

Pushing Back This Present Darkness

by Carter Conlon

This sermon emphasizes the importance of unity with God and each other to push back the present darkness in society. It highlights the need to turn from sin, put on Christ, and invite the Holy Spirit to fill and empower believers to make a difference. The message calls for a return to God's boundaries, unity, and reliance on His power to combat the darkness of the world.

Scripture: Acts 2:1, Acts 2:38, John 10:10, Ephesians 4:8, Mark 3:27, Amos 5:24, John 8:44

Topics: "Unity in Christ", "Empowerment by the Holy Spirit"

Description

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Transcript

I want to talk a little bit about that today. If you'll turn with me to the book of Acts chapter two, in a message that I've entitled, Pushing Back This Present Darkness. Pushing back this present darkness.

So Father, I thank you, Lord, God, for your evident presence here today with us. Thank you, Lord, for your word, God, which is truth. Lord, there's no truth outside of your word.

Our thoughts and ideas, my God, can only lead to weakness and oftentimes even eternal separation from you. But your word is a lamp and it's a light for our path. And your Bible tells us that the entrance of your words gives light.

And so God, open our hearts to you today. Help us, Lord, to receive truth. Let us not be stubborn.

God, about these things, or try to set our judgment above the word of God. Help us not to make this grievous error, which leads so many into a place of powerlessness. Give us the grace that we need, Lord, at this time, to push back the darkness, which would swallow a whole generation, if given the opportunity.

Your word tells us that when the enemy comes in like a flood the spirit of the Lord will raise up a standard against it. And so God, we invite you, Holy Spirit, we invite you to invade our minds, our hearts, our physical lives, our bodies, this temple that you've established on the earth. We invite you, Lord Jesus, to turn on the lights and make us a visible testimony in our generation.

We thank you for it with all of our heart. Give me the ability, oh God, to convey this word today and give each of us, beginning with my own heart, the ability to receive it. And we thank you for it in Jesus' name.

Acts chapter two. Now I want you to keep in mind the context of this particular verse of scripture. That generation had just put Jesus Christ to death.

They were not in the mood for him, they're not in the mood for his followers. There'd be a lot of people, they've gone back to religion as usual. They've more or less wiped their hands clean of this man.

There's a debate, I guess, of whether or not he was a deceiver or a good man. We're at the point probably where a great deal of the people don't really care. They're just glad to be rid of the controversy.

And of course that has repeated itself again and again throughout history. God found, at this time, 120 people, ordinary people like you and I, who just said, Lord, I want to make a difference. And this encroaching darkness, it doesn't get any darker, they've just killed the son of God.

I mean, can it get any darker than that in any society at any time? And there's a bloodlust among the people and they're in no mood to endure his followers. And of course that repeats itself again in our day. They gathered together and they began to pray.

Verse one says, when the day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. There was no strong there, no mighty, no royal, no noble of birth. They all knew that without the power of God, they were going nowhere.

They knew they were insufficient. Many in that room had made great promises to God, but they were unable to keep them. Peter, for example, had promised that he would die with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet when his turn came for his words to be put to the test, he cursed himself with an oath saying, I don't know the man. But they were in that one place of saying, God, we believe that we're set apart to be a testimony for you in the earth. And you promised to give us power to become that testimony.

So we throw our lives in to this purpose on the earth. And we recognize that without your power, none of this is going to happen. But you promised power.

You told us that if we would tarry, if we would pray, if we would seek you, if we would find ourselves in one accord with you and with one another. In other words, if we would be back in unity with the purposes of God, the thoughts of God, and we would recognize the importance of unity with one another, that you would meet us there and make us a testimony. And suddenly, verse two, there came a sound from heaven as if a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.

Then there appeared to them divided tongues as a fire and sat upon each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling in Jerusalem, Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven.

And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together and were confused because everyone heard them speak in his own language. They were all amazed and marveled saying to one another, look, are not all these who speak Galileans? How is it that we hear each in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes, Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and parts of Libya, adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and

proselytes, Cretes and Arabs, we hear them speaking in our own tongues, the wonderful works of God. Verse 38, then Peter said to them, repent.

That means turn from trying to do things your own way. Turn from your own thoughts, turn from your own reasonings, turn from your own practices and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. Turn to God with all your heart and be willing to be immersed in God.

May I put it that way? Call out to him and say, Lord, I want all of you and none of me. I want to be literally immersed. I want this temple that you call the temple of the Holy Spirit to be filled with light, filled with your love, filled with your wisdom, filled with your power, filled with your purpose.

And you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit for the promise is to you and to your children and to all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call. So that verse of scripture includes us today here in New York City. And with many other words, he testified and exhorted them saying, be saved from this perverse generation.

Then those who gladly received his word were baptized. And that day about 3,000 souls were added to the temple. A lot of them.

Now the history of man's relationship with God began with a perfect unity. Almighty God governed and humankind moved in perfect unity with his will. That's the way it was in the beginning when God created Adam and Eve and he would come down in the garden in the cool of the day.

There was a cooperation. God set the boundaries. Adam and Eve walked inside of those boundaries.

And there was wonderment at that time. There was a fellowship between God and man. And God's word says that everything that God created, everything he did, he looked upon it and said, it is good.

Can you just imagine being there at this time? But almighty God had an avowed sworn enemy who hated him, hated the fact that he was exalted less than God was. And he was described in Genesis chapter three as a cunning serpent, not only hating God, but hating mankind created in the image of God, given a mind, given a heart, given a spirit, given the power to reason, the ability to say yes, the ability to say no. And he came down in that garden with a seething hatred in his heart for humankind created in the image of God with a purpose.

Jesus said in John 10, 10, he came to steal, to kill and to destroy. That was his purpose. That was his mission in the garden.

That's what the devil is here for. That's what he does. Thank God one day he's going to be bound and thrown into a bottomless pit forever.

But in order to accomplish his purpose, he knew he would have to separate that bond of unity between God and man and to ruin you, to bring you and I into spiritual ruin, to render our lives ineffective. And actually to have us partakers of evil, all he has to do is to separate you from God, to bring about a disunity. Oh, you can even go to church, but you can be separated from God.

You can study the Bible and be separated from God, just to destroy that unity. And this he did in Genesis chapter three and verse five, he convinced the first man and the first woman that they could ignore the boundaries which God had set around them and determine by themselves what were acceptable

standards of right and wrong. It's exactly how he broke the unity between Adam, Eve and God.

You don't have to live inside of God's rules. You're made in the image of God. Therefore you can determine in yourself, you can be a judge of what is right and a judge of what is wrong in yourself and doing this, no harm will come to you.

And he succeeded in breaking that unity in the garden. And in Genesis three, seven, the first thing that is introduced into the world when that unity is broken is an awareness and a preoccupation with nakedness. They had a covering of God in the garden.

And when humankind sinned against God, the first thing they knew is that they were naked. And thus we have the introduction with the preoccupation of nakedness and by extension, the origin of sexual sin. And who can debate that sexual sin doesn't plague this and every generation before it.

This preoccupation with nakedness that has spawned a multi-billion dollar industry called pornography. All of these things that have come just from the separation in a sense from God, the disunity from God. In the very next chapter, we see the introduction of envy, hatred and murder.

Remember the thief came to what? Steal, kill and destroy. Now Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Abel. The next thing you see is one son's sacrifice is accepted with God and the other one's isn't.

And Cain, a seething envy in his heart got a hold of him, a hatred for his brother. And subsequently he actually murdered his brother without conscience. When the Lord came to him and said, where's your brother? And he said, how do I know? Am I my brother's keeper? There's just a nonchalance.

You know, humankind can start to murder without conscience folks. That's what separation from God produces. Jesus said to the religious around him in John chapter eight, verse 44, who claimed to be the children of Abraham.

He said, no, you are of your father, the devil and the desires of your father you want to do. For he was a murderer from the beginning. You want your own way.

You want your own rules. You want no boundaries and you will kill to get it. That's exactly what happened.

It's why they killed the son of God, even in the name of religion. This was the beginning of mankind wanting his and her own way up to the point of taking the life of anyone who got in the way of their objectives. And do we have a more glaring example than the recent law that was just passed in New York state on abortion.

Not only passing the law, but looking at our state legislators and the people around literally patting each other on the back and smiling as they sign a law of slaughter of the innocence and lighting up a building here in New York city, sticking their finger in the eye of God, daring God to judge the city. Might I add, oh folks, there's a line you can't cross. God himself said, you enter into the fields of the fatherless, I will rise and defend them.

And remember, remember, the scripture says do not be deceived. Whatever you sow, you're going to reap. And there are three immutable laws of the harvest.

You sow what you reap, you sow it later than you reaped it and you sow more than you reaped. A license to murder for convenience sake in many cases. Not all, I understand that, but in many cases just a license

to murder, unthinkable, unfathomable that a society could become so barbaric after signing this ungodly law, they should have hidden their closets in shame instead of lighting up a building here and celebrating murder.

You know, we read in the old Testament about the abomination of the nations, Moloch, how they took their children and they put them on this red hot idol. Tell me what makes us any different now in this generation? How do we claim any moral ground? In every society that starts to distance itself from God and moves into the utter depravity starts to sacrifice their children in the name of convenience. Not too far down the road in Genesis chapter 11, people at this time were still able to communicate with one another, but they decided to build a tower, you see, and they're still moving on this quest to be as God is without God.

And they ended up in their pride losing the ability to communicate with each other. You can check it out yourself in Genesis chapter 11. They said, let's make a tower up into the heavens.

It speaks of humanity trying to be God in itself because that was the sin that they embraced. We can be God. We can be as God is.

So let's build a tower to prove to the whole world that we are godly. We can get into the heavens by our own strength. The Lord came down and we see the introduction of another consequence of being disunified with God, a level of division among people got into this world where suddenly they couldn't communicate with one another.

And let's take a look at our society today. We see a preoccupation with nakedness and sexual sin. We see envy, hatred, murder, division, evil speech, lying has become the order of the day.

Now we see the killing of innocents coming our way. And don't anybody try to suggest there's any ability to communicate anymore. We see division coming into our society on almost every level.

And so the question arises, who is behind the obvious degenerating social condition of our day? I don't care what people call themselves. It's not flesh and blood we're fighting against. Do you understand? We're fighting spiritual wickedness in heavenly places.

The people who are signing these laws are just unwitting dupes. That's all they are. They're being influenced by powers of darkness.

They have no defense because they're not in relationship with God. So they're open to the suggestions of evil. And they're simply pawns of darkness.

That's all they are. I feel nothing but sorry for them. There's a day coming.

Everybody around that desk signing this ungodly law is gonna stand at the throne of God one day and answer for what they have done. And so the question arises, what can you and I do about this? Now there's three things I wanna talk about in just a few moments. Number one, recognize that the cross is God's invitation for you and I to come back to him again.

In the garden, when they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the Bible tells us that God said, now lest humankind, mankind, men and women, unless they touch the tree of life and eat of it and live forever, they have to be banished from the garden. And so the scripture says they lost access to eternal

life in God at that point. They lost access to the favor, the promise of God, the hope of God.

Everything of God was lost. Death began to reign. But at the cross, it's no coincidence that Jesus was crucified on the tree.

Do you understand? The cross is the tree of life regained. The cross is that opportunity to come back to God. Remember Jesus himself said, lest you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no life in you.

The cross is the tree of life regained. Everyone who wants to come to him now can. The way has been made back to God, back to unity with God, back to life in God.

Just like in Luke 15 with the prodigal son who recognized he'd been far away from his father. There's a voice of God calling us as the people of God back home to him again. My son, my daughter, get up, you can come home.

Bring, just come as you are. Come with your shame, come with your trials, come with whatever, even with murder in your heart, whatever's going on in your life, just get up and come home. And as he met his father, he found life.

He found a covering for his shame. Today, I want you to know that your shame can be covered. No matter what you've been doing or how you've been behaving, if you're willing to get up and come back and live God's way, there's a covering for your shame.

There's a hope for your future. There's life that God offers you. The thief comes to steal, kill and destroy, John 10, 10.

But the second half of that verse says, but I have come that they may have life and that they may have it more abundantly. Life, life that can only come from God. Life that can't be found anywhere else, but in Christ.

Life that is offered us at the cross where we can go and say, God, I don't have the love I need for this generation. And there's a tree there. And on that tree, a victory was won.

Captivity was taken captive and gifts were given unto men. And God says, no, you don't, but partake of me. I have all the love you will ever need to love the unlovable and make a difference in your time.

Ephesians 4, 8 says, when he ascended on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men. Jesus himself in Mark 3, verse 27, he said, no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man and then he will plunder his goods. I want you to know that when he was crucified and when he was buried and when he rose from the dead, the scripture says, when he ascended on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men.

Oh, the depth of the triumph of God on that cross. Oh, the depth of the mercy of God. Oh, the invitation of God back into his presence again, back into the purpose for our lives.

Oh, this incredible mercy of God that is available to you, to me. He says, if you open the door to your heart, your house as it is, I've already bound the strong man. I've already taken captivity captive.

I've already stepped on the head of the devil. I've already destroyed his power and his works. He's defeated.

He's defeated. It is finished. The victory is won.

We're more than conquerors now through Christ who loves us. Now he says, invite me in and let me plunder your house. Let me plunder the things that disunity from God have planted in your heart.

The preoccupation with nakedness, the envy, the murder, the deceit, the lies, the duplicity, the stepping on other people for personal advantage, whatever it is, it's gotten into your heart. Lord says, let me come in and let me plunder it. Not by might, not by power, not yours, not your might, not your wisdom, not your power, but by my spirit, says the Lord, let me come in and let the temple become mine.

And that's gotta be your prayer because it's mine. Now, oh God, you know every corner of this physical temple. You know everything that's in my mind.

You know everything that's in my heart. You know my future. You know the days ahead of me.

My God, my God, plunder this temple of everything of hell, everything that was sown in this human body because of sin that got into the human race. And we've all inherited it by nature. So let your captivity be taken captive.

Come back with a desire to walk in unity with God and come back to unity, both with God and with each other. Pray that your life might make a difference and watch what God will do. It's an amazing thing because you remember when they built the tower and tried to be God in a sense in themselves, the end result is that they were confounded and couldn't communicate with each other any longer.

Their speech was confounded. They lost the ability to communicate and relate. But what happened in Acts chapter two, when there's a recognition that Christ is the only way to heaven, the power of God is the only power that exists to live a victorious, saved and abundant life.

Suddenly God comes and fills the whole house. Oh God, oh God, I wanna tell you something. This generation needs you.

This generation needs a church again. Enough games, enough religion, enough goofiness in the name of God in his house. We need to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

We need to do it God's way for God's reasons and for God's purpose. Now, you remember what happened when they tried to be God in themselves? They lost the ability to communicate. Now what happens when God fills the temple and there's a recognition, not by might, not by power, but by my spirit, what's the immediate first evidence fruit? They now, what was lost at the Tower of Babel is now regained.

I hope you see it in the scriptures. They now have the ability to communicate again with other people of other cultures, of other tongues. They see the disunity starts to be broken and unity starts coming back together in God.

And suddenly you find yourself with a desire and a divine ability to speak to people that you've never been able to speak to before. You're suddenly communicating. You're communicating by the power of God.

You find yourself in foreign fields. You find yourself in places, neighborhoods that you're not familiar with. And you find yourself speaking.

You find the people standing in wonder and say, how does this person get the power to do what they're doing? That's what happened when David Wilkerson in 1958 came in to some of the worst areas of New York City and started as a skinny Pennsylvania white preacher speaking to black and Latino gangs. And he had nothing in common with them. And they're wondering why, how is it that these man's words, this man's words are touching my heart the way they are.

A sudden ability by the Holy Spirit, an enablement by God to go where we've not gone before, to speak to people we couldn't speak to before. Suddenly this inability to communicate because of sin is destroyed and we come back together and there's a compassion that's birthed of God in the heart of every man, every woman, every child. And God gives us the ability to speak where we haven't had the ability to do it before.

We hear them speaking in our own tongues, the wonderful works of God. We hear them speaking in words that we can understand. We recognize these people are not from our culture.

These people are not from our neighborhood. They're not from our environment. They don't share the value systems that we've learned to embrace.

But here they are speaking to us in a way we can understand about the wonderful works of God. Those things that only God can do. And they're doing it in a way that we recognize this is supernatural.

They were confounded, the scripture says, and amazed and say, whatever could this mean? You see, they were brought out of the natural. They were brought into the supernatural. The new owner had invaded the temple and the power of God was now not only upon them, but radiating through them.

And they were beginning to speak to other people of other cultures and nations about the wonderful things that God alone is able to do. God sets the boundaries. God gives freedom from bondage.

I don't know what they were speaking. It just says in the Greek, they were speaking the megalios of God, which means this, the marvelous supernatural works of God, not only that he was doing, but he was going to do. Jesus said, when the comforter comes, he's going to take what is mine, what I bought for you on that cross, and he's gonna show it to you.

And he's gonna show you things to come. So they're not only speaking about this moment of divine enablement, but I'm convinced they're speaking about that, which God is going to do in the future. And none of their religion had ever given them any of this.

Just a bunch of humdrum and trying to tangibly find some presence of God. Suddenly they encounter 3,000 people, at least encounter 120 who've been touched by the spirit of God. They're back inside the boundaries as it is of God's word.

Their captivity is captive. Their mouths are open, their hearts are enlarged, and they're starting to speak in a way they've never spoken before. You see, this is the heritage of the servants of the Lord.

Peter said, turn from your sin, put on Christ. Turn from your sin, put on Christ. Turn from your sin, put on Christ.

Turn from trying to be God. Turn from trying to be a judge of what is good and what is evil. Turn from the folly and the foolishness of your own reasoning.

Get back in the word of God. Turn and put on Christ. Put on God's purpose for your life.

Put on God's plan for your life. Put on God's calling for your life. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

You will, not you might, a few of you might, you will. You will. For the promises to you, to your children, to all who are far off, that would include New York City, and as many as the Lord our God will call, and that also includes New York City.

Then those who gladly received his word were baptized, and that day were about 3,000 souls added to them. I don't know about you, but I want my life to make a difference. I've made a bit of a difference.

I've made a difference, I guess, in the last 40 years or whatever, and thank God for that, but we're living in a new day. There's a new darkness. It's going to require more of God and less of me and less of you.

I want you to pray with me. God, let my life make a difference. Let me not be just a mediocre player in this incredible divine moment in history.

I wanna walk in unity with God. I wanna walk inside of his boundaries, his truth. I don't want to set my thoughts above the thoughts of God.

I wanna experience the full freedom of God. Did you know you can be free today? If you turn to him with all your heart, there's not a weapon of hell formed against you that can prosper. You can be free.

You don't need years and years and years of counseling. You can be free from things that entangle your mind and your heart and your spirit. You can be free.

And I wanna be a testimony of his love, his mercy, and his miracle working power. That is the heritage. That is the heritage of the children of God.

That is your heritage. That is my heritage. I wanna walk in unity with God.

I want a heart to walk in unity with people. I want a heart to push back this present darkness because it can only be done by the spirit of God. Israel at this time is conquered by the Roman Empire.

They have a different culture, different value system. They're vile and violent. The Caesar of that time is a lunatic.

He's immoral, thinks he's God. That's the Caesar that the apostle Paul was sent to speak to. The society itself has its religion.

It's not much interested. It's glad to be rid of Christ. So what can 120 people do? In the natural, nothing.

But they just got together and said, Lord, we are in one accord with your word and your purpose for each of our lives and with one another. And we're in one place. That place is, Lord, we can't go forward until you give us your Holy Spirit.

But when you do, we will step out and without fear, begin to speak your name. God always takes the foolish things of the world to confound the wise and the weak things of the world to bring to nothing those things that think they stand in their own strength. When I get to heaven, I'm going to the video section and I wanna see that was 120 coming out of that upper room.

There's just a few moments in history that I wanna see. That's gonna be one of my first after the cross. I wanna see that moment where they came out of that upper room and to the undiscerning eye and they were there, there was undiscerning people who said, these people are all just drunk, we get that.

But this was the hand of God came out of that room through 120 people who decided to come back to a place of unity with him and each other. And even mighty Rome in just a short season bent its knee to Christ. 3,000 bent their knee that day.

And the ideology that threatened to swallow the world at that time bent its knee. That's why I believe that the godless ideologies of this moment in history can also be brought to a place of bending its knee to Christ. I believe that with all my heart.

But it does depend on you and me, what we choose to do. We have a part in this. So I wanna give an altar call this morning.

At home, in the annex, in our campus fellowships and here in the main sanctuary. For people to simply say, God, I heard you this morning. And you visited us so powerfully during the worship time.

You bore witness, Lord, you bore witness that you were going to speak to us today. So God, help me wherever I am to come back into the boundaries of unity with you. Help me, Lord, to boldly approach the throne, to find grace in my time of need as your word tells me I should.

Help me not to be sold short of what you have for my life, God, when you have promised me eternal life and abundant life. This is your promise to me. Help me, Lord, not to carry on creating my own value system of what's right and wrong.

Help me, God, help me, God. Help me, God. I was praying on this platform this morning and said, God, whatever it costs me, I no longer care.

I throw my life in with this prayer. If it saves one baby, then it's worth it. If it saves one marriage, if it brings one prodigal son or daughter home, it's not about the numbers.

It's about the fact that maybe, just maybe if I throw my full life in with the kingdom of God and whatever that's going to cost, that it will make a difference for somebody. The rest is up to God. So Father, I thank you, Lord, for speaking to us today.

I believe that most people here have ears to hear. We recognize the darkness of this present moment. God, help us as your people, Lord, to rise up in the power of your Holy Spirit and make a difference in our generation.

Take timidity out of our hearts and give us the courage to believe that it's worth living for the sake of God's kingdom and the souls of men and women and children. Push back this present darkness, Lord, through our lives. Bring us together to pray and to fast and to believe.

God, we need your Holy Spirit more than we've ever needed you in our lifetime. There can be no victory without you, but we do see the precedent of how you have dealt and visited with other generations who've called out to you. And so, Lord, we cast ourselves at the foot of mercy this day.

We lay hold of the promises of God and we believe, Lord, that we can, as a people, push back the darkness of this day. God, we thank you. In Jesus' name.

Lord, you hear the cry of every heart. You told us to ask and you said everyone who asks receives. You said he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks, it will be opened.

If you know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask? These are your words, Lord. So we bend before your word today, God. We bring our lives into the boundaries of what your word tells us, oh God.

And we ask and we expect to receive. We expect, oh God, that this door will open. We expect, oh God, that great fruit will be born for your kingdom's sake.

We expect our timidity to be swallowed up of your love and your boldness. We expect our powerlessness, oh God, to give way to the presence of your Holy Spirit. And Father, we thank you.

Oh God, oh God, oh God, oh God. Oh God, send the Holy Spirit. For Jesus' sake, Lord, send the Holy Spirit.

God, do the work that's in your heart. You long, you long, Lord, for a church where you could send your Spirit. Send your Spirit in full measure to us, Lord.

And raise us up, God, to be the people that you've called us to be. Father, we thank you, God, with all of our heart this day. Hallelujah.

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