

LETTER FROM CARTER CONLON

Dear Friend,

In 2 Corinthians 11:3–4, the apostle Paul warned the people that if they were not careful, they could end up embracing a corrupted image of Christ. Likewise, Jesus Himself warned in Matthew 24:4–5, that in the last days many voices would rise declaring themselves to be manifestations (images) of the Son of God. In other words, they might be saying, "What you are seeing is Christ in me; this is what the presence of God among men looks like!"

A great last-day strategy of darkness is to confuse and corrupt the image of Jesus. Satan is the author of confusion and his scheme is to infuse bogus images of Jesus into the professing church, to lead the people who are seeking God into a wrong focus and powerlessness.

It is essential that you and I love the real Jesus. It's in Him and His work on the earth that we find purpose, strength and true life. Please let the Lord speak to you today. When you finish, put the newsletter down and tell Jesus honestly how much you love Him. Be encouraged, He will never stop loving you!

Yours in Christ,



Carter Conlon
Senior Pastor

YOU HAVE TO LOVE JESUS TO FOLLOW HIM

by Carter Conlon

I want you to ask yourself this question, "Do I love Jesus?" The answer must come from your heart, because it is the only way you will be able to follow Him when the days ahead get rough. If you said yes, are you willing to let the Holy Spirit examine the depth of that statement?

Jesus did this for Peter when He met him on the shore, after His resurrection, with breakfast cooking on the open coals. That day Jesus dug deep into Peter's heart. I believe this encounter was a key which enabled Peter to go the distance with Christ. This meeting on the shore was the third time Jesus revealed Himself to His disciples after the resurrection.

■ THE FIRST TWO ENCOUNTERS WITH JESUS

John 20:19 recounts the first time Jesus manifested Himself to His disciples in a resurrected form. The disciples were meeting secretly in an upper room because they were afraid of the repercussions of being followers of Jesus. The door to the room was securely locked to keep them from being discovered by the religious leaders outside in the winding streets of Jerusalem. They were astonished when Jesus, suddenly and unannounced, appeared in the room and said, "*Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you*" (John 20:21).

What an amazing moment! First, Jesus removed fear by speaking peace into their hearts and then gave them a divine calling. He was sending them on a journey, just as His Father had sent Him. This commission was intended to have the same purpose and authority He had been given: "As my Father has sent me to bring men and women out of darkness and into reconciliation with Him, I am now sending you. You are to be witnesses of this loving heavenly Father who sent His Son into the world to die for the sins of mankind." What an honor and a privilege God was bestowing upon these people of such humble origins.

The second time Jesus appeared to His disciples was equally profound. John 20:24–29, relates how Jesus challenged Thomas to have faith. Thomas had doubted the veracity of the other disciples' testimony, of having seen the resurrected Lord, and openly proclaimed he would not believe their testimonies unless he could see some physical evidence. In the same way, many Christians today want to live for God but they want to see something tangible. Because of such a lack of faith, many people fly all over the world to see some sort of miracle. Christ's appearance to Thomas, with the other disciples present, was significant because He challenged them to believe Him and His Word without having

to see a sign. This same challenge is intended for us, as well. Christ's message was simple: Don't be faithless but believing.

■ JESUS MEETS HIS DISCIPLES THE THIRD TIME OVER BREAKFAST

“Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord!’ When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his tunic (for he had stripped for work), jumped into the water, and swam ashore. The others stayed with the boat and pulled the loaded net to the shore, for they were only out about three hundred feet.

When they got there, they saw that a charcoal fire was burning and fish were frying over it, and there was bread. ‘Bring some of the fish you’ve just caught,’ Jesus said. So Simon Peter went aboard and dragged the net to the shore. There were 153 large fish, and yet the net hadn’t torn.

‘Now come and have some breakfast!’ Jesus said. And no one dared ask him if he really was the Lord because they were sure of it. Then Jesus served them the bread and the fish. This was the third time Jesus had appeared to his disciples since he had been raised from the dead” (John 21:7–14 NLT).

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The apostle John recounted these events to show God's incredible love and persistence. The first two encounters should have been

sufficient for the disciples to leave everything and do His bidding, but they had chosen to go fishing instead. Why had they not acted on His first and second meetings? What were they not grasping about their commission? If the disciples did not respond to Christ's calling after seeing Him resurrected and walking in their midst, then there is a strong possibility you and I may also choose to “go fishing” instead of obeying the Spirit's calling.

■ GATHERED AROUND THE FAMILIAR

I believe the disciples went fishing because this was familiar territory; this was what many of them had grown up with. We are all like this in some way or another. We would rather let others go to the mission field because we are just not comfortable with doing it ourselves. While in that boat on the lake they were neither moving forward nor backwards. They were essentially in a stagnant place and by their own testimony, after fishing all night, they had caught nothing.

Jesus stood on the shore looking out to sea at those He had already commissioned to be fishers of men. He called out, asking how they had fared, although He knew their all-night vigil on the sea had produced nothing. Yet, here He was—calling, loving, and supporting these men who had strayed from His calling. What a gracious Savior, so merciful and compassionate. He met them where they were, challenging them to have faith in Him. Beloved, He will also go after you and lovingly call you when you have strayed from His plan and purpose for your life.

■ HEARING THE VOICE OF GOD

These may have been simple men, but they were honest when He questioned them about their catch. Jesus instructed them,

“Cast the net on the right side.” In other words, “Hear my voice and do it the way I have called you to do it.” Miraculously, their net was filled to capacity. But it was His voice that brought them hastening to shore. It was here that Jesus isolated Peter and began to speak into his life. In a sense, Peter represented the new fledgling church.

We see in Scripture that Jesus posed a very tender but poignant question to the one who had denied Him and had led the others out to sea on a fruitless fishing expedition. *“So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?” (John 21:15).* Within earshot of them all, Jesus needed to root out issues of the heart that would have stopped him from fulfilling his calling. Theologians have tried to explain what was meant by the term “more than these.” Jesus obviously had pointed to something or someone in their immediate vicinity, but since the apostle John does not tell us exactly what it was, we can only speculate what Jesus was referring to.

■ DO YOU LOVE ME MORE THAN PERSONAL WEALTH?

I suggest that Jesus could have been referring to the 153 fish they caught, large fish that would bring good money on the open market. It was a bigger catch than they had ever caught and in reality it had come by the word spoken through Jesus. Their primitive obedience had brought in an incredible harvest of personal wealth. There is no other way to describe it. To me this represents the resources that were within the reach of Peter and the disciples. We could say Jesus was asking Peter, “Do you love me more than gaining personal wealth?”

As you walk with God, there will be an unveiling of His resources,

not just spiritual but physical. You and I must choose if we are going to love Him more than the money or material resources that become available to us. “Do you love me more than these?” Jesus had asked. “Do you love me more than the prosperity that you might have because I have come into your life?”

Jesus was openly asking Peter a question that challenged everyone listening to Him. “Do you love me more than your trade, your learned abilities, your idea of your purpose in life?”

When you come to Christ God gives you a new mind; a new heart; a new spirit; a new direction. He takes you out of your poverty and brings you into this incredible treasure that His presence always brings. But if you don't love Him more than “these things,” you are going to get waylaid. Yes, money is necessary to buy clothes and food, and to pay the bills, but you cannot love it more than Jesus.

■ DO YOU LOVE ME MORE THAN JOB SECURITY?

Jesus may have pointed to the boats and nets, to the things of Peter's trade that he thought would provide him security.

Jesus was openly asking Peter a question that challenged everyone listening to Him. “Do you love me more than your trade, your learned abilities, your idea of your purpose

in life?” This was a pivotal question and if Peter could not say yes to this, he would go back to being a simple fisherman. It is true he would still have had the testimony of knowing Jesus, while strumming his guitar and singing the songs of Zion—and there is nothing wrong with that. However, if he had stayed home and not followed the Lord, he would have missed the opportunity of becoming one of the greatest apostles and writing two New Testament epistles which will remain for eternity.

■ DO YOU LOVE ME MORE THAN YOUR FRIENDS?

“Do you love me more than these?” I wonder if Jesus was pointing to all the disciples standing around. These were Peter's lifelong friends who were willing to join him on his fishing venture, simply because he had said, “I am going fishing.” Jesus could be asking Peter if he loved Him enough to let his friends go their own way if they so chose.

Many young Christians do not make right choices in the early stages of their walk with the Lord. After committing their lives to Him, they do not cut unhealthy ties and let go of worldly relationships. Eventually, they get drawn away from Christ and their passion for God wanes, leaving them dry and empty once more. Jesus was asking Peter to live solely for Him even if he lost all past associations.

When Peter quickly responds, “You know I love you.” Jesus tells him, “*Feed my lambs.*” (John 21:15) In other words, feed the new believers with the understanding that coming to Christ means letting go of worldly things.

■ DO YOU LOVE ME ENOUGH TO LET ME LEAD YOU?

Jesus was drawing out of Peter what was really in his heart, “*He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?*”

(John 21:16). You can sense the emphasis Jesus placed on Himself. Do you love me? Do you love my voice so much that I can speak into you? Will you follow my voice wherever it leads you?

That is what Jesus asks of those who say they love Him. Are you willing to let Him lead you on a journey? A journey that when you get to the end, you will say, as the psalmist says, “*Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them*” (Psalm 126:2). People will look at you and say, “Look what God has done.” That does not come to those who just sit in church. Jesus is asking us to follow Him on a journey that is deeper; a journey that is further than we can go in our own strength.

■ DO YOU LOVE THE IMAGE OF ME BEFORE YOU?

Then it gets really interesting. In verse 17, Jesus says again, “*Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me?*” Why did Jesus ask Peter this third time if he loved Him? Perhaps Jesus was going after the image people had of who He was. Could they have created an image of Him that was not in conformity to who He was? If so, Jesus would have to remove that image, or the world would begin to believe this is what He looks like.

What kind of an image of God have we created in this generation? How are we representing God among men? What is being presented to this generation when we say: “This is what God looks like; this is what His people look like. This is what a people, empowered by the Holy Spirit look like.” Is it a true image of Christ?

In verse 12, when the disciples had landed their boat, Jesus asked them

to come and dine with Him. They instinctively knew this was the Lord, but none of them dared to ask Him who He was. This is amazing! Jesus must have appeared as an ordinary-looking man. He did not look like the Jesus they had known. You might think there should have been at least fifty angels with Him, attending the now-resurrected Lord, or surely there had to be some kind of glow around Him, right? But no, here He was, just an ordinary-looking person offering them breakfast on the shore. He was giving spiritual direction to fishermen whose efforts were fruitless and He was serving them, inviting them to be partakers of supernatural provision. The coals of fire, fish and bread had all come from the hand of God standing before them.

When Peter affirms his love for Him the third time, Jesus answers, *“Feed my sheep”* (John 21:17). In other words, “share with them this supernatural provision I have given you.”

■ IF YOU LOVE ME, FOLLOW ME

And then Jesus says to Peter, *“The truth is, when you were young, you were able to do as you liked and go wherever you wanted to. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will direct you and take you where you don’t want to go. Jesus said this to let him know what kind of death he would die to glorify God. Then Jesus told him, ‘Follow me.’”* (John 21:18–19, NLT).

Jesus was letting Peter see that he would be led into places that anyone in the natural would rather not go. He was saying to Peter, “In order for this to happen, you are going to have to follow me. You are going to have to embrace and love the image

of God that stands before you, that of an ordinary man, a servant given for you, and calling you in like manner to be given for others.”

Are you willing to follow this image of Jesus? Are you willing to follow in the footsteps of Christ and be an ordinary person who is God-gripped in the heart by the Spirit of the Living God? If you are, the love that you have for Jesus will send you out to serve other people. To serve a lost world; to serve those whose efforts are bearing no fruits. As you serve others, you will be empowered by God to share with them from a supernatural provision and tell them, “what God has done for me, He can do for you.”

■ DO YOU LOVE JESUS?

Now ask yourself again, “Do I love Jesus? Do I love that image of God?” If you do, then you will be able to say “I love you enough, Lord, to obey you in my lifestyle, and turn from sin and relationships with people who are not going your way. I love you enough, Jesus, to believe that you will provide for me. I love you enough to let you form your own image in my life. And even if it is never seen by men, as long as I know it is seen by God, that suffices. I will be satisfied to know that I walk with God and God walks with me.”

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 newsletter is an edited version of *“You Have to Love Jesus to Follow Him,”* a sermon given on **October 18, 2009** in the sanctuary of Times Square Church in New York City. Other sermons are available by visiting our website at tscnyc.org. 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 King James Version.