



Dust and Ashes

Ash Wednesday

“For you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” Genesis 3:19

WARM UP: *When was the last time you were reminded of your mortality? What brought it to your attention that your time on this earth was limited?*

Mortal. That means that you and I have a limited shelf-life. Maybe it was a near-miss or a doctor’s visit that brought it out of your subconscious mind and made it something that was real and nearer than you wanted to think. Life has a way of doing that to us. It reminds us from time to time that none of us are going to live forever and it is only a matter of time before we reach our expiration date on this earth.

But when was the last time you were reminded of your sinfulness? I’m betting that it wasn’t that long ago and that in the big scheme of things, living with that awareness is a whole lot more important. You see, once we reach our shelf-life date and expire, our souls go on into eternity where we will stand before a Holy God and give an account of our lives. That moment is going to be a whole lot more serious than your expiration date. Are you ready for it?

Today is Ash Wednesday. It is a reminder of our mortality and our accountability before God. It is also a season of preparation for that moment and a time for us to reflect on God’s provision for us through the cross of His Son Jesus Christ. As we prepare to celebrate the resurrection, we need to remember why Jesus’ sacrifice was necessary.

READ ABOUT IT: Isaiah 6:1–5; 61:1–3

1. *Growing up, did you ever get called into the principal’s office?*
2. *If King Uzziah’s reign represented stability and security for the nation, what did his death mean to the people? Why does God choose this time to reveal himself to Isaiah?*
3. *Imagine that you are Isaiah. What would that moment have felt like to you? How would you describe what you saw and how it made you feel in comparison?*
4. *What does it mean when the bible says that God is holy? What makes Isaiah despair for his life and brings forth his confession of his and the people’s sinfulness?*
5. *Animals were burned on the altar as a substitute for the death of a sinner. What is the significance of the angel touching Isaiah’s lips with a burning coal from this altar?*
6. *How would you compare Isaiah’s response in vv. 8 to that of vv. 5? What affect did having his sins cleansed have upon him?*

7. *Is this what God wants to happen to us, or an iconic statement of what God knows will happen, when we encounter the cross of Jesus?*
8. **Read John 12:37-41.** *How does John relate Jesus' rejecting and the Jews unbelief to this moment in Isaiah's life?*
9. *How is Isaiah's encounter with God like your own? How is it different?*
10. **Read Isaiah 61:1-3.** *During times of grief and repentance, people would wear sackcloth and cover themselves with ashes as a sign of mourning. What does God promise to replace these with, for those who see and repent of their sinfulness?*
11. *In light of God's holiness and Jesus' sacrifice, do you feel like you are wearing ashes or new clothes? Why?*