

DATE OF MESSAGE: July 17, 2016

MESSAGE TITLE: Why Fast?

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 58:1-12

KEY TRUTH

Many American believers are unfamiliar with the biblical practice of fasting. Today, we will learn how fasting expresses our longing for God and is used to bless us in our pursuit of Him.

GETTING STARTED: Have you ever fasted? What benefits did you experience? What did it cost you in terms of sacrifice? The Old Testament passage we will explore today contrasts wrong motives for fasting with God-honoring motives for fasting.

OBSERVATION

In what ways did God's people seem to do the right thing?

How did they spoil it? How did their view of fasting differ from God's?

If their fasting were sincere, what would be different about their relationships with others? Their concern for the poor?

What is the connection between fasting and one's concern for justice?

How is personal spiritual renewal related to seeking justice for the poor? Which do you think comes first?

Note the relationship between the yoke of oppression and the pointing finger. Where should God's people be looking to remove oppression?

APPLICATION

Will you ask the Lord to direct your heart to an observance of fasting? If possible, we invite you to join others in our fellowship to fast on Thursdays.

We fast not to participate in a religious activity but to experience God's presence and power in prayer. Fasting is more than denying yourself a meal or exposure to media sources. We deny ourselves in order to long for God in prayer. What do you believe God would have you give up by fasting? For how long? How will you spend that time in prayer?

Jesus warned people in Matthew 6:16-18 against fasting to be seen by others. How might believers observe this passage in their families when they fast? At work when everyone else goes out to lunch on a day you choose to fast?

PRAYER

Dear God, grant us repentance over our indifference for the oppressed and the poor. Lead us to become generous people who share what we have with those in need, including our homes. Give us a God-honoring desire to fast as a way to cultivate a heart for others in prayer.

SHARE POINT

Read Isaiah 58:1-12 and review the application questions. Share with someone in your life how God's Word is changing you into a growing disciple. Encourage that person to do the same. That person could be a family member, a friend, a co-worker or a neighbor.

COMMENTARTY NOTES

Isaiah is commanded in this passage to confront the hypocrisy of God's people with boldness and to clarify the true path to God's blessing. The people are not gripped by the practical implications of biblical faith. The 'delight' of verse 2 is a false delight, for it is an emotional mechanism for pressuring God into compliance with human wishes. When God refuses to be used, the people are offended that their religion does not work. Their unacknowledged attempt to gain advantage with God is exposed in their overbearing use of people. God called on his people to show humanity in their social life, and they are failing to do this. Isaiah uses sarcasm to dismiss false piety in verse 5. What establishes

true religion is not what is acceptable to man but what is acceptable to the Lord. God defines the true piety that He will bless in verses 6 and 7. He dignifies his dishonest people with appeals to reasoned thought. He calls on them to repent of every form of oppression. God promises to meet true fasting with true blessing when people turn from oppressing their neighbors. Unlike false gods, the Lord responds to obedience. God humbly offers his availability and presence to those who respond to His call. God again in verses 9 and 10 defines the conditions of the blessing in a manner consistent with his nature. The phrase 'the pointing of the finger' refers to either false accusation or destructive gossip. God reaffirms his readiness to bless his obedient people, including their bodies and their properties. The ruins of Jerusalem in the sixth century B.C., for example, symbolized the deeper spiritual ruins of long-standing disobedience.

SOURCES CONSULTED

ESV Study Bible

Serendipity Bible for Personal and Small Group Study