

Come Before Winter

“Do thy diligence to come before winter.” 2Timothy 4:21a

Today’s Scripture is companion to another verse about diligence in heeding the Gospel call; Jeremiah 8:20, “The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.” We do well to remember that the quiet coming of Jesus to Bethlehem was for the purpose of revealing our Savior and King amidst the shouts of “Crucify Him!” Harshness and meanness are inextricably connected to hatred, but the call to hear and heed the Gospel is always mercifully open to the wounded and penitent.

Regardless the state of your own heart, the Gospel call continues to go out; so it is therefore incumbent upon us to heed the warning that the winter of our lives is fast approaching, no matter the present season of Lent and Easter. When we are young, we do not notice the fleeting days, but when we are older, we are more sensitive to seasonal changes. We realize that the summer of our lives will not come around again. Perhaps we have already experienced the reality of reaping some of the harvest we have sown in poor soil. Could it be that Jesus is offering us an opportunity for a second planting in good soil? Ah, yes - that is, indeed, the Good News of the Gospel!

We may feel that our strength is so spent that we can only drag ourselves along the ground, but one upward look reveals our blessed Savior’s omnipotent arm outstretched to save us still! Weep not that the winter is closing in, but rejoice that the God of all seasons is calling you by name today – “do thy diligence to come before winter!”

Prayer: *Thank You, Lord, for calling my name above the shouts of doubt and despair – it is good to be in the household of God this day!*

How Big is That?

And He said unto me, “My grace is sufficient for thee...” 2Corinthians 12:9a

There is a Church in Florida with a roof that slants upward to a pinnacle with a thirty-foot Cross adorning the top. It can be seen for more than a mile away. One day, the pastor managed to climb up on the roof and stand near the Cross in order to show how big it is. It is his weekly habit to create a video-blog for the congregation, with a short message for meditation. The video showed how large the Cross appeared as he drew nearer to its base. He described how the true size of the Cross was becoming more apparent to him as he drew close.

The pastor provided a clear visual understanding of how we need to focus on the Cross of Christ in order to see the real size of things. A small view of God may suffice for some, but in

life's rugged reality, a big God is Who we need – and a big God we have in Christ Jesus. He has provided all we need in this life through His suffering and death on the Cross.

Take time this Lenten Season to concentrate on the Cross, because the closer we get to it, the clearer we will perceive its greatness and the immeasurable greatness of our Saviour who went to the Cross to pay the debt of our sin that we might go free and have all we need for a victorious life in a fallen world! His Cross is big enough to shelter you in its shadow, if you will venture close.

Prayer: *Father, thank You for the Cross, the instrument of Grace, that out-measures all our need.*

The Light of Life

I am the light of the world, the one who follows Me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life. John 8:12

Throughout the Old Testament, what was it exactly that the Law and the Prophets encouraged God's people to wait for; better stated, "Who" were they expecting and why? God gave His holy Law via the man, Moses. This Law showed the holiness of God and the perfection it demanded upon the heart of mankind, but nowhere in all of the Law and the Prophets did God declare that humanity can satisfy the Law's demands – if you break this Law, eternal death is the consequence. What can be done to avert the coming doom? Religious activity is always and only external, so what release is there for the inner human heart locked in darkness and guilt because of sin? Since there is nothing upon earth found worthy for such a task, then the remedy must lie outside the limitation of mankind. Indeed, the remedy must come from the same Heart Who graciously gave His righteous demands in the first place.

So unexpected, so small, so fragile, only a Baby but with Light that shines from the depths of the earth to the outermost galaxy! Only Jesus can shine bright enough to plumb the depths of the human heart, reveal the deadly malady, and not just reform the heart but exchange it completely with a heart willing to believe Him for complete and eternal redemption from the death sentence of sin. The angels appearing to shepherds had a Hallelujah to sing, but only the redeemed can sing redemption's song.

Prayer: *The Savior has come; thank You, Father. You have set me free, indeed!*

Our Near Kinsman

"...the man will not be in rest until the matter is settled today." Ruth 3:18:b

One of many blessings in the Book of Ruth is the urgency recorded in Ruth 3:18b regarding Ruth's near kinsman redeemer fulfilling her request. In chapters 1-3, we learn of the widowhood of Ruth from Moab and her Jewish mother-in-law, Naomi. Both women returned to Bethlehem-Judah because the famine in that land ended. Ruth entered Judah as a foreigner with no future but to glean food behind reapers; providentially, she gleaned in Boaz's field. Boaz, a near kinsman of Naomi, took notice of Ruth and ensured that she be well treated; providing her food from his own portion. However, there was one kinsman nearer who willingly forfeited his right to Boaz to redeem Naomi's property. Subsequently, Ruth became Boaz's wife and co-owner of the very field she once gleaned in as a foreigner. Ruth became the great, great grandmother of King David (Matthew 1:5).

The culture of that day offered a kinsman redeemer, if he agreed, the right to buy back land in the name of a deceased husband, considering his own benefit over the widow's. The application for us is not that men alone can own land and that women are subject to wait upon the desire of a kinsman redeemer, but rather what this cultural norm represents.

We have a nearer kinsman with which our human nature aligns; it is the world, the flesh, and the devil. But there is another Kinsman from heaven Who came to redeem and free sinners from sin and death. Jesus, our Kinsman Redeemer, came and destroyed our nearer kinsman's hold on us, and He did not rest at the right hand of His Father in Glory until He finished His redemptive work!

Prayer: *You came for a purpose and fulfilled it – Hallelujah!*

"Take Time to Make Time!"

"...Could you not watch with Me one hour?" Matthew 26:40b

My friend never had time for Bible study and prayer, and complained about it all the time. She anticipated a blessed 30 minutes of uninterrupted quiet. I encouraged her to worship five minutes daily. She discovered the 30 minutes she longed for and more. She learned to choose to make time!

The Apostle Paul warns us to not waste the gift of time (Eph 5:16; Col 4:5). Wasted time is lost and cannot be recaptured, and that realization may sadden us and fill us with a sense of regret that is paralyzing, resulting in further wasted time. How to get past this paralysis? We need to come to Christ and repent. Upon confession and repentance, God is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1John1:9). Now we must make the

deliberate choice to spend time with Him, and when we do, all our daily tasks become eternally valuable for His Kingdom.

Have we no time when Jesus took time to come to earth to save us? He took time to grow in a womb, be a child, and mature in a family setting until His ministry began at the age of thirty. At the appointed time He was baptized, and then called and taught His followers about eternal matters of the soul. At a certain time set by His heavenly Father, Jesus died for men & women and boys & girls, putting Himself under the discipline of time to redeem His own out of earthly time and into heavenly eternity! Whether one minute or one hour, early morning or late night, surely we can take time to make time for Him!

Prayer: *Father, thank You for taking time for us. May Your good hand be upon us for Your glory and the furtherance of Your Kingdom, as we redeem the time for Jesus' sake, Amen!*

"Turning the World Upside Down"

"...faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." (Romans 10:17)

Gordon A. Bayliss (1927-2006) an English Evangelist referred to the doors of Westminster Abby in London, England saying, "Big doors hang on little hinges!" I've visited the Abby, and the hinges of these massive doors are amazingly small.

When Luke wrote his eyewitness letter to Theophilus of the Acts of the Apostles, he speaks of the handful of folk who witnessed the ascension of Christ into heaven; these few are similar to a little hinge compared to the big door of thousands who came to Christ because of their witness and preaching. Down through two millennia, the little hinge of their witness continues to call an incalculable number of people to Christ.

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he refers to the "foolishness of preaching," another little hinge. Yet he emphasizes that it is through this seemingly feeble and foolish exercise of preaching that God works His eternal purpose in redeeming His people.

How is it that just eleven people can make such an eternal difference through the medium of preaching? Because God, in His omnipotence, ordained that the greatness of His power would be revealed through the weakness of the spoken word - big doors, do indeed, hang on little hinges!

Have you heard the Gospel of Jesus; that He came into to world to save and not to condemn? You need not look for a more profound expression than the saving power of these simple words, because the eternal message is a simple message, and its eternal truth hangs on the little hinge of faith no bigger than a mustard seed. And its matching hinge is a simple prayer of contrition.

Prayer: *Blessed Jesus, hear my words of heart-felt repentance. Please forgive me according to Your Word! Amen*

"Time to Rest Awhile" that's what I need!"

And He said unto them, "Come...and rest awhile" Mark 6:31

I was given the privilege to attend our National Association of Congregational Christian Churches (NACCC) in St Petersburg, Florida. I prayed for days in preparation, seeking God's hand upon me. In addition to the scheduled business meetings, our Association offered daily learning events. I searched for where God would have me to be. Being ever faithful, God led me to a learning event that would put me in just the right place to meet a dear Christian brother. He introduced himself and invited me to join him at the Classical Retreats Committee meeting the following morning - I had found God's place for me! This Committee is endeavoring to offer members of other NACCC committees an opportunity for refreshment and renewal in the midst of a busy schedule - "time to rest awhile."

Our Lord knows what we need and when we need it. By His example, Jesus revealed our human need to come away from daily business for quiet rest. Since apostolic times, multitudes of God's children lived and still live in areas of the world where quiet is not germane to their experience. These dear brethren teach us that quiet and rest are not dependent on comfortable surroundings with soft background music - it's not where or how but with Whom. Jesus has made room for you to rest awhile with Him. Quiet rest is not a location - it is a Person!

Prayer: *Dear Father, Your eternal voice pierces through the noise of my world, inviting me to come apart and quietly rest awhile with You, and I am so grateful. Thank You dear Savior, Amen!*

"It's Only Stone"

"...the gates of hell shall not prevail..." Matthew 16:18

In northern Jamaica, there is a small town that does not appear on any tourist map. This town receives little government assistance to maintain its buildings and roads. A few of these buildings are old structures of English architecture that speak of another day and time. But years of neglect have taken their toll, and the buildings are beginning to crumble as time overtakes them - they are only made of stone.

The Gospel of Mark 14:58 tells of Jesus' trial when men accused Him of saying blasphemously "I will destroy this temple that is made with hands and within three days I will build another made without hands." The destroyed temple was built by the Jewish captives after their return from Babylon, circa 519 BC. All that remains of it today is the "wailing wall."

That temple, though a great structure, paled in comparison with the glory of the original temple built by King Solomon, circa 1004 BC. Both King Solomon's temple and the temple built by the captives were subject to crumbling because temples made of stone cannot endure the assault of time or men. And neither of these earthly temples can compare to God's glorious temple made without hands - a temple made of "living stones;" each living stone being a person who has given his/her life in trust to the Savior. With these living stones He constructs His temple wherein He dwells - a temple that neither time nor men can destroy - a temple that will withstand any assault hell can conceive - a temple eternal made by the will of God which He will neither leave nor forsake!

Prayer: *Eternal Father fit me as a living stone in your temple, to serve You now and without end, Amen.*

"In His Service"

"...that he may please Him who hath chosen him to be a soldier"

"...that she may please Him who hath chosen her to be a soldier"

2 Timothy 2:4b

I am a soldier in the armed forces of the United States of America, with military emblems and the American Flag proudly displayed on my uniform. It is my privilege to serve my country.

However, I am first a soldier under the Chief Commanding Officer of the Kingdom Army of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! He has commissioned me to walk in His light and be light everywhere I go. So as a United States soldier, I serve to the best of my ability to bring honor upon my country. God's command to me is that I, in obedience to Him, humbly execute my duties in submission to my commanding officer "because the powers that be are ordained of God." (Romans 13:b)

God directs our every step, so serving our country right where we are is exactly where God has willed us to be in this moment in time. We can trust His sovereign hand upon our lives, and in the midst of war's turmoil, find rest for our souls. He promised to never leave us nor forsake us. He who created and controls the universe knows the way through this present battle. Whatever the outcome of earthly wars, God ordains that His Gospel Light be shed abroad to all nations. Jesus died to give us His eternal life and light, whereby we can share His love and be light to another soul - one "soldier" at a time!

Prayer: *May the peace that triumphed in Gethsemane, triumph in our hearts in our present warfare, Amen.*