

REFLECTIONS ON THE WRITINGS OF
C. S. LEWIS



Mercy
Passion

& Joy

LENTEN DEVOTIONS

ASH WEDNESDAY

Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” *Mark 1:14-15*

*I*n other words, fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement: he is a rebel who must lay down his arms. (*Mere Christianity*, 59)

As we enter the season of Lent today, we hear the hard words of Jesus calling us to repentance. C. S. Lewis teaches us that repentance involves surrender, laying down our arms, saying we're sorry, and Jesus teaches us that, following repentance, we will find good news, which he invites us to believe. We need both. We need to acknowledge that rebellion inhabits our own hearts, and we need to know that God loves us enough not to leave us in our rebellion. We need to know that God desires our entire lives to be lives of repentance.

In his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis called his early rebellion against God the desire not to be interfered with; he wanted to call his soul his own. In repentance, we learn that we belong to Someone else, Someone who created us, certainly, but especially Someone who redeemed us. The light at the end of the tunnel of repentance is the glorious grace of God and the forgiveness won by Jesus.

Heavenly Father, by my sins I have rebelled against your Word and will. For the sake of Jesus, forgive me. Amen.

THURSDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. *Psalms 51:3*

A serious attempt to repent and really to know one's sins is in the long run a lightening and relieving process. (*God in the Dock*, 127)

When David expressed his knowledge of sin, he described himself as being constantly reminded of his transgressions. When such is the case with us, we can rejoice for two reasons: first, that we have an awareness of our need (always the first step in improvement) and, second, that we have a solution in our Savior Jesus Christ.

For C. S. Lewis, the knowledge of one's sins brought not only anguish and dismay, but also relief. The relief comes in the long run, but not at first. At first, we must know the reality of the spiritual pain as much as we know the physical pain of illness or a

toothache. We don't go to a doctor unless we know we are sick (setting aside for the moment all preventive measures). We don't seek forgiveness unless we know that we have a spiritual sickness. Although the diagnosis is serious, even fatal, for the wages of sin is death, yet the awareness of our spiritual need can lead to a spiritual solution in the death and resurrection of Jesus for us.

Lord Jesus, I praise you for carrying my sins in your own body to the cross. Amen.

FRIDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud, and your sins like mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you. *Isaiah 44:22*

*R*emember, this repentance, this willing submission to humiliation and a kind of death, is not something God demands of you before He will take you back and which He could let you off if He chose: it is simply a description of what going back to Him is like. (*Mere Christianity*, 59-60)

The 40-day Lenten season of repentance seems long. After all, how long must we repent? At the same time, however, Isaiah reminds us how quick and complete forgiveness is when we repent. The brief and insubstantial existence of a cloud and a mist, which only obscure our sight rather than prevent any activity, remind us that God can easily deal with our sin. He can deal with our sin as the sun deals with the morning mist because our sins were taken upon himself at the cross when Jesus died. When C. S. Lewis describes repentance as “going back,” he is undoubtedly drawing on the actual meaning of the New Testament word for repentance. That word literally means to do a 180-degree turn and go in the opposite direction. If I am going east, to repent is to go west. If I am going my own way, that is, in the direction away from God, to repent is to go God's way.

And by the way, how long, or how often, must we repent? The answer is, “Daily, for the rest of our lives.”

Almighty God, in Christ Jesus you have forgiven me and taken me back as your own. Amen.

SATURDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. *Matthew 11:28-29*

“*I* am Re-birth, I am Life. Eat Me, drink Me, I am your Food. And finally, do not be afraid, I have overcome the whole Universe.” (*God in the Dock, 171*)

At times our sins do not at all slow us down, mostly because we are oblivious to them, but at other times our sins weigh us down heavily. We show the weariness of guilt on our faces, we find it difficult to “get up” for the tasks we face, and our daily activities lack liveliness and spontaneity. Sometimes things just don’t go well, and we don’t realize it’s because of unconfessed sin.

That’s when Jesus invites us to come to him and carry his yoke. It sounds strange that someone would invite us to carry his yoke and that the carrying of the yoke would bring us rest. Yokes can be heavy, as those who have seen a yoked pair of oxen can attest. But carrying the yoke of Jesus is far easier than carrying the burden of our sins. Or, one might say, become yoked to Jesus, and you will find that he is doing the heavy lifting.

Lord Jesus, help me to leave the burden of my sins at the foot of your cross. Amen.

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. *Isaiah 55:6-9*

MONDAY, FIRST WEEK OF LENT

The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. *Psalms 51:17*

“*C*ontrite,” as you know is a word translated from Latin, meaning crushed or pulverized. (*God in the Dock, 122*)

Long ago the Jewish people stopped offering sacrifices, as they had during Old Testament times. No longer do we shed the blood of an innocent animal in our place on God's altar, but we still have sacrifices we can offer. We offer ourselves as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1), and we offer a broken spirit, or contrite heart, as David writes in the psalm.

However, we don't offer our sacrifices because of their worthiness. Rather, we offer such sacrifices because Jesus has offered the once-for-all sacrifice, shedding his blood for us, and because our sacrifice points to his. As we think on his sacrifice, we are often moved to contrition when we realize that it was our sins that caused him to suffer, our sins that sent him to the cross and our sins that were paid for on the cross. That crushes us, which, as C. S. Lewis writes, is what the word "contrite" means. Though crushed when we see what our sins did to Jesus, we are then encouraged when we see the forgiveness that he has now secured.

Heavenly Father, accept my contrite heart and forgive my sins for the sake of Jesus my Savior. Amen.

TUESDAY, FIRST WEEK OF LENT

But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. *Matthew 6:6*

*I*t is always just possible that Jesus Christ meant what He said when He told us to seek the secret place and to close the door. (*God in the Dock, 294*)

Most people need time alone with their thoughts, sometimes to unwind, sometimes to think, sometimes to sort out their emotions. When I first met my future son-in-law, I didn't understand the emotions with which I was being flooded. But after a sleepless night, it became clear to me at about 5 a.m. the next morning. My daughter would, henceforth, be looking to another man to meet her primary needs. When I understood that, and knew it to be part of God's plan, I found peace. The sorting of emotions usually doesn't take that long, but taking the time is important and helpful.

God knows that we need time alone with him, in prayer, in thoughtful meditation upon his Word, and Jesus promises that our Father will reward us for that time spent with him. How could it be otherwise than that we are rewarded, if Jesus Christ himself recommended private prayer and also promised that the Father would bless it? Take time for private prayer today.

Lord, during this Lenten season and always, lead me to turn to you in prayer. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, FIRST WEEK OF LENT

The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. *Romans 8:21*

*W*hat is beyond all space and time, what is uncreated, eternal, came into nature, into human nature, descended into His own universe, and rose again, bringing nature up with Him. It is precisely one great miracle. (*God in the Dock, 76-77*)

C. S. Lewis describes the Incarnation as “one great miracle,” the uncreated, eternal God, coming into this created world. In the Incarnation a series of events was set into motion that will not be complete until the last day in human history. While we move toward Easter and the other great miracle of the resurrection, we don’t forget that the Incarnation was the start of God’s more direct involvement in human history.

Both Lewis and the apostle Paul remind us to keep our eternal future in view. St. Paul reminds us that we have company in our longing for a better world, that the entire creation yearns with us for the “freedom of the glory of the children of God.” Or, as Lewis describes it, when that last great day arrives, God will, fully and completely, bring up nature with him. He has changed everything in the death and resurrection of his Son; he will do so once more and for the last time as the culmination of all history. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

Lord, I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

THURSDAY, FIRST WEEK OF LENT

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. *1 John 3:18*

*B*ecause we love something else more than this world we love even this world better than those who know no other. (*God in the Dock, 160*)

Many of us know the humorous piece about a person who congratulates himself about the fact that he hasn’t been irritable or resentful today, hasn’t thought any bitter thoughts, harbored any grudges, etc. Then, as the story goes, he says to himself, “But very soon, Lord, I am going to get out of bed, and I’m going to need your help.” Funny, but very true to reality.

We need to walk the walk, not just talk the talk. Or, as John wrote, “Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.” C. S. Lewis puts it another way, writing, “Because we love something else more than this world we love even this world better than those who know no other.” John focuses here on the end result, while Lewis directs our attention to the root cause, that is, the Savior who died and rose again for us, conquering the last enemy, which is death. As we meditate on the suffering of our Lord, let us also put into action the logical consequence of seeing a multitude of needs in the world around us and meeting some of them.

Father, help me to walk in love as Jesus walked, putting my faith into action in works of service to others. Amen.

FRIDAY, FIRST WEEK OF LENT

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? *Psalm 22:1*

The “hiddenness” of God perhaps presses most painfully on those who are in another way nearest to Him, and therefore God Himself, made man, will of all men be by God most forsaken? (*Letters to Malcolm*, 65)

When Jesus spoke the fourth word from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” he was quoting King David. Most people are familiar with the opening words of Psalm 22, but very few have read it to the end. Some students of the Old Testament think that the end of the psalm, in fact the last ten verses, expresses the positive hope, or confident expectation, of the author for deliverance. The first twenty-one verses reflect the suffering of Christ on the cross, but the last ten verses, also from the same author, reflect that the anguish of the sufferer will turn into praise, worship and answer to prayer. The same should be our hope, even when we find ourselves in the midst of difficult times. The message of Lent is that repentance leads to forgiveness—first comes the cross, then the crown. For us, too, anguish turns into praise, worship and answers to prayer.

Lord, because you were forsaken on the cross, I know that the Father will never forsake me. Amen.

Mercy & Joy Passion

Let the writings of C. S. Lewis lead you through Lent with this booklet of daily quotes from arguably the greatest Christian apologist of the 20th century, followed by reflections by C. S. Lewis scholar Dr. Joel Heck. The daily quotes, Scripture, reflections and prayers lead the reader from contemplations on the mercy of Christ, the Passion he suffered on our behalf, to the astounding joy that is ours because of his great sacrifice for us.



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