

SERMON

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today, we begin our forty-day journey of confession, contrition, and repentance. Ashes are imposed and impressed on us with a cross on our foreheads. It is the first external reminder that Lent has come, and I must die. Ashes for baptized Christians are a sign of confession, repentance, suffering, and grief. When God first confronted Adam in the Garden of Eden after the fall into sin, God immediately reminded Adam that just as he came from the dust of the ground, so his body would become dust again in death. Although Adam and Eve were once created perfectly, they would now die because they transgressed God's command. As their children, we also speak these same words when we impose ashes: *"Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return!"* Death comes to all people because all have been born with it from our first father and mother, Adam and Eve. As King David truly confesses, *"I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me"* (Psalm 51:5).

Therefore, Lent is a very healthy, annual spiritual practice for us because it truly implores us to take off the old clothing of sin in order that we may be clothed anew by Jesus Christ. If you do a quick review of the Holy Scriptures, there is evidence of ashes throughout. Job covered himself with ashes because of his grief and shame (see Job 2:8). Jeremiah reminds us of ashes in Lamentations. Ezekiel preached that cities such as Tyre would repent in dust and roll in ashes (see Ezekiel 26–27). Isaiah also warned God's people about idolatry and worshiping wooden idols. One who worships them feeds on ashes (see Isaiah 44:20). In Esther 4:1, Mordecai mourns for the people of God, tearing his clothes and putting on dust and ashes after he hears the murderous edict of the king and his servant Haman. Later, after Jonah preached to the city of Nineveh, the king and all the people mourned in dust and ashes (see Jonah 3:6). Finally, Jesus does not hide from ashes but exhorts the Galilean cities of Corazon, Bethsaida, and Capernaum to repent in sackcloth and ashes in today's Gospel.

I.

The ashes you wear tonight remind you of your sin. Just as Nineveh sinned and repented in dust and ashes, many others repented after God's prophets preached to them. Today, we begin a new sermon series, *Promised Treasures*! Each week on Wednesdays, at our Midweek services, we will highlight an ancient visible and biblical object that impresses upon us who we are and what God has done to save us. A number of these objects are common in daily life today, but by utilizing them in this way, you will better appreciate your history as the people of God and your daily need for Jesus Christ.

Tonight, we sit and clothe ourselves in dust and ashes as Job did. Job was blessed with a large family from God. He had a wife, seven sons, and three daughters. He owned much land, had numerous servants, and thousands of animals. He was one of the wealthiest men in the east, like a modern-day Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, or Elon Musk. However, God allowed almost all his earthly possessions to be taken away in one fell swoop. Then, He permitted Job's body to be so deeply afflicted with boils and sores, from the bottom of his feet to the crown of his head, that he literally scraped his scabs and skin with a piece of pottery to obtain relief. All was so badly lost that even Job's wife desperately says to him, "*Curse God and die*" (*Job 2:9*).

All Christians suffer in life, and if you haven't, you will. In fact, St. Paul says to the Philippian congregation and St. Timothy that all Christians suffer. Some sufferings and trials are worse or less than others. Some are self-made due to our selfish ways that hurt and injure others who now do little to help us. Other suffering is simply brought upon us by others because we live in a fallen sinful world. And when sin touches us, so does death! Our grandparents die, our parents die, children die, and other loved ones perish. So, we sit in ashes with Job and remember what Dr. Martin Luther said before God: "We are beggars, this is true." Repentance levels the playing field of life. It makes us recognize that any and every blessing we enjoy and possess is only a gift from His almighty hand.

II.

However, being baptized into Christ's death is more than only wearing ashes. Jesus Christ promises to also raise you from the ashes of your death and grave and assure you of eternal life. Jesus promised Martha at Lazarus's death, *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live"* (John 11:25). St. Paul adds, *"We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead, . . . we too might walk in newness of life"* (Romans 6:4). You are no longer clothed in death but with life in Christ! After Job endured his ashes and his cross, God raised him out of suffering. Jesus Christ washes and raises you right now with a renewed purpose. He wipes away all your ashes and promises to bless you! Good Friday is coming, reminding you that Jesus Christ has taken all your ashes and old clothing of sin and was nailed to a cross with all of it. It is all buried with Him and is no more. That is why St. Paul says, *"[God] made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God"* (2 Corinthians 5:21). Easter promises you that God always raises the dead. You now have hope and joy because He raised His own Son, Jesus Christ, from the dead.

CONCLUSION

Yes, we sit in dust and ashes today in order to grieve, suffer, and repent again. However, we grieve as Job did. Job had hope and promise in his Redeemer. In the end, dear friend, you will not be clothed in ashes but in stunningly white robes, washed completely by the blood of the resurrected lamb, Jesus Christ! Your joy is not found in you, but only in the Lord Jesus, who offers you His precious body and blood for you in this Supper. In Him, you are clothed. In Him, you are redeemed.

In Him, you are secure, both now and forever! Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.