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COME BEFORE WINTER III

~ Scripture: II Timothy 4:9-22 ~

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SCRIPTURE

Turn with me to II Timothy chapter 4. We'll be reading from verse 9 thru to the end of the chapter. These verses have been the source of our current "**Come Before Winter**" series. II Timothy 4 is the last chapter of Paul's last letter. I want to consider the one last request Paul makes of Timothy. . .and some applications for today. Remember, Paul is writing from death row. Let's read.

*⁹Do your best to come to me quickly, ¹⁰for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. ¹¹Only Luke is with me. Get **Mark** and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. ¹²I sent **Tychicus** to Ephesus.*

I've always skipped over these last verses because of all these strange names. You probably recognize LUKE who was right there with Paul. But allow me to draw attention to two others—MARK in v. 11 and TYCHICUS in v. 12—because of the role they play in the story at hand.....

1. This is the **MARK** who wrote the *Gospel of Mark*. What Paul says in v. 11 is incredible, because early on Paul & Mark did not hit it off. There had been a sharp disagreement. During the 1st missionary journey, Mark deserted the crew on the Island of Cyprus and went home. He went AWOL, and Paul was deeply disappointed. Come the 2nd missionary journey, Paul didn't want to take Mark with him. But Barnabas intervened and things began to turn around. By this point, the rift is completely healed. And Paul asks Timothy to bring Mark with him so he could see him just one more time.

[That's part of what this whole sermon series is about, as you'll see later.]

2. **TYCHICUS** (in v. 12) is described elsewhere as "*a dear brother*" and "*a faithful servant of the Lord*". No doubt Tychicus is the carrier of this epistle to Ephesus—where Timothy is the pastor. Tychicus is being sent by Paul to take Timothy's place so that Timothy, Paul's "son in the faith", can come and be with him during the closing days of his life.

Let's continue the reading of the Scripture.

¹³When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments.

¹⁴Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. ¹⁵You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message.

¹⁶At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. ¹⁷But 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. ¹⁸The 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.

¹⁹Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus. ²⁰Erastus stayed in Corinth, and I left Trophimus sick in Miletus. ²¹Do your best to get here before winter. Eubulus greets you, and so do Pudens, Linus, Claudia and all the brothers.

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

CONTEXT

The year is A.D. 66 or 67.

Paul had been in prison before. A couple years back, he'd been under house arrest in Rome for preaching the Gospel. That was a cakewalk compared to this, because he was allowed to move about freely (e.g.: teaching and writing). He was released and went back to traveling—preaching and establishing churches.

But this time he was confined to a dungeon. There was a hole in the roof where they dropped down food. There was barely enough room to move around in. And it was cold and dank.

He was awaiting execution. Emperor Nero had begun a campaign against the Christians. Back in A.D.64, great fires ravaged the central part of Rome. The word on the street was that Nero himself had the fires set because he wanted to rebuild that part of the city. At the time, he was conveniently “out of town”. But still he needed someone to blame, and the Christians were the logical scape-goats. Paul, being a leading figure in the movement, was a sitting duck for arrest and torture.

It is clear from this passage that Paul knows he is about to die. And he tells Timothy that he wants him to come and be with him during his final days. Paul writes to Timothy with a keen sense of urgency. Verse 9 says: **“Be diligent to come to me quickly.”** Hurry up, Timothy, I need you! Do your utmost to **come before winter**.

WHY BEFORE WINTER?

Because in those days when winter arrived, all navigation pretty much came to a halt in the Mediterranean Sea. There could be a lot of snow and blustery cold weather. It was dangerous to travel on the Mediterranean during those months.

If Timothy didn't come right away, he would have to wait clear until next spring. And Paul was pretty certain he wouldn't survive that long. *“The time of my death, the time of my departure is at hand.”*

I like to think that Timothy did not wait a single day after Tychicus got there with the letter from Paul. I like to think that Paul did not have to spend the last days of his life alone in that dungeon.

In my mind's eye, I visualize Timothy getting the letter and running to Mark, saying: “*We’ve heard from Paul. He needs us! He wants us to bring his cloak and his books. We’ve got to go right away—before the Mediterranean is too difficult to make passage.*” They get there. . .there’s a joyous reunion. . .they pray and sing and praise God together. . . and make plans for how the missionary work will continue.

No one knows for sure what happened to Paul. Most likely he was beheaded by Roman soldiers (because he was a Roman citizen and that’s how Roman citizens were executed). But one thing is for certain! When the prison guard came to get Paul, he could look back to his friends. How good it was that they had come; what sweet fellowship they had enjoyed as they approached the day his earthly life ended.

I LIKE TO THINK THAT’S WHAT HAPPENED. BUT.

What if they didn’t come? What if there was some reason they had to put it off? After all, Timothy was a busy pastor: there were meetings, appointments, people that needed pastoral care, teaching & training to be done, baptisms and communions to celebrate. All good and legitimate things!

Can you imagine Timothy & Mark finally breaking loose after attending to all those matters. . .coming to Troas where they would get passage on a ship. . .only to find out that the last ship of the season had just set sail a couple days before? No more ships out of port until next April!

Can you picture Timothy living through that anxious winter, constantly kicking himself for not going when he first got the letter? Then grabbing the first vessel in the springtime. . .arriving at Rome. . . running to the *Mammertine Prison*, but not finding Paul. . .then searching out Claudia (or one of the others mentioned in v. 21), who says:

“Oh, so you are Timothy. Don’t you know that Paul was beheaded last January? Every time the jailer came to the door of Paul’s cell he would ask, ‘Is it Timothy? Is it Timothy?’ He thought you were coming. He was sure of it. His last message before dying was: ‘Tell Timothy I love him.’”

How Timothy must have wished he had come before winter!

APPLICATION

Oh, the agonizing consequences of delay / procrastination!

We assume there will be time to put things right—but not always. We’re not guaranteed tomorrow.

ILLUSTRATION: One of our members lost his mother suddenly this week. He visited her last Sunday afternoon. . .measured her countertop for a new one. . .and that was it, that was the last time he ever saw or talked to her. It’s like being in the middle of a movie. . .the film is cut. . .and that’s it! Someone you’ve known all your life- -gone- -forever.

Many of us (me included) have lost people we cared about, but weren’t there saying those last things we wanted to say. Maybe this afternoon, we go home and write that letter to someone in our family. . .to someone from whom perhaps you’ve been estranged. . .or someone you love & respect but haven’t told (in awhile)—before winter comes, before it’s too late.

ILLUSTRATION: In the church where Marcie grew up, there was a mother & daughter who became estranged over who knows what. Year went by. Neither of them could quite remember what the original issue was. They were eventually reconciled just before the mother passed. But, oh, the wasted years. Both wanted it to be over, but pride kept getting in the way. Neither would make the first move. And winter set in!

Do you remember JESUS in the Garden of Gethsemane? How He pleaded, “*Peter, will you pray for Me tonight? This is the worst day of my life, Peter. My soul is sad, because I am going to die. Please watch and pray with me, one hour.*” Yet when Jesus looked up, Peter-James-John were sleeping. “*Wake up! Please, I need you.*” When He looked up an hour later, they were still fast asleep. “*What? Couldn’t you watch with Me for one hour—when I needed you the most?*”

Yes, all three of them went on to do great things for Jesus. Each of them suffered and eventually died for Him. But, never again were they able to pray with Jesus in His hour of greatest need. That opportunity was gone.

Time is passing. To everything there’s a season. There’s a moment for putting things in order. . .

for fixing what needs fixing. . .for saying what needs saying. . .for forgiving what needs to be forgiven. . .for tying up loose ends.

Let me ask you: *What is He asking you to do before winter?*

What calling has He put on your heart. . .and you keep putting off?

What is He prompting you to say ‘NO’ or ‘YES’ to?

- Maybe it’s giving up a destructive habit.
- Maybe it’s making a change that has been needed for a long time.
- Maybe it’s going on a diet.
- Maybe it’s confronting a sin or an attitude you’ve let take root.
- Maybe it’s getting totally honest—telling the whole truth and nothing but the truth.
- Maybe it’s a step of obedience that God has asked you to take.

Could it be that someone here this morning has never fully said “YES” to Jesus Christ? O, you believe with your mind—but not your heart. Maybe the Holy Spirit is saying, “*Today is the day of salvation*”. If there are some things in your life you need to re-arrange in order to reconcile with God, then do it now! Don’t put it off until “tomorrow” or “some more convenient day”.

Never in Scripture do you find the word “tomorrow” when Jesus is inviting people to respond to Him. He always says, “Now! Do it now!”

- ***“Now is the time of God’s favor; now is the day of salvation.” [II Corinthians 6:2]***
- ***“Today, if you will hear His voice, do not let your hearts be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. Come to Him while it is still called ‘today.’” [Hebrews 13:3]***

I believe we have a great opportunity as the Church of Jesus Christ to impact this culture with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We were never put here to *conform* to the world around us (fit in); but to *transform* it. We must make the most of the day which God has given us in which to make Him known. Make the most of every opportunity that presents itself to share His love & message.

WINTER’S COMING!

That's not necessarily a bad thing. Winter is a season, just like fall & spring. I actually like winter. It has its charm and appeal. The winter sky. . .the way the sun sets are intriguing to me. But most of us dread winter's onset.

I say, let's avoid that dread, that fear, that anxiety.

One of the most debilitating, joy-robbing aspects of most people's spiritual walk is what I call THE WOULD-A-COULD-A-SHOULDA SYNDROME:

- *Would've* done more with my kids or for the Lord if only I had the time.
- *Could've* avoided falling into that trap if only I'd been thinking.
- *Should've* acted sooner.

We rack ourselves with **guilt** over such things. And I'm saying, let's not do that anymore. Let's head into the winter season (whatever that means for you this morning) with NO GUILT—because we've taken care of business.

NO-GUILT QUILT

To symbolize that this morning, each of you has been handed a swatch of material.

I want you to let that little square represent some action you are willing to take this coming week:

- Maybe it's a small step to put something back in order that's out of order (e.g.: call to make the appointment).
- Maybe it's beginning to pray. [Prayer can prompt you to take action OR give you a different perspective that can lead to action.]

I want us to be proactive in the pursuit of our dreams, goals, and healthy relationships. I don't want us to miss opportunities because we're afraid to take the risk. . .or we just keep putting it off. . .or we're afraid something won't work out.

We're going to bring those swatches forward in a moment and put them in the basket on the altar. The next time you see that cloth, it will have been sewn into a quilt (next week). The quilt will be displayed for all to see. . .then donated (possibly to Alpha House).

In the meantime, NO MORE GUILT!

So many people are living their lives in the winter of fear & guilt & regret. Let that not be the case for we who love and serve the risen Christ.

If you've got a case of the woulda-coulda-shoulda's, remember: God is not a God of condemnation, but a God of infinite mercy. *His grace endures forever!* HALLELUJAH! Receive His grace. . .and move on!