

# MAKING LENT MATTER

Ash Wednesday, which begins this week, marks the beginning of Lent. It's the season that precedes and leads up to the Greatest Day in History, EASTER! How should we approach Lent this year? For some of us it's the season to fast (deny ourselves) something such as pop, candy, chocolate, meat, chips, Facebook, or television, just to name a few. For others it's a way to lose the winter layer of fat before summer comes along, but we get to do it with religious overtones, another way of killing two birds with one stone. But before we decide on what to give up, let's take the time to look at why we should give up something. Allow these questions and comments to guide your Lent season this and every year.

- Is this (and any other) practice prescribed in scripture? The bible does speak of fasting from food and from sex. The fasting from food is often done as an expression of deep contrition or a seeking after God. The fasting from sex (for married people) is to devote themselves to prayer. This doesn't mean we can't fast from Coke or Doritos or K-dramas, but always the place to begin is with the scriptures. What about the fact that the season of Lent and Lenten fasts are not even prescribed in Scripture, and nowhere in the New Testament do we find the practice of placing the of ashes of burnt palm branches on our foreheads?
- Fasting from a vice is not fasting; it's obedience. If you say that during Lent I'm going to stop swearing, that is not fasting, that's obedience.
- Is your fasting motivated by the gospel and grace or am I trying to earn points with God? Fasting is a prescribed spiritual discipline found in Scripture, but the motivation behind the fasting is so much more important than the act itself. We must not think for a moment that our fasting will gain us any merit before God. Rather, our fasting must be the natural expression of the presence of a deep genuine faith that seeks to obey and honor God. It's the gospel (what Christ has done for us in his life, death and resurrection) that drives us toward a deeper awareness of our sin, that we begin to sense that the Holy Spirit is asking us to fast from food or sex, so we could devote ourselves to a season of prayer to be more holy.
- Finally, don't deny yourself something without replacing it with something better. This is the bible's teaching on spiritual growth. Denying yourself food without replacing it with something else is nothing more than dieting. But to deny yourself food during your lunch hour so you can hole away somewhere to read scripture and pray for an hour, something you normally would not do, is the way to go. Don't merely remove; replace. Remove the speaking of harsh words and replace with encouragement. Remove lustful thoughts by memorizing a verse on sexual purity. Remove love for money with generosity.

As we seek to become more rooted in Christ, allow this season of Lent to move you toward that end.

*Pastor Peter*