

# COME BEFORE WINTER

2008



**DO YOUR BEST TO COME TO ME QUICKLY**

*Scripture:*

**Psalm 100**

1. Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.
2. Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing.
3. Know that the Lord is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.
4. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name.
5. For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures for ever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

## **2 Timothy 4:1-9, 13, 19-22**

1. In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge:
2. Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction.
3. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.
4. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.
5. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.
6. For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure.
7. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.
8. 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.
9. Do your best to come to me quickly.
13. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments.
19. Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus.
20. Erastus stayed in Corinth, and I left Trophimus sick in Miletus.
21. Do your best to get here before winter. Eubulus greets you, and so do Pudens, Linus, Claudia and all the brothers.
22. The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.



## COME BEFORE WINTER

### THE LAST DAYS OF SUMMER

The days are still warm and the nights are cold and clear. Soon the trees and vineyards will display hues of gold and red and orange and maroon and yellow, contrasting with the deep green of the evergreens. The last crop of roses is beginning to fade. High clouds are abruptly whipped at right angles by high winds in the blue sky. Brightly colored leaves begin to drop.

Flocks of birds rush from field to field and then settle as close together as possible on the telephone line. Mountain hawks wheel effortlessly, patrolling their routes and then circling together. Green hummingbirds with red heads flit from purple flower to flower. Tall white herons walk very slowly and carefully through the garden. Bluebirds shoo away the smaller gray birds by the bird-feeder. Quail rush from sidewalk to sidewalk, mothers looking out for the babies, fathers looking out for the whole family from the highest perch they can find, which in our house is the bird-feeder.]

### BEFORE WINTER

Jack rabbits run from car lights. Wild turkeys graze on the hillside. Deer stop in their tracks and stare and then trot on their way to another garden or another flower-bed.

The time before winter is very special. It is a foretaste of new life emerging from change. Soon the cold, strong winds, the rain, and the morning fog will arrive. The days will be overcast and gray. Darkness will arrive earlier; the days will be shorter. They will pass more quickly. Winter is coming.

With the approach of winter, it is interesting to listen to the words of one who was approaching his final winter. The Apostle Paul writes a letter to Timothy, a young pastor and close friend. Paul sends Timothy a message: Do your best to come before winter.

In the fourth chapter of Second Timothy, Paul has finished his last sermon around the Mediterranean. He is imprisoned in Rome with little hope of release. He has a premonition that

his life may soon end and his ministry will be over. Then it will be up to his student, Timothy, to carry on his ministry. Paul writes, "I am ready at the point of being sacrificed. The time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Do your best to come before winter."

### PAUL'S CHARGE TO TIMOTHY

Paul charges Timothy: Be steady. Endure your share of suffering for the gospel in the power of God, doing the work of evangelist, preaching the word, being urgent in season and out of season, being unfailing in patience and in teaching. If Timothy does that, he will not only fulfill his ministry, he will carry on Paul's ministry of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### PRACTICAL NEEDS

Paul also has some practical needs. When you come, bring the coat that I left behind with Carpus at Troas; bring the books and above all the parchments. Paul wants Timothy to be there to share his death as well as his life.

**In that trying hour, we hear a very human voice, a very human request of a man to a friend.  
Come.  
Do your best to come before winter.**

Winter was about to set in in Rome. Paul wanted his coat, the heavy winter coat he had left in Troas. It is the only coat he owns. There is no heat in the prison cell. The cell walls are wet with saltwater brine from the Mediterranean Ocean. His heavy coat has withstood snows in Galatia and dust on the Appian Way, and it has protected him from angry crowds who tried to hit him and chase him out of town.

Paul also wants his books and his parchments so that during his last hours he can write letters to the young churches that have written to him. As you read many of those letters in the New

Testament, it is interesting to begin thinking about the fact that Paul, even up to the end, is answering the churches he helped start. They pour out everything to him. As you'll read, some of it is very positive and some of it isn't. But he wants, even up to the end, to respond in his letters.

Most of all, Paul wants to see Timothy.

**Theologian Henri Nouwen has written, "Simply being present to people who face death can be our greatest gift to them."**

### **PAUL'S LAST WINTER**

Paul knew from experience that when winter arrived, the season for sailing on the Mediterranean would close. It would be too dangerous for ships to go to sea. He himself had traveled those same waters and been shipwrecked more than once. Paul knew how dangerous the journey was in winter. If Timothy waits until winter, he will not be able to sail until spring, and Paul has a premonition, which turned out to be correct, that this would be his last winter. He will not live to see another spring. It is, therefore, a matter of coming before winter or not at all.

As with Timothy, so it is with most of us. There are some things which may never be done unless we do them now, before winter. We only have so much time available for certain things we need to do, and once the time is past, it often cannot be reversed. Winter will come, winter will pass away, new flowers will bloom; there will be new opportunities for a new time. The past will remain the past.

### **OPPORTUNITIES TO SHOW OUR LOVE AND CONCERN**

There are some things we need to do now. There are opportunities now to show our love and concern, to take action and strengthen our relationships with certain people. I know who some of them are, and so do you. The possibilities may not be there next year. There are people listening and voices speaking today

which a year from now may be silent or somewhere else.

### **CHANGING SEASONS**

I have always enjoyed living where there is at least some change in the seasons. I like winter. I remember living in Michigan and feeling the crunch of snow under my feet. I remember driving in the snow as our boys would deliver the newspaper route, because they couldn't go on a bicycle. I remember watching snowflakes falling silently on a moonlit night and stars shining in the cold, black sky.

Spring is a nice time of year. There are forgotten bulbs springing up, coming back again, regrowth, energy, encouragement, hope, anticipation.

And I like summer: the smell of a bed of needles under the trees, campfires, hot sun at the beach, (as you see, I got too much), orange and red sunsets, long days, cool water in the ocean surf, and going to sleep hearing the ocean.

### **START DOING WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE**

But the time before winter - how quickly it passes. It is a perfect parable of everything and everybody that is here for only a limited time, time that we need to take advantage of. The time before winter reminds me not to put off doing what needs to be done, to stop considering and thinking and wondering and start doing. It reminds me that despite all the things going on inside of me, the primary motivation for my taking action is inside of me. Paul says to Timothy, "Come before winter comes inside of me. I need you now. Please come."

And Timothy came. He came immediately to aid his friend and his mentor. Suppose Timothy had not come, saying to himself that he'd go and see Paul one of these days after he finished all the things he was doing that were so important. He would have missed the last ship. He would have waited until spring, and arrived too late to say goodbye.

Fortunately, that's not the way it happened. Timothy did come before winter. He heard the need and he responded to the voice requesting

friendship and affection. He walked with Paul to his execution. He received Paul's final benediction. He heard a call to action and he responded immediately.

### **A BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATERS**

Singer Art Garfunkel gave a concert several years ago at what was then the Burbank Center for the Arts. It was packed. The song that brought the audience to their feet was written by Paul Simon for someone experiencing winter in his or her soul.

**"Sail on silver girl,  
Sail on by.  
Your time has come to shine;  
All your dreams are on the way.  
See how they shine.  
If you need a friend,  
I'm sailing right behind.  
Like a bridge over troubled waters,  
I will ease your mind.  
Like a bridge over troubled water,  
I will ease your mind."**

May we remember next spring that there was someone's need we heard and met in autumn, exactly when we were needed.

Come before winter. Going to another person, sharing our humanity, just being there when we are needed and called, we will discover the living presence of Jesus Christ, the man for others. We will discover God with us.

Maybe you are the one who needs to ask someone for their presence with you. Or perhaps, someone is sending you a message to come before winter.

*Let us pray: The seasons change, but you, O Lord, are the same yesterday, today and forever. You have promised to be with us in times of joy and times of sorrow and you keep your promise. In the family of God, we have promised to respond when we are called. Our brothers and sisters carry heavy burdens and they bring them to church. If they feel welcomed and listened to, they will share whatever they have brought with them, and we will share one another's joys and sorrows.*

*In the name of Jesus Christ, let us pray together saying, ... (The Lord's Prayer).*



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