

Dear Friend,

I find myself looking forward to the year 2012. You may wonder: "What in the world does he find to look forward to when even the most optimistic among us are becoming disheartened?"

The answer is simple. My optimism comes from seeing the hand of God's mercy everywhere. Mercy will cause our generation to consider again the ways of the Lord. Mercy will remove the illusion we see as reality and call us to embrace the eternal. Mercy will bring the prodigal church home. Mercy will give us a revelation of His love. Mercy will allow believers in Christ to lay down the things that divide us.

Mercy will give us new eyes to see hope on the horizon and see even our enemies with the compassion of Christ. The mercy I see will triumph over the judgments soon to come. I see Christ's hands reaching out through yours and mine, offering a fearful people the deepest hope that every heart has ever longed for. I see the people of God standing with unshakable peace regardless of the fury of the storm. I see these things so clearly that I am reaching out for the fullness of them to be mine this year.

Let's go together. Let's get oil for our lamps and be ready to see the hand of God and our soon-coming King, even in this midnight hour. Let's do it now.

Yours, in Christ,

Carter Conlon
Senior Pastor

2012—A YEAR TO CONSIDER JESUS by Carter Conlon

As we have stepped into this New Year, I believe we also have entered a season when the Lord is asking His people to stop and consider something. Most likely it will be a short season, but a critical one—a season to seriously consider the extent to which we are willing to embrace and follow the full pathway that God has put before us.

Unfortunately, we are living in a time when much of the church of Jesus Christ has become hemmed in by the boundaries that society has set around it. We have allowed a handful of people to dictate when we can and cannot pray in public; what we can and cannot do in the name of Christ. Such limitations have been put in place despite the fact that those who believe in Jesus statistically comprise over 70 percent of the American population. We have retreated to a place where we can be assured that we will be tolerated—knowing that the world will have no problem as long as there is nothing in the church that stands as a definitive contrast to a society that continues to cast off moral restraint at an unprecedented level.

In God's Word we read of a church called Ephesus—a church known for its works, endurance and doctrinal purity. Yet Jesus said to them, "*Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love*" (Revelation 2:4). The church had lost the very thing that made her attractive—a wholehearted love for Christ and

the embracing of His work on the earth. Those outside the church must have looked in and seen a relationship of merely mutual tolerance, much like a marriage that had lost its spark of love and passion.

Do you remember the first time you fell in love? The first days of your marriage? You were filled with passion, unashamed to be seen in public with your spouse. You walked down the street arm in arm, proud to acknowledge that this was the person you had given your life to.

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Sadly, we look at much of what is purported to be the testimony of Christ today and cannot help but wonder where the passion is. It is like the married couple who stays together for convenience or for the sake of the children, all the while completely unaware of how unattractive their relationship has become. No wonder so many people have concluded, "If this is what a relationship with God looks like, no thank you! If this is the passion it produces, if this is the character that evolves from it, I would rather find something else."

■ A MERCY CALL

Although we have in large measure moved away from the simplicity of

Christ and have formulated theologies to justify our backslidden condition, I am thankful this is not the end of the story. The Bible tells us that we have a season to consider our ways. The prophet Haggai spoke to the people of God who were called to rebuild the testimony of Christ in their generation:

“Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little... Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord. Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit” (Haggai 1:4–10).

Many claim to be Christians, but where are the warriors—the men and women of character?

Consider your ways! Haggai was saying to the people, “You have settled into a form of religiousness. You developed strategies to fill the house of God and mask the encroaching spiritual bankruptcy, but now you suddenly find heaven closed. You boasted of a great harvest that was going to come in, but where is it? You had sporadic gatherings, seemingly with no substance, and the Lord blew it all away.”

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Today’s church has made conversion so easy. There is no longer a need for repentance, no requirement to turn from sin, no admonition to give one’s life fully to the work and cause of Jesus Christ. Instead, people are told that if they will simply repeat a little two-line prayer, their sins will be forgiven and they will be on their way to heaven. We have opened the gates wider than the Scriptures have opened them. We have brought in a supposed harvest, but now are finding that this harvest has no power to stand against all that society is throwing against it. Many claim to be Christians, but where are the warriors—the men and women of character? Where are those who are willing to stand in the face of the storm?

“And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands” (Haggai 1:11). The Lord called for a drought, and this is exactly where we find ourselves today. The Lord has called for a drought in America in order to get the attention of His people, as well as that of a lust-laden society.

Remember, the mercy of God sends us into the storm. Yes, it is judgment, but mercy precedes and triumphs over judgment. We need to

be brought into a place of realizing our true condition. How tragic it would be to live as if everything is fine only to discover later that we missed the whole purpose, stopped short of the gateway to eternal life, and lived a cultural Christianity with no reality in it.

■ AN ALTAR OUTSIDE THE GATE

The writer of Hebrews tells us, “We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle” (Hebrews 13:10). We have an altar! Yet there are those whose whole relationship with God is based on ordinances, laws and obligations. They have lost their passion and settled for a mediocre Christianity, just doing their time, reading their Bible for ten minutes every day, and vocally professing to be a Christian. They may not have the courage to love God in public or the heart to do His work, but there is also an altar for that—an altar with no power. There is no lasting ability, no sustaining strength, no revelation—nothing but ideas out of men’s natural minds.

We have a chance as a church to come out from our cultural captivity—to come out to a new place where our mouths are open in constant thanksgiving.

On the other hand, there exists an altar that is much deeper and more satisfying, but it requires a refusal to settle for rituals and profitless labor. That is why Paul said to Timothy, “Stir up the gift of God that is in

you” (see 2 Timothy 1:6). When you first came to Christ, the hand of God came upon you, and you were called to do something that only you could do. God gave you a responsibility, and He endowed you with gifts to glorify His name. So do not let things spiral down to the point of merely coming to church out of obligation; a passionless relationship with God that bears no fruit in the earth. If you allow that to happen, you can be certain that nobody will desire what you have. People will look at your relationship with God and conclude, “I am already despairing enough. I do not need religion adding to my misery!”

“Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate” (Hebrews 13:12). He suffered outside the gate! For the sake of saving us and enabling us to walk again with a holy God, Jesus traveled outside the gate—outside the limitations, outside the borders of the religion that tried to confine Him. He could have risen to become one of the highest in the whole echelon, but He refused to play their game. Therefore, they dragged Him outside the gate, outside of the city.

“Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name” (Hebrews 13:13–15). You and I are called to “go forth out of the camp” to where Jesus is. In other words, we have a chance as a church to come out from our cultural captivity—to come out to a new place where our mouths are open in constant thanksgiving. We can come out and approach the altar where the fire of God truly is, where His glory abounds, where people are given abilities that could only come from the heart of God.

Going to that altar requires humility, a contrite heart—admitting that perhaps our religion falls short of the glory of God for our lives. Notice that the Scripture speaks of “bearing His reproach.” That means it will require a death to self and a willingness to step outside the gate, for that is where this altar is found. At this altar we are willing to endure the scorn of a fallen world; we will not let the snickers in the workplace prevent us from bowing our heads. No! We have an altar, and it is called being given for the glory of God and for the souls of men. There is a place that this church age has been called to—a place where we fight to bring people into true freedom.

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Hebrews 12:1 says it this way: *“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses...”* The writer is referring to those saints described in the previous chapter—those who faced threats, fire, flood, trial, personal inability—yet none of these things were able to stop them. The same holds true for every genuine believer in Christ today—there is nothing that can stop the plan of God ordained for those who choose to be given for His glory.

“...Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1). No weight can crush us; no sin can keep us! Jesus came to give sight to

the blind, to open the prison doors to those who are bound, to heal those whose hearts have been wounded. That means we are free to get up and walk out of every place of captivity, and no opposition or limitation can stop us in this race. The only thing that can stop us is our personal choice to live within the confines that a fallen society has placed around us, cowering when they regard us as narrow, misguided, weak or foolish.

“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him...” (Hebrews 12:2). The source of His strength, the vision that was before His eyes, was the joy of seeing you free; the joy of having you back in a living relationship with Him! It was all about you and me. Yet what have we set before us in this generation? Gold, cars, jobs, position and power. No wonder there is no joy in much of what professes to be Christianity. Our focus is wrong—it should be all about people! Jesus did not quit or give in to the scorn or accusations that came against Him, because He saw you and me ruling and reigning with Him forever. We will not tremble or remain silent once we begin to see the men and women around us the way Jesus sees them.

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“[He] endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2). Jesus won a victory! That is the altar that you and I have if we are willing to join Him outside the city; if we are willing to escape the boundaries and be put outside of a

people who really are fighting against their own salvation.

“For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds” (Hebrews 12:3). Consider Him! Consider what He endured, and consider what you are willing to endure. Consider how deep and how far you are going to go in this walk with God. Are you going to settle in and become a powerless voice as Lot did—a man who was so intermixed with the ways of society that even after meeting with angels, he could barely bring his own family out of captivity? Or will you be like Noah, who built an ark, enduring the ridicule of people who passed by every day, and said, “You foolish old man, it has not rained here for years, and you are building a boat?” Yet the Bible says that Noah was a preacher of righteousness, and he brought his whole family to safety with him.

Do you feel the urgency of this hour? Do you realize that we are about to enter a storm of unprecedented proportions?

■ STOP AND CONSIDER

Do you feel the urgency of this hour? Do you realize that we are about to enter a storm of unprecedented proportions? Just as in Noah’s day, some people may ridicule this

message and put it away. However, I urge you to get oil now, to get strength now, to make a choice now. As Joshua said, *“Choose you this day whom ye will serve...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord”* (Joshua 24:15).

The prophet Isaiah said that in the last days, in the midst of the darkness, there will be a people who have a song of praise to God (see Isaiah 30:29). Of course, that does not just happen. It all starts when we make a choice to consider Jesus, understanding that the victory He has already won can be ours. We make a choice to go to an altar in a place that those who play games with God cannot go.

I encourage you to let 2012 be a year when you consider Jesus. Consider whether you will follow Him all the way. That means not being half-measure, not falling short, not running a cheater’s race, not bowing to the boundaries of society, not settling in to a relationship of begrudging service in the house of God. If you are determined not to settle for anything less than the fullness of what He has for you, you will find that the Lord will give you the strength of character to be salt and light in your city. He will give you compassion for all men, even those who oppose you. You will be taken into the divine life of Christ, and this will be a year when God will astound you!

Carter Conlon
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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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