

Dear Friend,

I hope this newsletter finds you with an encouraged heart, looking forward to what the Lord has for you in prayer. However, if you feel as I do, the bad news of our day is getting harder and harder to read. We all want something encouraging, giving us hope for the future.

Though the title of this article looks grim, what it contains does indeed have the power to bring strength to your life and future. Jesus never withheld from His followers the truth of what they were about to face, yet His words were filled with hope, strength, and even joy in the midst of their coming trials. *"Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you"* (Matthew 5:11–12).

Have a great day in the Lord.

Yours, in Christ,

Pastor Carter Conlon

PREPARING FOR A TIME OF SUFFERING

by Carter Conlon

Just prior to the striking of the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001, God began to warn our congregation here in New York City. Around July of that year, our church services were marked by a profound soberness. There were times when we pastors couldn't preach and the choir couldn't sing; we couldn't even pray. We would all just sit in silence. Nobody wanted to get up because the presence of the Lord was so strong. All the while, the continuous thought in all of our hearts was that we were about to face some very, very difficult days in the city. People would be running in the streets, terrified. We did not know exactly why, but we knew that we needed to be prepared to minister to them.

If we are open to listening to the Lord, He never leaves us in a place where we will be caught off guard.

Of course, not everybody was willing to hear this message. There were perhaps a few hundred who concluded, "We didn't come here for this. We came here to be blessed! We didn't come to hear that a great calamity is coming

to the city." And so they left. But when the towers were struck, an incredible sense of strength and stability was found among those who stayed. People were ready to minister; they rolled up their sleeves and said, "Tell us what to do." We began to buy truckloads of water and food, and we sent people out onto the streets and down to Ground Zero.

As I think back on those events, I am reminded that if we are open to listening to the Lord, He never leaves us in a place where we will be caught off guard. However, it takes courage—courage for the preachers to speak whatever message God has given and courage for the people to hear it. David Wilkerson was such a preacher.

In 1987, God put a burden on his heart, and he founded Times Square Church. The Lord told him, "I am sending you to New York City to gather a remnant. [In other words, those who desire a sincere walk with God through Jesus Christ.] I want you to warn the city that judgment is coming." The Lord gave Pastor David a vision of a thousand fires burning in New York City. He said these were race riots that would affect not only New York City but many major cities throughout the country. As we look around at our society, it is easy to conclude that those very days might be starting in our midst.

Because we were willing to receive the warning, we have been able to intercede. We have prayed in this church that there would be a thousand fires of revival burning in this city before those other days come—a thousand churches whose doors will not close, so that people can come in and seek God. This has been our prayer because the Bible tells us that mercy triumphs over judgment! It does not mean that judgment is not coming, but mercy takes away its finality when men and women find Christ as Savior.

■ A FIERY TRIAL

We see in the Bible that even in the days of the early Church, the Lord was faithful to warn His people when suffering was on the horizon. For example, in the Book of Acts it says, *“And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar”* (Acts 11:27–28). How did the early Church respond? *“Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea”* (Acts 11:29). Something in their hearts bore witness to the word of warning, so they moved to make preparations for themselves as well as others who would be in need.

The apostle Peter also gave a word of warning to the people of God: *“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy”* (1 Peter 4:12–13). This kind of message can be especially hard to embrace in times of peace—particularly when the Church is accepted in the world

and vice versa. God’s people can easily grow complacent and forget that they live in the midst of a society that can suddenly, even violently, become opposed to Christ and His followers.

You and I should not be surprised when we find ourselves facing fierce opposition in the coming days.

When Peter wrote this letter around A.D. 62–63, the Church was generally accepted and had been operating in relative peace. Yet, true to God’s warning, opposition in Asia Minor continued to grow and was soon officially sanctioned by the government. In fact, they were actually only a year or two away from Rome being burned and the Christians receiving the blame for it and, consequently, their blood filling the streets. The Holy Spirit knew all this was about to occur, and that is why He put it on the heart of Peter to say, *“A trial is coming your way. Do not consider it a strange thing.”*

In the same way, you and I should not be surprised when we find ourselves facing fierce opposition in the coming days. Hostility is already beginning to mount toward all that represents God and truth. According to the Bible, lawlessness will abound until the day God removes His restraining hand (see 2 Thessalonians 2:7).

Peter said, *“Rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad also with exceeding joy”* (1 Peter 4:13). Rejoice in the sufferings of Christ! What a foreign doctrine this is to us today. Yet the Lord is encouraging us to remember that an eternal kingdom full of great

joy lies just before us. Christianity is not simply about being happy in the here and now. Your life is merely a vapor (see James 4:14), and your time on this earth is only momentary.

Peter continued, *“If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified”* (1 Peter 4:14). In other words, if the world accepts you, it means that you are one of its own. But when you make the choice to step out of the ways of a fallen world and embrace the value system of God’s holy Word, trusting that every promise God made to you will be fulfilled as you walk with Him, you truly become a new creation. Your life changes, your conversation changes, your heart changes, your motives change. So do not consider it strange when this world suddenly rejects you!

■ IT IS PREPARATION TIME

Just as the early church heeded God’s warning and started making preparations, now you and I must do the same. Let’s look at a couple of ways that we can prepare ourselves for a time of suffering.

We must put away all forms of racism and other cultural issues that are bitterly dividing our society today.

After speaking of the fiery trial, Peter went on to say, *“But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people’s matters”* (1 Peter 4:15).

First of all, we must not be murderers. Before you automatically consider yourself exempt from this

warning, remember that the Bible states plainly, “Whoever hates his brother is a murderer” (1 John 3:15). That means we must put away all forms of racism and other cultural issues that are bitterly dividing our society today. We must learn to forgive and not allow this spirit of murder and hatred to get hold of us. Jesus Christ died for all people!

It is time to make the choice—get out of that relationship, leave that club, put that book down, get off that Internet site.

Secondly, according to the verse, we must not be thieves—unlawfully taking or withholding at somebody else’s expense. Instead of being takers, we ought to be givers. As the Scripture says, “Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need” (Ephesians 4:28). Let us not be selfish but instead live in a way that the love of Christ might be known through us.

Thirdly, we must separate ourselves from evil. “Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you” (2 Corinthians 6:17). It is time to make the choice—get out of that relationship, leave that club, put that book down, get off that Internet site. It is time to fully separate ourselves from the things that are weakening and blinding us.

And fourthly, we must not live as a busybody in other people’s matters. That means we must stay away from gossip, being critical of others, and being too quick to speak unadvisedly.

■ KEEPING OUR CONFIDENCE IN GOD

The preparation does not end there. According to the book of Hebrews, each of us ought to “recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings” (Hebrews 10:32). Remind yourself how faithful God has been—how He brought you through all your former struggles and trials! When you first came to Christ, perhaps your entire family thought you were crazy; your former friends did not want to hang out with you anymore. People would accuse you in the workplace simply because you chose to do what was right. And now, once again, you are facing a brunt of accusation on all sides. That is why it is important to recall how God showed Himself strong and brought you through in the past. He did not fail you, did He? Neither will He fail you in the days ahead.

No matter what we have to go through, it will be worth it in the end.

The writer of Hebrews says, “For you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods...” (Hebrews 10:34). Many of these believers had not yet personally suffered, but they were well aware that others who had gone before them had suffered. When it says that they “accepted the plundering of their goods,” it means they were laying down their own plans and dreams—all their ideas about how their lives should work out. Instead, they were willing to embrace the plan of God for their lives, knowing it would likely entail a measure of suffering.

The verse goes on to say, “...knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven” (Hebrews 10:34). This is essentially another way to be prepared for a time of suffering: Be assured, it will be worth it! No matter what we have to go through; no matter what people say or do to us, it will be worth it in the end. Remember, we are fighting for something eternal—not just for ourselves, but for others. We are fighting so that people might come to the saving knowledge of Christ. We are fighting so that we will have something to leave for the generation coming after us.

“Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance” (Hebrews 10:35–36). We must not cast away our confidence when things start to get difficult. All of us need endurance—that inner ability not to quit—not to draw back and try to preserve ourselves. It will no doubt be a fearful time when the Gospel is no longer tolerated and God’s people become the target of intense persecution once again. However, we must keep our confidence in God.

“So that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: ‘For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith’” (Hebrews 10:36–38). Always remember, it will be hard for only a little while, and then one day you and I will be at the throne of grace! We will all say, “Thank God, we made the right choice! Thank God, we were willing to hear His word of warning. Thank God, we turned to Him with all our hearts.” It will be amazing—there will be testimonies throughout all eternity

of how God kept us, how He walked with us, how He empowered us, how He changed us, and how He gave us that new Spirit He promised us!

I see a victorious Church—a Church standing boldly in the power of the Holy Spirit, just as she began in the book of Acts.

■ REJOICING IN THE MIDST OF DIFFICULTY

The good news is that eternity is not the only thing we have to look forward to. I believe our hearts are going to be filled with deep joy even in the midst of difficult days. There is going to be a fellowship in the Body of Jesus Christ such as you and I have never experienced in our lifetime. There will be rejoicing when we come together—times when we simply do not want to leave the house of God. The Lord is truly going to be our strength and our song. And He will give us the privilege of glorifying Him by allowing others to see His strength in us in a time of suffering. Sinners are going to come to us and say, “Tell us the reason for the hope that you still have!” You see, we will have hope because we heard the warning of God and took the time now to prepare.

No matter how difficult things may become, I certainly do not see the Church going out in a whimper. I see a victorious Church—a Church that is Christ-honoring, standing

boldly in the power of the Holy Spirit, just as she began in the book of Acts. And so in this time of preparation, my prayer has been, “Lord, take everything out of my life that will bring weakness into my heart. Let Your Spirit within me give me strength and cause my life to bring You honor.” I encourage you to ask the Lord for those things you have need of, as well. Ask Him for courage, endurance, and confidence. Ask Him for the grace not to give up in your present trial or in the ones to come. I assure you, He will not fail you! And not only in a time of suffering but throughout all eternity, you will never regret having put your confidence in Him!

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

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

*Youth and Young Adult Service

Live Webcast:

All our Sunday and Tuesday services can be watched live and replayed for seven days on our website.

tscnyc.org

This newsletter is an edited version of “PREPARING FOR A TIME OF SUFFERING,” a sermon given on June 7, 2015 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 New King James Version.