

## LENT – “A FAMILY REUNION”

### “WHY THE REBEL MUST DIE”

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Read: Matthew 16:24-28

*Prayer:*

*Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are [repentant]: Create and make in us new and [repentant] hearts, [so that we may come to see and hate our sin as you do. Thank you for the fullness of the forgiveness secured for your people in the person and work of Jesus Christ. We seek you] through Him who is our Lord and Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.<sup>1</sup>*

What is Lent? Lent speaks to “springtime” or “renewal”. It is a time to reflect on “first things”. It is almost and always to be a time when the “family gathers” and a spiritual reunion of sorts takes place. **It is a time when we remember and return. Family reunions close the gap created by distance. It enables us to reconnect with our past and hopefully bring clarity to our present.** Lent is like this. It is a time where we remember the Story and return to our Christian roots.

Perhaps it has been some time since you’ve remembered and thus have failed to live in the Story of God. Maybe you’ve not answered the call or accepted the invitation so the idea of reconnecting with your Christian past seems foreign and maybe a little threatening. Well, there is no time like today.

I would like to invite you into a journey that is clearly marked and has as its destination the person and work of God. I am inviting you to remember. To think about those early moments when you accepted the call and received Jesus Christ as your redeemer, savior, deliverer and friend.

Inside God’s Story, He put in play a forerunner whose design was to prepare the way of the LORD. He came in the spirit of Elijah and was embodied in John the baptizer. John’s message to a divided nation was “repent for the kingdom of God is at hand.” Those who were spiritually hardened resisted such utterance. They believed themselves to be intrinsically righteous and deserving divine favor. And on the other hand there were those who were waiting for the promise of God and in response bent their knees and bowed their heads in humble confession and repentance. This is where, I trust, His invitation to come finds you and me.

As John’s ministry was entering into its twilight, our Lord’s ministry was just beginning to dawn. His proclamation was in keeping with John’s.

<sup>32</sup> “Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. <sup>33</sup> But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven. <sup>34</sup> Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. <sup>35</sup> For I came to SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW; <sup>36</sup> and A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD. <sup>37</sup> He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. <sup>38</sup> **And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.** <sup>39</sup> **He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it**” (Matt. 10:32-39).

There is severity to the extended invitation. Its severity comes as a result of our complacency and forgetfulness. What we must remember and never forget is that we came to God as rebels who led and are a part of an unholy insurrection. We claim no allegiance to anyone but our own angry selves. We are the offspring of evil’s alliance. It is for this reason, “The rebel must die.” Yet from this crucible of “barrenness” comes birth, new birth to be exact. Listen to how Jesus strikes this same chord in Matthew 16.

<sup>24</sup> “Then Jesus said to His disciples, **‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.** <sup>25</sup> For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My

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sake will find it. <sup>26</sup> For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? <sup>27</sup> For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS. <sup>28</sup> Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom” (Matt. 16:24-28).

There is clarity in the simplicity and severity of the note sounded. Paul captures the essence of His Lord’s invitation and speaks of confessing Jesus as Lord.

<sup>8</sup> “But what does it say? ‘THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, in your mouth and in your heart’ --that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, <sup>9</sup> that if you confess with your mouth **Jesus as Lord**, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; <sup>10</sup> for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation” (Rom. 10:8-10).

This **Lordship** for Paul is placed in the context of Roman rule. It speaks of regal, kingship and monarchical status. Jesus Christ is King and His kingship is in opposition to any and all other usurpers. His dominion levels all others. No one and nothing compares or competes. When Paul invites us to “confess and believe” **his appeal is to pledge allegiance and uncompromising loyalty**. The means to this end is through the pathway laid before us by John and Jesus — death.

The confusing thing for us is a misunderstanding of the gospel. Our thinking has become diluted and muddled as it relates to what biblical faith and its resultant fruit looks like. There is death, burial and resurrection. Paul speaks of those who have died with Christ who are now walking in newness of life (Rom. 6). This promising and hope-filled resurrection and newness of life is not the resurrection of our life, but His and we are in Him. It is the Christ-life and NOT the “me” or my-life. This resurrection resulting from repentance is not the “ultimate make-over”. We are not “made over”. We are killed, destroyed, and annihilated and a new life is resurrected in its place. **The old house is not remodeled; it is removed**. In the words of William Willimon, “His message is not the simple one of the Baptist, ‘Be clean.’ Jesus’ word is more painful – ‘Be killed.’ The chief biblical analogy for baptism is not the water that washes but the flood that drowns.”<sup>2</sup>

The Lenten season calls us back to our “first acts”. For some of us we need to wake up and look at our immediate surroundings, habits, patterns, stockpiles, ambitions, goals and attitudes. Perhaps the walls of our souls have been breached and there is an encroaching clutter that is choking. Friend, let us come back to Jesus and let Him have His way in our lives. We must not forget that our enemy is persistent and perennial. The a-theistic (i.e. non-biblical god) world system runs a parallel program. It looks like the one constructed, created and written by God, but it’s a façade, fake, deceiving, alluring, seductive and deadly. The devil comes with stealth. His attack can be open and obvious, but often he appears as the angel of light. He dulls and deceives, creating callous and casualty. There is nothing in him that complements or is compatible with God. Our own flesh, the enemy from within, seeks to draw us away by placing us at the center of life. It is appealing and attractive, but hollow and bitter.

Maybe there are some who have never yet come the way of the cross. You have never entered into life, His life. Please do not misunderstand. You only come once, but once entered you never forget that pivotal moment or journey when your senses were opened and you saw, heard and felt Christ. Regardless as to whether you are new to this thinking or a seasoned veteran, Lent invites you to remember and return. It bids you to close the gap created by distance. It makes possible for us to reconnect with our past and hopefully bring clarity to our present. As we consider the Lenten season in preparation for the picturing of the Gospel during Passion Week, let us not fear but let us with boldness and confidence turn ourselves toward God and invite the Holy Spirit to purge from us the encumbering weights and the sin that has so easily beset us and let us renew our pursuit of Him with persistent patience as we look to Jesus who is both the author and the finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:1, 2).

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.bcponline.org/>

<sup>2</sup> William Willimon, “Repent,” in *Bread and Wine: Readings for Lent and Easter* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003], 8, 9.

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