

2 THESSALONIANS 2:1-12 PERHAPS TODAY!

“Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”¹

Even a cursory review of events now unfolding in our world lead the most jaded to begin looking up in anticipation of the Master’s return. Of this His child may be certain, His Return is nearer today than it was yesterday. The Master did say quite plainly, “Concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven” [MARK 13:32]. Nevertheless, though we are unable to speak with certainty of the timing of His return, we remain confident that He shall come again to gather His people to Himself. The Master spoke of His return to those who followed Him. His servants, the Apostles, likewise wrote of His coming and the necessity for His people to be ready for His return.

We are poised on the cusp of a new year; news reports bring disturbing accounts of turmoil in our world. As we read news headlines, the prophetic words of Zechariah seem stunningly current: “Behold, I am about to make Jerusalem a cup of staggering to all the surrounding peoples” [ZECHARIAH 12:2a]. The remainder of Zechariah’s prophecy must also be announced if we will be faithful to the Word. The prophet continued by saying, “The siege of Jerusalem will also be against Judah. On that day I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples. All who lift it will surely hurt themselves. And all the nations of the earth will gather against it” [ZECHARIAH 12:2b, 3].

The words of the Master are certainly apropos for this time. You will recall that He said, “When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains” [MARK 13:7, 8]. The Master cautioned those who would follow Him that when these things began, they must be on their guard [see MARK 13:9], for those who are called by His Name would be marked for abuse of every sort—because they are called by His Name.

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I don't know what this New Year will bring—no one knows. No doubt “Evil people and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived” [see 2 TIMOTHY 2:13]. Nevertheless, I am confident of this singular truth: Christ the Lord is coming again, and His coming may be momentary. Jesus has promised to return for His people, and He has not rescinded that promise. I live in anticipation of His coming for the people of God. His return may be this year—perhaps today.

GOD'S TIMETABLE — No doubt it is an encouragement to remember that Christ has told us of what is yet to be. During His final days in the flesh He invested a great deal of time informing disciples of future events. Then, based upon what He had taught them He warned disciples, “Be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand” [MARK 13:23]. Knowing what is about to occur gives the child of God great comfort and enables that child to stand firm in this most holy Faith.

The next major event in God's Timetable is the Rapture—the removal of God's people from this world. There are Christians who are fearful, believing that they will be called to go through the Great Tribulation. However, I am of the persuasion that “God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him” [1 THESSALONIANS 5:9,10]. Knowing that we are destined for rapture and not for wrath is indeed great encouragement. Thus, the Apostles says, “Encourage one another and build one another up” [1 THESSALONIANS 5:11].

Earlier, in that same letter to Thessalonian Christians, Paul had informed the believers of God's plan. He wrote, “We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord” [1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-17]. Again, Paul used this teaching to build up the Thessalonians, and all who would follow in their train. He wrote, “Encourage one another with these words” [1 THESSALONIANS 4:18].

God has pledged on His sacred honour to remove His people from this world before He pours out judgement. We Christians should know that we have not been fitted to live on forever in the flesh; we are not destined to continue on this earth. Here, our presence is resented and the One we serve is not loved. The Master Himself warned those who would follow Him, “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: ‘They hated me without a cause’” [JOHN 15:18-25].

At best, the denizens of this fallen world tolerate believers; however, our presence is not welcomed! Paul described the life of conscientious believers, “As servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything” [2 CORINTHIANS 6:4-10].

Indeed, “Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body, by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself” [PHILIPPIANS 1:20, 21]. With the Apostle, we say with confidence, “According to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” [2 PETER 3:13].

So, God has appointed a day when Christ the Lord shall return to remove His holy people, and they will be gathered to Him. Our text introduces the Rapture as preceding several events on God’s Timetable. Immediately following the Rapture, the period that is identified as “The Great Tribulation” [see REVELATION 7:14] begins. In the text for this day, that time is identified as “the Day of the Lord” [2 THESSALONIANS 2:2].

“The Day of the Lord” refers to a period of unprecedented judgements poured out successively on the earth. That time is referenced by Isaiah, who warns:

“The LORD of hosts has a day
 against all that is proud and lofty,
 against all that is lifted up—and it shall be brought low;
against all the cedars of Lebanon,
 lofty and lifted up;
 and against all the oaks of Bashan;
against all the lofty mountains,
 and against all the uplifted hills;
against every high tower,
 and against every fortified wall;
against all the ships of Tarshish,
 and against all the beautiful craft.
And the haughtiness of man shall be humbled,
 and the lofty pride of men shall be brought low,
 and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day.
And the idols shall utterly pass away.
And people shall enter the caves of the rocks
 and the holes of the ground,
from before the terror of the LORD,
 and from the splendor of his majesty,
 when he rises to terrify the earth.

“In that day mankind will cast away
 their idols of silver and their idols of gold,

which they made for themselves to worship,
to the moles and to the bats,
to enter the caverns of the rocks
and the clefts of the cliffs,
from before the terror of the LORD,
and from the splendor of his majesty,
when he rises to terrify the earth.”

[ISAIAH 2:12-21]

Isaiah continues by speaking of the day as a day of “destruction from the Almighty” [ISAIAH 13:6], a day that is “cruel, with wrath and fierce anger” [ISAIAH 13:9]. It is a day of vengeance [JEREMIAH 46:10] and “a time of doom for the nations” [EZEKIEL 30:3]. In that day great celestial signs will be observed in the heavens [JOEL 2:31; AMOS 5:18-20; ACTS 2:20]. That day will come suddenly, unexpected by those of this world, for they will not be watching for it and they will have shoved far from their mind any thought of God’s presence, much less His judgement [see 1 THESSALONIANS 5:2; 2 PETER 3:10]. Yet, the spirit of those who are redeemed will be saved in the Day of the Lord [see 1 CORINTHIANS 5:6].

In contradistinction to “the Day of the Lord” is the “Day of Christ” [e.g. PHILIPPIANS 1:10] or the “Day of our Lord Jesus” [2 CORINTHIANS 1:14]. This refers to the time when the redeemed stand before the Judgement Seat of Christ to receive their rewards for service to Him. It speaks of the time when the perfection of His work in those who are redeemed will be displayed before all heaven. At that time, we who are saved will boast of what Christ has accomplished through our fellow saints [see 2 CORINTHIANS 1:14; PHILIPPIANS 2:16]. The redeemed will at last be perfected in Christ the Lord [see PHILIPPIANS 1:10], for at that time He shall bring to fulfilment the work He began in each believer during their life on this earth [see PHILIPPIANS 1:6].

This “Day of Christ Jesus” is the basis of Paul’s revelation given to Corinthian believers. “We know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

“So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” [2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-10].

For the sake of completeness, it is necessary to look beyond the Great Tribulation. Judgements unprecedented in the history of mankind will be poured out on the earth for a period of seven years. However, even during that terrible period, God will receive any who turn to Him in faith. Tragically, the most of mankind will curse the name of God, curse the God of heaven rather than turn to Him in faith [see REVELATION 16:8-21]. Really, it isn’t much different from the situation that prevails in this day when people are too wrapped up in pursuing their own desires to think of God or their relationship to Him. Thus, the most of mankind reveals that “self” is central to all life.

After the Great Tribulation, Christ the Lord will return to earth. He will judge the nations who will be gathered before Him. As a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, so the Judge of all mankind will separate the saved from the lost [see MATTHEW 25:31-46]. The saved will have revealed their faith through commitment to Him throughout the Great Tribulation, and the lost will have revealed their commitment to their own comfort through attempting to preserve their own lives during that same period.

This purging of the population of the earth serves to usher in the millennial reign of Christ the Master, and those who are raptured will reign with Him during the Millennium. It is worth our while to read of that glorious time. “I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

“Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years” [REVELATION 20:1-6].

That time of perfect peace concludes with rebellion. As foretold in the Second Psalm [PSALM 2:1-6] and by the Revelator [REVELATION 20:7-10], though the Millennium will have been a time of peace and prosperity, mankind will rebel against the reign of Christ the Lord. The rebellion will be short-lived, for God shall destroy the rebels, and then shall be the Judgement before the Great White Throne. The lost of all time will be compelled to stand before the Son of God [see REVELATION 20:11-15], and they shall hear their fate pronounced, “I do not know where you come from. Depart from Me, all you workers of evil” [LUKE 13:27]!

The Timetable God has established and which He has declared through His servants is **RAPTURE, TRIBULATION, MILLENNIUM, JUDGEMENT** and **ETERNITY**. In our text, the Apostle comforts believers by clarifying the timing for some of these pending events. Some among the Thessalonian believers were discouraged. They were disturbed, errantly concluding because of a counterfeit letter or perhaps a deviant prophecy that the Rapture had already taken place, and they had been left behind. They wondered if they were then entering into the Great Tribulation.

Paul cautioned them that “the Day of the Lord,” the day of His judgement on the earth, will not occur until three events have taken place. First, *there will be a rebellion against truth*—an apostasy. This same truth is emphasised later when Paul warns Timothy, “Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared” [1 TIMOTHY 4:1, 2]. These are likely the same “times of difficulty” that will characterise “the last days” of which Paul would speak in his second letter to Timothy [2 TIMOTHY 3:1].

This apostasy will occur quite rapidly; the dream of liberal churchmen will at last be realised, for there will be established a truly oecumenical church. That church will be a moral church, teaching a doctrine formulated to assuage society’s expectations. This church will unite all religions under one roof, permitting worship of the Antichrist to be rapidly instituted. This church is the scarlet whore foretold by John [see REVELATION 17:1-18].

The second thing that must occur will be *the unveiling of “the man of lawlessness,”* the antichrist. There is no need to speculate about who this individual might be, we are not told, nor is it important that we should know who this individual is. He will be revealed at the appropriate time; but his identity will be revealed only after the people of God have been taken out of this world. This man will be Satan’s masterpiece who will usher in the Great Tribulation by his presence. He will not be revealed until the faithful of this present age are taken into the presence of the Master at the Rapture.

Finally, *the One now restraining evil must be taken out of the way.* It is the Holy Spirit, resident in the people of God and working through the churches of the Master, who now restrains evil. When the people of God are removed, then the Spirit of God will no longer be at work in the earth restraining evil. As an aside of great significance, we sometimes imagine that we are unimportant and that our presence as followers of the Risen Son of God makes little difference. Child of God, your presence is all that holds evil in check. The presence of churches seeking the glory of God and endeavouring to spread the knowledge of His grace now slows the progress of wickedness. If you would see what the world will be when the Spirit of God no longer is at work because the people of God no longer proclaim His glory, simply review the events that are prophesied to occur during the Great Tribulation!

What is important for us to grasp is that these markers will occur very quickly. The timing will be at most days—possibly hours, not years or months. Though as they are unfolding there will be no Christians from this era to witness what is taking place, there will be casual Christians—people who are church members, people who heard sermons about these events, perhaps even some who now listen to my words— who will realise what is happening. In horror, they will realise that they are entering into a time of unprecedented judgements and of opposition to anyone who dares turn to the Son of God.

For, you see, there will be people who come to faith even during those awful days of the Tribulation. However, they will turn in faith at dreadful cost, for arrayed against them will be the satanic power of the Antichrist and his minions. Here is an allusion to Antichrist’s rage, “That day will not come, unless ... the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God” [2 THESSALONIANS 2:3b, 4]. Those living at that time will either submit to the man of lawlessness, receiving a mark that identifies them with his reign, or they shall suffer relentless persecution [see REVELATION 13:16, 17]. Throughout this book of the Apocalypse, we read of those tormented souls who are “slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne” [e.g. REVELATION 6:9-11; 7:9-14].

STORM CLOUDS GATHERING — It is said that great events cast a shadow before them. It simply means that for those who are able to discern the signs, events can be foreseen. This is the basis for the Master’s teaching to the disciples as recorded in **MARK 13:3-8**. The events foretold are “but the beginning of the birth pains.”

I grew to manhood in the area known as “Tornado Alley.” Violent storms spawn tornados with amazing regularity during the late spring and early summer months in that area. I worked on a haying crew in my teens; this was well before the advent of the round bales that are more common today, and the hay was prepared for market, which meant producing bales that weighed a minimum of 125 pound bales. The hay would be cut and windrowed one evening. It would be dry enough to bale by mid-morning; as the baler dropped the bales, a truck or tractor towing a trailer would follow behind picking up the bales to transport them to the barn.

Frequently, my job would have me working in the barn, stacking the bales as two trucks would rotate bringing the bales. We worked at a furious rate because there was a virtual certainty that we would have severe storms each afternoon. About four o'clock each afternoon, you could see a cloud begin to rise in the northwest. The cumulonimbus cloud would grow, rapidly climbing to a height of as much as 75,000 feet within the space of an hour. Whenever these clouds began to form, the pace became more frenetic, more intense. Everyone knew that a storm would shortly be unleashed, lashing the landscape. We called such violent storm "toad stranglers and gully washers." Often, hail and tornados accompanied these violent storms. We knew that we would have to find shelter; the towering clouds announced the pending storm.

We who are born from above during this present Age of Grace will not be present to see the storm that will break over the earth. Nevertheless, the Master's words seem to indicate that we can see the clouds gathering, announcing the storm that will shortly break. The key to prophetic fulfilment is Jerusalem. God chose Jerusalem as His dwelling place. There, He commanded that Israel should build a Temple to worship Him. There, in Jerusalem and in a rebuilt Temple, the False Prophet will place an image of Antichrist, compelling all mankind to worship it. Jesus warned His disciples, "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near" [LUKE 21:20].

Two generations ago, it seemed impossible that there would ever again be a Jewish nation. However, in 1947, the United Nations established a Jewish homeland. Israel has repeatedly fought armies of vastly superior numbers. No one can review the history of this young nation without being astonished at the manner in which God has protected them and preserved them. Twenty years after establishing a Jewish homeland, Israel seized Jerusalem from the Arabs that had attacked them. Today, Jerusalem is under Jewish control, and the Jews assert they will never relinquish control over the city.

Since the nation was founded, Muslim neighbours have insisted they will destroy Israel, driving every Jew into the sea. Israel has given land for peace, and no peace ensues. Israel has repeatedly made concessions at the insistence of naïve western politicians, in a vain hope of securing peace with Arab neighbours. During the past three years, it seems as if the words of warning which the Master spoke so many years past are coming true: "The days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side" [LUKE 19:43, 44a].

To listen to the news on any given day, it would appear that Israel hasn't a friend in the world. The United Nations appears united in opposing the continued existence of Israel. Anti-Semitism is on the rise throughout Europe; in some areas, especially where large numbers of young Muslim immigrants are found, Jews are openly persecuted.² Even our own nation is not immune to the increase in hatred expressed toward God's Chosen People.³

² For examples of contemporary opposition, see Wickinfo, <http://www.wikinfo.org/index.php/Antisemitism>, accessed 29 December 2011; Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antisemitism>, accessed 29 December 2011; Alan M. Dershowitz, "Norway to Jews: You're Not Welcome Here," Wall Street Journal, March 29, 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704474804576222561887244764.html>, accessed 29 December 2011; Leon De Winter, "Anti-Semitism is Salonfähig Again," Wall Street Journal, June 14, 2010, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704575304575296463512785910.html>, accessed 29 December 2011; David Mamet, "Israel, Isaac and the Return of Human Sacrifice," <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204826704577074241213222280.html>, accessed 29 December, 2011

³ See Manuel Prutschi, "Anti-Semitism in Canada, Jewish Political Studies Review 16:3-4 (Fall 2004), <http://www.jcpa.org/phas/phas-prutschi-f04.htm>, accessed 29 December 2011

Nevertheless, God loves His ancient people. He warns, that the one who touches Israel touches “the apple of His eye” [ZECHARIAH 2:8]. The nations that now have set their mind to destroy Israel shall themselves be destroyed. God, through Zechariah, states that He has His eye on mankind, even as He watches over Israel [see ZECHARIAH 9:1 ff.]. The LORD God specifically says that He will protect Israel from the assaults of the nations, especially at the end of days.

“I will encamp at my house as a guard,
so that none shall march to and fro;
no oppressor shall again march over them,
for now I see with my own eyes.”

[ZECHARIAH 9:8]

God, Himself, shall deliver His people when the nations surround them.

“As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you,
I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.
Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope;
today I declare that I will restore to you double.
For I have bent Judah as my bow;
I have made Ephraim its arrow.
I will stir up your sons, O Zion,
against your sons, O Greece,
and wield you like a warrior’s sword.

“Then the LORD will appear over them,
and his arrow will go forth like lightning;
the Lord GOD will sound the trumpet
and will march forth in the whirlwinds of the south.
The LORD of hosts will protect them,
and they shall devour, and tread down the sling stones,
and they shall drink and roar as if drunk with wine,
and be full like a bowl,
drenched like the corners of the altar.

“On that day the LORD their God will save them,
as the flock of his people;
for like the jewels of a crown
they shall shine on his land.
For how great is his goodness, and how great his beauty!
Grain shall make the young men flourish,
and new wine the young women.”

[ZECHARIAH 9:11-17]

Moreover, the Lord who watches over Israel is none other than Christ Jesus our Master. Zechariah identifies Him as the One who delivers Israel, protecting them from harm when he writes:

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you;
righteous and having salvation is he,
humble and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

[ZECHARIAH 9:9]

PERHAPS TODAY — It requires no imagination to suggest that events are rushing toward the great finale for mankind. It is entirely possible that the Antichrist has already been born; all that waits the revelation of this individual is the Rapture of God’s people—then he will be revealed. At that time, those awful events that will culminate in God’s final Word to the earth will be set in motion. We who are Christians are called to live with confidence in this present age knowing that we are destined for salvation and not for wrath. We are responsible to labour at the task of declaring Christ’s love and warning all who will receive our word to flee from the coming wrath.

Perhaps today! Ere this day is finished, it is possible that Christ the Lord could return. Whether He should come or whether He should delay, we who look for the return of Christ Jesus the Master are nevertheless called to “be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” [1 CORINTHIANS 15:58]. We were assigned a task, and the charge we received has never been rescinded. You recall the charge, “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].

We live in the knowledge that the time is short; whatever work will be done must be done now, while it is day. Child of God, you must work to fulfil the will of the Master who urged us, “We must work the works of Him who sent [the Master] while it is day.” Then, He appended this explanatory word to encourage us, “Night is coming, when no one can work” [JOHN 9:4]. Jesus’ words lend urgency to the need to be busy about His work.

Each Christian must take to heart the admonition of the Apostle to the Gentiles. Recall Paul’s admonition, “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ” [EPHESIANS 5:15-21].

As we witness to God’s grace, as we unite in worship and as we build up one another in this most Holy Faith, always bear in mind the need for each one who names the Name of Christ to live a holy life to the praise of His glory. Keep the words of the Apostle in mind, “You know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” [ROMANS 13:11-14].

In that spirit, poised as we are the cusp of a new year, I ask this question of you who believe: are you fulfilling the charge we receive? Are you witnessing to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ? Do you pray for the lost and are you standing firm in this most Holy Faith? Do you stand firm against wickedness and expose the words of darkness?

Too many who are called by the Name of the Master are content to be religious rather than live a holy life. Quite enough time has passed with us attempting to be liked by the lost rather than declaring the mercies of our God. Surely, the words of Peter apply to us in this day, “Since Christ suffered in the flesh, equip yourselves also with the same resolve—because the one who suffered in the flesh has finished with sin—in order to live the remaining time in the flesh, no longer for human desires, but for God’s will. For there has already been enough time spent in doing what the pagans choose to do: carrying on in unrestrained behavior, evil desires, drunkenness, orgies, carousing, and lawless idolatry. So they are surprised that you don’t plunge with them into the same flood of wild living—and they slander you. They will give an account to the One who stands ready to judge the living and the dead” [**1 PETER 4:1-5**].⁴

And what of you who are now outside the grace of God? What answer will you give at His return? And what will be your fate? Here is salvation, here is forgiveness, here is life, offered now through faith in the Son of God. He died because of your sin, and He rose from the dead to make you right with the Father. Therefore, the message we deliver to you is that which is found in the Letter to Roman Christians, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” That passage concludes with a glorious promise—a promise which is for you, if you will but receive it, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” [**ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13**]. Amen.

⁴ **The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Version** (Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville, TN 2009)