from this tough situation." Loved ones, that's what leads us into all sin. It's the attitude that leads us all into all sin.

When do you take advantage of the exam papers that are available in the frat house even though you know what's wrong, because you feel, "I have to get these exams. It's my responsibility to get them however I get them. And I couldn't even tolerate the idea of missing them." What if God wanted you to miss them? What if he has another plan for your life?

You know how it gets hold of us when we see the car that we want or the piece of furniture that we want for the house or the apartment. And we determine with that 'mark of Cain' inside us, we want it. And we are going to get it. And we have the right to have it.

Loved ones, do you see that at that moment, there's a dear figure that is bent lovingly over you with his arms right underneath you? And He is saying, "Look, trust me. I know what your house is going to be like in ten years time. I know what that car is going to be like in ten year's time. And I am going to have to provide another one for you. Trust me. Just lean back into me, and lean into my Son Jesus, and have the same attitude to life and to things that happen to you as he has. Enter into the ark of Jesus."

The moment you do, loved ones, the Holy Spirit fills you with the love of God and with a deep peace and a joy that no amount of possessions or achievements can make up for.

But it's, "There is no condemnation for those who are 'in' Christ Jesus." And if you're in Christ Jesus, you react like Christ. And if you're sitting there and thinking, "Well, some of the things you hit on, "I do not react rightly." Okay loved ones; deal with God about it this morning. Don't fiddle around. Don't put it off. Don't let Satan condemn you and say to you, "You're hopeless. You have no chance. You're not in the ark. You're lost." Get into the ark.

Don't stand back there. That's foolish. It's not realistic when the ark is available, to stand back and say, "Oh, I am not in the ark. I'm not in the ark. What'll I do? What'll I do?" Now, no! You get into the ark. That's sense.

So really loved ones, if you go out with condemnation in your heart this morning, it's just your own fault. Jesus is here. And God has already placed you in Jesus. And what he is saying to you is, "Are you willing to stay in my Son Jesus? Or do you want to get out and endure that mark of Cain and be a fugitive throughout the earth?" Really, the choice is ours.

I think all of us here -- each one of us is facing it on different issues. So I am saying to you, will you face it on your particular issue? That mom that just is determined to make those kids, "Do it exactly the way I want it!"

And that dear dad who is just struggling in this job market, and afraid for his own life, and for his very existence, and the old 'Cain mark' is coming up and saying, "I'll have to start threshing

around to get a job for myself..." Would you enter into Jesus and say? "Lord, this is your timing. And you're in charge of me, even in the midst of this chaotic situation, and I rest in you."

Loved ones, if you do, you'll find that the life of the Holy Spirit begins to give you life, begins to bring you peace. The big thing is it puts you into reality, because that's reality. We have a loving Father who does take care of us and he takes care of you. Let's pray.

Dear Father, we've just been brought up to thresh around for ourselves when things get tough, like we've been encouraged, our Father, to do that, to stand up for ourselves like men. Father, we see that while we are required to be responsible, we are not required to resent or to reprove you because of the things that come to us. We are expected to see those things, too, as something that is under your control and that you can take care of.

So Father, we would, each one, deal with the things that bring condemnation to our hearts, with attitudes of resentment and retaliation that are those of Cain, with attitudes of bitterness and of hostility, with attitudes of self-pity. Father, we would enter into the ark of Jesus.

And oh, Lord Jesus, we would take our place with you, and accept God's timing and accept God's judgment on us, and accept his opinion of us and accept his ways of deliverance instead of our own.

Lord Jesus, we would be baptized into your Spirit and into your attitude. And we would hand all these things over to you, Father, and ask you now to take care of them. And we will abide in peace and faith and trust, so that there may be no condemnation at all, that will come to our hearts.

We thank you, Father. Thank you that you are dear and loving, and that you are in control, and that our hearts do not need to be filled with resentment and retaliation. Thank you, Lord.