

Things to Come 1

Romans 8:38e

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

We've all had different kinds of mums and dads so it's very hard to generalize about that kind of thing; some of us had good experiences and some of us have had bad experiences. You didn't have to fret about where you were going to get new clothes, or about the rent or the mortgage payment; that was all in their hands and their interest and approval of you was all that mattered. And it was just great at the end of the day to go out to wherever your dad came home from work to walk home with him or to meet him at the gate and come in together. Life was beautifully uncomplicated and simple. And I think for most of us, at least at that age, very relaxing; the bad things were few and far between and life was very pleasant and very peaceful.

That's the way our Creator wants us to live today; he wants us to have that kind of relationship to him as our Father. He wants us to relax and rest in him. He wants us to play in our sandboxes and to trust him for the next meal. He wants us to relax about the future and trust him to provide what we need, and all we have to do is do what he tells us. Of course, that's where it came unstuck for us because we remember that when we were five or six we did have to do what our dads and mums told us to do. And there's something in us that tells us if we're going to trust the Creator as our loving Father, and trust him to provide everything for us, then we probably have to do what he tells us; we have to go where he wants us to go, and we have to work at the kinds of things that he wants us to work at. We have to trust his judgment for our careers, and trust his judgment for our marriages.

That's what most of us were not prepared to; we decided, "No, I want the peace and the security of a loving Father, but I don't want to have my life dominated by somebody else's will." I think most of us here decided at some point in our lives that we weren't going to live like that; we decided, "I like the security and the peace that having a loving Father brings me, but I want to live my own life, I want to do my own thing in my own way." So we cut ourselves off from that kind of relationship with our Creator. And yet, we were made in his image.

Most of you here would agree with me; you do need love -- most of you sitting here would say that. You would say, "Yeah, I recognize that there's something inside me that wants love. It was good back there when I was five or six years old -- and I do in a way hate the psychologists that say I'm looking for a father figure and all that stuff, because I suppose deep down I really am; there is something in me that wants love." And it is true loved ones; we are made in God's image, we were made to be his children, we are made to be loved. The killer is that most of us have cut ourselves off from God, and yet we still need his love.

You remember how it was so good when your dad hoisted you up on his shoulder; you thought nobody could feel more important than you. All the significance you ever wanted was for him to call you or to give you part of his meal. That made you feel, "Boy, you're really important." You had a great sense of security and a great sense of happiness just being with him. Loved ones, most of us still need that -- we've cut ourselves off from our Creator, but we still need his love.

And you know what we've done; most of us have tried to get it from everybody else. We've tried to get it from people, or tried to get it from things, or tried to get it from

experiences. We've tried to get the things that our Father's love would have given us, and you know that. Most of us have trouble because people don't love us the way we think they should love us. Most of us have all kinds of resentment during the day because we don't think people pay the attention to us that they should and that's the way most of us have started to live -- we've tried to get from people and things the love that our Father would have given us. You know what has happened; we've just perverted and twisted these personalities out of any recognition of what they used to be. Our personalities have become so twisted that even if we want to regard our Creator as our loving Father, we can't because of this miserable, twisted, personality of ours.

I think a lot of you will agree with that. You'll say, "I hear what you're saying and I would really like to trust God for next week's paycheck, I really would. But, there's something in me that won't -- there's something in me that doesn't want to risk it." Loved ones, that's that old, twisted personality of ours; we've got so used to living off everybody else in the world and looking to everybody else for the love that should come from our Father, that now we couldn't even treat him as our Father if we wanted to. And that's the cry of most of our hearts, "the good that I want to do -- that's the thing that I cannot do; I want to trust God as my Father, but it seems to "airy fairy" to me. I can't do it. I can trust my bank account, or I can trust my marriage partner, or I can trust my colleague at work, but I don't seem able to trust this invisible God that you're talking about."

It's because these personalities of ours have become twisted out of all recognition. And there is no way in which you can treat God as your loving Father the way you used to treat your parents, unless this old, twisted personality can somehow be destroyed and you can be recreated. That is what God has done in Jesus. That's what God's love in Jesus means; God has taken your old, distrustful, suspicious, man-fearing, man-dependent personality and destroyed it in Jesus. And that personality that has got so used to looking to people and things for what you should be getting from your creator, that it has been destroyed in Jesus.

So anybody who wants to begin a relationship -- a Father-child relationship -- with the creator of the world, anybody in this room who wants to do it, can do it this morning because that old personality of yours, that is naturally distrustful of God, was destroyed in Jesus. And you can come into a loving relationship with your Father if you want to, and if you're prepared to die to all other loves but God's. That's how you come into an experience of God's love in Christ.

Now loves ones, that love of God in Christ is in some way like our parent's love, and yet in some ways it's different; it's different in its purity and its power. And the part of the verse of Romans 8:38 that we're studying this morning is concerned with the difference in power. Now, maybe you'd look at the verse first and then I'll explain to you what the difference is. It's Romans 8:38. Paul is saying this love that God has for us in Jesus -- nothing can separate us from it. "For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." The part that we're studying this morning is "I am sure that not even things to come can separate us from that love."

That was the limitation of our dad's love. It was such a shock when he said the Vikings would win and they didn't win. You knew he loved you, but suddenly you began to be aware that his love had certain limitations to its power. He just did not know everything that was going to come about. He said it would snow and it didn't snow. And suddenly you realized that that dear dad of yours, upon whom you depended completely for your own security, didn't know everything that was going to come

about; sometimes he said certain things would happen and they didn't happen. Then one day it struck you, as it certainly struck me, that even if he did know the things that would come about in years hence, yet there would come a time when he would not be there to take care of you. However much he loved you or however much your mum loved you, there was going to come a time when they would be dead and you would have to manage it on your own.

Now loved ones, this is what this verse says about God's love; there is no such limitation in God's love. No "things to come" can separate you from the love of your dear Father in heaven. That's what I'd like to share with you; that even the "things to come" will not separate us from God's love. It's important in these days to know that. I don't know how all of you think about the next 25 years up to the year 2000, but I think a lot of us have wonderings, and doubts, and some fears. What God is saying this morning is, "If you have died to every love but mine, and you've begun to treat me as your dear Father, and begun to look to me alone for love and stopped looking to your partner, or your friends, or your colleagues, and you've started to treat me as the dearest person in the whole world, and you've started to love me above every other love, then I will take care of you whatever things to come may come about."

Now what will come about loved ones? What are the things to come? Maybe we should look at Matthew 24 and begin the study there. Matthew 24:3, "As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?' And Jesus answered them, 'Take heed that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: all this is but the beginning of the birth-pangs.'" Things will get worse, that's what Jesus says. There will be increasing numbers of Guru Maharaj Jis. There'll be increasing numbers of people like the Korean, [Sun Myung] Moon. There will be more and more people who will claim to be Christ. There will be more and more deception during the next number of years, the 25 or 30 years ahead. There'll be increasing wars and rumors of wars. Two thirds of the world's population exists in the third world and they'll demand, more and more, to have their share of the world's resources so there will be increasing famine, and increasing battle and strife in world economics as that takes place.

There'll be increasing distress and distrust among the nuclear powers; more and more we'll suspect the other person is building up their armaments so that they'll make the first strike. Increasingly we'll become afraid of places like India, or other places that do not have sufficient food, and yet have the ability to explode a hydrogen bomb. So there will be increasing fear and distrust among nuclear powers. There will be increasing blackmail and embargos on food and energy between those countries that have food and energy. More and more of us will blackmail each other and will enforce embargos. More and more of us will become distrustful of what the other fellow on the other side of the ocean is doing. Until eventually, we'll all be so distrustful of each other, and so filled with fear, and our own national economies will become so chaotic, that we'll have to make a choice between chaos and totalitarianism.

And at that time, because chaos means destruction and totalitarianism means survival, we will chose totalitarianism. That is, we will all choose to trust one man whom, in a sense, all of us equally distrust. We'll decide we have to stop this rot somewhere; we have to have somebody who can bring some kind of order into the chaos that now exists in world commerce, the chaos that now exists in world armaments. And so we'll welcome, actually, that great figure that will come forward and will

be prepared to govern the world and to bring some kind of unity into it.

Now loved ones, you should not listen to this with any skepticism, because the truth is that the spirit of this kind of antichrist is already in our world. That's what God says in 1 John 4:3, "and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of antichrist, of which you heard that it was coming, and now it is in the world already." And it is -- South America is filled with military dictatorships. You know that. You can count on, maybe half of one hand, the number of nations in South America that are not under military dictatorship.

But then when you look to another quarter of the world, in Russia and China, you find that they are under what they call "collective leadership" but what we know is just a dictatorship. And then if you look at another quarter of the world you see that they have had to choose between communism, chaos and totalitarian rule. So already throughout our world, the greater number of us exists only because we are under a dictatorship. We ourselves have democracy, but the mass media is so effective that more and more we are acquiescing in what takes place rather than protest, aren't we?

We ourselves are being brainwashed and prepared for the dictatorship of an antichrist figure. You know yourself that it used to be the truth that it was a joke -- Americans saying that you could not fight City Hall. This was the one country where you could fight City Hall. But our society is becoming so complex and so massive that it is increasingly difficult to work up inside ourselves enough energy and action to fight City Hall. So the whole world, in a sense, is being prepared for this kind of a dictatorship, so when the antichrist figure comes, it will be very natural to all of us. Indeed, most people will look around and say, "This is the only answer; this is the only way to bring some kind of order into world trade, and world commerce. It's the only alternative we have to chaos and destruction." So that spirit of antichrist is already in the world, and the antichrist figure himself may be in the world.

But that is the first thing that will happen coming up to the end of the world; there will be an antichrist figure that will rise up, and all of us will welcome as the one solution to the hideous complexity into which our world has, by then, fallen.

Now one magnificent thing will happen at that point: before the antichrist himself is possessed and taken over completely by Satan there is something else that happens to those who are children of God and you find it in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, "For the Lord himself," that is, Jesus, "will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words." And that's what is referred to as the rapture.

Some of you know of that name and many of us think of that as the second coming of Christ and really it's not quite accurate to call that the second coming of Christ. The second coming of Christ is something that comes a number of years later, as we'll see next Sunday, when Jesus comes to destroy Satan. But really, that is the time of the rapture and that's what will happen, loved ones. Those of us who have ceased to depend on other people's love and have begun to put our dear Father in heaven as first in our lives -- those of who really do not only believe in God, but treat him as God in our lives -- Jesus will come and take us up into his Father's presence.

And the dead, those of us who have been buried over these past thousands of years, we will be taken up, and then those of us who are still alive, we will be taken up to be with Jesus. And that will be before the hideous persecution that will take place on the earth; it will be before what people call the tribulation. And of course that's why God's love is so evident to us in his taking us up before the tribulation comes about. It's very important for us to see that, because I think a lot of us talk at great length about the tribulation and about persecution. I think God wants us to believe his words and see that one of the first things that happen after the antichrist begins to rise and before Satan takes over the antichrist completely in person; Jesus will come and take us to himself.

Now who will be involved in that rapture? Perhaps you'll look at a difficult passage in Revelation 12. I'll try to interpret it simply, and then go into more detail next Sunday. Revelation 12:1-6, "And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; she was with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth, in anguish for delivery. And another portent appeared in heaven; behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems upon his heads. His tail swept down a third of the stars from heaven, and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, that he might devour her child when she brought it forth; she brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which to be nourished for one thousand two hundred sixty days."

Part of the clue is in that Verse 5, "She brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne." This is the same word that is used of the rapture; that we will be "caught up together with Christ." And the woman in the Bible usually symbolizes the church, "And the woman brings forth a male child," and the male child usually signifies Jesus or those who are really in Jesus. The dragon always symbolizes Satan, and Satan's determination is to stop the church bringing forth the real body of Jesus. But it is the real body of Jesus that will be taken up to him in the clouds. So who are involved in the rapture? The man child that the church brings forth. So it is important to face that.

Do you see that there are many of us in this room that believe in Jesus? But only some of us really treat him as our Lord. It's just true; let's not be silly about it, or ignore it, or try to be polite to each other; all of us here probably believe in God and probably believe in Jesus, but only some of us have actually died to living off of other people. A lot of us here have two kinds of insurance policies; we have the insurance policy of depending on other people for the love that we need; of getting as much from other people, and things, and experiences as we can, and then we like to think we have this other insurance policy tucked inside of our pocket and it's called "belief in Jesus."

Actually, it's not possible. Do you see that? The church contains the body of Christ; it is not the body of Christ. No church, it doesn't matter how perfect that church may be, no church is the same as the body of Christ. Loved ones, some of us here will be caught up with Jesus -- some of us who really belong to him. And I would encourage your dear hearts to try to be real about that in your own lives. Stop this business of, "I believe in Jesus." The devils believe in Jesus, but they shudder because they don't do what Jesus tells them to do.

Now, those of us who are part of the man-child that will be caught up with Jesus in the rapture are

those who actually, in our day-to-day lives, obey and depend on Jesus for all that we need, and not on other people, or experiences, or things; those of us who have died to what everybody else can give us and depend on him, himself. Those are the ones that will be involved in the rapture. That's why there will be a division, loved ones -- there will. And you dear husbands and wives, and you brothers and sisters, and mums and dads, and sons and daughters, you do need to see that there will be a division at the time of the rapture; that some of us will be taken and some will not.

Jesus made it very plain in Matthew 24:40, "Then two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left. Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming." And you remember, in another place, it says, "Two people will be lying in the same bed and one will be taken and the other left." So I would encourage all of you who can hear this; will you be real about what you say you believe? Because only those of us who live it day-by-day will be taken up with Jesus.

He is no fool, loved ones; we can bluff each other, we can say, "I believe in Jesus" but he knows; he knows if you know him, he knows if you love him. And those of us who do love him will be taken up to be with him. Many of you wonder, "When will this be?" And love ones, though the Bible is very precise and delineates carefully the events that will follow the rapture, the Bible never states when the rapture will take place.

Now, a lot of us read and misread scripture, and apply signs to the rapture that are actually applied to subsequent events following the rapture. Jesus was never in any doubt about it; he said, "Nobody knows when the rapture will take place." The events that follow the rapture are very clearly delineated and we'll study them next Sunday, but the rapture itself, no one knows when it will take place. That's stated in Matthew 24:36, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man. For as in those days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man." Verse 42, "Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you almost must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect." And it is impossible loved ones, to tell exactly when that rapture will take place.

What will happen to Satan? Well, that is described in Revelation 12:7-9, "Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they were defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven." So as the real body of Jesus is taken up to be with him so Satan himself will be cast down. "And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, 'Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. Rejoice then, O heaven and you that dwell therein! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!' And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had borne the male child."

Satan will be cast down to the earth and will be set loose in the world. It's not so much that the Holy Spirit will be withdrawn from the world as that his restraining effect on Satan will be withdrawn and the church that is left will be persecuted ruthlessly by Satan because it will no longer be protected by the real body of Christ that dwells in it. Then takes place that time called the tribulation, and the tribulation will last probably for about three and a half years. But we'll talk a little bit more next Sunday about it.

But then Satan will rule the world and yet even during that time some people, as they are persecuted within the Church, will receive Jesus because of preaching that will be done from heaven itself. But loved ones, we who now are real with Jesus will never see those events because we will be with him, sharing responsibilities that he has for us in heaven.

Now just two things that I'd ask you to notice in connection with these things; what are you and I to do in the light of these facts? 2 Peter 3:8-15, "But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire! But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you wait for these, be zealous to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the forbearance of our Lord as salvation."

That's what we're to do; we're to be zealous; to be without spot or blemish, loved ones that's our responsibility. The tribulation will not touch those of us who are in Jesus so we are not meant to be paranoids talking about the terrible persecution that is coming upon us. Loved ones, it's pathetic the way some of us talk about the little bits of hardships that we have in these days. It is nothing compared to the real tribulation -- and the real tribulation we ourselves will not see because of God's love for us; he will take us up before that ever comes about.

So first of all, let's forget this business of talking with mock concern about the tribulation. Loved ones that is not our concern; that time of persecution will not touch us. Our responsibility is to be zealous in these days to be found without spot or blemish in Jesus. The second thing we should do is clearly outlined in that New Testament lesson, in Acts 1:9, "And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'"

We should not stand looking up. We should not be all preoccupied with these things. That's why it's good to talk about them in just two Sundays, and then get on with the business that Jesus has given us; and that is to express his life to this world while this world still has some kind of order in it. So I'd encourage those of you who are in Jesus this morning not to stand looking up and gazing into heaven, and not to be all preoccupied with the books about prophetic events, but to get it straight in your own mind, and then do what God said the disciples should do, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and

Samaria and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.” And that’s what we are called to do.

But loved ones, the beautiful thing is that none of the things to come will be able to separate us from God’s love because unlike our earthly dads, he will be alive and will be controlling all the time the things that happen to us and will rescue us from them before they get completely out of hand on this world. Next Sunday I’d like to share about the events that will follow. And I’d like to recommend one book that I don’t agree with completely; but it is the best and most balanced treatment that I can find, and that’s All Things New by [Arthur E.] Bloomfield.