WHAT IS THE MEANING OF LIFE?
Program 188
We Have No Identity
by Ernest O'Neill

"We are the hollow men! We are the stuffed men leaning together, headpiece filled with straw. Alas! Our dried voices, when we whisper together, are quiet and meaningless, as wind in dry grass, or rats' feet over broken glass in our dry cellar."

Sounds pretty miserable, doesn't it? It's old T.S. Eliot's poem. You remember, the one that ends with the lines, "This is the way the world ends. This is the way the world ends. This is the way the world ends. Not with a bang, but with a whimper." It's his poem called "The Hollow Men".

And of course, we immediately say, "Oh, that's pessimistic, miserable negative stuff. Don't let's hear it." And yet, we do sense some element of truth in it. We are the "Hollow Men". We are the "Stuffed Men", leaning together, headpiece filled with straw. And when he goes on in a further verse to say, "those who have crossed with direct eyes, to death's other kingdom, remember us, if at all, not as lost violent souls, but only as the hollow men, the stuffed men."

And that's what we have been sharing over the past few days; that many of us feel like that. We look inside to see if we're there and we can't find ourselves. And we feel like hollow men, we feel like stuffed men. That is, we feel like guys, like guys at Halloween that are stuffed with straw and are propped up, and made to do what the other people want them to do. And often, that's the way we have come to spend our lives. We perform as people require us to.

The teacher wanted us to do certain things, so we did it. And we got some kind of reward for it. And so we went on there, and we kept on trying to please our boss, our parents, our professors, now our colleagues, maybe even now, our children. We keep on trying to please other people and to do what will make them happy. And so, from time to time when we look into see who we are, we realize that we have almost ceased to exist. We are dead inside. And that's what this man Jesus, you remember, of Nazareth said would happen to us.

He said, if you take the position that there is no Creator, and that my Father is not the Creator of the world, and that there is no God in this world, then you're in a pretty dangerous position and a pretty vulnerable position, because there are five billion of you here in the world, and there's only so much food and clothing to go around. So you are responsible for grabbing what you can. Moreover, this planet itself is spinning through space with no visible means of support and no real guarantee that it will continue.

And if it has all come as a result of time plus chance and is at the mercy of the impersonal activities of atoms, that are not governed by any rule or by any heart of kindness, then there is no knowing when the whole thing might just blow up or fall down forever right through space. So, there comes into you a tremendous sense of insecurity, and of course it's an insecurity that finally you can never satisfy. But, we have set to with a will to try to do it. And that's what He said would happen. He said, "You will yourselves become, in fact, conformed to the image of this world."

You will begin to do what the world of people and thing and circumstances want you to do. Because you think that that will get you security. So, you try to gather the stocks and shares that you can to make yourself feel safe. You try to gather the

insurance policies and the pensions that will make you feel safe. But, finally, you won't feel safe. Because finally, there is no safety. Finally, you will die. And if there's nobody there to catch you after you die, then there's nothing. And so, the whole thing is a futility that may as well just be ended now.

And so, Jesus said that if you live like that you'll end up becoming enslaved to what people want you to do. And many of us have done that. Many of us are governed totally by who smiles at us in the morning. You know, whether we're British or American, we love to be liked. We like to be liked. And we like people to like us. And that's why we say we're sorry so often. Have you noticed it? We always say, "Sorry, sorry." We always want to please everyone else and to apologize. For we know not what, but that we just want to please them.

And many of us have ceased to be ourselves. We're so busy trying to please people. We're so busy trying to get the money that we think will somehow give us security that we've forgotten what we were possibly here to do at all. And Jesus said if you live like that, you'll die inside. You'll just go dead inside. You'll become hollow, you'll become a stuffed man that is governed like a puppet, by the circumstances and the people and the things that you meet through life.

Now, I just ask you today. Look at what you've done today! Look at how your day has gone. Just go over it in your mind if you're sitting in your car or if you're sitting at home. Just think of how the day has gone. And think of how many of your hours have been filled with obligations that you tried to fulfill to other people, often not to help them but to help yourself. And yet, you ended up not really doing what you think you should do at all. Indeed, many of us have contradicted deliberately what we think we should do.

Many of us at the office think certain things about the politics of the nation or certain things about the meaning of life or certain things about what's happening in the Middle East and a conversation comes up where the drift seems to be the other way, and we are so anxious to please, that we will not say what we really believe. And that just becomes another nail in the coffin or the casket of what we used to be. Until now, we have difficulty finding out if there's any "me" at all, deep down.

Then, of course, you know what happens. We get quite desperate about it and we determine, well, we have to authenticate ourselves. As old John Paul Sartre said, you remember, "We have to authenticate ourselves." So you authenticate yourself by action and by will. So, even if you will yourself to commit suicide, you're authenticating yourself. And so, there came this tremendous lie and deception into our thinking, that if we just authenticated ourselves, then we'd somehow find ourselves.

So, many of us started to do all kinds of wild things. And it was wonderful to break over the traces of marital faithfulness and do something desperate and something wild and something unlike ourselves. And so, great numbers of us have given ourselves to doing something different just for the sake of being different. And of course, we're governed by the same thing as we were governed by before. It's like the hippies who all wanted to be individualists and different, so they all grew beards and they all stopped washing themselves. They all became the same. And so do we.

We all become the same in our difference. We all try to order from the same unique magazines and from the same exciting new stores. We all try to wear the same new clothes. We all try to go for the same, new expensive automobiles. We all try to adopt the same new American phraseology or English phraseology. We

tend, in trying even, to authenticate ourselves to become again conformed to what other people think or other people do. And so the tremendous tragedy is that many of us have become dead inside because we can no longer sense what we should do or should be.

And that's what Jesus said. He said inside you is your spirit; that's you as you really are. And for many of you now, your spirit has gone dead. You've become just little physical and psychological animals, and there's nothing left inside. And however much you try to make it alive, you cannot make it alive. You have to actually be re-created all over again. You have to be born all over again. You have to come alive again so that you, as you were, a fresh little child, comes alive all over again.

And actually, there's an amazing piece in the Bible, that old book that you certainly have at home somewhere, and if you look up Ezekiel, one of the Old Testament prophets. And if you look up Chapter 36, and verse 26, you'll find this amazing promise that our Maker has given us. He said, "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." And that's a promise that actually He alone can keep. How is it possible to come alive again inside? How is it possible to find yourself? Let's talk a little more about that tomorrow.