*The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying: “Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.” So, Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days’ walk across. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out: “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put-on sackcloth. When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed His mind about the calamity that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.* Jonah 3:1-5, 10

*In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of His appearing and His kingdom, I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage with the utmost patience in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound teaching, but having their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. As for you, be sober in everything, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.* 2 Timothy 4:1-5

*The story is told of two men riding a tandem bicycle up a steep hill. After much effort, they finally made it to the top of the hill. The front rider said: “That was a tough ride.” To which the second rider replied: “Sure was, and if I hadn’t kept the brake on, we might have slipped backwards.”*

*So much for working in tandem.*

You Can’t Handle the Truth!

1. One of the most fascinating qualities of the Bible is the fact that the Scriptures apply and respond to the issues transcending times, places, societies and cultures. Our New Testament reading today is from the Apostle Paul’s letter to Timothy, a young man who lived over 19 centuries ago in Anatolia, present day Turkey. His epistle indicates the existence of the problems people faced then, and there. It might be in a sense ironic that today, the same problems still exist in our, 21st century society, and not only here in the western hemisphere, but all over the world. As the history indicates, the same issues, the same problems resurfaced in every society over the centuries of human existence, over and over again. The world’s affairs still resemble, just as I shared with you a few weeks ago, a hamster’s wheel, one that goes round and round, but gets nowhere. What is astonishing in this is, that notwithstanding today’s reality, in all these times, there were people who tried, and were able to accomplish substantial changes in their lives, even to the point of being able to influence others and to a degree change the society.

2. Over the centuries of human history, there were great men and women of faith who brought changes into the society they lived in, and at the same time made these societies more humane and caring. Let’s look at some of them, even if just a few.

* William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, was a pawnbroker's apprentice who dedicated his life to Christ at the age of 17, and became a passionate Methodist preacher, and social reformer in Victorian England.
* Apostle Paul, as Saul of Tarsus, has transformed himself from the bloodthirsty persecutor of Christians, to the follower and the apostle of Jesus Christ, after his encounter with Jesus on the Road to Damascus.
* St. Augustine, a young wealthy man, who enjoyed a lustful lifestyle, turned to God, and became one the great Fathers of the Church.
* Florence Nightingale was born into a wealthy and well-connected British family and at the age of 17, she experienced what she believed a call from God at the family estate of Embley Park, prompting a strong desire to devote her life to the service of others. Today we know her as a founder of the modern nursing.

3. Let’s read again Paul’s words to Timothy: *“For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound teaching, but having their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths.”* This is exactly what we see today in the world, and this also includes many churches across many denominations. There is no true commitment, neither to the Church, nor to what to believe. The word *“doctrine”* is often considered a *“four letter word.”* The meaning of the tradition has been replaced with revisionism at every level. In the end, people pride themselves of not offending anybody, therefore the truth that exposes wickedness, sinfulness and any form of wrongdoing, cannot be spoken and accepted. After all, our society emphasizes equality, where we do not want to offend anybody, so *“anything goes”* is a new socially acceptable norm.

4. The so-called *“liberal, progressive theology”* took over majority of the Seminaries and Bible Colleges, and consequently many pulpits. Yet, what did this theology liberated us from? God? Salvation? Eternal life? Sin? As I look at this, I believe that we were being *“liberated”* from the voice of God, and we have received a freedom to do whatever anyone pleases. So, the history again says: *“Hello. We are here again!”* to those who listen. When I open the Bible, I see there not only the *“God’s Plan of Salvation,”* but I also see there a guide for a successful and meaningful life, life that leads to eternal joy, and life that is full of fun and joy without lust, immorality and intoxication of any kind. Unfortunately, the “liberal theology” denies the importance of these and leads away from God’s influence over His people. The same is happening in the educational system, in the academic circles on every level, where the faculty do not want to conform to science, but to the societal whims. In the end neither the professors nor the students, want to conform to the scientific truth, and rather embrace all forms of revisionism and progressiveness. The latest *“equal rights issue”* denies the existence of two genders, male and female, and creates an unlimited number of them, not according to what the biology teaches and proves, but according to whimsical wishes of people. In final result, a social caprice overwrites science, and consequently the good is called evil, and evil is called good.

5. I do not pretend to be a *“biblical scholar,”* but I believe I know the Scriptures well enough to say aloud: *“enough is enough.”* I cannot understand how is it possible for Christians who study the Scriptures the *“Word of God,”* to try to find the ways to defend their own *“half-truths,”* and *“upward lies,”* rather than accept God’s wisdom. I believe this is happening because the Bible has become labeled and referred to as a *“myth,”* not the *“Holy Word of God.”* Our society, including many of the so-called *“Christians,”* accept the Bible as a set of rules to be defined by the society in a particular historical context, and not as the *“Infallible Word of God.”* I heard many arguments offered by many pastors, professors, teachers, but they all remind me of the Pharisees who would come to test Jesus, and to whom He replied: *“When it is evening, you say: ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’ And in the morning: ‘It will be stormy today, for the sky is red, and has a threatening look.”* The Bible is and always will be, the *“Infallible Word of God,”* no matter what anyone says. Once we stop accepting the Scriptures as such, our faith, our worship, our life and everything we believe does not make any sense anymore. Whatever the modern society says, in the end however, God, and His “Word,” will remain victorious. We must realize that once we deny the Bible to be the only true and the *“Infallible Word of God,”* the truth is also questioned and denied.

6. Modern society, and modern world turned away from the authority of God, and try to rely on the authority of men. So, let me ask this: *“Who and where is the infallible man?”* A four thousand years ago, Diogenes, a Greek philosopher was known to search for such a man, with a lamp in his hand. His *"search for an honest man"* exposed the hypocrisy and the sham of the polite, societal conventions of his times, which is found in his conclusion that there is not, and there will not be, such a man. Our society, just as Diogenes’ is in exactly the same situation with our desire to be so polite, as *“not to offend”* anybody. Diogenes was essentially right, with the exception of Jesus Christ, but on the other hand Jesus was a very exceptional man, since He was both human and divine. Ironically, even many of the secular polls today suggest that vast majority of people believe in God, even without knowing Him. This clearly indicates to us how confused this world of ours is. We, the Church of Jesus Christ, are to confront all those confused and to bring to them the message of salvation, the Good News of Jesus Christ.

7. The Bible says that the time will come when the Word of God will be taken away from this world, and we witness today so much hostility towards Christ’s Church and His Word, even in this country. What we witness is the warning not to the world, but to us, Jesus’ followers, because it is us who read this book, know this book, and believe it. The truth of *“God’s Word”* must be communicated to the outside world and must be cultivated within the Church. There is a lot of opposition to this, both in the Church, as well as in the world, but those of us who trust Jesus and believe His message, who know and believe that He is with us, even here and now, also know that we are charged by Him to reach out to all who need to hear God’s message. Yes, we live in the time of a doctrinal confusion, the time when churches instead of cooperating compete with each other, but in spite of all of these, God calls us to boldly speak, to proclaim His Word, to share the message. And this is what Paul’s words directed to Timothy, direct us to do as well. Let us never forget this, and let us never abandon Him. We are here because He is our Lord and our God. So, let’s listen to His voice, and let’s go into the world and share His Gospel.