

**LIVING IN  
THE  
FAST (ING)  
LANE**

## LIVING IN THE FAST(ING) LANE

Sept. 27, 2015

**Sermon in a sentence:** God's response to our fasting is based upon the *way* we fast, not on the *fact* that we fast.

**Congregational reading:** Isaiah 58:1-12

**Scriptures:** Isaiah 58:1-12; Lev. 23:27-32; Jer. 14:1 - 15:4; Mark 9:29; Acts 13:2-3

Isaiah 58:1-12 NKJV "Cry aloud, spare not; Lift up your voice like a trumpet; Tell My people their transgression, And the house of Jacob their sins. <sup>2</sup> Yet they seek Me daily, And delight to know My ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and did not forsake the ordinance of their God. They ask of Me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching God. <sup>3</sup> "Why have we fasted,' *they say*, "and You have not seen? *Why* have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?' 'In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your laborers. <sup>4</sup> Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as *you do* this day, to make your voice heard on high. <sup>5</sup> Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? *Is it* to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? <sup>6</sup> "*Is* this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? <sup>7</sup> *Is it* not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? <sup>8</sup> Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your

righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. <sup>9</sup> Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, "Here I am." If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, <sup>10</sup> if you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall *be* as the noonday. <sup>11</sup> The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. <sup>12</sup> Those from among you shall build the old waste places; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of Streets to dwell in.

**Definition of fasting: Fasting is the spiritual discipline of denying our physical body of food for a short period of time, in order to draw closer to God with our soul and spirit.**

Over time, many people have come to look at fasting as the quickest, surest way to answered prayer. We have heard people say: "I'm fasting for my husband to get saved." Or, "I'm fasting for a new job." Or, "I'm fasting to find God's will for my life."

Many examples from the pages of scripture speak to us of the times people fasted and the reasons for their fasts:

- As a sign of great sorrow (Jud. 20:24-26)
- As a sign of national mourning (2 Sam. 1:12)
- For healing (2 Sam. 12:16)
- For deliverance and protection (2 Chr. 20:1-4; Ezra 8:21-23; Est. 4:16)
- As a sign of penitence/atonement for sin (Lev. 23:27-32 [fasting is 'humbling and afflicting the soul': see Ps.

35:13, Is. 58:5, Acts 27:9]; Ezra 9:4-6; Dan. 9:2-6; Joel 2:15-17; Jonah 3:5-10)

- As a response to God's judgment (Joel 1:14-15)
- For power over demonic forces (Mark 9:29)
- As a part of our regular spiritual disciplines/seeking after God (Mark 2:18; Lu. 18:12; Acts 13:2-3; 1 Cor. 7:5)

**When we fast, for whatever reason, we quickly come to an acknowledgment our physical frailty and our basic, existential need for God. We cannot live without Him. He is the One; the only One, who provides our basic requirements for the sustenance of body, soul and spirit. Fasting helps us to remember this fact.**

**Fasting is a very personal experience. Nobody can fast in our place. No one can put our body under subjection in this manner but we ourselves.**

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**Isaiah gives us a significant exposition on fasting, and his writings contain certain aspects we don't often consider. He shows us that fasting, in and of itself, is not a magic potion to cause God to act on our behalf.**

**Let us break out both the positive and negative elements of fasting as he presents them.**

**Unacceptable fasting (Is. 58:3-5):**

- Exhibiting false humility (v. 3,5)
- Serving our own selfish interests (v. 3)
- Exploiting our employees (v. 3)
- Engaging in quarrels and strife (v. 4)
- Wickedly striking out at others (v. 4)
- Falsely appearing to be penitent, contrite and holy (v. 5)

In this 1<sup>st</sup> section, we see how important the way we *live* is to the success of our fasting. The list above is quite devastating and as we read it, it is no surprise that God ignores prayers from people who live that way. So, as Isaiah states, **here is the result of unacceptable fasting:**

- **God will neither hear nor respond to our prayers (v.4)**
  - o See Jer. 14:1 – 15:4 for another example of God rejecting fasting and prayer due to blatant and consistent sin.

**Acceptable fasting (Is. 58:6-7):**

- “Loose the chains of injustice” NIV (v. 6)
- Undo heavy burdens and break yokes (v. 6)
- Release people from oppression (v. 6)
- Feed the hungry (v. 7)
- Bring the homeless poor to our homes (v. 7)
- Clothe the naked (v. 7)
- Do good to our own relatives (v. 7)

We know that salvation is not dependent upon our good works. It is the free gift of the crucified Christ. However, it is clear that God is very concerned about our interactions with all people, and pays close attention to the condition of our hearts, our attitudes and our actions.

This passage lets us know that our times of fasting should be seen as opportune moments to serve others, not as times to display our own (self) righteousness!

**Results of acceptable fasting (Is. 58:8,9a):**

- **The light of God shines out from us**
  - o **Luke 11:34-36**The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore, **when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light.** But when *your eye* is bad, your body also

*is full of darkness.* <sup>35</sup> Therefore take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness. <sup>36</sup> If then your whole body *is full of light, having no part dark, the whole body will be full of light, as when the bright shining of a lamp gives you light.*

- Eph. 5:8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.

- We receive healing
- Our righteousness will be seen
- The glory of the Lord will protect us
- We will call and the Lord will answer. "He will say, 'Here I am.'" (v. 9a)

The Lord then proceeds to repeat Himself, so we won't miss the conditions for His open ear and quick response (Is. 58:9b-10a):

- Remove the yoke
- Don't point fingers
- Don't speak evil
- Care for and feed the hungry
- Care for afflicted souls

Then He will graciously bless us (Is. 58:10b-12):

- Our lives will be filled with light
- The Lord will guide us
- He will give us water in the midst of drought
- He will give us physical strength
- We will re-build things that were broken down
- Our lives will be like beautiful gardens and refreshing streams of water

You may have noticed that relatively little is said about prayer as an accompaniment to fasting in our Isaiah text, while much is said about the practical 'acts' of fasting. This serves as a reminder that **fasting is part of a balanced**

**godly Christian life, not the *only* component, nor the single 'killer app' to access God's power.**

**What then shall we do? Pray, fast, serve God, serve others, maintain humility, resist self-righteousness and be a light in dark places!**