

## What Governs Your Behavior?

Romans 14:20

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Do you remember John Wayne and Bing Crosby and Jack Benny? You're probably saying, "Yes, I hear people talking about them all the time. Yes, I remember them well. I mean they were household words in America. That's why we talk about them all the time." Yet you're also saying, "Wait a minute. No, we don't talk about them all the time. I do remember them but actually this is the first time I've heard them mentioned besides the fact that the John Wayne movies are going to be on this week. Yes, I remember them but people aren't talking about them all the time." It is interesting, isn't it? People who are so well known as that are quickly forgotten.

Really this dear old book (the Bible) puts it very clearly if you look at Psalm 103:15-16. "As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more." Actually another translations reads, "For the wind passes over it and it is gone and its place remembers it no more."

It's interesting that people so well known as that are very quickly forgotten and their place remembers them no more. Even though the Hughes Tool Company still exists and is part of a business deal that is being negotiated now, yet he himself we've long ago forgotten. Nobody talks about him.

You and I have a tendency to say, "Yes, but that's them. I certainly agree it's very true what the scripture says, 'For man, his days are as grass. He flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it and it is gone and its place remembers it no more.' That's certainly true of John Wayne, certainly true of Bing Crosby, certainly true with Howard Hughes but it won't be true of me."

It's funny, isn't it? We detach ourselves from it and say, "Oh that's so true. Man's days are like grass, yes. Except mine aren't, mine aren't." It's funny how we do it. We know we're going to die, but somehow we don't think it's going to happen the same way with us. We think, "yes, they're all gone and people have forgotten them but with us it's going to be different."

Why do we do that? You might say, "Well, we're not morbid. That's it. We're just not morbid." Or you might say, "Well, we don't want to think about it. I've been to funerals and sure I've seen people die. I've seen my own mother being buried. But I still think I'm not going to end up in that spot the same way. It's not going to be exactly like that. The reason I think that way is, I think I'd go crazy if I actually thought that that would happen to me."

It's interesting loved ones, but there is another reason why we can be so philosophical about other people's death and why we do not face the fact that it's going to happen to us. It's actually a true and real reason. I'll show you where to find it. It's in Ecclesiastes 12:7. There is a reason we keep all thinking, yes it happens to Wayne, happens to Benny, happens to Crosby, happens to my mother, but it won't happen to me.

Ecclesiastes 12:7- "And the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it." That's why. "The dust returns to the earth as it was." Your body crumbles up and becomes

dust or ashes that we could put in a box and spread on water if we wanted. But your spirit returns to God who gave it. Your spirit inside you is immortal. It's immortal. You actually are immortal. That's why you think "But it won't happen to me". If you say, "Well, then I'm right, aren't I?" No, you're wrong -- because we accept two lies about that truth.

The first lie is that it means we continue on this earth forever. That's not true. It's your spirit that is immortal. You will not continue on this earth forever. Actually I'd ask you to look over how fast the past 5 years have gone. Look how much faster they went than the 5 previous years. Let me assure you that the next 10 years are going to whip by so fast that you won't even see them. So it's not hard for you and me to realize that time is passing.

The truth is you will not continue on this earth forever. That's a lie that Satan creates from the real truth that you have a spirit that is immortal. It's your spirit that is immortal. Your body is not immortal. You will not continue on this earth forever. Your body will crumble and cease to exist. The things that you can see, the grey hairs or the things that are beginning to bulge in the wrong place that didn't bulge before, those are the things that tell you it's moving on. It's moving on and you can't stop it. It will come to the end as far as this earth is concerned a few years down the line.

The other lie is when we think, "Oh well my spirit's immortal so that means I'm going to dwell in God's presence forever." No, loved ones. That's a false sense of security. If you believe that just because you're a human being and just because your spirit is immortal, (because it is immortal), that you're automatically going to dwell in God's presence forever - NO. No, this dear book [the Bible] is very clear that at the end of this life there is going to be a great dividing among all of us who have been at unity for so many years as human beings.

I'll show you where that is. It's in Matthew 25:34. "Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'" Then in verse 41 there is a great dividing. "Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'"

All our spirits are immortal but some of us will live in the eternal presence of God forever and some of us will live in a hell of separation and of critical selfishness forever. That's it. So our security can be a false security. If we keep on saying, "They forgot about Wayne, they forgot about Crosby, they forgot about everybody else, but not me. I will continue" -- you will continue, but that isn't the issue. Who wants to continue forever in a hell of selfishness and a hell of hatred?

Loved ones, the question is, what will happen to you the moment after you die? What will happen to you the moment after you die? What is important at that moment? What have you done in this world that will be important at that moment? What have you done that will count when God asks you that moment to give an account of yourself? Someone has put it this way: what have we done on earth that will count a moment after we die? What is it that you and I have done on earth that will count at all a moment after we die?

Well, our achievements: the things we've done, the money we've made, the buildings we've built, the jobs we've had. These are the things that will count the moment after we die. Think of it. Think of

Walt Disney. Think of how he was. He came up and there he sees, the moment after he dies, the mighty Creator standing before him and he says, "Look, there is Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck and Goofy." Even though those dear creations (made by Walt Disney) have given so much pleasure to so many of us, you know what you think when I say that. You say, "No, all that will be 'Mickey Mouse'." Disney won't say that. He wouldn't think of saying that. That's not important. That's not what will count a moment after we die.

You and I have a tendency to exclude ourselves. We say, "Yes, but we're different. It would be "Mickey Mouse" for Disney to point to those things -- Goofy, the Seven Dwarfs and all the rest. Those are silly things and weren't worth anything. But, what I've done in my life, what I've achieved at Control Data and Dayton's and what I've achieved at The Ford Motor Company -- I've spent years of my life achieving things in these businesses.

Think of Henry Ford. Think of how he went before God and said he founded the Model T. God looked at him and said, "That's the one without air conditioning, without radials ...." It's all passing. It's out of date. It's nothing. The things that we fiddle our life away with, that we used to get this stuff here, we'd be embarrassed at that the moment after death. It doesn't matter what way you put it.

In a world where we can say, "I built Charlie's Café Exceptional", .....which used to be there. "Well I built the Foshe Tower, the highest building....", no, not any longer. Everything you mention. Everything you think of that you've spent hours doing and your life doing is all out dated. It's all gone. It's all been transcended by what somebody else has done or it suddenly seems petty and silly at that moment after death.

It seems that none of those things really count or really make any difference because the fact is this whole world is going to be burned up. It's going to be replaced with a new earth and a new heaven. All of the buildings on it, the gardens and the yards that you and I have taken care of, they'll all be burned and they'll all disappear. None of those are worth anything a moment after we die.

Is there anything then that you and I do in this present life that is worth anything the moment after we die? Is there anything that we can do while we're on this earth that is worth anything the moment after we die? Well there is.

I don't know if you remember how this book (the Bible) talks about heaven. It talks about it in terms of a great city, of a garden or of a marriage feast. Jesus often talked about it as a great house where there were many mansions. He was going to prepare a place for us. In other words, heaven is going to be a place where there is togetherness. There is a great sense of being together. It's going to be a great place where all kinds of people live together forever.

Then there comes into your mind, with my boss - forever? Will I live with that character that lives next door to me, with that critical creature that I meet at church every Sunday -- forever? That's true isn't it? If those people are going to be in heaven it's going to be hell. If all the people that we know are going to be in heaven it's going to be unbearable.

Loved ones, we're getting down to the only thing that is worth doing in this present life because

God knows that fine well. He knows fine well that there's a Gorbachev. He knows well there's a Charlie Manson. He knows well that there's a Hitler. He knows well there's that critical neighbor that you have. He has so designed this world to take care of that.

I'll show you the verse where it's explained. It's Romans 8:28. God says everything in this world, everything, all things are working together for a certain purpose. "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose." Now what purpose does everything work together for? Romans 8:29 "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son," - Why? -- "in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren."

That's the purpose of this world's existence. It is that we might become like Jesus so that we can live together forever with our maker and with each other.

That's the only thing that is worth living for and that will be worth anything a moment after we die. It is that you yourself have become like Jesus in your own character and that you have spent your days bringing others into that same likeness. That's it. I'm not talking about converting. I'm not talking about preaching. I'm talking about exactly the things that we've shared this morning.

Now the only way that heaven will be heaven is if it is filled with people who are like God and like his son Jesus. The only thing that will count a moment after you die is the extent to which you yourself have become like Jesus and the extent to which you have helped others to become like him. That's it. Nothing else matters, loved ones, beyond that.

That's why this verse that we're looking at today says what it says. Remember God states in this verse that nothing else matters but the work of God. The work of God is to bring others into the likeness of God. Nothing matters but that. It doesn't matter what your views of homosexuality are (and I'm not for that), it doesn't matter what your views are on the cemeteries or on the Jewish visit or the SS visit. It doesn't matter what your views are on which Holy Days you should observe. It doesn't matter what your views are on what people should eat or what they should drink. If you destroy the work of God for that which is bringing other people into his likeness it doesn't matter what great and mighty judgments you set forth. If you're not making others more like Jesus and you're not growing more like him yourself then all your knowledge is of no value. That's what the verse says. It doesn't matter what you eat or drink. If for that reason you destroy the work of God then you may as well have no knowledge at all.

Loved ones, here's the error -- well two errors that many of us make when we hear this. One is we say, "We can't all be pastors. We can't all be missionaries. We can't all be fulltime Christian workers. We can't all spend our life making other people like Jesus." Loved ones, this whole clerical thing came in late on. It really did. This whole clergy thing came in late on.

The Jewish Rabbis were not permitted to take any money at all for the purpose for which they lived their life. The purpose they lived their life for was to teach people about God. Jewish Rabbis are not permitted to take money for that. They all have to have trades and professions. That's why Jesus was a carpenter for 30 years. That passed on into the early church.

In the early church, apart from the apostles who traveled from place to place in the countries, the early church was composed of people like us. There were no fulltime pastors. There were no fulltime

clergymen. There were no fulltime ministers. You were a pastor and you had a job as a finance man. You were a deaconess and you had a job as a manageress in a restaurant. You were an elder or a healer, (a healing minister) and you were a secretary. In the early church everybody had ordinary jobs. By that means they expressed what we call the sustaining grace of God to maintain order in the world while the redeeming grace of God was working to make people like Jesus. But, they all also had as a primary task an expression of their redeeming grace of God bringing people into Jesus' likeness. So there were no fulltime clergy in the early church. We have gotten into this game ourselves.

So loved ones don't say to me this morning, "Do you mean if that's the thing that will count the moment after we die, are we all to become fulltime ministers and fulltime missionaries?" That's the last thing we need. We don't need more of us in that thing. We need all of us in ordinary job situations knowing full well that the main purpose of our life is to become like Jesus ourselves and to bring our colleagues and friends into that same character likeness.

Loved ones, your job is important to do well in that it makes you more like Christ and it is a blessing to God in the world. It counts for nothing the moment after we die. The only thing that counts the moment after we die is to what extent that you helped God complete his creation by becoming more like him and to what extent have you helped him to create and populate heaven by bringing others into his likeness.

I'll tell you the second error. The second error we have is when we say, "Oh, you want us to teach people what the attributes of God are so that they will become like him. You want us to preach to them and share on every occasion we can what God is like so that they will be able to be like him." No, not at all -- because they can never be like him. They can never be like him. It doesn't matter how much they try. They can't be like him. All the knowledge in the world that you push down their throats and into their ears won't make them like God. They can't be like God. The work of Jesus on Calvary was God destroying them as they are and remaking them in his image. They've already been made like God. What they have to do is begin to know that, have faith in that, express faith in it, and move in obedience to that.

In other words they need to see you walking in the reality of the change that God wrought in you on Calvary. That's it. They just need to see plumbers who are honest, who are gentle and kindly, who have clean mouths and lives, who have a spirit of joy as they work, who have a spirit of love, and a spirit of outgoing care.

That's it. They need to see secretaries who come in the morning rejoicing because God is their Father and because they know there is a place with him in heaven waiting for them. They know he's with them every moment of the day and when the Xerox machine won't work properly they look up to him and receive the patience that he is able to give them through Christ. They are able to express that patience. People need to see that. They need to see that there is a miraculous way in which they have been made like God and that they have a chance of heaven.

Loved ones, what are you doing that will be important the moment after you die? What are you doing in your present life that will be important the moment after you die? In other words, are you involved in the work of God? Thank God it no longer means becoming a fulltime Christian worker. It means, is that (the work of God) the primary purpose of your life tomorrow through Friday? Because when you come to that moment (of death) the stocks won't matter, the house won't matter, even the lovely children or the grandchildren won't matter. The moment after you die God the

Creator will look at you to see if his image is reflected in you. Then he'll look behind you to see how many others you have brought into his likeness. That's the one thing that counts the moment after we die.

Could I just say a word to those who are of Catholic backgrounds? (But we Protestants are in the same spot.) Remember how in Catholicism we often said there is this level for the clergy and sisters and then this level for the ordinary people? It's not so.

We Protestants say there's this level for the ministers and evangelists and this level for the lay people. It's not so. Loved ones we're all in the same boat. The moment after we die God will look to see if you're like him so that you can live with him forever. Then, he'll look to see how many others you have brought into his likeness.

So I'd say to you let's get started. Let's begin now. If you have spent too much of your life in wasted time and in things that will not count the moment after you die, I would encourage you to settle it this morning. Why not give your life to Christ this morning and ask him to come into your life and begin to make you like God so that you will be with him forever and so that you can begin to bring others into his likeness this coming week.