

LENT Introduction
February 26, 2017
Clearwater Bay International Baptist Church
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[*Note: Some of the information in this introduction was purposefully taken from the 'Journey to the Cross' book, which we will use for the 40 days of Lent.]

Easter will be upon us before we know it.

I want to do something different today. I want to take this time during my sermon to encourage you and give you some tools to prepare for Easter.

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I want to help us focus and not just drift aimlessly by the death and resurrection of Jesus; to help us think deeper and longer. We want to celebrate more than Palm Sunday & Easter Sunday.

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Make Easter a little more meaningful this year!

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are at the very heart of Christianity.

The good news of the gospel is that God has acted in history to conquer evil and reconcile sinners to himself through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Those who have been united with Jesus – who have submitted to Him as savior and Lord – will one day be raised up and taken to be with him forever.

In order to make Easter meaningful, I would like you to celebrate LENT.

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What is LENT?

The word means.. 'Spring', but historically it refers to 40 days (not counting Sundays) before the Resurrection of Jesus.

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When does LENT begin?

On the Christian calendar, the season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and goes to Easter Sunday. Lent this year begins on March 1st, which is this coming Wednesday. It's called 'Ash Wednesday' because people from some traditions will put ashes on their forehead in the shape of a cross. This is simply a sign to show repentance and brokenness. In the Old Testament, people would dress themselves in sackcloth and put ashes on their head as a sign of repentance.

Sundays themselves are not counted in these forty days, as they are generally set aside as days of renewal and celebration ("mini-Easters" of sorts).

So, 40 days from this Wednesday, March 1st...till Easter, which is on April 16th. (not including Sundays)

The number **forty** carries great biblical significance based on: the forty days of rain Noah and his family endured in the flood, the forty years Israel spent in the wilderness, Jesus' forty-day fast in the wilderness, the forty days Jesus spent on the earth after his resurrection, and so much more. Forty days has been used by God to represent a period of trial, testing, and preparation.

Likewise, **Lent** is a season of preparation and repentance during which we anticipate the death (Good Friday) and resurrection (Easter Sunday) of Jesus.

[SLIDE] Traditionally, the Advent (Christmas) season is a time for feasting. The Lent (Easter) season is a time for fasting.

It is this very preparation and repentance – aimed at grasping the intense significance of the crucifixion – that gives us a deep and powerful longing for the Resurrection.

Lent is first and foremost about the gospel making its way deeper into our lives.

Lent is a journey to the cross: meditating on our sin and weakness, looking to Jesus as our perfect example and substitute, and being heightened in our worship of his victory over Satan, sin, and death.

On the cross, Jesus took our place to bear God's righteous anger toward our sin and rebellion.

He was separated from God - so that we could experience union with God.

He was crushed by God - so that we could be adopted by God.

He was raised with God - so that we too might be raised with God.

The drama of how this unfolded is the story of **Lent**.

The journey of Lent is to immerse ourselves in this grand story so that it might increase our appreciation and love for Jesus.

May we mourn the darkness in our hearts and rejoice in the light of God who came into the world to save us!

Give yourself to Him this Lent season through repentance, marination in the word and preparation.

Your reward will be the same as that of Jesus: the overwhelming joy of Resurrection.

May you be renewed in your love and affection for him this Lent season.

Listen to the scriptures...

Joel 2:1-2, 12-13

Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming; it is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains a great and powerful people; their like has never been before, nor will be again after them through the years of all generations. “Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.”

Psalm 51:1-2,6,10-12

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

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What should I do during LENT?

1. Use the devotional guide.

In your personal devotions, read, pray and worship.

Dads, read over it after dinner with your family.

All you have to do is read and pray.

Let this jump start family devotions.

Perhaps you want to gather together with friends and do it.

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The discussion guide has 4 sections:

- Call to Worship
- Confession
- Contemplation
- Closing Prayer

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2. Fast. Give up something to help you focus.

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Mark 4:19 says,

“The cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word....”

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During LENT, choke out the world, not the word.

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QUESTIONS:

What are the things that take up your time?

What do you turn to...to make you feel better?

What chokes out the word from your life?

Is there anything that has a hold on you?

What could you give up to spend more time with God?

[SLIDE]

Remember:

Fasting is not to impress God.

We deny ourselves familiar comforts in order to spend that time with God.

When we crave and long for those things.....we are reminded that our true comfort and joy is in Him alone.

Ephesians 3:20

Our God is “able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us.”

PRAY