

Dear Friend,

Today is one of those days when I find myself overflowing with joy!

Last Saturday many of us witnessed the incredible blessing of the Lord on Summit International School of Ministry in Grantville, Pennsylvania. I suppose you could say it is the legacy of Pastor David Wilkerson's revelation, in the latter years of his ministry, of the power of the new covenant.

There is no substitute for freedom in the Christian life. In John 8:32, Jesus said: "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Freedom was all over the faces of the students receiving their graduation diplomas. Many of them testified of being set free from fear, free from guilt, free from the sense of powerlessness and limitation that often accompanies those who have not fully understood the victory of the cross. They headed out full of faith and vision, prepared, as the school motto teaches "to live for the benefit of others."

I encourage you to take some time to visit the school's website (summitpa.org). Times Square Church is committed to seeing this school prosper. I knew in my heart that graduation day that I was witnessing the hope we all should have for the future.

Have a wonderful day.

Yours, in Christ,

Pastor Carter Conlon

JESUS, TAKE THE STONES FROM MY HANDS

by Carter Conlon

"Jesus went unto the mount of Olives. And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them. And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, they say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act.

"Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground.

Forgiveness is directly linked with mountain-moving faith.

"And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw

none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (John 8:1–11).

Forgiveness—that is what this story is all about. How important is forgiveness? Well, very simply, without it we are not saved. It is conclusive in the Scriptures that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We have fallen short of who we were created to be, of how God designed our lives to be lived, of what kind of testimony we should have here on earth. We are truly amazed when we come to a place of understanding the depths of our sin yet recognize how God, in His mercy, chose through His Son to forgive us.

Forgiveness is also directly linked with mountain-moving faith. Jesus once told His disciples, "...Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe...he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore...What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses" (Mark 11:23–25). Jesus was saying, "I am willing to give you

faith that can move mountains—all those things that stand before you and hinder what your life is destined to be. Whatever you are lacking, I will supply. But when you come to Me, if you have anything in your heart against others, forgive them, that your Father in heaven may forgive your trespasses.”

Without forgiveness, we cannot remain in the life flow of the blessing of God.

It is clear that without forgiveness, we cannot remain in the life flow of the blessing of God. Jesus went on to say, *“But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses”* (Mark 11:26). That does not mean that you lose your salvation every time you struggle with unforgiveness, for it is a struggle that no one is immune to. However, it does mean that when we harbor unforgiveness in our hearts, a sense of well-being is lost. That life flow and ability to hear from God becomes hindered because ultimately the kingdom of God is all about forgiveness.

■ **AN OUTWARD DISPLAY**

Picture for a moment the scene in our opening text: Jesus is sitting in the temple teaching the people when suddenly in bursts some scribes and Pharisees. Keep in mind that the scribes and Pharisees were the keepers of the law—the ones who were supposed to represent the testimony of God in the earth. To their credit, they started out with the desire to preserve the Word of God. Fearing that it might eventually devolve into something other than what God had originally

meant, they set out to be purists. They intended to guard the Word and to exemplify what was written in the text of Scriptures that they had up until that time. However, they ended up being more of an example of how religious zeal and incomplete obedience to the full revelation of God in the Scriptures can leave people bearing very little resemblance to Jesus.

Into the midst of the crowd they came, bringing a woman who was of the family of faith but who obviously had fallen and failed. Casting her down at the feet of Jesus, they said, “This woman claims to belong to the family of Abraham, part of the seed of God’s testimony on earth, but we caught her in the very act of adultery. Our Scripture says that she should be condemned and stoned to death. What do you say, Jesus?” The Word says that they asked this question in order to test Jesus and have reason to accuse Him. Ironically, they were quoting the Word of God, but they were arguing with the author—trying to tell Him what He meant when He wrote the Book.

Consider as well the outward appearance of the scribes and Pharisees in this whole scene. They would have been spit-and-polished, with everything pristine—their garments pressed with precision, the borders of their sleeves and skirts measured to exactly the right length. They had prayer shawls over their shoulders and prayer beads attached to their sides so that they would be known as people of prayer. Standing there adorned with all of this paraphernalia, they also had one more thing—they had stones in their hands. Or at least they had stones very close at hand, ready to condemn anyone who failed to meet their religious ideals.

■ **REWRITING THE SCENE**

Now contrast this to Jesus, who, according to Scripture, identified

with the common man. He was made in our likeness, He took upon Himself our frailty, and He understands our weaknesses. He had no outward display—no symbols of prayer and obedience—except the manifestation of the full power and purpose of God.

If we are found with stones in our hands, we will not have any power to make a difference.

As a carpenter’s son, Jesus likely wore regular workman’s garments. There was probably dirt around His knees since He had stooped down to write on the ground with His finger. Although we do not know exactly what He wrote, we do know that it stung the conscience of the religious but gave hope to a woman who had fallen. In other words, Jesus rewrote a scene of judgment and death into a place of forgiveness and hope. He rewrote this woman’s future—perhaps giving her the reassurance that her past as well as present frailties were still covered by the mercy of God, for she knew she was a sinner in need of a Savior. On the other hand, those standing by with the stones had long lost the understanding that they themselves were outside of the kingdom of God, having failed to represent His heart of mercy.

Jesus could not have rewritten this moment in history if He, too, had been holding stones. The same holds true for you and me. If we are found with stones in our hands, we will not have any power to make a difference or to rewrite the future; we will be unable to

represent God in our generation. After all, how can we represent a kingdom that is established on a foundation stone of forgiveness if there is unforgiveness in our hearts? It is simply not possible, which is why we must come to a place of total forgiveness. Of course, this is never easy. It means that we must learn to overcome grievances that have been learned or personally experienced—sometimes deeply embedded over the course of our lifetime.

■ HOW TO LET GO

I remember a time when I was betrayed by somebody whom I loved and trusted. The betrayal was so deep in my heart that it took me about a year to get over it. I cannot tell you how many times I went before God and said, “Lord, I am not even at forgiveness yet—I am dealing with trying not to hate somebody. You have to help me.” No matter how many times I attempted to put those stones down, my hands simply would not let them go. If I succeeded in throwing them down for a moment, it was as if a bungee cord was attached to them, and they eventually bounced right back up into my hands again.

Nevertheless, I persisted in the battle, not willing to be a hypocrite in the kingdom of God. I found myself in the same place over and over, praying the same kinds of prayers, until one day, the Lord spoke to my heart: “Here’s how to do it. Turn your hands over and let Me take the stones away.” I realized at that moment that it was impossible for me to put them down in my own strength. Only the Lord could take away the stones, and I found that He was willing to do it.

The Scriptures speak of another man who had stones in his hands. He dwelt in the mountains and in the

tombs—one is a high place and the other is as about as low as you can go on the earth (see Mark 5:1–5). However, instead of casting his stones at other people, he was cutting himself with them. It is a picture of a person who hates himself for what he has done and for what he is becoming. Just like the Pharisees, this man needed the courage to say, “Jesus, take these stones from my hands.”

Likewise, many Christians today are unwilling to forgive themselves for the things they have done in the past. Although the Lord has cleansed them, they persist in calling themselves unclean. God alone can give them the grace to let go of the past—to release the stones from their hands.

■ REPRESENTING CHRIST IN THE DAYS AHEAD

Without forgiveness at the core of our being, we can talk about Jesus, but we cannot represent Him. People who merely talk about Jesus become concerned solely about the exterior—about their own reputation, about being called, “Teacher, Teacher” and having the best seats at banquets (see Matthew 23:6–7). These things become the whole focus of their life. But the people who truly represent Jesus are the ones bending down, writing in the sand. They are rewriting into people’s lives the mercies of Almighty God, no matter what they have done or how they have fallen.

I believe very soon many prodigals will be returning to the house of God—men and women who perhaps gave their lives to Christ when they were young, yet somehow ended up on a wrong path. They took the life of Christ and went far beyond the borders of where they should have been living—but not beyond the reaches of God’s love. And now the Lord is giving His church the

opportunity to represent Him, offering these people hope for the present and rewriting their future. Just as the father welcomed the prodigal son when he came home, we can put our arms around others, covering their failures and empowering them to become everything that God is calling them to be. We can put a robe over their shoulders, shoes on their feet, and invite them to join us on the journey. But before we can do this, we must put down our stones.

If we end up embracing any part of this system that is throwing stones at each other, we will no longer represent the Christ who went to a cross.

I don’t know about you, but I do not want to misrepresent Christ in this world. Yet if I am ever going to err, let it be on the side of mercy. Let it be mercy that rewrites my life and the life of everybody God desires to touch through me. I want to be a bridge builder, not a bridge destroyer. I want to see the church come to life once again in our generation—every race, every nationality, every denomination coming together as one body in Jesus Christ for this final moment of time. This means that all of us must drop our stones—denominational stones, racial stones, all the grievances that we have been holding on to. By the grace of God, we must be willing to stoop down, get our hands and knees

dirty, and start rewriting the future in people's lives.

It all begins by holding up our hands and saying, "Jesus, take the stones from my hands. I know that I do not have a right to carry these, but I cannot put them down. You have to take them from me." Remember, Jesus is not angry with your frailty or your struggle. All He is asking is that you simply turn your hands over and trust Him. Trust Him to take away any unforgiveness in your heart, any self-condemnation, any inner judgments that you may not even be aware of. It is God alone who can help you to forgive and bring you into this place of mercy and faith that He speaks of. It is God alone who can enable you to stop beating yourself for your past failures.

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If we do not come to God and allow Him to take away these grievances now, as the body of Christ we are going to be swallowed by the evil of this generation. After all, it is clear that we are living in an hour when society is becoming increasingly divided and civility has practically gone out the window. This comes as no surprise, for Jesus warned that in the last days, nation will rise against nation (see Matthew 24:7). In the original

Greek, this means that ethnic culture will rise against ethnic culture. In other words, the world will be marked by bitter divisions and hatred. Yet in the midst of this, you and I cannot be found like the rest of society. If we end up embracing any part of this system that is throwing stones at each other, we will no longer represent the Christ who went to a cross. Let everyone else do the judging, but we are called to live by a higher law—the love of God, the mercy of God and the forgiveness of God in Christ Jesus. It is the willingness to embrace what we would not naturally embrace; the willingness to call "clean" what others regard as unclean; the willingness to receive with hope what others would call failed.

There is no other gospel that will change the hearts of men. It is not our garments, it is not our Scripture memorization, it is not our big Bibles—it is the love and mercy of God in our hearts that will make the difference. It is time to allow Jesus to take the stones out of our hands so that we can truly represent Him in this generation. As we learn to forgive, and as we are willing to stoop down and identify with people who the whole religious scene is about to write off in their ignorance, I believe there will be a harvest of souls in this generation beyond anything we ever could have imagined. Hallelujah!

Carter Conlon
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CARTER CONLON

Carter Conlon is senior pastor of Times Square Church, where he has been on the pastoral staff since 1994.

TIMES SQUARE CHURCH

Times Square Church was founded in 1987 by Pastor David Wilkerson, author of "The Cross and the Switchblade." It is an interdenominational church located in the heart of New York City.

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WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

| | | | |
|----------|---------|----------------|--------|
| Sunday | 10:00AM | 3:00PM | 6:00PM |
| Tuesday | 7:00PM | Church Service | |
| Thursday | 7:00PM | Prayer Meeting | |
| Friday | 7:00PM | Church Service | |

This newsletter is an edited version of "JESUS, TAKE THE STONES FROM MY HANDS" a sermon given on February 19, 2012 in the sanctuary of Times Square Church in New York City. Other sermons are available by visiting our website at tscnyc.org. You are welcome to make additional copies of this sermon for free distribution to friends. However, for all other forms of reproduction or electronic transmission existing copyright laws apply. This sermon cannot be posted on any website or webpage without permission from Times Square Church. Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references are from the King James Version.