

Dear Friend,

In a time of social upheaval, God, through the prophet Isaiah, gave an incredible invitation to the people who could still hear: *"For thus says the Lord God, the Holy one of Israel: 'In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength'"* (Isaiah 30:15).

The time, very much like ours today, was anything but quiet. Angry voices were undoubtedly rising like a tide, looking for somebody to blame for their present dilemma. In the midst of it all, God had provided an open door of peace and comfort which only He could supernaturally give. It stems from a deep inner confidence that He is in complete control of all things and that everything and everyone in His hands is completely safe.

I urge you to find and pass through that open door today. Quiet and confident voices will undoubtedly be deeply valued and increasingly sought out in the coming days. Your voice can become an ambassador of the security that so many soon will be desperate to find.

It all begins with prayer.
Remember...it's time to pray!

Yours, because of Him,

Pastor Carter Conlon

A THIEF IN A PARKING LOT

by Carter Conlon

Very early one morning many years ago when I was a young police officer, I received a call that an alarm had gone off at a local dentist's office. I was the only officer to respond to the call, and as I arrived, the thief was just emerging from the office with stolen goods in his backpack. Seeing me, he took off running, and I followed in hot pursuit. After a short chase, we ended up in a vacant parking lot where he stopped suddenly, turned, raised his fists, and exclaimed, "It's only you and me now." About eight seconds later, it was only me.

The devil will try to convince you that you will constantly be in pursuit of a victory just out of reach.

Jesus once said, *"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly"* (John 10:10). You and I also face a thief today—one who has come to steal our future, our families, our joy, our hope, and our effectiveness on the Earth. However, Jesus is reminding us that He has made a way for us to have an abundant

life. And so it is important that we understand that we have the power to overtake this thief, just as I did that morning in the parking lot.

■ THE THIEF'S FIRST ERROR

The thief I encountered made four presumptive errors that I believe are reflective of the way the enemy works today. First of all, he presumed that he could outrun me. What he did not know was that I actually liked to run! In fact, back in those days, I worked out two hours a day and ran at least two miles every night.

Similarly, the devil would like for you to believe that you will never catch him. He will try to convince you that you will constantly be in pursuit of a victory just out of reach. However, I remind you that Satan is a liar. God has called as well as equipped you to overpower him. David the psalmist said it this way: *"For by You I can run against a troop. By my God I can leap over a wall"* (Psalm 18:29). He went on to say, *"I have pursued my enemies and overtaken them; neither did I turn back again till they were destroyed. I have wounded them, so that they could not rise; they have fallen under my feet. For you have armed me with strength for the battle"* (verses 37–38).

The gates of hell cannot hold the Church captive when she finally realizes who she is in Christ and begins to pursue the powers of darkness.

A lot of people think the Christian life is about having power to just hold down the fort—to somehow put up a shield so that the devil cannot hurt us anymore. Yes, that is part of it, but we have been given power for so much more. We are called to pursue the kingdom of darkness! We have been given power, just as Jesus was by the Spirit of God, to open prison doors and see wounded hearts healed; to see blind eyes given vision for the future; and to see captives set free. When Jesus said, “You are My Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against you” (see Matthew 16:18), He did not mean the gates of hell coming our way, He meant us in an offensive against the gates of hell! Remember, the enemy cannot outrun us. The gates of hell cannot hold the Church captive when she finally realizes who she is in Christ and begins to pursue the powers of darkness.

There is a point when we must lift our heads and roar right in the face of the devil.

■ THE THIEF’S SECOND ERROR

The second presumptive error made by the thief in the parking lot was that he could keep what he

had stolen. He somehow assumed that I would not be able to take it back from him. However, consider the words of Jesus: “*When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils*” (Luke 11:21–22). The devil cannot keep what he has stolen from you!

Let me illustrate this with another example from my life. When I was fifteen, I began to suffer from panic attacks due to immense pressure in my life. I felt inadequate to achieve the goals that others placed on me, so anxiety and fear became a deep part of my life. It crippled me to the point that I found it hard to ride on a bus or even leave the house at times. It was a very, very difficult season in my life.

I thank God that I later came to Christ. Yet, one night after getting saved, I felt another panic attack coming on. Even though I was now a Christian, the devil tried to convince me that he could keep what he had stolen. He had stolen my confidence. He had stolen my voice and, in many ways, he had stolen my future. It was as if Satan was saying, “Okay, I have lost you to Christ. I will agree with you that you have eternal life. But the abundant life is not going to be yours, so just be content with what you have.”

In the past when I had felt a panic attack coming, I immediately had popped Valium pills, often topping them off with an eight-ounce glass of whiskey to get myself through. But that night, I got up, and in my heart I was determined, “No more pills! I am a believer in Christ now. No more whiskey; that is gone from my life. The Bible says, ‘If God be for me, who can stand against me?’” I did not even remember the

whole verse, yet I believed it with all my heart.

You see, there comes a point when we have to face the thief in the parking lot and take back what he has stolen. There is a point when we must lift our heads and roar right in the face of the devil. That is what I did that night. Right there in the middle of my living room, I declared, “Satan, you can only kill me if God allows you to. And if He does allow you to, I am going to heaven, so I win either way. You throw at me everything you’ve got, but I throw at you what I now have: In the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, I resist you!” Suddenly, a heat hit my feet, continued through my legs, the middle of my body, my chest, and out the top of my head. Forty years ago I was set free from nine years of hell!

I urge you—know your Bible, for it is your weaponry!

Paul instructs us in the book of Ephesians: “*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places...And take...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*” (Ephesians 6:10–12, 17). In other words, “Have truth in your inward parts. Walk in a right relationship with God. Take the sword of the Spirit—the Word of God.” I urge you—know your Bible, for it is your weaponry! I

had only half a verse of Scripture that night, but because I used it, I was set free from nine years of hell on this Earth!

You must understand who is behind you. You are not facing the enemy alone.

■ THE THIEF'S THIRD ERROR

The thief in the parking lot made a third error that night: He presumed that I was alone. As he turned and raised his fists, all he could see was one uniformed police officer and himself. What he failed to realize was that backup was on its way. At least two other officers were coming to help me. If that did not work, there were more than six hundred officers available in the police department, and if things really got out of hand, as many as were needed would be heading my way!

In the same way, you must understand who is behind you. You are not facing the enemy alone. Ask the Lord to give you a vision of who you truly are in Christ; a vision of why *“even the demons believe—and tremble”* (James 2:19). The prophet Elisha once prayed something similar in order to encourage his fearful servant. *“Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” And Elisha prayed, and said, ‘Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.’ Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha”* (2 Kings 6:16–17).

So why should you tremble when you face the enemy? You have

the weaponry of Christ. You have sufficient backup. You have brothers and sisters in Christ who will be there to help you in your time of need. You have outside forces that will come down and help you if you need them. You have hundreds in this battle with you! And best of all, at the helm you have a General so awesome that at the mere mention of His name, every knee must bow and every tongue must confess that Jesus Christ is Lord! You are never alone!

■ THE THIEF'S FOURTH ERROR

The fourth presumptive error the thief made that night was his belief that his words were sufficient to resist my advance. This is a tactic often used by the enemy. Think about the time the giant Goliath was hurling accusations, trying to discourage the armies of God. As young David decided to go down into the valley to fight this bigmouth from hell, Goliath taunted him, saying, *“Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. And the Philistine said to David, ‘Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!’”* (1 Samuel 17:43–44).

You and I have the right to stand in the devil’s face and say; “In the name of Jesus Christ, I resist your advance!”

Yet David was not stopped by Goliath’s threats. The Spirit of God came upon him, and he said, *“You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in*

the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. Then all this assembly shall know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord’s, and He will give you into our hands” (1 Samuel 17:45–47).

Do not forget that you and I are called to something much deeper than merely living for ourselves.

The devil thinks that he can stop you from going forward simply with his words. But remember, you and I have the right to stand in the devil’s face and say, *“In the name of Jesus Christ, I resist your weapons; I resist your advance! You are not taking my home. You are not taking my family!”*

■ THE THIEF TODAY

Today, you and I have a thief in our parking lot, and he is challenging the Church. He is trying to convince you that he is faster than you are and that he can keep what he has stolen. He is trying to make you believe that you are all alone and that he can resist you simply by his words.

However, we are not unaware of his schemes (see 2 Corinthians 2:11). It is time for us to get up and say, *“No, devil. No further! As a matter*

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of fact, you are going to back up. You are going to take a little rest now in the parking lot!”

Do not forget that you and I are called to something much deeper than merely living for ourselves. We are called to push back the powers of darkness for the sake of the captives and for the honor of the name of Jesus. By the grace of God, let's go into this battle now. Let's use our weapons of spiritual authority—weapons of understanding our identity in Christ, weapons of boldly praying as if we cannot be denied when we see it written in the Word of God. Let no thief remain in our parking lot! Let us be everything that God has called us to be!

Carter Conlon
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This newsletter is an edited version of "A THIEF IN A PARKING LOT," a sermon given on July 2, 2017 in the sanctuary of Times Square Church in New York City. Other sermons are available by visiting our website at tsc.nyc. 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.

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.

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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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