



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

7643 Huron River Drive

Dexter, MI 48130

734-426-8480

Come Before Winter II

2 Tim. 1:7-10

November 6, 2005

By Matt Hook

This church talks a lot about doing things for God. We're a bunch of doers. Newkirk Hall and the Christian Ed. Building were built by the congregation members themselves! People here value doing things for God. But you may be here thinking "Hey, if I can just make it through today, I'll be doing plenty! And for some of us, I believe that's right. But for others, I worry that we're living frustrated lives, because we're so out of touch with the reality of our spiritual lives. We want to be where the action is; we want to experience God; but we just wind up sparse. Playing it safe. Spiritually emaciated, or dull.

During the Depression a man named Yates owned a sheep ranch in west Texas. Because he did not earn enough money to make his ranching operation pay, Mr Yates was in danger of losing his ranch. His family, like many others, had to live on government subsidy.

As he grazed his sheep on the rolling hills of west Texas, he no doubt worried about how he would make ends meet. Some surveyors approached Mr. Yates and asked permission to dig a wildcat well. He signed a lease, and they drilled. At 1100 ft. they struck a huge oil reserve and that first well gave over 80,000 barrels a day. Many subsequent wells gave more than twice that much. The ranch was literally on top of a black gold mine. Mr. Yates owned it all the day he purchased the land and received the oil and mineral rights of the property.

He was a multi-millionaire living in poverty. The problem was, he did not know the oil was there. He owned it, but he did not possess it.

What a tragic, but accurate example of the Christian life. The moment we become children of God through faith in Christ, we become heirs of God, and all of His divine supernatural resources are made available to us. Everything we need, including power, love, and even self-discipline to be men and women of God is available to us. But most of us continue to live in self-imposed spiritual poverty because we don't know how to dig into those spiritual resources.

The tragedy is we've got the Giver of Life *within* us, when we've got faith in Christ. In order to grasp what we've already got, we need to look no further than the Holy Spirit. We need to know that He is powerful and available, like air. We live in spiritual poverty without him, like the sheep farmer on the oil field. Who is God's Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit *is not* a ghost, just floating around in our lives with no purpose, not an "it," not passive, not imaginary, and not a substitute for God. The Holy Spirit *is* a distinct personality. When Jesus left the earth and

sent a Helper, like Himself, the Helper came and became a part of the disciples' lives deep within. No longer near them, like Jesus was, but *in* them. The Spirit is active and involved. What does He do? He mobilizes and empowers people. He is hard at work convicting us, guiding us, instructing, making God known, opening the meaning of the Bible to us, and making Christ famous, just to name a few! The Spirit is real and relevant. Remember, just because we can't see the Holy Spirit, doesn't mean He's not there or is not real. Just before Jesus' ascension back into heaven, He told His disciples, "*you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth*" (Acts 1:8). The Spirit is no imaginary, vague hope; that is a promise from our Savior. The Holy Spirit is Deity. Imagine what it means to have the presence of the living God within you?

Stop for a minute and think about this. The third member of the Godhead, the invisible, yet all-powerful representation of deity, is actually living inside your being. His limitless capabilities are resident within you, since he dwells within you.

Do you think there's anything you can't handle? Do you think God's Spirit wants you to go through life fueled by fear or guilt? Of course not! Paul reminded Timothy of this before he asked him to come before winter, in his last known correspondence to 2 Timothy: *1:7 "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. 8 So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, 9 who has saved us and called us to a holy life-- not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, 10 but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."*

When Paul wrote these words, he was in prison; transferred from house arrest to the dungeon in Rome. Dark, cold, damp, with the only light to his cell coming from the slats in the ceiling. And there by the dim light, he takes his pen and begins to write. Paul knows his time is up. He's awaiting a certain execution. He asks Timothy to come before winter. Pick up the torch. Carry on. But please, come before winter. But before He asks Timothy for anything, Paul reminds Timothy that God has given him a spirit of power, a spirit of love, and a spirit of self-discipline.

Paul reminds Timothy that God's given him good gifts for leadership. Timothy, young and timid, felt overwhelmed by his leadership role. Today, Timothy needs to fan into flame those God-given gifts and use them without fear or shame, because Timothy is to advance this gospel beyond where Paul has taken it. Today, God is calling YOU and me to advance this Gospel beyond where it has ever been! You and I have been created for such a time as this.

Listen to Paul's words again: *7 God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. 8 So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord* God always gives us what we need to lead. God didn't give Timothy the nervousness he felt; that came either from Timothy's own baggage or from the evil one himself. Instead, God equipped Timothy with love, power, and self-discipline. God has already given you everything you need to accomplish the job that He created you for! He empowers us before he ever expects anything from us. God gives everything you will ever need before He asks it of us. But listen how He does it, as Jesus himself explains in his parables of the Kingdom in Matthew 13:44 *"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. 45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. 46 When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."*

Here's how it goes: You realize our need for Jesus. He comes to you and says I love you, and I freely give you my life in exchange for yours. My death will take care of your death. I ask you for your heart and your trust. And when we realize how incredibly good His words are, we say "Yes Lord! Take all of me!" And He says "Okay. First, why don't you give me your house." And we say "Sure, Lord. Use it for your glory." And then He

says “And I’ll need your cars.” (Okay). “And what about your job. Is that mine?” (I guess so.) “How about your hobbies?” (Hm, okay). “And the rest of your wealth.” (Yikes. Okay). How about your future? Your family? Do they belong to me?...And eventually, if we’re growing we say yes, even that. And He says “Good. They all belong to me, and all of my promises belong to you. Now. Here. I don’t need your car right now. Would you drive it—for me? And your house. Here are the keys. Remember, it’s Mine, but I’m giving it to you to use—for me. And your job. And your future. And your family. They are all Mine. But I’m going to ask you to take care of them for me. Will you? Will you? And when you and I say “Yes, Lord.” We are agreeing to be His stewards of all that He has entrusted to us. I still am amazed God trusts me with so much! But He does. It’s a goldmine. Hold it lightly. It’s not ours. It’s God’s.

Like Timothy, we are being asked to “come before winter,” and bring what Paul needed; even to him in prison. How do you do that? You hold *tightly* to God’s Spirit. You hold *loosely* to everything else, and live in God’s power, love, and self-discipline. That’s one thing the church helps us to do.

Every person who joins this church makes a pledge: to uphold it this church. What does that mean? It means you and I pledge to sustain it, to defend it, to encourage it, to endorse it: with your prayers, your presence, your gifts, and your service.

1. **Your prayers:** you must pray for our church. When you pray, you give God room to work. You bring divine resources to bear. You use the only weapon we have to bring strongholds down. “*3 For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. 4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*” 2 Cor. 10:3-5.
2. **Your presence:** you must participate in our church. One definition of church is family of God, brothers and sisters in Christ. And don’t you know the trouble that comes when one of the members of the family doesn’t make it to the reunion! (EX. 20th H.S. reunion). Every time we meet for worship, it is a ritual of reunion with one another. Our worship is not the same without you! Attend worship unless you are sick or out of town. Participate in at least one activity to help you grow in your faith. Give of your time in Christian service at least once a year. Come before winter!
3. **Your gifts:** you must bring your unique talents and gifts to bear. There is nothing accidental about you. Just as Timothy was responding to God’s purpose by coming before winter to Paul, you and I have the equally important role of being where we are today, using *our* gifts. Your spiritual gifts, your heart passions, your abilities, your personality, and your experiences are all gifts that you can offer to Christ. It also does include your monetary gifts. Jesus himself said “*Where your treasure is, there is your heart also*” (Matthew 6:21, Luke 12:34). If your heart and soul are connected to what you and I give money to, it means our checkbooks are theological documents. It tells people what we put faith in, what we pour our heart and soul into, and where our trust lies. I know we have varying **levels of comfort** with this process. We have people at a variety of places on their journeys. We have those who are a part of the company of...
 - a. The Captured—chomping at the bit to take the next step in faith to build the kingdom.
 - b. The Committed—solidly growing the kingdom, enjoying their life as a part of DUMC.
 - c. The Conflicted—knowing the truth of the Gospel, wondering what their next step is.
 - d. The Curious—checking out to see if this is the church for them.
 - e. The Crowd—wondering if the claims of Christ are true.

- f. We will say—If these last two are you, we just ask you to bear with us over these next couple weeks, taking care of family business and God’s ministry.
4. **Your service:** There is much work to be done! “5 *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*” Philippians 2:5-7.

So come before winter. Don’t be embarrassed to speak up for our Master. Take your share of suffering for the Message. We can only keep on going by the power of God, after all, who first saved us and then called us to this holy work. It was all His idea, a gift prepared for us in Jesus long before we knew anything about it. Be God’s steward. Care for His things, His people, His message. Let us pray: “Lord, we know you have empowered us to live fulfilled lives beyond anything we can manage. So let us come before winter. Let us come today, that all may know your power and love in their lives as well. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”