

WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO

by Carter Conlon

"Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother: Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home" (John 19:25–27).

John was the only disciple, along with three women including Mary, the mother of Jesus, who had the courage to go to the cross and be with Jesus. In this verse we see John standing before the cross, listening intently to every word Jesus was speaking.

The many events of the night before had crushed John's perception of life up to this point, causing his security to be taken from him. Let us look at what happened to John that resulted in him being so shaken.

■ THE PREVIOUS NIGHT

In Matthew 26:31–35, Jesus tells His disciples, *"All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee."* To Peter's mind, this was inconceivable; being a strong man and a natural leader, his first impulse was to react by saying, *"Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended."* With all the disciples listening, Jesus responded, *"Verily I say unto thee, That this night,*

before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice." Peter and the disciples, could not readily accept what Jesus was saying. Being the spokesman for the group he impetuously answered Jesus, *"Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee."* Peter's reply placed the rest of the disciples in a precarious position. In fact, they were now in some measure forced to make a decision to either agree with Jesus' statements or with Peter's. Amazingly, the Bible shows us that all the disciples, including John, stood with Peter, *"Likewise also said all the disciples."*

These Peter-type leaders make grandiose and hollow boasts for their own self gain, but deny a living relationship with Christ.

■ JOHN INFLUENCED BY PETER

To a large degree, John's decision to stand with Peter may have been influenced by Jesus' earlier statements about Peter, *"Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven"* (Matthew 16:18–19). Peter had just acknowledged Him as *"The Christ, the Son of the living God"* (v.16) and Jesus

was saying He would build His church upon this revelation. As far as the disciples could comprehend what Jesus had said, He had given Peter the keys of the kingdom and they would have looked up to him because of it.

Peter was a forceful and persuasive man in whom people naturally put their confidence. This may have been another reason John acquiesced to go along with Peter. John had known Peter a long time as both friend and trusted confidant. After all, they were fishermen and worked closely together.

■ PETER'S DENIAL

Now Peter, the "strong one," when confronted about his relationship with Christ, denied it saying, "I don't know the man." After having made such boastful statements that he would die with Him rather than deny Him, he was now confessing and living in denial of Christ. Suddenly, Peter was having nothing to do with Jesus and wanted no association with Him. Hearing Peter's total rejection of Jesus must have devastated John. How heartbreaking this must have been for him; his confidence in Peter was shattered. Peter, who seemed to have it all together and spoke freely of the things he believed in with great bravado, was now warming his hands by the fire of those who hated Christ.

What was John to do now? He could no longer trust Peter for leadership. Was he going to follow in Peter's footsteps and run from Jesus? Or was he going to find

courage to go back to the one he had truly loved, and continue to receive direction from Him?

■ SELF-DIRECTED LEADERS

I have often wondered how many people today, when disappointed by self-directed leaders, run from Christ and the church. These Peter-type leaders make grandiose and hollow boasts for their own self gain, but deny a living relationship with Christ. They claim to have received direction from God, but in reality it is not His true leading at all. They go on to disappoint people, causing many to lose heart and walk away disillusioned. As Peter influenced the other disciples, so today when these leaders turn from God's will, they lead others with them.

■ JOHN GOES TO THE CROSS

In his heart, John knew there was more to following Jesus than what he had witnessed in Peter. He stood up and took hold of the courage of his convictions and headed out to the cross where his Lord was crucified. He determined that the words of Jesus were trustworthy and made a decision to identify himself with Christ and His cross. He did not care what people thought or said of him; he was going to Jesus, perhaps saying in his heart, "I know that is where the power of God is. Nobody has ever spoken into my heart like this man and I am going to where He is."

John left Peter warming himself at the world's fire and went to the cross; to the one with all power and authority. Upon arriving at the cross, John would have been aware of the onlookers' general indifference and outright callousness to the ultimate expression of God's love. Beloved, Jesus could have called down twelve legions of angels to defend Him, but He did not. Instead, He chose to go to the cross where He prayed, "*Father, forgive them; for they know not what*

they do" (Luke 23:34). Nobody was taking His life from Him, He laid it down of His own accord and He would take it up again; since He was always in control and absolute authority. Yes, Jesus had the power to destroy them all—high priests deriding Him, soldiers casting lots for His garments, and others who were disinterestedly walking by. John knew Jesus could annihilate them all with just one spoken word. He had seen the storms calmed, dead men raised, and blind eyes opened. In the Garden of Gethsemane we see Jesus' power clearly demonstrated when the soldiers came to arrest Him and inquired, "Who is Jesus?" He had responded, "I am He," and the force of His words caused them to fall immediately to the ground. Jesus had the power to destroy, but He chose to exercise His kingly power to forgive.

■ BEHOLDING THE SAVIOR

As John beheld the suffering Savior at the cross, what seemed to be a tragedy, was actually causing a stir of unspeakable joy in heaven. Only heaven knew of the victories being won on the cross. John was gaining the sense that something far deeper, than what could be perceived by the natural eye, was taking place. Something central to the heart of God was transpiring and tragedy was soon to become triumph. What a privilege for John to be an eyewitness of the Savior taking the sins of the world; being nailed to the cross once and for all. With a heart open to Christ, three critical truths soon became apparent to John.

Whether or not you understand it, your whole life's purpose is defined by the cross.

First, John saw the love of God as he had never seen it before. He may

have thought he knew this love, but he saw it displayed to such a degree that it staggered the imagination. He had an inkling of it, when he laid his head on the bosom of Jesus at the last supper. Now this great love was being displayed in its fullest expression. John watched the God who created the universe allow Himself to be mocked, tortured, and killed for the sake of a lost and dying world.

Second, John saw forgiveness taking place right then and there, freely given by Jesus to those who betrayed Him, "*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*" (Luke 23:34). Forgiveness was not just something that was to happen in the future, it was happening now. We see Jesus giving forgiveness immediately to a dying thief who cried out with one simple plea, "*Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.*" John heard the deeply compassionate reply of Jesus, "*Today shalt thou be with me in paradise*" (Luke 23:42-43). John witnessed the first New Testament salvation, which would thereafter be given to everyone who called on the name of the Lord.

Third, John heard Jesus pray, "*Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit*" (Luke 23:46). In this prayer of commitment by Jesus, John witnessed the power to love and forgive comes only from abandonment to the will and ways of God. Otherwise, it was senseless for Jesus simply to be put to death by an indifferent society, unless His confidence rested in God who was able to sustain Him. In the same way you have to realize God is able to give you His life to sustain you. This is why no power of evil can triumph over those who believe in Him. No matter what difficulty or trial comes your way, you are kept in the hand of the Father, and according to Jesus, no man can pluck you out! You are resting in the one who is able to keep you. Glory be to God!

■ WHAT DO I DO NOW?

As John stood before Jesus at the cross, he faced difficult questions: What was going to happen next? Where would he go? What could he do? Everything John once considered stable had been turned upside down. Peter, a man whom he had trusted, had proven to be unfaithful and the Savior he loved was dying before his very eyes. Everything seemed so completely opposite from what he had first expected. Yet, he had come to the cross and finally began to grasp the entire reason for his existence. He realized only in Christ can life be found. Like John, whether or not you understand it, your whole life's purpose is defined by the cross.

You are looking for direction, hoping He will show you what your life will be twenty years down the road.

I wonder if John had the same inner cry that many of us have today: "Oh, Lord, please just talk to me; let me hear your voice. Please reveal my future to me. Tell me what I am supposed to do. What is my life going to be? Where are you going to take me? What are you going to do through me? Tell me what to do and where to go. I do not know where to work. I do not know who to marry. I do not know what to do with my children or what to do about my neighbor. I do not know what to do on the job—I just do not know; please speak to me." You may have one or all these questions pulling at your heart and you go to church desperately hoping God will answer you. You are looking for direction, hoping He will show you what your life will be twenty years down the road. You cry out, "Lord, just speak to me!"

Though John did not vocalize these same questions, they were more than likely in his heart, "Jesus, please, one more time, I really need to hear from you. Everything has failed me and I am confused. Everyone else has run, and I do not even know where they are. Even Peter has turned. They only ones left are these three older women. What now?"

As humans, we always want to know the whole picture. Perhaps it is a safety mechanism so in case God does not come through, we can make our own plans. You want to know exactly what is going to take place sixty years down the road, if you live that long. You hope to come to an altar and have the Lord tell you everything. You pray, at least in your heart, "Lord, show me the whole path." If He did so, you would leave your job and whatever else you think you should do, to bring His plans to pass.

Clearly Jesus could have told John everything that was going to happen to him. He could have said, "Well, John, you're going to have quite a life; I have extraordinary things planned for your future. You see, you're going to travel and preach in churches all throughout the world. Then, at the end of your life, I'm going to send you to a Greek island where you'll be given a mind-boggling revelation. No one but Isaiah and perhaps Daniel has ever seen anything to rival the awesome things you will see." He could have explained everything, but that is not what He does.

■ JOHN AT THE CROSS

At the cross, John looked up to see Jesus' lips moving. He might have hoped this was going to be the moment when Jesus revealed the plan for his life, "I'm about to get the revelation I've been waiting for!" But Jesus looked down at him and merely said,

"Behold thy mother!" (John 19:27). What a simple word coming from the mouth of God. What did He mean by the statement? Folks, it really is quite uncomplicated. Jesus told John to look after this woman who was so precious in His sight. "This one who is dear to me should now be dear to you. I want you to see her the way I do. She is not just a little old lady; she is valuable to me. Look after her, John. Be there for her. If she needs her groceries carried home, I want you to carry them home for her. I am giving you this one person who is dear to my heart."

Jesus was asking John to care for her and John could have said, "Well, you know, Jesus, I have a lot going on right now. I appreciate your asking, but it really does not fit into my image of myself. It is a nice idea, but to take this old lady into my house just does not work for me. Besides, that is really a long commitment. After all, she could live another thirty years or so." John, at that time chose to love her and take her into his home "And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home" (John 19:27).

Jesus had also said the same thing to His mother, Mary, "Woman, behold thy son!" (John 19:26). He told her, "Love this young man who needs guidance. Care for this man who needs a compassionate touch. Right now, I cannot touch him from here on the cross, but through you he will still be able to lean on me and know my heart."

You see, God looks upon you the same way He looked upon John and Mary at the foot of the cross. When He sees the multitudes today, who have never known the Father's touch, He says, "I can touch them through you. They can know my heart through yours." This is the power of the cross.

■ THE CHURCH RETURNING TO THE CROSS

You maybe asking yourself right now, “Where do I start, what should I do?” You begin with your family: behold your brother, behold you sister, behold your mother, behold your father, behold your children. This is where it all begins; it has to start here.

Unfortunately, today we see the family unit being attacked. Even in the church of Christ we see this breakdown in relationships, largely due to the selfish theological perspective of its leaders. They have cast off the cross, the love, the forgiveness, and the giving of oneself for people; which can only be found in Christ. The result is a generation who do not care for their neighbor or their family’s well-being. Divorce has become rampant in the church, equaling that of the world. We need to come back to the cross. Praise God, there is a promise in Malachi that we can stand on today, “*And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.*” (Malachi 4:6).

In this verse I see the church coming back to the cross in these last days. This means you will no longer live for yourself, but are living for God. Subsequently, by God’s grace you will be able to love those around you, to live for other people, and forgive those who have wronged you. It has to begin in your family and extend from there beyond the home.

We do not expect loving people to be a great revelation, but it is, and it is so deep that many people fail to see it. John later wrote, “*Herein*

is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.” (1 John 4:17–18).

We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also. (1 John 4:19–21). Hate in this text really means to be indifferent toward another person. It is the attitude that says, “I am fine and I do not care what happens to you.” John knew that loving God was synonymous with loving people and caring for them.

Today, see the people around you who mean so much to Jesus and love them. Care for them as Christ would care for them. When you do not know what to do, choose to simply love people.

Carter Conlon
December 2, 2007
©2008 Times Square Church

This message is an edited version of a sermon given in the sanctuary of Times Square Church in New York City. Other sermons are available by visiting our website www.tscnyc.org or calling 1-800-488-0854. 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.

Founding Pastor
David Wilkerson

Senior Pastor
Carter Conlon

Tel:
212-541-6300

Fax:
212-541-6415

Church Location:
237 West 51st Street,
Between Broadway & Eighth Avenue

Mailing Address:
1657 Broadway, 4th Flr.
New York, NY 10019

e-mail:
info@timesquarechurch.org

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	