

## Living in the Light

Romans 13:13

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

It's really hard to get to used to writing 1984 on your checks, isn't it? And for those of us who were brought up on Orwell's "1984" at college, it's a particularly momentous kind of time for us because for 20 or 30 years now we have been watching to see if he was right and to see what would turn out that way.

Sometimes you think it has turned out that way when you think of what he said about "new speak" you remember? "New speak" was the kind of language that governments would use to make unorthodoxy impossible -- or "double think" -- whereby you thought again and thought the very opposite of what was true. Sometimes when you listen to the politicians, or when you listen to Andropov talking about America or Reagan talking about Russia, or you read the newspapers, you begin to wonder, "Do we not have "new speak" or "double think" right here among us?" Yet some of the other prophecies we're just glad weren't fulfilled. The government cannot watch us on two-way TV screens -- yet anyway -- the churches have not all become museums, as he said they would, and procreation does not take place only by artificial insemination. So some of those prophecies, obviously, have not taken place, and we are glad of that. Yet you must admit we're glad in a hopeful kind of way because, deep down, we see so many of those trends are present, even in our own society, besides the totalitarian societies.

So it's certainly an exciting kind of year for those of us who wondered, "Would it be as bad as Orwell said it would be"? And yet that isn't really, primarily, why it's a momentous time for all of us here in this room, because this book (the Bible) assured us that whether Orwell described it correctly or not, the whole place would go from bad to worse.

In fact, to me, that's what it says in Timothy 3:13; God said, "while evil men and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived." The whole world will just deteriorate. It may not deteriorate just as George Orwell described it, but it will deteriorate; there's just no way in which you can avoid it.

You remember that this book (the Bible) assures us that actually it won't be destroyed in a nuclear holocaust. It won't. It will be dealt with in a different way, and you may want to look at that, because some of us allow the fear and uncertainty that comes with the fear of nuclear disaster to govern our lives in a way that isn't God's will at all. It's in 2 Peter 3:7, "But by the some word the heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men." So the heavens and the earth will not be destroyed by a nuclear explosion that men have created; they are, in fact, stored up for fire, "being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men."

So this book (the Bible) assures us that there is no uncertainty about the future; the world will generally go from bad to worse, but it will not succeed in destroying itself. In fact, Jesus will come and will take from the earth those of us who are still alive and then the earth itself and the heavens will be destroyed, and they will be renewed completely, and then there will be a great judgment that will take place. So in reality, we are not dependent on Orwell or what he thinks about what will happen.

So this isn't really a momentous time primarily because it's 1984. This is a momentous time because we all are a day's march nearer home, that's it. We are going into another of the years that for every one of us here in this room are getting fewer and fewer. Even if you are in your 20's, they're still getting fewer and fewer for you. That's why it's a momentous time. The second Sunday in a New Year is an important time for every human being because we are a day's march nearer home. We are going into another of the few years -- how many of which we all have we don't know -- left. We are taking another step into the unknown world of this time and space age. We are moving a step forward; closer to that day when each of us will meet our Maker. We'll meet the person who created us and gave us this life that we have, when we were little babies. That's why it's a momentous time.

We are moving forward to that time that the Bible describes as a time when the Lord of earth will come in his own glory and all the holy angels with him. And before him will be gathered all nations and he will separate them, one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. The Bible, you remember, says that that day, the day of the Lord, will come like a thief in the night -- when nobody is expecting it. So that's why this is a momentous day for every one of us here, whatever you believe about God, or about religion, or about church; we're another year nearer the end of our lives.

How do you get ready for that time? How do you prepare for it? Loved ones, look at Romans 13:13 and you'll see very clear direction there: "let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day." Why? Why live and behave as you would in daylight? Why?

I'll show you in Psalm 139:7, "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, thou art there! If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there thy hand shall lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, 'Let only darkness cover me, and the light about me be night,' even the darkness is not dark to thee, the night is bright as the day; for darkness is as light with thee."

That's why; because when you think you are doing something in the dark that nobody can see, or you're doing something furtively that you think God doesn't know about, even darkness is light to him. He sees it all. He sees everything in your mind at this moment -- he sees all your thoughts, he knows all your little ideas, all the little plans you have. He knows all the little wayward tendencies that your mind has at this moment -- all the things that you are thinking of doing, even though you know you shouldn't do them. Those are all light to him.

That's why we need, if we're going to meet God, to start living now as in daylight. Start living now as if you are in daylight, because even if you are not in daylight to the rest of us, or you're not in daylight to your wife or your parents or your friends, you are in daylight to God. He can see it all bright as day. He can see everything you do, everything you think, everything you are thinking of doing, he can see it all.

There is no such thing as night, you see. That's what that says -- even the night is light to him. Night is simply a concession that we time-space creatures need to charge our batteries to keep on going, but there is really no such thing as night, there is no such thing as darkness. There is actually nowhere to hide; that's our error -- we think there is somewhere to hide. We think if you do it under the bed boards, or you do it in the bedroom, or you do it at night, or you do it in the

darkness that somehow people won't see you and God won't see you, but he sees everything. And we're dumb; we're just pretending like the ostriches; we're sticking our heads into the sand and because we see only darkness, we think the danger has disappeared.

Loved ones it isn't so; God sees you every moment. There is a verse in the Bible (Genesis 16:13) that says, "Thou God seest me", and that means he sees your least little thought of criticism that you've just thought, he sees your least little thought of resentment that you have just felt. And that's why, in order to get ready to meet him, start living now as if you're in daylight, because you are in daylight and you're only mocking him and pretending to him when you keep on thinking that he doesn't see. He sees -- he sees everything we do.

Now you know fine well, loved ones, the difference between living in daylight and living at night -- you know that. From the time we were little kids, we all got the idea that you could do anything under cover of darkness. I know in Ireland at night we'd play "thunder and lightning"; we'd run and knock on the doors of people and run away, and it was just a little more difficult for them to see you! Then we raise those little childhood games to the nth degree, don't we, until we become big mature adults and can do all kinds of other worse things, and hurtful things, in the darkness. But it's all a game, you see. It's all a game.

It's as if you have the Garden of Eden here on earth, and God is up above it -- as if above a maze and here are the little people scurrying through the maze. Now, if you are up above it, you can see and can say "oh take that corner, turn right, now turn left, no, the other person's going that way, turn around."

When you're above the maze and you can see everything, that's what it's like. It's like we're in the Garden of Eden with trees in it, but God is up above and we are behind this tree, then we get behind that tree and then we get behind another tree so that he won't see us, and he's saying "Hi" because he sees you -- that's it. He can see everything and we're just playing games, we're just pretending; we're trying to make a fool of him and actually we're just making a fool of ourselves.

That's why the first thing, at the beginning of this New Year, is to begin to conduct ourselves as in daylight, as in daylight. Begin to step out into light in your own life. Begin to be open about what you're like and what you are; about the wrong things in your life, and about the right things in your life. Begin to be open to God, to God; not to the rest of us -- although you have to be open to some of us about some things -- but primarily to God. Stop pretending. Stop cutting yourself off from him. That's not mannerly, it's not kind, it's not loving, and it's not realistic. God can see it all anyway, so acknowledge it before him; bring it out before him. Be real about it, step out into light about the things that you know are wrong in your life, and be open with him about them and say that to him.

Now an interesting thing happens when you do that, and you'll find it in Ephesians 5:11. "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is a shame even to speak of the things that they do in secret; but when anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light." That's what you find.

When you make a thing visible, suddenly instead of it being a thing that condemns you and brings guilt to your conscience, it becomes light to you. In other words, the moment you begin to be real with God instead of playing these games -- pretending that you are really hidden behind the tree of the garden and that he can't see you because you do the thing in the dark -- the moment you stop playing that game, and you start bringing things out into the open, and you become real and honest

with him, that moment he begins to give light to you about himself, that's right. He begins to give light to you about himself and the things that you make visible, they themselves become light.

Many of you are in the position where you say, "I don't want to say that I do this thing because I can't stop doing it." Well as long as you continue in that situation, you are going to be imprisoned by that thing forever because that is the whole deception; that you somehow have to get rid of this thing first, and then you can admit to God that it was in your life. That's madness.

The thing to do is to make it visible to him; to say, "Lord, you know this is here; I have known it's here for years, and actually so have you. Lord God, I know this is wrong. I admit it's here in my life, and Lord God, I ask you, now, to give me light about it, and to give me life and grace and strength to get rid of it." That's the first step; admit that the thing is there, and there's nothing so small that when you admit it's there, God does not immediately begin to pour light in upon you.

Of course, the reason you can admit it's there is that he has done something to change you, loved ones, he has. He has arranged a miracle in his son Jesus whereby he is able to change your whole personality. And for that reason, he is able and willing to forgive you for that thing, that's it.

I don't blame you; I don't blame you holding back and trying to cover your sins and trying to pretend they aren't there; if you really do, you have no reason for believing that God will do anything but kill you. Well, then, obviously, you'll keep quiet about the thing. I mean if he is going to punish you, you'll want to pretend that you're not justified in being punished.

But loved ones, he won't punish you, because he has done something to you in Jesus that is able to change your life, and is able to get you to walk the way he wants you to walk. So the moment you make the thing plain before him and acknowledge it, that moment, he forgives you and he begins to pour light in upon you.

Now, that's what is mentioned in one of the Proverbs. I don't know if you've ever read it. It's in Proverbs 28:13, "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy." Now you know day follows day, week follows week, month follows month, year follows year and we continue to drift into nothing. So isn't that the story? I mean, that's all our stories, it's the same; we just drift from year to year, week to week, month to month, no great change in this and 80 years down the road, we're little different from the way we started.

Now the way to stop that is to acknowledge it to God. "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper but, he who acknowledges them will find mercy." Today, loved ones, live in daylight; bring things out into daylight before your God, be real about them, acknowledge them before him and say, "Lord God, I need these changed and you alone can change them in me. Lord, will you begin to give me light about this? I am not going to pretend anymore. I am not going to be a hypocrite anymore. Lord God, I am going to be real with you now; these things in my life, they're wrong. I acknowledge that."

Do that first, because God has promised, "He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor requite us according to our iniquities" but "as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." (Psalm 103:10, 12) And that's what he will do; he will forgive you if you live in daylight today and begin to do it now. Don't listen to any voices that say,

"Well, it's not really wrong, it's not really wrong." If you are in any doubt about it, it's probably wrong, and you'd better acknowledge it before God now.

There is another reason for stepping out into daylight about things that are mentioned in that verse -- the debauchery, the revelry -- and all the lesser versions of those. I don't know that too many of us are engaged in nights of debauchery; apart from anything else that wears you out and you couldn't carry on your work, so not too many of us are involved in that. But it's the things that are variations of that; it's the unclean thoughts, it's the unclean motives, it's the fantasy dream of a moment that you entertain. It's that kind of thing -- have done with that -- move out of that.

Have you ever got up on a spring morning and everything seems so clean and so bright and so pure when you see the little birds, and you think, "Oh, I feel so dirty, compared with this clean spring morning?" Now, loved ones, we're meant to live in spring-like cleanness every moment of our lives, and it's possible; but you start by stepping into daylight.

Now, there is another reason, actually, for living and conducting yourself as in the daytime; it's found in the previous verse that we studied a few weeks ago and it's Romans 13:12, "the night is far gone, the day is at hand", that's it. I know it seems to many of us as if the night is pretty deep, but actually the night of violence and nuclear warfare, that night is almost gone. The night of lying and dishonesty, the night of hypocrisy, the night of strife, the night of hatred, it's almost gone. It's worked its way pretty much out to near the end and actually, I think, whether you are religious or not, you will probably admit that. It won't go too much further because it'll just destroy itself.

The night is far gone, the day is at hand. The day started at Christmas; the day started when God put his own foot on the ground in his son Jesus. From the day that happened, there came about a new power in the world. Up to that moment, dishonesty and lying and financial affairs were more potent than openness and honesty. Up to that point, hypocrisy and pretence in reputation was more potent than honesty and humility. Up to that time, anger and force was more potent than gentleness and love. But from the moment God stepped on the earth, he brought a transforming power into the world by which, in Jesus' death, he destroyed the elemental spirits of the universe that give the power to lying and dishonesty in business, that give the power to hypocrisy and pretence in reputation, that give the power to force in anger in war. He destroyed the elemental spirits that give those things their power, and he brought in a new order.

So when he healed lepers and he raised people from the dead, he wasn't just changing the physical nature of bodies, he was bringing in a new power that changes everything even in the midst of this darkness. So if you begin to live as in daytime, you link up with that power.

There are two ways to deal with strife in a home situation; one, frontal attack, the power of the right arm -- either in arguing with the person -- or having one of those endless sensitivity groups that never end. Or two -- believe that Jesus has destroyed the invisible powers and spirits in that home that create such antagonism in that other person towards you and that confuses all the communication in the home so that there is never any possibility of clarity. Believe that that has happened, and simply love the other person and keep believing and lo and behold you will see a miracle take place, because the night is far gone, and the day is at hand; the day is already showing itself.

So, loved ones, the more immediate reason for living as in daylight now, is that you've got a power

going for you that will achieve more than the powers of darkness can achieve for you. So God says to us today, "Stop manipulating; stop trying to manipulate the powers of darkness to get what you want. Step out of darkness, step into daylight. Begin to conduct yourself as in daylight." Walk every moment of your day as if God can see everything, because he really can. Live that way -- it takes a great burden off your heart, takes a great weight off your heart.

Do you know how much burden we bear just keeping up a show? Do you know that? Do you know how much of your inferiority complex or your schizophrenia or your paranoia is due to you pretending, pretending, pretending and covering up, covering up, covering up? Stop it. Your God can see you all the time, so you're involved in a charade. Be open with him; walk in daylight. Be what you are and acknowledge to him what you are and he will begin to bring light upon you. He will begin to reveal the powers of his Son's resurrection in your financial affairs, in your family affairs, and in your professional affairs. Let us conduct ourselves as in the day. Let's pray.

Dear God, in a way it's a relief to so many of us that you have been seeing us all the time. In a way, it says to us that we can stop the charade and stop pretending. We can almost feel the strain draining from our faces as we realize that you have known all the time. We ask your forgiveness that we have counted everybody else's opinion as more important than yours; they'll all be dead, yet we'll still have to meet you.

Dear God, forgive us for not being concerned that you were able to see all the things in our lives and in our minds. We acknowledge them to you now, Lord. This is just a game we're playing and we are not going to do it any more. We acknowledge to you the things that are in our lives. You see them; you see the thoughts that we have and you see our motives. You see Lord, how selfish, how rotten at the core we are in so many things. Lord, we want to acknowledge each one of them because we brought them into our lives individually and we want to acknowledge them before you individually. We want to start walking in some kind of sanity again, some kind of honesty.

So Lord, we acknowledge these things to you. We confess them to you. They are wrong and they shouldn't be here; we shouldn't involve ourselves in them at all. Lord, we confess them to you now and we ask you to forgive us for them Lord, we want to be done with them -- we don't need them. We want to finish with them. We ask you now to give us light in life so that we'll begin to sense your strength in our lives and your grace.

Then Lord, we give up now, for this year ahead of us, the ways of darkness. We put away from us, now, the ways of force and anger. We put away from us, now, the ways of hypocrisy and deception and Lord, we're going to walk in simplicity; we're going to be simply what you have made us. And we trust you to let the power of Jesus work in our many situations and resolve them in your way, in the way of the children of light and not in the way of the children of darkness.

So Father, we would begin this year of 1984, grateful to be still alive, and ready, now, to conduct ourselves as in daylight, and to live every moment of our lives in the knowledge that you can see everything, and that it is all laid out before you. We look forward to the relief and the freedom from the strain that comes from living in the light, for your glory. Amen.