

MERCY PASSION AND JOY

DAILY DEVOTIONS FOR LENT



JOEL HECK

ASH WEDNESDAY

REPENT AND BELIEVE

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

In other words, fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement: he is a rebel who must lay down his arms. (C. S. Lewis, 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.

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

FINDING RELIEF

For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.

PSALM 51:3

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

For C. S. Lewis, the knowledge of one's sins brought not only anguish and dismay but also relief. Although the diagnosis is serious, even fatal, for the wages of sin is death, 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

GOING BACK

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

Remember, 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. (C. S. Lewis, 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

YOKED TO JESUS

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. (C. S. Lewis, 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

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, THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

SACRIFICE

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

PSALM 51:17

“Contrite,” as you know is a word translated from Latin, meaning crushed or pulverized. (C. S. Lewis, 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, THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

A PLACE FOR PRAYER

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

It 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. (C. S. Lewis, 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 then 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.

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