

# 2 Timothy 4:1-21

Sunday 7/31/2016

The camp week was great, and a lot of fun things happened. Everyone had a great time, and I want to thank everyone for everything they did. So many of you sponsored kids to go to camp, and it was a great week. This year is completely different; I have had kids come up to me today wanting to be discipled, and everyone is ready to go. We are going to try to keep the fire alive in these kids and help them in any way we can with what God has done in their lives.

I did not have to think about what I wanted to preach today. My text is in 2 Timothy 4:1-21, and I want to begin by talking a little bit about the Apostle Paul.

## I. The Significance of Paul's Last Words

I have met so many preachers and normal Christians throughout the years whose favorite character in the Bible was the Apostle Paul. I honestly do not know that I have just one; mine works from week to week. But I certainly understand why so many people fall in love with Paul. Mel Sabaka, my father in the Lord, his favorite character was the Apostle Paul, and he would talk about that all the time. I understand because no other man, probably in the New Testament, has the insight into the ministry as Paul does.

We know that he was given the privilege of unveiling the concept of the New Testament church, him alone. God gave it to him, and all the New Testament churches start from him. Our church here follows the line all the way back to Antioch 13. We have talked about it many, many times. When you study his writings, you begin to see how he thinks, the mind behind him, why God picked him. He is one of the most unique men that ever lived down through history.

We see in his writings one of the things that had a profound impact on my life was seeing Paul writing about the things that were important to him. In 2 Timothy, he writes to a young man he had invested his life in, Timothy. He invested his life in him because Timothy, from all appearances, looks like he took over for Paul after Paul went home to be with the Lord.

The thing that always impressed me about the book of 2 Timothy was that this was the last thing Paul wrote before he went home to be with the Lord Jesus Christ. The last thing he was thinking about before he went home to glory was the young man that God had put in his life. The Bible talks about Timothy, Philemon, and Titus. Those are three men who the Bible records for you that Paul made an impact in their lives, but there are many, many others. Those three men write books because they make up for us the pastoral epistles. Those three men are pastors.

Paul's impact on so many people's lives was always a very impacting thing in my life to realize that the last thing he was thinking about, the last conscious thought he had, was a man that God had put in his life, particularly a young man that he had trained for the ministry.

## II. The Law of Last Mention

The last thing a man says in the Bible is a great study, but usually the last statement he makes will always be worth studying. In the Bible, I have told you about the law of first mention. The

first time you find something in the Bible, that usually unlocks something and lays something out for you. But at the same time, there is also what I call the law of last mention. That is simply the last thing that a man says in the Bible, or the last thing that God says, or the last thing that Christ says about somebody in the Bible, is usually very significant.

Take Hebrews 11. Hebrews 11 has been called God's great hall of fame. More appropriately, it should be called God's great hall of faith because the men who were famous in that chapter, there are sixteen of them, were men and women who exercised great faith in what God had told them to do. You will find that in Hebrews 11, these are the last things that God says about these sixteen people. The last thing He says about a man in the Bible is always very instructive. It really is.

I look at these people in Hebrews 11, and I see that not all of them, most of them, never really had a perfect life. A lot of them had struggles in their lives. A lot of them had problems in their lives. A lot of them had issues in their lives. But you know what I have learned over the years? We are all running a race. Sometimes we put so much emphasis on the things that people do when they make mistakes, and we hold them so accountable to it and do not give them a second chance to help them through things in life. But you know what I have learned? You are supposed to run the race, but the real issue is how did you finish? At the end of your life, it will not be about the times you and I fell. It will not be about the times you and I failed. It will be about the times that when you did fail, did you get back up and keep going? It will not be about how you started; it will be about how you finished. Paul in the Bible and the Bible itself talks about those things.

Have you ever seen the last thing that God said about David? The last thing in detail that God said about David was Acts 13:22, long after David had died.

*Acts 13:22*

*And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will.*

You know that David had some trouble in his life? David's life was not a pristine Christian life all the way through, no more than yours has been or mine will be. He had trouble with his family, had trouble with Saul, he had trouble with Uriah the Hittite, Bathsheba, all of those issues in his life, Absalom. The last thing God says about him, the last thing that God said in the Bible about David in any detail, is that he was a man after My own heart.

I have often wondered, I know this probably will not happen, but I have often wondered if sometime in the future there was a Third Testament. You have the Old Testament and the New Testament. If God wrote a book about the church age, I wonder what the last thing God would say about you and me. I wonder what the last thing that would be recorded about your life and my life. Would it be anger? Would it be bitterness? Would it be failure? Would it be disaster?

I remember the last thing that Jesus said to Israel. The last thing He said to Israel is one of the profound statements that was ever made in the Bible, found in Matthew 13. In the Old Testament, the last thing Jacob said and the last thing he did was in Genesis 49 when he

pronounced the blessing on the twelve tribes. Tremendous passage. Go sometime and look at the last word that Jesus said to Pontius Pilate before He was crucified. Incredible stuff. In other words, what I am saying is the last thing a person says always shows his perspective on things.

Moses writes the first five books of the Bible, but the last book that he writes is the book called Deuteronomy. Do you know what he does in Deuteronomy? It is probably the greatest of all five books that he writes. Do you know why? Because in that book, he gives his perspective. He shows you where Israel has come from. He tries to get them to look back and remember where they came from, who they are, and where they are going. It is an incredible book.

Do you know what is true in life? I like to read a lot of biographies about great men and people that found themselves in great times of turmoil who overcame the circumstances. I like to study and read a lot of biographies about military men, great military leaders. Everybody knows General Douglas MacArthur. He did a lot of great things. He brought us through the Pacific War in defeating Japan, and he brought us through Korea. He was a great general. But with all the things that he did, do you know the number one thing that everybody who knows anything about him at all remembers about General Douglas MacArthur? It was the last speech that he gave at West Point. The last thing he said, he was remembered for all down through history. When writers write about him or read about him or people talk about him, they always quote that last thing that he said. He said, "Old soldiers never die; they just fade away." Incredible.

We came from the Salvation Army camp last week. That is who runs that camp that we were at. The Salvation Army was started by General Booth back in the 1800s. It was an army to win people to Christ and to really take the Gospel to people. On his deathbed, and he was a great guy, great preacher, did a lot of great things, but he is remembered for the last thing that he said when he died. It was "Others." He was on his deathbed, and he wanted to address all of his people, which he always did on Christmas Eve. He was so weak and so tired, but they hooked up a microphone and put it over the radio because he wanted to speak to his people. He was so weak and so ready to go home to be with the Lord that he could only get one word out. But that one word summed up everything in his life. He said, "Others." Do you know what your life and my life ought to be about today? Others. When you and I go home to be with the Lord and we wind up with the judgment seat of Christ, do you know what ought to speak for you and me and our life with Christ? Others. Incredible stuff.

Bull Halsey, Admiral William Halsey, they called him the Bull. He was another South Pacific commander, a great guy. He brought us through the other side of the Pacific where MacArthur had the Central; he had the Southwest and went through some very tough times with Guadalcanal and early World War II. When he retired about 1946, he walked off that battleship, and the last thing he said to the hundreds and hundreds of men that had served under him as he said goodbye and they brought his colors down and folded them up and put him in that boat and the yeoman rode him to shore. The last thing that he said that everybody remembered when he looked at them after all they had been through, after all the great battles, all the great dark times, all the times they almost lost but had the victory. He looked at his men and he said, "Lest we forget."

Have you ever noticed the last thing that John ever said in the book of Revelation? Revelation 22? The last statement in your Bible? The last thing that is said that John said directly to you is, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." It is incredible, the last things in the Bible. The last thing a man says in his life will give his perspective of life. It is what he has gotten out of it, what he has seen, what he has learned. Many times, the last thing that he will say sums up the sum of everything that God has done in his life.

### III. Paul's Final Charge to Timothy

In the book of 2 Timothy, you have the last thing that Paul says before he goes home to be with the Lord. He is thinking about the young man or the young men that he gave his life to carry on his work. To me, this has always been a game-changing message. I heard this message forty years ago, and it changed my whole life. I was just a young guy back then, and I was looking all around and trying to figure out what was going on in my own life. I had just gotten right with God, and God was beginning to work in my life, and I was in a camp just like you were. I know the importance of what God can do in a camp because I know what He did in my life. I know what He did in Joe's life.

I will never forget, I sat down there one night and I heard a guy get up and preach, and he drew out the message. The message was about the last thing that Paul said, and the last thing that was found in 2 Timothy, and it changed my whole perspective of life. Forty years ago, I first heard this message. I have preached it many times. For me, it is holy ground. In the Bible, we talk about going back to Bethel where Jacob would go back to Bethel. We talk about how going back to Bethel is a picture of where we go back to when we get with God, when we just get alone with God. We may have some tough times in life, and we may get a little away from God, but then we always, like Jacob did, go back to Bethel. Jacob going back to Bethel is a picture where you and God are just like this. This message is my "back to Bethel" because I preach it to myself. For me, I look back and realize what an impact it made on my life. The last thing he says in 2 Timothy, he is thinking about the young men that God gave him.

Let us look at this and kind of walk down through here for a moment. 2 Timothy 4:1-21. I am going to brief some of these until we get down to where our message is going to be.

In verse 1, he says:

*2 Timothy 4:1*

*I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;*

He is giving him a charge. There are six charges that Paul gives in his writings, and you ought to look at them sometime. But he gives young Timothy a charge here, and Paul is preparing him to carry on the work of the ministry.

He says in verse 2 that you are to:

*2 Timothy 4:2*

*Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.*

That is really good advice. You ought to be ready anytime. We talked about this with kids last week; you ought to be ready anytime to be able to put out the Gospel.

He says in verses 3 and 4:

*2 Timothy 4:3*

*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;*

*2 Timothy 4:4*

*And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.*

We know that is true. It was true in his time.

He says in verse 5 that we are to:

*2 Timothy 4:5*

*But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.*

He is telling this to Timothy.

In verses 6, 7, and 8, he says:

*2 Timothy 4:6*

*For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.*

*2 Timothy 4:7*

*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:*

*2 Timothy 4:8*

*Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.*

Paul is getting ready to go home to be with the Lord. He went down to Jerusalem, got thrown into Roman jail, and was arrested and taken to Rome. That is where he wound out his life. We do not know exactly when, but we know the approximate time. It is obvious that he is executed by Rome, and probably the book of 2 Timothy takes place right around that execution. He says in verses 6, 7, and 8, "My time is at hand. I am ready to be offered. I fought a good fight. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness."

He comes down through verses 10 through 20 and talks about the brethren, brings up some personal matters. He talks about in verse 10 that Demas has forsaken him. He talks about in

verse 11 that Luke is the only one that is with him, the beloved physician who wrote the book of Acts and the Gospel of Luke. He says in verse 13, "Don't forget, I want the books and the parchments." Then he says in verse 14, "Alexander the coppersmith, he did me much evil."

Then in 2 Timothy 4:21, Paul's last statement. What a statement. I want to talk to you about Paul's last statement to Timothy. I want to talk about how it impacted my life in a practical way. When you look at this statement and you lift it out of these scriptures and you apply what he said to Timothy in a spiritual, practical way to your life and my life, my hope today, on this last day with all you young kids here and all you moms and dads here, is that you will leave here today with the same life-changing purpose that it gave me because it changed my life.

He says in 2 Timothy 4:21 to young Timothy, the last direct thing he says to him:

*2 Timothy 4:21*

*Do thy diligence to come before winter.*

John Biscat, would you stand up and ask God's blessing on our preaching today? Amen.

I have often wondered and thought, did Timothy ever get there in time? Paul said, "Do thy diligence to come before winter." The Bible does not say if he ever got there or not. This is the last thing Paul writes, the last thing Paul says. He is killed, he is beheaded at some point down the line. I thought to myself, I know their relationship; it was a father-son relationship. But I have often thought to myself as I think about this, I wonder if Timothy ever got there.

The night I heard it preached, Dr. Ruckman drew it out of these drawings that he did here, and he drew that thing up there, and he was making the same points that I want to make, and he showed that Timothy did not get there in time. He showed Timothy showing up late and Paul already being beheaded. It is a thing where many times all of us, when somebody needs something, when God needs something, when God makes the call to us, we all do the same thing. We put it off. Timothy, I think, might have. Maybe he stopped off to visit another church on his way to encourage those people. Maybe he got busy, and maybe he just did not get there. Maybe he did, I do not know. But I often think about it, or maybe he got there too late to do any good.

I know how hard it is when winter comes. I know how hard it is in Kansas City when winter comes. When you get a good winter, you folks up north, certainly you folks in Alaska and Lincoln and some of those places, when your winter comes, you get a winter. Sometimes it is hard to get around. You have a car, you have four-wheel drive; these people did not. I want to tell you something, in the Middle East, the winters get really bad sometimes. Why over there in Matthew 24:20, when he is talking about the tribulation and the Jew happened to run out of Jerusalem and the Antichrist chases them, he says:

*Matthew 24:20*

*But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day:*

It is hard to move. It is hard to travel in the wintertime.

## IV. Do Thy Diligence to Come Before Winter

For me, when I look at this and I see Paul saying to young Timothy, "Do thy diligence to come before winter," for me, it brings up something in my own mind that really challenged me that I want to talk to you about today. I want to take this passage, pull it out, make it a personal application to it in a spiritual way, and I want to give it back to you. I want to simply say this, folks: There are some things you need to do before winter gets here in your life. Because when winter gets here, there are some gardens you cannot plant. There are some golf games you cannot play. There are some races you cannot run. There are some ball games that you cannot be part of. There are some things if you do not do them in the springtime or the summertime or the very last of the fall of your life, you are not going to get done.

Psalm 1 says:

*Psalms 1:1*

*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.*

*Psalms 1:2*

*But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.*

*Psalms 1:3*

*And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.*

Your life has four seasons to it. You kids right now that went to camp, you are in the springtime of your life. My singles and some of you young married couples or young singles, you are in the springtime of your life. You get up to be about thirty or forty years old, you move into the summertime of your life. You get up into the fifty or sixty, you are moving into the fall of your life. You get over there in the seventies and the eighties and the nineties, you are in the wintertime of your life. I want to tell you something: When winter comes in your life, there are some things you cannot do anymore. My text says, "Do thy diligence to come before winter." Because when winter of your life gets here and your season of spring and summer and fall are gone, there will be some ball games you will not play anymore. There will be some places that you will not be able to go. There will be some things that you cannot do anymore in the wintertime of your life.

When winter gets here, it is hard to get around. When the wintertime of your life gets here, kids, things change; it is hard to get around. I think of the gray, old days of wintertime, the bare trees, the wind blowing down the streets. Taking my dogs out at night in December or February or January, that old wind going down the back of your neck and the leaves swirling around and blowing cold, damp. I have driven down the road on a dark Sunday afternoon in the middle of winter. It may be two o'clock in the afternoon, but those dark, ominous clouds covering those corn fields, and it is just bleak, it is just bare, it is just gray, it is wintertime. I want to tell you,

there are some things, kids, mom and dad, there are some things that in the springtime of your life, you better get done. My text says, "Do thy diligence to come before winter," because there is a time coming in the seasons of your life when you are not going to be able to do it anymore.

## ➤ 1.) Form Good Habits

I will talk to you young kids for a moment, I went to camp last week. I will tell you something, you better form some good habits before winter gets here in your life. You better form some good habits while you can. The habits you form as a young man and a young lady in the springtime of your life, if they are bad habits, they will destroy you when you get older.

Ecclesiastes 4:12 says:

*Ecclesiastes 4:12*

*And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.*

You take a little piece of thread right now that your mama sews with, and you can wrap it around your finger and snap it. You can take it and pull it. You take that same piece of thread and wrap it around your finger a hundred times, and you will die trying to break that thread. You can have a bad habit in your life, not deal with it, add another bad habit to it, wrap your whole life in your springtime around bad habits, develop those bad habits. Those bad habits will entwine themselves around everything in your life, and then there will come a time in your life when you are thirty or forty, and you will say, "I am going to live for God now." No, you will not. You have wrapped yourself into the habits.

I do not know if you ever saw this or not over in John 11. You have the story of the raising of Lazarus. I know in a doctrinal sense, Lazarus is a type of the restoration of the nation of Israel. I get that. But I do not know if you ever saw the rising of Lazarus as a picture in a practical way. In the New Testament, there are three people who were raised from the dead. In the Bible, when somebody is raised literally from the dead, spiritually, do you know what it is a picture of? It is a picture of you guys getting saved. It is a picture of you guys coming out of the darkness into the light, from the dead of trespasses of sin into a new life in Christ Jesus.

I do not know if you have ever studied or not. I want to tell you something, kids: The longer you wait to break the bad habits you have, the longer you wait, the harder it is going to be. You have them now in the springtime of your life where you are strong, you are smart, you have all your ability with you. Now is the time for you to form good habits because there is coming a time if you form some bad ones, they are going to run you.

I look over there in the New Testament. In Mark 5:40, there is a little twelve-year-old girl that is dead. Jesus comes in and raises her from the dead. She is twelve years old. She is up and on her way. Then I find another time in Luke 7:14-15, there is another guy here, looks to me about maybe twenty or thirty. He is dead. Jesus comes in and raises him from the dead. The Bible says that he sits up, and then they have to help him to walk. Then you come to John 11. Lazarus. He would be eighty-five, ninety years old. Jesus raises him from the dead. But he cannot move. Here

is a picture of you getting saved late in life, in the winter in life. He cannot move. Do you know why? Because he is wrapped up in grave clothes. That little girl, twelve years old, she got up, gave her doctrine, something to eat, and off she went. The younger you are when you start to form the right habit, the better off you are. That older guy, he had to get saved, he got saved, but somebody had to help him. Lazarus, he was wrapped up in all the grave clothes. A picture of all the things that we put in our life. The longer you wait, the harder it gets. Harder it gets.

Ecclesiastes 12:1 says:

*Ecclesiastes 12:1*

*Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;*

1 Timothy 4:12 says:

*1 Timothy 4:12*

*Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.*

Proverbs 2:2 says:

*Proverbs 2:2*

*So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding;*

Because there is a wintertime coming. Right now is the time to form the habit, do the right things. Put the right things in your life as you grow. Because there is coming a time in your life if you wait, when winter gets here, you will never get it done.

## ➤ 2.) Say What Needs to Be Said

I will tell you something else. I will talk to all of you now. There are some things you better say to some people before you cannot say it anymore. I know in the Bible the key phrase of everything in the Word of God, certainly for the church, is restoration. When you got saved, God restored you, the image that was lost in Adam. All your Christian life, God has, through a process of restoration. The whole Christian walk with God is nothing more than being restored, and then God restoring us on a daily basis with His grace and fellowship. Not salvation, but our walk with Him. God's people who so freely take that restoration will never give it to somebody else.

I will tell you something. There are some things you better make right with some people before wintertime gets here. Husbands, there are some things that you better take care of with your wife before you cannot. Wives, there are some things you better say to your husband before you cannot. There are some things you better tell your parents right now before winter gets here and you cannot say it anymore. I will tell you, there are some people you better thank. There are some people you better learn to forgive. There are some people you need to learn to say, "I am sorry" to. Tell them you love them before it is too late because when wintertime comes.

Mom and dad, you better tell those kids you love them now. You better show them every day of their life, every fifteen minutes. Kids, you better tell your mom and dads how much you love them while you still can. You better put your arms around them and show them how much you love them, how much they mean to you because I want to tell you something. Do not put it off. Do not wait because there is a time coming when wintertime gets here, you are not going to be able to do it anymore. Some things you better make right. Husbands, some things you better tell your wives. Wives, some things you better tell your husbands. You better forgive each other for some things.

Listen, kids, I lost my dad when I was twenty years old. You see me now, you know me the way you know me now, you love me for the way I am now and what God has done with us. But at twenty years of age, I was not a very lovable person. I thought I knew all there was to life. My whole goal was to make a military career out of the army. I wanted to spend my time in the army. When I was nineteen, they found out my dad had lung cancer. I will never forget, they brought me home on emergency leave, and I came in to see my dad. I had left my dad about a year and a half before as I went off to the army. My dad at that point was strong and was a steel mill worker. I will never forget. I walked on the porch that night after flying into Cleveland, Ohio, and catching a place down to Canton, went to my home, and walked in there, and there was my dad, who when I left the last time was a strapping 220-pound guy. Now he weighed about 110 pounds. Cancer had emaciated him.

But I was such a mess. I was sorry, I was sorry. My life was upset. My mom then told me that night that they had gone to whoever they went to to file the papers to get me out of the army because I was the only one left in the family, and my family needed me. Though I understood that, it bothered me because this was my life. I wanted to be in the army. I was so stupid at that point, as most of you are right now. I could not look past what I wanted. I could not see that God wanted me out of Uncle Sam's army because He wanted me in God's army. My mom filed all the papers. The Red Cross filed all the papers. I will never forget. I was supposed to turn my paperwork into my CO, and I just did not do it. I did not want out. I was thinking about me.

My commanding officer called me in, and he says, "Alexander," he says, "I have got this second letter. Why have I not processed this? Do you know why I have not processed it, Alexander?" "No, sir." "Because I have not got anything to process, Alexander. Where is the paperwork?" I said, "Sir, I did not turn it in." He says, "So you are going to allow me to take the heat because you did not turn it in?" I said, "I am sorry, sir, but I did not turn it in." In a moment, the whole thing turned. He took his glasses off and he said to me, "You do not want out of the army, do you, son?" I said, "No, sir. It has been my dream my whole life. I got this far. I want to go the distance." He says, "You are incredible. We have got a whole army for guys that want to get out and cannot. You are a guy who can get out and will not." He says, "Son, you go home and take care of your mom and dad. As of now, I am putting your paperwork through. You are a good soldier. You are a good man. Good men are hard to find. I am sorry to lose you, but your family needs you more."

Now you would have thought that meant something to me. It did not. No, I went back to Ohio, got out of the army, went back to my job. My dad got continually worse. I read the medical

report the doctor sent to my CO that said, "Mr. Alexander probably will not be alive in six months." I was a mess. I really was. I was the kind of guy that all I was thinking about was myself. Do not listen to me, kids. I had, back in the era of fast cars, John, I had a '67 GTO. It was the fastest car I ever owned. All these new fast cars were coming out. I am ashamed to tell you what I am about to tell you. I really am, but I feel like it is worth telling so you kids do not get in the same mess that I was.

I got looking around, and my mom was showing me because we knew dad was going to die. I found out in the fine print that when my dad passed away, all of our cars and everything was paid off. In the back of my mind, I was sorry my dad was dying and all those things. All I could focus on was the fact that when he was dead, I did not have to pay this car off, and I was going to go get me a new hot car. My dad died. They paid the car off. I went out and bought a brand new Camaro Z28, 1972. I got the car of my dreams. I got it all right, but then God did something in my life.

I went to church one day with my mom and went in and heard the message that old Tommy Thomas preached that I told you many, many times. God began to work on me. We got up to preach that morning, and he said, "I am going to preach to you on the second coming of Christ, and I have a question: Are you ready?" He died of a heart attack right in the pulpit, and the last time before he hit the floor, went home to glory, he screamed at the top of his voice and pointed his finger, "Are you ready?" I was sitting right in the back, and as far as I am concerned to this day, he was pointing to me, and I was not ready.

Boy, God began to work on me. I got right with God. Started going to church. That is when God put me with my Apostle Paul in my life, Mel Sabaka. I began to go to camp and began to do the right thing and help people. Every day I would go to work at the Hoover Company, and then I would drive home and eat real quick, and then I would get into that Camaro and drive over thirty miles over to camp, and I would do the Gospel and the stars with the kids, and I would help at camp, and I would lead the singing, and God was really using me. That Camaro was the hottest car I ever saw in my life. Black with silver stripes on it, Cragar mags all the way around, Mickey Thompson tires all the way around. It was hot. Had open headers on it. You could hear that thing coming from ten blocks away, and I would drive that little thing in there and park it in there. Shut that sucker off. But I really did not care about it at that point. God had changed my life.

That night was senior high camp, and Peter S. Ruckman threw out the message, "Do thy diligence to come before winter." I sat there and I listened, and I looked deep inside me, and I realized that I was wasting my life, and if I did not change some things, summertime was coming, fall was coming, and then winter was coming. I went out there that night, and I tell you, God was on my back.

Final thing with a little kid. I do not know who he was, do not even know his name. Just a little kid about fourteen or fifteen. I was walking over to my car, that Camaro, spoiler up the back, sitting up in the back, fired it up. It sounded like an F-16 lined up on the runway. I walked over to my car, and I was in shock. God knows when to put the right people in your world to make it worse when you need it to be worse. I was already dying. I was already hurting. About that time,

this little kid came up and he said, "Mr., is that your car?" And I said, "Yes, it is." He said, "Wow." He said, "What are you doing here in a place like this with a car like that?" That did it. Next week, I bought a 1972 Vega.

Not a day goes by in my life that I do not think about my dad. There is not a day in my life that I do not think about how selfish I was, how it was all about me, all that he did for me, the two jobs that he worked, twenty-one years in a steel mill, the sacrifices he made so I could be better and have a better life than him. I understand. It is all under the blood. I realized it was all part of God's plan. I realized that it was all God's working to get me through his death where I needed to be. I get it. I know today he is a cool man. He is happy. He is praising the Lord to see his boy preaching. But I want you to know something. I would give a million dollars today for just five minutes by that bedside to say, "Daddy, I love you. Daddy, thank you. Daddy, thank you for all you did." Too late. Wintertime.

I stand there in that grave cemetery. Look at that marker. Frank H. Alexander, 1914-1971. I stand there in the wintertime. Look at that gravestone, knowing that down in that ground is the man who loved me, who sacrificed for me. When he was dying, all I could think about was me. I will stand there and say, "Dad, I love you, man. I wish I could tell you. I wish I could show you. I know you know. I know you are up in heaven. But I would give everything I have for just five more minutes by your bedside to hold your hand and tell you how much I love you." Wintertime.

Kids, there are some things you better say to your parents. There are some things you better say and some appreciation you better show before you cannot. The mole leaves blowing across that grave. Wind whipping down that old road. There are times that I get on the internet, go to that Google map search or whatever it is, dial in that street access, and just look from a satellite view and keep pulling it down that old graveyard. To help my sermon or to hurt my sermon, whoever took those pictures for the satellite took them in wintertime. Snow all over those tombstones. Bare trees. Cold. Bleak. There are things you better say, some things you better do, kids, before winter gets here. There are some kinds of acts of kindness you better show before it is too late.

I read the story one time of an old farmer. Lived down in South Carolina around the turn of the century. Him and his wife were just good people. Did not have much. Did not have anything. Scratched a living out of the ground with their crops and everything. Just poor. One horse, one mule, one buggy, log cabin, tar paper shack. Did not have anything they could do just to keep their head above water. Every three months they would drive into town in their little buggy to get supplies that they had to have.

One day, he went in, wife went with him. He is ordering up, he is a gruff guy. He is your typical guy who all his life he worked hard. He was a no-nonsense guy. He is buying the things and making sure everything is right there and they did not charge him too much. He looks for his wife, and she is gone. He puts the things all out in the buggy, and he is kind of irritated where he cannot find her. He goes walking through, and you have the hardware store here, and then you have a little mercantile store over here where they have all kinds of stuff. He walks in there, and there she is. She is over there in the lace department looking at white gingham lace on a big roll. He walks up and he says, "Come on, we have got to go." She says, "Honey, could we just get

maybe a couple of yards of this? I would like to make a dress." He would say, "Absolutely not. We do not have time for that kind of stuff. Come on, let us go." She puts it back, gets in that buggy.

About six weeks later, seven weeks later, a couple of months, I do not know. She got a fever, and she died. After about being gone for three or four weeks, his friends did not see him around town anywhere. They got worried. One night they decided they better go out and check on him, make sure he was all right, losing his wife. It was a rainstorm, and they drove down there in their horses and their buggies, about twenty of them, to check on him, got to his house, and there was nobody there. House was dark. They got a little concerned, and one of them said, "Hey, down the road there, there is a light down there by the cemetery." So they said, "Well, let us go check it out." They drove down there, pulled up to the gate, pouring down rain, lightning, thunder, walked into that graveyard. There he was on his knees in front of her tombstone, weeping like his heart was going to come out of his mouth, and draped all over that tombstone was white gingham lace. Too late! Wintertime. There are some things you better say. There are some things. There are some acts of kindness. You better do before winter gets here.

### ➤ 3.) Serve God Diligently

I will tell you something else. There are some things you better do for God while you can. My text says, "Do thy diligence to come before winter." Psalm 1, as I already told you, says your life is like a season.

James 4:14 says:

*James 4:14*

*For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.*

Proverbs 27:1 says:

*Proverbs 27:1*

*Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.*

Jesus said in John 9:4:

*John 9:4*

*I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.*

The Bible says in Psalm 1 that you and me are like a tree. Once we are saved, we are like a tree planted by the river of waters that bringeth forth its fruit in its season. Apple trees do not bear apples in February. Pear trees do not give pears in January. When you and I hit the wintertime of our life, we cannot serve God anymore. My text says, "Do thy diligence to come before winter."

Do you know the greatest sin in the Bible? It is not something you do. The greatest sin in the Bible is never a thing anybody ever committed. The greatest sin in the Bible is a sin of omission. The worst sin in the Bible are not the things you do; the worst things in the Bible are the things you do not do. "Do thy diligence to come before winter." This message changed my life.

I have seen them stand by that casket. I have seen them look down. I have seen them hold that dead, cold body. I have seen them kiss that cold brow. I have seen them put letters in there saying the things in a letter that they never could say while they were alive. I have seen them weep and cry and hold their hands. I have seen them wail as they closed that casket lid, thinking in their heart, "If I just had five more minutes." Wintertime. Too late.

The Bible says in Psalm 90:10, talked about a couple of weeks ago:

*Psalms 90:10*

*The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.*

It says that your life and my life are threescore and ten, seventy on the average. Then we are told to number our days and apply our hearts unto wisdom. The wisdom of life. How much time we really can give God. I know for you kids, probably some of you adults, seventy years sounds like a long time. But have you ever applied your hearts to wisdom and numbered those days? Let us just take my case for instance. I was twenty years old before I got right with God. Now I have fifty. They say that you sleep a third of your life, that is eighteen years. Now you just have thirty-two. You eat five years of your life, now you have twenty-two. Twenty-two years out of seventy, and that is not counting the downtime of being out of fellowship, being on vacation, ball games, parties, and all the other things we do. Apply your hearts unto wisdom, number your days. At the very most, what, fifteen to twenty years you really give God. Wow. Out of a lifetime.

#### ➤ 4.) Lead Your Family

I will tell you something else. There are some things you better do as a family before you cannot do them anymore. Like pray together, minister together. You young couples, you better get the last four weeks down and see that child as God's heritage, and the fruit of your womb is His reward. Dad, there are some things you better lead your family right in before you cannot do it anymore and winter gets here. I have seen it too many times. You do not do it, and then lose those kids, and then you get heartbroken and cannot try to get it back and try to get it back, and you cannot. It is wintertime.

The greatest story of that in the Bible is in Genesis 19, old Lot. Old Lot lived down in Sodom, and he was as worthless and worldly as any man ever was. He got a message from God one day. That message from God says, "You better get your act together because My judgment is going to fall on Sodom, and you better get up and get your family out of here." Now where he did not care, now where all his life he was one of the brethren down in Sodom, and he was all with everybody else. Now suddenly he has got Jesus in his heart, and he runs down there to his kids who live in that house, and in Genesis 19:14, he comes up and he beats on that door in the

middle of the night, pulls that station wagon up, tells his wife to get the tailgate down, get the luggage in, and he says to those kids:

*Genesis 19:14*

*And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons in law, which married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons in law.*

Who, Lot? Your dad has a message from God? Wintertime. There will come a time, dad, when you do not take your role and do what you need to do, that when really push comes to shove and it really starts to happen and you want to change it, wintertime, no credibility. My text says, "Do thy diligence to come before winter."

## V. The Church's Legacy and Future

I made a lot of mistakes in my life, dumb things. But I thank God every day of my life for God allowing me to build this church right before the wintertime of my life gets here. Forty years of my life have been dedicated to taking young men and young ladies, building them in the Word of God, sending them out across this country, across this world. I am sixty-six, and I can still do a lot of things. I still play volleyball, softball. I can get some things done. I am no fool. I know that I have more days behind me than I have in front of me.

I have tried to build my people to believe and love a book that God gave us. I have always tried to give you the Word of God just the way it is. I have been hard on you, but I have been fair with you. I have never asked you to do anything that I was not willing to do myself. I have always led from the front. I have never led from the rear. I train you to be leaders. I watch you with people. The endless hours you give to others, the way you handle them, the way you amaze me how without even me being involved, you just do exactly what needs to be done the way I would have done it.

I watched you at camp last week, the planning that went into it, the work that you all did, the teamwork. Nobody getting their nose bent out of joint because they did not get to do this or did not do that. We just dedicated to the Word of God of changing these little kids' lives that God gave us. The counselors get into the Bible when they do it, and they teach it. I preach, and people come forward. But how about the craft people out there that spend those endless hours showing them how to put those little crafts together? How about John and Betsy and the kitchen people over there that while they are over there doing their thing, they are laboring and cooking the food and getting it ready and cleaning it up, getting it all done? It is everybody. It is everybody. You are loyal to the Word of God, to the Lord Jesus Christ, to this church, and to me as your pastor, that you trust me to be God's man and follow me as God leads me.

I know we get our idiots here just like any other church. Whenever you have light, you have bugs. But the desire of my heart has always been to build you strong and solid and straight, to give you the best chance you could have as a young person, as a young single, as a young couple, as a mom and dad with children. I watch so many of you grasp that vision, carry it to your

families. This work, this church, is solid with the leadership that will carry on long after I am gone.

I want you to know, I have no plans of retiring. I think a pastor that gets to a point in his life when he retires probably should have never got into pastoring in the beginning. This is not a job like any other job. God did not call me until I was sixty-five and could collect Social Security. God called me until I could not preach anymore. God called me that there was no breath left in me. There may come a day that I cannot stand in this pulpit anymore. There may come a day when I cannot preach anymore, but it will never be because I am down in Palm Springs or on some golf outing someplace because I am retired.

One of my heroes in the Bible is Joshua and Caleb. Caleb is an incredible guy. Not a lot said about him in the Bible, but enough said to know that he is my hero. He fought all through the battles with Joshua, fought everything. Over there in the book of Joshua, he is now eighty-five years old, eighty-five years old, eighty-five years old. While most pastors would be out on a golf course or a circuit out there someplace, eighty-five years old. He goes up to Joshua and he says, "I do not know if you forgot this or not, but you promised me Mount Hebron as my inheritance, that mountain. I am eighty-five years old. I want my mountain. I have stayed here. We fought the battles. We whipped everybody. That is my mountain. I want that. I want that mountain." He did not say, "I want a little cabin down in South Missouri." He did not say, "I want to buy me a little place down here and get a condominium where I can have timeshare." He says, "I want that mountain." Joshua said, "It is your mountain. Go take it." The last thing you see, the last thing you find in the Bible about him, and the last thing is always important. He is heading up those mountains to claim what is his. Eighty-five years old. He did not retire. He retired. "I want this mountain." He went up there by himself, sword in the hand, glittering his eye, with a smile on his face saying, "That is my mountain. God help anybody that is on my mountain."

This work, this church, will go on. The wintertime of my life, and it will come. It will come for me, and it will come for you, and it will come for all of us. Run the race as hard as you can while you can. Kids, learn from the mistakes of others. Learn from the things that you see happening in school with your friends that you know are not right. Learn from your own mistakes. Get into these groups of accountability and let us help you. Let us be the buffer for what is coming your way. Mom and dads, get on your tower and stand your watch. Keep what God has done in your child's life this last week alive because there is a wintertime coming where you will not be able to do it.

Back in the 1920s and the 40s, the United States Army was divided up into blocks of regiments in different theaters of operation, and they were called a corps. A corps may have anywhere from ten, twelve divisions in it, and a four-star, three-star general will be over the corps. In his last speech at West Point, and that was really home for Douglas MacArthur, all he knew was West Point. He went there, he played ball there, he got his bars there. All of his life when he would come back to the States, that is where he would go. When he spoke the last time at West Point, he said this in his closing remarks, right before he said, "Old soldiers never die; they just fade away." Then he said, "And I as an old soldier now just fade away." But he said to all of the young men that were there, some two thousand of them, two thousand five hundred, all wearing gray

uniforms, they call it the long gray line. He said, "Now farewell, I bid you farewell. After sixty years of the long gray line, I now leave you. But he says, 'No, and when I pass over the river to the other side, know that in the final moments of my life, I will have in my heart and on my lips three things: The Corps, The Corps, The Corps.'" His whole life was the army. His whole life was the men he commanded. He wanted them to know that when he left this life, he would be thinking of them.

What a contrast to the Apostle Paul, who when he is ready to meet the Lord Jesus and go home to be with the Lord, he has finished his course, he has run his race. The last thing he is thinking about is the young men that he invested his life in. I want to say to you, thank you for who you are. Thank you, all of you, for allowing God to change you, my people. Thank you for allowing God to heal your marriage, take away your addiction, take a life that was headed for disaster and turn it around for one that is headed to glory. Thank you so much for making what is coming in my life, the wintertime, so rich.

I tell you, like Paul, you cannot be with people like MacArthur was with his, like Paul was with his, like I am with you. The last conscious thoughts I have as I pass from this life to the next one will be my family and you, the corps, the corps, the corps. The men and women who have made up the corps of this church, who I have complete knowledge and satisfaction that if Jesus carries His coming, that this work will go on way beyond me and way beyond some of you. I told your kids last week the reason why camp is so important to me because these kids, if Jesus does not come within this group, the pastor of this church, the deacons, the leaders, the ones that will take over when I am gone, when you are gone, if Jesus does not come. That is why this message is so life-changing. That is why this message brings everything back to a reality that there is a wintertime coming in our life.

We think that we have the rest of our life. We always put things off. We procrastinate and all the things that we do, but I am telling you, my friends, my co-laborers, my fellow soldiers, I say unto you today, your kids and you, the parents, "Do thy diligence to come before winter." You better get some things done while you still can. You kids need to start forming some habits before you get to the point you do not want to worry about it anymore. You parents need to see what is being offered here for your kids to help support you in what you want to do. There is not one parent in this room, I do not believe it, that wants their kid to wind up being a disaster. Then why do they? Because there is a wintertime coming. There are the things that we have to do as a church. There are things that you have to do as a parent. There are things that these kids have to do. We need to work together. We need to pull together to make sure that they get the best chance they can.

Every head bowed and every eye closed. I want to say to you today with every head bowed and every eye closed, nobody looking around, every eye closed, maybe you are here today and you do not know for sure if you die right now that you would go home to spend eternity with the Lord. We had a bunch of kids saved at camp last week, and they are fired up and ready to go. We have the discipleship for them, we have activities for them, we have singles and young men and young ladies who are going to help them, encourage them, be mentors to them, find out what your goals are and help implement those goals. But maybe you are here this morning and you have never trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as your own personal Savior.

I am going to be down here in just a moment, and we are going to move on, but I would like to ask you. There is nobody looking around but me and the Lord obviously speaking in your heart today. If you are here today and you say, "Bob, I do not know for sure if I would die right now, I would go to heaven," would you just lift your hand, let me pray for you, put it back up, put it back down till I acknowledge it, and then we will move on. Anybody? "I am not sure if I died today. Here is my hand." Anybody at all? Just going to wait for a few moments. I know we had a great week last week, but I just do not want to pass this moment without asking because there is a wintertime coming. Anybody at all? God bless you. Thank you, pal. Anybody else? I am not sure. One brave man raised his hand. Anybody else? Anybody else?

Moms and dads, you need to think about what God did last week. I told you the last night of camp, I fulfilled every promise I told you I would. I told you what God would do last week with your kid, and He did. Now it is up to you. I can help you, I can support you, I can give you all the things I will, but I cannot replace mom and dad in a kid's life. You are going to have to get your own priorities. You are going to have to look at your own wintertime. You are going to have to look at things and say, "Hey look, there are some things that we have got to change," and you are going to have to be willing to change them. There is some attitude that is going to have to go. There are some things that need to be said, some things that need to be done before wintertime gets here. You need to think about that today. You need to take that with you. Just as I did some forty years ago, that message just pierced my heart. As I walked out in that parking lot, God had that little kid just put the icing on the cake, and I was done, man. I was done. Are you done? What will it take in your life before you realize your responsibility of what you have got to do?

The young man that raised his hand, every head bowed and every eye closed, would you look at me, son? I love you, buddy. If you want to know for sure how to be saved, I have got a guy right back here, and your pal can come with you, take you back in the room and open up the Bible and show you how you can know for sure. Would you like to know? God bless you. Just stand up and go on about. Marcus, go with him. Danny is back there. Just take him back there with you. God bless you, son. God bless you. Danny, do not take him in the high school room, Danny. Take him back in my office. I need a high school room.

Father, we do thank you. Praise you for the Lord Jesus. Lord, help us to know that there is a wintertime coming in all our lives, and we need to get some things done before winter. I do not know if Timothy ever got there. I would like to think that he did. But I do not know if he did. I do not know if he got done what his father asked him to do before his father went home to be with the Lord. But Lord, I want to know that I want to do what my Father wants me to do before I go home to meet Him. I want to be faithful. I want my people to be faithful. We want to do our diligence to do everything we can before winter comes as a church. Because our time is coming, and we will not be able to do it anymore. We will not be able to go that extra mile. We will not be able to go that distance. We will slow down. I am slowing down right now. But Lord, help us. Help us in the twilight of our lives to be faithful. But we will only be faithful in the twilight of our lives if we are diligent in the springtime of our life. Help us, Father. Help us to be good students, good parents, good kids, good men. Good moms and dads. Good singles. Good folks who just want to do in these last days what God has called us to do. Thank you for our church.

Thank you for the men and the women in it and for all that they do for you. What a privilege it is for me to be their pastor. I thank you and praise you in Jesus' name for His sake we ask it. Amen. God bless you. You are dismissed.