

The Glory of God in Awful Places

by Carter Conlon

Carter Conlon's sermon explores the presence of God's glory in the midst of suffering and difficult circumstances, emphasizing the transformative power of trials in a believer's life.

Duration: 37:49

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, 2 Timothy 2:6, 2 Timothy 2:12

Topics: "Glory Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the pastor uses a metaphor of a captain and a first mate to illustrate how God uses difficult circumstances to shape and prepare His people. The pastor explains that sometimes we hold onto old ways of thinking and values that are not aligned with God's will. To help us let go of these things, God uses the 'hammer of the word' to challenge and transform us. The pastor encourages the congregation to embrace their current difficult situations, as God is using them to prepare them for future challenges and to equip them to be vessels through which He can bring deliverance and provision to others.

Transcript

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This recording cannot be posted on any website, however written permission to link to the Times Square Church homepage may be requested by emailing info at timesquarechurch.org. Other recordings are available by calling 1-800-488-0854 or by writing to Times Square Church Tape Ministry 1657 Broadway, New York, New York 10019. Psalm 55, I don't think I told you that already, Psalm 55 in the Old Testament, the glory of God in awful places, the Psalm of David. Now, as we're turning there, I just want to ask the question again, have you ever been in an awful place? Are you in an awful place? Have you come to church this morning saying, I'm in an awful place? Have you said those words to somebody around you? Have you uttered them to God? Have you just groaned them from your own heart? I'm in an awful place.

The Webster's Dictionary defines awful as extremely bad, unpleasant, disagreeable, and a place that inspires fear. Have you ever wandered out of an awful place before? And perhaps you're in an awful place and you'd like to get out now. This is where David was in Psalm 55.

I'm going to read from verses four to eight. He says, my heart is sore pain within me and the terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me.

Horror has overwhelmed me. And I said, oh, that I had wings like a dove for then would I fly away and be at rest. If you want to put it in modern terms, if I could just figure out a way to get out of here, how happy I would be.

Lo, then I would wander far off and remain in the wilderness. Selah, I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest. Now, don't have to go into all the circumstances of David's trouble.

Needless to say, there were, it was a people trouble. Most of our troubles always are somehow associated with people. And David in his heart is saying, I, I just want to get away.

I want to get away from all of the strife. I want to get away from the advice or lack thereof. I want to escape the criticism.

I, I want to just get away. I want to find a place of peace and rest. Have you gotten to where you don't see anything of God in an awful place? Have you ever been there? And the place starts to look so dark.

It seems to be so little light at the end of the tunnel that you don't see anything of God. You don't find any purpose to it. And you don't see any reason as to why you should remain in it.

All in a sense that might be of God appears to be lost. It's gone. It's dissipated.

This is an evil place. And of course the enemy will be right there telling you those very things and telling you somehow you've angered God. Somehow God is mad at you.

Just leave this place. You see, because the enemy himself knows that in the place that you're in, this awful place, there's a very deep work of God going on there. Something that he has experienced through history.

When a man or woman come out, like in the song of Solomon, for example, it says, who is this coming out of the wilderness, leaning on her beloved? He knows the danger. When somebody has come out of one of these places and has learned something about the way the kingdom of God operates, how much violence as it is can be brought against his kingdom and how much he can lose hold over the minds of the people. As David, some here today would say, if I had a way and a plan, I'd be out of here.

I'd rather live in the wilderness than remain here. And I know, I know I'm speaking in the spirit to somebody myself. Anyway, I've been here.

I know what this is all about. I've been in places throughout my life as a Christian. I've been in seasons and times through sickness.

I've been there through difficulties that we all have to face that everything in me wanted to be somewhere else other than where I was. And how confusing it must've been for David at this time. He could remember Samuel walking into the room that day.

He could remember in his youthfulness, the expectation perhaps in his heart that God was going to do something supernatural through his life. He can remember the day when all of his brothers were passed by for this specific anointing. And Samuel poured this horn of oil on his head the words that were spoken

over his life.

And many of you can remember this, the day that you first came to Christ. Christ came to your house. You didn't come to his, he came to yours.

He revealed himself to you. Spoke these incredible things over your life and poured this precious anointing of the victory that he has won for you on Calvary, over you. And this anointing began to lead you as it had with David into places that you knew that only supernatural strength could win victories there.

Think of David standing up on the mountain and when the whole army who have really lost the presence and the understanding of the ways of God are unable to fight for the honor of God. David running into the valley, facing that giant and with the anointing of God on his head and the promises of God in his heart, defeating this incredible enemy that had come against the testimony of God among his people. Think of David carrying within his heart a resident promise that he was to be part of a lineage that could never be triumphed over.

Now the Lord in some point in his journey had given him these promises. He would have had to know it spiritually and then eventually God would speak this to him vocally that I've put you in a place and given you a lineage and the lineage that I'm giving to you and through you cannot be triumphed over. Now he couldn't fully understand that this lineage is Christ, that he was in the physical lineage and a spiritual type of Jesus Christ and there is a lineage of which you and I are part that could not be triumphed over.

Now God's word to him was completely true but yet even with all of the promises that David had and all of the promises that you and I have, we can find ourselves in moments like Psalm 55, my heart is sore pain, terrors of death are all around me, fearfulness and trembling are upon me and I'm overwhelmed with horror. He didn't write it that way because it rhymed folks, this was coming from his heart. I'm overwhelmed, I've got a sense of darkness that's come upon me, a sense of foreboding of something terrible has happened, something very dark is going on in this place that I don't understand and it's possibly in measure at least taking away some of the promise that I felt that I had in my life and that's why he cries out, oh if I had wings like a dove I'd get out of here and if I could just get out of this place I'd be at rest.

I'd wander off and I'd find a cabin as it is in the wilderness and I'd stay there, oh I'd be so happy there. No you wouldn't be happy there, none of us would be happy in the wilderness. It's just like when I go home in the summertime, have you ever noticed we have two dogs and there's a door with a swinging thing in it, have you ever noticed that whatever side the dog is on he always wants to be on the other side of the door and he goes out and lays down there for two minutes and then looks at the door and then he wants to be on the other side of the door and this goes on all day, never happy and there's a lot of that in us folks, we always feel like we're on the wrong side of the door and especially when things seem to be out of our control in spite of the fact that they're never out of the of God's control.

As with all of us today, I'm sure David would like to have just reigned without suffering, I mean it'd be awesome. I remember when I first got saved and I heard we're going to rule and reign with Christ forever, I remember the thought comes let's do it now, let's just go, let's rule and reign and there are some theological misguided places where they actually attempt to do that now in immaturity like giving a child a chainsaw and sending him out into a forest to cut it down. He had failed in Psalm 55 but there's forgiveness so we ask ourselves the question why would this awful place need to be? That is if it needs to be at all.

Why this awful place? What is the purpose to this? I thought we're supposed to be saved and happy, I thought we're supposed to run around as happy, happy, happy all the time, blessed, no problems, no struggles, no trials, on the top, remember we're the head not the tail, all the rest of that stuff. We're supposed to be running around with this testimony of ever-increasing victory and of course there is an ever-increasing victory, it just doesn't come the way we think it comes. Now in the context of what I'm speaking, I want to ask you a question, don't turn there but in 2nd Timothy chapter 2 verse 12, what does Paul mean when he says if we suffer we shall also reign with him? What is the context of that? Now Paul is speaking to Timothy, he's telling Timothy earlier on in that chapter to endure hardness, he's a good soldier, he says don't be entangled with the affairs of this life and he tells Timothy and he's constantly encouraging him not to be afraid, you're going to be drawn as it is into places that you'll need the grace of God to go and Paul is always encouraging this young man and he makes a statement actually before you get to verse 12 and he says the husbandman that labors must be first partaker of the fruits and he said the Lord gives the understanding in these things and Paul is talking about hardness, he's talking about being a soldier and then he goes on to verse 12 where he says if we suffer we shall also reign with him.

So what is he talking about? Now a lot of people have taken that out of context, there are the flagellants for example, the religious people who climb stairs on their knees and they beat themselves until their backs bleed considering perhaps that they're in some measure fulfilling the scripture but that's not what it's talking about. There's something much deeper than just what we can see on the surface. Now in Luke chapter 9 if you'll put a marker in Psalm 55 and go to Luke chapter 9 please with me verses 23 and verse 24.

Now this is where Jesus talks about taking up our cross and following him. Now verse 23 of Luke chapter 9 and he said to them if any man will come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me for whosoever will save his life shall lose it but whosoever will lose his life for my sake the same shall save it. Now the context of taking up our cross to save our lives folks can only be understood in that if we seek to preserve what we think life is and should be then we will lose the life that God in Christ is destined for us to have.

That's what he's talking about, take up the cross. Jesus from the moment he had an understanding as it is in his physical body of the will of his father had taken up the cross knowing where that cross was going to lead him, knowing the kind of life it was going to give him, knowing the adversity he was going to walk into and the rejection he would experience but you see there was a life far beyond anything that we think in the natural life should be. We live in a generation when much natural thinking has been infused into the ways of the word of God and so people are trying not to hammer this square peg into a round hole as it is and it doesn't fit that life should be always thus and thus and but it's it's all strictly a humanistic view of what life should be.

Jesus said no I have something so much better if you seek to save this life, if you seek to save your image of yourself, if you seek to save your own ambition or what even you think religion should make you into, if you if you seek to say that you're going to lose what I have for you, something much deeper, something much more powerful, something much more glorious, something that is that we have that is motivated and moved by the resurrection of life of Christ like Paul says in him we live and we move and we have our being. This is the life that Christ is saying I don't want you to lose this and you will lose it if you attempt to come to church and mold God as it is into agreeing with what you think life should be because he has something so much deeper, so much higher, so much farther. Now think of Jesus for a minute thinking knowing for a certainty that at a particular age in his human body that the purpose of his life was the

redemption of man from his sins.

Now remember I'm talking this morning about the glory of God in awful places. Now if this is the case if he knew this let's say let's reason back say he knew it at five maybe knew it at seven maybe at eight certainly at 12 because he was in the temple at that age reasoning as it is in the scriptures. He knew this was the destiny of his life to be given as a sacrifice a substitute sacrifice for the sins of humanity so that you and I could have eternal life in God.

My question to you then is why not just then go to the cross at 12 years of age? Why not go at 18? Why not at 25? Why not just leave the table at the last supper and just go and be nailed there if that was the final destiny if that was the purpose? Why all the awful places in between? Why the awful places in between the last supper and the final nailing to the cross? If really the cross is just the issue why couldn't he just have gone to Calvary and his own disciples say look let's just fulfill the scriptures nail me to this thing now let me die here quickly. Why all the awful places? And I'm speaking in the context of where Christ says if you will know this life that God has for you take your cross daily and follow me. There's a pathway you see why why did he have to be betrayed for money? Why did he have to face an angry mob and Gethsemane? Why did he have to stand before hollow and hypocritical religious accusers? Why did he have to suffer abuse at the hands of the Roman authorities? Why did he have to be nailed and counted among thieves on the cross and as opposed to just being exalted as it were as a king? Why did he have to suffer being reviled by those that he had even created by the words of his own mouth? Why did he have to suffer the humiliation of the parting of his garments while he was still yet alive? What is the point of all of these places? You see the only reason I can even fathom is because it had been prescribed in the word of God that through this journey he would bring glory to God.

This was a prescribed journey. He said I didn't come to do my own will I came to do the will of the one who had called me. I came to do my father's will.

It was pre-written folks in the word of God. Everything I've shared with you was written in the word of God and folks there is a path for you. There's a path for me and as much as we would like to avoid it it is found when you begin to study the word of God you're going to discover something.

There's a pathway where God's glory is revealed in awful places and if you and I try to escape it we end up being a church that has no influence in our generation. We have no power in our words. We have no authority.

We just run around trying to save our lives all in the name of Jesus and wonder why it has no effect on our society around us. Listen to these words from Psalm 22.

He says I'm a worm and no man a reproach of men I'm despised of the people all they that see me laugh me to scorn and they shoot at the lip they shake the head saying he trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him let him deliver him seeing he delighted in him but thou art he that took me out of the womb thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts I was cast upon thee from the womb thou art my God from my mother's belly be not far from me for trouble is near and there's no one to help many bulls have compassed me strong bulls of passion have beset me around they gaped upon me with their mouths as a ravening and a roaring lion I'm poured out like water all my bones are out of joint my heart is like wax it's melted in the midst of my bowels my strength is dried like a

potsherd and my tongue cleaves to my jaws and thou has brought me into the dust of death dogs have compassed me the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me they pierced my hands and my feet I may tell all my bones they look and stare at me they part my garments among them and cast lots upon my vesture be not thou far from me oh lord oh my strength hasty to help me deliver my soul from the sword my darling from the power of the dog now these are the words of Christ and folks it was in the word of God and when you study the scriptures you begin to understand there's a pathway for those who are going to follow him it's a pathway that God has prescribed and what God prescribes has a reason it's not just there to create misery for you and I the best way I can describe the purpose of suffering

want you to think for a moment the man clinging to the sides of a sinking ship he's not knowing that soon the downward pull will take him down with it into the depths and many people are like that even Christian people they go to church Sunday but they're desperately hanging on to some old way of thinking some old values something of this world that is doomed to spiral downward now the captain sees it from his vantage point and instructs the first mate to take some kind of a blunt object and start hitting him on his fingers until he eventually lets go now this man's going to suffer he's hanging on to this thing with everything he's got and he has no idea all of a sudden somebody comes along he comes to church and he thinks that the pastor oh bless me bless me in my present condition help

me to hang on and the pastor takes out the hammer of the word and one by one starts hitting his fingers until he has to let go finger by finger until he's hanging on by two more fingers and surely he's not going to hit me there also and if the final blow of the hammer comes and he has to let go not realizing it's his life has been spared he's not going to be dragged down with this whole system as it is that's the purpose of suffering the best way I know how to describe it think throughout scriptural history think of Moses suffering in the wilderness having left the palace as it was in the place where he thought the destiny of his life was supposed to begin and end only to realize that the letting go of what he thought the purpose of his life was brought him to a place where he was able to

lead many to freedom it was in this place of suffering it was in an awful place I don't have any doubt that if you were to go back in history and talk with Moses he'd say this is an awful place I had such access to power I was once called to do something but I really totally misread what I was to do and because of it I'm in this awful place leading a few sheep and I've I've even lost the power to speak here I used to be an eloquent speaker and now I can only stammer a few words together I seemed I'm no longer young I'm not seemingly a man that anybody would look to but I've encountered God here in this awful place and how could Moses know that this was prescribed by God this was an awful place it was a god-awful place for lack of a better description an awful place prescribed by God you

might be in a god-awful place this morning because out of this place he was going to in this place he was going to meet God and out of this place he was going to come with something worked in him that cannot be learned in a textbook it can only be learned by the Holy Ghost and he comes out with something so deeply worked in him that God now has a vessel in his hands through which he can bring three million people out of the captivity of one of the most powerful armies in the world at that time think of the testimony of Paul when Paul is saved and the Holy Spirit goes to Ananias Ananias is told I will show this man the great things he must suffer for my name's sake and Paul's testimony is of being taken from awful place to awful place when you read his testimony the number of times he was

beaten the number of times shipwrecked the number of times he was betrayed the number of times he was stranded even in the ocean or the sea from awful place to awful place and only to have a pen placed

in a yielded hand at the end of his days God now had a vessel through whom he could flow and words were not just from his mouth but through his hand something from the heart of God was about to be revealed that has been a great encouragement and continues to be even to you and I today I don't know what Paul's hand looked like it might have been fairly gnarled and maybe a little bit of arthritis may have set into it I don't know he'd been a long time and through a lot of things I don't know what his hand looked like but I do know when God looked at it he said now I can put a pen or quill in

that hand and now that hand can be moved by the Holy Ghost and words in my heart can be put on paper for future generations think of Joseph for a moment from the place of a dream to 13 years of awful places after his dream 13 years of betrayal 13 years of imprisonment 13 years of being forgotten 13 years of being worked and quite often not rewarded only at the end of this awful place Joseph without hesitation even crying out to one of the king's servants remember me in this awful place and get me out of here do something I can't I don't know how long I can stand being here any longer only to come out at the end and in his hand were put the keys to a storehouse a storehouse of supply that a starving generation was going to need oh folks I do believe that God has the Moses the Paul's the

Joseph's the Deborah's the deliverers are in the appointed awful places right in this moment I do believe that there are many sitting here even today you wonder say God why am I in this place not realizing the Lord is preparing you for a hard time coming when people are going to be starving they're going to be needing direction they're going to be needing a way out of captivity they're going to need resources there's going to have to be men and women who know God they found him in these awful places they've known his glory their whole testimony is not well one day you know we're all going to get out of here and we're going to be so happy that's not their testimony their testimony is no I found him in these hard places I know I know who he is that's why Paul and Silas could sing in the

midst of an inner prison and all of hell begins to shake because there are two men there who have found him in one of the most awful places this world could ever put a person into that's why Paul says if we suffer with him we shall reign with him if we suffer we shall reign now a lot of people think of suffering as now and reigning in heaven and that's the way this is quite often interpreted but I want to suggest to that this is all in the present if we suffer we shall reign now think about Jesus and I'm going to share something with you if you could open your heart I believe it could revolutionize how you see the difficult places that the Holy Spirit will take us through now what if what is the first thing that Jesus did when he rose from the dead I'm I'm going to read according to the

gospel of John the first thing now he's now a victor over death he's now been raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Ghost he's a victor now over death he has suffered now he's living now on the other side of that suffering still in a human body still on planet earth until the day he ascends to his father but he's still reigning he's already won the victory it's not to be won it is won John 20 tells us that he spoke with such tenderness and authority that he brought a woman called Mary who had lost hope in her awful place immediately out of her despair that's reigning with Christ folks it's when you've gone through suffering you've known hardship you've known difficulty you've trusted God God's hand has kept you he's lifted you out of the place that would have swallowed anybody who

hasn't got the power of God upon them you walk into somebody else's situation a woman who's lost all her hope the things she she thought would bring her freedom look to be dead and he speaks her name with such incredible tenderness asks her a question why are you weeping what are you looking for and and speaks her name folks this is what i mean when i talk about reigning with Christ it's the power to speak

that brings people out of despair it's a word it's it's not just it's not just light information that we all have it's not just opening your bible and quoting a scripture to somebody who's suffering it's far beyond that it's reigning with Christ it's the power to speak with such tenderness just a few words and prisons are unlocked and wounded hearts are healed and hopelessness finds

hope and blinded eyes see what they couldn't see before it's reigning with Christ and i dare say those who have never suffered and will never know this the second thing he does he appears in an upper room where the disciples are gathered the doors are locked the scripture says for fear of the jews this is an assembly of the fearful an assembly of afraid people he walks in and the first thing he says out of his mouth is peace amazing peace to reign with Christ is to have the power to bring the peace of God with you wherever you go you walk into your house and your children are fighting and everything seems to be out of control you walk in but you're walking in resurrection life now you're walking you're reigning with Christ you walk in and your presence just the presence of God in you

coming into the room you can say peace whether you have to speak it with your mouth or just the presence of Christ in you coming into the room peace comes peace that's what happens to those who reign with Christ there's a power in their speech to lift people out of despair there's an anointing and an authority of their lives to bring peace wherever they go and then it goes farther in verse 22 it says he breathed upon them and he said receive the holy ghost amazing the lord was speaking to my heart he said carter that's that's when i brought you to the place where i can i can breathe through you where your words are not your own it's not your own reasoning anymore you're not trying to just help somebody out of a situation you have something from God you are living in this place where you

can open your mouth and the the life breath of God is infused into those who are listening that's the difference between preaching and resurrection preaching anybody can stand in this pulpit and just open the book and read it to you but if God finds a vessel who has suffered and come out in victory i'm not even remotely suggesting i've arrived at this but i see it and i embrace it with all my heart then God says no this then all of a sudden this takes on a new dimension i am now reigning with Christ that means that you give me authority to open this book and the words that have come from the heart of God will breathe life into dead bones and breathe life into hopeless situations and breathe life and hope and expectancy into those that have lived under the illusion that you're a loser that

you're never going to amount to anything you're never going to get out there's no purpose to your life God gives authority not only breathes life into them but then tells them what they're going to do and tells them they have authority he said whoever sins you remit i remitted whoever sins you retain i retained you're going to walk in a realm of life that's what it means to reign with Christ and the classroom to that reigning is suffering if you found another way well bless God for you but i never have i'm not aware of one and these are classrooms that the Lord will take you through they're God appointed God awful places and in these places you'll find him you'll find him there's no sense in trying to escape if you escape it you escape the very work that God has been doing in you to bring

about a life that will glorify him we're coming into a time in history where people are going to lose their hope like Mary everything they hope for as they see it is dead and gone we're coming into a time like with Moses where people are weary and crying and they don't know what to do we're coming into a time where people are going to be locked in their houses for fear it's already beginning now we're coming into a time when people are going to be desperate for provision and God has been preparing an army and the army has been preparing if you study this book has always been found in awful places but in these awful places

the glory of God is manifested hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah today if you will trust God and believe that all things work together for good if you will simply believe

one verse of scripture all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose it will put your flight plan your flight plan to flight you say no i'm not leaving here i'm going to trust that you will reveal yourself to me and you'll reveal yourself through me i'm letting go of my own reasoning i'm cutting off my escape routes i'm saying no here i will find God here i will find power purpose and meaning i am going to reign with Jesus Christ i'm going to walk in resurrection life i'm going to walk in resurrection power i am not running from this situation i'm not going to look for deliverance from outside i'm going to find God right where i am right now in this job in this community in this building in this body in this marriage in this circumstance

i'm going to find God here and now and at the appropriate time he'll roll the stone back and i'll find authority in my words and so will you real spiritual authority hallelujah thanks be to God thank you Lord how many this morning need to find the glory of God in your awful place raise your hand all right in the annex we couldn't see your hand but the Lord sees it while i got a scripture for you if you seek me you will find me if you search for me with all your heart no escape routes no back door no plan b i've got you where you are and there'll be something of my life given to you if you will seek me right where you are and don't seek me to escape seek me just because the Lord says i'm worthy that you should seek me don't try to escape i've got you in the place where you need to be if

you can see that he is preparing an army if you can understand that there will be voices in these streets in the days ahead with spiritual authority and hope and life who can bring peace into terrified homes and neighborhoods then i see great hope i see great hope folks for a future that's going to need God now Lord i thank you God with all my heart i know i've delivered your heart and i pray today Lord that you bring this to a close by causing the hearts of men and women to agree with what you speak Lord it's agreement that's what you've always looked for come let us reason together you said i pray God that all my life i may agree with you in this truth this issue of not running not escaping God finding you in the midst of whatever situation i find myself in thank you for the promises

Lord that we will we've suffered with you we will reign with you here on planet earth and i thank you for it with all my heart i'm going to do something a little different for those who did raise their hand here in the annex as we stand i'm going to ask you to make your way to the front of this sanctuary i want you to glorify God for the place that you're in want you to do something you might not have done for a long time thank him that he has you right where you need to be thank him and let the glory of God just like happening this youth meeting let the glory of God begin to touch your soul some of you are going to experience something here at this altar the glory of the Lord will touch you an understanding of the purposes of God let's stand together balcony you can make your way to

either exit main sanctuary to slip out of where you are begin to thank him no sniveling no groveling thank him thank him for where he's got you thank him for the marriage you're in thank him for the children you have thank him for the job you're working at thank him for the fact you have no job thank him just thank him he knows he knows praise God for those that have come to this altar i want you to pray a simple prayer with me here and the annex as well and those who just feel to pray it standing in your seat we're going to pray a simple prayer of thanksgiving Lord Jesus Christ thank you thank you for putting me and allowing me to be in the awful place that i'm now in you must have seen something in my life that you would give me the privilege of finding your glory in this difficult

place this is a difficult place i accept everything that the cross of Christ brings into my life i know that you're working it out so that my life may bring glory to you may bring glory to you i accept the suffering because i know on this side of eternity i will reign with Jesus Christ for this i give thanks and i give you all the glory in Jesus name now let's thank you just thank give him praise hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah this is the conclusion of the message

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