

Sermon for Sunday, June 4, 1978, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor  
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"THOSE ON THE LEFT SIDE OF THE PLANE"

Romans 10:5-13

Text: "because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9

I want to begin this morning by telling an ethnic joke. I mean that joke in a spirit of good will and fun, but especially to make a point. I hope no one will take offense. If you are of Italian origin, I'ma hope-a you not getta mad! Italian, as you know, is one of the romance languages. I've always thought Italian was so euphemistic. It has a lot of ending vowels and rolled consonants and it is usually spoken with such enthusiasm that one can't help but enjoy listening to it. However, when Italians translate their vowel endings into English, it does make for some interesting words.

Anyway, the joke is not new and maybe you've heard it. It is the story about the flight of the Italian airline, Alitalia, from Rome to New York. The plane takes off from the airport in Rome and just as it takes off, there is a loud noise. Right away the captain comes on the intercom and says to the passengers, "Ladies and-a gentlemen. We have-a just-a taken off from Rome-a and we lost-a one-a engine on-a take-off. But don't a-worry. This-a plane, she-a fly-a fine on three-a engines. So-a, relax-a and enjoy-a the flight." Well, a few minutes go by and the plane is off the Italian coast now over the ocean. The captain comes on again and he says, "Ladies and-a gentlemen. I'm-a sorry to tell-a you that-a second engine has a-gone out-a. But don't a-worry. This-a plane, she fly fine on-a two-a engines. However, those of you who can-a swim, get on the right side-a plane. But don't a-worry. Everything, she's a-alright-a." Well, the plane flys along for a little while and then it becomes obvious that it is losing altitude. The pilot comes on the intercom again. "Ladies and-a gentlemen. I'm-a sorry to a-tell-a you, but we have-a lost another engine. But don't-a worry. Everything she be all a-right-a. I'm-a gonna put the plane-a down upon the water. But don't-a worry. We are not-a far from-a the coast; about one a-mile-a. Those of you on the right side-a the plane who can a-swim, you swim for the beach and you have-a no a-problem. For those of you on the left-side-a the plane, who can't-a swim, we want-a to thank-a you for flying Alitalia."

There are two points I want to make about this joke. First, spiritually speaking, life is an airplane with its engines gone, headed for a ditching on the sea of disaster. Second, spiritually speaking, none of us can swim. All of us are on the left side of the plane. The Bible says, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 5:23) The Bible says, "There is none righteous, no, not one." (Romans 3:10) So, spiritually speaking, all of us are non-swimmers on the left side of a plane that has lost all of its engines.

But I have some good news for you this morning! That good news is this: every plane that makes a trans-oceanic flight has a life-jacket under each seat. Before you ever leave the ground, the stewardess shows you where the life-jacket is; she demonstrates how to put it on; she tells you how to inflate it. And if the plane goes down, it doesn't matter which side of the aircraft you are sitting on for you have a life-jacket.

This morning I want to tell you how to put on your life-jacket and how to inflate it--how to make it work. That would be worth a lot wouldn't it? If spiritually you are a non-swimmer on a plane heading for a ditching, for a crash landing on the water, it would be worth a lot to know there was a life-jacket and to know how to use it. You see, there is all the difference in the world in being a non-swimmer on the one hand, and on the other hand, being a non-swimmer with a life-jacket!

Here is the first step: admit you are a non-swimmer. Once when I was a little boy, a bunch of us guys went down to the river and they went swimming. I didn't know how to swim, but I wasn't about to admit it. Finally, by peer group pressure, they forced me to get in the water with them. I began to thrash and kick about as though I could swim and all the time I was drowning until somebody realized I could not swim. A lot of people won't use a life-jacket because they are holding on to the idea that they can swim, that they can save themselves. But God can't save us as long as we are holding on to the idea that we don't need him. Some of us have the idea that by being good, by being morally upright, a sort of spiritual boy scout, we can swim for ourselves. Now, being good may make you a good non-swimmer, but it doesn't make you a non-swimmer with a life-jacket! So, first of all you must admit you are a non-swimmer.

The Bible tells us about a man named Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a religious leader, a learned man, a devout man, a moral man. Yet, the Bible tells us that he came to Jesus by night. Why? Because in his heart he knew he was a non-swimmer. Jesus told him he needed a life-jacket. He said, "You must be born again." Or again, on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit of God fell upon the followers, Peter preached to the crowd that gathered. The Bible says that the people were cut to their hearts and cried out, "Men and Brethren, what shall we do?" That is, we are non-swimmers, what shall we do? Or again, here is the jailer at the city of Philippi. An earthquake had tumbled his prison walls and sprung his jail doors. He thought his prisoners had escaped and that all was lost. At that point he started to fall on his sword because he finally recognized he was a non-swimmer. Paul stopped him and told him how to put on his life-jacket.

Yes, the first step is to admit we are non-swimmers in a spiritual world for there is none righteous, no not one. If you are satisfied with your life, content with who and what you are, at ease with yourself, you can never wear God's life-jacket. You can't wear it because you don't know you can't swim. Jesus put it this way, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners..." (St. Mark 2:7) Do you remember the story Jesus told about the two men praying in the temple? One was a Pharisee. He stood there in the temple and prayed, "Lord, I thank thee that I am not as other men..." He didn't even know he couldn't swim. But the publican standing beside him smote his breast and not even daring to lift his eyes to heaven, cried out, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner." He knew he was on the left side of the plane, a non-swimmer.

So the first step is to admit we are non-swimmers, on the left side of the plane. Now, once you do that, you can take the second step. And the second step is this: put on God's life-jacket. Have you ever seen a demonstration of how to put on a life-jacket? There are certain steps to follow. First, you put the jacket over your head, secondly, you tie it around your waist, and thirdly, after you are out of the plane, you pull a cord to release a gas that inflates the jacket. So, there are also some steps for putting on God's life-jacket. If you want to have Jesus, there are two steps you must take. First, you must believe with your heart. Yes, you must believe Jesus is who the Bible says he is, the Son of God, and that God raised him from the dead. You know, it is interesting that the Bible says that we must believe with our hearts. To believe something is to give intellectual assent to it. Now, to believe in Jesus intellectually is important. As the British writer, Dorothy Sayers, once put it, "The Christian faith is first of all a rational explanation of the universe...it is... a hard, tough, exacting, and complex doctrine, steeped in a drastic and uncompromising realism." (Creed or Chaos, p. 28) But the Bible says that to believe with the mind only is not enough. A lot of us believe with our minds in the sense that we give intellectual assent to the Bible and to Jesus. But the Bible says we must with our hearts. That involves the total man. It involves my emotions, my feelings, my sentiments as well as my intellect. There are a lot of people who believe intellectually who are going to Hell because they never believe with their hearts. It is the whole person responding in total faith and surrender to God.

One of my favorite religious pictures is the picture of Jesus standing at a door, a lantern in one hand and the other raised, knocking. If you will look closely at that picture you will discover there is no handle on the door. That is the message of the picture. Jesus knocks, but the door has to be opened from the inside. It is one thing to hear a knock at your door. It is quite another to open that door and let the caller in--to make him the welcomed and honored guest of your home. So it is one thing to believe, but it is quite another to believe with your heart.

Have you believed with your heart? Have you opened the door from your side to let Jesus into your life? A. J. Gordon tells the story of a small vessel caught in a terrible storm just off the coast of New Jersey. Her bow struck a bar and she was made fast. The waves crashed down upon her, threatening to break her up and sink her at any moment. From the shore a life-saving crew shot a line over the vessel, but the crew did not know it would take them safely to shore. All night long, drenched, shivering, under the dire peril, they cried out for help when the life-line lay at hand. God's life-jacket is in your reach this morning. All you have to do to take it is to believe with your heart, to invite Jesus into your life.

But our scripture this morning tells us there is a second thing we must do. Our text says, "if we confess with our lips that Jesus is Lord...we will be saved." That means there are no secret disciples! A lot of us say, "I'm going to let my life speak for me. The way I live is going to be my witness to Jesus." Well, I want to tell you something--there is not a person who is capable of living a life worthy of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Jesus says you must confess me with your lips. There are no secret disciples. The life-jackets for overseas flights have two interesting features about them. First, on the upper right of the jacket is a little light. It is activated by a battery that operates when it comes in contact with salt water. So, a non-swimmer in the water first of all has a light shining on him. But secondly, the life-jackets have a whistle attached with a cord. It is to be blown to attract attention. Believe me, the non-swimmer in the water wants to attract all of the attention he can!

The Bible says, "whoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in him, and he in God." (I John 4:15) And Jesus says, "whoever acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my father who is in heaven; but, whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven." St. Matt. 10:32,33 Jesus also says, "Let your light so shine before men...that they may glorify your Father.."

Let me ask you, have you believed with your heart--that is, have you put on God's life-jacket of salvation by inviting Jesus into your heart? And if you have, is your light shining and are you blowing your whistle about Jesus?

No, there are no secret disciples. I want to say to you business men, you lawyers, you doctors, you teachers, whoever you are--I want to say to you housewives, you professional women, there are no secret disciples. I want to say to you college students that in your classrooms, your dorms, your fraternity dances, there are no secret disciples. I want to say to you young people, at the football game, the prom, the date--there are no secret disciples. No, your light is shining and your whistle is blowing.

In our test for this morning St. Paul writes, "if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Notice the words, "raised him from the dead". You are not asked to believe in some remote figure of the past. You are not asked to believe in some historical memory. You are not asked to believe in some dead hero. No, you are



