

Jesus Take the Stones From My Hands

by Carter Conlon

The sermon emphasizes the importance of forgiveness and how it is directly linked to mountain-moving faith, highlighting the contrast between Jesus' approach and the Pharisees' and scribes' hypocrisy.

Duration: 51:59

Scripture: Psalm 130:1-4, Psalm 139:23-24, Isaiah 6:5-7, Matthew 11:28, Mark 9:24, Mark 11:22-26, Luke 15:20, John 14:1, Romans 3:23-24, Ephesians 4:32

Topics: "Forgiveness", "Mercy"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of forgiveness and letting go of grievances, symbolized by the act of Jesus taking the stones from our hands. It calls for a deep transformation of the heart, moving from judgment to mercy, and representing Christ's love and compassion in our generation. The message highlights the need for unity, kindness, and bridge-building in the church, focusing on the power of forgiveness, faith, and love to rewrite history and bring hope to those who have fallen.

Transcript

Good morning, Times Square Church. What a wonderful presence of the Lord here today, which I believe will be with us all day. Thank you for those that are visiting with us, and we do hope that you take time for the fellowship that's prepared for you after the service today.

I've got a word burning in me. I wrote it out two weeks ago, and I spoke it at the Revival Services Summit, International School of Ministry, about two weeks ago. But this word just doesn't leave me.

It's going deeper into my heart. The more I think about it, the more I read it, the more I meditate on it, the more I want it with everything in me. It's from John chapter 8. Please, if you'll go there.

And it's called, Jesus, take the stones from my hands. Now, Father, God Almighty, I yield my body to you as a living sacrifice. I don't know how else to do this.

But your presence has to come, and you have to consume this sacrifice, and accept it, and make it into what you want it to be. I'm asking, Lord, for the grace to speak this clearly. Give me your heart, Lord.

God, my own heart is so short. Give me your heart. Give me the grace to live this the rest of my life.

Take me there. Guide me. Lead me.

Guide us as a church, as a church age. May we finish this season with a testimony that truly honors you and the earth. I thank you for it in your precious name.

John chapter 8, beginning at verse 1. Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives. And early in the morning, he came again into the temple. And all the people came unto him, and he sat down and taught them.

And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us that such should be stoned, but what sayest thou? This, they said, tempting him that they might have to accuse him.

But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest even unto the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, he saw none but the woman.

And he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee. Go and sin no more.

I think everybody here this morning would agree with me that in this generation, we as the testimony of Christ in the earth need a fresh touch of God. We need fresh strength. We need fresh vision.

We need something that only God can give. Man-made religion is insufficient for this hour. It is a testimony that has no power.

It has no ability to represent God and ultimately brings no freedom to the people that are partakers of it. We quite often hear the term, Lord, send revival. And most everybody has a mental picture of what that is.

Now, some believe that it's just returning to a highly emotional state of religion, yet continuing to fall short of being an accurate representation of Christ in the world. Now, I used to travel as a revivalist, so I know what this is all about. I would travel into churches.

The cry of their heart would be, Lord, revive us. But it would be in the context of their present practice. Our definition of God, our level of service to God, we've lost heart, we've lost hope, but so we're asking you to come in, represent God and revive us, but we don't really intend on changing.

We just want to feel happy about ourselves the way we are. And that's the way most people see revival. They don't see it as really a radical change, a new heart, a new mind, a new direction.

They just see it as the rekindling of something that they've already embraced and believed to be an adequate testimony of God. Revival's not a return to a mountaintop experience or emotion, but rather, revival, real revival, is coming back into alignment with the Word of God. We all have a tendency to stray.

You have it and I have it. Our natural minds will read the Word of God and we will perceive things to be a certain way, but it may not be fully correct the way we're seeing it. Remember, in the book of 2 Kings, a young man called Josiah, one of the last righteous kings of Judah, he started to rebuild the temple.

And when he started to rebuild, suddenly one of the scribes rediscovered the book of the law. And whenever a true rebuilding is taking place in the earth, the book of the law had been there. It had just been hidden to those who were neglecting it.

The Word of God, in other words. And suddenly the Word of God comes back into focus and when Josiah rent, it was read to him, the scripture says he rent his garments. He took his kingly robe, as it is in Torah, in two.

He was so grieved at how far he and his own people had strayed from what they were called to be in the earth, the testimony they were called to be. The same thing happened with Nehemiah in Israel after they returned from the captivity in Babylon and they began to rebuild first the temple and then years later the wall. The scripture says they gathered the people and beginning with Ezra and then through a series of priests they began to unlock the Word of God again and they made it easily understood to the people.

And the scripture says that there was a weeping among the people and followed of course by a joy and a rejoicing. There was a sense of, God what have we done to your name? How have we lived in a way that has not honored you in the earth? And revival will always carry that with it. You and I can't have a genuine move back to the heart of God without a reckoning in the sense of how we've represented him in the earth.

Now today I want to speak about forgiveness. That's what this story, our opening text is all about forgiveness. Now this lady that's caught in this act, this sinful act as it is, is a child of faith.

She's one of the children of God. The Pharisees represent that which is supposed to be and the scribes the testimony of God in the earth. These are the purists for lack of a better way of saying it.

They didn't start out wanting to crucify Christ. They started out wanting to preserve the Word of God. They feared the devolving as it is of the Word of God into something that wouldn't say what it originally meant.

And so they set out to be purists. We're going to guard the Word of God and we're going to be the ones who exemplify what is written in the text of the scriptures they had up to that time. And so they were the guardians of the law.

And we'll follow through with that. Just want you to have that picture in your mind. The story is about forgiveness.

Now how important is forgiveness? Number one, without it you're not saved. And neither am I. We all needed to be forgiven. All have sinned.

It's conclusive in the scriptures and fallen short of the glory of God. Fallen short of what we were created to be. Of how God designed our lives to be lived.

Of what kind of a testimony we're supposed to have and even of Him and the earth. We've all sinned. Settle it folks because that's what the Word of God says.

There's not one of us that's righteous. Not even one. Prophet Isaiah said that all of our righteousness are filthy rags in the sight of a holy God.

He had been lifted up as a young man into the presence of the Lord. And in spite of his attendance at the temple, in spite of his ability to see into the scriptures and bring a measure of revelation to the people, when he stood in the presence of God, he said, I'm a man of unclean lips. I live in the midst of a people of

unclean lips.

Mine eyes have seen God in His glory. All of our attempts to be holy are filthy in the sight of God. And he knew that without mercy and forgiveness he had no hope.

Even being in the presence of God he had no hope and he knew that. And it was at that moment that he knew he was a sinner on equal ground with every sinner on the face of the earth. Suddenly mercy touched his lips and he came back to the earth with a revelation of mercy.

And when you read Isaiah you'll understand it is a revelation of the mercy of God. Yes, it talks about men's ways and how they need to change but then it moves into the Messiah, the willingness of God to be bruised and beaten and to take upon Himself all of our failures and struggles and all of our iniquities. The willingness of the Son of God to be spit upon, bruised and mocked and have His clothes taken from Him and gambled for and yet still say, Father, forgive them.

They don't know what they do because the story is all about forgiveness. I thank God for that day when I realized, and you should thank God for the day when you realized that we had no hope. Church attendance does not get you to heaven, folks.

It's a heart that knows that we have sinned against a holy God and there is no other remedy for that sin but to come to Him in faith with humility in the heart saying, Lord, no matter how many times I've read my Bible or how much I've prayed or how good or bad I've been, nothing I have done or anything of myself could ever merit You receiving me into heaven for eternity. It is only because your Son died on the cross 2,000 years ago for me that I have any hope. We're not saved without forgiveness.

Without forgiveness, we can't stay in the life flow or the blessing of God. Mark 11, 26, Jesus said, if you do not forgive, neither will your Father, which is in heaven, forgive your trespasses. Now, that doesn't mean that every time you struggle with unforgiveness, you're lost because we all struggle with it from time to time.

It means that a sense of well-being is lost. That life flow, that ability to hear from God, to walk in God, to represent God is lost and the sense of well-being is gone when we harbor unforgiveness in our heart because ultimately the kingdom of God is about forgiveness. How can you and I represent, how could you sell Fords if you drive a Chevrolet? Let's put it that way.

How can you represent the kingdom that is established on the foundation stone of forgiveness if there's unforgiveness in your heart? It simply doesn't, it's like oil and water, it simply doesn't work, it doesn't mix together. We can't represent Christ on the earth without forgiveness. The psalmist cries out in Psalm 130, verses 1 to 4, he says, out of the depths, I cried to thee, O God, Lord, hear my voice.

Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If you, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who will stand? But there's forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared. The psalmist had a revelation that you and I should have.

Lord, if you took a pen that could not be erased, and you marked down every wrong thought, and every wrong attitude, and every wrong thing that we said or did or thought we were going to do, if you marked iniquities, who would stand? Who would be left standing? There'd be nobody, folks, there'd be not one of us in this room if he marked our iniquities and our struggles. But there's forgiveness with you that you may be feared. And the word feared just means we stand back with such an awe that we're speechless.

There's forgiveness with you, God. It's an amazing thing. We heard a song about it just before I got up today.

It's an amazing thing to, when you finally have come to the place of understanding the depths of sin, and how God in his mercy chose through his Son to forgive us. Forgiveness is directly linked You don't have to turn there, I'm just going to read it to you. It's directly linked with mountain-moving faith.

Mark 11, 22, he said, Have faith in God. This is the words of Christ again. For verily I say unto you, that whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be cast into the sea, and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass.

He shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, Whatsoever things you desire, when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you shall have them. And when you stand praying, forgive if you have ought against any, that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive your trespasses.

Christ is saying these incredible words. I'm willing to give you faith to move mountains. Everything out of your way that stands before you and what your life is destined to be in the earth.

I'm willing to give you faith to believe that whatever you need to finish this journey, I'll give it to you. Whatever strength you're lacking, I will supply it. But when you come to me, asking the mountains to move, and asking for that supply, if you have anything in your heart against another person, forgive them.

That your Father in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. Our opening text shows us how religious zeal and incomplete obedience to the full revelation of God in scripture can actually leave us looking quite different than Jesus. I want you to think about this for a moment.

Jesus is probably somewhere in the outer court of the temple because the scripture tells us it was essentially a dirt floor. Of course the temple wouldn't have been filthy like that. So he's somewhere in the outer courts of the temple.

The people are sat down as you are today and he's teaching them. And then suddenly here's an infusion of scribes and Pharisees who are supposed to be the representatives of God in the earth. These are the holy people, as it is.

These are the keepers of the law. These are the ones who are supposed to be teaching others about what the kingdom of God looks like. Now they haven't come in looking for an answer.

They've come in to accuse Christ. They've come in to argue, in a sense, with the word of God. Now follow this with me.

Here they come. They've found a lady in their midst who's of the family of faith who's obviously fallen and failed. They've brought her in and they've thrown her down in the midst.

It's like somebody, it's like a busload of zealots showed up at our door today, brought in somebody who was of the household of faith who has fallen or failed. And they run to the front of the church and they throw her on the floor in front of all of us. That's exactly what it was like.

And they said, look, this person claims to belong to the family of Abraham, part of the seed, as it is, of God's testimony in the earth. And we caught her in the very act of adultery. Now the scripture we have says that she should be condemned and stoned to death.

So Jesus, what do you say? And the scripture says they ask this question, tempting him or testing him that they might have something to accuse him of. Now here they have the word of God. They're quoting the word of God and the irony of it all is they're arguing with the author.

They're trying to tell him what he meant when he wrote the book. Now they have, their clothing is clean. They're very, very big on clothing, Pharisees and scribes.

All of the sleeves have to be exactly the right length. The skirts have to be down to an appropriate length. The cuffs on the shoes, they're spit and polished.

I mean they look like they just graduated from a military academy. All the borders are right. Sleeves exactly the right length.

Everything is pristine. The presses are right in the right place. So this is very important to them.

All the borders are measured to perfection. They had read in the scripture in Deuteronomy that they were to take the word of God and keep it as just before their eyes, as frontlets before their eyes. So they had made a little box with a strap and they strapped the word of God to their foreheads.

Sort of quite didn't get the concept of what this was about. But it was an outward display that we are students, you know, of the word of God. We know what the word of God says.

We have this little box with the word of God attached to our forehead. And we are keepers of the word of God. We are sincere about the word of God.

We want the word of God to be fully known and appreciated and understood in our generation. They have prayer shawls over their shoulders because it's very, very important to be known as people of prayer. And they want everybody to know that they're people of prayer.

And they have prayer beads attached to their sides, quite lengthy actually, to show that the length of prayer is very, very important. You can't pray for just five minutes and expect God to answer you. It has to be, you have to give a certain amount of time to each bead up the side of your leg as you're praying and as your shawl is over your head.

Very, very important to religious people. And they have all this paraphernalia and they have one more thing though. They have stones in their hands.

Or, they have stones very, very close at hand. Willing to condemn everyone who fails of their seeming obedience and their religious ideals. Now contrast this to Jesus.

Jesus most likely, because he was a carpenter's son, had a regular workman's garment on. There was, the scripture tells us that he identified with the common man. And he took upon himself our frailty, was made in our likeness, and understands our weaknesses and understands our frailty and invites us to his throne not in times of strength, but in times of weakness.

There's most likely dirt around his knee area because he had already stooped down to write in the sand as it is beside this woman. And if I were to stoop down, there's no way my finger's gonna hit the platform until my knees are down in the dirt. He has no outward display.

He has no symbols of prayer and obedience except that the full power and purpose of God is being manifested through him. He wrote something in the ground in the midst of their accusation with his finger. I don't know what it is that he wrote.

I've heard a lot of sermons on it. I've preached a few myself. And won't it be the irony of ironies to us when we get to heaven and finally ask him and he says, nothing in particular, I was just... I was just doodling in the sand.

I don't know what he wrote. But I know one thing for sure, it stung the conscience of the religious and it gave hope to a lady who had fallen. Jesus rewrote a scene of certain judgment and death into a place of forgiveness and hope of a new life and a future.

He rewrote this woman's life. He rewrote her future. Perhaps he gave her a sense that her past is still covered and her present frailty is still covered by the mercy of God because she knew she was a sinner and needed a savior.

And yet those standing with the stones had long lost an understanding that they were themselves outside of the kingdom of God because they had failed of the heart of God that was being clearly displayed by his son coming into this world. I know one thing for sure, he could not have rewritten this moment in history if he too had been holding stones in his hands. And folks, you and I, if we have stones in our hands, we can't rewrite history.

We won't make any difference. The Bible says in Matthew chapter 24, in the last days, nation will rise against nation. In the original Greek, it's ethnos.

It means ethnic culture will rise against ethnic culture. There'll be divisions and hatreds and bitternesses in the world. And God help us if you and I are found with stones in our hands.

We won't have any power to make a difference. We won't have any power to rewrite the future. We won't have any power to represent God in our generation.

We have to come to the place of forgiveness. Now I know how hard this is for so many. I know there've been situations of abuse far beyond anything that I have ever had to endure in my lifetime.

I know it's so difficult. One time in my life, I was deeply betrayed by somebody I loved and trusted. The betrayal was so deep in my heart, it took me a year to get over it.

I can't tell you how many times I went before God and said, Lord, I'm not dealing with forgiveness here. I'm dealing with hatred. It's at a whole other, I'm not even at forgiveness yet.

I'm dealing with not hating somebody. You have to help me, Lord. You have to help me, God.

I'm telling you folks, no matter how many times I tried to put those stones down, my hands wouldn't let them go. And if I succeeded in throwing them down for a moment, it was as if there was a bungee cord attached to them and they bounced back up into my hands again. And the next week, I find myself in the same place praying the same kinds of prayers until one day, I don't know how it happened.

I can't tell you where it happened, but I persisted because I'm not willing to be a hypocrite in the kingdom of God. But I persisted in this battle. And one day, it was almost like a revelation.

Jesus said, here's how to do it. Turn your hands over and let me take the stones from your hands. Because I couldn't put them down.

And I know I'm talking to people here today who can't put the stones down. I understand that. But Christ is not angry with your frailty.

He's not angry with your weakness. He's not angry with your struggle. All he's asking is that we simply turn our hands over.

In Mark chapter 5, there's another man. The scripture says he dwelt in the mountains and in the tombs. And one is a high place and one is about as low as you can go on the earth.

And the scripture talks about this man also having stones in his hands, but he was hitting himself with the stones. He was cutting himself. That means he's hitting himself.

He hates himself for what he's become. He hates himself for what he's done. Hates himself for the memories in his life.

And this man, just like the Pharisees, has to have the courage to say, Jesus, would you take these stones from my hands for you've cleansed me and I'm still calling myself unclean. You've forgiven me, but I still hate myself for what I did in the past. God Almighty, would you give me the grace? Give me the grace, Lord, to let it go.

Folks, I don't know how else to do this. It's got to be a revelation from God. It's got to be something that comes into the heart.

It's got to be a cry so much deeper than anything you or I could do. But I know that I want to represent Christ on the earth. And without forgiveness, at the center core of my being, I can't represent Him.

I can talk about Him, but I can't represent Him. There's a difference between talking about Him and actually representing Him. People who talk about Him become all concerned about the exterior, all concerned about what people think about them, all concerned about being called teacher, teacher and having the best seats at the banquets.

That's their whole focus of their life. But people who represent Jesus are bent down and they're writing in the sand and they're rewriting into people's lives the mercy of Almighty God, no matter what they've done, no matter how they've fallen, no matter where they are. You know, it seems appropriate to be preaching this after the death of Whitney Houston this week.

You know, I don't know much about her. I opted out of that whole realm about 30 years ago. That's the truth.

I didn't even know what she sang. But I heard that she was raised in church, not far from here. I heard she sang in a choir and in a young people's choir and then suddenly had a shot at fame.

I don't blame her. Hardly anyone of you here wouldn't take that shot if it was given to you this afternoon. So let's not be pompous about this.

And in that journey, you know, life and popularity and these things can really beat on a child of God. And she was beaten down eventually by a lot of the circumstances that she had to face. And I don't know all of

them.

I just know that I feel a lady that was in despair at the end of her life. You know, the scripture says this poor man cried and the Lord heard him and delivered him. And I was just, a weeping came on my heart this week because I knew what I was going to be preaching.

I said, Jesus, I would love to have been there. I wish I could have just hugged this lady. I wish I could have just told her that Jesus loves her.

I wish I could have unlocked a new covenant and grace and just told her there's a way through and there's a way out and there's a way of strength. I wish I could have been there. It seems to me not inappropriate but short to tell somebody how much you love them and how much God would receive them.

And after they're dead, why not tell people when they're alive? I was praying. I said, Lord, I just wish I could have been there. It's a burden of the Holy Ghost because I don't know this person.

But I just, that's the child of God. I just wish I could have been there to make a difference. And the Lord said, take courage because you can be there because there's going to be a lot more witnesses coming through the door of Times Square Church.

Male and female, men and women who've taken their best, children of God, people who gave their lives to Christ when they were young. And yes, they've taken a path, maybe taken the life of Christ and gone a little far outside of the borders as it is of what they should have been but not outside the borders of the love of God. You've got to understand that.

And I have to understand that. And the Lord will give you and I the ability to rewrite the past and to give hope for the present and to rewrite the future if we are willing to represent the God who left his mansion and ran down a road to receive his son who was heading home. And folks, a lot of people are coming back to the church in our time, see it as the prodigal son did, just the best of two evils.

Because in many cases, the church has not been a positive experience. But you and I can change that for many who are going to come home in the days ahead. We can truly represent God in this generation.

We can put down our stones. We can be ambassadors of the one who went to a cross and said, Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing.

We can put our arms around people as the father did to the prodigal son and cover their failure and help them, empower them to become everything that God is calling them to be and put shoes on their feet and invite them on a journey. I thank God with all my heart that we still have that opportunity. We still have the opportunity to bear one another's burdens.

We still have the opportunity to represent Christ to a generation that needs to know him. We still have the opportunity to open our doors and our arms to sons and daughters of God. Yes, we may not appreciate their lifestyle, but it's not about us anyway.

It's about God and his people. Now, I know, preaching this this morning, I'm going to take some flack from some Pharisees out there. I know you're going to take your best shots at me in the days ahead, but I'm telling you something right now.

Aim low, because I'll be riding in the sand. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

I don't want to misrepresent Christ in this world. And if I'm ever going to err, let it be on the side of mercy. Let it be mercy that rewrites my life and the life of everybody that God would touch through me.

Let it be mercy. We don't have to be quick with scriptures. We don't have to be quick with judgment.

But we do have to be quick with kindness. We do have to be quick to represent Christ in our society and in our time. Hallelujah to the Lamb of God.

I want to be a bridge builder, not a bridge destroyer. I want to see the Church of Christ come to life in our generation, of every race, every nationality, every color, every denomination, come together as one body in Jesus Christ for this final moment of time. It means that a lot of us have got to drop stones, the denominational stones, the racial stones, everything that we're holding in our hands.

As difficult as it might be, we've got to let it go, or we'll never represent Christ in our generation. You have to let yours go, and I've got to let mine go. But by the grace of God, we're going to have to stoop down and start rewriting history, start rewriting the present, start rewriting the future in people's lives, because we are the body of Jesus Christ on the earth.

Jesus, that's been the cry of my heart for two weeks now. Take the stones from my hands. These inner judgments, these things that I'm not even aware of, the things that will make me do the wrong thing at the right time.

Help me, God, to represent you. It's not the will of God that any should perish, but that all should come to the saving knowledge of Christ. Help me, Jesus, is the cry of my heart to represent that.

Help me to get my knees dirty. Help me to get my hands dirty. Help me to be willing to stoop down and identify with people that the whole religious scene is willing to write off in their ignorance.

Help me, God. Help me to be where you are, because Jesus Christ does not forsake his children. No matter how we fall or fail or falter, he hears the most quivering plea for mercy, and he runs.

And that's got to be my heart, and it's got to be your heart in this generation. Stand on the sidelines and hold your stones if you want, but I'm not standing with you. You won't find me there.

I'm going to reach out in God's strength and grace to every soul, everyone who breathes, whether they know God or don't know God, whether they've had some experience or no experience. I want to stand and stoop and represent Jesus Christ to my generation. There's no other gospel that will change the hearts of men.

It's not our garments. It's not our scripture memorization. It's not our prayer shawls.

It's not our beads. It's not our suits. It's not our big Bibles.

It's the love of God in our hearts that will make the difference. My prayer lately has been, Jesus, please, God, take me where I need to go. Help me to be a bridge builder wherever those bridges need to be built.

Whatever you want to do, Lord, just do it, that your name might be glorified in the earth, that your people might be encouraged and strengthened everywhere. Jesus, take the stones from my hands. And that's

where it begins.

You and I, it begins at the basic level, the basic battles, the basic grievances. Let's not go to the bigger ones till we deal with the smaller ones. That, oh, God, you've got to take this from me.

I can't let it go. You've got to help me to forgive that I might be brought into this place of mercy and faith that you speak of in life. You've got to help me to stop beating myself for my failure.

Because you said that if you have received me and I've trusted in you, that I don't have the right to call common or unclean anymore what you've cleansed. And so God Almighty, help me to stop beating myself. You know, most people who throw stones, throw them at themselves first.

And the only way they can feel good about themselves is they have to throw them a little harder at other people than they do at themselves. But I want to represent the Christ who went to a cross. Let everyone else do the judging.

I resign. I'm out. I'll still preach what is true.

I'll still believe it. I'll still live it. But there's a higher law, and the higher law is the mercy of God, the love of God, the forgiveness of God in Christ Jesus, the willingness to embrace what we wouldn't, the willingness to call clean what we're only willing to call dirty, the willingness to call received what we call failed, Oh, God, help me.

God, help me. Lord, I pray, Father, that you got to help us today, Jesus. You have to help us, Lord.

Help us to stop this parade of death. Help us, Lord, to make a difference in our generation. Help us, Jesus, to represent you to a world that needs to know that you love them.

Help us, God. Lord, you didn't violate a line of truth, but yet you went to your knees and wrote in the sand. Help us to understand these things.

Help us to embrace it. Jesus, take the stones from our hands. We ask this in your precious name.

Now, we're going to worship for a moment, but I want to give an altar call, and it's simple. Now, for some people, it means more than for others. You know, for somebody here, it's a snicker in the office place, and you're getting annoyed, so those stones are not too glued to your hands yet.

But for others, it's a lifetime of abuse. It's a lifetime of grievance, whether it's experienced or learned. Had a man one time come to this church, and he wanted to make a donation to feed children in the world through child cry, and he said, as long as you don't feed this class of people over here, as long as you don't feed this culture, everything is fine.

Well, we didn't take his money. You know, here, sitting in this church, worshiping God, filled with unforgiveness, filled with bitterness, and it was all because of a past injustice years ago, a genocide a hundred and something years ago, and just this unforgiving injustice that had been passed on to him, and he embraced it to the point where he would rather have these children of that particular race starve to death than be fed, and somehow think this is okay. In the house of God, and wonder why there's no life, and wonder why there's no joy, and maybe even giving out of a conscious, consciousness in a sense of the frailty and trying to pacify his own conscience because of the deep unforgiveness.

And some of it is personally experienced, and some of what grievances are learned grievances, but as the body of Jesus Christ, we have to get through this, or we're going to get swallowed by this generation. We're living in a society now that's bitterly divided. It seems that niceties are gone.

Even people campaigning for the same party are cutting each other's throats, and I'm not political any more than I am involved in the music scene, the secular music scene. I'm not part of that, but it just seems like civility has gone out the window, and Matthew 24 is starting to be experienced right before our eyes. But you and I can't be like that.

If we embrace any part of it, then we become part of that system that's throwing stones at each other, and we can't do it and represent Christ. And so it's as simple as just holding your hands up and saying, Jesus, take the stones out of my hands, and let me represent you in my generation. And for those that this applies to, I'd like to open the front of the sanctuary, and in the annex you can step between the screens, and those at home that are listening, you can just fall on your knees right in your living room and in Roxbury as well.

But when you respond to this altar call, I'd like you to open your hands palm up, if you will, and just say, Lord, I've tried to throw them down, but I can't, so you have to take them now. And can we believe God for a miracle? Can we believe that this mountain will be moved? And for some, it's a mountain here today. I know that.

I know it's a lifetime of feeling a certain way. But I know the mountain can move when I'm willing to forgive. And I know I can be given what I need when my motives are right before God.

And I'm here with you today. I haven't had to endure what many of us have today. I'm the first to admit that.

But I've had to learn to forgive as well. And we must all do this together. And if we do, there'll be an outbreak of love in this church that you never believed was possible.

There'll be a caring and a compassion and a willingness to embrace. You know, we'd be taking the strapped scriptures off our forehead and starting to hug somebody who's going through a struggle. If that's you today, as we stand together, would you make your way to the front of the sanctuary, please? Let's stand now on the balcony of the main sanctuary.

Slip out of where you are. Please just come with your palms up and ask the Lord to help you. ■ ■ I, the Savior, say, ■ Thy strength indeed is small.

■ Child of weakness, watch and pray. ■ Find in me Thine all-embracing love. ■ Jesus did all to be my own.

■ Sin has left a crimson stain. ■ He washed it white as snow. ■ For now indeed I find ■ Thy power and Thine alone change ■ the rippled sky ■ and bent the heart of stone.

■ Jesus did all to be my own. ■ Sin has left a crimson stain. ■ He washed it white as snow.

■ For now indeed could I have ■ Thy grace to make ■ my bondage mine ■ in the blood of Calvary's Lamb. ■ Jesus did all to be my own. ■ Sin has left a crimson stain.

■ He washed it white as snow. ■ Before the throne I stand ■ in hymn of need. ■ Jesus died.

■ My soul today shall still be free. ■ Jesus did all to be my own. ■ Sin has left a crimson stain.

■ He washed it white as snow. ■ Sin. ■ Jesus did all to be my own.

■ Sin has left a crimson stain. ■ He washed it white as snow. Father, in the name of Jesus, we ask you to move this mountain.

God Almighty, there's enough stones in our hands to make a mountain today. But Lord, we're asking you to move this and take it out of our hands, Lord, and give us supernaturally the heart of Christ. Give us your heart, Lord God, for this generation, for this church age, for everyone who calls themselves by the name of Christ, for sinner and say alike, Lord, give us your heart.

God Almighty, give us the grace to lay down every grievance, all the self-hatred. Lord, take the stones out of our hands, Jesus. We simply offer them to you, Lord, as an offering, part of being a living sacrifice before you.

We don't have a right to carry these, but we can't lay them down, so you've got to take them, Lord. God, do a miracle. We ask it today, Father, in Jesus' name.

Do a miracle, Lord. Lord, people have suffered terribly, and only a miracle can take these stones out of their hands now. But that's who you are.

You're a miracle-working God. That's who we're coming to, Lord. God, not only do you deliver us from the condemner, you deliver us from ourselves.

You deliver us from condemning. Lord, you give us freedom to love. That's who you are, Lord.

God is love. You've said it clearly, Lord. And whoever knows God knows this love.

Father, I thank you, Lord, for something deeper than my heart can express. My mouth doesn't know the words to say this, Lord, but you're doing something profound, and I thank you for it, God, with everything in me. I pray, Lord, in the days ahead that we might be found in places, Lord, loving people the way you do.

Lord, only you can do that. And building bridges, Lord, where they need to be built. And Father, we just thank you for it.

Help us as a church to represent you in New York City. Help us to be kind to other churches, Lord, in the city. All churches, Lord.

Everywhere, Lord. Help us to be kind. Help our hands to be outstretched, Lord, and not clenched.

Give us grace, Father. Give us grace to not be swallowed by the spirit of this age. Help us, Lord.

Your hands were open when you went to a cross. Help us, God Almighty, to have that open hand. Give us this grace.

And Father, we thank you. I thank you for my brothers and sisters at this altar. I thank you, Lord, because we have to believe you for a miracle because we don't have the strength to do this.

It's all in your hands now. You've got to reach down. You've got to take it.

And Father, by faith, by faith, by faith, by faith, by faith, by faith, Lord. By faith, Jesus. By faith.

You said every prison door will open. Blinded eyes will see. Wounded hearts will be healed.

Captives will be set free. By faith, Lord, by faith, we stand here today. By faith, we pray.

By faith, we move forward, Lord. By faith, we become everything you've called us to be. By faith, we'll see New York City revived.

By faith, God, by faith, we'll hear songs of praise in the streets of this city. Oh, God, by faith, Lord, by faith and faith alone. Hallelujah to the Lamb of God.

Thank you, Jesus. Now let's just give him praise in this house today. Hallelujah to the Lamb of God.

Hallelujah to the Lamb of God. Hallelujah, hallelujah. Hallelujah.

Hallelujah. Before we go today, I want you to remember one thing. Don't wait until people die to tell them that Jesus loves them and you love them.

Would you tell somebody, tell somebody you love them today. Tell somebody that God loves them. Tell somebody that we're all going to make it through.

By the grace of God, we're all going to make it through. Tell somebody, tell somebody. Hallelujah, hallelujah.

Glory to God. Let's sing a song or something. Hallelujah.

Hallelujah, hallelujah. Hallelujah. I love you.

Hallelujah. I want you to know I love you. Praise God.

There's such a thing as a group hug with the choir. We're going to make it, folks. We're going to make it.

We're going to make it to the other side. And we're going together, thank God. Hallelujah.

Hallelujah.

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