Ash Wednesday: A Call to Repentance

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Good evening! I would like to thank all of you for joining us this evening for this Ash Wednesday service. As you already know the purpose of our gathering this evening is to prepare our hearts and our minds for the Lenten Season. During this time of the church calendar, we anticipate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This victory over sin and death signifies that every person who places their trust in Jesus Christ has their sins forgiven and has the hope of eternal life with Him in heaven. This world is not our home, but while we are here we need to live the life He has blessed us with in a thankful way showing that we honor the Lord in both what we say and what we do. This evening, I would like to share some thoughts regarding Ash Wednesday to give us time to reflect on what the Lord has done for us through the sacrifice of Christ.

The Scripture we will be discussing this evening comes from the Gospel of Mark chapter 2. It is in this passage of Scripture that we have recorded for us the calling of Matthew to become a disciple of Christ. To give us the proper context for this verse please read with me starting with verse 14. “As He passed by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting in the tax office, and He said to him, “Follow Me!” And he got up and followed Him. And it happened that He was reclining at the table in his house, and many tax collectors and sinners were dining with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many of them, and they were following Him. When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that He was eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they said to His disciples, “Why is He eating with tax collectors and sinners?” And hearing this, Jesus said to them, “It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (2:14-17). In this passage we are given a picture of the heart of Christ when He came to earth to carry out His ministry. Jesus is the great physician who came to heal the sick and to bring the good news of the coming of the kingdom of God to earth. In this passage we are provided with the three reasons why we are here this evening.

As we prepare for the lent season let us take time this evening to mourn our sin. Throughout our lives we go through tough times that cause us to resist what the Holy Spirit is speaking to us. All of us have said things we should not say, have had evil thoughts that do not bring glory to God and have also acted in ways that do not bring glory to His name. Keeping this in mind we come before the throne of grace acknowledging that each of us needs salvation and that we also have done nothing to deserve such grace. When the ashes are placed on our foreheads we are remembering what God spoke to Adam and Eve in the garden after they had sinned. “By the sweat of your face You shall eat bread, Until you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19). Let us remember our position in the kingdom. God is our Creator and sustainer who made us from the dust. We are only here a short while and then we will return to that dust. But, that is not where the story of our life ends!

Secondly, Ash Wednesday reminds us of our present relationship with Christ. For the good news of the Gospel to make a difference in our lives we need to admit that we are sick and in need of a physician. This was the problem that Jesus had with the religious leaders of His day. The scribes and pharisees felt that since they followed the Law of Moses they were not in need of saving. This pride they had in their own words blinded them to the need for salvation. This evening you and I are reminded that we are sick and only the Lord Jesus Christ can heal us of our sickness.

Finally, Ash Wednesday prepares us for Easter. On Easter Sunday we will celebrate the victory over sin and death that was won by Jesus Christ. No longer do you and I need to fear death or the grave. We can look forward to leaving this world and entering our eternal home where we will be in the presence of Christ. The pain, sickness and sin that envelops the world will pass away. We will be restored to a perfect relationship with God that is filled only with love, peace, and eternal joy. Let us live victoriously in the good news of the gospel.

As we continue our service this evening we will read responsively Psalm 50, which is the song that David sang after he had been caught in the sins of murder and adultery. As you may recall, King David had one of his soldiers murdered so that he could have that soldier’s wife as his own. Not only did he murder that man, but he was about to become the father of a child that he had created with that woman. David was made known of his sins by the prophet Nathan who also reminded him that God had placed him on the throne elevating him to the highest position from the lowliest of beginnings as a shepherd. David’s cry for forgiveness is supported by his repentance and the desire he had for God to restore a right spirit in his life. May this be our cry as well this evening. May we contemplate our need for forgiveness, may we humble our hearts to receive the forgiveness that can only be offered through Christ. Please join me in a word of prayer.