

Dear Friend,

Please allow me to simply quote excerpts directly from the Life in the Spirit Study Bible commentary on 2 Timothy Chapter 3:

"Paul prophesies through the Holy Spirit that evil in the world will accelerate and intensify as the end approaches...There will be a widespread collapse of the moral structure of the family and society in general...These times will be especially grievous and trying for God's true servants...The full blessing of salvation in Christ Jesus and the mighty end-time outpouring of the Holy Spirit will occur in and through the Church that has a passion for Jesus, longs for His coming as the Bridegroom, and carries the fire of God in true New Testament faith and ministry."

May this be the year of God's fire re-igniting to its fullest in and through your life. It all begins with one commitment: "It's time to pray."

Yours, in Christ,

Pastor Carter Conlon

BEND, BOW OR BURN

by Carter Conlon

"Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, Against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, 'Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us'" (Psalm 2:1-3, NKJV).

"Why do the nations rage?" the psalmist asked. There is something in the hearts of fallen men in every generation, an internal rage that declares, "We will not live under the governorship of God. No, we will cast away these cords that have restrained us and instead do what we want to do. We will be our own god; we will decide what is good and what is evil. And we will even create our own utopia at the end of it all!"

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Throughout history, fallen humanity has tried to cast out of its consciousness the knowledge, testimony and presence of God, which typically leads them to resort to threats and intimidation. Consider the following account in the book of Acts: "[The rulers and elders of Israel] conferred among

themselves, saying 'What shall we do to [the disciples]? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name.' So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.' So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done" (Acts 4:15-21, NKJV).

These threats that the disciples received were nothing new. I like to call them "pre-awakening threats of darkness." Whenever God is about to do something profound, His people will inevitably face opposition. The apostle Peter said it this way: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (1 Peter 4:12-13). Peter was saying to the people of that time, "Do not think it is strange when we have to fight opposition

as we purpose to reclaim godliness in our nation.” In the same way, if you and I are praying for an awakening in our cities and in our country, we must be prepared for the fact that darkness simply will not retreat without a fight. In order to get an idea of the kind of opposition we can expect to encounter, let’s take a look at other examples in the Bible, for there has been a noticeable pattern throughout history.

The freedoms we have known are now in jeopardy; laws are soon going to change for the worse.

■ OPPOSITION IN THE PAST

The book of Exodus tells us of the time when the Israelites were close to being delivered from the hand of the Egyptians. They were about to experience an awakening of sorts, which was preceded by opposition from the enemy. *“Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, ‘Look, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we; come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land.’ Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh supply cities”* (Exodus 1:8–11, NKJV).

In other words, “We will tell you what you can build, and you must build it according to our specifications. You can go to your house of worship, but you must worship our way. You will bend your knee to our will, and if you refuse, it is going to cost you!” This is very similar to the opposition that you and I currently face and will see in

greater measure in the coming days. The freedoms we have known are now in jeopardy; laws are soon going to change for the worse. It may be only the voice of the minority as of now, yet their threats still have the potential to prevent the Church of Jesus Christ from realizing the power that she actually has.

Another example of these pre-awakening threats of darkness can be found in the book of Daniel. Most theologians believe that Daniel was strongly influential in the eventual issuing of a decree that allowed the people of God to return home to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. However, before that awakening came, Daniel and his Hebrew friends faced incredible threats during their captivity in Babylon. The Bible tells us that King Nebuchadnezzar had a huge statue of gold set up, and a herald cried out: *“To you it is commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, you shall fall down and worship the gold image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up; and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace”* (Daniel 3:4–6, NKJV). In other words, “You are going to become one with us. You are going to embrace our new social direction, or you are going to burn. We have an image of humankind that we have set up, and now we are commanding everyone, everywhere to bow before it when they hear the music! If you don’t, you are going to burn!”

However, Daniel’s three friends—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—refused to bow. Although they knew their fate would be the fiery furnace, they declared to King Nebuchadnezzar: *“We have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning*

fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up” (Daniel 3:16–18, NKJV). As a result, the three of them were bound and cast into the furnace, yet God delivered them without a single hair on their head being singed.

Of course, darkness did not retreat. Later, under Darius, king of the Medo-Persians who eventually took over Babylon, a new decree was issued. *“All the governors of the kingdom, the administrators and satraps, the counselors and advisors, have consulted together to establish a royal statute and to make a firm decree, that whoever petitions any god or man for thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions”* (Daniel 6:7, NKJV). In other words, “We will tell you when and where you can pray; we will tell you how and to whom you can pray. If you don’t listen to us, you are going to be cast into a den of lions!”

It is only the arrogance of humanity that says, “We can redefine marriage.”

■ REFUSING TO BOW

Unmoved by the new decree, Daniel went home and knelt in prayer before the Lord, as was his habit. Are you and I willing to do the same today? After all, in order for spiritual freedom to remain and for the hearts of rulers to be turned back to truth, it will once again require a people who bend only to the will of God and not to the will of man. No matter what kind of statue the godless of this generation erect and try to get this society to bow down to, God’s people must stand for truth!

It is only the arrogance of humanity that says, “We can take wrong and make it right. We can redefine the family; we can redefine marriage. We can decide when life should be born and when it should die.” In essence, they put up their golden statue of themselves, strike up the band, and say, “Now it is commanded to all people of all nations: Bend your knee and worship the way we do!”

You and I still have the right and responsibility to pray, and we can do so anywhere we choose!

Nevertheless, there comes a time in history when men and women of God must hold up the Bible again and say, “No, sir, you cannot take evil and call it good. You cannot change the laws of God. Abortion is wrong. God ordained marriage to be between a man and a woman. It is wrong for politicians to lie. It is wrong to mock the name of Jesus.”

Think about it for a moment: If God’s people had simply bent under the weight of the threats in the past, how many divine, life-changing moments might have been lost? Peter and John could have gone home, sighing, “Well, the authorities are threatening us and saying that we cannot preach or teach now in the name of the Jesus, so let’s just have home fellowships instead. Let’s all just lay low and keep to ourselves.”

No! Just like Daniel and his friends, the disciples refused to bow or back away. The Scriptures tell us that *“they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and*

said: ‘Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the mouth of Your servant David has said: “Why did the nations rage, and the people plot vain things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ.” For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus” (Acts 4:23–30, NKJV).

The threats of darkness sent the disciples straight to prayer, and they even quoted the words of our opening psalm. Then they began to ask God for more of His presence, boldness, power, and healing—in other words, more of what got them into trouble in the first place!

Historically it has been through people who refuse to be intimidated by evil that freedom from oppression comes.

Christ will always be glorified by people who choose to pray, no matter what threats of man may surround them. Therefore, despite what the vocal minority may be attempting to dictate to us today, you and I must remember that we still have the right and responsibility to pray, and we can do so anywhere we choose! For those of you who are in school or in

the workplace, you can pray walking down the subway or in your car; you can pray at your desk; you can pray while shopping for groceries. You can talk to God whenever you want and when people ask you what you are doing, you can reply, “I’m talking to God! Would you like to join me?”

Historically it has been through these types of people—those who refuse to be intimidated by evil and instead choose to pray—that freedom from oppression comes, laws change, and even the hearts of kings are softened. Yes, Daniel did end up getting cast into a lions’ den for his refusal to bow to the commands of darkness. However, look at what King Darius wrote after God delivered Daniel from the lions, completely unharmed:

“To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in the earth... I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. For He is the living God, and steadfast forever; His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall endure to the end. He delivers and rescues, and He works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions” (Daniel 6:25–27, NKJV).

He was now giving glory to God—all because one man refused to bow!

■ ASK FOR COURAGE

Although the threats of darkness may intensify in the coming days, we must remember that Psalm 2 continues: *“He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure”* (Psalm 2:4–5, NKJV). Though the nations rage and formulate their plans against God and those who are called by

His name, they are merely “plotting a vain thing” at which the Lord laughs. His Word is the standard of righteousness and truth, and it cannot be transgressed without consequence. Derision and distress is what awaits those who turn from His ways.

On the other hand, those who are willing to wholeheartedly embrace God’s truth are instructed to “*serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son* (that means to embrace the Son of God), *lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him*” (Psalm 2:11–12, NKJV). So how do we serve the Lord with fear rather than bowing in fear before the enemy?

***Those who will
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First of all, it is important to recognize that you and I do not have the courage within ourselves to remain fearless in the face of opposition. I am careful not to make any vain boasts, for Peter once did that, only to find out what was really inside of him. However, you and I can ask God for the courage we need, and, as the psalm says, “blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.”

As you ask Him, God will give you the courage to refuse to bow to the commands of darkness—to swim upstream when everybody else is

going in the other direction. Such people are the ones who will make a difference in the days ahead. They will not necessarily be the big names and big players in well-known ministries; rather, they will be ordinary people like you and me. Some will make a difference on a national scale, and others will make a difference on a community scale. But in the sight of God, one is the same as the other. We all have an opportunity to make a difference in this generation.

Never forget that when you make the choice to stand in the midst of the fire; to be firm when everything around you is telling you to bend; to do right when society has embraced the concept of doing wrong—even if it means that you have to stand alone in your family, your community, your workplace—God promises to be with you. He promises to walk with you through the flood and through the fire; to close the mouths of lions. God promises to bring you into His presence in such a way that you will know without a doubt that you are being sustained by the hand of God.

So let’s believe God together for a great awakening in this generation. Let’s believe that He is going to fill us afresh with His Holy Spirit so that we will not bow to any threats of evil. And as the Lord enables us to stand and speak His Word with boldness, we will find that our testimony will not be of ourselves but of God and His mighty power within us!

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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This newsletter is an edited version of “BEND, BOW OR BURN,” a sermon given on **November 2, 2014** 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.