

## Giving It Up

An early custom in the church was that at the beginning of Lent ashes were to be put on the heads and later on the foreheads of believers in sign or the form of a cross. Ashes in both the OT/NT were symbols of repentance.

At the end of the Book of Job, Job says (Job 42:6)  
"I sit in dust and ashes to show my repentance."

Matthew 11:21(Jesus says)

"What sorrow awaits you, Korazin and Bethsaida! For if the miracles I did in you had been done in wicked Tyre and Sidon, their people would have repented of their sins long ago, clothing themselves in burlap and throwing ashes on their heads to show their remorse.

So ashes are a sign of remorse, repentance, and humility before God.

When ashes were placed on the forehead they were placed with these words (from Genesis 3:19) "For you were made from dust, and to dust you will return."

Signifying that the ashes were not only a reminder of sin but also of our mortality; and that sins bitterest consequence is death. Thus the need to repent and get right with God before it is too late. Yet remember, the ashes were applied on the forehead in the form of a cross, as a reminder of the Good News that Jesus Christ forgives all sin, all guilt, all punishment.

Of course ashes and Lent are not mentioned nor commanded in the Bible by God and so you are free to observe or not observe Lent. And ashes are meaningless even hypocritical unless there is true repentance and a change of behavior.

Isaiah 58:5-7

You humble yourselves  
by going through the motions of penance,  
bowing your heads  
like reeds bending in the wind.  
You dress in burlap  
and cover yourselves with ashes.  
Is this what you call fasting?  
Do you really think this will please the LORD?  
"No, this is the kind of fasting I want:  
Free those who are wrongly imprisoned;  
lighten the burden of those who work for you.  
Let the oppressed go free,  
and remove the chains that bind people.  
Share your food with the hungry,  
and give shelter to the homeless.

Give clothes to those who need them,  
and do not hide from relatives who need your help.

God doesn't want our religious activity; He wants obedient lives. Lent must be more than an exercise of fasting it must be a way to connect with God. Lent with the help of fasting gives us an opportunity to reflect and to prepare us for Christ's resurrection on Easter for our redemption.

Today is the beginning of Lent. We often think about Lent as a time to fast—remembering how Jesus fasted 40 days in the wilderness. We think of Lent as a time to give up something as a reminder of our dependence on God. We think of Lent as a time to remember our sin and our mortality in the days leading to our remembrance of Jesus' crucifixion.

When I was growing up I didn't like Lent. It meant sacrifice, I had to give something up. Of course I usually gave up something that was easy for me to give up; so much for sacrifice.

Many of us give up certain things for the forty days of Lent, and doing so can be a very beneficial thing for us. This year during Lent we want to take that idea one step further and talk each week about things that God wants us to give up, not just for forty days, but forever. And we need to start with...

### **Giving Up Control**

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7

The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it. But the LORD God warned him, "You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden — except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die."

The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the LORD God had made. One day he asked the woman, "Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?"

"Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden," the woman replied. "It's only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, 'You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.'"

"You won't die!" the serpent replied to the woman. "God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil." The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too. At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.

This is the story of the fall. Adam and Eve did not obey God, they wanted to control their own life.

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil. For forty days and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry.

During that time the devil came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread."

But Jesus told him, "No! The Scriptures say, 'People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Then the devil took him to the holy city, Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, and said, "If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say, 'He will order his angels to protect you. And they will hold you up with their hands so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone.'"

Jesus responded, "The Scriptures also say, 'You must not test the LORD your God.'"

Next the devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him the kingdoms of the world and all their glory. "I will give it all to you," he said, "if you will kneel down and worship me."

"Get out of here, Satan," Jesus told him. "For the Scriptures say, 'You must worship the LORD your God and serve only him.'"  
Then the devil went away, and angels came and took care of Jesus.

Adam and Eve disobeyed God, thinking that they knew better than him, with disastrous consequences (for themselves & for others, including us). Things haven't changed since the beginning of time. We still think we know better than God, we still want to be our own gods. We still think we can control our lives better than God; and the consequences continue to be disastrous for ourselves and for others.

The first Adam failed God and sinned, but not the second Adam, Jesus. While being tempted in the wilderness, Jesus denied his own impulses and followed God's will (that was good for us).

In the modern world, where we are used to having control over so many things, we often fail to seek God's will for our lives and try to call all the shots ourselves. God wants us to deny ourselves and give him the final say when we are charting out the course of our lives.

In his book "Emotionally Healthy Spirituality," Peter Scazzero identifies in the three

temptations of Jesus First: The temptation of: I am what I do (Performance).  
The devil said to Jesus, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread."

Our culture puts the same pressure on us by asking, what do you do? What have you achieved? As if this is what makes us secure and significant, as if this is how to control having life. But Jesus answered, "We live by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Temptation two: I am what others think (Popularity)

The devil took Jesus to the holy city of Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, and said, "If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say, 'He will order his angels to protect you. And they will hold you up with their hands so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone.'"

You want people to believe in you don't you?

Today we are addicted to what other people think – this is what controls our life. We care more about what people think of us than we even realize.

But Jesus responded, "The Scriptures also say, 'You must not test the LORD your God.'"

Temptation three: I am what I have (Possessions)

The devil took Jesus to the peak of a very high mountain and showed Him the kingdoms of the world and all their glory. "I will give it all to you," he said, "if you will kneel down and worship me."

Look around at what everyone else has, you're a nobody Jesus, you have nothing so how can you think you are somebody?

Culture today measures success by what we own. So our idols become possessions, and obtaining them controls our lives. But Jesus told the devil, "Get out of here, Satan for the Scriptures say, 'You must worship the LORD your God and serve only him.'"

One of the things we must give up forever is control – giving up that control to God. Let Him hold the keys, let Him call the shots. Trust Him and His will at all times and in all circumstances.

That sounds good, but are you sure you really want to do that? I don't think we want to give the control of our lives over to anyone, even if that One is God. We know in our minds and say with our lips that we can trust God's will, but our lives, our actions say something else.

[Devotion from page 23 of "Day by Day"]