

# “Come Before Winter”

**Introduction.** All scripture is beneficial, though at times, we may not understand the benefit and purpose of certain passages. Catholics tell us that the scriptures were never intended to be the sole authority in religion. They say, “Some of the epistles were no more than personal letters, and were not to be used as one’s only authority.” They give the example of where Paul tells Timothy to “come before winter” in 2 Timothy 4:21. They say, “It had meaning and purpose for Paul and Timothy, but not for us.”

However, even in the same book where the expression “come before winter” is found, we have 2 Timothy 3:16-17 which shows that the scriptures thoroughly furnish us for every good work. No one has the right to say, “The scriptures do not thoroughly furnish us for every good work.”

For a brief time, I want us to examine the expression, “Come before winter.” We can see why such would be important to Paul and Timothy, but what meaning or benefit could this verse possibly have for us?

## ***I. The Context Of The Passage***

- A. Paul spoke of soon departing from this life in 2 Timothy 4:6 and, thus, the book of 2 Timothy is the last letter of Paul in the New Testament.
  - 1. Since Paul thought he would soon die, there is no doubt he is calling Timothy to him to bid him farewell.
    - a) When one is in a difficult situation, it is good to have close friends to call on. Most of us have a lot of associates, but few close friends.
    - b) Paul probably had only three close friends at this time:
      - (1) The Lord, who stood with him and strengthened him (2 Timothy 4:16-17).
      - (2) Luke, who was there with him at that time (2 Timothy 4:11).
      - (3) Timothy, who was his “own son in the faith” (1 Timothy 1:2).
  - 2. Timothy first learned of Paul when Paul came to Lystra preaching the gospel (Acts 14:8-20).
    - a) This is where Paul was stoned and left for dead. Friendships made during some disaster (shipwreck, hurricane, etc.) are not likely forgotten.
    - b) Later, when Paul visited Lystra the second time, Timothy joined Paul (Acts 16:1-3). In his letters, it is obvious that Paul highly regarded Timothy (Philippians 2:19-24).
- B. Paul wanted Timothy to bring two items with him (2 Timothy 4:13).
  - 1. His cloak.
    - a) The cloak was probably a traveling cloak with long sleeves.
    - b) Winter was coming and a cloak would have been particularly helpful.
  - 2. The books and parchments.
    - a) These books, or papyrus scrolls, may have been portions of the Old Testament, classic writings, or books written by other Christians or by himself.
    - b) Parchment was made from the skin of animals. For some reason, they were particularly precious to Paul.

## **II. Why Come Before Winter?**

- A. Evidently, Paul did not think he would survive until spring. It was dangerous to travel on the seas during winter (Acts 27:9-10).
- B. Figuratively, we need to accept certain “calls” now.
  - 1. The call to readiness (Matthew 25:1-13).
    - a) The first lesson is, “Don’t sleep until you are prepared.”
      - (1) The wise looked forward and planned.
      - (2) Some see only the present with no thought of the future.
    - b) The second lesson is, “Don’t expect others to do your work for you.”
      - (1) We will not go to heaven by “riding the coattails” of another. Children need to remember this in regard to their parents.
      - (2) Others cannot step in and do what we are personally responsible to do. The foresight of the wise could not help the foolish
    - c) The third lesson is, “No second chance will be given.”
      - (1) They wanted the bridegroom to open the door, but the door was shut.
      - (2) What was shut could not be opened again.
  - 2. The call to make resolve problems between brethren (Matthew 5:23-24; 18:15-17).
    - a) So many of the problems in churches revolve around brethren who will not follow these commands to reconcile themselves.
    - b) Sometimes division is necessary (cp. 1 Corinthians 11:19), but let’s not divide because of pettiness and an unwillingness to forgive (Matthew 6:14-15).
  - 3. The call to sin no more (John 8:1-11).
    - a) Sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1). Everyone has sinned and fallen short of God’s glory (Romans 3:23). God is holy and we should be too (1 Peter 1:14-16).
    - b) We have to put away sin like an old garment (Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:5-7). We can no longer serve sin and unrighteousness (Romans 6:6-7).
    - c) There are several lists of sins in the Bible (Romans 1:29-31; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:3-5; Colossians 3:5; 1 Timothy 1:8-10; Revelation 21:8). If Christians do not abhor sin, we condemn our souls and bring reproach on our congregation (Romans 12:9; cp. Psalm 119:104, 128).
  - 4. The call to make the most of our time (Matthew 26:36-46).
    - a) The Lord needed sympathy and encouragement. The disciples did not understand what Jesus was facing, although He had told them plainly (Matthew 16:21-23; Luke 9:44-45; 18:31-34; 24:25-26). These three men would later be willing to lay down their lives for Christ, but they could never “watch” for the Lord again.
    - b) Often, we intend to do some favor or say some kind word to our parents, grandparents or close friends, but we let the opportunity slip away (Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 5:15-16; John 9:4).
      - (1) When politician and writer Clare Boothe Luce was asked, “Do you have any regrets?” She answered, “Yes, I should have been a better

person — kinder and more tolerant. Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night, and I remember a girlhood friend of mine who had a brain tumor and called me three times to come and see her. I was always too busy, and when she died, I was profoundly ashamed. I still remember that after fifty-six years.”

- (2) In John 12:1-8, Mary had an opportunity to honor Jesus and she took advantage of it. If she had put it off, the opportunity would have been lost forever. We need to show honor to brethren now because we may not have opportunity to do so later.
5. The call to obey the gospel (Matthew 11:28-30).
  - a) The call is simple (Acts 2:21; 9:14; 22:16; Romans 10:13; 1 Corinthians 1:2).
    - (1) Hear (John 6:44-45; Ephesians 1:13).
    - (2) Believe (John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6).
    - (3) Repent (Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 3:19).
    - (4) Confess (Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10)
    - (5) Be baptized for the remission of sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38).
  - b) If you are a sinning Christian, the call is to repent (1 John 1:9; Acts 8:22).
  - c) The disciples quickly responded to Jesus’ call to follow Him (Mark 1:16-18), but there will be grave danger in not answering His call now (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

### **III. Why We Should Answer Our “Calls” Today**

- A. Now is the accepted time (2 Corinthians 6:2). If you hear His voice today, obey today (Hebrews 3:7, 15; 4:7). There are no passages which say “obey tomorrow.”
- B. Now is emphasized for two reasons.
  1. The uncertainty of life.
    - a) The brevity of life has been described in various ways in the Bible.
      - (1) It is like a shadow (1 Chronicles 29:15; Job 8:9; Psalm 102:11; 144:4).
      - (2) It is like a weaver’s shuttle (Job 7:6-10).
      - (3) It is like a runner (Job 9:25-26).
      - (4) It is like a handbreadth (Psalm 39:5).
      - (5) It is like the wind (Psalm 78:39).
      - (6) It is like the grass (Psalm 90:5-6; 1 Peter 2:24).
      - (7) It is like a leaf (Isaiah 64:6).
      - (8) It is like a vapor (James 4:14).
    - b) One may pass from this life at any time.
      - (1) Automobile accidents claim thousands of lives every year.
      - (2) Even the young die with tragic diseases.
    - c) Tomorrow, one’s heart may change. For whatever reason, the heart may be acceptable today, but not tomorrow.
  2. The Lord could come at any time.
    - a) He will come like a thief (1 Thessalonians 5:2, 4; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 16:15).
    - b) Thus, the admonition is to watch (Mark 13:37).

**Conclusion.** Thus, Paul asked Timothy to give diligence to come before winter. Let us suppose that Timothy delayed in going to Paul. He had matters to attend to in the congregation where he was located. He finally starts, but he is told that he had missed the last ship until spring. What an anxious winter Timothy would have spent. Spring finally arrives, and Timothy is standing on the dock ready to go. He arrives in Rome and goes to the prison to inquire of Paul, only to be turned away by the guards. He finally goes to the brethren in Rome, and finds out that Paul had been executed sometime during the winter. And they say to him, Paul's last words were, "Give my love to Timothy." You must take advantage of the opportunities you have now. Indeed, "Come before winter."

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