

Come Before Winter!

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When the apostle Paul wrote his last epistle, known as Second Timothy, he was very near the end of his life of service to Jesus Christ. He was evidently imprisoned in a Roman prison, but this was no house arrest as before. The prison was cold, dark, and lonely, and he was facing a death sentence. Paul was seen as a lawbreaker, having defied the Roman court's order banishing him after the first imprisonment. Triggered by Jewish opposition, especially Alexander the coppersmith, Paul is arrested and held. The initial stage of the proceedings ("the first defense") goes badly for Paul, none of the Roman brethren having the courage to appear in his support, (2 Tim. 4:16). This is not surprising, since the Christians had been wrongly blamed by Nero for the burning of Rome, and it was dangerous at this point to be associated or seen with Paul. While Paul had enjoyed sustaining visits during his first Roman imprisonment from brethren such as Luke, Aristarchus, Timothy, Tychicus, Onesimus, Mark, Epaphrus, Demas, and Epaphroditus, now he tells Timothy very sadly but plainly, "Only Luke is with me," (2 Tim. 4:11). The need for help is now urgent. It was autumn, and it would take 2 or 3 weeks for his letter to reach Timothy. Navigation was dangerous, and almost non-existent in the winter (see Acts 27:12). In his cold, isolated dungeon, Paul needs help, and he needs it soon. If Timothy did not arrive with assistance before winter, there would be no hope. It was under these circumstances that Paul implored him to "give diligence to come before winter."

How similar to our current conditions are these thrilling glimpses into Paul's last days. As we run the race for our Master, and fight the remaining days of the "good fight," are there not many around us who urgently need to "come before winter?" From our cell of isolation and loneliness, we think longingly of those once near us, whose presence would again refresh our fainting soul, and we cannot help but call to them with burning desire to "come before winter!"

Come while your heart is tender, while you can still be pricked by the precious preaching of Christ's saving gospel. Come while you still have strength and vitality and God-given talents yearning to be used in service for the Master. Come while you still have influence, opportunity and financial means with which to make a difference in the cause of Christ. Come while your loved ones remain on this side of eternity, straining through tear-filled eyes to see you again in the fold. Don't wait! The situation is desperate now. "Come before winter!"

The coldness and deadness of winter is set forth by God like an annual display, reminding us of the end of man's life. In life's early spring, as in the summer and fall, we need to have a healthy respect for the coming winter. We need to "work while it is day, for the night cometh when no man can work." Following the busy sunlight of the early year, soon the fall breeze and the chilly air give way to the frozen silence of winter. In which season is each of us living now? Only God knows.

As I write these lines, less than three hours remain before the winter solstice, also known as midwinter, which marks the day with the shortest period of daylight and the longest night of the year. Thus winter begins. How many of our friends and brethren will live long enough to see it through? How much longer would the apostle Paul live after penning these imploring words for his dear son Timothy to "come before winter?" Whether Timothy made it in time we are not told. We are told only what we need, and

there the record ends. But it does include this haunting line for our benefit—for the benefit of all who need to “come before winter!”

The Bible teaches that life is short. “Man born of woman is of few days.” Life is like “a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.” Man’s “days are like grass..when the wind has passed over it, it is no more.” The most precious of opportunities sometimes come only once. “Today is the day of salvation.” Today you may still look forward to the coming winter.

If you can hear your Savior’s call, don't delay! Don't assume that you will have another day, another season. The need is urgent and the time is at hand. Come while you can, come before winter!