



Daily Devotional

Friday, March 12, 2021

Pastor Eric Jay

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we find in the disparity of Your suffering the fullness of our life and salvation. You gave to us by giving up Yourself. Lord, as we follow You help us to give of ourselves as You have given to us. Amen.

Scripture: Isaiah 58:5-10

*Is such the fast that I choose,
a day for a person to humble himself?
Is it to bow down his head like a reed,
and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him?
Will you call this a fast,
and a day acceptable to the Lord?
⁶ "Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of wickedness,
to undo the straps of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover him,*

*and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?
⁸ Then shall your light break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up speedily;
your righteousness shall go before you;
the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.
⁹ Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.'
If you take away the yoke from your midst,
the pointing of the finger, and speaking
wickedness,
¹⁰ if you pour yourself out for the hungry
and satisfy the desire of the afflicted,
then shall your light rise in the darkness
and your gloom be as the noonday.*

Devotional – "Give It Up!"

The season of Lent is a season of preparation. It is a season when we focus on the sufferings of our Lord Jesus and His death on the cross. Jesus did many miraculous things during His earthly ministry. Many people were healed and transformed physically and spiritually by Him. It is by no means an overstatement to say that He literally changed the world with His ministry. However, this is not why Jesus came. Jesus came to die. He came to suffer for sins, die our death and rise again to give us new, eternal life.

Jesus said this very clearly in John 12 when He said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁷ "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name."

In that same passage from John 12, Jesus said, "²⁶ If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him."

The season of Lent is a time we set aside in our lives to go where Jesus went, to go to that place of self-denial in faithfulness to God, and that place of self-sacrifice. We remember in this time our sin that Christ willingly allowed Himself to be crucified for in order to forgive us, and we repent of that sin, longing for the glory and “Alleluia” of Easter morning.

It is a common practice to give something up during Lent. Many times people give up some kind of indulgence or give up something that they know they shouldn't have in their lives anyway. While there is absolutely nothing wrong with giving something up for Lent, I think the words of David in Psalm 51:17 should predominate our Lenten worship. “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”

God's heart broke over sinful humanity. His merciful and limitless love for us drove Him to give up His one and only Son to die in our place, for our sins and to provide for us salvation as a free and undeserved gift of God. If we look to our Lord, following Him as we seek to make our Lenten sacrifices meaningful, then whatever it is we give up for Lent shouldn't be so much about what we take away from ourselves but what we give to others. The more we meditate and focus on what Jesus gave up in order to give us, the more we should be compelled in this season of penitence to give of ourselves to others.

This is exactly what God is saying through His prophet Isaiah in our text for today. The Lord asks a series of rhetorical questions to tell us what the purpose of any season of fasting and self-denial should be.

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and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover him,
and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

⁸ Then shall your light break forth like the dawn...

⁹ Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry, and he will say, ‘Here I am.’”

I very much like what American Bishop Fulton J. Sheen said about the proper focus of Lent. "We can think of Lent as a time to eradicate evil or cultivate virtue, a time to pull up weeds or to plant good seeds. Which is better is clear, for the Christian ideal is always positive rather than negative. A person is great not by the ferocity of his hatred of evil, but by the intensity of his love for God. Asceticism and putting to death the lusts of the flesh are not the ends of a Christian life; they are only the means. The end is charitable love. Penance merely makes an opening in our ego through which the Light of God can pour. As we deflate ourselves, God fills us. And it is God's arrival that is the important event."

God has promised us that if we are faithful to repent, He is faithful to forgive. Christ has instructed us to forgive as we have been forgiven and to be merciful even as our heavenly Father is merciful. This is our Lenten worship.

Thanks for joining me today for another time of devotion in God's Word, and remember, that God has forgiven yesterday, is with you today and has already taken care of tomorrow. Amen.