

## Falling into Jesus

Romans 9:33

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

It might be good for everyone here and for those of you who are watching on television to know that what we have been doing for the past eight years in Campus Church is to study the book of Romans chapter by chapter and verse by verse. We do that because then it is more likely that we will see reality as God has expressed it rather than as man expresses it. So, we are bound by the truth he has revealed in his word and the proportions in which he places that truth. We have been doing this for eight years and we are now coming to a big day for us as we are at the end of a chapter Romans 9:33. I was just thinking the boys and girls that were born into this congregation will be able to tell their birth according to which chapter in Romans we were at!

We've been talking, loved ones, in the past weeks about the fact that there are a great many unhappy religious people and there are many happy pagans. I said that one of the things that put me off Christianity was the number of so called Christians who were narrow minded, prejudiced and depressed while I had many happy-go-lucky pagan friends who were just fun to be with. This made it very difficult for me to believe that Christianity explained reality when I saw that. You remember we have been sharing that the explanation for this phenomenon is the same explanation that Paul gave for the fact that so few Jews, to whom God had first revealed himself, knew him personally as their father, while so many Gentiles, in comparison, knew him personally as their father. You remember the reason that Paul gives is the Jews were unprepared to trust God with their lives. They preferred to trust themselves, to put their trust in themselves and their own ability to be as righteous as him. As a result of that, they became self-righteous people and not pleasant people to be around at all.

That, of course, is the real key to knowing God personally. To know him personally you have to trust him as your dear father who will provide you with all you need while you are on this earth. What all of us have discovered is that we have developed a deformed nature that has been dependant on people and circumstances for happiness for so long that it seems absolutely impossible for that nature to trust God for everything. That nature has gotten so used to trusting people, things and circumstances or even itself, it seems as if it is inherently incapable of trusting God as a loving father. So, of course, our nature is always getting impatient and it gets angry because it cannot get from people the love an infinite God can give us. Many of us have found we get angry when we don't want to get angry we get irritable of people when we don't want to get irritable. Of course, the reason is that our nature is so deformed and perverted from being dependent on people and things rather than on God. It is always looking to people and demanding from wives a kindness that only an infinite God can give. We are always looking at our peers, looking for a respect, acknowledgment, praise and an up building that no human being can give us because they are looking for it themselves. We are constantly finding strain in our lives.

We have said that deformed nature of yours was destroyed in Jesus on Calvary in God's cosmic action done eternally in his own mind and then set forth on Calvary in the first century. God took the deformed, perverted, self-righteous, world dependent part of you and destroyed it in his son. That's what Colossians 3:3 means: "You have died and your life is hid with Christ in God." That's what actually happened. Your nature has been changed. But for it to be manifested in your own life, you have to be willing now to identify yourself with Jesus in his death. Identify yourself in his

death to people, to his dependence upon people and in his life in God and his dependence on God. But if you are willing to do that, if you are willing to identify yourself in Jesus in his attitude to the world and his attitude to God—then you'll find the change that has been wrought in God's eternal mind is made real in your actual life today by the Holy Spirit. You'll find a new nature inside you that is described perfectly by God's laws. Because that's what God's laws do, they describe the nature of a person who trusts God completely and absolutely as their loving father. You'll find your life described by that.

Here's the question I'd like to deal with this morning: If Jesus and his death are the means by which God has changed our deformed natures so that we are able at last to trust God as our loving father (because the untrusting part of us is destroyed and we have a trusting part that we can trust him) then why does Paul say what he says in this verse we are studying? Now look at it, loved ones, and think about it. In other words, if Jesus is God's answer to our predicament, then why does Paul use these words in Romans 9:33? "...as it is written, 'Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone that will make men stumble, a rock that will make them fall; and he who believes in him will not be put to shame.'" Why does Paul refer these words to Jesus? Isaiah wrote those words about the eighth century B.C., he wrote them about Jehovah. That Jehovah, God, would be a stone that would make men stumble. But Paul applies them to Jesus and says Jesus is the stone that God has laid in Zion that will make men stumble and a rock that will cause them to fall. But he who believes in him will not be put to shame. Now why does Paul talk about Jesus as a stone of stumbling? That's the Greek, it means a stone of stumbling, a stone that is put there specifically to make men stumble, that's what it means. If you look at the Greek, it's a stone of stumbling that will make men stumble. That's the emphasis here. Now, why does God refer to his Son like that?

Firstly, do you see where the stone is placed? It is placed in Zion. It is placed there not only for the self-righteous Jews to stumble over but for all religious people to trip over. So it is placed first of all in Zion. Presumably, we are all part of the spiritual Zion. It is specifically put there to catch out those people who think they are religious. Now you tell me, why was Jesus' death a stumbling block to the Jews? Do you know? It was because they believed there was nothing wrong with them. That's right. They believed there was nothing wrong with their own natures. They believed they just had to try harder to obey God. They felt they could do it on their own. They felt they could do it by their own works, instead of putting faith in him; by their own works they could obey him. They felt by their own efforts they could obey God. There didn't need to be any change wrought in them at all. That their natures were OK; if they just tried a little harder, they would be able to obey God. So, the idea of a savior was repugnant to them. I don't know what you were like but at one time I hated the word, savior, because it implied, "poor me" needed some help from somebody else. That is what the Jews thought about a savior. The idea was repugnant to them; it was an insult to them that they should need anything changed in themselves. They felt their need was to obey God's law by their own efforts and their own strength. So, to them Jesus was a stone of stumbling, because they would not accept that their natures were in any way perverted or required any change which they could bring about themselves. So it is with thousands of religious people, really.

There are thousands of people like us throughout the world who claim to believe in Jesus. They claim to believe in his death but they will not accept that there is anything radically wrong with themselves. They believe we can trust God, sure we can. We just exercise trust. They will not accept that they have a nature that is utterly perverted and deformed--that unless changed by its original maker and utterly transformed, they will never be able to trust God. They refuse to believe that. They refuse to believe that there is any necessity for them to die to the world and come alive

to God. So, of course, their lives are filled with anger, envy, jealousy and all the acts and transgressions of God's laws. What they do in the face of that is, they look at Jesus' death and they refuse the idea that they have to be transformed and they have to die and be raised anew. They look at Jesus' death and they reduce that holy death to a sacrificial bribe to God not to look at the transgressions in their lives. That's what it is.

They reduce the whole, miraculous, cosmic death in Jesus to a sacrificial bribe which they offer to God so he won't look at the transgressions and sins in their lives. So, such people will say, "Sure I've sinned. Sure I get angry at times. I'm less than honest at times but that's only human everyone does that. But I don't need to worry because I believe in Jesus." That's what they say. Now to people like that Jesus is a stumbling stone. Why? Because his words contradict what they have just said. Why? Look at it in Matthew 5:17: "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them." But these people say, well what if I break the law from time to time, Jesus' death covers that. They say, as long as you fulfil them that's all that counts. But Jesus says, "For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished." (vs. 18) Then they tend to say as long as Jesus accomplishes it for us that is all that matters. Jesus' words are a stumbling stone to them. "Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." (vs. 19) Then they'll say it doesn't matter if I get angry from time to time, what does it matter? Jesus' death covers it. But the very person whose death they are claiming to offer as a bribe to God to overlook their anger is the same one who said, "You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment." (vs. 21) They try to obey by their own efforts but with a nature that is unchanged. So their obedience is continual failure. They continually try to plead the death of Jesus as a bribe to God to not look at their failures.

You know, loved ones, how they'll do it. They'll say all Jesus asks is that you love him. But it is Jesus who said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Indeed, in John 15, he says if you keep my commandments then it is plain that you love me. Or they'll say, "Well, all you have to do is believe in Jesus. That's it, just believe in Jesus." But you remember in John 3:36, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life." It's turned around negatively in the last part of the verse. Those who do not obey will see death. In God's eyes to obey and believe are synonymous – they mean the same thing. If you believe, you obey. If you don't believe, you don't obey. Actually we know it in our own lives. If we really believe a thing, we do it. These loved ones will say, "All you need to do is receive Jesus' spirit. Receive his spirit, get his spirit into you, get baptized in the Spirit and that's all. It doesn't matter about the transgressions in your life."

But the fact of the matter is, "But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law." (Galatians 5:22-23) In fact when the Spirit of Jesus comes into you he enables you to live as God wants you to live. God's laws describe the life of a person who has Jesus' spirit inside him and trusts God as his loving father. So it is as natural then to be kind, loving and patient as it was at one time to be angry or envious. It's a new thought to us that it is natural to love. It is natural to be kind. It is natural to be gentle as that is how God made us originally. That's how he can return us and rectify us in Jesus.

So there are many loved ones who find Jesus a stumbling stone. Because they try to offer Jesus' death as a bribe to our Father not to look at their sins but Jesus' own words condemn them of sin and convict them of sin. Now those are some of the religious people who find Jesus as a stumbling stone.

But believe it or not, there is another group. There is another group who carry self-righteousness, self effort and works even further than the previous group do. These people are filled with a false peace and filled with human efforts. And yet they are filled with a life of a failure. But this second group carry their self-righteousness and self efforts even further. That is why God describes Jesus even more intensively in this next phrase. Romans 9:33b: "a rock that will make them fall." The Greek word is not "lithos" (stone) or "petros" (boulder). It is "petra", a rock or rock mass, a massive rock that will not move. The next Greek word is "scandalous"; it doesn't mean "make them fall" but "to entrap them". In fact it has a meaning of luring people over a cliff so that they fall to their death. It really means Jesus is a rock mass of deadly entrapment.

Now to what group is he a rock mass of deadly entrapment? Oh, it is to many of us here. There are many of us who realize that Jesus' death is not just a bribe to offer to God. There are many of us here who recognize that our natures are perverted and deformed. We recognize that we are hopelessly dependent on people, things and circumstances. We try to be free from them but we cannot. We come to the point where we cry out, "the good that I would, I cannot do." We know we have to be changed. We see Jesus' death as a mighty, cosmic death that we ourselves were involved in. We see that our natures were changed and transformed there. If we are willing to be identified with Jesus and his death to people and things and circumstances, and to die to people's love and come alive to God's love, then we recognize that we can be changed and transformed.

So, we set about producing the faith that will bring that about. That's what we do. We set about to produce the faith in us, the destruction of that selfish nature which took place in Jesus. Actually, what we try to do is crucify ourselves. We laboriously examine each area of our lives where there are indications that we trust others' opinions rather than God's. That we depend on others' financial supply rather than on what God can give us. We laboriously examine every area of our lives that take that kind of attitude to God and people. Then we try to produce the mental attitude to Jesus' death onto ourselves that will enable us to be freed from all of that mess. Somehow we feel if we can only identify ourselves with Jesus, dotting every "i" and crossing every "t" and adopting every mental and emotional attitude to him and to his death and to ourselves, then we will be freed. We feel if we can do it just as Watchman Nee describes it or Oswald Chambers describes it, just as Charles Finney describes it, then we can come into it.

And so we whomp ourselves up and try to adopt the attitude of a dead person to the criticism we receive in our office each day or our school or work. It holds for days, it holds for weeks and then one day we discover a wildcat streak of anger that comes out of us. The whole house of cards that is self crucifixion comes tumbling down and we get up and start over again. We start tramping up that Calvary road again, to make it real in us, to produce the right faith -- the right attitude that will do it.

Really Zion, bluff Zion, pseudo Zion, is a pretty miserable place. Because it has a lot of easy believers on the one side who have a false peace because they think that Jesus' death allows them to live however they please. They get a superficial joy from the fact that they think they aren't going to meet hell the way everyone else is who sins. On the other side you have the crucifiers who have no peace at all because they are trying to enter into Jesus' death by their own efforts. Loved

ones, usually with all of us, it goes on. We pray again and we search ourselves by introspection. We try a little suppression of the anger. We try to consecrate ourselves more than last time. We try to pray longer than last time. We read another book to find out, in what way am I not taking the right attitude. We ask another person who has entered into Jesus' death, "Now how do you think of this? When someone criticizes you, how do you react?" We try to reproduce the same thing. Then we come to services and think maybe it will happen in the service. And we fall and fall again until at last we can't get up any longer.

We are just crawling weakly toward the perfect will of God. We at last come to the place where you can't even rely on self to crucify self and then we see the great secret which brings release. The secret is this -- only one person can die Jesus' death, that's Jesus. You cannot die it; you cannot make it come real in you. Only if the "Spirit of the Lamb" -- with his total resignation and surrender to God, his Father only if that Spirit comes into you, and dies that death over again in your life, only then can you be crucified and raised with Jesus and freed from sin. Loved ones, that is true. You cannot bring it about yourself. All you can do is be willing of the dear Spirit of the Lamb of God to come into you and be himself in you. All you can do is be willing to die to people, circumstances and things inside you and to come alive to your Father inside you.

The only thing I would add is that some of you misinterpret the word "willing". Some of you think it is "want". It's not just "want"; all of us want the life that is free. All of us want a life that loves God and trusts him. It's not just wanting. It's are you willing, actively willing to cooperate with the Spirit of the Lamb with whatever he asks you to do. In whatever attitude he asks you to have, are you actively willing to do it? In other words, there is only one way to enter into the deliverance from your selfish, independent nature that took place on Calvary. It is to fall in; you fall into Jesus in desperation. You fall into him and you grab hold of him and his dear Spirit, and you say, "Lord, Jesus, Lamb of God, live it all over again inside me. Come and do it now. Come and die inside me, I'll do whatever you tell me. Die inside me and rise up inside me and free me to be what God wants me to be."

Loved ones, there is a way for man to rise. It is by letting the Spirit of the Lamb, Himself, come in and be again in you what he is in himself.

Let us pray. Thank you, Lord, that there is no other way but for you to come in and die inside us and take down to the ground all that you choose. Then to rise inside us and to take up from this puny human being all that you want to take up to your Father in heaven. Lord Jesus, Lamb of God will you come and be yourself in us and free us from these perverted natures that prevent us from trusting our Father as our loving God. We ask this for your glory, Lord Jesus, so that others will see you alive in this world in us. Amen.