

LETTER FROM CARTER CONLON

Dear friend,

New York City is infamous for its taxi drivers. Over the years I have heard them called many things, usually uncomplimentary, but I would like to tell you about an anonymous driver that I would call an angel.

In the late fall of 1996, I awakened around 2:30AM to hear my daughter Kate struggling to breathe. I found her semi-conscious on the living room sofa, turning a grayish-blue color. I immediately realized there wasn't time for an ambulance. I felt the Lord say to take the elevator to the ground floor and go out into the street. I went out and saw a lone taxi coming my way. I flagged him down and explained my dilemma. He told me he would wait while I went back inside for Kate. I got into the car with Kate in my arms and told the driver which hospital to take us to, but he looked at me and said, "There's not enough time to get there." He proceeded to take us to a closer facility that I wasn't even aware of, driving the wrong way down two main streets to get there quickly.

By the time we arrived at the hospital, Kate was barely breathing. Two nurses and a doctor met us at the door and rushed away with my daughter to stabilize her. The driver said, "You go with your daughter—I'll wait." After quite some time I returned to the parking lot. The driver was still there. I told him Kate was going to be fine. When I tried to pay him, he refused to accept it. He told me he was glad she was okay and drove away.

A few days later, I decided to find this man to thank him for saving my daughter's life and perhaps take him and his family to dinner. I gave the car company his description and information on his car. They informed me with regret that no driver of East Indian origin nor a car with that description was on duty that night.

Sometimes deliverance comes in ways that we least expect it. Be of good cheer! God has a lot of creative ways to keep you in the days ahead.

Yours in Christ,



Carter Conlon
Senior Pastor.

WHEN DELIVERANCE LOOKS LIKE OLD, ROTTEN RAGS

by Carter Conlon

Jeremiah was the lone prophet in Jerusalem prophesying its destruction. His message was so contrary to the false prophets who were preaching peace and safety that they became angry and vengeful, and sought with all the finality of murder, to silence him. These hardened men resorted to extreme lengths and severe measures to shut God's Word out of their conscience. The king's officials seized Jeremiah and lowered him into a pit to die. *"So the officials took Jeremiah from his cell and lowered him by ropes into an empty cistern in the prison yard. It belonged to Malkijah, a member of the royal family. There was no water in the cistern, but there was a thick layer of mud at the bottom, and Jeremiah sank down into it"* (Jeremiah 38:6, NLT).

These huge subterranean cisterns were in common use in and around Jerusalem. They were dug into the ground to trap the run-off water during the rainy season for use in the long, dry summers. This particular well was situated in the prison courtyard. Due to its overuse during the Babylonian siege, it was empty except for the mud at the bottom. Now, cruel men used the cistern as a dungeon to inflict death upon their victim, without performing the actual killing themselves. Here, Jeremiah, the man of God, was deep in mud and had literally days if not hours

to live. All he could do was cry out in the deep groans of a saint living in a great spiritual depression.

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■ GOD HEARS YOUR CRIES

This dungeon was in close proximity to the king's palace with all its subordinate chambers, such as the treasury office. However, Jeremiah could not be sure anyone would hear his pleas for help coming up from this cavernous grave. Unless God rescued him, he was not going to last long in the thick mire.

Beloved, you know as well as I, when no one else hears our cries for help, God does. The Lord also sees every act of the wicked and will set free His people when they call out to Him in time of trouble, as the Psalmist says, *“For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary; from heaven did the Lord behold the earth; To hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are appointed to death; To declare the name of the Lord in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem”* (Psalm 102:19–21).

God has His own peculiar resources to rescue the perishing. He has His chosen vessels in every quarter ready to do His bidding and His will. These people are standing by to act on behalf of those He loves who are crying out for deliverance. If you can only get this one singular truth firmly settled in your heart, it will keep you in every trial you go through. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise when *“Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, one of the eunuchs which was in the king's house, heard*

that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon; the king then sitting in the gate of Benjamin; Ebed-melech went forth out of the king's house, and spake to the king, saying, My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon; and he is likely to die for hunger in the place where he is: for there is no more bread in the city” (Jeremiah 38:7–9).

■ UNLIKELY DELIVERER

God's selected rescuer for His servant Jeremiah is an obscure individual and an unlikely deliverer. Ebed-Melech was a slave of Ethiopian descent. Whether he had been betrayed in life or had been captured in battle, he was now in servitude to the king of Judah, living in Jerusalem. He is a person who had obviously known great treachery and pain in his own life. Having been made a eunuch, he had also experienced enormous disappointment, knowing there could never be any future posterity from him.

Many who are hurt in life become hardened to the cry of the poor and the injustice around them. Others, like Ebed-Melech, who had a trust in God, remain tender and soft, which allowed him to be used by God in a powerful way. Those who have known betrayal in life are usually more attuned to the needs of the poor, and are able to show empathy towards them. God delights in using people like Ebed-Melech. They are the nobodies in society, which the rest of the world views as old cast-off garments, rejected by everyone. However, God sees them as His unusual treasure.

It is this foreigner, a slave, and a eunuch, who is moved with compassion by God to save the prophet Jeremiah, from this make-shift death trap. Ebed-Melech knew Jeremiah would shortly die if he

remained in that well. It was arguably the most gruesome place he could be in, completely devoid of hope and human comfort. The Bible does not say how much longer Jeremiah had left to live, but I want to suggest to you that his time was short. No one had been assigned to lower food or water to him and you can only live three to five days without water. By going to the king on Jeremiah's behalf, Ebed-Melech placed his own life on the line. He approached the king, knowing authority had already been given to the other officials to do with Jeremiah as they saw fit. Not only was this incredibly brave, but it was a selfless act of faith to do good for someone else in need. Ebed-Melech knew the consequences, if his request was denied it could result in the same fate as Jeremiah. Only God could intervene and change the mind of the king at this point.

■ JEREMIAH'S DELIVERANCE

Ebed-Melech went to the king and said: *“My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon; and he is likely to die for hunger in the place where he is: for there is no more bread in the city”* (Jeremiah 38:9). In other words he is saying, “I need to go get this man out immediately. I need you to give me permission to save him.” *“Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, Take from hence thirty men with thee, and take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon, before he die”* (Jeremiah 38:10). In a turn of events, which can only be described as miraculous, the king gave his consent. *“So Ebed-melech took the men with him, and went into the house of the king under the treasury, and took thence old cast clouts and old rotten rags, and let them down by cords into the dungeon to Jeremiah”* (Jeremiah 38:11).

Here was a disadvantaged man, Ebed-Melech, who was immediately

given the right to liberate the prophet of God. He walked by the king's treasury and headed for the basement storage room. He could have stopped and gone directly into the treasury where all the wealth of the king was kept, looking for gold chains, money, or similar treasures to buy ropes and ladders to let down to Jeremiah. Instead, he went into the house of the king under the treasury and began to rummage through all the cast-away garments in search of the best means of delivering Jeremiah. This is truly amazing!

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If you had the opportunity to say, "God, give me the resources to go and free the lost and perishing. Take me to your treasury and give me all that I need in order to get humanity out of despair." I wonder how many of you would have gone straight to the coffers for gold. I daresay there is hardly anyone who would not come out with a bag of money to buy a ladder and tools to release Jeremiah. Here now is the difference: the motivation of Ebed-Melech was only for the safety and well-being of Jeremiah. So he gathered together what was actually needed for Jeremiah's liberation: cast-away garments, cords and old rotten rags.

I can just picture Jeremiah as he put his hand over his eyes, straining as he looks up from this place of despair, trying to see what God's deliverance for him was going to look like. He had probably been praying and crying out with deep seated groans to God, "Lord, help me!" When to his utter amazement as he looked up to the top of the dungeon he did not see angels or

heavenly armies coming to his aid. He saw an Ethiopian man, his rescuer, a slave, a fellow bond servant, a compassionate man, who had risked his own life for him.

■ CAST-AWAY GARMENTS AND OLD ROTTEN RAGS

What was being unfurled towards Jeremiah was something so different from what you think the provision of God would have looked like. I wonder, was Jeremiah stunned to see cords and old rags unraveled towards him. Would you be thinking, is this really the way out, if you saw your deliverance in this form? Would you be saying, "Is this God's provision? What does this mean? What is the significance of this? Why am I being set free with old garments and not gold from the treasury? Why didn't he take a bag of money and buy a ladder? Why didn't he do something more dramatic?"

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When you are going through difficult times, waiting for God's deliverance, do you look up expecting to see some supernatural phenomena such as Christ coming on a cloud of glory? Or expecting to see something like

Jacob's ladder with angels ascending and descending to your place of despair? God is able to deliver you any way He chooses. I want to encourage you not to set your vision on how you perceive He will rescue you, but to allow God to perform His will His own way.

For me, these old rags speak of so many different aspects. For instance, with Jeremiah, they represented comfort for his aching and tired body. You clearly see this by the words of Ebed-Melech who said to him, "*put now these old cast clouts and rotten rags under thine armholes under the cords. And Jeremiah did so. So they drew up Jeremiah with cords, and took him up out of the dungeon*" (Jeremiah 38:12-13).

In another sense, old rotten rags symbolize the poverty and filth of millions in the world today. I have personally witnessed in my travels hundreds of children who are without hope, who are rejected, unloved and uncared for in society. They are covered with dirty rags, not knowing what or how they can be cleansed. They do not know that there is a Savior who paid a dear price for their salvation. I also think of a generation where many who once served Christ with a fervent heart have cast off His garment of righteousness; they have gone back to the old rags of sin and degradation not realizing they are again in a dungeon of mud.

Then there are those who, like the soldiers at the cross, gamble for the garment of Christ as an opportunity for personal gain. How much gambling like this is still going on in the house of the Lord today for the garment of Christ? They see Christ's salvation as nothing more than personal power and influence. People who come in and say, "Just think of this anointing that is going to come on my life, I will become known and famous in the kingdom of God." What a shame

WHEN DELIVERANCE LOOKS LIKE OLD RAGS

that Christianity has come to this. While so many are casting lots as it were, for this garment of Christ, they have cast off the garment of His great compassion for humanity. We live in a generation where it seems everyone is coming into the house of God for themselves. The selfishness of the world has not only permeated the church, but now has its own theological backing. They think God's power and authority is strictly for their own benefit.

In contrast, the 120 disciples of Jesus, when the Holy Spirit baptized them with power, did not try to keep it for themselves or debate any longer who was the greatest among them. No, as bond servants, they laid their lives down and went into the streets with the Gospel of Christ giving glory to God. As the newly-formed church, they went not with man-made ideas or plans on how to win Jerusalem for Jesus; they simply went with the heart of God to reach a lost humanity. What the disciples unfurled to mankind may have looked like old dirty rags, yet 3,000 men and women were lifted out of their despondency of sin and brought to Christ in one day.

■ HERE IS YOUR DELIVERANCE

You can see Jeremiah putting those old rags under his arms, and immediately his hands are in the air laying hold of his source of deliverance. As suddenly as the despair had come into his life it was now gone. The Scriptures say he was lifted out of the cistern, out of the mud and placed back onto solid ground. Ebed-Melech demonstrated what it meant to be a bond servant to God.

Jesus Christ was a bond servant for us and now sits at the right hand of God. He is touched with the feelings of your weaknesses and with your struggles. He is touched with your pain and grief, and He knows what it is like to go through difficult times. He himself was wounded for your transgressions, He was bruised for your iniquities, and the chastening of what you deserve was laid upon Him. He knows what it is like to have had friends leave and run from Him. He knows what it is like to have those who boasted of their loyalty, abandon Him during His hour of greatest need.

I thank God with everything in my heart that this is the kind of Savior we serve today. As you look up to heaven and say, "Lord, deliver me" you may see coming down from the top of your bitter despair, discarded garments and old rotten rags. And God says: Here is your deliverance.

Carter Conlon
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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	Church Service	
Thursday	7:00PM	Prayer Meeting	
Friday	7:00PM	Church Service	

This message is an edited version of "When Deliverance Looks Like Old Rags," a sermon given on August 24, 2008 in the sanctuary of Times Square Church in New York City. Other sermons are available by visiting our website at tscnyc.org. You can also write to: Times Square Church, Sermon Ministry, 1657 Broadway, New York, NY 10019. 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 written permission from Times Square Church. Unless otherwise noted, all scripturereferences are from the King James Version.