

The Old Paul—what is your story? Come Before Winter! **“Letters from an Old Man”**

Eccl. 3:1-8; II Timothy 4:9-22

Introduction

Paul is an old man by the time he writes the prison epistles and the Pastorals, around 60 A.D. and afterward. He has experienced life in its glory and in its disappointments.

Winter is nearing—the challenges are looming large. Life is difficult—what shall one say?

Consider Paul’s immediate concerns. These things I need!

Why before winter? When winter sets in the Mediterranean becomes dark and dangerous, ships are easily destroyed. Paul had a premonition that he wasn't going to last out the winter; "the time of my departure is at hand." If Timothy delayed, he'd have to wait until spring when the ships were again allowed to travel. Before winter or never!

Times in life when the possibility of action ceases—winter, darkness.... We come to such times—time to act. We must address immediate concerns.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8--"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven." Late on a fall day, Lowe’s at closing time. The woman at the checkout looked weary. I asked if it had been a busy day in the store. She said it had been “unbelievable.” She went on to speculate that fall days get people to think about the coming of fall, and with that all of the unfinished projects at home, which because of changing schedules, school beginning, and winter coming, might not get done if delayed any longer.

A. Paul wants his cloak—physical winter

Emotional and physical are integrated; strained, broken family relationships. Financial problems. Unpredictable illness. Deaths in the family. Such are not the actions of an angry God. Normal part of life. None exempt. Build on rock, not sand. Physical winters come and go.

B. Paul wants his Bible—spiritual winter

Miester Eckhardt, 13th c. scholar, outer world brings spiritual winter and threats to spiritual wellbeing, outer world impacts inner world. We come, assemble, to work on inner persons, from time to time the ordinary turns into the extraordinary, something special.

C. Paul wants John Mark—relational winter

Time to repair relationships.

Napoleon Bonaparte was a man who sought greatness, but ended his life imprisoned because the peace of the world demanded it. In prison he had the remembrance of homes and cities that he had wrecked in pursuit of world conquest. His efforts shed rivers of blood. As he came to the end of his life, the saddest comment ever recorded were his words "I wonder if there is anyone in the world who really loves me?"

Paul is thinking of his friends: John Mark, Jesus as friend, Luke, Timothy, Demas.

Paul’s priorities. These things I seek. What could Paul see when he looked back?

Our experiences give us insight into the text from 2 Tim, especially references to winter.

Paul wrote these lines from his prison cell in Rome where he was awaiting final judgment by the Roman Supreme Court, perhaps even Caesar himself. Paul does not expect to live much longer. Listen to verses 6-8: "As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I

have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me a crown of righteousness....”

Before he closes, he has a special request of Timothy, his son in the faith and perhaps his closest friend. This is not a letter of instruction to a church, but a personal plea to a trusted friend: Listen again to his request: "Do your best to come to me soon, for Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful in my ministry. I have sent Tychicus to Ephesus. When you come, 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...."

There are some things that must be done before winter, if they are to be done at all. This is the “winter” of life for Paul.

Paul is passing the torch. That perfectly describes the message of the book, and a priority for Paul. The aged Apostle Paul, writing from death row in a dark, dank prison cell in Rome, pens a final message to his young protégé Timothy to encourage him to continue his work after Paul’s imminent death. As we come to the end of chapter 4, we are reading the final recorded words of the Apostle Paul. After he wrote these last few verses, the curtain closes on his life. What happened next has been debated for 2,000 years, but it seems most likely that very soon he was beheaded by Nero. So what was on his mind at the end of his life?

Paul’s theology. These things I believe! Paul wrote about the things important to him. We talk about what is important to us. What is our story?

In my story, is Jesus what I talk about?

This study is not only from the 2 Timothy texts, but from Paul’s later writings.

Jesus was Paul’s message—woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. We proclaim him. AT THE END OF ONE’S LIFE, ONE SHOULD BE ABLE TO UNDERSTAND WHAT REALLY MATTERS.

A. The person of Glory: The GLORY of God

Christ's work is to bring us to glory without spot or blemish (Eph. 5:26), he is the savior of the body. Here is no cheap salvation, but a salvation so broad in its scope that any narrow treatment misses it entirely.

We will study this concept especially from **Colossians**.

B. The power of glory: GOSPEL, salvation through RECONCILIATION, UNITY, RE-CREATION

This appears in many places, we will focus especially in **Philippians**.

The broken wall.

The one new building in which the Spirit dwells.

The divine mystery, Eph. 3, togetherness, God at work in us...

The new life, the new man, Eph. 4:11ff, full grown; 4:17ff, Christ-likeness, living in love, light, wisdom.

The HS, the seal, the promise, the earnest, the source of our unity, the foundation of our togetherness in the body. This spirit makes unity possible.

C. The practice of the Glory: Understanding SUFFERING

Life's ebb and flow brings one from darkness to light.

This is a major theme of **1-2 Timothy**.

D. Participation in the Glory: HEAVEN--Sharing the glory

The heavenly ascent, heavenlies, Eph. 4:7ff.

We will think of sharing and fellowship in the book of **Philemon**.

We will come to this as we consider leadership in the **Pastorals**.

There come times when our spirits will hurt, and we feel God no longer hears or cares. Like Paul we need the word to know that all the saints suffered in kind. Plus we need to a time of closeness with God ourselves—we have seen his glory, shared his glory. These will sustain in our Spiritual Winter. Are you prepared for the winters of life?

We will never do all the things we hoped to do. Perhaps the most important words of this text are "Do your best..." These may be the words with which you sent your child off to school on the first day. Paul repeats them twice: "Do your best to come to me soon," and "Do your best to come before winter." God does not expect of us things we cannot do. Nor should we expect of ourselves things we can't do. In this present, which is the only time we know we have, we can live it to the fullest. God expects us to "do our best." And when we do that, God will take care of the rest. What are the decisions you need to make before winter comes?