

Forty Days

For many years, the theme of Messiah's Lent has been: ***To those who confess their sins, accept their mortality, and reset their priorities, shams are over; truth and real life begins.***

The other day after working out, I went to the locker room. I did the sauna, showered, dressed, splashed on my Old Spice and was just about to leave when the door opened and into the men's locker room came – a pretty, smiling young woman! She looked at me and recognized that I wasn't of the female persuasion. She smiled at me and said, "I knew it was one of these two doors, one side of the hall or another." Then she happily turned and left. I like a straight ahead woman. None of that pesky and time-consuming looking around for signs to tell her which door to use. Just try one. If that's not it, well, it's the other and very little time lost. I'm just glad she wasn't two minutes earlier. But in her straight-ahead, take no prisoners, "go for it" kind of approach, this woman models something for Lent. Why? Because it's time to act. No more "I know I should but..." No excuses. It's time for the desert. ***We can't become what we were meant to be if we stay what we are right now.***



Mark 1:13 (HCSB) He was in the wilderness 40 days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and the angels served Him. The forty days of Lent mark the forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness. In the Bible, the wilderness is the place of change. It is a place of silence, privation, temptation and pain. The kind of place where you are likely to ask, "How is it with my soul? Am I getting life right?" The desert is the place where the old dies and the new is born. The Bible uses this illustration over and over. Moses fled into the wilderness and met God in the fiery bush. He walked out of the desert to become the great leader and liberator of his people. Jesus spent forty days "in the wilderness," tried by hunger, thirst, and the devil. Forty days getting to know God and His love and His will in a way that would last forever and bring the salvation of the world. After St. Paul met the Risen Lord on the road to Damascus, he went into "the Arabian wilderness." He came out the greatest evangelist in Christian history. All went into a desert and came out "new," with wisdom, love and power that they never would have had otherwise. They came out with God in their souls. Lent is the desert, the place where the old dies and the new is born.



The wilderness, Lent, is a scary place. In the wilderness, Jesus was ***"tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals."*** Demons and devils and howls in the night! ***"We can't become what we were meant to be if we stay what we are right now."*** But that means change and that is what we fear like devils and howls in the night! It is easier to stay the way

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we are because it is familiar and seemingly safe. **Mark 1:13 (HCSB) He was in the wilderness 40 days, being tempted by Satan.** Forget about a character with a pitch fork and a pointy tail. I'll tell you what the devil is. The devil is *you not really believing what Jesus said*. A lot of people say: I know what Jesus taught about how to live life and I believe in it but I just find it too hard to live out. No! No! That's the excuse, the sham. I think just the opposite is true. I think the Gospel is easier to live than to believe. I think it would be rather simple to live it if we really believed it. If you really believe something, you'll act on it. The problem is that we just don't believe the Gospel. We really don't. We pay lip service to it. But do you believe Jesus literally when He says, **Mark 8:35 (ESV) Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.** Do you believe that cross and sacrifice is how you will find real life? Do you believe the way of powerlessness, of service to others, the love of enemies, trusting of God in all things, forgiving never judging, this way of suffering love, of self-denial and the way of the Cross. Is that what you believe? We really don't believe it – which is why it is so hard to live out. People who want to argue about the Bible being “literally true” usually mean something like “Did a whale really swallow Jonah?” Who cares? But did Jesus literally mean “turn the other check”? Love your enemies? The greatest is servant of all? He may have meant it but we don't believe it – and that is why we need Lent all the more. Get back to honesty. We don't think like Jesus, we think like the world. We don't really believe the Gospel; so why should we be surprised if we don't live it? ***To those who confess their sins, accept their mortality, and reset their priorities, the shams are over; truth and real life begins.***

Like Jesus, Lent gives you forty days. He went into the wilderness to discover what was true and what He would do. This is one of the few stories in the Bible that I go back to



over and over and try to imagine. And I picture that on one of those nights, Jesus looked up into the star-filled blackness of the heavens and discovered the truth, “Abba, Father, You love me.” Then He lived every second of His life thereafter as if that was the one truth that could never be doubted. And if that is what is true, then here is what I will do: ***“I will trust You come what may, Abba, and I will do Your will no matter what - even if it be a Cross.”*** Then He walked out of that desert. Use these forty days as Jesus did: find what is true and

what you will do. Lent is a call to truth. ***For him who confesses his sin, accepts his mortality and resets his priorities, shams are over and realities have begun.*** Then “dust to dust” becomes *light to light*, and “ashes to ashes” become *life to life*. So be it. Amen.