

Dear Friend,

In today's environment it can be so easy to lose heart, even to the point of personal health being affected. Our society is on an ever-descending trajectory. It seems to me that Paul's prophecy of the last days in Second Timothy, chapter three, is rapidly being fulfilled right before our eyes. I feel compelled to call out to all who still want the incredible strength that God freely offers through Jesus Christ. The call is to an honest, heart-searching relationship with Him. We must put away all that hinders the life of Christ within us from becoming our strength.

Please don't consider this letter just another "ho-hum religious writing" from some ministry begging for your attention. That isn't the reason why I write to you. I want you to make it to the end of this journey as a faithful and fruitful follower and witness of Jesus Christ. This is possible, no matter how insufficient you may be feeling today.

Let God speak to you. You will find, as the prophet Jeremiah recorded, that God's thoughts are for you and not against you. He wants to hear and answer your prayers. He is more than willing to be made known to you and turn away all of your captivity (See Jeremiah 29:11–14).

Please, let this be day-one of the new strength that only the voice of God can bring.

Yours, in Christ,

Pastor Carter Conlon

CAN GOD SPEAK TO YOU?

by Carter Conlon

If I were to ask you the question, "Can God speak to you?" your response likely would be, "Of course He can speak to me! Why else would I be reading this? Why would I go to church and lift up my hands to worship Him? It is obvious that God can speak to me." Yet, before you answer so quickly, consider the following scene in the book of Luke: "*And all the people that heard [Jesus], and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him*" (Luke 7:29–30).

A group of people were gathered in the presence of Jesus. They all were well aware that He had power and they were hearing a clear word being spoken to them. Perhaps there were even those among them who personally knew some of the dead people Jesus had raised to life again or the blind who now could see.

Nevertheless, there was a line that divided this group of people into two—a line described in these verses of Scripture as "the baptism of John." Those who had accepted the baptism of John could hear the voice of God and justified God. However, those who had rejected his baptism were unable to hear what the Lord was saying. In other words, they could not be moved from where they were to the place that Jesus was calling them to.

Unfortunately, the same holds true in the body of Christ today. Although there may be those who are gathered around the Word of God, there tends to be a certain dividing line. I have often witnessed this over the years—a congregation of people sitting under the same Word, in the same presence of God, yet emerging with two entirely different results. Some of them are growing into the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, changing by the Spirit of God from image to image and glory to glory, just as the Scripture says. Others, however, continue to accumulate knowledge without change. They can quote verses and attend conferences, but realistically speaking, they are the same today as they were ten years ago.

Many people in our generation have come to what they assume is a saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ, yet they have never truly repented.

Jesus went on to describe such a person: "*Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation?*"

And to what are they like? They are like unto children sitting in the marketplace, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept” (Luke 7:31–32). One group of children is saying to another, “We brought you joy, but you refused to leave the place of mourning.” And on the other side, they say, “We brought you a presentation of mourning, yet you refuse to leave where you are and join us.” The point Jesus was trying to get across was this: “Whether I call you with a testimony of the fullness of joy that can be yours, or if I warn you of the sorrow that awaits those who refuse to turn from sin, neither of these will cause you to get up from where you are and come over to where you should be.”

So what is the reason for the difference between the two groups of people? I believe it was simply this, as illustrated in our opening text: Those who had received and embraced the baptism of John recognized that their lives had fallen short of all that God intended. In contrast, the others did not agree with the counsel of God against them. They resisted change and instead embraced a form of godliness, ultimately precluding them from the divine power and life that was being freely offered.

It is amazing how many people in our generation have come to what they assume is a saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ, yet they have never truly repented. In other words, they have never come to realize how “other” than God we all are; how much of a corrupt nature we possess. That is the key difference—the reason why some people can hear the same Word as others yet remain unable to enter into the power of it. They fail to understand that even with all our good deeds, there is

nothing in and of ourselves that we can present to a holy God.

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■ THE BAPTISM JOHN PREACHED

“And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; as it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight” (Luke 3:3–4).

The baptism John preached was a baptism of repentance—one where we acknowledge, I must die, and Christ must live. When John said to “make His paths straight,” he was not saying to repent and be baptized so that you can somehow get through to God. The moment you turn and receive Christ as Savior, you are fully accepted with God. Rather, he was talking about a repentance that opens the pathway for God to come to you.

“Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth” (Luke 3:5). In other words, as you come in humility, Jesus will be faithful to remove every obstacle that stands in the way of your knowing Him in the way that He desires. He will bring down

every place that you think is impossible—every crooked way, every lie that tries to convince you that God cannot or will not come to you.

John continued, “*And all flesh shall see the salvation of God*” (Luke 3:6). What an incredible promise! That means each one of us can have a clear view of Jesus once we are out of the way—once we are no longer holding on to anything that God is telling us to let go of. That is why you and I must make the choice now to say, “Lord, if Your Word says it is wrong, then it’s wrong! If You are telling me that I need to forgive, then I know there are no excuses for holding on to bitterness. If there is an aspect of my character that You are after or a practice in my life that needs to go, then I will heed Your rebuke!”

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■ NO GOOD THING WITHIN

As John preached in the wilderness of Judaea, I can just picture people pouring out of the cities in response to his call. Yet it was not the religiously proud who came out. Rather, it was the publicans, the tax collectors, the common people—those who did not necessarily have anything of pride to hold on to and keep them blinded to truth. As they came out to be baptized of John, notice what he said to them: “*O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*” (Luke 3:7).

Imagine that! The people are actually coming out to repent, so why insult them now?

God is willing to deposit within each one of us all that we will need in order to face the future.

It was almost as if they faced one last test before going into the waters of repentance for the remission of their sins. And the test was simply this: Do you agree that apart from Christ, you have the nature of Satan in you? Before you go into these waters of baptism for the remission of your sins, are you convinced that in your flesh dwells no good thing? Ever since Satan approached Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, the seed of the serpent was sown into all humanity, meaning that every one of us has that inner sin nature that wants to be as God. We want to determine for ourselves what is good and what is evil, even if it is contrary to what is written in the Scriptures. However, there stands a wrath against sin—one that nobody will be able to escape. Some people may assume that they are getting away with playing religious games their whole lives, but there is a day coming when everyone will stand before the throne of God.

John continued, *“Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire”* (Luke 3:8–9). Bring forth fruits worthy of repentance!

That means no more attempts to justify certain practices in our lives; no more excuses for the things that we have neglected to do. God has the right to take the axe to the root of every tree inside of us that must go, and it is our privilege to allow Him to do so.

■ GREATER THAN JOHN

Jesus Himself later gave this testimony of John the Baptist: *“What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind? ...A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet. This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee”* (Luke 7:24, 26–27). John was imprisoned at that time. He was in a season of personal upheaval and turmoil, leaving him with questions in his heart and only a dim vision for his future. This is the exact place where many people find themselves today, and it is where many more will end up in the days to come. In fact, I believe God is speaking to us now so that we will be prepared to stand when everything around us begins to fail. The Lord desires that we be ready for the time when it may become difficult to understand His ways—when voices are raised everywhere, even inside our own heads, challenging the authenticity of Christ.

Jesus was essentially saying of John: *“Although he is in a wilderness, seemingly attacked on every side, he will not be overcome. He has been a man of truth, not only preaching a baptism of repentance of sin, but living it. Therefore, he has been given an inner confidence. There is a deposit of the life of God inside of this man that will keep and sustain him, even if he has to die for the cause of Christ”* (which he did).

Likewise, God is willing to deposit within each one of us all that we will need in order to face the future. I cannot minimize what the Holy Spirit has been speaking to me. The days ahead of us are going to be extremely difficult, perhaps unlike anything we have ever known. We are going to need strength and God desires to give it to us, but it does not come unless we are walking in truth. We cannot continue to live in ways that are clearly contrary to the Scriptures. (I am not referring to the struggling Christian but to the one who is willfully engaged in practices that God’s Word warns against.) Neither can we retain any measure of our own righteousness or our own sense of self and still expect to enter into the fullness of what God has for us in Christ. There must be a willingness to walk clean and straight. Otherwise, we are rejecting the counsel of God and ultimately shutting off the supply of Christ.

We do not have merely a measure of Christ, we have access to the full life of God in Jesus Christ! John could point to Him; we can know Him.

Jesus then went on to make a phenomenal statement, *“For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he”* (Luke 7:28). Here is how I see it: John had a measure of the Spirit given to him for the calling that was upon his life—to announce the coming of Christ. However, today we do not have merely a measure of Christ, we have access to the full life

of God in Jesus Christ! John could point to Him; we can know Him. We can have the Holy Spirit living inside of us, carrying us in our weakness. We are reminded that this is not a message for those who are strong in themselves. Rather, it is the least, the weakest, and the seemingly most frail in the kingdom of God who Christ empowers—with an even greater measure of power than was given to John!

■ GET RIGHT WITH GOD

Today I implore you—as a pastor, as a father, as a brother—get right with God. At times I feel like Noah, standing outside a place of complete safety as people casually pass by. In those days, many who heard Noah might even have agreed with him, yet they still refused to turn from their own ways and follow God. However, you and I must realize that we will not be able to stand in the coming days if we do not fully commit ourselves to obey the Lord. As the Scripture says, *“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent”* (Acts 17:30). In other words, the Lord commands us to have a change of heart; to agree with Him and turn from what is wrong.

Lately I have been praying, “Lord Jesus, help me to see if there is anything in my life that is going to lead me astray and, if so, give me the grace to put it away. I do not want to stand in a place where I reject Your counsel, even if it is against me.” Over the course of my life, there have been things that God has had His finger on; attitudes I had embraced that I thought were acceptable but in reality had fallen short of God’s standard. Some practices were obvious,

others were not. But I believe the one thing that has kept me up until this point in my life is that my heart has been open for the Lord to speak and reprove if needed. Of course, I do not want to merely start presenting a record of past victories, for they are no guarantee of the future. My heart must stay open so that God can speak to me.

And so I ask again: Can God speak to you? Can God go after that issue of the heart; that practice in your life; that sense of self-righteousness? Or will you reject His counsel and end up locked out of His power?

If you continually choose to come to Him in humility of heart and with a willingness to agree with His Word, God will bring down the mountains and raise the valleys. He will create a clear pathway between you and Himself, and you will find that He promises not only to keep you but to give you power, joy and victory in the coming days!

Carter Conlon
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CARTER CONLON

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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	Prayer Service	
Friday	7:00PM	The Gate*	

*Youth and Young Adult Service

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