

Accepting or Rejecting God's Provision

Romans 8:13

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Dear ones, would you turn to Romans 8:13 and we could begin looking at the verse that we'll be studying today. Romans 8:13 and just the first half of it, Romans 8:13a. "For if you live according to the flesh you will die." What does that mean to live according to the flesh? Well if you just look at Matthew 26:47 you'd see a glaring example of it. "While he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'The one I kiss is the man; seize him.' And he came up to Jesus at once and said, 'Hail, master!' And he kissed him. Jesus said to him, 'Friend, why are you here?' Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him. And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest, and cut off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.'" That's living by the flesh.

Somebody cuts at you with a sword and you whip yours out and cut his ear off. That's living according to the flesh. Somebody whips at you in the office with just one of those sarcastic, sardonic comments that cut right into your heart and you whip right round and whip one back to them. That's living according to the flesh. Someone barrels right into you just cutting you apart with criticism and you whip right back at them and criticize them. That's living according to the flesh. Living according to the signals that come in through your five senses, without any hesitation you just respond immediately. The signals come in through eye gate, ear gate, through the touch, through the feel, the signals come in, and you immediately react out again the same way. That's living according to the flesh.

So it's being utterly governed by what your body feels or senses at that moment, and that's really what walking in the flesh really is. It's reacting as if the only one you have to defend you is yourself, and the only power you have to defend yourself with are your own powers and abilities. That's walking according to the flesh. And I mean to tell you that that's what cuts the family apart, what destroys the relationship with the roommate, and what has broken up thousands of friendships. That's living according to the flesh. You just act, we say from the gut level, but it isn't even from the gut level, it's just from the surface. The signal comes in from somebody else, you send the signal right back the same way. That's walking according to the flesh.

Now the other part of the verse, now that we've defined the first part of Romans 8:13 says, "If you live according to the flesh you'll die." And then the second part of the verse runs, "But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live." Now how do you put to death the deeds of the body? Well if you just flick back to Matthew 26 and read the rest of that account there, you'd see how to put to death the deeds of the body by your spirit and it's Matthew 26 and verse 52. Because you need to remember it wasn't Peter who was being arrested, it was Jesus. Verse 52, "Then Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?' But how then should the scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?' At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, 'Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me.'"

And Jesus just regarded himself as dead already. He just regarded himself as dead and he had nothing to fear from the clubs or the robbers and immediately he just looked up in the spirit to the fact of life that his Father had the whole galaxy to throw at these people if he wanted to and that he could do it at any moment. And Jesus, instead of looking to himself to defend himself or looking to his own powers to use, he just looked quietly up to the Father and said, "You can do it if you want to and I'm willing to wait for your defense. If your defense doesn't come, that's okay I'll regard myself as dead." That's putting to death the deeds of the body by your spirit, loved ones. In Peter's case, the reaction of his body governed everything. He saw the fellows coming at him with a sword and the old blood pressure started to rise inside him and the old muscles started to tense up and he pumped the old adrenaline into the system to get ready for action and at the very act when he was killing the other fellow, he was in the act of killing himself.

Because you remember old William Penn said, "The person who is angry with somebody else does more harm to himself than to the other person." And really, that's what we've found over the past few weeks. That if you live according to the flesh and react like that you actually begin to die inside yourself because of the amount of fluids that you begin to secrete in your body. Because of the tremendous strain you begin to put on your whole blood circulation system, you begin to die prematurely if you live from crisis to crisis because you live according to the flesh and that's the way Peter operated. Jesus didn't operate that way at all. He was just absolutely submitted to his Father. He was absolutely satisfied with the reassurance. That's strange when the taxis even oppose you. He was absolutely satisfied with the reassurance that his Father could supply all the power that he needed and that's all he required and he didn't require any action on his own behalf.

In other words, the two reactions, dear ones, are absolutely opposite to one another. Now why are the reactions absolutely opposite? Well, you know because old Peter believed that to get success and enjoyment and security in his life, he had to grab all the food, shelter, and clothing, all the prominence among people that he could possibly get by his own efforts. That was his whole attitude and that's why he reacted as he did. When he saw them taking something like his life away from him, he felt that he alone defended his life. He felt that he was responsible for it and him only. Jesus didn't think that at all. He was not preoccupied with grabbing all the security, the enjoyment and the success that he could out of life. He had given all that up to the Father. He was preoccupied with finding out why God had put him here on earth and he had given himself to doing that thing with all his heart and that was the difference between the two of them and really that's the difference for us.

You either live one way or the other. You either live here as if you've to grab as much success and enjoyment and prominence as you possibly can by your own efforts. Or, you really do believe that you're here because your Creator put you here to do some job. And if you do that job well, he's going to supply you with all the success and the prominence and enjoyment that you need and really that was the difference between the two of them. I think, really you can see if you check the rest of the account of Jesus' existence after he left the earth that it really did pay off for him to live that way. Because Jesus, in fact, ended up doing what his father had put him on earth to do. Maybe you'd look at it dear ones, it's 1 Peter 3:22: "Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him."

Really at this moment, Jesus is restraining the chaos that exists in Vietnam as far as it is being restrained at all. It's his power that restrains it. It's his power that holds the physical atoms

in place that enables us to continue to exist as a world at all. It's him that will be the judge of all of us at the end of this life. So really, Jesus is at this moment doing what his Father set him up to do. And yet, that only came when he himself was prepared to humble himself, to give up any hopes that he might have for his own life and to allow God to do what he wanted with him. And loved ones, that's the only way really, to put to death the deeds of the body. If you're straining and straining because you want to be an accountant and you're going to be an accountant whether God wants you to be an accountant or not, then your life will be filled with lots of little strain points. And so any time anybody looks as if he's frustrating your purpose, the old strain will rise and you'll find that reaction in the flesh against them.

It's the same with a fellow or a girl. If you're determined to marry that girl whether it's God's will for you to marry her or not, you will try to worry yourself into a marriage, whatever God wants. And every time you begin to see the thing wavering, the strain will come up in your heart. And really loved ones, the only way to come into the position of freedom in your own life is to accept Jesus' attitude. "Lord I've already died. As far as I'm concerned, I'm already dead. If they kill me now here in this garden, that's okay. If you allow them to kill me, that's all right." Whereas old Peter, old Peter is only 30, only 28 or 30 and he has a whole life in front of him and he certainly doesn't want to lose his life. And loved ones, that's where the strain comes in. It's really a question of whether you commit the whole thing to God and concentrate on being what he wants you to be in this life or whether you're out to grab everything you can for yourself when you want it.

And I know a lot of us here probably say, "Well yeah, I'd love to be like that. I mean, I'd like to be real passive like a Chinaman and just bear everything. Yeah, poker face as if nothing touched me. I'd love to be free from colitis and from hypertension and all the things that I know I'm working myself into by living in the flesh. But it seems there's something writhing inside me, some strong, selfish will that I cannot control. And I've done my best to control it, but I cannot." Loved ones, you know that it's that selfish will, it's that desire to be what we want to be, that was crucified on the cross with Jesus.

Do you see that the Father has worked it all out? The Father knows why you're here. God didn't make you to be one of the waste pieces of garbage that were going to be just thrown out anyway. God has made each one of us here in this place for a certain purpose. Now God knows what that is, and all he's asking you to do is to believe that and to begin to trust him to lead that out in your life. But loved ones, do you see that there is a mass of us here this morning who have all our own little programs laid out for our lives. And so one person, he wants to always have a Cadillac. He thinks he'll die if he doesn't always have a Cadillac. And now he hasn't one at the moment but he wants to be able to buy a new one every two years. That's what he wants. Somebody else here wants to be a famous. That's the killer, we always want to be famous, we don't want to be just good but we want to be famous. But somebody else here wants to be a famous poet, and somebody else here wants to be a housewife with 10 children, and somebody else here wants to have a beautiful house with a two car garage and a lake cottage, and somebody else here wants a job in which they will do lots of travel, lots of travel, must have lots of travel. And we're all sitting here with all kinds of weird little plans that we think we just have to fulfill if we're going to be happy.

Now loved ones, it's those miserable little programs that we have that bring the strain into our lives. It's those miserable little programs that bring the jealousy, and the anger, and the envy, and the jealousy when we see anybody coming against us with clubs who may upset our program. But do you see that the Creator has a plan for you and he knows what he intended you to do in this life.

What he's saying to you this morning is, "Look, would you have a look round you and see how every sparrow seems to have a place to fly? Would you look around you and see how I've arranged all the rivers? None of them are backing up, they're all getting out sooner or later to the ocean. Now would you look around me and see that however long it seems that spring is coming, spring always comes. Now, then, would you look at a daffodil and would you see the way I've designed all the little petals? Now, do you see that you're far more complex than a daffodil and if I took care to put the daffodils in certain places, don't you see that I have a place for you, and that I have a plan for your life? And would you not just, by exercising your spirit towards me, put to death the deeds of your body with all its strain, and its jealousy, and its ambition because your program is not being fulfilled. And would you just relax and trust me and I'll release my Spirit in you so that you can react to people who frustrate you the same way my son did."

But loved ones, the key is in beginning to trust that the Father has a plan for your life. You see, it doesn't only apply in our jobs. The killer is it applies in the way we want to operate our room at home. We have certain plans for that room. "Yeah, those flowers ought to sit just there. That fool who lives with me, he ought to know that's the ideal place for those flowers. It has come straight from Mount Sinai, that's the spot for those flowers." And we have all kinds of other little programs. So really loved ones, you know you don't think of it, but if I really pushed you, you could probably produce about 25 different little programs that you have outlined. There's a certain way to swim that you think everybody should use. There's a certain way to spend your day off and that's the way you want to spend your day off and if anybody cuts across it, they're really destroying your life. And we have all kinds of programs inside our hearts, and when somebody cuts across those programs that's what causes the reaction and the strain. That's what brings about the hypertension. That's what brings about the ulcers.

Loved ones, what I'm saying is, would you not believe that your Creator knows you and knows you better than you know yourself? And that's what we won't believe, isn't it? I mean, we are so egotistical. Because your reaction immediately I say that is, "Yeah well maybe. Well, it might, well, yeah but he really doesn't really know me, doesn't really know me deep down." But loved ones, He does. Your Creator knows you intimately and he knows exactly what will fulfill you. And you tend to sit there and say, "Yeah yeah. Fulfill me? He knows that I have to suffer a lot of trials. I know him. He just does that kind of thing to people." Loved ones, he doesn't, he's a dear Father. All the most beautiful things we have, the sunshine, the bright colors, the sea, all those things come from him. So he's the same father in regard to you. He wouldn't give his son to die for you if he meant you harm. He wants the best for you. And really the only way to come into a place of peace such as Jesus enjoyed in that situation is, "I accept, Father, you have a plan."

Loved ones, some people laugh when I tell this, but I think now when I tell it I think I'm talking about a different person so it's really reasonable to me. But I destroyed myself with envy, jealousy, everything you could name, destroyed myself with it because I was determined I wanted to be a famous preacher. Yeah, where everybody would know me and everybody would look up to me. And I wore myself out every time anybody seemed to be preventing that possibility. And then what peace came when I started to teach in the Catholic school and it looked as if, "Now you'll never preach again in your life." What peace came when I said, "Father I want to be what you want me to be. And if you want me to teach for the rest of my life, that's good. If you want me to brush floors for the rest of my life that's good." And loved ones, a dear peace came into my heart then that prevented any more irritability, and any more ambition, and any more jealousy when somebody seemed to be cutting across my plans. And loved ones, do you see, it's the same for you.

The way to come into that place is to start believing your Father knows what he's doing. Just start believing that he's been in the creator game longer than you have and he thought it well out before he ever started this whole thing and he knows exactly where you're going to be and he knows where you'll be in 10 years time and he'll have it planned for you. And he has it all outlined and loved ones, you can trust him. And really, when that verse says, "if you live by the flesh, you'll die" it's true, loved ones. If you live the other way, as if you have to grab all the security and enjoyment and all the prominence and success you possibly can get by your own efforts, you will wear yourself out. Because there are 700 or 800 of us here at least who are going to try to stop you doing that. But if you relax into the Father's arms, no one can frustrate his plan for your life, no one. If you lie back into it and begin by your spirit to put to death the deeds of your body.

Loved ones, I don't know where you are in that you know, but I know some of you are sitting here with problems in the marriage because of this. Some of you are sitting here with problems in the boy/girl relationship because of this. Look, if he doesn't want you to have the girl, do you think you're going to make a successful marriage without God? Do you? Some of us have the attitude, "I'm going to marry her whether it means misery for me or not." I mean, it's stupid. Some of you are sitting here and worrying about the job that you haven't got. The Father has allowed you to come into this, hasn't he? Doesn't he know you're in it? Doesn't he know you're in this situation without a job, or virtually without a job? Doesn't he know this has happened to you? Don't you think that he's already making plans for you? Do you think he wants the old stomach to be churning and you're destroying yourself and dying when he is already planning out the deliverance for you? Loved ones, would you begin to look at it from God's view point? That's really what I'm saying.

Would you blast yourself out of your miserable, little, egotistic, subjective experience and would you look out, see the empirical evidence before you that the Father has planned the thing and designed it carefully, and would you simply make the logical inference that he must have done the same to my life and why don't I just lay back and begin to enjoy his world and accept what he's giving to me, and trust him to give me what is best for me. Oh brothers and sisters, you'd be a lot happier to live with I tell you. You'd be a lot more pleasant to be with. So would I, if we'd relax. And each time we see somebody coming with the clubs and the swords, we would instead of cutting them up them with a sword to stop them stopping us, we would look up to the Father and say, "Lord, this looks as if it's going to change your plans for me. But I know that no man can change your plans so I trust you. And I trust you Father that you can work this even into your plan. This period of unemployment that I'm now facing, Lord you know about it and I know your will for me is rest and peace and faith. And you can see by this churning of my old stomach and the sleepless nights, that there's anything but peace in my heart at the moment. So Father, I'm just going to hand this over to you."

I think I've told some of you in classes about Stanley Jones. He went out to India as a missionary about 70 years ago, and he served for two or three months and became sick. He went up into the hill country, tried to recover, got a little better, and came back down again. Two months later he went back to the hill country. He was ill again. He came down and served another month and then came back to the States. Spent three months getting himself gathered together here and went back to India. He was there three months and he had a nervous breakdown. Went up into the hill country again to try to recover. Spent six months up there and came down again. Works for about five or six months and then became ill again, both mentally, emotionally, and physically. One night, he was trying to pray and he seemed to sense a voice inside him saying, "Stanley, why don't you hand the whole thing over to me?" And just in one of those revelation moments of truth, he said, "All right Lord, here."

Eight years ago I chauffeured Stanley Jones around Minneapolis. He was the liveliest 85 year old I had ever seen in my life. He spent six months in India lecturing and six months in the States lecturing and had been doing that for 40 or 50 years. At 86, he did faster press ups than I ever saw anybody doing. And it all came when he at last accepted that his Maker knew what he was doing and he handed the whole thing over to him. And loved ones, would you do it? Both those of us who are in agony here this morning and those of us who still think we have the whole thing under control because we're going to hit a rock sooner or later too. But would you think of doing that? Would you think of believing that your Creator knows what he's about and would you think of handing it over to him? Well if you do, there'll be just a gentle spirit that will begin to come into you of love for other people and of contentedness that will make your life a continual blessing to other people. And you'll find yourself not reacting in that old, hateful way. But you'll find yourself responding deep from inside in your spirit. Well I hope that somebody here today will stop and hand it over. Let us pray.

Dear Father, you can see deep down into our hearts. You can see the twisting and the writhing inside us our Father. You can see that we've grown so used to a sense of unrest that we even think we're relaxed when we're not relaxed. Lord, we see we're silly, foolish people and we see we're rebellious too, Lord. We often sense that you had the thing under control but we just wanted it to be under control the way we wanted it to be. Lord, we see that you're asking us to hand the whole thing over to you for you to do it the way you want. So that if you want us married, we'll be married. If you want us poor, then we'll be poor. If you want us unknown, we'll be unknown. If you want us to remain in this difficult, almost impossible situation for life, you will give us grace to remain there in peace. Father, we would ask you by your Holy Spirit to help us to see the sense of this and to see that it is your will for us. And instead of living according to the flesh and killing ourselves day by day with the strain we create, to put to death these deeds of the body by your Holy Spirit, filling us with your love and your trust. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.