

Dear Friend,

Have you ever been told something that you thought was simply too good to be true? Perhaps you received a notice in the mail and after reading it thought: "Could this be real?" Some people have a hard time believing anything that seems out of their reach. Such has always been the dilemma when God decides to move in supernatural power.

Consider that what Jesus is planning to do in our time has little to do with our own records of success or failure. It is not about our strengths or our weaknesses. It is a sovereign moment when He decides to reveal once more that He is a God of love and mercy. He takes all of us in our barrenness, weakness, distress and confusion and in spite of all that, chooses once again to display His own faithfulness and power in us. He uses you and me as a mercy call to our generation. In fact, this could be the beginning of a final call to a last moment in history.

Can He use you and me? This is a question each of us alone must answer. After reading this newsletter, cry out "Yes, oh, Jesus, yes! Use me in my weakness to glorify your Name once again!"

Yours, in Christ,

Pastor Carter Conlon

THE MIRACLE OF WEAKNESS

by Carter Conlon

Hebrews 11, often considered the chapter of faith, speaks of those who were greatly used of God in times gone by: *"Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens"* (Hebrews 11: 33–34).

The writer then goes on to make a phenomenal statement: *"Women received their dead raised to life again..."* (Hebrews 11:35). This refers to a specific power that, throughout the course of history, God had put into the hands of women to raise back to life that which was considered dead. Although the writer of Hebrews does not elaborate with specific examples, there are many in the Old Testament—one in particular in the Book of Ruth.

"Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem-judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion..." (Ruth 1:1–2).

The name "Elimelech" means kingly or mighty, signifying that he most likely had some kind of relationship with God. An inheritance was given to him—a heritage of knowing the

ways of God. However, we see that Elimelech led his family into the land of Moab. Now the Moabites were the descendants of Abraham's nephew, Lot, who had escaped Sodom and Gomorrah and ended up having an incestuous relationship with one of his daughters. This was how Moab was birthed—a place of spiritual mixture.

I heard your cry long ago. I saw your sorrow, and I decided to bring you home in weakness, for I intended to do something through you that could come from My hand alone.

Elimelech must have been aware of the history and known that Moab was not the place of blessing that God had promised through Abraham to His people. Nevertheless, he proceeded to lead his family there during this season of famine. He is a type of those who claim to love God but are still living in mixture—half following God and half being led by their own senses.

As they ventured out from Bethlehem, perhaps Elimelech and his wife, Naomi, anticipated

a prosperous and wonderful future awaiting them. Little did Naomi know that she would end up suffering the loss of almost everything, including her husband.

■ RETURNING HOME EMPTY

While still living in the land of Moab, Naomi received word that the famine in Bethlehem was over. Left with no other hope, the Bible tells us that she and her daughter-in-law, Ruth, also now a widow, arose and headed back to Bethlehem.

Do not miss the significance in this—Bethlehem means “house of bread.” Bethlehem was where God chose to send His Son to be born in humble circumstances as the ultimate answer for a sin-sick and confused world. Bethlehem was where the wise were on a journey; where lowly shepherds out on a field had an open heaven—a vision of angels rejoicing and telling them where they might find this great provision of God. And so coming back to Bethlehem represents coming back to the simplicity of Christ, to the mercy of God, to His supernatural provision. It is a place where we finally leave all our own ideas and plans behind.

How could she have known that what she held in her arms was the very promise of God to bless the entire world?

Naomi once went out full of what she thought was faith and anticipation for the plans of God to unfold. Yet in reality, they turned out to be presumption—mere human plans that could offer nothing but false hope. By the time Naomi returned to Bethlehem, all her expectations were replaced by a deep sense of

loss and bitter disappointment. After all, she had suffered not only the death of her husband but of her two sons as well—which meant the complete death of her lineage. In a sense, she blamed God for all of this. Coming home, she said, *“Call me not Naomi [which means pleasant and agreeable], call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?”* (Ruth 1:20–21).

It would be like those today who say, “I am still going to go to church, but don’t bother me. I don’t want to go to hell, but I can’t say that I really trust God anymore. I trusted Him at one time, but things did not turn out the way I thought. I have nothing to show for my Christian journey. Just leave me alone in my bitterness.” It is those people who feel like the best opportunities in life are gone and the new wine of hope and optimism has run dry.

By this point, all Naomi had left was Ruth, and she could not even see a valid reason why Ruth should be following her. Naomi turned to her earlier in the journey and essentially said, “There is nothing from my life that will be of any advantage to you. Why don’t you stay where you are?” (see Ruth 1:12–13). Yet Ruth was a young woman who simply refused to let go. It was as if there was something in her heart that instinctively knew that God had not failed. There was more to all of this than they could fully understand.

■ CATCHING THE EYE OF THE KINSMAN-REDEEMER

The Scriptures tell us that the two women came back to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest. Entering into the work of the harvest, Ruth began to pick up what the reapers had left

behind in the field. This is a type of going after that which has been neglected, unnoticed, or considered insignificant. Yet as she continued to labor in the field—perhaps feeling small and forgotten herself; laboring with sorrow and deep questions in her heart—suddenly the eye of the kinsman-redeemer fell upon her.

In the same way, God says to you today, “In your weakness, open your arms. You will be stunned at what I put into them.”

It seemed that God was saying to Naomi and Ruth, “I have not forsaken you. I have reserved you for a special purpose in My kingdom. You think you are alone, but you aren’t. You think you have failed, but you haven’t. I heard your cry long ago. I saw your sorrow, and I decided to bring you home in weakness, for I intended to do something through you that could come from My hand alone.”

It is just as Paul stated in 2 Corinthians 12:10, *“...For when I am weak, then am I strong.”* It is not in my strength that the kingdom of God advances—it is in my weakness, for that is when God is finally allowed to be God in me. When I have nothing left but Him; when all my strength and resources have run dry; when all my natural hopes are dead; when I return with nothing else to do but gather that which everyone else has deemed insignificant—suddenly I realize that God’s power is made perfect in my weakness! Suddenly I realize that He has put compassion in my heart for the weary, the weak, the widowed, the orphaned, the poor, the hungry, the imprisoned, the destitute!

Eventually, through marriage to the kinsman-redeemer, a child was born to Ruth. *“And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel. And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath borne him. And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it. And the women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, there is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David”* (Ruth 4:14–17).

This child of the miraculous, who was provided by the kinsman-redeemer, was laid in the arms of Naomi. This child that was given to her in Bethlehem brought her and her house back to life, bringing new hope for the future. It was just as the Scripture described: “Women received their dead raised to life again”—their dead children, their dead families, their dead hopes, their dead plans, their dead dreams, their dead spirituality!

Remember that God is able to raise the dead. He is able to restore hope, vision, joy, and faith that has been lost.

Within this child Naomi held in her arms was the seed of every promise that God had made to Abraham, for through that child, a son named Jesse would be born. Jesse would have several sons, and the youngest, David, would become the greatest king that Israel would ever know, other than Jesus Christ. All the way

down through the lineage of David, this seed of promise would continue to travel until Jesus Himself was born in Bethlehem in a manger. Jesus would live for thirty-three years on the earth, go to a cross to offer up His life, be raised from the dead and send the Holy Spirit. God’s Holy Spirit would then come to you and me—the Church of Jesus Christ. Imagine—all of that was laid in Naomi’s arms!

■ OPEN YOUR ARMS

It is important to recognize that this child was not given to Naomi when she was strong but rather at the time of her greatest weakness and need. How could she have known that what she held in her arms was the very promise of God to bless the entire world? It was all contained in this child that was given to a bitter woman who had lost all her natural hope, who did not see herself as a great player in the kingdom of God, a woman who had questions about the past and no hope for the future. Yet as she came home in weakness, the greatest miracle of all was placed into her arms!

In the same way, God says to you today, “In your weakness, open your arms. You will be stunned at what I put into them.” The Lord reminds us through Naomi that He does not despise our weaknesses, our struggles, our questions, or our bitterness—even toward Him. However, you must be willing to open your arms to what God has to give to you. Naomi had to open her arms to this child. She could have said, “Ruth, you keep it, it’s just a baby!” No! She opened her arms, for there must have been something in her heart that said, “This is so much more than I ever could have hoped for in my own strength. This is so much more than when Elimelech and I left Bethlehem and headed out to the land of Moab, thinking we would find fulfillment there. I know there is something of

promise in this child that God has put into my arms.”

It is in our weakness that God chooses to hand to us the testimony of His Son.

Perhaps today you feel small, marginalized, insignificant, or empty. Maybe you think that the best wine of your life was ten years back, or circumstances have left you with deep disappointment and even questions about God. Yet if you will just open your arms, you will find new hope for your family—whatever that may look like for you today. Remember that God is able to raise the dead. He is able to restore hope, vision, joy, and faith that has been lost.

If you will open your arms to what God has for you, you will find a new understanding of the miraculous. You will discover that it is in our weakness that God chooses to hand to us the testimony of His Son. When we are strong, pride and human effort often get mingled with it all, and we ultimately make a mess of things. Yet in our weakness, suddenly it is all about God—all about His power and His plans. In our weakness, there are no seven steps to anything. There is but one step: Open your arms and let God put the promise into them.

■ RETURN TO BETHLEHEM

I personally believe that a spiritual awakening is coming to this country one last time. Many people are going to wake up and realize that they must get back to God. There comes a moment, just as there was for the prodigal son, when our eyes are suddenly opened and we say, “We must get back to Bethlehem! We must get back to the house of God

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and the simplicity of preaching the cross of Jesus Christ. We must get back to relying on the miraculous power of God again. We have tried to reason the kingdom of God by ourselves. We have tried to persuade men by argument alone, only to find ourselves as a lone voice in this generation. No, we must get back to what God alone is able to do!"

I assure you, God's people will not be coming back in strength—we will be coming back in weakness. We will not be coming back full of pride or with a list of things that God has to fulfill. No, we will be coming back with our struggles, our trials, our difficulties, our weaknesses, our confusion. Yet we will be coming back to Bethlehem because there is bread there. Provision and strength have always been there, along with the miraculous power of God.

You may return in the same manner as Naomi did, saying, "All I have left is one child who I drag to church every Sunday. Is this all that my life has amounted to?" Yet I say to you: The eye of the Kinsman-Redeemer has fallen upon you! He sees you and says, "Ah, there is a person into whose hands I can put the promise of My Son," for the Lord knows that you will not hold it lightly now. You will cherish this gift of God; you will cherish the ministry He entrusts to you. Naomi took that child and laid it in her bosom. She held that baby

close, just as you will hold God's promise close to your heart.

If the Lord can find a people who will walk humbly before Him, He will indeed be willing to show Himself to be God one more time. He is willing that you receive your dead raised to life again! The question is whether or not you are willing to let go of the doubts, the pain, the unbelief, and the sorrow. Are you willing instead to embrace by faith what the Lord desires to give you? Are you willing to say, "Lord, as I come to You in my weakness, I ask You to put something into my arms that is deeper, richer, and fuller than anything I ever could have planned in my own strength?" You must be willing to say, "Give me something that cannot be attained apart from faith. Let the miraculous begin to abound, and let the promises that You have made begin to flow through my hands."

If you will choose to open your heart and your arms to what God has for you, even if you do not fully understand it all, you will begin to see that there is indeed miraculous power in weakness.

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.

Tel:
212-541-6300

Fax:
212-541-6415

Church Location:
237 West 51st Street
Between Broadway & 8th Avenue

Mailing Address:
1657 Broadway, 4th Floor
New York, NY 10019

e-mail:
info@timesquarechurch.org

WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Sunday	10:00AM	3:00PM	6:00PM
Tuesday	7:00PM	Prayer Service	
Friday	7:00PM	The Gate*	

*Youth and Young Adult Service

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This newsletter is an edited version of "THE MIRACLE OF WEAKNESS," a sermon given on **May 12, 2013** 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.