

THE FELLOWSHIP OF CHRIST'S SUFFERING

by Carter Conlon

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" (1 Peter 5:8–11).

These verses are part of a letter the apostle Peter wrote to warn and encourage Christians of his day. History reveals they were on the brink of being persecuted and plunged into unbelievable pain and suffering. The Holy Spirit knew that Nero would ascend to the throne as the next Roman Emperor, so He anointed Peter to write this epistle to give confidence to the believers. Nero would be the catalyst for intense persecution that resulted in the death of many Christians during his reign.

■ DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL

Peter was accustomed to suffering. He had his own particular "dark night of the soul," when he denied Christ three times and then went out and wept bitterly. Jesus had warned him of his coming denial and encouraged him. Jesus said to him, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not" (Luke 22:31–32). After the resurrection,

Jesus restored Peter's faith. This allowed him to overcome his defeat and prepared him to comfort those heading for troubled times.

■ SATAN AT THE LAST SUPPER

The same evening Jesus encouraged Peter, he had been sharing a meal with His disciples. He had broken the bread which signified the kind of suffering and death He would undergo.

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"Now Jesus was in great anguish of spirit, and he exclaimed, 'The truth is, one of you will betray me!' The disciples looked at each other, wondering whom he could mean. One of Jesus' disciples, the one Jesus loved, was sitting next to Jesus at the table. Simon Peter motioned to him to ask who would do this terrible thing. Leaning toward Jesus, he asked, 'Lord, who is it?' Jesus said, 'It is the one to whom I give the bread dipped in the sauce.' And when he had dipped it, he gave it to Judas, son of Simon Iscariot. As soon as Judas had eaten the bread, Satan entered into him" (John 13:21–27 NLT).

Now Satan was at the Last Supper that night, circling the table like a roaring lion. It is at night when lions usually hunt. It is in darkness the devil as a roaring lion found somebody to devour. He overheard the discussion of Christ's coming suffering and as he prowled, he looked for a heart he could possess. He found it in the person of Judas Iscariot. Judas was an opportunist who continually looked ahead to see how God would prosper his life. It is no surprise then that he handled the money bag, because Judas wanted to profit from this relationship with Jesus, not suffer with Him.

In that divine and intimate moment when Jesus reached over and gave Judas a piece of the bread, it was God's love and mercy being extended to him as if to say, "I am offering you a chance to walk with me. I am going to be rejected and abused by man. I am going to Calvary. There is going to be wrath poured out in that place, and I will be seemingly triumphed over. But I am offering you an opportunity to go with me and be given for others." Judas was not interested in this pathway. He was not interested in talk about a cross, about rejection, or about being triumphed over, even if it was only for a season.

This was the problem: Judas accepted the bread and what it ultimately represented with a deceptive heart. In doing so he opened up a way for Satan to enter into him. Satan, as a hungry lion on the hunt had been looking for a way to break the unity shared by Christ

and His disciples. The unity which Psalm 133 says, commands a blessing from the head right down to the borders of the garment.

■ THE WEAK LINK

In Judas, Satan had found the weak link he was looking for, a hypocrite. Judas gave the appearance of following Christ, but his heart was far from Him. Many times we have seen this repeated in the professing church of Jesus Christ. People take the bread and cup of communion, but have no interest in moving with the Holy Spirit's leading. They are there strictly for personal gain. When their selfish purposes are not fulfilled, the enemy gets a hold of them, and there is a roaring of unrest in their soul.

When Jesus looked at Judas, He spoke directly to the devil when He said, *"That thou doest, do quickly"* (John 13:27). Judas rose from the table and went into pitch blackness with the same unrest in his spirit, to demand money in exchange for betraying Jesus. He leaves the house of truth for the house of the Pharisees, the temple of hypocrites. What a sad contrast!

The Pharisees, who claimed to know God, were well-read in the Old Testament and frequented the temple. Yet, when God appeared in their midst as a man and challenged them to change their direction, these same leaders constantly questioned Him. I can imagine Judas walking into their midst and saying, "Give me money. God wants me to be wealthy. In fact, that is the reason I came to God in the first place."

■ SATAN AT THE CROSS

"They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion" (Psalm 22:13). These Pharisees were the same religious leaders who stood at the cross roaring at Christ, mocking Him and saying, "He saved others, but He has no power to save

Himself." They belligerently called to Him to come down from the cross if He was the Christ, promising to follow Him. They were glorying in the death of Christ because they would now be able to put Him out of their consciousness once and for all. Now they would be free to go back to their dead religion.

In reality, Jesus was surrounded by Satan himself. Satan had stalked and beguiled the multitude and infused his darkened thinking into their hearts. Like the Pharisees, Satan gloated and declared that the victory had been won; the prey was in his teeth. But the devil did not realize that death would not triumph.

*Like a strong
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"The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaketh proud things: Who have said, With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own: who is lord over us? For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him" (Psalm 12:3-5).

■ A GREATER LION

Mark 15:37-39 says of Jesus on the cross, *"[He] cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost. And the veil of the temple was rent in twain [two] from the top to the bottom. And when the centurion, which stood over against him,*

saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God." Like a strong male lion emerging from the tall grass, Jesus cried out with a powerful roar as if saying to Satan and his minions, "You thought you had finished me, but you do not realize you are dealing with the Lion of the tribe of Judah! You thought you had me in the grip of your jaws and that your voice was the loudest. You forgot I am God and I will always have the last word." At that very moment, the earth shook, the rocks split, and the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom. Even the centurion standing watch over the crucifixion, who had seen a lot of people die, exclaimed, *"truly this man was the Son of God"* (Mark 15:39).

Jesus roared out against sin, death and hell and devoured it. He rose from the grave and gave the spoils of victory unto man. *"When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men"* (Ephesians 4:8). Jesus gives those who receive Him a spirit of power, a new heart and a sound mind. He gave you and me an assured future and a Word that can triumph over any power of evil.

■ THROW DOWN THE LION

This triumph can be seen in the Old Testament when a lion came against David as a young boy while he was tending his father's sheep. David said, *"I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him"* (1 Samuel 17:35). Remember, he was only a boy in his teens who found himself in a vulnerable position with a roaring lion standing right in front of him. The word smote means to throw down. It is amazing how God supernaturally gave David power to take hold of the lion, throw it down and kill it. You may be a young person but if the Spirit of God is with you, He will give you power to look the devil in the eye and defeat him. You

may have asked yourself, "How will I stand in this generation?" You will stand in the same way everybody has stood in the past, in the power and might of God. He will give you His Holy Spirit and you will be able to stand against your enemies. God will give you the power to overcome the roar of the devil's accusatory and condemning voice. Hallelujah!

Again, in the book of Judges, we read as Samson went down to the Philistine camp, a young lion burst out of its hiding place with a roar and attacked him. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson and he tore the lion apart as if it were a small goat. Days later, he passed by the carcass of the lion and saw that bees had made a hive with honey in the comb. He took the honey and fed his family with it. In the same way, you do not have to worry about the future. The very thing you think is going to destroy you will actually give you life as you turn and go God's way.

You have the same Holy Spirit David and Samson had. You have the power to lay hold of the enemy, and not be in terror or panic because of him.

Do not be given to intimidation from Satan, a defeated lion.

■ STAND AS PILLARS

For those of you who have walked with the Lord a long time, you may still face some of your greatest battles. When Daniel was an older man, he was betrayed and thrown into the lions' den. He came out alive, untouched and unharmed by the lions. You too will have the same victory in your trials. When the king lamented and called out to Daniel in

the morning, Daniel answered, "God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths." There comes a point when, like Daniel, you have been through enough to know not to listen to the roar of the enemy. God has your heart and you can trust His Word.

You and I are not on the losing side, we are on the victory side.

I want to encourage you to hold firm to your position in Christ. Don't let fear get hold of you and become a source of discouragement to those who are watching your life. Stand as pillars; do not be given to intimidation from Satan, a defeated lion. Keep your confidence in God, and let your quietness and strength be a testimony to others.

■ LOOK THE LION IN THE FACE

I quoted the apostle Peter in the beginning of this message where he said to be sober and vigilant, because your adversary the devil as a roaring lion walks about seeking whom he may devour. In other words, he walks about looking to infuse his thinking into the heart of an unsuspecting person, the way he did with Judas. You have a chance to be the church in your generation. You have an opportunity to stand in the power of God, look the lion in the face, and say, "In spite of your roaring, I have authority over you in the name of Jesus Christ."

Today, you need to say, "God, fill me with the Holy Spirit. I want power to go with you even into the place of the suffering. I want your power to reach the poor, and the power to give myself for the lost." If this is your heart's

desire, you will have your prayer answered, and God will be able to reveal Himself through you to a needy and dying world. In Psalm 56:2-3, David says, "*Mine enemies would daily swallow me up: for they be many that fight against me, O thou most High. What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.*" In verse 6, it says, "*They gather themselves together, they hide themselves, they mark my steps, when they wait for my soul.*" This is exactly how a lion hunts. But what set David apart from other men is he knew where his help came from. In verse 9, David said, "*When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God is for me.*" This is the same God who through His Son, Jesus Christ, said on the cross: "It is finished," and He literally meant the battle was over. You and I are not on the losing side, we are on the victory side. You will not be triumphed over. Walk with God, and you will see a supernatural provision in the coming days. Your security is not in your 401K, but in John 3:16.

Carter Conlon

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Dear friend,

February 10 through 12, the congregation of Times Square Church will be fasting for the full three days. We will have prayer services from 7:00 to 9:00 in our sanctuary every night of the fast. We invite you to join with us via live web stream at tscnyc.org.

We will be appealing to the mercy of God for our society and our city. People from all walks of life will be interceding for those they touch shoulders with every day. In 2 Chronicles 5:13, when the glory of God came powerfully into the temple, the people were gathered together with one voice, singing one song. They praised the Lord, saying, *"He is good; for his mercy endureth for ever..."* The Lord had given King David and King Solomon the pattern of this song saying, in essence, that this is how He wanted to be known.

I think you will agree that our country today needs the mercy of God clearly shown through Christ Jesus on Calvary. Will you pray with us? Let's believe God together for one last great ingathering of souls before He comes again. Send us your prayer needs by completing the prayer request form on our website at tscnyc.org and we will stand in agreement with you each night.

Yours in Christ,



Carter Conlon
Senior Pastor

This message is an edited version of "The Fellowship of Christ's Suffering," a sermon given on **October 12, 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.

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

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