

Ash Wednesday

Many Christians around the world will celebrate Ash Wednesday on February 14, 2024. It marks the first day of Lent and always falls 46 days before Resurrection Sunday. During the Ash Wednesday service, ashes are placed on the forehead of a person reminding them of their humanity. The focus of Lent for Christians is repentance and prayer, as we move toward Holy Week and look with anticipation toward the empty tomb.

The ashes are meant to represent dust. This is a reference to what God said to Adam when he was expelled from the Garden of Eden. Following Adam and Eve's rebellion, these are the words of Almighty God to Adam.

By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken, for you are dust, and to dust you shall return. (Genesis 3:19, NASB)

Ash Wednesday and Lent in general is a time to reflect on our sinfulness as we begin our journey to Holy Week. But humanity would not end in a nihilistic hopelessness. No, there is hope. God has always had a plan. He would send His Messiah, our Salvation.

There are a number of Bible passages that serve as a reminder, to the dreadful human condition. In Genesis chapter 18, the Lord appeared to Abraham and warned him about the sinful state of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham stood in the presence of the Lord and this was his response.

Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes. (Genesis 18:27, NASB)

Solomon, also, acknowledged his lowly condition as he looked back at this life.

All go to one place, All are from the dust, and to the dust all return. (Ecclesiastes 3:20)

During Lent, we think about our inability to love and serve the Holy God. It is only by His grace that we can be right with Him. Apart from his gift of grace we are lost.

The idea of ashes to ashes, dust to dust reminds us that God created us from the dust of the earth. Because of our sin, someday our physical body will once again return to the dust from which we came. During Lent we also remind ourselves that the world has nothing to offer us. True treasure comes from above. This season gives us a time to align our priorities accordingly. Jesus warns us,

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19–21, NASB).

It is also a time for us to reflect on the amazing gift of salvation offered by Jesus, our Lord and Savior. There is a judgement coming. Only by the grace of God, through faith in Jesus' atoning sacrifice will we escape. The author of Hebrews offers a warning to all who will hear,

And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him. (Hebrews 9:27–28, NASB)

Lent is a time to reflect on the amazing gift Jesus offers freely to those who believe. It is a time to remove those things in our lives that do not belong. It is a time to truly consider that amazing promise of the empty tomb. Hallelujah! Jesus has risen. He has risen indeed. Amen.

-The Pastor's Thoughts Feb 2024