

DO YOUR BEST TO COME QUICKLY- COME BEFORE THE WINTER..2 Tim 4:9 &21

INTRODUCTION. Those of us who have lived in the tropics know of the growing sense of urgency that sets in before the rainy season is upon us. That's when travel can be difficult as roads become impassable and bridges unsafe.. and shallow-rooted trees keel over and fields are flooded.... and a damp muggy haze hangs over everything. Even here last month in my home town Doncaster and the South West of England unprecedented storms have created problems in what some have described as once in a lifetime. We saw people trying to help each other to get things done NOW for more was to come.

The urgency of **getting things done now** is always close at hand. ..a room needs decorating before visitors arrive. The coat should be bought before increased in price... I once heard two women talking on the metro -one said 'If I tell him I did well with bargains in the sale, he'll be pleased. at least its better than letting on I've spent a £100 !.. Seriously though, **in affairs great and small we are caught up in the quest to meet a deadline.**

Here in 2 Timothy **Paul** writes with the same **urgency**. He is in jail, a dying man, (v 6) and a man with only three close friends.

The UNSEEN MASTER whom he serves day and night-ever since he accepted the Lordship of Christ on the Damascus road.

LUKE his doctor and companion .. and then.....

TIMOTHY , a young Hebrew/Greek half caste whom he left in charge of the church in Ephesus. So he writes to ask Tim' for **his old travel-stained coat** and the **parchments**. **And to his request he adds the urgent postscript... do your best to come quickly... Come before the winter..**

PAUL knew that travelling during the stormy period was very dangerous.- no doubt the terrible ordeal of shipwreck on Malta would be etched on his mind. ***Euroquilla***, **the fierce North Easterly wind** was bridled by no master and come the winter had free reign to reek havoc on whom it would. Little wonder that ships crept along the coast, not venturing out into the open sea. **The winter would come down separating people until the spring. Maybe it was the Paul felt in his bones he wouldn't be around come the spring.**

Strange is it not, we usually think of **St. Paul** as the strong man of the show.

Powerful preacher, efficient administrator, wise counsellor, passionate advocate And yet despite all that suddenly we are faced with the other side, a very human side ... *He, Paul had needs which they could meet.* Never forget even the strongest among us need succour. Paul needed comfort, both material and spiritual... It was Dr Colin Morris who first made me sit up and notice the two requests...1. The cloak left behind at the house of Carpus in Troas- Was Paul, I wonder getting absent-minded in his old age? William Barclay reminds us that this cloak is a simple, circular garment with a hole for the head, rather like a poncho- very much the winter garment. He also asks for the Parchments, possibly the early Gospels.

Its strange how history has a way of repeating itself...a1500 years later **William Tyndale** was lying in prison in **Vilvorde in Holland**. He had been arrested, tried and condemned to death for having dared to give the people Bibles in their own language. It was a cold damp winter, so he writes to a friend... "Send for Jesus sake a warmer cap, something to patch my leggings a woollen shirt, and above all my Hebrew Bible".

So these very human requests from **Paul and Tyndale** remind us that material succour and spiritual help are basic needs of us all... BUT there is only a limited time to provide them.....which only friends could do.....That's where we come in!

1 MATERIAL SUCCOUR: Think for a moment..

How can we apply these things ? We have within our power a

great potential to encourage the happiness, security

and friendship for so many people if only we would act now. Colin

Morris reckons that some of the saddest words ever penned were inscribed by Thomas Carlyle over his wife's grave at the Old Kirk in Haddington.. they read " Oh that I had you with me for five minutes by my side that I might tell you all"... But whatever Thomas Carlyle had left unsaid, his wife was not to hear-**the winter [death] had intervened**. There is an urgency laid upon us to say NOW what we mean and do NOW what we intend..BUT we often dilly dally on the way.

PROCRASTINATION is the destroyer of genuine effort by others.. not only in the big issues but more often in the little things-the ordinary events... St Paul might well speak to us across the years.. Act now before the winter- before its to late...

For you my friend..Is there a letter you ought to write today?

An unresolved quarrel that ought to be cleared up

to save a relationship?
Is there a visit to a frightened soul that
might save them from gloom, despair or bitterness?

AND what about in the realm of community service-the sort of things that involve us 'off' the church premises where being a Christian is not so easy and yet in that very place is all the more compelling and important?

I ask you, is there a meeting you ought to attend- or a cause that could do with your weight to get things moving (not popular you say?) - but maybe for that very reason in ought to engage our interest)

Is there a small task you could undertake in a project?

Are there newcomers among us whom you ought to greet and get to know?

Clearly there is a need for urgency, and both history and the Gospels spell it out for us...John the Baptist came with the message:-

The axe is laid at the root of the tree.

He is gathering his wheat into his barn.

And his message to those questioning about what they should do..his reply was straight to the point...Soldiers...no intimidation/ no extortion/ no grumbles about pay/People.... Share goods and clothing with the needy.. Officials... Honest dealings at all times

Jesus too spoke in practical terms reminding us again that the Gospel is to be rooted in the life and affairs, good and bad for ordinary people. ..because it is - Good news for the Poor

it is recovery of sight for the blind

it is release for captives and oppressed

Material needs are important and our concern often depends on whether or not we are the haves or the have nots....! If in doubt just keep watching your T.V. for sooner or later we will be brought face to face with people staring into empty food bins or across blighted withered crops... *Yet its still only half the story* because it needs to be matched with a concern for **spiritual succour**.. to talk of one without the other is to only half address the problem and to 'sell people short'..

SPIRITUAL SUCCOUR is contained in the idea of the Parchment and the Book, with important things for ourselves, our neighbour and our world. It comes firstly as a challenge to us to commit our lives openly and honestly with no pretence... BUT it must go on from there....**otherwise we fail to grow in grace**.. The Christian life is more than warm thoughts and gentle dreams of Eternity We need to

prepare ourselves.. 'before the winter comes'. Paul's word in Ephesians 6: 10ff 'Finally be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might' is a continual reminder to Christians that there is a battle to be fought. Owen Chadwick in his biography of Michael Ramsay [a former Archbishop of Canterbury] quotes the primate.. "People ask me if I have ever felt like losing my faith. No: my faith is part of me. But faith isn't a state of ease and calm serenity. It is an adventure of ceaseless battling with troubles a peace of mind and serenity indeed but costly peace and serenity *in the midst of conflict*"

The sad thing is that history could parade before us a vast army of people who can be described as spiritual cripples who did not prepare for the assault course of life. I am not talking in physical or mental terms it matters not whether they are thin or fat, brilliant or dull.. BUT spiritually it matters a great deal. AND this must be our first priority before the winter! Attention to the Scriptures, to Prayer, to Worship and the Sacraments... for these are the things that give a true perspective to our lives. AND what about in the realm of growth I don't mean quoting scripture at people. I'm talking about ideas and ideals that ought to engage us *.Much of it is there in 'Fruitful Church'.*

Of course sometimes we are not sure if we want to make the effort. But its so worthwhile, believe me I've been there,. BUT we need to get on with it

An old Rabbi was once asked by his disciples when they should make their peace with God. He reflected for a moment then replied. A man should make his peace God one minute before he dies". But master.. We haven't the foggiest idea when we shall die."Exactly" said the Rabbi.. "So do it now!" Do it before the Winter.... **Amen**