

Old or New Covenant?

Romans 9:4

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

I'll ask this question, but I know that your answer will be, "Yes". Have you ever wakened on a bright, sunny Saturday morning and looked forward to a great weekend with your loved one, roommate or friend -- then, over the silliest, stupidest, pickiest little issue you fell-out with the other person? You had an absolute set-to with each other and you threw away that weekend of bliss forever.

One of the beauties of communicating with each other is that we're all the same. We've all had that experience. You know the way we've looked back on Sunday morning and we've wondered, "How on earth did it ever happen? How did it set out so beautifully and end up so miserably? How could I have brought myself to fight over that thing? It isn't worth it." We just do not understand how we ever came to disagree with each other, how we ever came to throw away a beautiful weekend of happiness over one petty little issue.

There is a famous Russian novelist, Dostoevsky, who dealt with that particular issue again and again in his novels. He was always trying to solve that streak of perversity in our old personalities, that stubborn irrationality in our human nature, that impulsive destructiveness that results in us doing what we didn't want to do and spoiling something that we never wanted to spoil. Here's the way Dostoevsky put it in his "Notes From Underground." "Why does it happen that at the very, yes, at the very moments when I am the most capable of feeling every refinement of all that is 'sublime and beautiful', as they used to say, it would, as though of design, happen to me not only to feel but to do such ugly things?"

Loved ones, that fatal flaw in our personalities, that radical perversion of our human nature occurred when our forefathers dislocated the relationship that they had of submission and trust in our Creator. Before that dislocation, the submission and trust that they had in our Creator was what provided them with all the security, significance and happiness that they needed. Immediately, when they dislocated that relationship, they had to find that security, significance and happiness somewhere else and they began to look to each other and other people for it. They began to look to the physical earth itself and immediately, there took place a warping of our personality, a perverting of our human nature that turned us into domineering, self-ruling, self-exalting, greedy monsters. The only option God had when he saw that was to destroy it.

You know, we've said this so often together that I'm sure some of you are almost bored with it, but really we need to keep saying it because some of us don't realize how serious the problem was. Loved ones, it was so serious that God had to destroy that warped personality. The real problem with many of us here this morning is that we say, "Ah yeah, I'm a little greedy and yeah, I did have a bad weekend this weekend, but I'll have a better one next weekend. Yeah, I do do some things that I don't really want to do but they're just little weaknesses that I'll clear up after awhile."

Loved ones, I'll see you after this life is over and you'll still be saying that. The truth is, they're not just little weaknesses. Those weekends that you've so often spoiled with your loved one, those days that you've thrown away because of your bad temper or irritability -- those come because our whole personalities have become warped. They work from the outside in instead of from the inside

out. That's why we do the wrong things. The wrong things aren't just chance happenings. The wrong things are actual expressions of what we have now -- they became perverted, warped personalities that are not the way our Creator made them. That's why the only option God had was to destroy us. That's what he did in eternity.

You'll only make sense of the rest of our conversation this morning if you see that God did that in eternity. Would you look at the verse in Revelations 13:8. (The Revised Standard Version is great except in odd spots and this is one of them. Really, R.S.V. is one of the best translations but there are times when they juxtapose the phrases when the Greek doesn't. For all you King James enthusiasts, this is where King James is right and R.S.V. is wrong.) "And all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain." That's wrong. The Greek doesn't run that way. The Greek runs, "Every name that has not been written in the book of the Lamb, that was slain before the foundation of the world." The Greek phrase "before the foundation of the world" actually follows the verb, "that was slain".

In other words, the verse is saying, "the Lamb was slain before the foundation of the world." In what we've often described as a super-special, super-temporal miracle, God took all of our warped, twisted, personalities that Dostoevsky talks about, put them in his Son, Jesus, and destroyed them there as an eternal miracle before the foundation of the world. Any of you who have trouble with that, you don't realize that we have many ordinary examples of that here on earth. You know that there are computers now that have a perfect program for your income tax. All you have to do is put in your own numbers and the program spits out the right answers. So the program is built in there and all you have to do is fill in your personal details. We have many examples here on earth of things that are set up and they'll go immediately when you fill in your details.

That's what God did in Jesus. He put us as a race, into his Son, destroyed us there and remade us by transplanting the spirit and the heart of his Son into us and immediately, we can fit ourselves into that program if we're willing to do it. Besides, you know yourselves that ever since Einstein, we know there's no such thing as time. Time really doesn't exist, does it! You know that because you know how vacations go so fast and winter goes so slow. If we hadn't these old watches and if we hadn't the marks of age upon us, time would be seen by all of us to be "one great eternal now". Even if you go to "Star Wars" [a movie] you get the whole sense of time machines -- the ability to be able to transcend time so that we see that what we're living in is one eternal now. Our time here on earth is just a concession that God gave to us because he has made us physical. But loved ones, in reality, we were destroyed in Jesus before the foundation of the world -- and we can have that realized and have that in our own lives the moment we are willing.

But, of course, mankind has spent most of its time arguing that we didn't need that kind of remedy, that we didn't need that kind of radical destruction of our personalities. We'd either argue that we didn't need it, or we'd argue that it hasn't been provided, that we can't do anything about the evil that is within us. In fact loved ones, God destroyed us before the foundation of the world. Always, right down through the centuries, he's been trying to reveal that that is so. We men and women have been trying to argue that it's not so, that it isn't needed. Every time God has done something miraculous to show us that this had taken place, we had on our part emphasized "the human" and argued that it hadn't taken place.

As you know, we've been discussing these months the covenants that God made with the Israelites. With all those covenants God was trying to convince us that, "That radical perversion that has taken

place in your human nature was destroyed in my Son. I've destroyed it. And I'm able to transplant his spirit and his heart into yourselves to make you complete, new creatures." Each time God would try to make a covenant with the Israelites, the Israelites would come back and emphasize the human side, the human part of the covenant. They would ignore the divine miracle. And of course, they would continue to live in the midst of the perversion that Dostoevsky describes.

You'll see that yourselves if you'll turn to the covenant that God made with Noah. Genesis 7:17-23. God clearly declared and demonstrated that death was the only answer to this perversion of human nature: "The flood continued forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased, and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. The waters prevailed and increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark floated on the face of the waters. And the waters prevailed so mightily upon the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered; the waters prevailed above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep. And all flesh died that moved upon the earth..." That was God's declaration; the only way he could destroy the violence that we had produced by our selfish personalities, was to destroy us. "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."

It was because God knew that the antidote of the miraculous, supernatural destruction in Jesus existed that he made the covenant with Noah. Genesis 9:11 states, "I establish my covenant with you, 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." It was because of that destruction that took place in Jesus. So God said to Noah, "Because of that, I'm going to let you continue to live here on the earth. And I'm going to give you the responsibility of bringing nature into order." But Noah's descendants did the same as we've always done through the centuries; they ignored the miraculous destruction of self-assertiveness that has taken place in Jesus and they emphasized their own human responsibilities for keeping nature in order.

Then began centuries of oppression and domination by man such that God had to come again in Abraham's time and reveal again the miraculous destruction that had taken place before creation. And that's what he did, loved ones. This time God didn't emphasize death but this time emphasized to Abraham: "Look, the trouble that you have in your life, the weaknesses that you cannot overcome, the personality that you cannot overcome because of your own helplessness, I can control by my own power and my own ability. I can do something about it. I can do something for you that you can't do for yourself."

This is how he expressed it in Genesis 17:15-17, "And God said to Abraham, 'As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her; I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.' Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, 'Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?'" And God said to Abraham that he'd do what Abraham and Sarah themselves could not do. And Abraham was ignoring what God was saying. God was saying, "By my supernatural power I can do what you cannot do with your own inadequacy." And Abraham was saying, "No, no, you cannot do it. Anyway, it's not important what you do -- it's important what I do."

And from then on Abraham began to emphasize faith -- his faith first of all in God. But his

descendants began emphasizing their faith in themselves again. Again and again human nature has always emphasized what it can do. It's part of the covenant, not what God can do. And loved ones, that's the way it went right down to the covenant that we're going to talk about today. We normally call it the old covenant; the covenant God made with Moses. It's the covenant of the Ten Commandments, or we call it the covenant of works, or the covenant of law. God's aim in that covenant was the same as his aim in all the other covenants -- to show, "Look - don't you dear people see that I have put that intractable will of yours, that perverted personality that you cannot control, those emotions that you cannot discipline, into my Son Jesus? I have destroyed them there on the cross and I have remade you and I can give you my spirit to flow through you and make you like myself."

God was saying that again and again. When he came to Moses he was saying the same thing. It was God's way of saying to man, "Look, you haven't entered into the miracle that I have wrought. Otherwise, if you had, here's what you'd do: you'd obey my commandments. If you had allowed me to remake you completely in my Son to destroy that old self-exalting personality that you have developed, then these things would happen. If you are dead to yourself with my Son, then, as in Exodus 20:3, you would have no other gods before me. You wouldn't make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness that is like anything that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You wouldn't bow down to them or serve them. For I your Lord thy God am a jealous God bringing the iniquities of the fathers upon the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments."

"If you had accepted the mighty work that I have done in my Son to you, you would not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. You'd remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your manservant, or your maidservant, or your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it. If you receive my spirit in your life you'd honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you. You wouldn't kill. You wouldn't commit adultery. You wouldn't steal. You wouldn't bear false witness against your neighbor. You wouldn't covet your neighbor's house. You wouldn't covet your neighbor's wife or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's."

God was trying to say to Moses and the Israelites, "But don't you see, you all are disobedient in these things? You do them because you haven't entered into the great covenant that I have for you and that I have given you glimpses of through my spirit." The Israelites said, "It isn't necessary. We can obey those laws on our own. We're going to prove to you that you're wrong -- that it is possible to obey these laws without that mighty transaction that you say took place before the foundation of the world. We're going to prove to you that we can obey this under our own willpower and our own ability and our own self-discipline.

That began the Jewish race's exaltation of self-righteousness in place of God's righteousness. And that self-righteousness has come down right to this very day. Loved ones, that was the old covenant. Yet, do you see that God still extended mercy to us because all those covenants only vaguely revealed the truth of the mighty miracle of what God had done to us in Jesus? So God continued to extend mercy because those covenants were only partial revelations. But do you see the new covenant under which we all live? It's so plain and so clear that even a little child cannot

misunderstand. Loved ones, in real see, touch, hear events in the year 29 A.D., God placarded before history and before the whole world, the destruction in his Son of you and me. It is so obvious and plain that no one questions the historical event of the crucifixion. No one seriously questions the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus. There is no one who, in light of scientific evidence, would say that these things did not take place. God had plainly in see, touch and hear terms shown us what he did to us in Jesus.

God has given us all sorts of explanations and it's plainly stated in Romans 8:1-4: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

It's put in literal terms in Romans 6:1-7: "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? 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. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For he who has died is freed from sin."

Really, what God is saying is, "Don't believe the socio-biologists, who say that you're bad tempered because of your genes. Don't believe the psychiatrists who say that you'll lose your temper because you're sick and you can't help it. Don't believe the false gospel teacher who says that God will forgive you so just do your best." But God is saying to us this morning, "Don't you see what I've been trying to reveal for generations through all the covenants that I made with you and with your fore-fathers? Don't you see that I've been trying to show you that I took you -- your miserable little warped personality with all its greediness and all its desire to criticize and tear down other people -- I've put it in my Son and I've destroyed it there and recreated you. I am able to transplant the heart and spirit of my Son into your spirit. I'm able to make you like him. Don't you see that?"

Loved ones, do you see what so many of us are doing? We are saying, "Oh it doesn't matter. Jesus has died -- that's the sacrifice that will please God. I'll do my best, but you can't be perfect so I'll just continue confessing my sins, getting forgiveness, and carrying on day after day until I meet God face to face." Don't you see what a parody it is? Don't you see what an insult to God that is? The new covenant is different from the old covenant. The new covenant is, God will change you this morning if you are willing to be changed. God is able to take that personality that you have so carefully perverted over the years, and he is able to make real in you the destruction of that personality that look place in his Son, and is able to remake you completely new. That is the new covenant.

What God is asking you this morning is not, "Do you believe that I can do this?" It is not, "Do you believe that I will forgive you your sins because my Son has died for you?" It is, "Are you willing to be included in my Son when he died to everything but me? He died to the importance of his reputation. He died to the importance of what other people thought of him. He died to his own comfort, died to his own rights. He died to his right to lose his temper at home. He died to his

right to tear other people apart. Are you willing to be included in that death? If you are, I can fill you with my spirit and make you completely new so that you'll no longer have that streak of perversity in your life."

Now, loved ones, that's the new covenant. It's entirely different from the old covenant. It involves a change, not just a covering of sin, but a complete transformation. So, I'd ask you this morning, "Are you willing for that?" We human beings are always on the same track, we're so bored. We say, "There's nothing we can do about the way we are so we can't even try. It's the same old theme; that we're hopelessly lost. We can't do anything to change ourselves." Loved ones, that is the heart of the new covenant. God can change you this very day. He really can!

Let us pray.

Dear Father, I pray for my loved ones here. Lord, I pray for those who, like me, felt that it was hopeless, that felt they just could never change. "It was true for everybody else, but not for me. I was just too bad. I was twisted in ways that other people weren't." Lord, I would pray for any dear friends who would feel like that this morning. I'd ask you to show them what you did to all of us. You say that we had to be destroyed and remade completely and that's what you did in Jesus. We can experience that this morning if we are willing for it. So dear Father, will you show any of us here if we aren't willing? Lord, if there is any way that we are still demanding that people look up to us or that we be respected, or any way that we're demanding rights that Jesus never had. Will you show us that now? And by your Holy Spirit, would you show us that that's why the changes have taken place? It's not because you haven't or can't do it in us, but it's because we're not willing for it. And then Lord, will you show us that there's nothing in life for us unless we are willing -- there is nothing in life but years and years and decades of moral impotence? Lord, show us that there's only one way to go and that's the way you have planned for us. Holy Spirit we would ask you to come in and reproduce the confidence of a life of Jesus within us. We ask this because you want it -- and for the sake of all those loved ones that we have hurt through the years -- and we ask it for our own salvation -- in Jesus' name. Amen.