

Jesus Died for You at Your Worst (Romans 5:6)

by Ernest O'Neill

Jesus' death provides the basis for our acceptance by God, regardless of our sinfulness or lack of sanctification, and it is the key to both justification and sanctification.

Duration: 32:45

Scripture: Romans 1:28, Romans 2:15, Romans 3:24, Romans 4:22, Romans 5:1

Topics: "Reconciliation With God", "Freedom From Sin"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the importance of experiencing a change in our lives as believers in order to be a witness to others. The sermon is based on the book of Romans, specifically chapters 5 to 8. Chapter 5 emphasizes our reconciliation with God and the peace we have through Jesus Christ. Chapter 6 focuses on our freedom from the power of sin, while chapter 7 discusses our freedom from the law. Finally, chapter 8 describes the life and spirit that result from being justified. The speaker highlights that these four chapters are summarized in the first five verses of chapter 5, which emphasize the peace and hope we have in God.

Transcript

I think many of us have felt that our parents have dealt with us unfairly or that we haven't had a fair chance in this world because of the terrible parents we've been given. And I think, first of all, it's important just to share with you that I wish we really would all stop that kind of self-pitying attitude. Brothers and sisters, none of us are perfect and none of us will be perfect parents.

And we ought to see, for a start, that all of us are in more or less the same boat. We've all had parents that have not been perfect saints every moment of their days. But really what I want to use is that kind of example just to begin thinking today about the verse we'll be studying.

If you feel that your parents have treated you unfairly or you just had an unfair deal in this world because of the kind of parents you had or you haven't got, you know that often you can begin to bear a grudge against them. And you can just be resentful towards them. And I think the psychiatrists are right when they tell us that often these grudges run very, very deep in people's hearts.

Often people destroy their own families because of this resentment and this grudge that they still feel towards their own parents. Now, you know that if you're in that situation where your parents have treated you unfairly or have somehow dealt with you in a way that you think was wrong, you know when you feel that grudge and resentment inside, there are two opposing factors inside you operating at that time. One is the old conscience.

The old conscience keeps on saying, listen, you ought not to feel this way. You ought not to be so petty over this kind of thing. And you know that there is in you a sense of guilt and a sense of guilt that spreads death in your own personality and spreads death in your relationship with your parents.

There is something inside you that says, no, you shouldn't be acting this way. Even though you feel this grudge, this somehow isn't right. So there is something inside you that gives you a sense of guilt even though you feel in many ways this grudge very strongly in your heart.

And then on the other side, there's a sense inside your will that you feel, well, I have every right to do this. There's a defiance inside you that says, no, they treated me this way. This is the way I ought to treat them.

And that feeling is so strong inside you that at times it bursts out and it's uncontrollable. You'll go home to visit your parents and you'll want to be loving and kind to them, but this thing inside you will burst out from inside and will fill you with bitterness and fill you with a coldness. And you'll want to love your mother with all your heart, but there'll be a coldness and you'll hold back.

Now, brothers and sisters, I think it might help if we see that all of us have come into that kind of experience. You're not alone in it. All of us have found that there is something inside us that seems to condemn our action.

There's a conscience inside us that makes us feel we're wrong. And yet there's another thing inside us, our own strong will that is defiant and that tries to justify it. You know with the first guilt, it doesn't matter what you do, you can't do anything with it.

You try to rationalize it away as a kind of adolescent hangover. You try to say, oh no, everybody feels a certain amount of this towards their parents and so I can feel it too. You try to rationalize the guilt and it still stays.

Some of us try to work it out. We try to be kinder to our parents in other ways. Those of us who have some money from our jobs, try to give them presents.

The bitterness still stays inside us but we try to give them presents to work over the guilt and try to justify it and try to make up for it. Some of us try to be good parents ourselves. We decide, well, I feel this towards my parent and I know it's wrong but I'm going to be a good parent myself.

And we try to rationalize and work away the guilt and you know that it's no use. That your conscience keeps on reminding you that you've broken the fifth commandment of the Father in heaven, honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you. And your own conscience keeps on reminding you, you've broken God's law and God has committed himself to breaking you and to condemning you to death for that defiance against his will.

And you just know it's impossible for you to get rid of that guilt unless somehow someone bears that death penalty for you and takes away the condemnation. Unless somebody enables God to receive you despite

that thing that you've done. And you know that that's really why Jesus called out on the cross, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? And the answer to it is, I've forsaken you because of the sins you bear in your own conscience that all the other men and women in my world have committed against me.

And you're experiencing forsakenness from me and eternal death and separation from me for their sake. And you know, brothers and sisters, that then we begin to see that if Jesus has borne that penalty for us, then we are justified in being allowed to live. Otherwise, we really feel we're strangers in the world.

We feel we all have no right to be alive and we still keep trying to punish ourselves. But when we see that Jesus has died that death for us, then we feel justified in remaining alive. And we see that God is justified in allowing us to remain alive because already he has condemned someone for that sin.

That's the experience of justification. And that's what we need if we're to become children of God. That's what we need if we're to have that guilt dealt with in our consciences.

But you know that most of us, even after we've had the guilt dealt with in our consciences, even though we've had our sins forgiven, even though we've been born of the Spirit and become children of God, most of us still have trouble with that independent defiant will inside. And I think that's true. Many of us go home as Christians.

We know our guilt has been forgiven. We know we were wrong in the attitude we took towards our parents. And yet, we find something inside us continuing to break out against them.

At a time when the father needs real gentleness and real love, we break out and we wipe out against them with sarcasm or with criticism. At a time when our mum needs real fellowship and real company and real understanding, we wipe out against her with some kind of caustic comment that hurts. And most of us find that still we have the problem of the independent will.

Most of us have found as Christians, yes, we're clear of the guilt, but that independent will is still there. And it will not let us be like Jesus, even if we want to be. We find we want to be like Him, but we cannot because of this strong defiant self-assertiveness inside.

And this self-deification continues really to put God in the background of our lives. And it makes us more and more incapable of obeying Him. Now, we begin to see that what we need is not just justification, but what we need is to be changed inside in our attitudes and our motives and our reactions and our desires.

What we need really is sanctification. And that's what we've begun to discuss over the past few Sundays. The need for sons and daughters of God not only to be justified, not only to know that God accepts them because of Jesus' death, but to be actually sanctified, to be made more and more like Jesus inside, so that they will act like Christians and not only simply believe like Christians.

Now, brothers and sisters, that explains the plan that God gave to Paul in the book of Romans. In the first four chapters, he deals with justification, and in the second four chapters, he deals with sanctification. And maybe you'd like to look at that now if you turn to Romans and chapter 1. It's page 977 in that black RSV Bible, 977.

And the first four chapters of Romans deals with justification, the need for us to be justified in God's eyes by God Himself, by some arrangement that He has made, rather than trying to justify ourselves in His eyes. And you see, Romans 1 and 28 deals with the predicament that we were in because we ignored

God. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct.

And the whole of Romans chapter 1 deals with that, the predicament that men have got into by living independent of God. And then chapter 2 deals with the fact that we know we rebelled against Him. It's not something we're ignorant about.

Chapter 2 and verse 15, for instance, they show that what the Lord acquires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness. And their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them. And God deals with the truth that we know we've rebelled against Him.

And then chapter 3 deals with the fact that God justifies us because of our faith in Jesus' death. And you get that there in chapter 3 and verse 24, for instance. They are justified by His grace as a gift through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

And then chapter 4 deals with the fact that our faith is regarded by God as righteousness. We always think, you see, we have to try to be righteous or moral for God to think well of us. But the fact is that He counts our faith in Jesus' death for us as righteousness.

And you get that in verse 22 of chapter 4 of Romans, verse 22. That is why His faith was reckoned to Him as righteousness. Now dear ones, then you see Paul changes to the great result in our lives of justification.

And so in 5, 6, 7 and 8, Paul begins to talk about sanctification. And so if you don't want to hear anything about sanctification, you shouldn't come to the theatre for the next five years. Because it'll probably take us that to get through the chapters.

But chapter 5, 6, 7 and 8 deals with the results of justification in our lives today. You see, that's why the church has so often failed before the world. Because it has not allowed God to change its life and its heart.

So often it has stood in a place of justification, but it has not allowed itself to be sanctified. So often we Christians have said, oh we're accepted by God because of Jesus' death, but we have not allowed our lives to be changed. And so our friends at school and our friends at work and our neighbours in the street see no change in us.

And it's because there's been no change in us that they do not believe God really. And so chapter 5 deals with our reconciliation with God. You see it there in verse 1, we have peace with God.

And then chapter 6 deals with our freedom from sin, where God frees us from the power of sin. And then chapter 7 deals with freedom from the law. So many of us live under the law, you know.

Even if it's the law of Freud, or the law of our parents, or the law of good social behaviour. So many of us live under laws and regulations. And then in chapter 8 it's a description of the life and the spirit that results after we're justified.

Now brothers and sisters, those four chapters are summarised in chapter 5, verses 1 to 5, you see. Those four chapters are all summarised in the first five verses of chapter 5. For instance, our reconciliation with God is stated in the verse 1. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. That's one of the effects of being justified in God's eyes.

We have real peace. And then, you see, the result of this is a beautiful natural experience. I think we have to see that.

Becoming like God is a beautiful natural consequence of justification. And it is a lovely and a spontaneous and a joyous experience. Now, that is described clearly for us there in those first five verses, you see.

Look at verse 2, for instance. Through Him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. In other words, becoming like Jesus is not an old grinding, working, striving business.

It's a thing that you rejoice about. In fact, the Greek is the subjunctive tense, the subjunctive mood, and it means let us rejoice. Let us rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God.

And so, sanctification for a Christian is a joyous experience. It isn't a striving, straining one. And, you see, it goes on in verse 3. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings.

Even the trials that God allows to come to us to expose our own waywardness and our own inadequacies, even those we rejoice in. In fact, the Greek mood is again the subjunctive, and it says let us rejoice in our sufferings. So, you see that it is a joyous thing.

And then, in verse 4, that these inadequacies within us eventually drive us to the only source of real hope, which is Jesus. Endurance produces character, and character produces hope. And then, in verse 5, the answer to all our yearning and our hoping is the Holy Spirit, that God's love is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, which has been given to us.

But sanctification is a joyous thing. For most of us, that isn't so. For most of us, we give our lives to Jesus at the beginning, and we receive Him into our hearts.

And it's just a delight to serve Him and to love Him. And for the first weeks, the Bible study is great, and the prayer is easy. We just love to be with our Savior.

And witnessing is just spontaneous. We just love to talk about Him. It's easy because it has changed our whole life.

And we walk like that for two or three weeks or two or three months. And then we begin to find a will within us that does not want to bend towards Him. He tells us to speak to somebody about Himself, and we begin to feel a fear that they will think the wrong thing about us.

He tells us to witness at work, and we begin to feel a fear that they will think we're wild, fanatical, fundamentalists. And we begin to hold back. He tells us to get up early one morning, and we say, oh, just another few minutes in bed.

And we begin to negotiate our surrenders to Jesus. And bit by bit, we begin to discover a lion inside us that is growing stronger and stronger. We want to do what Jesus wanted us to do, and it was easy at the beginning of our lives, but now it seems hard.

We don't want to lose our temper, but we lose our temper. We don't want to think unclean thoughts, but we find ourselves thinking unclean thoughts. And then we make an effort to overcome these unclean thoughts.

And we pray about it for a number of weeks, and we get victory over the unclean thoughts. And then the jealousy comes in, and we start working on the jealousy. And then the unclean thoughts come up again when we work over the jealousy.

And gradually we find that we're beset on all sides in our hearts with strong desires and feelings that are against God. Now, brothers and sisters, I'm afraid most of us do not walk into sanctification in a glorious, rejoicing way. But at that point in our lives, many of us look in.

After years, maybe as Christians, we find that we're hypocrites. We have a double life. We have a life inside that is not like Jesus at all.

And outside, we're professing what we don't possess. And many of us at that point begin to look inside and say, well, I can't be a child of God. Look what I feel.

And we begin to look, you remember, at a verse like Galatians 5 and 19. And we see ourselves described there. Not at all described in verse 22, the Spirit is love and joy and peace and patience and kindness.

But it's page 1015, Galatians 5 and 19. We find that this is what describes us. Now, the works of the flesh are plain.

Immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing and the like. I warn you as I warned you before that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. And we say, that is what I am like.

I get angry at times. Certainly, I have envy. Certainly, I get jealous.

In fact, these things are so great and strong inside me that they're turning me apart. I cannot be a child of God the way I am. And we look inside and we see the mess there.

And we say, God cannot possibly accept me. Now, loved ones, that's how many of us try to tackle sanctification. Now, brothers and sisters, do you see the answer to that mess? The answer to that mess is your answer to this question.

How good were you when Jesus died for you? How good were you when Jesus died for you? Did you have no envy? Did you have no jealousy? Did you have no anger? Do you see that Jesus died for you when you weren't even trying to be like Him? Jesus died for you when you were an absolute rebel. Now, He won't cease to die for you because you've become a little more like Him, yet there's still a lot of uncleanness and satanic work inside you. Now, you see, many of us lose our sense of our justification before God because we look inside to see how well sanctification is going.

Now, brothers and sisters, if you look inside to see if you look like a child of God, then you're trying to save yourself by your works. And you remember, Romans says that no man will be justified by the works of law. And so it wouldn't matter if you looked inside and saw yourself perfectly sanctified.

You still wouldn't be acceptable to God because sin is not a quantitative thing that if I have that much of it, I need Jesus to die for me. But if I have only that much, I can make it on my own. Sin is a qualitative thing.

It's an inborn independence and rebellion against God that made it necessary for Him to condemn the whole world to death, unless someone died that death for the world. Now, you see, Jesus died for you when you were sinner. And He still dies for you, more especially as you're now beginning to want to enter

into real sanctification.

But the tragedy with many of us is that we try to start entering into sanctification, and God begins to bring conviction of inward sin upon us, and we start looking in and being preoccupied with our defeats and our inward sin, instead of seeing that the only basis of our acceptance with God is Jesus' death for us, not our sinlessness and not our sanctification. And, brothers and sisters, unless you retain an assurance that you're accepted by God whatever you're like, God cannot continue to work in you to sanctify you. Now, you see, that's the importance of this verse today, and it's why Paul goes back to it.

You know, it's Romans 5, if you look at it, page 980. Romans 5 and verse 6. And you can see that God has taught us how to see the connection between justification and sanctification by guiding Paul to write of it in this order. He just finishes in the first five verses of chapter 5 in telling us the kind of thing that God is going to try to do in us, and then he says in verse 6, while we were yet helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly.

Now, brothers and sisters, even though you have envy in your heart and jealousy in your heart, do you see Christ died for you when you were far worse than that? In fact, the Greek word is repeated twice. It's a word called *ete*. And it means still.

And the right translation or a more correct translation would be still. Even at that time, at that very time when we were incapable of doing anything to help ourselves, at that time, Jesus died for us. Now, brothers and sisters, Jesus died for you when you were utterly unclean, when there was no even beginnings of sanctification inside you.

Jesus died for you, not because you were beginning to move towards His Father, but because He loved you with all His heart. And you see, even the word that is used in that verse is not unrighteous people who know what the standard of the law is, but fail to live up to it. It's not even for unrighteous people that Jesus died, but the word there is the word that means ungodly.

Jesus died for the ungodly. So, even when you were incapable of doing anything to save yourself or make yourself right with God, Jesus died for you and made it right for you. How much more, loved ones? How much more is His death still effectual for you now as you're beginning to receive a new conviction of sin within? Now, do you see that this is why so many churches have turned against sanctification and have said, no, it's responsible for neurotic introspection.

It's responsible for a teaching of perfectionism that is not possible. Because so many of us, as God has begun to deal with us in a deeper way about the inward sin, we've changed the ground of our justification. We've changed it from belief in Jesus' death to the attitude within ourselves.

And do you see there's a subtle pride there? Because we only begin to look inside of ourselves for some justification for God's accepting us because we really think there is still some good inside us. And that's really why we lose the sense of our acceptance with God. Because we've looked inside and we're starting to hope that there's something good inside us.

Now, brothers and sisters, a joyful, safe and victorious entrance into sanctification depends on our right attitude to two verses. Now, I'll show you the two verses. One is Romans and chapter 7 and verse 18.

Romans 7 and verse 18. It's page 982. Romans 7 and 18.

For I know that nothing good dwells within me that is in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. I know that nothing good dwells within me.

Loved ones, while we have that attitude to ourselves, then do you see we can go to only one place for our acceptance with God. And that is Romans 5 and 9. Romans 5 and 9. It's just one page back. Since therefore we are now justified by His blood.

Now, our right attitude involves our real belief in Romans 7 and 18. And while you have no doubt that there is nothing good dwelling in you and nothing good that can persuade God to accept you as His own, then you're driven to look to Jesus' blood and to say, that's the only ground on which you can possibly accept me, Father. But when you begin to doubt Romans 7 and 18, when you begin to think, yeah, maybe there is something good inside me and God can look in and see how well I'm doing victoriously in sanctification, then you begin to doubt Romans 5 and 9. I remember a letter that a dear one wrote in this week's Decision Magazine, I think it is.

And obviously, it's good coming from her because she's just become a child of God. But it's wrong for us to continue to walk this way. And it says, Dear God, I thank You for forgiving me my sins and I hope to walk in a way that makes me worthy of Your salvation.

Now, do you see, we can never become worthy of God's salvation. And the entrance into sanctification depends on us hanging on to the fact that the only reason God accepts us is because of Jesus' death. Brothers and sisters, Jesus dies only for sinners.

Jesus can't die for people who think they're saintly. Now, do you see, God expects you to become saintly. But He expects you all the time to have the attitude of Paul, I am the greatest of all sinners, to be receiving more and more conviction of inward sin within you so that you'll yearn and cleave all the more to Jesus and to His Spirit.

So, it's a paradox, the Christian life. God expects you to enter into Christ's likeness. But He expects you inside yourself to see that none of that can come from you yourself.

And that Jesus only dies for sinners. Now, that's emphasized, you remember, throughout the New Testament. But if you look at Matthew 9 and verse 13, there's a clear statement of it there.

And it is good for us to believe this fully, loved ones, as the Holy Spirit begins to convict us of sins like anger and jealousy. It's good to see that our acceptance with God depends on Jesus' blood. Matthew 9 and verse 13.

Go and learn what this means. I desire mercy and not sacrifice. For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.

Now, brothers and sisters, Jesus died for you when you had only sin in your life. Now, He's still in that business of dying for that kind of person. And you remember what it said, you know, in the verse that we read in the New Testament lesson.

It's Luke 7 and 47. And it's the same truth, Luke 7 and 47. Therefore I tell you, her sins which are many are forgiven, for she loved much, but he who is forgiven little loves little.

And it is God's will that each time the Holy Spirit brings us an awareness that we are not like Jesus, it is the Holy Spirit's will that we should immediately look to Jesus and thank God that He accepts us because of Jesus. And then allow the Holy Spirit to begin to deal with that spirit within. But that is God's plan for us.

He wants us to walk joyfully into sanctification. Not looking in and saying, oh, I failed again. I'll never be like Jesus.

You should say that, but say, that's right, I never will be like Jesus. I can never be like Jesus. I of myself can do no good thing.

Father, I thank you that you accept me because of Jesus' death. And oh, Holy Spirit, I trust you to come in and fill me completely and be like Jesus yourself inside me. But brothers and sisters, that is the attitude God wants us to have, to remember constantly that Jesus died for us while we were yet sinners.

At a time when we were absolutely ungodly, Jesus died for us. Not because we looked as if we might be godly, not because we weren't as ungodly as the rest, but because He loves us. Brothers and sisters, do you see Jesus died for you because He loves you? Not because you looked as if you might be useful to the Father.

Not because you looked as if you might become a saintly person. Not because you were trying hard. But Jesus died for you because He loves you.

And He still loves you today. And so He's still willing to offer His blood to His Father on your behalf. And He will do that as long as you're repentant enough to offer that blood.

But brothers and sisters, when you start offering your own degree of sanctification to God and ask Him to accept you because of your own worthiness, then you'll begin to doubt. And the ground will begin to rock underneath you. And loved ones, do you see that it is the Father's will that we should walk joyously into this? So I agree with you, it's a paradox.

The Holy Spirit wants to smack you right down every time you get angry. Wants to cut you right down every time you get jealous and bring it home to your heart that you are still on the throne of your own life. But He wants you at the same time to offer to Satan's accusation, not a kind of self-justification.

Well, I'm better than I was last week. Or I'll pray my way through this if you give me a couple of months. But rather, Father, I thank you that you accept me because of Jesus' death.

And I'm justified by His blood, whatever I'm like inside. And oh Holy Spirit, will you continue to cut me down here until you cut all this out of me and you put me completely on the cross with Jesus. And oh brothers and sisters, you know I'm so anxious that you'll all begin to walk in this way because you know and I know, our generation knows that what has put people off Jesus is Christians.

That's what has put people off Jesus. And you see it so often because we have not gone into this cross experience with Jesus. And so often we haven't gone into it because we've allowed the new conviction of sin to shatter our old confidence in Jesus' blood.

Now it shouldn't shatter it. It should emphasize it and stress it more and more. Loved ones, every time the Holy Spirit shows me something of myself that is there, I just thank God all the more for Jesus' blood.

And that's what He wants, you know. He wants us to walk that way so that we walk in continual peace and yet in a new conviction of sin each day so that we are really growing into His grace. Pray the Holy Spirit will show you it, you know, because I know it's difficult stuff really to understand.

So I pray that the Holy Spirit will interpret it to each of you. And if you have questions, will you ask me? Maybe come up afterwards, you know, if you want to talk. Or through the week, come and talk.

Or maybe it's better even to begin reading a book like *The Normal Christian Life* by Watchman Nee. A book that would really begin to explain this to you. Because it is time, brothers and sisters, that we begin to go on into scientification as a body, you know.

Let us pray.

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