

Lent- Repentance

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A Short Devotional for the Lenten Season

Days 1-7

Lent 2021

Repentance

Lent 2021- Day 1

Today, Ash Wednesday, the Roman Catholic church will mark its adherents with ash on their foreheads, a symbol of repentance and mourning in the Bible. In the Old Testament ash on one's head along with wearing sackcloth, a garment sewn from goat fur, symbolized sorrow, mourning, and repentance.

How appropriate then, that in 2020 and now 2021, we have now, through COVID-19 and regional shutdowns, the opportunity to repent and be sorrowful.

We might be sorrowful about our losses. Situations have changed, relationships have been affected, and rhythms disrupted. We might mourn the loss of income, a loved one, or the anxiety that many face. We might face the loss of a previous life that seems like a vision of the past, where schools met in person, offices buzzed, vendors sold without limitation, and home was a refuge instead of an operating base.

Today, as many take on ashes, may we remember to put on the garment of repentance. To wear sorrow means to honestly face our own tensions and anxiety. And in the middle of these acts, we call on God to see our posture and to recognize our faces past the ashes and sackcloth. We ask God to help us see our own sorrow, and in this we truly repent.



Repentance

Lent - Day 2

Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand (Mt. 3:2)

Repentance is a loaded word. It is also a message. John the Baptist proclaimed in his ministry, “Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.” Such a message undoubtedly shook the religious guard of the day who may have thought they held the keys to a kingdom. And while they had every opportunity to “repent,” it seems this turning of heart evaded them.

It should not shock us, then, when Jesus proclaims a kingdom, he too faces stark

opposition from the religious guard and from political foes. To proclaim a kingdom and invite others into it, suggests an insurrection or rebellion. For Jesus, it was a coming revolution where the king of kings would take hold as the dominating force in heaven and earth.

So, Jesus’ disciples, too, are tasked with this message of announcing a kingdom at hand (Lk. 10: 11). And the key to entry? Just as it was for John the Baptist’s ministry, so too, for Jesus’. Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand.

What exactly does this mean? The message was meant as a crossroads for its audience. You have to choose a side - with or against Christ as king. He does not do it forcibly as kings that conquer with armies and weapons.

He simply asks for repentance and turning to him as king of the nations and of the heavens. This means turning from our own kingdoms of nationalism, materialism, or even false religiosity. He asks for the deepest parts of our

allegiances. This means not trusting money, sex, intelligence, success, or other previous forms of security. It means relying on Christ as the source of life in all of our living and our allegiance. Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand.



Repentance

Lent Day 3

Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! (Lk. 10:13)

When a person reaches a point of public service or achievement, a politician might grant them a key to the city. This key represents the ability to enter the city with reverence and honor. The key bestows benefits and prestige for the recipient's service and heroic acts. But what about a person's dishonoring or shaming? What if someone committed something so horrible that it warranted a public shaming. In the United States, we would never do that.

However, in Jesus' days, a prophet might pronounce a "Woe." As opposed to "Whoa," a "Woe" is a curse. It pronounces judgment and stands opposite of the good version - a



blessing. It should not surprise us then that Jesus blesses and curses. He curses those who don't repent. What does this mean? Perhaps it helps to look at those who he blesses:

The poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, the children, the poor, the hungry, the weeping, the persecuted, and the hated for Jesus' sake.

So, why did Jesus pronounce a "woe" on the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida? It seems they lacked repentance. If Jesus looked on the San Francisco Bay Area, what would he pronounce? If he looked in on your block, woe or blessing? If he ate at your table, would he find hospitality or suspicion

Repentance

Lent - Day 4

Peter answered him, "you are the Christ." (Mk. 8:29)

Repentance translated as "penance" from Latin into English has a long history in the church. The simple translation led to the Catholic church's practice of allowing a priest to pronounce forgiveness or absolution to a confessor. Over the centuries, Reformed Protestants (of which the Baptists descend) rejected priestly forgiveness and the need for priestly confession.

However, there still is value in confessing. Confessing our wrongs reminds us that we are fallible and human. It confronts our souls as we might forget that we are sinners. Confessing opens the doors of communication and might even lead to those we wrong confessing to us when they wrong us.

As those who follow Jesus, we follow in the heritage of Peter's confession, "you are the Christ." Since He is the Christ, we are not perfect. We cover up our mistakes. We would rather run away from our impurities and our short comings. We would rather point the finger at someone else or gain control of the situation by finding solutions to cover our tracks. This is the human condition.

Repentance allows us to pray like this at the end of the day:

**I confess to almighty God,
and to you, my brothers and sisters,
that I have sinned through my own fault,
in my thoughts and in my words,
in what I have done,
and in what I have failed to do;
and I ask you, my brothers and sisters,
to pray for me to the Lord, our God.**

Confession heals. Confession to others is a form of repentance.



Repentance

Lent - Day 5

Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. (Rev. 3:19)

I would have hated to be in the audience of Laodicea and hearing John's word of the Revelation to our church. If you don't know the church of Laodicea, it's where we derive the term, "lukewarm" Christian. The church was described as lukewarm, comfortable.

The waters at Laodicea flowed southward from a hot spring about 4 miles north. By the time the waters reached Laodicea, you can imagine that it would be warm but not hot. Warm, but not cold enough for refreshment. Laodicea was also a place of comfort and riches. It housed a medical school and a booming economy. They did not need Rome's money for rebuilding after a great earthquake. Hence, Jesus, seeing into their hearts, cannot help but assess their lukewarm faith that matched their lukewarm waters.



He urges them to repent. Why? Because he reproveth and disciplines the ones he loves. He wants them to be zealous and not comfortable. He desires their energy and not their lethargy. Repenting of our comforts can be a way of clinging to Jesus.

In this season, many consider a 40 day fast or abstaining as a way of repenting. Some might choose meat while others give up caffeine. The substance is not the matter as much as the heart's focus. Emerge from lukewarm waters. Choose something this season to withdraw from and cling to Christ. This forms our proclamation that the kingdom of God is at hand.

Repentance

Lent - Day 6

Let your eyes be open to the plea of your servant and to the plea of your people Israel, giving ear to them whenever they call to you. (1 Ki. 8:52)



None of my children will ever accuse me of having open ears. Ashamedly, there are times where my children shout to gain my attention. I could be watching a football game or texting a congregant. I might simply be lost in thought or enjoying a cup of coffee.

Nevertheless, there are times I simply do not hear my children. It could be the faint tone of the childish voice or the overwhelming sound that drowns them out. Maybe subconsciously, I try not to hear it.

We might think the same of God when we pray. Maybe we feel like we have to shout louder or jump higher. Maybe we need to appear more innocent or holy. Perhaps we would appear better if we compared ourselves to others.

However, in multiple places of the Old Testament, Israel is reminded that if they ever sin against God (they did), and if they ever ended up in another land because of their sin against God (they did), they would be able to have God's ear. They were to cling to promises that if they repented, God would hear their case. They would not have to justify themselves. They would not have to hold extra festivals. To gain God's ear, they simply repent.

God's language is not in our defenses. His movement comes not with religious fervor or illuminating prayers. He hears the language of repentance. In our fasting or withdrawal, we have forty days to speak God's language. It does not scream our righteousness. It does not invite an audience. It simply taps on God's shoulder and says I'm here.

Repentance

Lent -Day 7

but then you turned around and profaned my name when each of you took back his male and female slaves, whom you had set free according to their desire, and you brought them into subjection to be your slaves. “Therefore, thus says the Lord: You have not obeyed me by proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother and to his neighbor; behold, I proclaim to you liberty to the sword, to pestilence, and to famine, declares the Lord. I will make you a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth. (Jer. 34:16)

When I enrolled in a paralegal class taught by a lawyer, he said, “just because you have a written contract, doesn’t necessarily mean you have a contract.” He then went on a diatribe on the legalities of a contract and its binding nature. There are often circumstances that surround contracts. There might be agreements made beforehand or amended afterward. I learned shortly that contracts were a signal of an agreement, and that the agreement itself exists in the minds and hearts of those who agree to it. Contracts are important. They communicate expectations and behaviors. They usher predictability and stability.



Israel too, existed in an agreement with God called a covenant, which detailed how they would live, make agreements, and keep their oaths amongst many other aspects of life. At one point, the Israelites made a covenant to free their slaves during a season of political strife and civil discord. Perhaps, they thought they could earn God’s favor. Perhaps, they felt they needed to be more in agreement with God’s laws. Their covenant of liberation, however would not last long.

Shortly after making their covenant to free Hebrew slaves, many land owning slave holders recalled their slaves. They broke their covenant. They, in the words of the Bible, profaned their covenant. And in Jeremiah 34, the prophet rebukes them for their behavior. They broke their promises, and wronged their neighbors, their very own people. They reneged on the contract.

For this, God would inflict ultimate punishment. Not only did they break that particular covenant, but they also broke their agreement with God in how they were to make promises regarding slaves (Dt. 15:12). They simply were not honoring their covenant, thus shaming their brothers and sisters.

True repentance is not something we do for a time until it seems convenient. Sure, we will not honor all of our promises or our efforts might fall short. However, repentance, turning to God and from our ways should be a way to honor God in a consistent way that longs to obey, even when difficult. Honor your agreements with others and confess promises that have been broken. In this, we proclaim freedom to the captive and mean it.