

Dear Friend,

This will be the third and possibly the final year for Prayer in the Square. The Lord called us to host, fund and organize this event for the last three years. He told us that the first year would establish credibility with the city, and we have received positive feedback from various city agencies, including the office of the Mayor himself, commending us for honesty, order, and keeping our word.

The second year confirmed to local churches that this was not the beginning of some new ministry but rather a gathering for the sole purpose of one hour of prayer, in humility, with all denominations represented and no personalities or ministry showcased. Those who have attended can attest to the fact that this has been so. Everything has unfolded exactly as the Lord impressed upon our hearts it would.

This year Prayer in the Square will be what the call has been about from the beginning. In prayer three years ago, we felt that 2009 would be a time of great distress for our city and country. However, our hope is in the fact that God has called us to gather to pray in our time of need. I do not believe that He would have called us to gather in such a place and at such a time if He had not planned to answer our prayer. I expect something spiritually profound to happen this year.

Please come and pray with us.

Yours in Christ,



Pastor Carter Conlon

P.S. If you would like to learn more about Prayer in the Square visit the website at nycprayer.org. If you are a pastor and you would like to participate with your church, we invite you to register online at nycprayer.org. The event will be **webcast live** on the website.

This message is an edited version of "Say Goodbye to Captivity," a sermon given on **December 28, 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

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	

tscnyc.org

SAY GOODBYE TO CAPTIVITY

by Carter Conlon

Many Christians are held captive by their adverse circumstances or the things of this world, and maybe you are one of them. God wants to put a cry of deliverance in your heart. A cry which says, "Lord, surely there is more for me in this Christian life than I am experiencing at present. I have been pouring myself out, but there has been no joy in it. I want to live for God, but every time I try to, I find myself serving the very things that hold me captive."

God wants to bring you out of this captivity and to a place where you walk in freedom, knowing the plans and purposes of God for your life. You will be a person who will not be moved in the midst of calamity, uncertainty, confusion or darkness. By faith you will say goodbye to everything that holds you captive, just as God promised His people when He delivered them out of the strongholds of Egypt.

■ AN INCREDIBLE PROMISE

You remember the story of how the people of God first came to Egypt. During a time of severe drought, Jacob and seventy members of his household journeyed into the land. There they were reunited with Joseph, the son Jacob thought he had lost, who had become a powerful leader second only to Pharaoh. Joseph settled them in Goshen and was able to provide bountifully for his family. Now after the Israelites had lived in Egypt for a long time, a king came to the throne who did not remember the work and testimony of Joseph. This Pharaoh looked over the Israelite community,

which had become a great nation, mightier than the Egyptians, and said to his people, "*come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land*" (Exodus 1:10, NKJV).

I believe God initiates such a cry during difficult times.

So the Egyptians set ruthless taskmasters over the Israelites to oppress them with forced labor, making their lives bitter with hard service. Their duties became more grueling as they were given inferior tools and insufficient materials to work with. Pharaoh kept them in servitude forcing them to build cities and monuments to himself. Life became so unbearable that a cry rose up in the heart of God's people. I believe God initiates such a cry during difficult times. He does this before He brings about a great deliverance. His deliverance of the Israelites came in the form of a man named Moses. By Moses' hand God brought plagues on all of Egypt until Pharaoh let the people go.

The freed Israelites are now caught standing at the brink of the Red Sea with the host of the Egyptian army

advancing in hot pursuit. "*And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will show to you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more for ever*" (Exodus 14:13).

What an incredible promise for this generation of people who had known only a life of captivity and hardship. As fear tried to ensnare them in a new bondage, this promise from God neutralized that powerful and paralyzing force.

■ A PEOPLE LED BY THE SPIRIT

If you were to stand as a spectator and view this unfolding drama at the Red Sea, you would have seen two extremely large groups of people headed in the same direction. Both would have appeared to be going after the things of God. However, on closer inspection you would have seen the first group, the Israelites, headed toward the place where all of God's promises are fulfilled; where the impossible becomes possible. They were being led and directed by the Spirit of God and He was acting on their behalf. "*The Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry ground; and the waters were divided. The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left*" (Exodus 14:21-22 NRSV).

If you want a good illustration of how this phenomenon would have looked to the children of Israel, open your Bible to the middle. Hold it up before your face, close one eye, and look

down the center. The rolling pages on each side represent the divided sea, and the center demonstrates where the Israelites walked to the other side on dry ground. This graphic image has a strong spiritual connotation. When you start reading the Bible, and believe the promises God has made, you will watch Him perform the miraculous for you as He did for Israel.

When you start walking with the Lord, in faith, He will go with you through every problem, no matter how difficult. Every book in the Bible will give you confidence to say the devil, “You are not stopping me! I am going through to the other side of this book with God.”

***If your life
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When the Israelites reached the other side of the Red Sea they sang songs of victory: *“I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea”* (Exodus 15:1). You, too, will sing songs of victory as God brings you through all of your difficulties. Hallelujah!

Once the children of Israel were on the other side, God immediately led them into the desert on their way to the land of promise. This wilderness was an extremely tough place; there were no grocery stores or internet cafés for high-speed web access; there was no take-out service or fast food delivery, except from

heaven, of course, when manna rained down every day. Life had suddenly become difficult for them; there were new hardships on every side. But God was going to prove Himself faithful to them in every new trial. Given the choice, that is exactly where I would want to be, with God’s people in His divine will, letting Him take me where I can never go in my own strength. I would rather let Him make me what I can never hope to become, so I can look back and say, “Only God could have done this.”

If your life has suddenly taken a turn for the worse, believe that God will not fail you. All of us have been touched in some way or another by the present difficulties of our society. God will be faithful to you now as He was to the Israelites in the desert. You will be able to look back one day at how the Lord has led you and say, “It was not by a committee or human design; it was not a ten-step program or self-help course that got me through. It was His divine power and His outstretched arm that delivered me.”

■ A SELF-SERVING PEOPLE

Now there was a second large group coming up in the rear who knew they were pursuing God’s people, rather than God and His promises. What a marked difference there was between these two groups! The Israelites were following God, while the Egyptians who had the shiny chariots, expensive uniforms and state-of-the-art weaponry, were following after them. They looked like they had prospered in everything they had put their hand to, but in actuality, their sole interest was to achieve their own personal objectives. Note what Pharaoh said, *“Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us?”* (Exodus 14:5).

The Egyptians’ pursuit of God’s people was nothing less than self-serving; they wanted to harness the blessings of God for

themselves, but the result was they drowned in the Red Sea. This is a powerful warning for those today who are also using God’s people to pursue their selfish ambitions and their own prosperity. They, too, will drown in the pages of Scripture. The Word will not make sense to self-seekers; they will look only for the verses that substantiate their selfish desires. Listen to Paul’s admonition, *“But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition”* (1 Timothy 6:9).

The Bible tells us very clearly, *“If the light in you be darkness, how great is that darkness”* (Matthew 6:23). Jesus spoke this in the context of having a focus on personal gain rather than on the Word and the righteousness of God. This is the reason why there is so much confusion and why so many people are not finding God. They have given up on the Bible and have turned to false prophets to interpret the Word for them. These counterfeit individuals are the glittery-eyed, silver-tongued ambassadors of Satan. They are standing in pulpits leading people farther and farther away from the truth of Christ.

■ MAKE THE CHOICE TO GO WITH GOD

Wherever you find yourself now make the choice to go with God, even though it may mean going into a desert with insurmountable difficulties. God is calling you in the midst of calamity, uncertainty, and great trial. Therefore stand on God’s promises and walk under His leading. He is calling you not to be moved by any of these circumstances. Stand still, as the children of Israel did at the edge of the Red Sea, and see the salvation of God. You will be looking into a spiritual kingdom that is hidden from the multitude whose focus is on the things of this earth. Your choice to go God’s way means you have exchanged

the value system of this world for the value system of heaven. Your pursuits will not be the same as the world's; therefore, you cannot be shaken by what is going on all around you. Your life will become a testimony to the trustworthiness and power of God.

Become a part of the people who refuse to be carried along with those who are moving steadily away from the purposes of Christ. Be the man or woman who says, "The whole crowd might be going this way, but I am not going with them." You might be fearful, with your own heart telling you to give up because you can only go so far in following God. You may even have voices around you, enemies from hell, telling you, "You think you can break free from the things that have held you captive? You have tried for years and years. What makes you think that freedom is going to come now?" You need to take your accusers to the Word of God and show them what the promises of God are: "*For thou hast girded me with strength unto the battle: thou hast subdued under me those that rose up against me. Thou hast also given me the necks of mine enemies; that I might destroy them that hate me. They cried, but there was none to save them: even unto the Lord, but he answered them not. Then did I beat them small as the dust before the wind: I did cast them out as the dirt in the streets*" (Psalms 18:38–42). This was David's testimony; God gave him the power to overcome every enemy that accused him and told him that he would fail.

■ DO NOT LISTEN TO THE ENEMY

Do not listen to the enemy when he tells you that this word is for somebody else but not for you. God is confirming it to you saying, "I will give you my power if you will let my Word have a place in your heart. I will give you the power to overcome every enemy. You will beat them as small as dust and throw them into the streets. They will have no power

to stand before you anymore." If you will listen to His voice, no bad news will be able to change the tenor of your life, the power and passion that is in your voice, and the clarity and direction in your steps. You can choose to stand on God's promises and go where He is leading. There is a glory that is going to come upon those whose minds are not saturated with the things of this world. Faith will come into your heart and you will declare the impossible, possible.

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■ MOVE TOWARD THE PURPOSES OF GOD

Your pursuit will no longer be self-serving, but it will become a passion to reach the souls of men and women who are on their way to hell. Jesus said, "*For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost*" (Luke 19:10). The Gospel of Jesus Christ is about Calvary. It is about Jesus dying for you so you can stand with confidence, knowing your sins are forgiven. Others will see the change and ask you how they can have the same life. People will observe the glory of the Lord in you and will listen when you tell them that what God has done for you, He will also do for them.

Beware of using Christ for your own objectives as you move forward in obedience to His call. You and I must be moving toward those dying around us. You cannot sit

still and say, "I know God, but I have absolutely no burden for those who are headed for outer darkness." God's burden has not changed and His mission is no different from what it was two thousand years ago. You must start following God's call to extend yourself, not in your own strength, but in the strength of Christ—doing what He tells you to do, speaking what He gives you to speak, reaching out in the manner that He directs.

■ GET UP AND GET OUT

Today if you are captivated by besetting sin, by the lies of the enemy; by the things of this world; by wounding of the heart; by struggles in your mind, by thoughts of depression and suicide; or by relationships and practices you cannot get out of – take a good look at them and say goodbye, because you are never going to see them again. By faith get up, put your feet in the water, take the first step and God will open the sea before you. It is not enough to get up and get out. You have to move to the other side of what God has for you, or your enemies will catch up to you again. Move to that testimony of Christ in your life, and say goodbye to captivity!

Carter Conlon
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