

Darkness is Passing

Romans 13:12a

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

I have mentioned this before loved ones, and if you could let me speak to the loved ones on television directly, that you are watching this maybe middle of January some time but this is actually December 4, and you all know that what we do is, we videotape the service this morning and that enables us to edit it down to half an hour which is the television time that we buy in Florida and in other parts of the States.

Now another advantage of videotaping is that you can edit out all the mistakes. So when I give a Bible reference that is wrong and I try, you remember, to correct it when I get to this bit, then we can edit that out and that saves time on the videotape, and of course, as you do that, I become a better and better preacher because you can edit out all the mistakes. And why I don't like using this illustration is I know my wife is sitting here thinking, "Hmm. I wouldn't mind seeing the edited version of last week."

In other words, it would be nice if you could do that with your life, because if you came here next week and asked, "Could I see the sermon that was preached last Sunday morning?" we could say to you, "Would you like the edited version or the unedited version? Would you like the version with the mistakes or the version without the mistakes." And often our wives and our husbands would love it if we could do that with our whole lives and they'd say, "Oh, I'd like the edited version of last week. I saw the original and I don't want that."

I personally would like to be able to do it ahead of time. I don't know about you, but I would love to be able to preview this coming week of my life and videotape it and then I'd love to be able to go right through it with the old editing machine and edit out the bad parts and the parts where I wasn't right and then I'd love to be able to play that version over with all the imperfections gone. That's the Gospel. That's the Gospel. It is. That's the Gospel. I'll show you loved ones, the first part of it. It's in Isaiah 46.

Isaiah 46:9-10, "Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done," - declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done.

God says, "I am God and I can declare the things that are not yet done in your life. I know those things. That's why I have been able to inspire prophets to prophecy the future because I see the future. I know the end of your life from the beginning. I am able to tell you the things that are not yet done that you will do this coming week. I have seen the videotape of the rest of the days of your life. I have seen all the lines that will be created in your face by your worries and your anxieties. I have seen all the sins that you are going to commit. I have seen all the inhibitions and the complexes that those will create in you. I have seen all those things. I know those things".

You and I have a tendency to say, "Oh, that's hardly Gospel to me. If God knows all that, why doesn't he just destroy me right now? Why doesn't he just utterly destroy me? If he knows the things that I am going to do and I can imagine what they're like, why doesn't he just wipe me out now?" That's the second part of the Gospel you know, that God doesn't do that and you'll see it in an

amazing verse in Romans 11:2.

Romans 11:2, "God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew." It's amazing. I mean, even though God foreknows all that you will do this coming week, in fact all the rest of the years of your life, he has not rejected you even though he knows what you will do. God gives us the right to live that very life that we choose to live, even though he foresees what we're choosing to do. He gives us the right and the freedom to do that.

He does not reject us and then here's the heart of the Gospel. God has played that videotape of your life before his own eyes and he has edited it. He has edited it. He has edited out the sins and the imperfections and all the things in your life that make you a rebellious, miserable creature. He has edited all of that out and he has a perfect videotape of your life that is completely edited. Where does it say it? I'll show you.

Romans 6:6, "We know that our old self", that's the old life, that we would live if we had our own independent power operating, "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."

In other words, God knows what you will do next week but because of his mighty power, he is able to set it out of time and into eternity and in his Son, he is able to put that videotape of your life, that old self, that old videotape, he is able to destroy it completely in his Son and then raise his son up and raise you up with a new edited videotape that has all the responses in it that Jesus himself wanted to make in your life from the very beginning -- and that videotape is available. That life is available.

In other words, in heaven, on a shelf, there is the videotape of your life lived by your own power and by your own will -- and on another shelf, put there by the Lamb that was slain from before the foundation of the world, there is a videotape of your life that is perfect and edited completely, the life that is lived by his own power. And if you ever doubt whether that second videotape exists, loved ones, I'll point you to an amazing verse in Ephesians.

Ephesians 2:10, "For we are his workmanship", his videotape, "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." That's just great. It's an amazing verse. "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

There's a videotape of your life that is already created in Jesus, that's the Gospel. The Gospel is not just that Jesus died so that your sins could be forgiven and then you would laboriously day after day as hour succeeds hour edit the videotape of your life by your own strength and your own efforts and your own resolution and your own powers and your own abilities, the Gospel is that of course your sins are forgiven but that's a by-product of the greater thing that God did in Jesus, he recreated your life in his Son.

He recreated it with all the good works that Jesus does in your life and you can receive that edited version, and if you say, "Can anybody? Can I?" Yes, "Christ died for all, therefore all died", you too. That happened to you too. Any of us, any of us can receive it. How do you receive it? How do you bring that out of eternity and into time? By faith, by grace, by sheer grace, you're saved through faith. By faith you can receive that new life of Jesus into you this very day, that whole lived life, you can receive by faith. That's how it happens. That's what the Gospel is.

The Gospel is that God has foreseen your whole life, has foreseen all its sins, all its complexes, all the lines in your flesh, all the anxieties, all the worries, all the things that you would, that you cannot do, the evil that you hate that's the very thing you do, he has seen all of that. He has put it into his Son. He has crucified it there and raised you up whole and new and that life is available to you by faith today. That's how we differ from Muslims or from Hindus or from this person and that person.

We live a saintly life by faith, receiving it from God himself who has already created it. We live it by faith and you can receive that this moment. If you say, "How long have I got? How long have I got to receive that? How long have I got to allow that edited version to take the place of this version that I am living now?" Well, that's what the verse was saying last Sunday - that you know what the hour is. In fact, maybe you'd look at that, it's Romans 13:11.

Romans 13:11, "Besides this you know what hour it is", you remember the Greek word there is actually the word for time, it's 'kairos', it's really besides this or 'kai touto' you remember, this too 'eidotes', knowing. We know 'kairos', we know what time it is. You remember we said plainly that that doesn't mean the time of Jesus coming because Jesus himself said, "Look, I don't know that. The angels don't know it in heaven. How can you know it?" He's not talking about that.

He is talking about 'kairos', a set determined stretch of time that God has appointed, that's the time that you and I have to receive that edited version of our lives by faith. We have 'kairos' time, a set, appointed time. For most of us, from age 13 to you are 70, that's it. From age 13 until you're 70, God has put you on this earth, he has done this miracle and he has now said, "Now, this is what I have done. Now I am giving you these 60 odd years to receive this by faith and to allow it to be made real in time and to give you a chance to re-edit the videotape that will echo down through the centuries forever and ever the deeds of your life." That's the set time we have.

You have 60 odd years to decide whether it's the deeds of the old unedited version or the deeds of the edited version that will echo down through the halls of eternity forever and ever. Because you probably realize that, not only from the Bible, but from people like Einstein, that the deeds that you do will echo through the universe forever. Do you know that? They will.

Even the scientists can show that if you're far enough away in the universe, you are able to see something there that has taken place back here in this location and so even from the point of view of physics, things that are done in this universe, go on being done forever and ever. So you have to determine which deeds will echo down through the halls of eternity forever and ever and you have these 60 years to determine that.

Sixty years? Well, you remember what he said? No, not really 60 years -- because it's like reading a dirty book. Every time you avoid stopping reading it, you're reading it. It's like watching a pornographic movie, every moment you resolve, "I am going to stop watching this", you've already made the decision the other way because you're watching it another moment.

In other words, you're making the decision when you're not making a decision. So really it's not 60 years, it's this moment. It's this moment. This is the time. You're deciding this moment which version of your life is playing. And by not deciding you've already decided that the version that is playing now will continue to play. And not only that, but as it plays another moment, it'll make it more difficult for you to decide the next moment not to play it because all of us know that. You

don't make it easier to stop doing the thing by continuing to do it another moment.

So loved ones, that's why time is so precious now to all of us. When I ask you how long have you got, it's not just how long have you got physically, it's how long have you got in there before you stop being able ever to stop, that's it. So we have this present moment to determine what we're going to live like and what life is going to be lived by us and that's why Paul is so strong in this, you see in verse 11, "Besides this you know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed...."

Which salvation? Well, he is obviously talking to people who are already saved -- but he is talking to people who say they're saved but haven't really started to live this new version of their life in Jesus. They haven't really accepted that they were crucified with Christ and that they are new people -- and so he is saying, "Not about salvation", because in some sense they have received salvation, the forgiveness of sins. What does he mean by salvation? Oh, the redemption of our bodies. He is saying that.

For salvation, the completed salvation, the redemption of our bodies is nearer to us now than when we first believed. Which item is he referring to? Oh, the one that is talked about in those solemn words, you know that you hear it at gravesides, the Revelation 20. He is talking about that. Revelation 20:11 and Paul was saying, this is nearer to us now than when we first believed.

Revelation 20:11, "Then I saw a great white throne and him who sat upon it; from his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead in them, and all were judged by what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; and if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire".

You and I are nearer to that than we were this morning, see, and you'll be nearer to it this afternoon than you are now and you'll be nearer to it still tomorrow than you are today. That's what Paul is saying, "Salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. Salvation for those of us who are resurrected to eternal life but judgment for those of us who are resurrected to eternal domination", and then he says in Romans 13 verse 12, "The night is far gone, the day is at hand."

Which version of your life are you living at this moment? Which version of your life is being played before all of us now? Is it the version that you were born with, where you believed there was a God but you really lived as if there isn't a God? In other words, you think to yourself, "Well, I am on my own here. I better use my position and my money and my job to wring what security I can out of this world, that's my main job here", is that the version that you're playing?

Is it the version that believed that certainly God was there but he didn't care anything about you at all and so you were rather much on your own here in this world -- and it's up to you to try to make other people notice you if you possibly can. And so is it the version that tries to get other people to notice you and tries to make yourself important and gets angry when they don't notice you and when they don't think you're important? Is that the version that's being played?

Is it the version that thinks, "Oh I have only got so long in this life, I'd better enjoy myself

while I am here as I had better wring out all the happiness I can, whoever I deprive of happiness in order to get it." Is it that version? Is it that version that is filled with half truths, with half honesty, with love of your own comfort and love of your own security, with a desire to have the form of godliness but nothing of the power of it, with a heart that has all kinds of resentments, that has all kinds of gossipy conversation with other people about your friends? Is it that version that is being played?

Well, you know, you see. All of us know. You know which version is being played now. You know which version of your life is being lived here on this earth, and that's what creates the darkness of course. That's why Paul talks about the darkness. When you get four billion of us living for ourselves and trying to get everybody to take notice of us and trying to use each other to make ourselves secure and trying to get as much happiness, physical and emotional satisfaction from each other as possible, you get tremendous darkness.

In fact the darkness is so great that it's like a dense fog. We can hardly see each other. You can't tell where the other person is. You can't tell what the other person is thinking. We talk about it today as a problem of communication. That's a big problem. We have only one big problem: communication, that's our only problem. Except it's not the problem at all. The problem is there are no communicators.

We're not communicators, we're rivals and competitors, we're enemies, we're suspects, distrusting each other and not being able to be trusted by anybody else. So there's a great darkness that fills our world, whether it's in your office or whether it's in so many churches or whether it's in our families, there's great darkness that separates us from each other because we're all living for ourselves and living as if there's no God but us, ourselves.

So that's why Paul says, "There is a darkness upon the earth", and yet how do you get rid of that darkness? Well, the only way to get rid of it is to get rid of the communicators who aren't communicating and that's what God did. God took the whole lot of us and Christ died for all of us, therefore all of us died, and if you're in Christ, you're a new creation and the old has passed away and the new has come.

So that's why Paul says, "The cause of the darkness has been removed and ever since Jesus died in 29 A.D. and that miracle was made known to the world, the hours of that darkness have been numbered." And that's why he says, "The night is far gone, the day is at hand", so actually it may seem to you as if the darkness is terrible. It's worse than ever before but everybody that knows what God has done in Jesus knows that the darkest hour is right before the dawn and the dawn is about to break, the day is coming.

So Paul is saying, "Get ready for it, get ready for it." Oh loved ones, stop talking about the end times and stop being preoccupied with who is the anti-Christ or who is not the anti-Christ and ask yourself, "Are you ready? Are you ready now if Jesus comes today, are you ready?" That's it. Stop all this fiddly, this silly stuff of diagrams; oh we're such silly people, getting so ready with our diagrams that we haven't time to get ourselves ready for Jesus coming.

The day is on its way, it's almost dawning, the night is far gone. Now, are you going to live the kind of life that you've lived up to this moment or are you going to go to God today and say, "God, if you have foreseen my whole life and you have edited it all out and made it all right in Jesus, then Lord God, I want that life to be made real in me, whatever the cost. Now I believe Lord that

you did that and I want now to live that life."

But loved ones, that's what the Father is saying to us today. That's why he says it. It's Romans 13:12, "The night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light." That means stop gossiping now, that's what it means. It means accept that you're no better thought of than Jesus, that's it. You're no better thought of than Jesus.

There's no way in which you're going to be understood by everybody. You're going to be misunderstood like Jesus and in fact, God has put you into his son who was misunderstood and was content to be misunderstood, who was content to be looked down upon and to be contemptuous, and God says, accept that and be prepared to be that and stop always trying to make things right.

Stop always trying to be understood all the time. Stop all the time trying to make others misunderstood. Give up all that stuff. Stop gossiping, stop criticizing, stop being concerned about your reputation, stop being proud. Put off those works of darkness because that darkness has its days numbered now. There's only light. There's a dawning of an eternal day that will spread life and trust throughout the universe, now get with it. Live like that. Live like that. That's it. Start now.

Jesus has changed you completely. Now accept that and live like that and put away the deeds of darkness that you know are deeds of darkness and don't look at that pornographic movie for one more second because if you live like this one more second, you're making it harder to change tomorrow, that's it.

God has worked the change. All you have to do is say this morning, "Lord, I believe that and I now live that way from this day forward." And maybe it's good to say you know, you can hear me this morning. Nobody here can guarantee you'll hear me next Sunday. None of you can guarantee you'll even be alive to hear anybody next Sunday, none of us.

So it's an important moment in all our lives. Which life are you living? Are you living the one that has muddled through so far, or are you living the one that God has made available to you in his son Jesus and can give you at this very moment? Let us pray.

Dear God, we keep on resolving to try to be different and we do make little changes but Lord we know that something more is needed. We're really just tinkering with the things that are wrong in our lives. We need a thorough sprinkling. We need a thorough overhaul. We need this life of ours to be utterly remade and dear Father, we hear your words, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation", and we hear also your words that Christ died for all therefore all died. Therefore in an amazing way, all of us are in Christ. It's simply a matter of whether we will believe that or not -- and if we will believe it, we are immediately a new creation, and the old has passed away and the new has come.

Father, we thank you for giving us another chance today to decide for you and to change our way of going and to receive what you have done in Jesus for us, by faith. Lord, we thank you for that and we will be real with you this day, for your sake and for our own salvation. Amen.