

Conquering the 3 “D’s” of Lent

Matthew 6:16-21

Someone once said that the task of the church is not to get sinners into heaven, but to get saints out of bed. I’m not sure who first said that, but there is an element of truth in that statement. It is actually God who is in charge of getting sinners into heaven, although the church does have an active role in that process. The church’s main purpose is to nurture that soul that God has saved by His grace and help him or her become a disciple for Jesus Christ. All that we do as a believer should be focused on that end.

Lent is a season of sacrifice and remembrance, but we are not competing with each other to see who can sacrifice the most. Our Lord reminds us that sort of outward piety is of no benefit to the kingdom. God is most interested in the secret things we do in gratitude to Him. Those are heavenly treasures, which can never be destroyed or taken from us. There is no greater treasure than knowing our place in heaven is secure.

Lent is a time to remember and give thanks that our Lord willingly sacrificed and suffered on the cross so that we might spend eternity with Him. It is a somber time of self-reflection, but one that can bring joy, healing and assurance to sin-sick souls weary of the ways of the world. Lent is both a journey to the cross and to the side of our risen Savior- Jesus Christ, and each day will present a new opportunity to either move closer or further away from the glory of the kingdom. If we are to move closer, we will need to identify and then crucify the earthly **desires, doubts and distractions** that can sidetrack us in our journey of faith.

How will we get there? If we are to overcome those three deadly “D’s”, we will need to use the same three weapons Jesus did to win His own battle with the enemy- prayer, fasting and Scripture. They are like a three stranded cord- not easily broken. They are all means of grace, things that connect us with God, and the good news is that they are readily available to us, freely given for our benefit. If you are not familiar with how to use them, there is no better time to learn than Lent.

Start small, saying hello to Jesus in the morning and good night to Him in the evening. Thank Him for the clothes you have to wear and the food on the table and the other blessings you receive. Skip a meal or a Starbucks now and then and put the money you would have spent on it in the mission basket where it will go to feed the hungry. Do something nice for a stranger, reconcile with someone you are at odds with. Spend time every day in the Scriptures, thank God for the promises you will find there, especially the assurance of eternal life to those who love His Son Jesus Christ. There is also a free Lenten devotional based upon the Beatitudes of the Psalms on the table in the foyer.

The truth is that we are battling the same enemy Jesus faced, one who would like nothing better than to see us fail. Though we don't have the weight of the world's sin on our shoulders, at times our battle with Satan will be just as real as that of Jesus. We will be tempted to give in to temptation, and renege on the promises we made to God.

Jesus won that 40 day battle with Satan with prayer, fasting and the Scriptures, and we will too. The problem is that the war with evil continues. Luke 4:13 tells us this: Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time". From all indications it appears that time is growing nearer and nearer. Let us be prepared. Amen

Almighty God, you have created us out of the dust of the earth. Grant that these ashes might be to us a sign of our mortality and penitence, so that we might remember that it is only by your gracious gift are we given everlasting life. Through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen