

1 Read

2 Intro:

"In this pandemic it is easy to feel that **death is just around the corner**"

3 Lockdown Illustration

- **my goal**: not 'encouragement' but 'enlightenment' - everyone will resonate with this, not just believers.
- **Chosen Illustration**: Letter from prison, **in the face of death**. Rome, **No indication** of future, **except** that "*the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.* (Act 20:23): Readied themselves... Has said final goodbyes (Act 20:38 *would not see his face again*)
- Apparently Paul was released after **2 years** - **2 years of facing death!!!**. **But** another **2 years** later, he's back again, and never came out - He died of persecution under Emperor Nero.

4 Proposition

- To share the **amazing news - Death can be greater than** anything in life. It's true. AND most importantly - possible to be **sure** - to be **confident!** I wish for all: to be able to Exchange Fear for Confidence.
- Don't know if I've ever used such an ominous and negative-sounding title: "**Confidence to Die under Lockdown**" - and I want to be as sensitive as possible/ But at the same time - exactly where the Christian Faith leads - Confidence to Die.

5 FCF: The Need for Confidence

- Death is **not the end** of existence
 - (**Philosophically: If it is**, then why bother trying to stay alive. Except the loss of a meaningless and crumbling world)
- But the Scriptures say, Death is the **entrance** to
 - Judgement (**Heb 9:27**, *it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment*)
 - & God's ultimate plan - the passing away of creation for a New one (**Rom 8**);

- & the banishment and punishment of sinners and evil (Rev 20)
- This has always been the case : It's what Christ **came** to accomplish: "*to destroy the works of the devil*" (1Jo3:8)
- **The NEED for confidence in the face of death:** SEE > **cf 3:19-20**
 - **! Tears in prison** - not from physical lockdown, but tears of exasperation at spiritual lockdown that 'so many' are in (even who portray religion, who are confident before death - mistakenly! ... will have no hope at death.
 - This message isn't only comfort for anyone facing death - but an urgent appeal to find True Confidence

6 Pray

humble, honest, faith generation

7 Proposition: Finding Confidence in the face of death

- **APP: Have you got Confidence to face death? Is it a deep river to pass with hope on the other side, or a black hole that sucks in everything without hope of return?**
- What Appears to be unsurety in v11 (SEE).
- But it cannot be - **cf 1:21-23** - freedom in jail!
 - This is the Language of knowing what he wants, and undistractable attention to arriving there. **How different that is to** "fear of death, unsurety", doing everything possible to hold onto life, tooth and nail.
- This letter is a chance to gaze into the Confidence a Christian has, through faith.

3 reasons to be Confident In the face of death

Firstly, Paul is

8 confident that Christ has forgiven him (9)

and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith--

8.1 Proof

- In (9) he is **claiming** to be **perfect** before **God** - ready to stand before Him!

- That's what "righteousness" means, that measure of perfection before God -
- **FCF: the most common 'unknown'** when people are asked - "Will God accept you as a worthy person into His Heaven?" - in other words: "Will God judge you **righteous**?" - Typically the answer is "I don't know" or "I hope so" - and you can see the calculations churning as they wrestle with it
- But there's **no calculating** in **Paul's** mind. No hesitation. No rewind over his lifetime, wondering *if he's been good enough*:
- **(9)** "**not having a righteousness of my own**"
- He upholds the unimaginable news which he's believed, and spent his entire life sharing with all who will listen: "*not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but **that** [righteousness] which comes through faith in Jesus Christ*"
- People can **claim 1 of 2 kinds** of righteousness - one that: "**comes from** [perfectly obeying **God's**] **law**" and another that comes "**from God** - apart from the law (*depends purely on faith*)"

8.2 Picture/ Illus

- In chains, House-arrest, **awaiting trial for 2 years!** Some scholars suggest it was 2 years because his accusers were delayed in **gathering evidence** and witnesses against him for the day before Caesar. And it seems they had **no case!** ... Yet that's **no guarantee!** In a world of deception and corruption, who knows what the trial would bring. (Within 4 years the wave of Christian persecution would be a tsunami.) There was every reason to expect that Paul would be judged guilty and thrown to the Lions.
- **In contrast**, if **God** was gathering evidence against Paul - in **2 seconds** what would he find? By Paul's own admission, God would find "**the chief of sinners**" "for I **persecutor** of Christians... I murdered Stephen" **God would have a water-tight case!** ... **Yet will** that bring condemnation? Paul doesn't claim his own righteousness: "*not having a righteousness of my own*" - he claims the other righteousness, the gift from God - because of what Christ did on the cross.
- **In the face of death, he has** confidence in the Grace of Christ

8.3 Practice

- **You can have the same confidence too. You can stand Perfect before God.**
- The Righteousness of God - **God-kind-of-righteousness**; **God-given-righteousness** is available to you as a Free Gift, apart from your works.
 - If that feels wrong to you - you're understanding "Grace" well. If you're comfortable with it - you don't.
 - You can never be comfortable with His Grace - But you can always be confident in it. And we see that right here.
- > Whichever sinner entrusts herself to Christ is perfected before God - justified to stand before God on the other side of death, in confidence, forgiven and purchased by the blood of God's own Son. That's what he means in (9) by "Found in Him"
- Look how he writes **so confidently**, 1:23, "**My** [confident] **desire is** to depart [=die!]" - not because he's good enough, but because he's confident in the Grace of Christ.

Secondly, In the face of death, Paul is also

9 confident that all else is worthless(7-8)

7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ

9.1 Proof

- We **develop** confidence in things by weighing up alternatives - comparing gain and loss. We do that regularly with evaluating what's worth our time (*is it worth my time listening to this sermon?*), and our money (*should I keep my contract or switch to prepaid*). Like to draw attention to the bargain we got, . ! Or seek sympathy on losses. But it's interesting how often our estimation changes over time, isn't it - as those things appear for what they really are)
- **v7-8 describes this**. Paul says: He's changed his mind on what is **gain** and what is **loss**: What he once **prized**, now he **despises**.

- **In (7) it's the gain** he once loved as a religious man, with all his Jewish heritage, academia, religious code (4-6). **Self-Righteousness**. But now, he will **quickly discard** that for ... **God-righteousness...**
- But **why stop** at self-righteousness!
- **In (8) he says**, "*Indeed I count everything else the same way*
 - When Christ interrupted Paul's life **gain** and **loss** was changed forever. He began Spring Cleaning his life, to put all the clutter out on the pavement, ... but **everything** he pulls out the closet of his life, which he once so dearly treasured, in comparison to Jesus, is worthless - it all needs to go to the pavement.
- "**Indeed**," he says, "*I have suffered the loss of **all things***" - in order that I may **gain** Christ - in other words,
 - there is nothing in the entire Universe, Visible or Invisible, more valuable than Christ;
 - (and the implication is: One must choose: Christ or the World)
- Jesus said,

Mark 8:34 "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 35 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. 36 For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? 37 For what can a man give in return for his soul?"

- **In comparison**, everything else "*is rubbish*" - not **on the give-away pile**. It's in the wheely bin. In fact the word he uses is 'dung'.
- **! Salvation is a death of everything else - final surrender of all we are and all we have, to Christ.**

9.2 Picture

- For Paul, Confidence in the face of death began long before prison// because // what this side of death has to offer is not worth hanging on to. Paul is **not afraid even to lose** his own life (Act 20:24).

(the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.) 24 But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God

- Why? Because : he's already surrendered it all, to gain Christ.
- **Gal 2:20** - written during the same imprisonment : *I have been crucified with Christ - It's **no longer** I who live...*

9.3 Practice

- Now if you cannot let go of Self and all you treasure in this world, you cannot hold on to Jesus - and you have no confidence in the face of death.
- But if you surrender all to Him - you have every confidence as Paul
- We are afraid to let go of certain things... Normally by the time we reach our death bed, we've been forced to loosen our grip on health - fingers peeled back one by one - but we're always beings with passion -> we invest and cling on to all sorts of treasure ... Death has a wonderful way of distilling what we value - the final things we are gripping on to till death us do part.
- For an unbeliever death has a sad lesson - that people were more valuable than things in life - but **now**, they must lose **even those**.
 - [All the talk about 'living in memory, and a better place is well-meaning, but fluff].
 - An unbeliever loses everything at death, and **more** than they want to admit: even grace, and must face the penalty of their sins.
- But a believer can face death with confidence because they are losing **nothing**. (! Well. they're losing pain, and sin, and grief...

Henri Nouwen tells of a Lutheran Bishop who was imprisoned in a German concentration camp during World War II and beaten by an SS Officer in order to extract a confession from him about his political action. The beatings continued to increase in intensity, but the bishop maintained his silence. Finally, the infuriated officer shrieked, "Don't you know that I can kill you?" The bishop looked into the eyes of his torturer and said, "Yes, I know –do what you want – but I have already died." Instantly as though paralyzed, the officer could no longer raise his arm It was as if power over the bishop had been taken from him. All his cruelties had been based on the assumption that the bishop's

physical life was his most precious possession and therefore he would be willing to make any concession to save it. But with the grounds for violence gone, torture was futile.

- They will "depart and **be with Christ**" - the One they have invested their very being in. (Look at that **affection**, "Christ Jesus, **my** Lord")
 - And they will see Him as He is. 1 John 3
 - And, they will be "transformed. Php 3:21
- Rom 8: "Trials which consume all you hoped for in the world... are not worth comparing to the glory that is coming"

Thirdly, In the face of death, Paul is

10confident of Christ's active power (10, 1:19)

10.1 Proof

This third point is **about life before** death (Isn't it true that even a *long time* before death *our confidence to die is tested* (even now as we talk about it))

- v10 tells us we **gain confidence** by the **living experience of God's power**: experiencing the power of Christ today

10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death

- "the power of his resurrection" - [not ref to our res but] means the power **as a result of** Christ's resurrection

(Eph 1:19, "that you may know 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead (... the working of the Holy Spirit

- So when he writes '*that I may **know** him and **the power***' - he means **to experience the activity of it**
- **The point is:** When you gain Christ, your whole life becomes **intertwined** with the mission of Christ, **in power**. May be under intense **p**ressure, may be in **p**lenty, but either will show His **p**ower as God's Image and Will are seen in your life.

10.2 Picture

- I love this picture of him under arrest - confidence in the power of Christ
- **Will he be freed?**
- 18b - 19a, read, "*I will rejoice [!], for I know that through your prayers and **the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ** [resurrection power] this will turn out for my **deliverance**"
 - Yes he is confident that he **will** be delivered!! But not deliverance from jail, death...
 - (20) "**that Christ will be exalted // in my body,... whether through a body alive or a body dying - The living power of Christ in me is my confidence***

10.3 Practice

- Now **what has Christ's power now** got to do with **facing death later?**
- For the believer, Death is only one blip on the continuum of God-powered Life, and in that moment, **all of God's power** to perfect His will in you is not lacking. [Fear of losing faith, losing mind, some unknown sin]. Death is a deep river, **but He will take you across it with all the same power He has worked in you till that point -**

Phil 1:6 "*He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion [perfection] at the day of Jesus Christ"*

- ILLUS One of the most precious times in my life, is being at the bedside of a believer who is passing away - feeling so envious, wishing to peer in the door as He opens it -
- but I know that my own time will come; And that **just as I've found** the working of His power **now**, I will find **the same then**.
- For now, as a believer, I need to be here- and apparently you as well need to be here, as Paul says, on mission, for the sake of others, that they too may come to know Him and the power of His resurrection...
- I've wondered if the pain of drawing close to death isn't God's final surge of sanctification - accelerated Perfection. The grand finale of Glory possible in this age!

- You too can experience **this other-worldly power** - not of riches and exaltation, as the world fights for, but of **Glory** - the redemption of Jesus taking place in you - and changing you, the power that transcends all circumstances.

11Application

- 3 anchors - **Grace of Christ** perfect to stand before God, **Surpassing Worth of Christ** vs what the world has, **Power of Christ** to carry through the river
- Think of the moment of death...we need to face it - unless Christ returns first
 - **ILLUS**: the final breath, the surrender of the body, an involuntary death - ready or not, passing through the door into eternity. None of us are unable to control the sentence of sin and death.
 - But Christ has lavishly provided the opportunity for a voluntary surrender **before** that involuntary surrender; a different door.

Jesus said, "I am the Door", "I am the Way, the Truth, the Life - no one comes to the Father in Heaven except by me" And for whoever enters by that Door - death will be the greatest thing in this life

Which door will you walk through?