

“Come before Winter”
2 Timothy 4:6-13, 21a; Mark 10:35-40
by
Matt Matthews

There’s an urgency in Paul’s words as he writes his friend Timothy. *Come to me as soon as you can, Timothy. Do your best to come before winter.*

Paul is saying goodbye to Timothy. He’s knows he’s near the end of his life. He’s putting his affairs in order. He’s making a list. *Timothy, please come to me soon. Bring Mark with you. Bring my cloak with you, and the books, and the parchments. Greet Prisca and the others . . . Do your best to come before winter.*

Paul reminds us that no season lasts forever. There are things that need to get done now if they are going to get done at all. If we put things off too long, we’ll put them off forever. There’s no time like the present.

Paul knows—as we surely know—that winter will be here sooner than we think. Our good intentions may be frozen if we don’t act on them now. Before it’s too late. Before an unexpected storm sweeps away our opportunity to act.

God is working on some of us right now to be an elder or a deacon. Our Officer Nominating Committee is praying for us. If we say, “Ask me next time” we may be passing up on the opportunity forever. Life is fragile. Things change. There may not be a next time.

Some of us have old friends we need to see, or important projects to finish. If we pass on the opportunity now, we may be passing forever. Paul reminds us winter is coming.

There are things our neighbors in North Carolina and Florida had been putting off all summer long. And now the floods have come; and their focus has necessarily turned to other things. They might encourage us to do those important things right now, before the waters rise and we miss our chance altogether. Before the fires swept across the west or the typhoon ripped into Indonesia, days were bright and evenings were filled with stars. Tomorrow would afford plenty of time to get important things accomplished. But “tomorrow” brought distraction, and what wasn’t done before won’t get done anytime soon, if ever.

Notice Paul’s urgency. *If you can, Timothy, come before winter.*

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Every autumn from the pulpit of Second Presbyterian Church in Little Rock, Dr. Allen Smith preached the same sermon. It was called “Come Before Winter.” It was based on this text from Second Timothy. Allen’s son Jim gave me a book of Allen’s sermons after Allen died. This one still seizes me.

At its heart, this is an unlikely stewardship message. *Come before winter.* Use all that God has entrusted to you wisely. Don’t waste any of it, least of all the gift of time.

There are some things we need to do now. Before winter. There are some people we need to appreciate, to thank, to love before winter comes and it’s too late.

“When you come [Timothy], bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments . . . Do your best to come before winter.”

Paul knew that, because time was short, some things needed doing right now, before the ice of winter makes them impossible to do, before the roads freeze, and the path becomes impassable.

Allen Smith put it this way: "How precious our opportunities are when we realize that they do not last forever. The simple statement, 'Come before winter,' reminds us that life has limits . . . Opportunities come along and, if not seized, they are lost forever. Time passes . . . That is what Jesus meant when he said, 'While it is day, I must do the work of the one who sent me; but night comes, when no one shall work.' It is day—but night comes."ⁱ

Night falls. Floods rise. And winter sets in.

Jesus is always saying to us, "Come, follow me. Before the December wind scatters the leaves of your good intentions. Come to me before your heart grows cold and your desires fade and your opportunity is gone."ⁱⁱ James and John dream about the future. *LORD, can we sit at your left and right hand when you come into your glory?* Let God handle the future, Jesus seems to be saying. You pay attention to the present. Follow me right now. Be attentive to the opportunities facing you today. If you put them off, you may miss your chance.

Summer appears to be long gone. Some opportunities for some of us have forever passed us by. The frost is on the pumpkin. The leaves are changing. Some opportunities are ready to be seized now. Before winter. Before it's too late.

Mark 10:35-40 ³⁵James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." ³⁶And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" ³⁷And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." ³⁸But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" ³⁹They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; ⁴⁰but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

2 Timothy 4:6-13a, 19-22 ⁶As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

⁹Do your best to come to me soon, ¹⁰for Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia,^[a] Titus to Dalmatia. ¹¹Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful in my ministry. ¹²I have sent Tychicus to Ephesus. ¹³When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments . . .

¹⁹Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. ²⁰Erastus remained in Corinth; Trophimus I left ill in Miletus. ²¹Do your best to come before winter. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brothers and sisters.^[b]

²²The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you

ⁱ (Allen Smith, "Come Before Winter," from *The Sovereignty of God's Grace*.)

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