

Ash Wednesday

by Thaddeus Barnum

Lent is a 40-day process to submit to the Lord's work in our lives, allowing us to be set free from the bondage of sin.

Duration: 21:32

Scripture: Psalm 32:5, Joel 2:11-14, Matthew 3:2, Acts 2:37, Romans 7:24-25, James 5:16

Topics: "Ash Wednesday"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of submitting to a process for the well-being of the soul. He refers to the 40 days leading up to Good Friday and Easter as a time to walk through this process. The first step is to submit to the Lord and acknowledge our inability to save ourselves. The second step is to allow the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, followed by making confession and asking for mercy. The final step is to ask God for the gift of repentance, recognizing that we cannot repent in our own strength. The speaker also highlights the need for true transformation and freedom from sin, rather than just being transparent about our struggles.

Transcript

And so we pray Lord how we need you tonight as we start this journey into Lent, how we need you always. Honor and glory belong to you and so receive us as we offer ourselves to you in Jesus' name. Amen.

Good evening. I'd like to make my appeal tonight to you from this text in Joel. And so if you've got Bibles and can find Joel, one of the minor prophets, I would like to appeal to this text with you.

Joel always reminds me of John the Baptist. The same flavor and often the same tone that we find in the Baptist. Because you hear and just as you heard read today, the sound coming out of Joel, the sound of the trumpets, this cry that the day of the Lord is at hand, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness.

So much so that in chapter 2 of Joel in verse 11, for the day of the Lord is great and awesome, who can endure it? And you get this sense of the ground shaking, the trumpet blowing, that we're suddenly standing in the presence of the Lord and the condition of our soul is now before him. Can we stand? Can we endure? And then comes this interlude of just utter compassion and kindness. This interlude where the Lord invites us in verses 12 to 14 to return to him, to return with all our heart, with fasting and weeping, with mourning, to rend our hearts and not our garments.

For the Lord is gracious. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in loving-kindness. And he relents over disaster.

And then you have this sense that as we do this, as we return to him, as we rend our hearts, that he may just indeed relent of this wrath for us and pour out blessing. This is an appeal to the well-being of our soul, the care and nurture and well-being of our soul. And what simply is fascinating to me is that the moment you and I have an ache or a pain, a headache too strong, something going wrong, boom, we're at the doctor's.

We need to make sure that our bodies are well. But when it comes to the issues of the soul, it's like, I got this. We don't know what to do, we just stuff it in and say, you know, we can handle it, we can fix it, it's gonna be okay.

Even though we know something is wrong, we still have that thing inside us that we can handle it. And that pride just kind of sneers its ugly face and says, I don't need help. And we somehow just accept the condition of our soul.

We resign that it's not going to change. And we turn into apathy, that cold, uncaring, it's just the way it is. And if it hurts too much, we'll just medicate it and numb it out and put up a stoic face for no one to see what's really going on inside of me.

And so the question becomes, what does it take? What does it take to actually get help for the well-being of our soul? Not just palliative care that we're just simply taking care of symptoms, but allowing the Lord to do the real work, the real journey of the soul, for Him to touch us deep within. What does it take for Him to do that work inside of us? And so this is the context that we're in. Because to be able to say that and say, I need help, immediately it puts us in the presence of the Lord.

It puts us under the government of the authority of His Word. And it puts us in the body of Christ, where the Spirit of God can minister powerfully to us and allow the medicine of the gospel, like an intravenous drip, come into our souls. There is medicine for the soul, like you hear from the medicine of the doctors that can cure the body, which, by the way, at the end of the day, you're going to hear it tonight, turns to dust.

But the soul, it lasts forever. The soul given by God. Why the nurture of it, the care of it, isn't more essential than everything? The medicine comes into us.

And the first wisp, first taste of that medicine, and suddenly we who could not believe that we could be changed within, receive faith to believe it's possible. We receive power to believe that what has so held us in bondage, we can be free from. Power to receive new life from above.

Power to persevere in this life, free, always free. And the grace to believe that one day it'll be over and we will be home with the Lord. These are the things that belong to us.

How is it possible? It's possible because of this person born in Bethlehem, who lived a sinless life, under the law, obeying the law, yet without sin, who goes to the cross of Calvary on our behalf, who raised on the third day and ascends to his Father. He's the one that made it possible. If you take that medicine bottle and you look at the fine print underneath, oh, it's got all these big terms, terms that you just have to unpack someday, but the medicine's got the medicine for salvation.

It's got the medicine for justification, medicine for sanctification, medicine for redemption, and medicine for glorification one day. Oh, yes, this medicine of the gospel's got power in it. But you're not going to want to go the journey, are you? You're going to want the quick fix, aren't you? And so what we often do is we don't talk about the bad news, good Friday.

We all want to sail into Easter morning, but our forebears gave us a process for the well-being of our soul. They gave us a pattern. They outlined for us a five-step, I'm going to use that language, they didn't say it this way, but a process to go through for the well-being of the soul, and it all starts for the willingness to submit to the process itself.

Point number one, the process to submit. Submit to the process that the Lord wants to do with us, which is why what our forebears called this is the the 40 days, the 40 before we get to Good Friday and Easter, the 40 days. Not Sundays, every other day, but Sundays, the 40 days to walk through a process.

Who is it that should enter the process? Well, always back centuries, it's been the time when those who are coming to faith in Christ would prepare for baptism on Easter Vigil. That preparation of what it means to be a Christian, to enter into that process of what it means to go through, leaving back our old self and allowing the born-again life to come into us. Second, it was for people who are having a notorious sin in their life.

They know they've sinned and they don't know what to do with that sin, and there's a process for healing of the soul that leads us to the reconciliation come Good Friday and Easter. For the rest of us, it is the normal chronic conditions of the soul that we just don't want to deal with, and we just keep pushing down. Or it's those traumas in life, those hard moments in life that have, rather than shaping us, they've defined us and turned into a bitterness inside our soul.

Or maybe it's just areas of captivity that the devil's got us. These great addictions or bondages that he's got us held captive in, and we simply live in it, and we never deal with it. Well, this is the process to deal with it.

The Lord's inviting us, and that's the Lenten process. It's Ash Wednesday that begins it. Let's enter into the process for the well-being of the soul, our relationship with the Lord, our relationship with each other.

Let's enter into the process, and it begins with ashes. Ashes are a perfect sign because ashes take us back to Genesis 3, and you'll hear these words said over you tonight. You are dust, and to dust you shall return.

Well, why are we dust, and why shall we return to dust? Well, it's because of this. The Lord intended us for life, but because of sin, and because of disobedience, and because of rebellion, we fell. And the life, the eternal life that was removed, now we enter into death, and death has now got us.

But listen to how the ashes are put on us. First of all, in these early traditions versus later traditions, these ashes have actually come from the palm branches of last Palm Sunday. The palms were actually burned, and those are the ashes that you'll have on your forehead from Palm Sunday.

The palms that were waved, why were they waving? For the glory of the King. Well, were we crying out, Hosanna, Lord save us. Lord, only you can save us.

But second, most importantly, we're using those ashes not just to blob your head, but to make over you the sign of the cross. The sign of the cross. How is it that we can be rescued from our mortality? How is it we can be rescued from this dust? Who will rescue us, and who will save us? And so, my dear friends, I say to you, this is a, this is the way we begin this process.

Here we are, willing to submit to what the Lord wants to do with us. Are you willing? Do you want him to not just rend your garment, your outside? I know many of us will do something as a pattern. We'll stop some normative routine.

We'll give up something, or we'll take on something. That's fine. Let it be a sign.

A sign of letting God do his work in your heart to bring the curative measures of his power to your life. And so, that brings us to point two. Point one, submit yourself to the process.

Point two, we submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit, whose first job is always the conviction of the soul. He convicts us of sin. He convicts us, does he not? Do you know what that's like? That, that, that moment he, he begins to reveal to us what's really going on.

Immediately, perhaps, we find it in symptoms. I read from Psalm chapter 32, when David no doubt was dealing with the issues of Uriah and his death and, and Bathsheba and that great sin. He said as a symptom, when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.

Day and night, your hand was heavy upon me. My strength was dried up by the heat of summer. When I kept silent about my sin, when I kept silent, I had these symptoms begin to appear.

And that's what happens to us. You can feel the restlessness inside when the conviction of the Spirit begins. And what happened to David? He couldn't keep it silent, could he? The Spirit of God moved the prophet Nathan to come to David, and suddenly David's secret sin was secret no more.

Nathan looked at him and said, David, you are the man. And that word pierced his heart, and he was utterly convicted. And that's the word that comes to it.

When the Spirit of God convicts, what do we cry out? Lord, what do I do? Just as it was when John preached and people heard the word, they said, what shall I do? Just like on Pentecost Day, when the Word of God and Jesus was preached, people cried out under the conviction of the Spirit, what shall I do? Can you allow that convicting process of the Spirit of God to let his word pierce your heart? That's my friend. I might have lost you already. Who wants that? When he authentically does that work of conviction, it leads to point three, and that is confession.

Which is why you've got in the next verse of Psalm 32, I acknowledged my sin to you. I did not cover my iniquity. I confess my sin.

I acknowledge it to the Lord, and I would suggest to you not to contain it alone. We go, just like James says, and confess to a safe brother, a safe sister. I've got to deal with, I'm dealing with something.

I need help to confess. What does confess mean? To confess means to say exactly what he's saying. It's to put the amen behind it.

It's not to try to justify. It's not try to argue. It's not try to defend.

It's not try to weasel out of, well, it's not as bad as the conviction really feels. No, it's that bad. I promise.

Amen. So be it. Lord, you're right about me.

So much so that what it always leads to is we ask, which is what we're about to hear in Psalm 51. When David came before the Lord, he began to ask, Lord have mercy upon me. Oh God, according to your steadfast love, according to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions.

You see what he's saying is, I can't do this on my own. I need you to do what I cannot do. Mercy upon me.

Blot out, wash me clean. Purge me from these things. Create in me, Lord, a new heart.

Renew a right spirit. Here I am, a broken and contrite heart, a broken and contrite spirit. Lord, here I am.

Can you see the utter inability in our confession? So we must wait upon the Lord to do what only he can do. This is what separates this medicine from all the religions and philosophies of the world. It is this, it is this medicine.

It is this gospel where we wait upon the Lord to give it. And that's called process. It's allowing Jesus to get deep inside and give us and grant us repentance, which is the fourth principle behind it.

First is to submit to the Lord. Second is to allow the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. Third is to make confession, to acknowledge it, to ask the Lord for mercy.

And four, to ask him to give us the gift of repentance. Why do I say the gift of repentance? Because we, in our own strength, cannot repent. We cannot, in our own strength, get out of the mess.

I'm reading from Romans chapter 7, when suddenly Paul realizes this conviction, this confession, that the principle is inside him. Something's wrong inside of him. There's a bondage.

There's a captivity. And he finally cries out, wretched man that I am, I can't do anything about this. I can't do anything about this.

Who will set me free from this? Now, I'm sorry, I'm probably taking too much time, but I'm going to say this to you. It isn't enough to be open and transparent about our sin. Sometimes I feel like in our culture, like transparency is like the highest summit anybody can ever arrive at.

We say it, I've got a problem. And everybody goes, oh, it's just so beautiful. Well, let me tell you, it is beautiful.

Holiness, transparency, go for it. But there's an indignation inside of me that says, dear brother, you've been transparent. Dear sister, well done you.

Now we're going to stand by your side until we see you set free from what has held you captive. We're going to not leave you where you are in your transparency. We're going to ask Jesus to set you free from whatever the bondage is, whatever the captivity is, whatever the burden is.

Do you believe that's possible? I believe it's possible. Why? Because in repentance what we find? We find Good Friday. We find the Lord taking us to Good Friday where the washing happens.

What kind of washing? The washing in the blood of the Lamb. The washing that can cure our souls. Don't race to Easter, dear friend.

No, no. The old man goes down into baptism, and oftentimes he keeps us down for a season. Why is that? To let the old man die.

The Lord can do a work inside of us that can literally separate us from the bondage of the sin. The language of the Bible is to come out of Egypt, not stay in it and say, well, I'm open, I'm transparent. Really bad life here.

No, no. He wants you to see it and know it and know the bitterness of the slavery. Absolutely.

He wants to take you out and lead you to. And that's the joy of Good Friday. I believe the Holy Spirit who convicts us and brings us to confession takes us to Calvary so that the power of the Lord can deliver us from whatever sin, whatever bondage, whatever the devil is doing in us and set us free.

For I believe the Baptists have it. There's power. Power.

Wonder-working power. There's some Baptists here. In the blood of the Lamb.

No, no. We don't dodge Good Friday. Good Friday is where it all happens.

For it says the word of the cross is to those who are perishing, foolishness. To us who are being saved, the word of the cross is the power of God. Which leads us to number five.

Once we've come out of Egypt, out of the bondage, out of the waters, the Lord brings us to the promised land and Easter morning comes and the Spirit of God comes and we can be born again in Christ. We can be set free and know what that freedom is really like because where the Spirit of the Lord, there is freedom. You and I in Jesus have been given the medicine that saves the soul.

And when we've got it and know it, we get to come alongside others and help them know it and be set free. No Christian should be under the bondage of the evil one. No Christian should step back and say, no, no, I'll never change.

It's got me. I'm always like this. I've always been like this.

It's the way it's always going to be. No. That is a lie from the pit of hell.

And so our forefathers gave us Lent. There's a process, dear friends, where we can be set free. There's a process to come to Good Friday.

Down in the waters of baptism where the old man dies. The blood of Jesus washes us clean and then he brings us up. He brings us out into new life.

Do not let this moment pass you by. If you've got a chronic condition of your soul that you've allowed to stay there, this is your time. Those ashes, that begins the journey.

Submit yourself to it and let the Spirit of God have you so that we can go to Good Friday together and watch the Spirit of God wash us, cleanse us, and create in us a new heart. In Jesus' name. Let us hear now the words of exhortation.

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