

LETTER FROM CARTER CONLON

Dear Friend,

One could say that we are approaching this Christmas season with similar concerns to those who were alive at the time of Christ's birth. Taxation was on everyone's mind and people were seeking a safe haven during a period of widespread hardship (Luke 2: 1–20). I can hear the multitudes, as many were gripped by fear and complaint, wondering, "Where is God in all of this?"

This must have been the conversation at the main inn of Bethlehem, when suddenly and softly a knock comes to the door. It was the Son of God. The innkeeper and guests were just too self-focused and busy to receive Him. He was turned away and the only place they found was a stable.

This Christmas, take time to be alone and reflect on how good and faithful Jesus has been to you. Most importantly, listen for that tiny knock at the door of your heart. I promise that what happens next will make your day!

Yours in Christ,



Carter Conlon
Senior Pastor

COMING OUT OF THE WILDERNESS WITH POWER (PART 2)

by Carter Conlon

In part one of *Coming Out of the Wilderness with Power*, we focused on the fact that God draws those He loves into the wilderness. We learned that the term "wilderness experience" does not mean an oasis or a place of leisure. Rather, by definition it is a remote environment devoid of all outward appeal, hope or comfort; a hostile place where few would willingly go. Most of us actually would resist going into a wilderness, yet that is exactly where God sent His Son.

In part two we want to focus on the actual "wilderness experience" of Jesus. We will see how He handled the temptations that came to Him in this inhospitable place and how His answers can instruct us. Remember, if you are a child of God, He will lead you into the wilderness from time to time in order to speak into your life. He does this so that an ever-increasing measure of His life will be revealed in you.

■ JESUS IS DIVINELY LED INTO THE WILDERNESS

"Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness" (Luke 4:1). As we look at the life and ministry of Jesus, we first observe how He was baptized by John in the Jordan River and empowered by God. The Holy Spirit immediately led Him into the wilderness, a dry and barren place, where He was tempted by the devil. Here in this testing ground,

the Father established that He must be the Son's only source of strength and victory over Satan. Jesus demonstrated for us that victory over the enemy will only be won by complete dependence on God and His Word.

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Nobody wants to go into the wilderness to face the battles of loneliness, hunger, and temptations from the devil. But, beloved, it is in these desert places that God works His will and purposes in your life. Here He exposes obstinate sin which has refused to go, it has been covered over and never dealt with. But it is also where He delivers you and raises you up to be a mighty warrior for His kingdom. He will open His Word to you and give you life and a song in your heart in this wilderness. It is strange but true that in these tough places you receive divine strength and encouragement from God. As you allow the Lord to take you on this journey, life may not suddenly become any easier, but your perspective of the "wilderness experience" will be changed. You

will embrace God's plan as the only plan for your life. You and I will be like the Shulamite, of whom Solomon wrote about, *"Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?"* (Song of Solomon 8:5).

God's ultimate goal is to have you come out of the wilderness with power, but be assured Satan will do everything possible to divert your focus from God and put it on your problems. As you encounter spiritual battles, one of your greatest temptations will be to trust in yourself and your own resources. This has been the devil's strategy since the Garden of Eden. A closer look at the temptations of Jesus will show you how God intends to bring deliverance into your life.

■ THE TEMPTATION OF COMMANDING

The Scriptures tell us Jesus was hungry after forty days of fasting and right at that point the devil came to Him with the first great temptation, saying, *"If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread"* (Luke 4:3). The devil craftily tried to provoke Jesus into supplying His own need rather than depending on His Father. In essence, Satan said to Him, "If you are truly the Son of God, then why are you hungry? Why are you suffering? Why are you struggling in this place? Why don't you simply use the power of your words to command a better life for yourself? All you have to do is command the hard places to go away to make your life easier."

If Jesus had yielded to this temptation to make a decision apart from God, He would never have been able to lay down His life for the sins of the world. He was committed to following His Father in everything, as the Scriptures declare in John 5:30, *"I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me."*

Jesus made a deliberate decision to rely on the Word in answering the devil, *"It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God"* (Luke 4:4). In other words, "Satan, I have not been sent into this world to look after myself or to command away my difficulties. I have been sent to redeem a people who have been lost to my Father. His heart passionately longs for them and there is only one way they can be brought home—I have chosen that way."

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The devil always offers a road of ease and selfishness. By choosing this path your heart will eventually harden. If you seek your own welfare, you will end up with no compassion for those who are lost and will ultimately push away and marginalize those who need God. He wants to set the prisoner free and He has chosen you to show others His delivering power. This is not a time to be "commanding stones into bread" but a time to be seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. God has promised He will provide everything you will ever need. If you look at the life of Jesus, you see He always had enough food to eat, clothing to wear, and a place to sleep, even if it was out in the open. The Father made it all available to Him because He chose to place His total dependence on God. Therefore He was able to say, *"My meat (food) is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work"* (John 4:34).

■ THE TEMPTATION OF RULING

Satan was undaunted by Christ's refusal to fall for his first temptation and tried another approach. *"And*

the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine" (Luke 4:5-7). The devil was saying to Jesus, "If you give me your adoration, this whole world will be yours. You can rule over all the kingdoms of men immediately and not have to live as a servant under them. If the reason you have come to this world is about ruling and reigning, do it now!"

This is one of the most effective temptations of Satan. You can be sure that at the root of this appeal is the pride of life, that ever-longing quest to be recognized, appreciated and honored. This kind of temptation can only have power if you are afraid of rejection. It is always difficult for the human ego to give one's life to serving people and then get pushed away, unappreciated. The devil was moving to shortcut the ways of God and offer ruling now rather than later. This temptation was so inviting because it offered an opportunity to gain human honor—instantaneously.

He had embraced this direction from His Father and would not be deterred from it.

Jesus knew that the vast majority of people would ultimately refuse His message and turn away from Him. But He had embraced this direction from His Father and would not be deterred from it. Jesus understood that He would one day rule and

reign with God and had no desire to undermine the perfect will of the Father. At the Last Supper, Jesus expressed the heart of a servant for this fallen world. Everybody who sat at the table with Him that night would fail Him and some would even betray Him. Still He bent and tenderly washed the feet that would run in every direction at the first sign of difficulty. Christ was saying to them, “I have made the choice to be given for you and I will go the distance, although many of you will not initially understand it.”

Jesus faced that old adversary, the devil that day in the wilderness and with the authority of God upon Him and said to him, “*Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve*” (Luke 4:8).

■ THE TEMPTATION OF UNBELIEF

“He brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence: For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee: And in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone” (Luke 4:9–11).

Now Satan tried to position Christ at the top of the temple where He would have to believe the Father to protect Him physically or to draw back in unbelief. By this temptation, Satan thought he had put Jesus “in check” and could destroy Him. The temple was supposed to be a place where life came from, but it had become a house of greed and dead works. Satan had taken Jesus to the temple, where he knew men chose to serve a dead religion rather than the living God. Satan knows that one of the surest ways to cripple the church of Jesus Christ is to move them out of faith and into unbelief. For this reason the devil brought Jesus to the very heart of it all—the house of God! He

knew the first generation of Israelites who came out of Egypt perished in the wilderness because of their hard hearts and unbelief. Jesus would have to believe God was able to keep Him on this journey to save fallen men or not. This is what Satan likes to do with people all the time, to get your back into a corner where there seems to be no alternatives. But beloved there is an alternative! It is called the Word of God. Hallelujah! The Bible declares Satan is a defeated foe and God has given us a great victory through His Son Jesus Christ.

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■ GIVEN FOR LOST HUMANITY

Jesus knew where the power of God was and He was intent on being given for fallen humanity. He had rejected turning a stone to bread, ruling over the people now, and putting the Word of God to a foolish test. His mind was fixed on going to a cross and being poured out so that others might be grafted into the lineage of Almighty God. It was as if Satan came to Him and said, “Do you really believe this is where the power of God is? Do you really believe there is a purpose to being given for fallen humanity? Do you really believe that God will sustain you on this pathway that you seem so intent on following?” Jesus knew that being given for people is where the power of God is released;

therefore, He was confident that God would sustain Him on this journey.

Jesus understood the nature of the temptation. He also knew that Satan wanted Him to have a margin of doubt on this road marked with suffering. Jesus knew He would die for the sins of the world and that God would raise Him up again on the third day. So He looked His enemy in the eye and answered him, “*It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God*” (Luke 4:12).

■ FAITH THAT UNLOCKS EVERY DOOR

If you really believe that the power of God is found by giving yourself for other people, then every locked door will be opened to you by God. Everything unlocks and opens when you are willing to walk this way. That is why Jesus looked at the devil and said, “You will not put God to a foolish test. God cannot lie like man—He will do what He says. What is written in His Word is exactly what will happen.” God’s purposes are winning your neighbor, co-worker, family members and ordinary people found in the highways and the byways to His kingdom.

■ JESUS COMES OUT OF THE WILDERNESS

The devil left the scene that day knowing Jesus could not be moved away from the plans of His Father. Jesus then arose, walked out of the wilderness, and headed to the very people God had sent Him to: the fallen, the destitute, the sick and the broken.

When He arrived at the local synagogue, He openly declared His mission for everyone to hear: “*He went into the synagogue on the sabbath day...to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath*

anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears” (Luke 4:16–21).

In essence, Christ said, “I did not come for myself. And the Spirit of God is not upon me to make hard places easy and this life effortless. The word is not in my mouth to satisfy my own desires and rule as a king. No, I have come for something much higher than this. I have come to be given for others.”

Jesus left their presence in the synagogue that day, with the Scribes and Pharisees in a uproar, because His words went against their teaching. *“And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. But he passing through the midst of them went his way” (Luke 4:28–30).* Why do you think the crowd could not throw Him off the brow of the cliff? It is because Jesus had put His faith in His Father, to keep and protect Him. Jesus knew that the Word of God was more powerful than any temptation the devil could throw at Him. He stood on the Word as it is written, *“For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their*

hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone” (Psalm 91:11–12).

■ SO SEND I YOU

The desert is a place of testing and proving, believing and accepting God’s plans for us. Out of that place comes power and purpose. Jesus paved the way by His own example of trusting in the Word of God and holding true to God’s calling. We have the ability to walk in this power. We are called to reach the lost and to serve a selfish and backward generation, not on our terms but on God’s. Not taking the easy way out, as Satan would try to tempt us to do.

Remember Jesus said, *“As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you” (John 20:21).* As followers of Jesus Christ, we are not called to live for ourselves. We are called to follow His example of total abandonment to the will of God without regard to self. Every time we stray from this understanding, God in His mercy will take us into a dry and barren place, where in desperation we will say, “Oh, God, what are you trying to tell me?” In that place God will show us His mercy, goodness and power. We will come out changed, with a greater understanding of the Father and a heart for the lost and dying. Hold fast to the Word of God and He will bring you out of the desert place with power!

Carter Conlon
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This newsletter is an edited version of “**Coming Out of the Wilderness with Power,**” a sermon given on **August 30, 2009** 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 scripture references 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	