

The Faith Kept – by Brother Kwok Hin Wong – Message 1 of 2

Brothers and sisters, please turn to 2 Timothy 4. We will begin reading from verse 1 to verse 8. After you have found the passage, please listen as we read.

¹I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;

²Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine.

³For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;

⁴And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

⁵But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.

⁶For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.

⁷I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:

⁸Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

Please also turn to Hebrews 2:10

¹⁰For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

Also Revelation 21:1-3

¹And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

²And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

³And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

Let us have a further word of prayer.

Our Lord, once again we look to You. How willing we are to hear our voice from Your Throne at this time. Lord, we pray that, according to Your own will, You would do what is in Your heart to really open us; that You would grant us an open heaven so that we would all be constrained to choose heavenly matters and that Your heavenly glory and fullness would fill us within; that we would be Your testimony on earth; that we may declare Your heavenly beauty and virtue until we see Your glorious appearing. Lord, we pray that through the moving of Thy Holy Spirit, You will lead us to the precious light of Your Word. We look to You to lead us during this time so that all of us will be able to meet You Yourself; that all the days of our lives, we will walk the path that the Lamb has trod and that You will truly gain us and we will follow wherever the Lamb goes. We look to You and pray in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

We thank the Lord that we are able to gather in His presence. As all brothers and sisters are aware, we are looking to the Lord at this time concerning the way of the recovering of the testimony of Jesus Christ. Our brothers have already brought us into the light of God from several other perspectives, enabling us to see how precious are the arrangements that God has made in each one of us. At the same time, they have also shown us that when we follow the Lord along this path, whatever we encounter, be they difficulties, sufferings or lessons to be learned, we all have this one desire to walk well so that the Lord will be satisfied. For me, I have accepted the arrangement by brothers to share with you how to keep the faith in this context.

Paul's triumphant song

We praise and thank our God. When Paul wrote to Timothy in his last days, he mentioned many matters to him. As we reach chapter 4 of 2 Timothy, Paul revealed some very, very burdened thoughts in his heart. You may say that Paul was encouraging Timothy to move forward. But more importantly is that we see the very precious state of Paul's heart. Therefore, when Paul stated in 2 Timothy 4 that he had finished his course, many brothers and sisters would regard him as there singing a triumphant song. Even though the course that he had gone through was filled with difficulties of trials and temptations as well as times of victory and times when he felt he was falling short, Paul was at the very end able to share with us assuring how his heart was filled with God's glory and joy. He said, "*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.*" We thank our God. Brothers have already shared with us to some extent about the course and the fight. And indeed we saw how Paul's course was filled with many things that were not easy to bear. Brothers and sisters, if you turn to 2 Corinthians to see the running account of the list of things that Paul faced, you will see recorded there the more serious matters he experienced during his thorny course of service in the Lord. We understand from there that things were really not easy. All the different dangers and each peril that he faced could have caused his life. It was true that on several occasions, he almost lost his life. But I must remind brothers and sisters that those incidents were only part of Paul's experience in his following of the Lord. The running account in 2 Corinthians was

only a partial and not the whole record of his total experience. Perhaps we would ask ourselves. If we were placed in situations similar to that short list of incidents, would we have been able to bear them? But we thank the Lord. After Paul had gone through that part of the course, he continued to move forward into even more difficult paths ahead. When he reached the time in 2 Timothy, chapter 4, he was able to sing this triumphant song. In this triumphant song, we are unable to find in Paul any sign of sighing about thanking God that his difficulties were finally over and that he had been able to finish the course. There was none of that. We do not see any grumbling or any murmuring from Paul. Nor were there any sighs of relief that although it had not been easy, nevertheless the course was finished. Nor were there sighs of consolation that there was no longer any hardship because he had finished what he needed to do. Paul had no such sentiments at all. All that Paul expressed is truly too precious to us. *“I have fought a good fight.”* Our brother has shared that it was not only a good fight but it was also a noble fight. He also shared particularly what kind of a finished course Paul had gone through. Now we thank our God. We find particularly the manner in which Paul expressed his experience in his entire course to be exactly the same as what John, on the island of Patmos, said of his feelings. This was also clearly pointed out to us by our brother. We thank and praise the Lord that we are able to see the joy and peace of Paul as he declared that he had finished the course.

In the passage of 2 Timothy we have just read, we see many different situations. I will just mention them in a general way. The first point is that in our serving and in our following the Lord, we will encounter much hardship. But all these will not hinder the execution of God’s will upon us. As Paul went through his course and finished his good fight, enduring many difficulties along the way, they were accompanied abundantly by the grace of God. Therefore he particularly reminded Timothy. Whether in season or out of season, whether he was welcome, rejected, rebuked or even being trampled upon, he was not to depart from the position upon which he ought to stand. He must not lay down the ministry which God has entrusted him with. He should continue to go forward with a clear direction. Here, Paul shared with us his personal experience: I have finished this course. What was his experience throughout? He has fought. He acknowledged it was a good and noble fight. What kind of course was it? It was one that was filled with God’s support, grace and mercy. It was also a course that led him into the fullness of life. We thank and praise our God. Paul testified that all that happened during the course were to bring him into the good and most precious will of God. Let us look at one thing from Paul experience. What was it that caused and enabled Paul to boldly finish his course in this manner? How was he able to fight that good fight? How was he able to finish this course he was set on? This is where we come to the burden that my brothers have placed upon me – the faith kept.

The Course

My feeling is that there is a very intimate relationship between Paul’s ability to finish the course and of finishing a good fight with the fact that he has kept his faith. This is because Paul himself said that when he was fighting the spiritual fight, he was not as one who was beating the air. As he was running the course, he was not running in a way that wasted his time. He knew well why he was fighting and why he was on that course. He

was able to do so because he had a very clear conviction in him, a conviction that had a lot to do with his personal understanding before God of His Word. In the Chinese Bible, we have this translation “*the Word that I believed in, I have kept.*” We often think that this word *Word* in Chinese here is the same as the word *Word* found in the verse “*In the beginning was the Word.... and the Word was God.*” But it is not. In the English, the word in 2 Timothy was simply translated as *faith*. I do not know what is the best translation of this word to give it the real meaning Paul intended. Of course, the simplest way is to translate the word as *faith*. Personally, I do not like to translate it as *faith* because that meaning would be too general and can easily incorporate many adulterated ideas to it. However, I cannot think of a better term to express this word. Therefore, we can perhaps accept this Chinese translation as “I have kept the *Word*”, even though it somehow falls short of the true meaning.

Mere words are meaningless

Brothers and sisters, I do not know if you have heard of this joke before. If you understand this joke, you will perhaps grasp what the phrase *kept the faith* is trying to convey. Many nominal Christians confess that they believe in this *faith*. However, what, in their hearts, is the substance of this *faith* that they believe in? It will be difficult to describe it in a few words. But this joke is quite meaningful for if we understand a little of the lesson it teaches, we will be able to translate that understanding into a greater significance. Many who believe in the Lord focus their sight on the blessings of the Lord. They do not pay attention to what God’s salvation has manifested in believers. Therefore there was this Christian who claimed to have believed in the Lord but who was always wondering in his heart how he could obtain blessings from Him. On one occasion, he encountered a difficulty, likely a very difficult one. Thereupon, he came before the Lord to pray, “Lord, I am now faced with a serious difficulty. Can you teach me how to deal with it?” Then he considered how he could know the will of God. He took out the Bible and said to God, “God, the Bible is your spoken Word. Now, I will wait for You to speak.” These words sounded very spiritual and seemed to indicate that he knew a lot. But as you listen to this joke, you will realize that mere words are meaningless. He continued, “Lord, I have prayed. Now, reveal to me what You have to say.” No one knows whether he got this idea from someone else or he thought it out himself. Then he closed his eyes and prayed, after which he opened the Bible and pointed his finger at a spot in the page opened before him. He said, “Lord, this is the word you have for me.” When he looked at the verse where his finger had landed, he was shocked. Why? The verse he saw said that after Judas betrayed the Lord, he was remorseful and went out and hanged himself. “Well,” he thought, “this is impossible. The Lord could not be saying these words to me.” So, he thought, “Perhaps I have pointed at the wrong place. Just now, I was searching for the Lord’s word in the New Testament. It may be that I should be looking in the Old Testament to see what the Lord has to say to me. I am sure that the Lord did not want me to hang myself.” So, he prayed and prayed again and afterwards he flipped to the Old Testament before he opened his eyes. What did he find? It was Isaiah 37:32. Brothers and sisters, there is no need for you to turn to the page for I will tell you. As he looked, he was shocked even more for there it said “*The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.*” Now, he was really confused. “I wanted to seek the Lord. Why does He want me to hang myself? I did not think this was right and so I sought confirmation from

Him. But the Lord showed me that His zeal shall complete this. Now I am a dead man for sure!” Brothers and sisters, this is just a joke. But it really points out to us the true heart condition of many of the so called children of God. The reality is not so much the method used but of how people understand the words that God have spoken to them.

Brothers and sisters, as Paul finished the good fight and finished running the course; he had this assurance within him as to why he had done so. It was the presence of clear and assured words made plain to him by the Lord Himself. Brothers and sisters. You may want to ask. If we consider the joke we just had, would we not say that “*the zeal of the Lord will do this*” are words from the Bible? That “*Judas went out and hangs himself*” was also from the Bible? Yes, these are truly all words from the Bible. However, you must realize when Paul said he had kept the faith; he meant the whole composite body of beliefs which he had believed in – the Word of truth that Paul has believed in. He has believed in all those facts comprised in and expressed by that whole body of truth. I believe brothers and sisters will acknowledge that “*the zeal of the Lord will do this*” are words spoken by God but this is not the true word of God in the sense in which we have been expounding. “*Judas went out and hanged himself*” are also words from the Bible. But this is not the kind of true word that the Lord has been speaking to us. Whether you call it keeping the faith or keeping the true word of God, we can be sure of one thing: the Lord Jesus whom we believe in is not made up merely of those few words. We can only say that those words are somehow matters relating to the Lord, or perhaps, are words recording something relating to the Lord. But they are not the “*faith*” we are to keep.

The Word is the Revelation of God

So, what is the faith we are to keep? Let us first deal with a few more matters about this testimony which Paul was giving before we come back to this question. We thank our God. When Paul clearly knew that he had fought a good fight and had finished the course, he arrived at a conclusion. What he had done was proof that he had kept the faith. Thus, these words in 2 Timothy 4 became very meaningful. On the one hand, it tells us that the fight Paul fought had a goal and the course was run according to a rationale. At the same time, those actions were based on something that the Lord had said into Paul’s heart – some evident matters about who the Lord was and what He had done. For Paul, it was this. I have really finished because I have accomplished in accordance with what the Lord has said to me concerning Himself. It was in this sense that Paul could say he had kept the faith. It is for this reason that it leads us also to a conclusion. What is it? It is not that since I have finished, I can now close my eyes without regret. It is not so passive. Those who follow the Lord do not have such pessimistic views or emotions. In Paul’s case, having finished his course and having fought his fight, he obtained also an assurance. What was that assurance? From now on, “*There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness.*” We thank the Lord. Paul saw what the end was to be. He was going to receive from the hands of the Lord that crown of righteousness and be brought also into the glory of God’s grace. He was to receive a glorious position from God and a glorious reality from Him. When Paul expressed this inner feeling, he also proclaimed, at the same time, that this crown was not only for him but for all who were willing to love and follow the Lord. We praise and thank the Lord. Paul was not only expressing what he felt but he was also, for our benefit, indicating to us the glorious result that will follow us.

At this point, I must mention what our brother said yesterday about the encounter Paul had with Agrippa. When Paul met the Lord, not only did he see the risen Lord and hear words from Him, he also heard the Lord giving him a mission. Now, we do not know everything the Lord said to Paul but from what he indicated, we know that the Lord had entrusted him with a very important matter. This is why Paul said that he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision shown to him. What was this heavenly vision then? Of course, it included the commission given to Paul. But at the same time, the Lord also showed him the honour that would be waiting for him at the completion of that commission. Therefore when we reach 2 Timothy, Paul said very clearly that he had finished all that he was commissioned to do and what awaited him now was to receive the crown of righteousness. We thank and praise our God. It is quite clear from the path that Paul followed, not only did Paul complied outwardly with what was entrusted but that, in all those arrangements, commission and guidance he received, he knew very definitely in his heart what the goal of that commission was.

The Word is God's Eternal Propose

To put it simply, the calling that God manifested in Paul was that His glorious will would be done in Paul. Now, what is this will? Brothers and sisters, you are not to look for this in external works. You must go back to find it in the will of God because His will is not merely for Paul alone. For Paul said, "*not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.*" Thus it is also for all of us and, therefore, has to do with God's will. It is not a special arrangement for a certain kind of work of God. When we see Paul sharing with us in this way, we not only see Paul's experience but we also see the arrangement God has for us. As we walk the path that Paul had trod and as we march to the fight that Paul has fought, we will arrive at the same result as Paul did. When we realize this, we will immediately understand a very basic issue. What is the arrangement God has made for our salvation? Brothers and sisters, this is a very basic question. How are we to understand the salvation that God has wrought in us? This is connected to what Paul said, "*I have kept the faith.*" When we first believed in the Lord, there was no way we could have admitted that the grace we had received was exceedingly great. This is because, at that time, all we knew was that we would no longer perish but have everlasting life. It is very rare for a person, at that moment of believing, to hear how the word of God was proclaimed. We have to acknowledge we could not have attained that capacity to understand the fullness of God's salvation at that moment of believing. At that time, we felt it was already great enough that we were saved. It is difficult for us at that moment to understand how much and how grand that salvation encompasses. All that entered our minds then was that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but has everlasting life. These were very clear to us: we believed in the Lord; we have everlasting life and we shall not perish. What else were there? We did not know much then. This is the stage that each of us has gone through. However, now that we have been in the Lord for some time, if our understanding is still confined only to the text of John 3:16, we have to admit that our understanding of the salvation of the Lord has come far short of the will of God.

Now perhaps we have heard of the verse, “*For it was fitting for Him for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory.*” Indeed, we have heard that God will lead many sons into glory but we stopped at the words “*many sons*”. As far as “*into glory*” is concerned, though those words went through our ears, they have never entered into our experience. It is already a great step forward as our understanding advanced from “being saved” to “becoming sons.” Nevertheless, brother and sisters, the salvation God gave us does not stop in us being merely made sons. Perhaps I need to explain, especially to the younger brothers and sisters here, so that this point is made quite clear. I earnestly beseech you to receive and accept this matter of salvation with a true and full understanding.

He will bring many Sons to Glory

You remember the Gospel story of the prodigal son. When this son was wandering afar, he was in such a state that he was even unable to have the pods that the swine ate to satisfy his hunger. We will not go into what followed but I just want to pose this question to you. When he was in that dire situation, like a beggar before men, was he still the son of that man? There was no reason not to be. He was still of son of that man. But what kind of man was the father? He was a wealthy man. At the very least, the son did not need to be in a situation where he could not even eat of the feed of the swine. Therefore, brothers and sisters, you notice that, by way of status, that would have been great if we are merely sons. But that is not the only condition that God desires us to be in. The sons God desires are sons who have entered into the glory. If we have become sons and yet have not entered into the glory, then we have come short. We are merely prodigal sons. We are not sons enjoying the abundance of the Father in His house. We are not sons who have received the glory of the Father and are manifesting it.

Before I move on, I want to mention another matter which is not quite outside our topic because it has a connection. Two or three weeks ago, my grandson was watching with his mother a DVD, the contents of which were neither spiritual nor non-spiritual and yet somewhat spiritual. I do not know how to classify it. It is about a certain place and the title was *Suffering for Christ*. This is why I say it is not spiritual and yet somewhat spiritual. It is not spiritual in the sense that it seems to be a public relations effort for a certain organization. Regardless, it was about some difficulties that occurred among certain Southeast Asian Christians in their local environment. When my grandson finished watching the DVD, he said something that was quite meaningful. As a young man of 13, he said, “The young people in the US really do not know what suffering is.” What he said gave me much thought. In our environment, particularly in the United States, the material things surrounding us often give us a sense of satisfaction. But, being content with such material things, we are easily led to a situation whereby we never come to consider the things of our Lord. We no longer consider how we can know Him better because we feel that we already have plenty and it makes no difference whether I know the Lord more or not. Now that the i-phone 4 is on the market, I also have one. Brothers and sisters, you know the situation. The hindrance preventing many of God’s children to move forward spiritually has a lot to do with our abundance in material things.

But I must return to consider what the salvation of God has wrought for us. In our brothers' sharing, this is a question that they have repeatedly placed before us: Do you realize who you are? This is a very interesting question although it sounds silly. Of course I am myself. Who else can I be? Yet this is a very serious question. If we do not know who we are, we are not qualified to go forward along the path of following the Lord. Why? Like the church in Laodicea, we feel that we are sufficient and already have everything. There is no lack. What else do we need? Brothers and sisters, if, in the mercy of God and through His plan of salvation, He intended to lead us into a condition in which He wants us to be in, we have to confess how great is our foolishness.

So, what does it mean when we mentioned a while ago that He, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, was bringing many sons to glory? What does it mean for us, as sons, to be led into glory and become glorious sons? At the very least, it tells us who we are – sons who are to be brought into the glory of God. Put it in another way, we are the sons of God who carry with us His glory. Brothers and sisters, if we delve into this a little deeper, we will certainly go on to enquire about the basis upon which the sons have been brought into God's glory. Yes, many times, we have gone over the Word of God. Yet, His Word does not seem to bear any direct relationship to us. Therefore, we are not sure who we are, what we ought to do and what we should pursue after.

Why did God Create Man

Brothers and sisters, this is very lamentable. But, I hope that you will see this as a wonderful matter. What does it mean to be a son in glory? I would put it this way and hope that I am not overstating it. We are only stating and accepting a fact here. Why did God create man? Only when we truly understand this matter is we able to appreciate how glorious, how full and how rich our salvation is. We see clearly from the Word of the Lord that when God created man, His purpose was very well-defined. He created man in His own image. What does this mean? I have mentioned this many times before.

Outwardly, none of us look alike, not even with twins. I know many twins. At first glance, they may look alike as if they have come from the same mould. However, when you know them a little longer, you will discover that they are not quite the same. Thus, when God said He made man in His own image, it poses a problem for us. Of course, at the time when God said this, He was pointing particularly to Adam but, by implication, He also included us in there. We then ask. Who are we like? For me, at least I do not look like Brother Dana. He is a big man. I was bigger once but I have now shrunk. It is impossible for us to decide whether we are like God from our outward appearance. How then are we to understand what God meant? We cannot do so by our own logical reasoning but when His Word is opened to us, we see that we are actually created according to His own glory. Whether we are tall or short, whether our hair is black or white, whether our eyes are short-sighted or far-sighted, these are not issues. However, as long as we are here, one fact cannot escape us and that is, we are to manifest one thing, namely, the glory of God. We thank and praise our God. This is how His own Word clearly confirms to us in Isaiah 43:7 – *Everyone who is called by My name, whom I have created for My glory.* Indeed, man has been created for God's glory. This is the first point that God declared when He created man.

The second point is that God delegated all His authority to man and entrusted man to execute such authority on earth so that all created things should submit to his rule. This is extremely important. Yet, do we see man manifesting this? No. We are not ruling but are ruled. This is most interesting. Forgive me for mentioning this concerning those who are new parents. As new parents, you feel that the authority in the family is not really vested in you. Who holds the real authority then? It lies with that little crying fellow who cannot even speak. When he cries, you become frantic. When he is quiet, you are anxious. It seems that the whole life in the family is completely controlled by a ruler directing you to do this or that. Brothers and sisters, I believe all of us who have been parents have more or less experienced this situation. And if you look at the environment around us, particularly during this year, you have seen so many changes in nature happening throughout the world. There are so many severe floods, and droughts. In so many places are various complications of relationship among men. It seems that men are controlled by these many external matters. Yet, brothers and sisters do not forget. Did God not ordain man to rule over such things when He first created him? But now, the reverse is true. Men are affected by many things around him.

Salvation - Back to the Original Purpose of God

This is the general condition surrounding us. However, we thank our God that when He initially made His salvation available to us, He not only showed us we would not perish but have everlasting life. He also made plan that He would gain many sons and lead them into glory. To what point is He leading them? He is leading them back to the initial state when man was created. Brothers and sisters, when we realize the original purpose of God and then turn to see the situation described at the end of the Book of Revelation, we see on the one hand God will be dwelling among men and on the other, the tabernacle of God is with man. As we read on, we come to the conclusion that God will have at last completely restored the original purpose in His creation of man. The glory of God is once again manifested in man. The authority of God is once again executed through man. I will not dwell further into the details but when we turn to this very fundamental issue, I wish brothers and sisters will see and understand the whole purpose of God in making salvation available to us. It begins with the very basic. Our sins are forgiven; we return to God and we are accepted by Him. Then, when we go back to the object of God's redemption, we cannot avoid seeing that it was to restore man to the original state for which he was created. Now here comes the problem. By what means have we been brought back from the position of a wandering prodigal to that of a glorious son?

Brothers and sisters. We all know that, as prodigals, we were before God like those wearing torn clothing. His word clearly tells us that all our righteousness is like filthy rags before Him. No matter how we adorn ourselves, we still remain like filthy rags before Him. Yet God has now brought us back into His presence. He pursues after our sins no more and acknowledges us as His sons. Furthermore, He tells us that we have been brought back not merely as sons but as sons in glory. How is it possible that we could have been brought into this condition? We thank and praise the Lord. It is all because of the work done by the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father. It is the result of who He is and what He did. We are able to have a part in salvation

because of the work of His Son. For the same reason, it enables to be restored to God's original purpose at creation. This is the glorious purpose that is placed before us.

Paul Place Himself in Christ

Now, when we go back to Paul, what did he mean when he said, "*I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, and I have kept the faith?*" There is no doubt that this statement expresses Paul's experience of placing himself completely and without reservation in Christ. Now, let us go one plane higher. Paul has fought a good fight because it was Christ who was there fighting. Paul thrust himself into that fight and appropriated the victory of Christ. He finished the course that Christ went through by placing himself in the hands of the Lord and enjoying with Christ all that Christ experienced. Why was Paul able to make such a choice? It was because he clearly understood the will God revealed to him and the words that God spoke to him were all centered around His own Son. Thus, he placed himself in the hands of the Lord without any reservation. Whatever Christ manifested, he imitated. Whatever Christ was unable to accept, he would separate himself from them. This is why he was able to say that he has kept the faith.

More complex Temptation nowadays

Brothers and sisters. This is how we should be walking before God today. I dare not say that the environment and situation we face today are direr than those that Paul encountered. But one thing I dare say boldly. The things we encounter today are much more complex than those faced by Paul. Among the many things we face today, particularly in the realm of the spiritual, the most severe one is the attraction of the world. This is because by nature, we live, within ourselves, with the things of the world in order to satisfy our "self". Our affections are very easily captured by the things of this world. Our minds are very quickly enslaved by the matters of this world. We are in the twenty-first century but I have personally experienced some most complex political environment of the 20th century. I was then still a young man and a student. When something new cropped up or when new ideas were circulated, emotions of young people would become extremely excited. One would very easily feel that a certain course was the right one to take. In those days, we have seen and indeed experienced how multitudes of people thrust themselves into the political upheavals. Under those circumstances, any mention of matters relating to the Lord would be regarded as backwards and outdated. Even at the time when I came to the United States, I encountered a different kind of sentiment or situation but the consequence was still the same. People were still saying those same old words: "You still believe in what your grandfather's generation believed!" What struck me was that such statements did not come from the many superficial Christians. Once I met a classmate whom I was with from high school to college. When we started talking, we realized we had not seen each other for decades. He told me in detail all that he had accomplished. Then I told him that I was still serving the Lord in the Church. He laughed "Ha-ha, ha-ha! You are still so God crazy!" Brothers and sisters, this is the present age. I repeat. I dare not say for certain that the environment at present is more severe than that in Paul's days but I am sure it is more complex. To be a witness for God in these days as someone who has been saved, we will encounter much temptations and trials. Take the trials arising out of the political scene. They were so real for the church in China. Even

though these have been going on for the last few decades, they are still going on today. If our hearts be focused on the work itself, we will forget whether it is the Lord or things aside from the Lord that we should have chosen.

Today, we also encounter many hindrances on the religious front. Some are outside the realm of Christianity such as the Muslim religion. It was most severe in Europe but this is not to say that it is not strong in the United States. Of course, it is also quite frenzied in Southeast Asia. No wonder my grandson said that for us young people in the United States, we do not know what suffering is. This is because our eyes have never noticed how the environment around us is manifesting opposition against the Lord. If we think about it, it is something we come across daily. Let us take an example. In the United States, many of us pay attention to the subject of education. Brothers and sisters, when you look into it, you will discover some very frightening happenings. Hidden inside many issues are powers that oppose God. Take a simple case in California. Was there not a vote last year in California on gay marriages? What followed was most interesting. A recent poll suggested the sympathetic sentiments on the vote had changed and if there be now another vote on the subject, what was pure may not be maintainable. Why has men's thoughts deteriorated to such an extent? I will not dwell at length on this. I will just touch upon this lightly so that, if our spirit is even slightly alert, we will very easily discover, hidden in every corner of the whole world, are sentiments and converging issues that oppose God.

What is even more catastrophic are the issues within Christianity. There are so many things in Christianity we see that are not of the Lord Himself. These things put us in touch with theological thoughts, with procedures of work, with what is acceptable and with increase in church membership. Among all these, they have forgotten the most crucial point: have men gained Christ? They consider this to be unimportant. I believe I am not saying this casually. If you wish to confirm these, which can be easily done. Look at the average Gospel tracts published by Christian bodies. Are you able to tell in them the gist of the Gospel? When you watch Christian broadcasts on TV, are you able to hear in them solid contents of salvation? If we wish to be good persons and do good deeds, there are many opportunities for those. But in asking people to be good persons and do good deeds, where does Christ come in? Is it in order to be good persons and do good deeds without Christ? Other religions tell you to be good persons and do good deeds too. But, brothers and sisters, we should be very clear on this. We can say all we want about being good persons and about doing good deeds but without Christ, they can never be put into practice. Such is the condition we are in today. If we are content to immerse ourselves in this impressive outward structure of today's Christianity, it would be extremely difficult for me years ago to understand the rationale of my inward feeling when I was personally called by the Lord to serve Him.

That was in the fifties of the last century when there was a great change in the political scene in China. In those days, the mention of anything pertaining to God was considered to be backward and outdated. But we do not know why God raised numerous young brothers and sisters during those days to serve Him. As if to stem against that tide, they remained standing on God's side. Personally, how was I moved by the Lord at that time?

At that time, I had some religious passion for the Lord but I did not really know Him. But the Lord had mercy upon me and He was working within me. During one of the meetings, brothers and sisters all felt that the meeting was not like a meeting at all. It was not that there was no preaching but it seemed that the Word of God was not coming out of it. The preacher no longer dared to preach His Word but spoke only vain and casual words. He thought that it was sufficient to deal with the situation in the prevailing circumstances. However, it was the young brothers and sisters who felt such a situation to be unbearable. They felt they needed the Word of God and that they needed to understand the will of God. They felt that under those solemn times, they could not stand strong and go forward without the Word of God. All the outward arrangements for that particular meeting had no life in them. Nevertheless, we thank God. Men can cause a meeting to become lifeless but the Spirit of God moves according to the will of God. We did not know how it began. The Spirit of God moved a few brothers and sisters there to have a heavy burden within them. They felt the church had come to such a low point that they could no longer find strength in such a desolate situation to continue their walk. It was because of this little spark of inward feeling that several brothers and sisters gathered to begin to pray. Thanks be to God. God began to work. It was during this time that the Lord gave me a very penetrating thought. What was that? It was the words in Isaiah chapter 6. Uzziah has died at that time and Isaiah had a thought. He did not know the future of Judah. Uzziah could not be reckoned as a king who was able to fully work out the will of God. Nevertheless, he did not bring Judah into a worse condition. At that point of time, while Judah was already declining spiritually, many Israelites still thought that they were not bad. It was during that time that the Lord spoke and Isaiah heard, "*Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?*" I was captured by these words at the time. I will not talk about myself. I will speak about Isaiah. When Isaiah heard these words, he also thought Judah was really not doing too badly. From men's perspective, the situation was perhaps not too dire but under the examining eyes of God, He had already seen the decline of His people. Therefore God uttered His voice from His throne. To put it in a nice way, God was waiting. To be passive, God was sighing. In the entire nation of Judah, not even a few heard the words of God. It was not that God had not spoken but that His words were not listened to. God had spoken but men did not comprehend His words. Brothers and sisters, I had a very heart searching feeling when I heard Paul saying that he had kept the faith. How many of God's child realize how desolate the Church has now declined into? Many look at the Church externally and thought she is still doing pretty well. But how many of us are in a church that has already traveled down the desolate path for quite a while. Brothers and sisters, I have to ask you. Even if God had not spoken (but now God had already done so), why has the Church been allowed to decline into such a state, often camouflaging the internal inadequacies by her outward condition? Brothers and sisters. This is a very, very serious problem. The Word of God has not penetrated into men and if His Word has not penetrated, how can they keep the faith?

The Recovering

One year I visited Rome and went to see the stairs that Luther climbed. When I was there, I could still see many actually climbing those same stairs. Two thoughts occurred to me. The first thought was why were there still people climbing those same stairs. The second

thought was why, as Luther was climbing and climbing, he was able to come out with something new. The climbing was not the method of God and was not what God wanted us to do. Why are men still so foolish at the present time to adhere to these outward forms? Brothers and sisters. Do you not see what the secret is? Luther was able to go beyond the outward physical action and derive from such action the understanding of what God was really speaking to him. That was sufficient as far as Luther was concerned. On the other hand, others felt that the edicts of the Pope were accurate. They felt that traditions of the Church were important while the Word of God was not so important. We thank and praise our Lord. Luther restored a little of the testimony of God. There were so many in darkness in Luther's days. So many were unable to see the future. So many felt that the future for them was to perform more religious rites. This was particular so in those days and in fact, the situation has remained the same in Roman Catholicism even today. They have seven Sacraments in their religion and if they perform those seven Sacraments right and well, they will have no difficulty in heaven in the future. However that was not the feeling inside Luther. He has done all those things because he was a priest. Not only did he perform those sacraments himself, he actually performed those on behalf of others. But he felt that this was not the way. He wondered what it was that would enable him to go back on the right way. So he climbed and climbed the stairs and finally, one day, his inner self was enlightened. He realized that it was not by physical acts and outward things but through justification by faith. God's Word has already been spoken. But why have we not heard? Why is it that we are still searching for ways outside the true Word of God? I do not know how Luther felt inside at that moment but at the very least, he was enlightened. In the same way, God's Word is still leading us forward. Luther, as a consequence, led what people thought was a religious reformation. I do not consider it to be a reformation but to be the starting point of the recovery of the Church. From that point on, God has been leading the children of God step by step onto the path of recovery. The Anabaptists saw also that all service in the House of God should have the Lord Himself as the goal. Those brethren before us have gone through many difficulties in the way but they have brought the Church of God back to the will of God. Through the many brethren in the past who have gone through much labour and hardship in their walk, it has enabled us to see that God has not given up that path of recovery. We are still traveling along it. But how should we be traveling on that way? Brothers and sisters, forgive me for concluding the sharing this evening with these very simple words: **return to the Word of God.** We saw how many of God's children before us who have gone back to God returned because they apprehended His Word. If you are not in the Word of God, even if you wish to fight, there is no battle to fight because you have already failed. You want to run the course; there is no course to run because the course has already been shut. Thanks be to God. His Word revives us once again. Let not the eyes of the children of God in this age be deluded by visible things. Let us pay particular attention to the clear statement of Paul's spiritual experience at the end of his journey: I have kept the faith; as well, I have fought a good fight and I have finished the course; and from now on, I wait for God's crown of righteousness to be put into my hands. May the Lord also constrain us to the same extent that we will follow after Him. Let us pray.

Lord, how we wish that You will enable us to hear Your voice from Your Throne. Man's voice can cease but Your words to men will never cease. How You have spoken to men in

the past, You now continue to speak in the same manner. Lord, may Your words illuminate our path so that the further we walk, the brighter the light will we see; the more we walk, the more will we accomplish Your infinite grace and mercy so that we can finish the race we have to run and manifest the victory of that good fight. May the glory be Yours. We pray in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.