

What Is Faith In Christ?

Romans 13:14a

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Many of us here, if not most of us, have no trouble believing the truth of the statements that we have been reading in this book the past Sundays. The truths are almost self evident in these days of tension in which we live. So, maybe you would just look at them, loved ones, it's Romans 13:11. "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; the night is far gone, the day is at hand."

The scientists have that clock you remember, by which they measure the likelihood of nuclear warfare and they've moved the hand back up towards midnight, it's now again a few minutes from midnight. So of course, most of us who live in this society are very aware, "Yeah, things do seem to be drawing to a close." In fact, we wonder ourselves, how much longer the world will be able to fight anarchy and chaos, which seems to be encroaching upon us all the time. But then in another way don't you think that all of us are very aware of the reality of these verses, in a kind of personal way too, because some of you are twenty, some of you are thirty, some are forty, some are fifty, some are sixty and some of us are older than that. And we are beginning to feel that year after year after year we've been saying, "Yeah! We are going to get ready. We are going to get ready to meet God. We're going to clean up our lives and get our life in order, so that we are ready to die, we are, we are, we are."

And we have been saying "Manana, manana, manana. [tomorrow, tomorrow] I am going to do that, I am going to do it, I am going to get ready." And every January that passes we say again, "This is the beginning of a new year, I am, I am going to make a change in my life now, I am going to get ready." And we are very aware that the night is far gone and the day is at hand. We are very aware that it is full time for us to wake from sleep, and we should have wakened from sleep years ago, and we have not yet done it.

And of course, we are aware that there is going to be a time when all the things that God already sees in us are going to be exposed to the light and you know that's how the rest of that goes in verse 12. "Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light, let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy." And we say to ourselves, "Yeah! Yeah! I want to have done with that stuff. I want to have done with the jealousy. I want to have done with the envy and the strife. I want to have done with the debauchery and the revelry. I want to have done with the unclean thoughts. I want to have done with this self-indulgence that fills my life. I want to stop it so that I am ready to meet God."

But how, how do you stop it? How do you change? Worldly wisdom says, slowly, painstakingly, uncertainly, no quick and easy answer, no simple solution to how to change habits of a lifetime. Slow, year after year after year, doing your best, trying to surround yourself with good company, trying to read the right books, trying to reinforce yourself with good fellowship in some church and bit by bit, gradually, you get rid of some of the habits of thought and of action and behavior that plague your life and make you ashamed to even think that God sees them. That's how you change.

That is a damning lie. That is a damning lie. There are too many of us in this room who have been on that self-improvement treadmill for years and we are no better than when we started, except that we see our failings more clearly than we did before. That is not how you change. You change by putting on the Lord Jesus Christ and you do that in a moment. You put on the Lord Jesus Christ. That's how you change. There's no other way. Now, if you say to me, "Brother, that's not honest. You are talking about how we get rid of the evil habits of thought and action that we have built up over a lifetime and now you are saying to us, you just do it by being like Jesus Christ. I mean it's not what you are saying. You are saying, all right put on the Lord Jesus Christ like a coat and you know what I really mean is, be like the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what I mean. Be like the Lord Jesus Christ. I am just putting it in a metaphorical way. Now, that's not honest, because you are saying to me, how do you change these habits? Well, just be good like Jesus. Well, that's what I can't do. I can't be good like Jesus."

Loved ones, if "putting on the Lord Jesus Christ" is just a metaphor for trying to be like Jesus, then I agree with you. It's a mockery. I think it's a mockery. Moreover, if this is just a metaphor, then that whole book (the Bible) there is just knocking us human beings, because all it's doing is describing the way we should be and then telling us to be that. And we are pleading, "But we can't, we don't know how to."

The world shattering fact is, that's not a metaphor. You know a metaphor is just a kind of a picture way of saying something that isn't literally true. That isn't a metaphor, "putting on the Lord Jesus Christ". That is a literal, mental and volitional and spiritual act that you can do in a moment that will change you absolutely and completely. It is possible, this morning, to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and to be changed. Now if you say to me, "Well, how can you put on Jesus Christ? He lived 1900 years ago. How can you put on a person who lived 1900 years ago?" Well, because of a unique power that this man Jesus Christ had. I will show you, loved ones, if you will look it up. It's in John 8:56, "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad.' The Jews then said to him, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?' Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.'" Jesus says, "Before Abraham was," who lived a couple of thousand years ago, "I am." In other words, Jesus says, I existed when Abraham existed.

And indeed there are several places in the Old Testament where he actually appeared to Abraham and he says, "I existed from before the foundation of the world, I've existed throughout time, I only appeared here in the first century for a short space of time to show you what I was like in your own physical body, but I am existing all the time. I destroyed the power of death and I have promised that I will destroy it in each generation. In every generation I will exercise the power I have over death." And here is the way he promised that, he said, "Lo, I am with you always." Jesus is alive every generation. Jesus is above time, he is outside time and space and he can impinge upon it at any time at all and that means he is alive here this morning, in this room. That's how it's possible to have any relationship with him. You can do it, because he is alive at this moment. His whole spirit, his whole power and joy is alive at this moment, right beside you, round about you.

Now maybe you say, "Yeah, but how do you put on a person, how can you put a person on? I mean, there is no way in which you can do that." And I agree with you; if he is in a human body like ours there is no way. I mean I can't get inside your body and put it on me, the way I can put this coat on. I could if I were a spirit, wouldn't you agree? If I were a spirit, I could, because that's what happened with Jesus in the tomb, you remember. His body lay there for the three days and nights and then his spirit returned to it and got inside his body and stood up and walked around, you remember,

and appeared over a period of 40 days. Moreover, you and I know that's what makes the death of a relative bearable, isn't it? The thought that in a moment all you have got there is a body. As you look at your loved one lying on the bed, you suddenly realize there comes a moment when it's no longer your loved one, it's just the body they inhabited and you realize that the spirit has gone.

So there's a difference between the spirit and the body. So obviously, if you are a spirit, you could come in and put on a person. Jesus is a spirit. Ever since he ascended to God, his Father, and took his body with him and it disappeared from the earth, he has been a spirit. And he is able to come inside us to surround us, to cover us, to clothe us; his spirit is able to. That's why we've talked, you remember, about spirits possessing people. In other words, it's possible for Jesus to be in us and fill us and to clothe us and surround us. It's possible to put on Jesus, because he is now a spirit and it is possible for us to don that spirit and to step into it; not just a spirit in the sense of a bundle of good principles or a bundle of moral qualities, but an actual spirit who is a real person. It is possible for us to put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now if you say, "How?" You are in the same position as Mary and there is only one answer to the how. Maybe you want to look at it; it's part of the Christmas story. I remember her reaction was the same, how? And it's at Luke 1:31 and the promise was made to her about Jesus, "And, behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus." And then verse 34, "And Mary said to the angel, 'How shall this be, since I have no husband?'"

And the answer is not a mental technique. It's not a transcendental meditation system. The answer is in verse 35, "And the angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.'" God alone can clothe you with his son Jesus. God alone can do it, you can't do it. If you try it yourself you'll end up with a system of controlling human temperaments. You will end up with a technique for the power of positive thinking. You will end up with a method of transcendental meditation or self-development or self-fulfillment. Only God can clothe you with his son Christ.

Is there anything you can do to make that possible? Yes, respond the same as Mary did, you see in verse 38? "And Mary said, 'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.'" You can say that to God. "Lord, I believe what you say you have done to me, I believe it. Let it be to me according to that." And what has God done? He has already put you in Jesus. He has already put you into Christ, that's right. He has already put you into Jesus. That's what that great verse means in 2 Corinthians 5:14, Christ died for all, therefore all of us died, all of us. All of us were put into Christ by God our Father, and were changed in Jesus. God, by a mighty feat, by a mighty act in timelessness and spacelessness, took all of us and put us into his son Jesus and crucified us and raised us with him. You only have to say to God, "Be it onto me according to your word, let it be as you have said you have done to me, let that be unto me."

How else do you explain the magnanimous feelings that you have at times? Aren't you surprised at times that you have such generous feelings in the midst of all the selfishness, in the midst of all the misery and the self-indulgence and the envy and the jealousy? Isn't it amazing, the good feelings you have at times, the good attitudes, the good acts that you almost surprise yourself by doing? That's because you are already in Christ. It's Christ that does those, it's not you; you aren't good and I am not good. There is no good but what God does and if there's any good in you, it comes from the Christ Spirit that is already clothing you. The tragedy is that his Spirit can only do that while your will is not resisting him.

That's why it only happens at times, when you're kind of relaxed or something, that you find yourself doing something, or you're not caring or you're not anxious about something, some of you find yourself doing something really nice. You think, I didn't think I was as nice a guy as that. Well, you're not really. It's Jesus, but you think, oh, I've really surprised myself. Well, you don't, it's Jesus that surprises you. But it's only in those moments when your will is not resisting that he is able to do it, or when your mind is not consciously believing, I am me and I am only me and there is nobody else in my body but me.

But the moment you believe, what is actually true is that God has put you in his son and that he is round about you, and in him you live and move and have your being; he is like a great ocean around you, and he is like a great ocean filling a little bottle in which it's floating on the ocean. Once you believe that, then the whole life and power of Jesus begins to manifest itself in your everyday action and your behavior, and you are changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.

The moment you believe that, that's how you put on the Lord Jesus Christ, you believe it. You believe, "Father, I believe that I am in Jesus, I believe that you've placed me in him, I believe that I see this world through the cushion of his dear womb. Father, I believe that he is round about me. Lord Jesus, I believe that you're surrounding me and that you are all around me and in my mind and in my motions, Lord, whatever you want to do, that's what we'll do." You say to me, is that all? Yes, that's the first vital step. If you believe that, you've put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

And then you put your coat on and you button it up and you cuddle up in the fireplace corner and you say, "Boy! I am not going out into that cold until I get something to keep me warm." And if you do that you'll never experience the benefits of having this coat on. In fact, you live in a fool's paradise. You'll have the coat on, but you'll never experience the benefits of that coat unless you go out into the snow and the rain, that's what this coat is made for. And so you put on the Lord Jesus Christ and then you don't make provision as if he wasn't on, you make provision as if he is on. You put the coat on and the coat is made for snow and rain; you go out into the snow and the rain and you feel the benefit of the coat around you.

Otherwise, it's like putting on the Lord Jesus Christ and then saying, "Yeah, but I am not going to go abroad until I get my investments settled, my retirement arranged, until I get married and have children and I am sure of everything else; then I am going to go abroad, since I have now put on the Lord Jesus Christ." But the whole purpose of the Lord Jesus Christ is to take care of all those things. So if you've put on the Lord Jesus Christ and then you start making provision as if you haven't the Lord Jesus Christ on in another words, as if he isn't there to take care of you at all, then you will never enter into the benefit of him being upon you and you will eventually lose him.

And part of the problem is this. Some of us try to put him partially on. So we get one arm in the sleeve, and we open the door a little. This is the arm of our business practices so we put him on in regard to our business practices and honesty with the IRS and then we open the door a little, we stick the other arm out. That's the arm of our sex life, we get frost bit, because you have to put him on completely, you have to put the Lord Jesus Christ on completely for all of your life, and you have to go forward believing him in all of your life, making no provision for the flesh in any part of your life. That is, giving no worry again to what you eat, or what shelter you'll have or what home you will have, or what your retirement will be like, but going forward into the snow and the rain, confident that this Lord Jesus Christ that you have put on will make provision for all your needs. That's how you change.

And you keep going that way even when a little gap opens and you feel a little cold and God is testing you and saying, "You're really sure? Seems you've just discovered cancer, do you think Jesus is enough?" So, he opens that little coat to see if you are still walking by faith. And even though you feel a little dart of cold, you say, "Yes, I have put on the Lord Jesus Christ, I believe he is sufficient, I believe he has made all things and without him was not anything made that was made. I believe that he is sufficient. I've put on the Lord Jesus Christ and I am not making any provision for the flesh. I am not making any more provision for the things that I thought I needed." In other words, if you're a sister, you say, "I've put on the Lord Jesus Christ. I know we're all supposed to have magnificent and maternal instincts and we're all supposed to have a real desire for a man, but the Lord Jesus Christ is more man than I could ever want, and I believe he is sufficient. If he wants to give me another man, that's up to him, but I believe him. I believe that he is sufficient. But I am not going to lie and make a mockery of him. I am not going to put him on and then say, "Now you're not enough. I need a warmer coat as well."

Or we men, we put on the Lord Jesus Christ and then we say, "That's sufficient, I don't need any more success than that." But, if we then say, "Well, I've put on the Lord Jesus Christ, but I also want to hit the top on my sales for this year and I want to have the kind of two car set-up that everybody else has, and I want to be looked upon as a success." Then you may as well not have put on the Lord Jesus Christ, because he has promised that he will add all these other things on to you, and that all you need is him.

And so that's how you change. That's what the Bible says. You should look at it. It's Romans 13:14, the last verse of the chapter. Romans 13:14, "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." The Greek actually means, don't take any forethought for the things that your body says it needs. You obviously need to give it food and clothing, but we're no fools, we know we're not arguing about that, we're all fairly sensible people. We know it needs that, but the secret is, that you put on the Lord Jesus Christ and then you don't get out the old binoculars to look for the girl, or to look for the next little emotional thrill that you need, or to look for the next little comfort. "Poor me! Nobody really loves me." You stop that. You make no provision for that sneaking, cowardly little flesh that wants all kinds of comforts beyond what Jesus himself is. You put on the Lord Jesus Christ, you put on the coat and you get out into the snow and the cold and the rain for the next seventy or eighty years of your life, and you find that he is sufficient, plenty.

Loved ones, it really is true in regard to sickness as well. We get what we expect. It is unto us according to our faith. And if we believe Jesus is sufficient, he in fact will turn out to be sufficient. How do you change? You can do it this morning. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, make no provision for any other solutions, you'll find you'll change by the power of God. Let us pray.

Dear Father, it all makes sense to us, that Jesus, who made all things and without whom was not anything made that was made, is the sum total of all those things himself and indeed is better than those things. Father, that makes sense to us. We know that the artist is always greater than the art. We know the carpenter is always greater than the wood. We know that Jesus is always better than the brightness and sunlit waves of the ocean, than the clear, clean air of mountain snows, than the exciting downhill thrill of the ski jump, than the warm affection of a man or a woman. We know Lord Jesus that you have made all these things and you are better than them all. And when we put you on and accept that you're all round about us and that our Father has not sent us here to earth naked then Lord the moment we believe that, that moment we find, we've all we need.

Lord, we commit ourselves now to making no more provision for those little titillating satisfactions that our emotions or our bodies or our minds demand. We intend to make do with you, Lord Jesus. And we know that making do with you is having everything. We commit ourselves to you for that dear purpose and thank you for yourself, so real and alive this morning, so warm with your arms around us for so long. We're sorry we kept you so long, our Jesus, ignoring you and pretending you weren't there. Now we believe. Let us go forward together, you and I, into this world for your glory. The grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of his Spirit be with us forever more. Amen.