

Dear Friend,

This morning I was reminded of another day in history when, in the midst of fearful darkness, some of God's people saw a way forward to victory. No doubt there were plenty of strategies and opinions on how to confront the downward spiral of their society. Yet the text of history records only one small group that found the pathway to healing and wholeness for their time.

A young girl, Esther, and some of her friends decided to fast and pray, after which someone would approach the king. It would not be a casual approach; in fact, the appointed person might lose her life for the sake of others.

Today's profession of Christianity has become so self-focused that it has lost much of its influence and power to effect change. The hour in which we are now living requires a radical and selfless approach to the throne of God—for the sake of others.

Although societies seem to be incapable of learning from history, let's not let eternity record that same indictment about us. We can make a difference. Learning from history, let us cast off fear for ourselves. For the sake of a fearful and perishing society, let us plead with our ever-loving and merciful Savior, Jesus Christ. He alone can rewrite the law of death over so many in our time and make it into a law of abundant and eternal life. It's time to pray!

Expecting to see you at the Throne,

Pastor Carter Conlon

A PICTURE OF HOPE

by Carter Conlon

When a society becomes so bonded to sin that the people are no longer able to hear the warnings of God, the Lord begins to show them two things: First, the reasons why the coming judgment is justified, and second, what the future without merciful intervention will look like.

We must be aware of what happened in history so we can understand our place at this moment in time.

A textbook case of this can be found in the book of Ezekiel when the Babylonian Empire invaded and began the destruction of Jerusalem. At that time, God decided to make the prophet Ezekiel a final illustrated picture to a nation that would soon be taken fully captive. Sadly, His people had become so hardened that they could not hear God's Word anymore. Those who were already taken captive had plenty of false prophets to reinforce their erroneous viewpoint that the captivity was only temporary. As for the people who remained in Jerusalem, they also mistakenly believed that the city of God could not possibly be conquered—despite their lifestyles that clearly exhibited a rejection of God.

■ A FINAL WARNING

It is important for you and me to be aware of what happened in history so that we can understand our place at this moment in time. We could very well be living in the final stage of America as we have known it. There is a captivity taking place right now in our society—one that is happening very swiftly. Of course, there are still voices saying, "Well, this is only temporary; it is all going to be behind us soon. The best is just ahead of us!"

That is exactly what they were saying in Ezekiel's day; therefore, these were the Lord's instructions to him: "*Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, which has eyes to see but does not see, and ears to hear but does not hear; for they are a rebellious house. Therefore, son of man, prepare your belongings for captivity, and go into captivity by day in their sight. You shall go from your place into captivity to another place in their sight. It may be that they will consider, though they are a rebellious house. By day you shall bring out your belongings in their sight, as though going into captivity; and at evening you shall go in their sight, like those who go into captivity. Dig through the wall in their sight, and carry your belongings out through it. In their sight you shall bear them on your shoulders and carry them out at twilight; you shall cover your face, so that you cannot see the ground*" (Ezekiel 12:2–6).

In other words, “Ezekiel, I want you to gather your belongings and dig a hole in the wall. I want you to show the people that they will enter a time of shame. All their bravado and talk about rebuilding will come to nothing. The people are going to be taken into captivity with their faces bowed toward the ground.”

“Before I judge you, I will show you a picture of what you are.”

“Say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “This burden concerns the prince in Jerusalem and all the house of Israel who are among them.”’ And say, ‘I am a sign to you. As I have done, so shall it be done to them; they shall be carried away into captivity.’ And the prince who is among them shall bear his belongings on his shoulder at twilight and go out. They shall dig through the wall to carry them out through it. He shall cover his face, so that he cannot see the ground with his eyes... Say to them, ‘The days are at hand, and the fulfillment of every vision. For no more shall there be any false vision or flattering divination within the house of Israel. For I am the Lord. I speak, and the word which I speak will come to pass; it will no more be postponed; for in your days, O rebellious house, I will say the word and perform it,’ says the Lord God” (Ezekiel 12:10–12; 23–25).

In other words, the captivity was going to be from the greatest to the least; nobody would be able to escape what God was about to do.

You see, when any nation has determined to pursue sin and cast away the Word of God, the Lord, being righteous in judgment,

will set a picture before them so that they may see what they have become. It is as if God is saying, “Because you will not listen to Me, I cannot warn you or cause you to turn from the course you are on. Therefore, before I judge you, I will show you a picture of what you are.”

■ ONE HOPEFUL SIGN

Remember, we know how God deals with nations by studying the way He has dealt with them in the past. Unfortunately, I do not see much difference between our present society and that of Ezekiel’s time. We have done violence to the Word and ways of God. As wonderful as our country’s history has been, we will not be the exception when it comes to God’s judgment.

You are the one final and hopeful sign for this generation. Not some new preacher—you!

However, we can still take heart, for I do believe we have been given a window of opportunity in this hour. According to the Scriptures, there remains one final and hopeful sign as long as there are those who can still hear and consider their ways: “*You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven*” (Matthew 5:14–16). Notice that the passage begins with the word “you”! You are the one final and

hopeful sign for this generation. Not some new preacher, not some fancy church—you! You are the one whom God will put on a lampstand in order to give light to all who are in the house. You are the one who will be enabled by God, if you choose, to do things that only He can do. If you will let Him separate you from all that weakens you, you will be as a city set on a hill—that hill being Calvary!

■ THE PICTURE OF PAUL

Consider the picture in the Book of Acts when the Apostle Paul was taken on a journey at sea. He had tried to warn the people of the danger ahead, saying, “*Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives*” (Acts 27:10). However, they refused to listen and relegated Paul to the belly of the ship among the prisoners. It was not long before a storm arose—one so fierce that they put up the sails and had no choice but to cast themselves to the wind. This sounds a lot like our generation, a type of society that says, “Listen, we do not want to hear your warnings. We only want to hear of the good that is coming our way!” We no longer have any direction. We do not know the difference between what is right and what is wrong, what is moral and what is immoral. Casting off all restraint, we are now being driven by the fickle thoughts of men that change from week to week.

The Bible tells us that the storm finally reached a point where everything seemed to be falling apart, and they went many days without light (see Acts 27:20). Down in the bottom of that ship, there must have been a cry in Paul’s heart, “God, I don’t know if I can take this anymore. I don’t want to hear the news of what is going on above deck—how fierce the storm is or what new strategy

they are coming up with to get us through.” Perhaps recently you have been experiencing a similar fight in your mind. We are living in a very dark hour, and it has caused you to sigh and groan over the state of our society. You are reluctant to even turn on the news anymore.

Paul saw something that natural men could not see: He saw a future when everything was falling apart.

Yet Paul, in the midst of it all, began to pray. And when he prayed, God began to speak to his heart and show him a future. Suddenly, somebody on deck must have called for him. I suspect it was the captain of the ship asking, “Where is that man who warned us not to take this journey? He claimed to have heard from God. I want to hear from him one more time!”

You see, Paul was a man whose heart was set upon a hill. Paul was set on being given for the sake of others, not living for his own comfort or his own survival. And so, in that last moment of time, when the people would not hear the word of God, the Lord was able to place on the deck of that ship a picture—a picture of what we can become when Christ is at the core of who we are and why we exist. It was a picture of hope expressed through a confident, surrendered man.

Paul essentially told them, “Be of good cheer, for I have a word from God. If you listen to this word, we are all going to

make it. The ship is going to perish, but not one hair of your head will be lost!” (see Acts 27:22–24). Paul saw something that natural men could not see: He saw a future when everything was falling apart. He saw what God was able to do!

Imagine the scene: The people are hanging on to the railing—all their plans and hopes for the future gone. Yet, standing right in the middle of them is this man with half a loaf of bread in each hand, lifting his eyes to heaven and giving thanks (see Acts 27:35). He is standing there as a picture of what it looks like when one’s confidence is in God—how there is always a hope and a future though everything around may appear to be lost.

What people in our society are looking for is reality. “Don’t tell me about your Jesus—show me your Jesus!”

I love the fact that simply because Paul’s heart was set upon a hill, the light of God was in him, and he became the one giving the orders! The soldiers were going to try to escape in the lifeboats, but Paul instructed them to cut the boats off. The only possible escape route would be through God! And so everybody was now dependent on the word from God that was coming through this one man. They were drawn to that final picture that was set before them—a picture of who God is and what He is able to do. And they all were given a future and a chance at eternal life. I do not know how many of them took it, but at least they were given

a chance. I have to believe that there were some in that crowd who concluded, “Whoever Paul’s God is, is God. The kind of vision and strength that he has found is what I want!”

■ YOU ARE A PICTURE

You and I must learn to stand just as Paul did, for not only is a day of great calamity coming, there are already people full of anxiety and fear all around. There are kids out on the street who have no fathers, no mothers, no direction; they do not know the reason for life. There are people in your apartment building and people across from you at your workplace whose whole lives are falling apart, yet they will not open a Bible. You can put a tract on their desk, but they will not read it. You see, we have come to the point where argument will no longer persuade people. They do not care what you believe. What people in our society are looking for is reality. “Don’t tell me about your Jesus—show me your Jesus!” And so the only alternative now is that we become a visible demonstration—a picture of who God is and what He can do; a picture of all that He promises; a picture of true worship; a picture of morality; a picture of fearlessness; a picture of what it looks like to have a heart for other people!

The only alternative now is that we become a visible demonstration of who God is and what He can do.

Sometimes that picture will be formed in the midst of your own struggle or trial. Perhaps there

will be times when you will have to remind yourself, “The Lord prepares a table before me in the presence of my enemies. My cup overflows with confidence in God. Everything may not be the way I would like it, but I know that everything is the way God has destined it to be. He will keep me; He will put light in my eyes and passion in my heart. He will light this lamp of His Holy Spirit inside of me and set me up on a lampstand. He will put courage in my heart and do impossible works through my life, causing people to be convinced that only God could have done this!”

Remember that the Lord said to Ezekiel, “The people have become hardened to My words, but when they see you, Ezekiel, it is possible that they may consider.” In the same way, as you allow the Lord to make your life a final picture of hope, I believe many in this generation will be called out of darkness into God’s marvelous light!

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

Live Webcast:

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

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