

2 TIMOTHY 1:12b

CERTAINTIES: WHAT THE NEW YEAR HOLDS!

“I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.”¹

“X-rays will prove to be a hoax!” So said Lord Kelvin, president of the Royal Society, in 1883. “Louis Pasteur’s theory of germs is ridiculous fiction,” was the contribution of Pierre Pacht, professor of physiology at Toulouse, in 1872. Charles H. Duell, commissioner of the US Office of Patents, in 1899 boldly proclaimed, “Everything that can be invented, has been invented.” Even Albert Einstein proved to be a stunning failure as a prognosticator. In 1932 he stated, “There is not the slightest indication that nuclear energy will ever be obtainable. It would mean that the atom would have to be shattered at will.”

We are poised on the cusp of a new year. News sites are replete with a new spate of predictions, just as they are every year. People speculate about which party will be in control of the government in the coming year, which team will win the Grey Cup, what the markets will do. I am not a prognosticator; I’m not a seer or one of the ubiquitous charlatans that predict the future during the days leading up to the transition of the years. Nevertheless, I can speak with a measure of certainty about what the new year holds for followers of the Christ. Our world is experiencing a transition from historical Christian morality to strange, startling and novel standards that really are as old as sin itself. Society’s transformation is dizzying—the old order is being abandoned and the new moral order is quickly becoming evident. Cultural Christians and religious adherents are discomfited, though they are often willing to join in with a full-throated cry for censure of any who dare stand athwart the mad rush to jettison the old order while embracing a new, controversial social order.

We live in challenging days. Society is being transformed at a bewildering clip; activities and attitudes that were once universally abhorred are now approved and even celebrated, while what was once thought to be good is condemned. The Faith of our Lord Jesus is being tested; and the testing will grow more intense in days to come. Events are unfolding at a dramatic pace as evil brazenly dares the righteous to object; adherents of this dying world challenge followers of the Master to defend the Faith once delivered. Increasingly believers are openly confronted as the wicked demand an apologia for what is believed; yet, the prevalent tone implies that most inhabitants wish we would just go away. In such a hostile environment, the model for Christian life and service is provided in the words of the Apostle as he was poised on the edge of eternity.

Verse twelve of the first chapter of Paul’s final missive to Timothy is arguably among the best known of all the verses Paul penned in this missive. The assertion readily suggests three significant affirmations that will provide the outline for our message this day. First, Paul speaks of *his boldness in the service of Christ* when he says, “I am not ashamed.” The Apostle then asserts *the reason underlying his bold testimony*, “I know whom I have believed.” Finally, Paul testifies to *the confidence that he, and assuredly all Christians, should possess* when he pens the words, “I am convinced that He is able.” “I am not ashamed.” “I know Whom I have believed.” “I am convinced that He is able.” In three stirring affirmations we have the essence of Christian life and service.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

ASHAMED? NEVER! Not so long ago, things that were done in darkness were concealed because those doing such deeds were ashamed of what they did. Those things were once universally recognised as “unfruitful works of darkness” [EPHESIANS 5:11]. At that time, people readily recognised that “It is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret” [EPHESIANS 5:12]. However, that day has passed; this is a new day—wickedness is in ascendency and righteousness appears to be in retreat. Wickedness has burst forth out of the closet where it once lurked. Today, the Faith is being shoved into the closet. Christians are being forced into the closet, as though faith in the Living Son of God is something for which we should be ashamed.

Maybe it is time for us Christians to be in a closet—the prayer closet. In a recent radio broadcast, a well-known pastor said, “Sin which used to hide in the shadows has now come out into the light. I heard it said a few years ago that when some people get out of their closets, it's time for Christians to get into theirs and pray. We need to pray in our closets and to pray openly as we're doing today... God doesn't need America. It's a great nation. God has given us our life and our liberty. But God doesn't need America to do what God will do in the world. But America desperately needs God and we need Him today.”² Doctor Jack Graham's words apply with equal validity to our beloved Canada.

Contemporary morality has been turned topsy-turvy. Those who practise what only a short time past was defined as indecent and against nature demand acceptance. Increasingly, not only tolerance, but celebration of those same rebellious acts is compelled through judicial action. The cost of following Christ has never been cheap. Though I make no claim of being a prophet, it seems abundantly clear that a costly payment for being a Christian will soon be demanded.

Morality in dying days of the Roman Empire was not radically different from the moral condition that describes our modern world. Sexual license, self-centredness, a sarcastic outlook on life, an overweening desire to be entertained seems to have marked that ancient society. Looking out on the city of Corinth, a city that reflected the moral conditions prevalent throughout much of the Empire, the Apostle described the society he witnessed. First, he wrote of a culture that had little time for God—in fact, he described a culture that exalted man and declared an individual's own pleasure to be the *summum bonum* of life.

Thus, the Apostle begins his description. “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things” [ROMANS 1:18-23].

Having excluded God from life, making their own self-interest the centre of their existence, the inevitable result was that members of that ancient society began to worship themselves—their own desires took precedence over all else. “Therefore, God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen” [ROMANS 1:24, 25].

² Diana Chandler, “Jack Graham: It's ‘crying time’ in America,” Baptist Press, Thursday, May 7, 2015, <http://www.bpnews.net/44712/jack-graham-its-crying-time-in-america>, accessed 7 May 2015

2 TIMOTHY 1:12
WHAT THE NEW YEAR HOLDS

Self-centred mankind moved inexorably toward utter debasement. Thus, we read, “For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error” [ROMANS 1:26, 27].

We want to believe that immoral individuals can somehow still be “good” people. However, the Apostle makes it clear that one who has excluded God from life is unrestrained; and when restraint no longer prevails, society moves inevitably into every imaginable form of evil. These dark words conclude the passage. “Since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them” [ROMANS 1:28-32].

During the days of the Republic, Rome was noted for reasonably high moral standards. After the death of Julius Caesar, Octavius effectively abolished the Republic near the end of the First Century BC, by which time the decline of Rome had begun. The Republic was a movement of the people, based upon the rule of law and a balanced constitution. The Empire exposed the transition that had already taken place in society. Increasingly, citizens sought to be supported rather than assuming responsibility for their own welfare. As people ceased to accept responsibility for their own governance, seeking government leaders to rule over them, they ceased to hold to the old moral codes. As was true of Israel in the days of the judges, so it was in Roman society: “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” [JUDGES 17:6].

Of Roman society when Paul wrote these words, Edersheim has written, “The freedmen, who had very often acquired their liberty by the most disreputable courses, and had prospered in them, combined in shameless manner the vices of the free with the vileness of the slave. The foreigners—specially Greeks and Syrians—who crowded the city, poisoned the springs of its life by the corruption which they brought. The free citizens were idle, dissipated, sunken; their chief thoughts of the theatre and the arena; and they were mostly supported at the public cost. While, even in the time of Augustus, more than two hundred thousand persons were thus maintained by the State, what of the old Roman stock remained was rapidly decaying, partly from corruption, but chiefly from the increasing cessation of marriage, and the nameless abominations of what remained of family-life.”³

Religion no longer had power to restrain people and no power to cope with the degeneration. The philosophies of the Greeks failed to meet the deep moral needs demanded by the times. The emperors had become criminal in their conduct and rule. Native-born Romans were decreasing in number due in great measure to an emphasis upon sexually deviant acts and to a general decision that children inhibited fulfilment. Seneca testified that children were considered with great disfavour and infant exposure had become prevalent. Lawlessness was rampant and unequal administration of the legal codes became commonplace; the moral fibre of society was vitiated. Because of the degeneration of society, corruption marked the governing class. Consequently, any movement that challenged the prevailing social condition was opposed. This was the world in which Paul ministered and in which he wrote the words of our text.

³ Alfred Edersheim, **The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah vol. 1** (Longmans, Green, and Col, New York, NY 1896) 256

2 TIMOTHY 1:12
WHAT THE NEW YEAR HOLDS

Christian evangelists were beaten, imprisoned and treated roughly from earliest days following the Resurrection of the Master. Christians were derided and treated with contempt; the leading lights of that ancient world could not tolerate seeing their lost condition when exposed by the brilliance of Heaven's glorious light. The actions of these leaders proved the apostolic warning, "All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" [2 TIMOTHY 3:12]. The most common effort to silence the followers of the Christ was to respond with violence in an effort to force them into silence. This is observed in the Word of God too frequently.

Peter and John had just been empowered by the Risen Saviour to heal a crippled man. People were running to see what was happening, they were hearing the message of life in the Son of God, when suddenly, "the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them" [ACTS 4:1]. Doctor Luke notes that these august leaders of the nation "were greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead" [ACTS 4:2]. Enraged, the leaders had Peter and John seized and put in custody. Unwilling to punish them at this time, the Council threatened them before setting them free [see ACTS 4:1-22].

Threats proved insufficient to intimidate the Apostles, so the high priest and the party of the Sadducees "arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison" [ACTS 5:18]. Threats had failed to silence Peter and John, so all the Apostles were haled into court. Though many on the Council wanted to kill these followers of the Way, they instead heeded the advice of Gamaliel—"they beat them and charged them not to speak in the Name of Jesus" [ACTS 5:40].

The account continues with one conflict following another as the Jewish leaders vainly attempt to keep the message of Messiah's death and resurrection from being declared in Jerusalem. They went so far as to employ a maddened rabbi named Saul of Tarsus, who engineered the murder of some and the imprisonment of many other Christians.

Opposition to the message of life was just as vicious outside of Jerusalem as it had been in the Jewish centre. Saul of Tarsus was converted to Christ and was afterward known as Paul. He would become the Apostle to the Gentiles [see ROMANS 11:13]. Chased from Damascus by murderous threats [see ACTS 9:19-25] and rejected by the Christians in Jerusalem [see ACTS 9:26-30], it appeared that Paul's evangelistic career would be short-lived. However, a believer named Barnabas was sensitive to the Spirit of God; he saw what others couldn't see in this erstwhile persecutor of the Faith. So, he brought Paul back to Antioch where they formed the first missionary union and God dispatched these two men on the first missionary venture of the Faith.

What a trip! It was the first of multiple adventures for Paul, the valiant herald of the Faith. Beaten, stoned and left for dead, deprived... but let the Apostle himself tell you about his life. Defending his ministry because he was challenged by some whom he ridiculed as "Super Apostles," Paul wrote the Church of God in Corinth, "Whatever anyone else dares to boast of ... I also dare to boast of that. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant" [2 CORINTHIANS 11:21-29]?

2 TIMOTHY 1:12
WHAT THE NEW YEAR HOLDS

Then, he concluded with a flourish by speaking of where his strength lay. The Apostle remembered one final incident that could have been overlooked since it was far in the distant past. Thus, we witness the Apostle's words, "If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands" [2 CORINTHIANS 11:30-33].

In spite of the intense and continual opposition he experienced, in spite of the bitter calumny spewed against the Faith, in spite of the physical violence, Paul boldly testified, "I am not ashamed." And what was there for which the Apostle should be ashamed? Shame arises because one has acted in a manner that dishonours life, dishonours identification or dishonours parentage. When a given society has rejected the holy standard distinguishing morality from immorality, that society will attempt to shame those who refuse to approve of the prevailing fluid moral standard. Morality will become an oozing muck—it will be aqueous, flowing, adapting to whatever someone or some particular group imagines it should be. At such time, the one who is out of step with society will be pressed to embrace the changing moral code. When thus pressed, she may try to justify her refusal to agree with the error or she may stand firm in adhering to the godly standard to which she is committed. However, if her standard is deemed aberrant and deficient by the majority, she will require exceptional courage in defiance of the common more.

This brings up a matter of great significance for the Christian. Morality is always defined by the standard held. The moral code of a society is no better than the standard adopted. If our standard is determined by whoever shouts the loudest, by whoever employs the most caustic language or by whoever is most vigorous in promoting deviancy, morality will be constantly changing. Words will cease to have meaning and something akin to the Maoist purges against those who fail to kowtow to the new morality will take place.

Engrave a vital truth on your mind—*Morality cannot be easily imposed upon a society. Morality comes from within society and is subsequently encoded through laws.* Without divine intervention, it is unimaginable that the morality of a deviant culture can be transformed, for *the morality of a society reflects the prevalent religion of that culture.* Western civilisation has been generally founded upon and sustained by the Mosaic Code. While the United States was never officially a Christian republic and Canada was never a Christian confederation, for much of the history of these two nations, the Christian Faith has been a leading contributor to the unofficial civil religion which is the Faith of Christ the Lord. Western society abided by truths grounded on righteousness. John Adams, second President of the United States of America, famously wrote in a letter addressed to the officers of the First Brigade of the Third Division of the Militia of Massachusetts, "We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion... Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."⁴

The times were dark when the Apostle wrote the words of our text; yet, the Word of Christ the Lord permeated society, penetrating beyond the borders of that ancient world, driving the Roman eagle screaming from her nest. Though the earth drank the blood of many believers who yielded their lives rather than deny the One who loved us and gave Himself for us, yet the truth advanced, destroying arguments and lofty opinions raised against the knowledge of God.

⁴ William J. Federer, **Great Quotations: A Collection of Passages, Phrases and Quotations Influencing Early and Modern World History Referenced according to Their Sources in Literature, Memoirs, Letters, Governmental Documents, Speeches, Charters, Court Decisions and Constitutions** (AmeriSearch, St. Louis, MO 2001)

2 TIMOTHY 1:12
WHAT THE NEW YEAR HOLDS

Contemporary Christians are prone to imagine that we live in the worst possible times. We hear well-meaning believers bemoan the loss of reverence in society. It is no secret that we are beset by wicked people who ridicule the Faith and taunt godly morality, doubting that God is capable of doing anything good or bad. It is apparent that the Roman world was wicked, but few are aware of the social conditions in the New World and those of the Old World at the time George Whitefield preached. English society in the early 1700s had thrown off all moral restraint as it forcefully rejected its Puritan heritage from the previous century. Spiritual depravity and moral degradation characterised society when this bold man of God began his ministry of proclaiming the Faith. The Reformers and the Puritans had been relegated to murky backwaters of derision. England had become a gin-crazed society where immorality flourished. God was publicly mocked on the stage and in the press. It was out of such dark, hopeless circumstances, that revival came through the preaching of George Whitefield and the Wesleys.

I KNOW WHOM I HAVE BELIEVED! Here is a truth that no Christian must ever forget—*Christianity is not a religion—it is a relationship.* Too many professed Christians attempt to live by rules, only to grow discouraged and disappointed. Were we to write this affirmation as though we adhered to a religion, we would say, “I know *what* I have believed.” However, our faith, as is also true of the Apostle’s faith, is in a Person—the man, Christ Jesus. The Christian Faith may be tested by what we observe, which are the actions performed; but the Faith revolves around our relationship with the Risen Son of God.

The great problem for modern preachers is that we do not preach Christ. Too often we preachers preach morality, decrying select sins while ignoring the sinful acts of the professed people of God. We denounce judicial activists who exalt sin while resisting righteousness. Yet, we have been silent about the pornography that floods our homes and our computer screens. We call that entertainment, never admitting that our standards are steadily eroded by our amusement. We are quick to express shock at the language our children are using, but we do not want to alienate them by censuring the songs of the day. We say that our language is salty, though it is more accurate to say that our speech has become coarse through association with uncouth language of our entertainment. We preachers are uncomfortable about addressing the matter of stewardship of life. If we Christians were to spend on missionary advance what we spend on our hobbies or on cosmetics, we would evangelise our nation within a generation. I say these things not to complain about the sinful behaviour of the day, but to confess that we fail to preach Christ. Surely, if we walked with Christ we would be transformed.

The Apostle has taught us, “Walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do” [GALATIANS 5:16, 17]. If the Spirit of Christ dwells in me, and if I allow Him to direct me in all things, including my speech and my entertainment, I will soon see the fruit of the Spirit blooming in my life. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” [GALATIANS 5:22-24].

The Apostle has also taught us, “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” [COLOSSIANS 3:1-4].

2 TIMOTHY 1:12
WHAT THE NEW YEAR HOLDS

I have told you in previous messages how Lynda and I came to faith in a church that taught us all the rules by which we were to live. No one ever said that we were saved by knowing and keeping the rules, but the unspoken assumption was that anyone who didn't know these rules or who failed to maintain those rules likely was not a Christian. We would just about have the rules down pat when something would occur that exposed yet another rule that we could not have anticipated. As I read the Word of God I made the discovery that Christ is our Saviour and He is our Guide. It seemed radical to me at the time to permit new Christians freedom to make a mistake! I discovered that the Spirit of God was far more effective than I could ever be at transforming believers. If I wanted to see people clean up their lives, I would have to learn to trust the Spirit of God to work in their lives—and His Name is not Mike!

I remember quite well when that message finally came home to me. We were serving in a congregation in the San Francisco Bay Area. It was during the seventies, and San Francisco was sort of a mecca for people looking for purpose. God was moving in great power on a daily basis. Men and women were coming to faith quite regularly. Many of those coming to faith were street people. We had been informed by pastors of sister churches that our people were not acceptable because they were too scruffy.

I had been privileged by God to serve as an instrument of God's grace to one young man who became a fellow believer. The young man had a thin, scraggly beard and long, matted hair. He wore old faded jeans and a shirt open to his navel. He slouched as he casually shuffled along to some distant beat which others could not hear. Nevertheless, he appeared convinced that Jesus was risen from the dead and that the Lord of Glory had saved him.

He came to church for a few weeks, quietly drinking in the teaching that was presented both in the Sunday School class and from the pulpit. He listened intently, nodding in all the right places and interacting appropriately. It was perhaps a month after he had requested and received baptism when I greeted a young man at the door. As I welcomed him, I asked whether this was his first time to visit with us. The gentleman began to laugh and responded, "Brother Mike, don't you recognise me?" It was that same young man. However, he had shaved, and his hair was neatly trimmed. His shoes were shined and he was wearing a suit and tie.

"What is this?" I asked. "What happened to you?"

He smiled as he replied, "You know, I have been trying to tell others about Jesus. Too many people don't take me seriously. I prayed and decided that I needed to look as if I meant business if I wanted to be effective. So, here I am!" God was teaching that young man; and God was doing a far more effective job than any mere mortal could ever do.

If that had happened only in San Francisco, I might be inclined to think it was an "American" thing. However, to my astonishment I've discovered that such transformation is nearly universal. In New Westminster a young man came to a church service where I was preaching. He was obviously struggling with emotional conflicts. As I talked with him he blurted out that he had gone to another congregation in the city only to be turned away. When he asked where he might find help, the pastor of that congregation told him to come over to our church because we would help *anyone*.

A man in this community brought his family to a church I was pastoring. He had been sent over by the pastor of another larger church who told him that we were an "entry level" congregation. As that man told me of this, I remembered the words of the Master, "The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds" [MATTHEW 11:19].

2 TIMOTHY 1:12
WHAT THE NEW YEAR HOLDS

One of my dearest friends in an ethnic congregation in the city of Vancouver came to our services because he was told that we specialised in getting people saved. He listened intently to the exposition of the Word and in a very short time, he placed his faith in Christ and identified through baptism as a follower of the Risen Lord of Glory. To this day, that young man remembers me each Christmas, sending a bag of coffee as a statement of his gratitude. I was the instrument of grace whom God used to open the door to faith for that young man.

In each of these instances, and in multiplied other instances, the message has been, “Look to Christ. He will receive you and He will save you.” Jesus invited those who were tired of the struggle against sin, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” [MATTHEW 11:28-30]. The Son of God calls and we respond to Him.

When Jesus’ cousin, John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him, he cried out, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” [JOHN 1:29]! He said this for those who heard him speak because they were oblivious to the coming Messiah. However, the very next day, John was standing with two of his disciples when he saw Jesus walk by. Again, John cried out, testifying to the disciples stand with him, “Behold the Lamb of God” [JOHN 1:36]! John had one consistent message, pointing people to Jesus. If they could but meet the Saviour, Jesus would care for the necessary transformation.

Paul, testifies in the text before us, “I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed” [2 TIMOTHY 1:12]. If all you have is religion, it is quite likely you will be ashamed when trials come; You will have no root, there will be no depth to your life. However, if you have a relationship, you will never be put to shame, for you will rest in Christ the Lord. We are very careful in this congregation to point people to Jesus. Salvation is not in a church, salvation is not in a creed, salvation is not in rite and ritual—salvation is in Jesus the Son of God.

Frequently, as I point to the Saviour I cite ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13. However, there is a verse I seem to neglect—and I should quote it now. ROMANS 10:11 informs readers, “The Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in Him will not be put to shame.’” The statement iterates something Paul quoted shortly before he caused that statement to be entered on the letter. In ROMANS 9:33, the Apostle cites Isaiah when he writes, “It is written,

‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence,
and whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame.’”

Paul cites the final strophe of ISAIAH 49:23: “Those who wait for me shall not be put to shame.” True believers in the Christ will never be ashamed.

I AM CONVINCED THAT HE IS ABLE! We live in challenging times. Wickedness seems to be in ascendancy. Governments promote what is exposed as dishonourable in the Bible. The churches of this day appear disoriented; the pastoral staffs often feel threatened. Many Christians are intimidated, silently anticipating the gathering storm. In the late 1980s, Charles Colson pondered the next step for our culture when it has rejected its Christian heritage. He speculated that as had happened after the collapse of the Roman Empire, Christians would retreat into pockets of community which he called “enclaves of light.” They would be surrounded by a hostile culture espousing neo-barbarian values which will have gained complete ascendancy.⁵

⁵ Charles Colson, **Against the Night: Living in the New Dark Ages** (Servant Publications, Ann Arbor, MI 1989)

2 TIMOTHY 1:12
WHAT THE NEW YEAR HOLDS

If we focus on the opposition to the message we proclaim, we will surely retreat into enclaves. Though we may call them enclaves of light, the light will be greatly dimmed; we will be marginalised, isolated, effectively silenced. When England and the New World was sunken in moral turpitude and the faith had been reduced to a few glowing embers, God was at work preparing for revival. Whitefield burst onto the scene with a message denouncing evil and pointing to Christ the Lord. Whitefield shook the Wesley brothers out of their own religious stupor and impelled them to set in motion societies for methodical study of the Word resulting in powerful prayer meetings. Whitefield and the Wesleys were divine instruments to revive England and to bestir the New World; they rescued these nations from the certainty of moral irrelevance and from divine judgement.

Early Christians knew they had received a commission. Jesus had commanded those who would follow Him, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” [MATTHEW 28:19, 20]. Consequently, these first followers were obedient to Him. Their obedience grew out of the confidence of His final statement: “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

This Jesus who spoke as no man ever spoke was *with them*. This Jesus who gave sight to blinded eyes, enabled the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak, restored strength to withered hands and crippled legs was *with them*. This Jesus who broke up every funeral he ever attended by raising the corpse to life was *with them*. This Jesus who fed multitudes with a little boy’s lunch was *with them*. This Jesus, who gave His life as a sacrifice for sin, taking upon Himself the sin of all mankind, thus freeing us forever from the fear of death, was *with them*. This Jesus who conquered death, hell and the grave, rising from the dead and being seen by those who knew Him was *with them*. This Jesus who is now seated at the right hand of the Father was *with them*. Knowing Him and believing Him, they would be obedient to His Word.

Here is what is needed if we will be successful in this changing world—we must recapture the wonder of this powerful statement given to all who believe. “I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that He is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me” [2 TIMOTHY 1:12]. We must incorporate this truth into our own lives.

None of us know what the future holds; but we are assured of Who holds the future! Does it mean that one day we may be imprisoned because we declare Christ and serve broken humanity in a spirit of love? We can say with confidence, “I am not ashamed.” Does it mean that we will face ridicule and censure because we cannot dishonour Him who loved us and gave Himself for us? We can courageously testify, “I am not ashamed.” Does it mean that we may be fined and suffer seizure of our wealth because we cannot approve of what is dishonourable? We Christians following the Saviour can attest, “I am not ashamed.” We are not ashamed in this dying world. We fear God and we have heard the words that warn us, “Whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels” [MARK 8:38].

This is not the time for retreat! It is high time that we quit playing church and begin being the church. We Christians have sounded off quite enough about how evil and wicked the choices are that are imposed by governments. It is time that we begin to serve the dying in a spirit of compassion and humility. It is time for us to refuse to participate in evil and to resist the siren call to just get along with those assaulting the Faith. We are not to be a silent people, but neither are we to be a boisterous people. We are to stand in the power of the Risen Lord, serving those who are dying through declaring the truth in a spirit of brokenness and gentleness.

2 TIMOTHY 1:12
WHAT THE NEW YEAR HOLDS

The days definitely appear dark, and if we focus on the darkness we will cease working. However, we do not know what the Master will do; we are not given the details of His coming. If Christ delays His return, then it may be that He is preparing to revive His people and to give us a time of refreshing. Until He blesses us from on high, we must prepare for that coming renewal, anticipating a great harvest of souls to be ushered into the Kingdom of God. If Christ should return shortly, then let us determine that we will be found working when He comes. Do not allow yourself to fall into lethargy and grow quiescent in a vain attempt to preserve your life. The Master has cautioned, “Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the Gospel’s will save it” [MARK 8:35].

He is able! This must become the watchword for us as a congregation, for us as followers of the Risen Saviour. This must become the watchword for each of us as individuals engaged in the service of our King. I have spoken to people who are perhaps called to some great task—a task that we cannot yet visualise. Will you accept the Master’s call? Will you go out in His strength because you know that He is able? Listening to this message today may be the preacher whom God will use to spark the great revival which will transform our nation. Perhaps some great thinker is even now pondering the words I have spoken, and she or he will challenge the wickedness of this day, driving it back into its lair. The God we serve is able; and we know He will accomplish what He wills.

The question for each one who listens is whether you have discovered for yourself that He is able to deliver you from sin? Jesus has paid the penalty for sin, taking upon Himself the sin of all mankind, and that includes you. Jesus now offers life to all who will receive it. The Word of God promises, “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is my Master,’ believing with your mind that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be set free. It is with the heart and one believes and is made right with the Father and with the mouth that one agrees with God and is set free.” God has promised, “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be set free.” Our prayer is that you have accepted this freedom, even today. Amen.