

“I Know Whom I Have Believed”

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The words which serve as the theme of this convention and the focal point of the two essays which will be read during this convention are written in Paul's Second Letter to Timothy, chapter one, verse twelve. The man who wrote these words by inspiration of the Holy Ghost was imprisoned as a subversive, charged with treason. That charge carried with it the death penalty, and Paul knew that he would most likely be found guilty and put to death. Early Christian tradition says that he was beheaded at the time of Nero's persecution in 64.

Paul was writing to a young co-worker who, he hoped would continue the gospel work in which Paul had spent so many years and for which he was now in such grave jeopardy. He expressed confidence in the man and in the gospel which Timothy and others would preach. Especially, he expressed confidence in him who established the gospel, who is at the heart of God's Word, Christ Jesus. Paul knows him. Paul continues to trust him as he has in the past.

He writes: "I am suffering yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed" (2 Ti 1:12). Paul was suffering because of his activity as "a herald and an apostle and a teacher" of the gospel (v. 11). He had never used that word "suffering" with regard to his many hardships in the gospel work. He uses it now, when he is no longer free to move about as Christ's ambassador. But he was not ashamed of his present condition or disappointed because of his suffering. He had written to the Christians at Rome: "I am not ashamed of the gospel." (Ro 1:16). Now he writes from Rome: "I am not ashamed." The Roman government had made him an object of shame. The Roman people might conclude: "He must have done something shameful!" Some of his fellow Christians, even Timothy, might be scandalized by his situation. Paul is not ashamed.

There is nothing of self-pity, no complaining, no catalog of woes in these words that were written for our learning. Not because Paul is stoic but "because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day." Paul is convinced that his future, his eternal destiny, his place in heaven are on safe deposit with a most reliable Trustee. Furthermore, he is persuaded that he who is the living Content of Paul's gospel will also be its able Custodian. No imperial judge or any power in the world is strong enough to cancel the apostle's eternal hope or silence the message of salvation. Even if the government follows a consistent pattern of persecuting the church to the boundaries of the empire, the content and the message of faith will endure.

Paul's confidence was not misplaced or mistaken. God has not failed to preserve his gospel in the world. And when we are gone he will entrust it to others. It will still be his power for salvation. Regardless of how many times the church's obituary is written, in spite of the bizarre things that happen in the visible churches, no matter how or when the Lord calls one of his spokesmen from service on earth to service in heaven, the gospel endures. We can trust the Lord to guard and prosper it until the trumpet sounds and the time for preaching is past.

We will not speculate on just why President Naumann selected these particular words as our convention theme. There is no need to elaborate on the appropriateness of these words of the Apostle Paul—on certain obvious parallels between the apostle's situation and that of our departed leader. The situation of both has improved in a way that we have yet to experience. Their confession, "I know whom I have believed," is the confession of all of us assembled here and of the people we represent. We are like grass but the Word abides forever. Our lives are like vapor, but Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

It was the suggestion of (then) Vice-President Mischke that the two essays, based on the convention theme, concentrate on the "whom" and the "I know." This essay will treat of the object of our faith and what he has done for us. Professor Panning's essay will treat of the sure promise of God's Word, which give us the certainty of faith.

The present essayist believes, as you do, that *all* Scripture centers in Jesus Christ. He is aware that the Apostle Paul himself wrote much concerning our Lord and Savior that is not included in this epistle. He has tried to define the scope and limit the length of this essay by confining himself to what Paul wrote in this, his last letter, regarding him whom we trust.

I.

“I know whom I have believed.” Twelve times in this letter the holy writer calls him *Christ Jesus*, once *Jesus Christ*. He is a man with a man’s name, a common name. He is not an unearthly being who only seems to be a man. He is not a mythical figure who lived “once upon a time.” He is not an idealized character from second-century fiction. He was born when Augustus was emperor. He died when Tiberius was emperor. He was circumcised, grew up and learned as he grew, became a carpenter. He was baptized, tempted, sad. He was hungry, thirsty, angry. He slept and wept and prayed. He sweat and bled and died. He was a Jew with a common Jewish name.

Paul, however, writes about “the promise of life that is in him” (1:1). He is no ordinary man, then. He is *Christ*. Jesus is His name, but Christ is His office. He is God’s Chosen Man, to do God’s work, in God’s appointed time. He is the LORD’S Anointed, the Messiah. Paul reminds us of that by pointing to Jesus’ ancestry: “descended from David” (2:8). God had promised Israel’s greatest king, “When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom” (2 Sa 7:12). To call Jesus “Christ” is to acknowledge that He is the fulfillment of that promise made to David.

It happened when it seemed it couldn’t ever happen. The kingdom of David became two kingdoms after he was gone. One of those disappeared and the other was captive in Babylon. The royal tree of Jesse was reduced to a stump. God’s judgments on the sins of His people made it seem as though He no longer had any plans for them or for an heir to the throne of David. But “His way is to make something out of nothing—life out of death, righteousness out of sin, honor out of shame, riches out of poverty,” as Luther said. And so a small-town maiden bears a child who is in the natural line of David (Lk 3:23ff). Her carpenter husband accepts and provides for the boy and so gives Him legal status as David’s Son (Mt 1:1ff). Some second-century writers were so ashamed of these obscure beginnings for the Son of David that they invented other origins for Him.

David was not ashamed. Speaking in the Spirit, he called Him “Lord.” “The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet’” (Ps 110:1; cp Mt 22:41-45 and parallels). No ordinary man, no mere man, David’s Son is David’s Lord.

David was not ashamed to acknowledge Him as “Son” and “Lord.” The eternal Father has acknowledged Him, too. He who descended from David “was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the, dead” (Ro 1:4). He had been executed by experts. His death was assured by a spear thrust. His body was laid in the tomb. “But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem” (Ac 13:30f). Paul had preached that in Galatia and now he reaffirms it in this letter from prison: “Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel” (Ti 2 :8).

Any man can say, “On the third day I will rise again.” But only God can do it. And He did it! He lives. If a man said, “I will end all war, cure all cancer, solve the energy crisis, and curb inflation in three days,” everyone would laugh. But if he did it, they would pay attention. When a Man said he would rise from the dead on the third day, a lot of people laughed, too. But He did it. He did it, and attention must be paid.

No religion of man, none of the world’s so-called “great religions” can affirm regarding their founders what Paul’s gospel affirms concerning Jesus: “raised from the dead.” Of what religious leader in today’s “living religions” do his followers declare: “He has risen, just as he said” (Mt 28:6)? The form of the verb that Paul uses in his summary of the gospel (2:8) shows that Jesus Christ is still alive. The widow’s son at Nain, Jairus’

daughter, and Lazarus were brought back to life only to die again. But Jesus is raised from the dead and continues alive.

“Remember,” writes Paul, “this is my gospel.” He is not a dead teacher or a tragically martyred leader. He is the living Christ. This is the One whom Paul has believed and because of whom he has such confidence for his own and the church’s future. The brilliant Pharisee who had persecuted the church spent himself as an itinerant preacher, stumping around the Mediterranean world, enduring hardship, laboring and praying over congregations on the basis that Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead.

That is the sure foundation on which our lives are built. “I know whom I have believed ... : Jesus Christ, raised from the dead.” The memory of a dead rabbi could never fill us with the assurance that the Holy Almighty regards us as His forgiven prodigals, or enable us to shape our lives according to His will, crucify the flesh and war against temptation, suffer reproach for His name, and live in the hope of a blessed eternity with Him. A convention like this and the whole program of our synod and its congregations and federations and agencies would be a pitiable and shameful waste of money and talent and vacation time and lives if they were for the purpose of honoring and preserving the memory of a dead moral philosopher. Why spend ourselves and our resources to tell our children and share with the world the information that there was once a good man who died young, who wanted us to be good? Would the prize be worth the game? Is it? “Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead.” He lives, and “the promise of life is in Christ Jesus” (1:1).

Who of us has not known spiritual depression, that experience when faith seems non-existent? Who of us has never known discouragement in the gospel work? Luther knew all about it from long and profound bouts with the devil of depression. There was one truth that permitted him to survive and overcome: “He lives. He lives.” “I know *whom* I have believed.”

With the Father, he is the Source of “grace, mercy, and peace” (1:2). I can bid you a good afternoon, but I cannot give it to you. Paul could bid Timothy grace, mercy, and peace in the confidence that God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord can and do give them. God’s favorable regard for the undeserving, His forgiveness for sinners who can plead no merit or mitigating circumstances, His declaration of peace on those who were by nature at war with Him—these gifts and the gift of accepting them come from God.

The initiative had not been with the earnest student of the Law or the rampaging Pharisee but with God. The initiative has not been with ordained men or teaching ministers or consecrated laymen. The initiative was with Him “who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time” (1:9). Before the beginning of time, in eternity, God graciously purposed to save us and call us to a holy life. His decision, His intention, His grace. Nothing in us, then or now. It is the Lord’s doing and it is marvelous in our eyes.

He already *gave* that grace in eternity, in His secret counsel, in Christ Jesus. He revealed it in time, openly, in Christ Jesus. “It has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus” (2:10). The mystery of God’s eternal saving grace is revealed and disclosed in the coming of the Son of David who is David’s Lord.

He was a little child so that you could become a perfect man. He was wrapped in swaddling clothes so that you could be liberated from the chains of death. He in a manger, so that you could be in the sanctuary; he upon earth, so that you could be in heaven; there was no room for him in the inn, so that many mansions in heaven might be at your disposal. Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich. His poverty, therefore, is our inheritance; and the weakness of the Lord is my strength. He chose want so that he could be an abundance of gifts to all (Ambrose of Milan, d. 397).

II.

The name Jesus is a one-word summary of who he is and what he has done. As the Jews used it in naming a child, it was a confession of faith: “The LORD is my salvation” or, “The salvation of the LORD.” The angel who assured Joseph concerning Mary’s Child and told him what the Boy’s name should be explained it: “You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Mt 1:21). In our teaching and preaching we usually say, “Jesus means Savior.”

In this letter Paul refers once to him whom we have believed as “Savior” (1:10). Eight times in the New Testament that word is applied to God. Sixteen times it is applied to Jesus. That reminds us that Jesus did not act in opposition to His Father or change His Father’s attitude and intention toward us. Rather, He demonstrated what His Father’s attitude and intention is; He carried out His Father’s will. It also reminds us that salvation is a divine work, that no mere man could accomplish it. Like creation, our salvation did not happen by itself. Nor was it accomplished by a mere human being.

We believe in “... our Savior, Jesus Christ, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (1:10). Savior. The word had wide religious use in Paul’s century. A temple was inscribed to “Asclepius, God and Savior.” The Egyptian mysteries taught, “Serapis is Savior, Isis is Bringer of Salvation.” In the eastern part of the Roman Empire those who worshiped the emperor said *kaiser sooteer*—Caesar is Savior. From what did those people need a savior? From the fear of demons, from the message of the stars, from helplessness against their own immorality even when they hated their immorality, from the fear of death, from the vengeance of the gods or of the unknown god. Any ruler who showed promise might be called “savior.” Any peddler of religious notions who came from any distance could offer salvation for a price and find takers.

Are things better today? There are still idols, some fashioned by human hands and others invented by human minds. Wood and stone, silver and gold, ancestors and demons are still worshiped or placated. In our advantaged and enlightened land certificates of deposit and recreational vehicles, culture and refinement, status and position, progress and science are the only gods that some people serve. There is a god called “security” and how he works to make people dedicate their lives to him. There is a god called, “success” for whom people will knowingly trade their immortal souls. There is that little god called “ego,” and he reveals himself by everything that is selfish and self-seeking and self-serving in our lives.

Like the Greeks of Paul’s time, we have those who teach and live the doctrine that man’s only reason for being is to seek his own pleasure and the only evil is pain. Denying the existence of God, denying accountability to him, denying the eternal consequences, they say: “Live with dignity; die without regret. Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.”

Our land with its home-grown religions and imported cults knows something about the existence of God. There are polls that favor his continued existence. At the same time there is moral anarchy, everyone doing what seems right or feels good or is his thing. There are self-styled liberals tolerant of anything and everything except those who say: “This is what God’s Word teaches.” There is knowledge but not truth.

And there is death as the consequence of all this sin and unbelief. The elephant does not ponder his death. With his huge brain he still doesn’t worry about it. The death of a dog does not prompt other dogs to write poems about canine mortality. They are involved in the consequences of our guilt (Ro 8:20.22) but they have not themselves offended a just and holy God. Man has, and conscience accuses him, and death preoccupies him. He is afraid, or he ought to be.

People may despise death or even choose it, but they cannot do anything about it. It was there waiting for us when we were born. If it did not get us then it will wait for another time, even if it has to wait a hundred years. There was a song in the ‘60’s that said: “Life is what you do while you’re waiting to die.” That is not living. That is the cringing existence of a terrified slave, living a life of quiet or not so quiet desperation.

God did not intend it, for He breathed into man’s nostrils the breath of life. He created man in His image, living and immortal. It is not natural, ever. But there it is. The devil has done his dirty work, and there is no hiding it. There is nothing we can do to overcome it or escape it because there is nothing we can do about its cause, which is sin.

But see what God has done: “... Our Savior, Christ Jesus ... has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” The Son of David is not a religious genius making one more educated or wild guess. He is not a charismatic leader urging men on to eternal suicide. Ancient Horace said: “Do not bring a god onto the stage unless the problem is one that deserves a god to solve it.” Only God could solve our root problem with all its consequences and He Himself came on stage.

David’s Lord became a man, lived the perfect life of love to fulfill the Law of God, died as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. He was treated like the greatest of sinners—in a sense He *was* the greatest of sinners, because He carried the whole human race’s guilt in himself. In our place He was God-forsaken. He died and was buried. He did not stay dead. “On the third day he rose again from the dead.” God has accepted His sacrifice for us sinners. God who punished our sin in Him has credited His righteousness to us. Just in His dying He destroyed death by removing the cause of death. People still die and you and I are still mortal. But the sin that made death deadly, that guilt that made us worthy of eternal death—these have been removed by His death. Death has lost its sting and the grave has lost its victory and God has given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Whoever trusts Him will not perish, but have everlasting life.

“God will forgive. It is His occupation,” said Heinrich Heine. Our age imagines a tolerant god who has no absolute standards, a careless god who does not punish sin, a helpless god who is powerless to exercise judgment. That is how His mercy and love and patience are always perverted by the wisdom of the common man. “God is nice and in him is no nastiness at all,” paraphrased Hebert Kelly. But God did not ignore sin or sit and cry about what a disappointment mankind turned out to be. He dealt with sin in a way that accords with His justice and destroyed death at enormous cost to Himself. For an apostle waiting for the sword to fall, a man with circulatory problems, a woman with multiple sclerosis, a child with leukemia there is life and immortality.

“I know whom I have believed.” Salvation is in Him, “with eternal glory” (2:10). The grace, mercy, peace, life, immortality—all the blessings of salvation are ours “through faith in Christ Jesus” (3:15). The Savior saves. His salvation is received by faith, by trust in Him.

Paul’s faith was not in Paul, but in Paul’s Savior. In Paul the Savior demonstrated how far down He can reach with His forgiving grace. The Friend of publicans befriended a Pharisee of the Pharisees. The Friend of sinners rescued the chief of sinners. It is the way He dealt with me—sometimes a rebel, sometimes self-righteous, sometimes rude, and always a sinner. Paul’s faith was not in Paul’s works, but in Paul’s Savior. This man had been and was deeply involved in the struggle to do God’s will, to imitate Him. But his trust did not lie in that direction now. It must be that way with you. Even if you did everything He has commanded you to do you would still be an unprofitable servant and doomed. Paul’s faith was not in Paul’s faith, but in Paul’s Savior. He has trusted, but his emphasis and reliance is not on that. It is in the object of faith, on Him *whom* Paul trusted. It must be that way with us. When we look to ourselves to examine our vibrant, vital, strong faith what do we discover? We discover something weak, flabby, non-existent. Faith can’t use all those wonderful adjectives; it needs content. When it contemplates itself it grows morbidly shy and disappears. It shrivels up and dies if it tries to feed on itself. The Savior is the content of our faith, the Crucified is the object of our contemplation, the Risen One is faith’s food. Tell a drowning man to “hang on, hang on,” and he will drown if there is nothing to hang on to or if you do not show him where it is. Tell a scared child to trust you and you can’t make the child do it if he doesn’t regard you as trustworthy. Tell a sinner to “have faith,” “believe,” “keep trusting” and he will go to hell if you do not show him the faithful Savior.

III.

Jesus Christ the Savior is our Lord from whom comes every good thing (1:2). More than 200 times in his epistles Paul uses that title for the living Christ. Like the word “Savior,” this title was commonly applied to Roman emperors. It implied that Caesar had authority in every sphere of life and activity. It suggested that he was the guardian of everyone’s best interests. The word *kurios*, Lord, was used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to signify the special name of God by which He revealed Himself as the faithful I AM, the God

of covenant grace. When Paul calls Jesus “Lord” he is calling Him the Sovereign who is above all Caesars and kings and lords, the Guardian of all our interests. He is also identifying Him with Jehovah or Yahweh of the Old Testament.

Now, Paul is a prisoner because of Him (1:8) and suffering because of His Gospel (1:12). But Paul is not ashamed or disappointed, not complaining or disloyal. This is his Lord’s cause and the matter is in his Lord’s hands.

The Lord has dealt capably with such situations in the past. In southern Galatia, on his first missionary journey, Paul had experienced opposition and violence at the hands of those who hated the Lord whose servant he was (Ac 13 and 14). Expelled from Pisidian Antioch, conspired against at Iconium, stoned and left for dead at Lystra. “You ... know all about my ... persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecution I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them” (3:10,11). The Lord was still in charge, looking out for the gospel’s interest, for the advantage of His elect who should still be called by Paul’s preaching, for His apostle. The enemies probably said, “The rascal lucked out and survived.” Paul says, “The Lord rescued me from all of them. “

Paul was not a fatalist but he knew his Lord and what He can do. “At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion’s mouth” (4:16,17). Paul’s Sovereign stood by him when no one else was there to give him the encouragement of just being there or of speaking on his behalf. The Lord gave him the strength to speak on *His* behalf, to proclaim “the message” to the heathen. Paul was not a fatalist and did not have a deathwish. He simply knew whom he was trusting and knew that in his economy there are no bad situations, only different kinds of good situations. Are we ready, as Paul was, to let the Lord use us in all situations?

Whether soon or late, whether in Rome or elsewhere, whether as a prisoner or free citizen, “the Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (4:18). Paul’s Lord has taught His disciples to pray, “Deliver us from evil.” Paul prayed it with confidence, knowing whom he had believed, knowing that in His way and in His time He would do it. It is never an untimely death when the Lord brings one of his own safely to his heavenly kingdom. Those who know Paul’s Lord and pray, “Deliver us from evil,” also know that the lion’s mouth may be the Lord’s way of delivering us from greater evil and worse attacks of the evil one.

Paul, the Lord’s prisoner who is not ashamed, exhorts Timothy (and us): “Do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord.... But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life ... ” (1:8,9). He who saved us from eternal futility and regret and torment has saved us for holy living. “My Lord ... has redeemed me, that I should live under him in his kingdom, and serve him ... ,” we confess with Luther. He whose power overcame the devil and the grave provides the power for that service. It is His motivating and enabling power that causes us to treat the least of His family members as though we were dealing with Him—and we are (Mt 25:40). It is the power of His saving and sanctifying grace that causes us to treat all men in the way He would deal with them.

The most important way in which you and I can be “little Christs” (Luther’s phrase) is “to testify about our Lord.” The Lord does not leave us citizens of heaven here on earth to make a name for ourselves, build monuments to ourselves, amass wealth. He leaves us here to be witnesses to His purpose and grace. The emphasis of that witness is not on the “I,” the “know,” or the “have believed.” It is on the “whom,” on Him who loved us and gave Himself for us.

A faithful testimony to the love of Christ and the good news of what He has done for us may bring ridicule, subtle persecution, even danger upon us. People are not generally against morality, but the natural man does not like to hear that his morality is worthless at the judgment seat of a just and holy God. People are not usually opposed to the moral philosopher Jesus (as they imagine Him to be), but the fleshly mind does not take kindly to the truth that there is salvation in no other. People are generally sympathetic to the tragic figure on the center cross, but not to the idea that their everyday gossip, chiseling, bigotry, avarice, superstition, contempt for

authority, lust and general lovelessness brought Him there. People can make it rough for those who testify about the Lord. It is easy for us to report Paul's words and consider them here in the safety of numbers. It is not so easy when we are alone, and confronted by persecution, opposition, or ridicule.

Paul writes, "Do not be ashamed." Do not be silent when you ought to speak, selective in your truth-telling, ambiguous in the testimony of your life.

"I know whom I have believed." He is the Lord. He is God incarnate, who is King of kings and Lord of lords. He is in charge of this universe and He is my Sovereign. He acts in the interests of His elect, including me. He has redeemed me in order that I might serve Him. His apostle reminds us, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness" (2:19). He exhorts us, "Pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2:22).

IV.

Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior is also "the Righteous Judge" (4:8). He will come again, visibly. He will come again, in royal majesty this time. He "will judge the living and the dead" (4:1). Every individual will be included in this process of separating. If forgiving is the Lord's occupation, as Heine said, so is judging. For the sake of this One Righteous God spared, not Sodom and Gomorrah, but the world. By this One Righteous He will judge the whole race.

The standard of judgment was announced by the Risen Savior more than 1900 years ago: "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mk 16:16). He who established the gospel by His own sacrifice and commissioned His disciples to herald His gospel till the end of the age will not introduce the standard of the law on that day. We are judged and will be judged by our relationship to Him. I know whom I have believed." There will be no mention of the transgressions and failures of those who are in Him on that day—only their good works. There will be no acknowledgment of the excellences and efforts of those who rejected Him—only their failure to love (Mt 25:31-46). There will be no ground for any objection to the verdict He delivers. "That last judgment ... will be a day of judgment in the precise sense that there will be no place for uncomprehending complaint that this sinner has been blessed or that that good man has been punished" (Augustine, *City of God*). Miserable sinners like me will be invited to inherit the kingdom by Him whom I have believed. Great benefactors of mankind will be excluded and will go away to eternal punishment, because they have not trusted Him. That will be the just judgment of the Righteous Judge. The business of His believers is not to question that but to preach the gospel, to make disciples, to testify about our Lord.

Like Paul we can concentrate on that work which He has given us to do, without brooding over injustices we have suffered or nourishing schemes of retribution against those who have wronged us. Paul writes "Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done" (4:14). We can carry on the gospel work and leave *all* other concerns in the hands of the Righteous Judge. Here is a trustworthy saying:

'If we died with him, we will also live with him;
If we endure, we will also reign with him' (2:11.12).

In one sense we have died with Him. "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection" (Ro 6:3-5). We are dead with Him, dead to sin and its power. We are alive with Him, with our lives dedicated for service to God. "If we endure, we will also live with him."

Paul expected to die with Him in another sense, to die as a martyr to His truth. Paul also expected to live eternally with Him. He includes all believers in the “we” and encourages us to hold out in the hope that “we will also reign with him.”

If we disown him, he will also disown us;
If we are faithless, he will remain faithful,
for he cannot disown himself (2:12.13).

If a person is ashamed of Jesus, disowns the Lord instead of denying himself, seeks to please the world instead of the Savior, then Christ will also disown him on the day of judgment. How awful! It is an easy thing to deny. But it is not an insignificant thing. Whether it be burning incense before the emperor’s statue or simply running with the pack and hiding any distinctive Christian witness in speech and life, “if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot deny himself.” The Righteous Judge will not deal falsely with those who have disowned Him. He will deal justly, and also disown them. It is “a trustworthy saying.” Lord, keep us steadfast and make us bold to confess. Fix our hearts on your grace and give us strength to endure. Help us rely in every situation on Him whom we have trusted.

Lord, give us the clear and confident view of our destination that Paul had as he neared the end of his travels. Bless and keep us so that when our work as your servants is finished we can say without empty boasting: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing” (4:7.8).

The story of Socrates’ death is moving, in its way. There was a noble serenity about the way he made preparation to die, offered consolation to his friends, took care of last-minute details. But with regard to the future he could say nothing very definite or hopeful: “Only God knows whether my judges or I will be better off after today.” There is no such uncertainty in Paul’s words to Timothy. He is not passing into oblivion but into glory, not into a shadowy realm but into eternal light, not with a question but with an affirmation. The victor’s crown is in store for him. It is the crown won for him by Christ, revealed to him in the gospel, assured by Jesus’ resurrection. It is the crown of righteousness, and the Lord, the righteous Judge will award it to him on “that day”—the day of his appearing.

This triumphant hope is not Paul’s special and personal privilege as an apostle. The Lord will award that crown “to all who have longed for his appearing.” It is for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; for Moses and the prophets, and all who believed their testimony regarding him who was to come; for Anna and Simeon, and all who looked forward to the redemption of Jerusalem; for you and me. It is also for those whom the Lord will gather and keep through the gospel in Word and Sacrament that he has entrusted to us.

“I know whom I have believed.” The blessings of the past, the strength to do today’s work, the confidence to face the future are his gifts. What a joy and privilege to serve him!