

Lent, Preparing for the Easter Event

When studying Paul's letter to the church at Philippi, we find the Lord Jesus Christ encouraging us to find joy in everything. And in this discovery the foundation for this joy in everything is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul writes,

"Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith- that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. - Philippians 3:8-11



Paul's aim is knowing Christ in his death and resurrection so that he himself will share in Christ's resurrection from the dead. This is where his gaze is fixed while he suffers in prison. The eyes of his heart are on Christ and his righteousness which leads to his own resurrection and intimate relationship with God in the dance of eternity. Therefore, Paul says, "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, rejoice." (4:4).

In this same way we can enter the Lenten season, or our preparation for "The Easter Event" by taking time to fix our gaze on Christ's atoning work of suffering, death and resurrection. God may use this in your life for joy in everything. I want to encourage you to take up a special devotional book, website, or reading plan through one of the gospels during the "Lenten Season."

"The Lenten Season in the early church was the prelude to the most important celebration in the church's calendar, the greatest event of all history, the culmination of the incarnation, the death of death procured in the death of Jesus Christ (and subsequently evidenced by the empty tomb three days later). Early Christians prepared for these events by stepping out of their normal routine for special times of devotion, prayer and sacrifice, focusing their minds and hearts on the meaning and implications of Calvary." (John D. Hannah, *Journey to the Cross, Devotions for Lent*).

Lent is a time to reflect on the faithfulness of Jesus Christ on our behalf. It is not a time to do penance and prove our own faithfulness. It is a season in the life of the church where we set aside time to remember Jesus and the grace that is found in him through faith alone. It is a time to trust God to give us the eyes to see, the minds to know, and the hearts to grasp how great his love, wisdom, and power is toward us in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is a time to see how soiled we are by our own sin in the light of his righteousness, and to repent through his kindness to seek him more by faith. It is a time to look upon his suffering and death so that we may be assured of his salvation worked for us, so that we may live in love to him and those around us.

We usually observe Easter with a Good Friday Service and a Resurrection Sunday service. But Lent is an extended time of forty days leading up to these two days. The church in the fourth century marked the beginning of Lent by counting back forty days from Easter (excluding Sundays), which takes you to the Wednesday seven weeks before Easter (March 5th this year). Sundays themselves are not counted in these forty days, as they are generally set aside as days of renewal and celebration, like mini-Easters. It is during these forty days that I encourage you to take a journey to the cross and the empty tomb.

Take up and read, sing, pray, and meditate around the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Lent is a journey to the cross and empty tomb. It is a journey “looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:2). It is a journey that involves looking at our sin and weakness, looking to Jesus by faith as our substitute, our victory over Satan, sin, and death, our righteousness, our adoption as sons and daughters, and our resurrection for our newness of life now, and eternal life to come.

Suggested Resources for the Lenten Season:

Journey to the Cross, Will Walker & Kendall Haug

The Passion of Jesus Christ, John Piper

Cross of Christ, John Stott

Kings Cross, Timothy Keller

Biola University Center for Christianity, Culture & The Arts - The Lent Project, <http://ccca.biola.edu/lent/>



Catalyst Sermon Series

You can listen to the Catalyst Sermon Series: *Gospel Centrality* - Galatians 2:11-21, *Stewarding a Gospel Movement* - 1 Peter 2:4-12, *God Seeks Worshipers* - John 4, *God Builds Community* - Acts 2:37-48, *Generous Lives* - Luke 10:25-37, and *Humble Cultural Engagement* - John 5:1-17 at www.ccotc.org/sermons.

Catalyst Conversations...Sign Up for One in the Narthex at Barnwell St.

Please take the opportunity to participate in a Catalyst Conversation by signing up after Worship or Life Groups. Catalyst Conversations are a one time opportunity for you to participate with other church members, regular attenders, and guests in a discussion around CCC’s Vision and Mission. We desire that you have an opportunity to engage yourselves and affirm together what we believe is God’s biblical vision for his church. The Catalyst Conversation is a small group gathering of 8-10 people facilitated by a couple (husband & wife) who will be prepared to lead the discussion. We desire that the Catalyst Sermon Series and the Catalyst Conversations will lead us as a church toward a planning process for the re-planting of Christ Covenant Church at 3100 Covenant Road. Therefore, your participation in these conversations is vital to a movement of the gospel at Christ Covenant Church.