

**Date:** October 28-29, 2023

**Title:** Look Up - "Look Up for Confidence"

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

**Speaker:** Kurt Bjorklund

Good morning. It's great to be together. Let's take a moment and pray together. God, thank you for the chance to be together. And God, as we've been praying the last several weeks, we ask that you bring peace to Jerusalem and Ukraine. God, we pray that as we're gathered today in Wexford, Beaver, Southpointe, Strip District, Butler, and the Chapel, you would speak into each of our lives. God, if I've prepared things that don't reflect your truth, I pray you keep me from saying those things. And Lord, if there are things that would be beneficial to those of us who are gathered here this morning, that I haven't prepared, I pray you'd prompt me, and I would follow your leading in this moment. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

I came across a statistical ranking of some things the other day, and it was things that Americans are significantly afraid of. I started to look through the list, and at the top of the list was a loved one dying. That was some 68% of people who were seriously afraid of that. Which made me wonder about the other 32% who are like that's fine. And then right behind it, loved ones becoming seriously ill or becoming personally, seriously ill. Not having enough money for retirement was 55%. Mass shootings, gun violence, and losing physical mobility were on the list. Corrupt government officials, chronic disease, high medical bills, 48%. The US getting involved in another war, a car crash, one of the current presidential candidates being elected as president, corporations influencing government, and then at 44% was dying.

And here's what I thought was interesting, that above dying personally, was high medical bills. As Americans, we're more afraid of the cost of medical care than we are of actually dying. Then below dying were things like a house fire or natural disasters, the extinction of plants and animals, being hit by a drunk driver, another COVID pandemic, and snakes at 38%. And public speaking was only 6% behind dying. So according to that, most of Americans are more afraid or almost as afraid of standing in front of a group of people and talking as they are as afraid of death.

Now, I found that somewhat humorous because as we come to Second Corinthians five verses one through ten, we've been working our way through Second Corinthians. This is a passage about confidence, about courage. And I say that because in verse six and in verse eight, this word is used. Here's what it says. "Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord." And then verse eight says, "We are confident..." The ESV translates that we're of good courage.

And so, this is talking about confidence. Let me just ask you, what are you afraid of? I guess that maybe some of the things that were on that list would hit your list, but probably many of us have something intensely personal. We might say, I'm afraid that my relationship will never get better. I'm afraid that the way that I've gotten to where I am, I can't sustain that pace and do it for the rest of my working life. Or I'm afraid, you fill in the blank.

So, how does courage, how does confidence, come into being? Well, in Second Corinthians, chapter five, verses one through ten, the apostle Paul, I believe, addresses two areas that it's typical to maybe need confidence. And one of them is universal. Whether you're a person of faith or not, this is an area that you know is coming, and that's the issue of death. He addresses this in verses one through nine and then he addresses the issue of judgment. And this is one that many of us, even if you're a person of faith, prefer not to think about. And yet the Apostle Paul here says, these are things that I have confidence about when I think about death and when I think about judgment.

What a lot of us like to do when it comes to these two topics is we like not to think about it. Even the way that we talk about death is a way that we actually show that we don't like to think about it because we don't like to use the word die. If somebody dies, what do we say? They passed away. It sounds softer in our minds because we don't like to think about it. And the only times that we tend to think about it is when we're at funerals. And even then, we like to get through it as fast as we can and get to lunch. I know that's a little uncomfortable, but there's some truth to it. And so, what we tend to do is say this is a problem.

I think what Paul does here, is he gives us two pictures that address these two issues. The first is what I'm going to say is a tent. It's right in the text, and the second is a tribunal. And the tent is seen in verses one through nine. Here's what he says right at the beginning of chapter five. He says, "For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands." The word in the original language for a tent could be translated as Tabernacle. But here in the New Testament, its meaning tended to be a temporary structure. So, when people read this, they would have said, our body, our current body is like a tent, and you know that a tent is something that you don't spend an inordinate amount of time preparing the way you do a house for a few nights in a tent. You'll put some time into it, but you'll say this is not worth the same amount of effort as my house. And so, the picture here is saying your earthly life, your earthly body is like a tent.

Now, you may think, okay, that's not very encouraging or comforting. That doesn't inspire a lot of confidence because you're telling me that my life is temporary. But that's exactly what he's doing here. He's saying understand that all of the energy, all of the effort you put into your body, into your life here and now, has a temporary aspect to it. What's the old joke? You never see a U-Haul behind a hearse. I mean, there's something temporary to it.

And then what he does is he talks about how this brings about frustration or a groaning. Verses two and three say, "Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked." And so, he uses a second picture. I'm including it in the tent, and this is of being clothed and naked. And he's pointing to this idea of saying there's a groaning in us when we recognize the brevity of our life, and there's a groaning when we recognize even the futility of this.

And you know how this is. Sometimes something happens to you physically and you recognize that your body is not what it once was. And you say, oh, this is the path that I'm on. Or you have a moment where you craft something to be just right in your earthly house, and then your husband or your wife or your kids walk through and you're like, oh, I just got that

right. You blow leaves off your yard, and the leaves fall again the next day and you're like, oh, why did I spend all my time trying to make it look a certain way? Because there's futility to it.

But it isn't just when things don't work. Sometimes it's even in the best of things. You go out to dinner with some friends, and you have a wonderful meal, a wonderful time, and when the dinner comes to an end, you have a moment of saying, oh, this isn't going to last. You plan and strategize to have a wonderful time with family and friends over the holidays. You have that wonderful time, and then everybody leaves, and you have that moment of saying, oh, what did I work on here?

That groaning may not feel like it's inspiring confidence, but what I think is happening here is he's saying understand that there's a tent, there's a nakedness in a sense, but it is going to give way to something that is grander and better. That's the picture here that we have with this heavenly house not built by human hands. Verse four, "For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life." Your groaning moments, your moments of saying this isn't the way it should be now, a romance that fails, a relationship that's hard, a futility with something that you invest so much of yourself in that is your longing to say things should be different, they should be better.

Then he says this. Verse five, "Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come." So, the moments when you experience the Spirit of God may be just a moment of worship where you're singing, and all of a sudden, your mind is taken away from all of the groaning, all of the hardship, and you say there is something bigger and grander and better is a deposit. And the word here for deposit is like a down payment. It's a down payment of God's goodness that is yet to come.

And it's because of this, verse six, that we have this confidence. He says, "Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. For we live by faith, not by sight." This hearkens back to chapter four, where he had said that we fix our eyes, verse 18, not on what is seen, but what is unseen. And this is building on this argument that started in chapter three, where he talks about this, the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. And the New Covenant, he says, is this way that we relate to God, where we say, my standing with God is not based on my performance, but on what Jesus Christ has done. And when that becomes part of our way of understanding things, then we can address the groaning, the light, momentary afflictions of chapter four, because we see what is unseen. We fix our eyes on what is unseen. We walk by faith and not by sight.

Verse eight, "We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord." And then He says this in verse nine. "So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it." And so, the tent is a reminder that all that we spend our time building and working toward in this life has a temporary, frustrating aspect to it. But because of that, there's a permanent and beautiful aspect that's ahead.

Bob Russell, in writing about this some years ago, talked about the idea of heaven. He said that heaven is a place where there's permanence, perfection, people who have gone before

us, and there's endless praise. He said this is what makes the house, in a sense, that's built by God, desirable. In a way, what we could say is if you're in Jesus Christ, if you've trusted Jesus Christ, and experienced the New Covenant, you can say that the worst things that happened to you in this life are as close to hell as you will ever be. But if you're not in Jesus Christ, then the best things in this life are as close to heaven as you will ever be. And it's because of this that he says we make it our aim. We make it our goal to please the Lord because this is temporary, this is frustrating. But what we invest beyond this life, that is not temporary, that is not frustrating.

Then he comes to the second picture. As I said, the first picture, the tent death, is something that whether you're a church person or not, you'd say, well, okay, I know that's coming. I don't like to think about it, but maybe I can see how a belief in Jesus Christ would help. But judgment is something that few of us like to think about. Verse ten says this. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." And I'm just going to say this is a picture of a tribunal. I use the word tribunal because the word that is used here for judgment seat is the Greek word *bema*. It was literally a word that meant a place where judges render a verdict, and it was usually in an athletic contest. It would be the place where they would stand above and judge something that was going on. And so, the picture here is saying this is what's coming.

Now, I've been alerted to an issue of interpretation from somebody on this text who's trying to right now get an academic article published right, and what this person pointed out to me is that this text could be and might even be better read as we receive in our bodies the reward for what we've done or the judgment, the recompense, rather than we are rewarded for what we've done in the body. Now you might say, okay, what does that have to do with anything? And I'm not going to get into all of the academic sides of that but what that would mean is instead of saying there's this divine ledger for the future and God has a column where he's like here are the nice things you've done, here are the naughty things you've done, and I'm going to bring it all up and you're going to give an account for everything someday, that you are giving an account, in a sense, in what God is doing now in your life.

And you may think, well, okay, how does that work? Well, I'm not saying that there isn't a future judgment. By the way, some interpreters would say there are two future judgments. There's the white throne and the Bema seat or the tribunal. The white throne is for everybody to see whether they're in heaven or not in God's eternity in heaven. And then there's the Bema seat, which is for believers.

I tend to see that there's one judgment, and as I read this, what I'm drawn to is the idea that as we think about how God judges or works, we need to see that in Scripture there are several pictures of this idea. Let me just show you a few verses. Galatians chapter six says this, verse seven and following. "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." So, what does that say? Simply there is a sense in which as you think about the concept of judgment, that there is something to it in this life, not just in the life to come.

Romans chapter one gives us the same idea, verse 24, after talking about some decisions that people make, says it this way. "Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity..." Verse 26, "Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts." Verse 28, "Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind..." So, one of the ways that Scripture speaks about judgment is that God will not be mocked and that we will receive in this life a recompense for what's happened. God gives us over. One of the reactions to sin, from God, is to say go ahead and have more sin, have more of the devastation of it, that God gives us over.

But there's also this idea in terms of judgment. Ecclesiastes chapter 11 gives us this. Ecclesiastes 11:9 says, "You who are young, be happy while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment." And so, it is pointing to the future and saying there is a time in which God will judge. Chapter 12, verse 14 of Ecclesiastes, "For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil." And then Romans chapter 14, verse ten, puts it this way. Again, this is the same idea that shows up in First and Second Corinthians 5:10. This is Romans 14:10 and it says this. "You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat."

And so, what I'm pointing to here is that you have in Scripture the sense in which there's some judgment now, there's a sense in which judgment is future, and there's a sense in which judgment isn't just for people who haven't trusted Jesus Christ. Now, if you're a follower of Jesus Christ, don't mishear this. Romans 8:1 says, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus..." If you have trusted Jesus Christ, judgment for you is not about your security. There is no sense in which you need to fear it from an eternal standpoint. But what I want you to hear is that God is not mocked, and this is an important word for some of us who say, hey, I punched my ticket for the future, and now I can do whatever I want. Or if you've experienced mistreatment at the hands of somebody, you've been a victim. And you may say it seems like this person has never had to give an account for what's happened. You know, that God is not mocked. Whatever a person sows, he will also reap. Maybe in this life, maybe in the life to come.

Now, let me try to just help us think about this a little bit. I saw recently that Britney Spears is coming out with an autobiography or a memoir. And Britney Spears, some would say, was like Taylor Swift of the nineties. Others would say she's nothing like Taylor Swift. But one of the things she leaked, evidently to maybe get some more people interested in reading, is that she had gotten pregnant along with Justin Timberlake back in the day, and she chose to abort the baby.

And what happened was a bunch of people came out and said, oh, this is tragic. Think of the pop genes that were in this baby that could have been. You know, there's a bit of irony to not think that something is a life and then grieve what it could be. But it made me think of something. Somebody had sent me an article a while back about Stevie Nicks, who was a pop icon of the seventies and probably was closer to Taylor Swift in the seventies.

She gave an article that has now come to light again a few years ago because she has a Barbie doll coming out in her image. Here's what Stevie Nicks said about the four abortions that she had in the seventies while she was chasing her pop career. Now I understand that not everyone who's gathered here would say abortion is wrong before God. I believe that it is. But my point today is not to talk about the rightness or wrongness of abortion as much as to say if you would grant just for a moment that it's something that God doesn't want. How does God bring about judgment? Does he store up something and one day say ha? Or is there something else?

Listen to these words of Stevie Nicks. "To give up four babies is to give up a lot that would be here now. So that really bothers me a lot. It breaks my heart, but they're gone." And the interviewer notes that she teared up and she had to recompose herself for this next statement. She said, "But I couldn't because I was too busy, and I had all of these commitments." Then she goes on to say basically, not only did it hurt me to have given up these children who would be part of my life now, but the fact of giving up the pregnancies also broke up the relationships with their fathers because of the hurt that was there. And in a moment of reflection, she's saying, I'm not sure that the choices I made are the choices I'd make again.

My question is just when we think of judgment, it's easy to somehow get this idea that God has this naughty and nice list, and in the future, he's going to ring us up on every account. I'm not saying that there's not any element of that, but there's a sense in which God, in our body, allows us to experience in our being, in our tent today, some of the choices that we make.

There's another pop icon who just made a statement recently. Billie Eilish came out and said that she had started watching porn when she was 11 years old, and she said that her use of porn has made it so that she has a hard time having a realistic relationship with another person. And again, I know some people here might say, well, I'm not sure that pornography hurts anybody. It's just a simple pleasure. I think it's wrong before God also. But my point is not to talk about the merits or demerits of pornography as much as it is to say, listen to these words that Billie Eilish says about her use of pornography. She says, "I think porn is a disgrace. I used to watch a lot, to be honest. I think it really destroyed my brain, and I feel incredibly devastated."

You see porn or abortion or whatever, if you're a follower of Jesus, isn't that God someday is going to necessarily store up all of this stuff and say ha, you made this mistake one day or you made this choice, as much as perhaps some of how God works is that if you use pornography, it keeps you from experiencing a real relationship with a real person right now because you use it as a substitute. And what happens is sometimes we don't see how what we choose and what happens are connected.

Now this passage does say, make it our aim to please the Lord, verse nine, our goal. The word that's used there is talking about an overarching ambition. And I wonder sometimes when we think about it, if perhaps the direction of our life is something God will hold us accountable for. And what I mean is, if you're a parent or you had a parent, you know the difference between a defiant choice and a mistake. If your kid makes a mistake, you don't enjoy it. Maybe you do. But that's a you problem. You don't enjoy coming down on them. You usually come alongside them. But when it's defiant, you say, I can't let this be a thing.

And what happens at least, here is the aim, is to please the Lord, and then He says why? Because we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ for the things done well in the body, whether good or bad. And the good or bad here is something that's also worth noting. One commentator puts it like this. He said, "The use of the word bad does not indicate the believer's judgment is a judgment on sin since all their sin has already been judged in Christ. The contrast between good and bad is not one between moral good and moral evil. Bad, does not translate the Greek word *kakos* or *poneros*, the words for moral evil, but the word *phaulos*, which means worthless or useless. Richard French, who is a linguist, writes that *phaulos* contemplates evil under another aspect, not so much that either of active or passive malignancy but rather of its good for nothingness. The impossibility of any true gain coming forth from it. *Phaulos*, this writer continues, describes more mundane things that inherently are neither of eternal value nor sinful such as taking a walk, going shopping, taking a drive in the country, pursuing an advanced degree, moving up the corporate ladder, painting pictures, or writing poetry."

I'm not sure I would agree with his assessment that those things are worthless. But here's his point. And that is, if you read this as saying that there's judgment for our good or our worthless deeds, what you begin to see is maybe the picture here is not one for a Christian to be afraid of judgment and how God is going to store up all of these things for our future as much as saying there's stuff that happens now, there is an accounting, but God will also reward what is done for him.

In fact, in the New Testament, there are five different times that a crown is mentioned, or five different crowns are mentioned. Actually, a couple more times, one is in First Corinthians nine, verse 25, and this is an imperishable crown that is given to people who choose discipline in their approach to spiritual things. "Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever." So, there's a crown that comes from God that is given to those who train themselves, who discipline themselves around spiritual things.

First Thessalonians chapter two, verse 19, has another crown. This is the crown of rejoicing. "For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you?" The crown of rejoicing is for people who give themselves to the work of helping other people find and follow Jesus Christ. In other words, when you say has this been worth it, has the energy that I've put toward this, has putting myself out there, my reputation, to invite other people toward a relationship with God through Jesus Christ worth it? He says there will be a crown. It will be rewarded.

In Second Timothy, chapter four, verse eight. There's a crown of righteousness that's promised for those who love the appearance of God, of Jesus Christ. It says, "Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing." If you ever hit a spot in this life, this world, where you're feeling like what you're looking at in the world is disheartening, and you say oh Jesus, come, it says there's a crown for that.

In James, chapter one, verse 12, there's another crown. It says, "Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him." So, when you endure a hard situation

and it feels like it doesn't matter and nothing good is happening, there's a sense in which the New Testament says there is a crown, there is an award, and you will appear before a tribunal for having endured.

And then in First Peter, chapter five, verse four, there's one last crown. And this seems to be specifically for those who care for others spiritually. It says this, "And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away." And the context here is those who are leading, especially in the local church.

Here's the point that I'm just trying to make. I'm hoping almost more than you get all the detail of that, that you're a little overwhelmed and say God is not mocked, He sees. And so, when you think about your future to look up and say I can have confidence when I face death because the best is yet ahead if I'm a follower of Jesus. I can have confidence when I face judgment because Jesus has paid for me, and God will not forget the things that have been done to His glory and His Honor.

What that means for you, for me, is that we want to make it our aim to please the Lord in everything that we do. So, the way that you interact with people at work, in your home, in your neighborhood, the things you do when nobody's looking, they all matter. And your confidence can grow as you say I am directionally seeking to please the Lord. It is my goal to honor Him, and in doing that, I can look up and say whatever is coming, there's confidence because I know who Jesus Christ is.

Now, I mentioned earlier that this idea of the New Covenant is part of how we have confidence. It's a little bit of a mixed idea to talk about the crowns that come because of what we do. And it would be easy to say, well, do I behave my way into a good judgment or is it all pre-done, therefore, it doesn't matter? And what I've tried to do is say understand that you need Jesus as your savior because without it you can't be good enough. That's what the New Covenant means to say, I've come to understand that, but also understand that just simply saying because Jesus has died for me, it doesn't matter what I do, misses what God might be doing in your life or my life. And so, the question is, what is your goal and what adjustments could you make in your life today that would most please God so that you can have comfort in facing a tribunal and knowing that your earthly body is but a tent?

Let's pray. God, today as we are gathered, I pray that you would show each of us where we've been a bit flip with the idea that you see, you know, and that there is a sense in which we appear before a tribunal. And God, I pray that would move us to have a greater degree of confidence coming towards you and saying I want my aim in life to be to please you. And we pray this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Thanks for being here. Have a great week.