

Greetings:

The study that Pastor Pat brings on Sunday mornings is a reflection of the study for that week. It represents a lot of research. Not all of what he has prepared is communicated. In an attempt to continue the learning process, he is making available his study notes to the congregation.

They are edited, but not “book” ready. To the critical eye mistakes can be found. So he asks that you take the material with humility, teach-ability, and charity.

Enjoy and if you should have any questions or corrections, please do not hesitate to email him at [pastorpat@waukeshabile.org](mailto:pastorpat@waukeshabile.org).

**Date:** March 1, 2009

**Title:** The Relationship of the Cross to the Lenten Season

**Series:** The Way of His Cross

**Text:** Colossians 2:16-23

**Theme:** God uses “shadows” to point us to Christ. The shadows of God enable us to live in the story of God.

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Waukesha Bible Church is a family of families seeking to live in **the Storyline of the Bible**. She is determined by design to have a **God-centered, Christ-exalting worship; a Word-centered teaching** focused on personal **discipleship** through intentional and systematic instruction; a **Global-impacting mission** that resolves to be a **church planting church**; and a **Grace-based fellowship** where disciples are invited to live under a **reigning grace** characterized by a **Gospel-driven sanctification** that celebrates a divine **monergism** to the Christian life.

## The Way of His Cross

Date: March 1, 2009

Title: The Relationship of the Cross to the Lenten Season

Text: Colossians 2:16-23

**Theme:** God uses “shadows” to point us to Christ. The shadows of God enable us to live in the story of God.

**Introduction:**

Like most things surrounding us, by familiarity, they lose their significance. We become so accustomed to all things “Christian” that we fail to see beyond the shadow and believe the thing it represents is the shadow itself. It is like the plastic fruit sitting comfortably in the middle of the dining room table. What the plastic fruit represents is real fruit, but the illusion exists to make those who see it for the first time to think it is real. The cross in our “Christian” culture is like plastic fruit. It exists only to represent the real thing. In many ways, we have allowed the cross to collect dust as it sits comfortably in the middle of our lives; to become familiar, and in its familiarity, our view of it diminishes and we rob it of its intrinsic value.

Although we wear it as a fashion accessory, the cross is an instrument of death and destruction. It is to be abhorred and shunned. Yet in the death of Jesus Christ at the cross, the implement of devastation became a symbol of life, not death. The significance of Lent lies in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Lent is positioned for calling us back to what is real. Consider the emphasis the Gospel’s place on the last week of our Lord Jesus and in particular the last day.

In most biographies, the death of the person concerned is a mere incident at the close of the book. In Hay’s life of Abraham Lincoln there are 5,000 pages, but only 25 are devoted to the dramatic account of his assassination and death. There is certainly much of dramatic interest in the passion and death of Jesus, but when we look at the space given to these events in the Gospel writings, what do we find?

All the Gospels declare that Jesus was crucified during the Jewish feast of Passover. John adds the information that Jesus had experienced at least two previous Passovers (John 2:13; 6:4). This, together with other clues, indicates that his public ministry lasted something like two to three years. Matthew’s Gospel has 28 chapters. In Matthew 21 Jesus rides into Jerusalem on the Sunday before he is crucified. That means that a quarter of Matthew’s Gospel deals with the final six days of his life. An additional chapter deals with his resurrection. Mark has 16 chapters. In Mark 11 Jesus rides into Jerusalem. That means that about one-third of Mark’s Gospel deals with that same period.

Luke’s Gospel is a little different. Luke has 24 chapters. He gives two chapters to Jesus’ conception, birth and childhood, followed by one on the ministry of John the Baptist. Then he gives six chapters to Jesus’ public ministry, chiefly in Galilee. At the end of chapter 9 Jesus begins his last journey up to Jerusalem. This means

that of the 24 chapters, 15 deal with the final few months of his time on earth, six of these dealing with the final few days and the resurrection.

John's Gospel is the most significant of all in this regard. John has 21 chapters. Half-way through the Gospel, in chapter 12, Jesus arrives in Bethany for that final week. By chapter 13 we have already got to his final meal with his disciples, the night before his crucifixion. Chapters 13 to 18 tell us about the events of that fateful night. Chapter 19 deals with the conclusion of his trial and crucifixion, and chapters 20 and 21 tell of his resurrection. This means that almost half of the Gospel is about the last 24 hours of his life, together with his resurrection.  
<http://www.christianity.co.nz/cross-4.htm#emphasis>

The historical intent of Lent is to place the modern reader into the storyline of the Bible. If we consider the biblical storyline and three corresponding "holy-days," it is perhaps easier to understand why Lent is notable. First, the season of Advent celebrates the foretold and pre-figured Hero's arrival. In Advent God's Hero arrives. Second, the season of Lent celebrates the foretold and pre-figured Hero's work. It is not simply the Hero's arrival that fulfills the promise; it is His work. Lent notes the Hero's work by marking Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday. Finally, the season of Pentecost celebrates the expansive and continuing legacy His church is left with as a consequence of the Hero's work. Pentecost marks the certainty of God's promise and story in the carrying out of His mission in and through the church.

Thus, Lent calls us back. It beckons us to remember what the shadow means. It invites us to look past the shadow and see the person and work of Jesus Christ. How does Lent do this?

### **THE BIG PICTURE:**

- March 1 - The Relationship of the Cross to the Lenten Season
- March 8 - The Wisdom of the Cross
- March 15 - The Work of the Cross
- March 22 - The Way of the Cross
- March 29 - The Word of the Cross
- April 5 - The Weight of the Cross
- April 12 - The Wonder of the Cross

### **Its Eternal Value:**

All of biblical revelation and all of general creation points to Christ. Through prophecy and picture, through foretelling and pre-figuring all things bear the imprint of God and point to the person and work of Jesus Christ. The Church Calendar enables the intentional to carefully and conscientiously remember God's Story.

### **The Problem:**

Our glaring problem is not only do we forget, but we get stuck in the shadow and fail to look beyond the shadow to what the shadow represents.

**The Storyline:**

The Bible tells a singular story that pushes the reader to the person and work of Jesus Christ. Life has meaning only as it is understood as part of God's one story. Currently we are building toward Passion Week which includes Good Friday and culminates in Resurrection Sunday. All of this is a part of the Hero's work. These events are the hinge on which Christianity swings. In their absence there is no such idea as Christian, salvation, deliverance, hope, help, or heaven. As believers we can never afford to live our lives independent of God's one story.

**Questions:**

1. From the previous verses, why is no one to act as our judge?
2. How are food, drink, festivals, etc., described in verse 17?
3. What is the shadow in relation to the substance?
4. Who is the substance casting the shadow?
5. What is the danger of the shadow?
6. What is the prize?
7. What are we suppose to focus on in verse 19?
8. What logic does Paul use in verse 20 to show why we are not to be enslaved to the shadow?
9. How does Paul conclude this paragraph? What value does the shadow have in fighting against fleshly indulgences?
10. How does Colossians 3:1 begin and what is the relationship between 3:1-4 and 2:16-23?

The Holy Spirit is calling to us from this passage to consider three ideas.

**To Know:** The Holy Spirit desires for us to know the object casting the shadows of life.

**To Choose:** The Holy Spirit desires for us to choose Christ above all things created.

**To Feel:** The Holy Spirit desires for us to feel the joy of resting in His immeasurable person and work.

**Outline:**

Yet part of the initial question is, "What is Lent?" Why should we even consider the idea of Lent? I would like to consider our look at Passion Week from two perspectives. First, I would like to consider the shadow's problem. Second, I would like to consider the shadow's purpose.

- I. The shadow's problem, its peril.

All of life is a shadow cast by God. He wants us to see the heaven and hear His glory and celebrate His handiwork. God gave the sacrifices and feast days so that a nation would be prepared for the One who came. Some shadows are "permanent" while others are intentionally temporary. Remember the cutting of the New Covenant on Good Friday and at the Lord's Table and Celebrating His triumph on Easter Sunday

and every Sunday are shadows. Our intent at this time is to see God's hero work and to understand how we are a part of this one story.

Although there are three problems I see in how this season is marked by the church at large, I do not wish to throw the proverbial baby out with the bath water. However, because many of us are from liturgical churches, when we speak of Lent we have a "knee jerk reaction against it." I believe it is good for us to consider these ideas and to see that we are a part of a global community of believers where these ideas are noted.

A. **First**, the shadow is not a means of meriting divine favor.

Whatever the shadow is, it is not this. Those who have distorted Lent and mutated it into a means of meriting favor from God have grossly erred. The Book of Colossians clearly notes how we are complete in Christ (Col. 2:10) and how He has forgiven us of all our transgressions (Col. 2:13) and how our lives are hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3, 4).

It is the person and work of Jesus Christ that merits everything we have before the Father. God gave us His Son (Rom. 8:32). **What more can we want? What more do we need?** In His Son we are fully and completely blessed (Eph. 1:3). There is nothing we did or can do to gain anymore than what we now have in Christ. His work for us can neither be diminished nor increased.

We are inviting you to pray and fast next week. We are inviting you to read a provided devotional for the days leading up to Good Friday. None of these "things" or "shadows" improve your standing before the Father. That issue is settled. All of them are designed perhaps to awaken or continue to encourage us to the in-story experience we are praying for each of us to have.

Those who look to Lent as a time of earning favor or gaining more salvation are grossly misled and stumbling over the shadow.

B. **Second**, the shadow is not a time for fleshly introspection.

Historically, this season is a time for abstinence, of self deprivation. Often when reading about Lent you will note the word "penance." The word "**penance**" means, "repentance: remorse for your past conduct, or voluntary self-punishment in order to atone for some wrongdoing." If you do not understand justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, then you will have an unscriptural view of repentance. No where in the Bible does it teach believers to inflict themselves for the purpose of personal atonement. The Bible does teach Spirit-driven confession and repentance, but neither one are creating or causing a relationship with God. Both confession and repentance are consequences of a believer's relationship with God. They are some of the fruit the Holy Spirit produces in and through the believing. The unbelieving practice the unbiblical idea of penance; the believing understand the place of confession and repentance in their life.

However, as we seek to understand this season in the church calendar it is of interest to note the celebration of **Mardi Gras**, which means “Fat Tuesday,” before Ash Wednesday and thus the beginning of Lent. Most of us note how it is celebrated as a time of gross indulgence in preparation for a season of abstinence. It is as if license and legalism are the two polar opposites. Many of us will eat a Pączki donut. “A pączek is a deep-fried piece of dough shaped into a flattened sphere and filled with confiture or other sweet filling. Pączki are usually covered with powdered sugar, icing or bits of dried orange zest.” They are typically served on “Fat Tuesday.” These are the traditions surrounding Lent. They are not evil, but mere shadows. They can, however, become a problem if we are not careful.

I am not asking you to abstain from anything that is good in order to merit favor or to heighten your awareness of your innate sinfulness. I am asking you to note the clutter, and to see if this clutter is not keeping you from seeing and hearing God. Remember, the question is not is God speaking; the question is are we listening?

No one need look far if their desire is to find hidden sins. We cannot afford to forget that within the “flesh” there dwells no good thing. The entire thrust of Colossians is to point us to Christ and His work and the impact of that event on the believing. Colossians is not telling us to look in; it is telling us to look up. It is only as we come to understand who He is and what He has done that we will have a true understanding of who we were in Adam and who we now are in Christ. This season is not about you and me but about Him.

- C. **Third**, the shadow is not to determine whether one is or is not worthy of the Lord.

Those whose identity is *in Adam* will never be worthy in and of themselves. And those whose identity is *in Christ* will never be anything less than worthy in and of Christ. There is no action on the introspective that can cause them to be more or less worthy than they already are in Christ.

While reading Romans 8, I was again arrested by verses 8 and 9.

<sup>8</sup> “and **those who are in the flesh cannot please God.** <sup>9</sup> **However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit,** if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him” (Rom. 8:8, 9)

The contrasting picture is between those who are believers and those who are not believers. The picture is not between two types of believers; those who do not please God and those who do please God. As a believer you please God. You are worthy before God simply because and only because you are in Christ. God the Father has imputed to your account the righteousness of Christ. He did this because of what His Son did. The Holy Spirit is making you aware of this and awakening you to this truth.

Again, the entire argument of the apostle Paul is to show us that we can't and only God can. Paul's argument is not an enablement, but a rescue. Everything about the Letter points us away from self and to the Savior.

Perhaps right now you are saying, "If all this is true, then why would we even speak this language, what is Lent?" Let me suggest to you three thoughts as to why I believe it is healthy for us to consider this season.

II. The shadow's purpose, its provision.

A. **First**, the shadow enables us to enter annually into the storyline of the Bible.

I have written on this in the various articles provided for you. The historical intent of Lent is to place the modern reader into the storyline of the Bible. If we consider the biblical storyline and three corresponding "holy-days," it is perhaps easier to understand why Lent is notable. First, the season of Advent celebrates the foretold and pre-figured Hero's arrival. In Advent, God's Hero arrives. Second, the season of Lent celebrates the foretold and pre-figured Hero's work. It is not simply the Hero's arrival that fulfills the promise; it is His work. Lent notes the Hero's work by marking Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday. Finally, the season of Pentecost celebrates the expansive and continuing legacy that His church is left with as a consequence of the Hero's work. Pentecost marks the certainty of God's promise and story in the carrying out of His mission in and through the church.

B. **Second**, the shadow is a time to focus more intentionally on the person and work of Jesus Christ.

We have already noted how the primary focus of the gospels is on the person and work of Jesus Christ. **Everything we read pushes us toward, places us in, and points us back to the person and work of Jesus Christ.**

The season of Lent are the days surrounding the Hero's work. Lent enables the church to remind her of who He is, what He has done, and who she is because of it. Historically the church marks it as a forty day period. Forty is the biblical number for assessing. It is a time to assess where one is in relation to the Lord and the story of which He is the Hero. All assessing must be in light of the previous three "warnings." Life has a strong tendency to pull us out of the Bible's storyline. We become so consumed and distracted by life that we forget and fail to live in God's story. An intentional approach to Lent can help the believer remember the story.

Everything in Colossians chapter two assumes chapter one. Chapter one is the cause and chapter two is the consequence. Chapter one explores and celebrates the immeasurable person of Christ. As a consequence of His person and His work, which is equally infinite, Paul speaks of the believer's standing as certain, factual and objective.

- 2:7 Firmly rooted and built up in Him  
 2:8 According to the tradition of men rather than according to Christ  
 2:10 In Him we have been made complete  
 2:11 In Him your flesh was cut away  
 2:12 In Him you were buried and raised up  
 2:13 In Him you are made alive  
 2:13 In Him all your transgression have been forgiven  
 2:14, 15 He has conquered all of His enemies and removed every obstacle  
 2:16 In Him no one should act as your judge  
 2:18 No one should rob us of the joy we have in Christ  
 2:20 In Christ we have died to His enemies and every obstacle  
 3:1-4 He is our life

These are the truths we need to be reminded of and are to consider. There is nothing that escapes the power and influence of these truths. Every relationship we are in is to be colored and controlled by these truths. Do you remember this or have you forgotten?

C. **Third**, many use the shadow as a period of “putting off.”

Right now, this season invites us to understand the role of the shadow and, where necessary, to put off those weights that bind us and blind us.

By using it as a time for “laying aside weights” (Heb. 12:1, 2) the Spirit of God can seize this season to break the strongholds of **financial greed, food gluttony, and personal glory**. We are not here for ourselves but for Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. Christians should always live in light of their Lord and Savior; but the world, the flesh, and the devil have the power, through stealth, to distract and deceive the people of God. Let us not forget the warning in Mark 4 in the parable of the soils.

“but the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful” (Mark 4:19).

We are (I am) so easily distracted by mere shadows and trinkets and deceived into believing this life is all there is. This season can be a powerful wake up call to remember the voice from behind the veil, to remember the substance which casts the shadow and to remember that Jesus Christ is enough in this life and in the life to come.

D. **Finally**, why are we using the shadows of prayer and fasting?

The reason that the elders are inviting us to join them in prayer and fasting is to temporarily alter these activities from being non-thinking and possibly enslaving. Unfortunately, we often participate in prayer and eating without much forethought. Prayer and Fasting is representative of multiple shadows. We are not telling you how often or how much or how long you should pray and fast. What this looks like for you

might appear different than what it looks like for me or anyone else. So all we are asking you to do is think about it.

More than ever the people of God must remember. From Mark 8:17, 18 we noted how by not remember the hearts of the disciples became hard.

<sup>17</sup>“ And Jesus, aware of this, \*said to them, "Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? **Do you have a hardened heart?** <sup>18</sup> "HAVING EYES, DO YOU NOT SEE? AND HAVING EARS, DO YOU NOT HEAR? And **do you not remember**” (Mark 8:17, 18).

The day and age in which we live stifles the believing and casts the dark shadow of unbelief over their souls. It is the prayer of His people to their heavenly Father, to the resurrected and living Christ, and to the guiding and guarding Holy Spirit to stir them from their spiritual apathy and to will them into a delighting joy in all that He is for them. May God hear His people.

As followers of Christ, let us not forget the cross. Let us use this time to reflect deeply on who God is and what He has done in this powerful display of divine grace. The cross is fundamentally a symbol of something or someone greater. The cross is about God and His only begotten Son who gave Himself voluntarily in incarnation and vicariously in salvation. **It is His cross and resurrection that most shadows the power of God.** Thus as we start Lent, may the Holy Spirit drive us to remove the rubble that impedes us from aggressively and singularly living for Him.

### **Shepherding the Sheep** (What’s the NEXT STEP?)

1. Are you thinking about God? Do you see yourself and your activities as a part of His one story?
2. Are you thanking God that this is all about Him and not about you?
3. Are you thanking God that the person and work of Jesus Christ is enough and that there is nothing more for you to do before the Father to earn His favor?
4. Are you surrounded by clutter? Is your view of God blocked by “things”? I cannot tell you what that clutter is. But I believe you know what it is. May God grant you the power to remove those things in your life that block your view of Him.
5. May God use this time to awaken us to His Story and how we are a part of it. May this time be a time of deepening and growth.