

## Final Confidence

Romans 10:11

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

During the past few months, we've been discussing how to live the life we were meant to live in this world -- free from the crippling worries and anxieties, and free from that "angst" that seems to burden so many of us human beings in the 20th century. In that life that we are discussing, every part of our physical, psychological, and spiritual nature would work together in a perfectly integrated personality -- creating a real love that would build other people up -- our colleagues and our friends. It would enrich our society.

This is what we've been talking about for several months now. We got the recipe for that life, of course, from a man who is head and shoulders above every other great religious leader that the world has ever seen, a man who is head and shoulders above any philosophers that we've ever known. That's the man called Jesus of Nazareth.

You remember he is a man looked upon as the greatest ethical teacher that the world has ever seen. He is looked upon as a man who had power to heal diseases and to control the forces of nature. Most of all, especially when we talk about the best way to live life, he is a man who has claimed to be the only begotten Son of the creator of our world.

He has claimed to have lived with our Father Creator before even the universe itself was made. He has backed that claim by being executed by the Romans, coming back to life again for over a month, and showing that he had power over life and death -- even over the entry into and the exit from this world whenever he wanted.

It is this man who has described to us the way to live, according to the plan that his own Father, our Creator, had made. That is what we have been discussing. Most of the time we have discussed Jesus' death and life in connection with our present life here on earth. We have been talking about how his death and life can work a great change in our personalities, enabling us to live the kind of life we were meant to live here and now.

It is important for us to see that Jesus' death and life also prepares us to live in the expanded universe that our Creator God is now making for us. And so, it is certainly important to see how Jesus' death and life can change our personalities now, enabling us to live an eternal quality of life here in this present world.

But it is vital, loved ones, to see that God's word does not leave it there. God's word points out that the main purpose of Jesus' death and life is to prepare us for the transcendent life that is going to begin after this life here ends. It's important for us to see that.

I think all of you would agree that we have not lost ourselves in a lot of talk about "never-never land" beyond the grave. We don't do much practicing for the guitars on the Golden Pavements of Jerusalem. We have concentrated to a great extent on the realistic, relevant effects of Jesus' death and life on us here, in connection with our friends and our colleagues.

But, loved ones, it is vital to see that this life is very, very short. It is usually not more than

seventy years long. For Bill and for Rick, who are now with Jesus, it was twenty-eight and thirty years long. For many of us, it is not seventy years long; but even for those of us who live to seventy or eighty, this life is very, very short.

It is really just a little transient moment that is gone before you realize it. It is a nothing compared with the infinite eternal life that God has ready for us in the rest of his universe, which begins after death in this physical world.

So, it is important for us to see that Jesus' death and life has primary relevance for that life, because that's the real life that we were made for. This life is just a short time of probation and preparation.

It is important to see too that God does hold us responsible for our reaction to Jesus' death and life. God is going to hold us responsible, after this life is over, for the way we have treated the plan that he has prepared in his Son Jesus to change us, and to prepare us for the life that we will live forever with him in the universe.

After death, he will require that accountability from us. He will! It would be unfair of me not to tell you that. The first moment after you die you immediately enter into eternity -- and you don't need to get into arguments about a "purgatory" or a "middle waiting place" or something like that. You enter immediately into the great present moment of eternity. It is important for me to say that the moment you breathe your last breath, God will hold you accountable for the way you have responded to what you have heard about his Son's death and life and about his plan for your life.

He will hold you accountable. It runs right through the preaching of the early days. In 40 A.D. Peter went to Caesarea. He explained, "And he (Jesus) commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead." (Acts 10:42) And so, from the earliest days, Christian preachers have always shared that there would be a day when you would have to explain to God why you did what you did with his Son.

I used to think that was just imagery for the sake of the uneducated in those days. But then eleven years later, Paul went to Athens. Paul himself was a highly intelligent and highly educated scholar, and Athens was the center of learning at that time. Paul explained, "He [God] has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead." (Acts 17:31)

You and I need to see that Jesus' death and life is important not only for our present life -- your victory over your temper or our victory over our egotism or our selfishness -- but it is vital for the kinds of things that will happen to us after this life ends.

Of course, it was the same with Jesus himself. You may remember that he explained: "When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. 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 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.'" (Matthew 25:31-34, 41)

If we are going to be relevant or real at all, loved ones, it's vital that we do see this: we will come into a situation after death where we will be required to give account for the way we have responded to God's plan for our life.

When Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees, he said, "Nothing is covered that will not be revealed. Whatever you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed upon the house tops." [Paraphrase of Matthew 10:26-27] So there will be a great public judgment, however difficult it is for us to imagine it, and however tempting it is for us in our sophistication and our cynicism to say it won't happen. We cannot part company from him who showed more wisdom than anyone else in the world, when he implies to us that there will be a moment when our lives will be laid out before all the world to see. They will see everything that we have done and everything we have said. In that day many of us will be shamed by seeing what we did with the offer that God has made to us in Jesus.

So it is important for us to see that, loved ones. You may say, "How do I avoid that shame? I don't want to be in a position where I have to be ashamed of what I have done with the most important thing in life -- my Maker's plan for me. How do I avoid that shame? How can I live in a final confidence now so that I have nothing to fear on that day?"

You know that there are all kinds of answers. A very popular one is, do the best you can. We were brought up on that from our earliest days. Our moms and dads would use it. Our teachers would use it to encourage us in other little skills and techniques. But often it is urged upon us for life itself, and it runs: "Do your best. That's all a person can do. You can't do anything more than your best. Be kind to your neighbor. Be fair. Be just. Do what you can do to help people. That's all a person can do. And that will ensure that you will not be ashamed on the Last Day."

That, of course, is humanism. It is respect for humanity and it's doing everything you can to help human beings. Or it is idealism -- living up to the best that you know. It's aiming at the best ideals that you know. The person who urges it upon you says, "Listen, you won't do everything right. So you will do some things wrong and you will do some things right. God will balance the wrong against the right. At the Last Day he will give you a fair shake and you'll come out okay."

This is the kind of thing that leaves a vagueness in your mind, because you are often concerned about totting up the pluses and the minuses. You are not too sure how you stand at different times. But it kind of gives you a vague feeling of, "Maybe it's all right." But in a way, too, it's strange -- because it's never a game you can win. You can never be sure that you've done enough good. You can never be sure if you've done too much evil. You can never be sure how one will balance out against the other.

But the big thing is, loved ones, Jesus just refuted that absolutely. That belief that you can ensure that you will not be ashamed on the final Judgment Day because of your good works -- Jesus refuted that. Maybe you would like to look at it with me. It is interesting because it is so blunt. "Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.'" (Matthew 7:21-23)

It's kind of startling isn't it? Because you can see how people might say "Lord, Lord, did we not give at the office in your name? Did we not contribute to the political campaigns in your name?"

Did we not help poor children in India in your name?" We can see that maybe some of that stuff is questionable. Maybe God isn't too enthusiastic about the United Fund or something similar. But what we really have difficulty in seeing is: "Lord did we not prophesy in your name?" You kind of feel, if you prophesy in his name or if you cast out demons, that means that you must really be a follower of Jesus.

Of course, what Jesus is saying is, "Look, doing good -- doing ethically valuable works -- is not necessarily doing my Father's will." In that first verse, he says, "but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." So he draws a distinction between ethical or moral goodness and God's will -- which is interesting, isn't it? Actually God is not concerned primarily with moral good or ethical good. That is an outworking of anyone who knows God, but not God's primary concern. God's primary concern is that we do his will. Paul said the same thing in Romans -- that none will be justified by works of law, just by doing good.

The answer is found in another verse -- I Thessalonians 4:3: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification." The will of God is for inner purity. The fact is, you can often be involved in all kinds of good works outwardly, without it ever affecting your inside heart. That is one of the reasons why good works will never bring us into a position where we are free from fear of shame on the Last Judgment Day. However many good works you do, they need not necessarily change you or affect you or make you fit to live with God forever. So of course, God has said, "No, good works will not save you from shame."

Some people go the other way of course, and say, "Well, listen! You pretend to be good but you are really resentful inside. You pretend to be magnanimous, but you're really miserly inside. Well, so what? Aren't we all? All human beings are self-deifying, self-gratifying, self-glorifying creatures. So you can't do anything about it. Just be what you are. Just live that way." They go to the other extreme and they say, "Look. Don't even try! Just be what you are -- and then at the end, we'll see how it sorts out."

Well, it just won't sort out. God has left no room for us to live giving free vent to our worst desires and our worst passions. He has told us that it is impossible. He cannot accept a person who lives that way. It's in Romans 2:6-11. "For he will render to every man according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for every one who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality." God implies that there will only be shame for those of us who give vent to the worst in our natures.

Well then, what is the answer? If doing externally good works will not save us from shame, and if giving full vent to the evil selfishness within us will not save us from shame -- then what will? Inner and outer conformity to Jesus. That is what God is after -- inner and outer conformity to Jesus.

Remember, that famous verse, "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him." A lot of us get into trouble because we do not realize that the "good" is expressed in the next verse, Romans 8:29: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestinated (or pre-designed) to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren."

Loved ones, that alone will save us from shame -- inner and outer conformity to Jesus. That is something that begins here and now. That is why we have this verse that we are studying now, Romans 10:11: "The scripture says, 'No one who believes in him will be put to shame.'" That is the only way to avoid shame. Believing in Jesus means believing that all that he said is true. Of course, he said there was only one way to be like him at all inside and out. He explained it there in John 15:5. "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."

You cannot be like Jesus at all unless you are in him. You have to be in him. That is what Jesus says is the basis of our hope of fellowship with God. In John 17:23 he says, "I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world." Verse 23 says, "I in them and thou in me." The only way to be free from shame is to be in Jesus. That is what happens the moment you really believe in him. The moment you really believe in Jesus, God actualizes the miracle he has already worked when he put you in his Son.

I would just repeat to you all those words that Paul used to explain to the people who came down to be baptized in the river. He said, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. (Romans 6:3-6)

Now that is the only way to be free from shame. Over the past weeks we have talked about it continuously. What you have to decide is, "Am I willing to live the kind of life that this Jesus lived -- at this moment, when he is with his Father having a great time, just enjoying themselves? Am I willing to be in him at this moment doing that, enjoying him and enjoying his Father and not yearning?" Jesus is not at this moment wishing that he was in Colorado skiing. He isn't! He knows the one who made the slopes is right there by his side. And He's more exciting, more thrilling, and more transcendent than coming down any ski slope.

He is not wishing that he was married at this moment. He is utterly satisfied with his dear Father, utterly satisfied with the thrill and exhilaration of being known by the one really authentic and important "other" in the world.

Are you willing to be in Jesus? You have to decide that first. Believing is being willing to be in what you believe. The truth is that all of us were placed in Jesus by God. We were included in Jesus. But you have to decide, "Am I willing to stay in him?" That's it. To be a pagan you actually have to step out of Jesus. You actually have to opt out of him. To be a Christian, you have to simply decide that you are going to stay in Jesus. That is because God has reconciled the world to himself by putting the whole world into Christ, crucifying it there and destroying it, and renewing and recreating it. All a child of God has to do is be prepared to stay in Jesus.

Now, are you ready to live that kind of life? You have to decide that. You have to decide, "Am I willing to submit to the same things Jesus submitted to -- those Roman soldiers, the way they insulted him, the way they whipped him. Am I prepared to do that?"

This is a very personal matter between you and God. Do you see? It is a personal matter. I think a lot of you sit day after day thinking all the worst things. "Oh, cod liver oil! I hate to drink cod liver oil." They gave it to us in Ireland when we were young. "Would I have to drink gallons of cod liver oil if I submit to Jesus?" NO, NO! God is not a miserable, terrible old God! He made a beautiful world. He made you what you are. He gave us all the beauty of the lakes, the oceans, and the rivers. He is a dear God who loves us.

But you do not have to deal with your fantasies of what would possibly be the worst that could happen if you give yourself over to God. You must deal with God himself in a personal way. There isn't one of us who doesn't need to deal personally with God. "Lord, what would being in Jesus mean for me?"

It is going to mean something different for you from what it meant for me or for the person next to you. You have to decide, "Would I be willing to be in Jesus?" Then, once that is settled, you are to live like that day after day. You are to submit yourself to his Spirit and do what he tells you.

That brings a FINAL CONFIDENCE that is equaled by no other pretence. That gives the final inner assurance that on that last day, you will not be put to shame.

I think someone quoted in a prayer this morning that, "The Spirit of God witnesses with my spirit that I am a child of God." That is the way it works. You know inside. You think, "Am I really willing to die with this Jesus? Am I willing to submit to what he submitted to? Am I willing to submit to what his Spirit now tells me that I might have to submit to? Am I willing?" Then the Spirit of God witnesses that you are willing, if you are. Then your day by day submission to the Holy Spirit confirms that as the years pass.

It brings about in you a looking forward to death, not as a morbid thing. (I want to fight it as long as I can and stay alive until I am 120.) It takes away that fear the old poet had who wrote, "Do not go gently into that dark night." It takes away that terrible fear that he had. It brings a readiness and a looking forward to real life, which begins the moment after you take your last breath here on earth.

I just ask you -- how do you feel about it? Do you feel confident at this moment that you will not be put to shame in that moment after death? If you do not, I would say you should deal immediately with it, with Jesus, and immediately with what God has done for you in him. Decide immediately: "Am I willing to live this way?"

Those of us who are not willing must go out there and battle through the next thirty to forty years with fear tugging at our heartstrings all the time, and then at the end, have a terrible fear of darkness. That is not God's will for us. God's will is that this is just the beginning of a magnificent life that he has already prepared for us.

I do not know how to say it strongly enough, because you know that I am the guy who eventually ends up by your graveside, or some guy like me. I cannot say how strongly I wish and I pray that each one of you would go right into life after this life is over, that none of you would go into death and the second death, and the utter darkness. I pray that you will not. Let's do everything to help each other so that we do not do that. Let us love each other. Let us do everything. I'll say it backwards. I will say it any way, standing on my head! Let's do it whatever way we can, to make sure that none of us in this room goes into that second death and that utter darkness.

Let us pray. Dear Father, these things are so big that we hardly know how to talk of them. Lord, we really have to stand and just be silent before you. We know that these are truths and we know that these things will happen. Lord, we want to be ready for that. So, Lord, all I can do is pray for my brothers and sisters here. If any of them is not right with you, if any has not settled things – I pray they will settle it today, and that they pray and commit their lives to you, and accept the kind of life that you lived, and be willing to let you live it again in them. Lord, I pray this for each one of us here so that we may experience that truth, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.” Amen.