

## **A Neglected Practice that Brings Rewards**

Don Ruhl • Savage Street, Grants Pass, Oregon • October 13, In the year of our Lord Christ, 2019

Scripture Reader and Reading: Jacob Noveske – Ezra 8.21–23

Song Leader and Song Suggestions: Phil Joseph – No Suggestions

### **Prelude:**

#### **I. Fasting!**

- A. Does that have anything to do with being a Christian?
- B. Isn't this the practice of some wild fanatical cult?
  - 1. Yes, it has something to do with being a Christian, and
  - 2. no, we are talking about some wild-eyed cult.

#### **II. Neither Jesus nor His apostles commanded fasting, but**

- A. they practiced it, and
- B. they regulated how it was to be done, because
  - 1. fasting is something that originates from our own need,
  - 2. just like eating does.
    - a) God does not command us to eat, because
    - b) He does not have to command us,
      - (1) we eat naturally, and
      - (2) He does not have to command us to fast, because
        - (a) the need will arise naturally, but
        - (b) even as He regulates eating, so He regulates fasting.
          - i) However, special things happen when you fast and pray,
          - ii) so you will want to set aside times to fast.

#### **III. Fasting simply means abstaining.**

- A. There are things from which we must abstain, besides just food, and
- B. there are things on which we must feast, besides just food.

### **Persuasion:**

## I. Times of Fasting

### A. As a sign of repentance

#### 1. Jonah 3.5

**5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them.**

**– Jonah 3.5**

### B. When seeking direction

#### 1. Acts 13.2

**2 As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”**

**– Acts 13.2**

### C. When you need power

#### 1. Acts 9.9–11

**9 And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. 10 Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.” 11 So the Lord said to him, “Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying.**

**– Acts 9.9–11**

### D. When you are seeking an answer from God

#### 1. Ezra 8.21–23

**21 Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. 22 For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against**

**the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, “The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him.” 23 So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer.**

**– Ezra 8.21–23**

E. Some advice:

1. Stay out of the kitchen.
2. Do not be with people who are eating.
3. Be alone if you can.
4. Pray for self-control when the hunger pains come.
5. Matthew 6.16–18 do not make it look like you are suffering:

**16 “Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 17 But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.”**

**– Matthew 6.16–18**

## **II. Isaiah 58.1 – The Voice of a Trumpet**

**1 “Cry aloud, spare not;  
Lift up your voice like a trumpet;  
Tell My people their transgression,  
And the house of Jacob their sins.”**

**– Isaiah 58.1**

- A. God did not want the prophet silent,
- B. no, not when Israel walked in sin with no thought of turning from it.

## **III. Isaiah 58.2 – Seeking God Daily**

**2 “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.”**

**– Isaiah 58.2**

A. Here is the paradox:

1. The house of Jacob continued in sin, but
2. they also sought God daily,
  - a) delighting to know His ways,
    - (1) as though they were living righteously,
    - (2) as though they had not forsaken God’s ordinances, and
  - b) they still asked Him what the ordinances of justice were, and
  - c) made it look as though they delighted in approaching God.

B. God saw right through their hypocrisy!

#### **IV. Isaiah 58.3–5 – Then They Asked Why Their Fasting Did Not Work**

**3 “‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and You have not seen?  
Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?’  
[The answer is] In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure,  
And exploit all your laborers.**

**4 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.**

**5 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?”**

**– Isaiah 58.3–5**

- A. Fasting, abstaining from food or drink or both, is done to
1. afflict one's soul to get the attention of God, and
  2. to deepen one's spirituality.
    - a) You might think that you would think on food all the time, but
    - b) you do not,
      - (1) although the hunger pains come, but
      - (2) pray for self-control and God will hear your prayer.
- B. He revealed problems with their fasting:
1. They simply saw it as an opportunity to miss work, and
  2. to make their laborers do all the work.
  3. They used it as an opportunity to debate.
  4. They struck out in wickedness against others.
  5. They were not doing it to have their voices heard by God.
  6. They also made a show of it.
- C. None of those things are what God wants to see when we fast.

**V. Isaiah 58.6–14 The Fasting God Wants**

- 6 “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?**
- 7 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?**
- 8 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.**

- 9 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,**
- 10 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.**
- 11 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.**
- 12 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.**
- 13 If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath,  
From doing your pleasure on My holy day,  
And call the Sabbath a delight,  
The holy day of the LORD honorable,  
And shall honor Him, not doing your own ways,  
Nor finding your own pleasure,  
Nor speaking your own words,**
- 14 Then you shall delight yourself in the LORD;  
And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth,  
And feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father.  
The mouth of the LORD has spoken."**

**– Isaiah 58.6–14**

- A. We can fast from food and drink, and
1. Jesus gave regulations for that in Matthew 6.16–18, but
  2. God revealed the fasting that pleases Him and gets His attention.
- B. v. 6 – To unbind
1. the bonds of wickedness,
  2. the heavy burdens they put upon others,

3. the oppressed, and
  4. every yoke they had put upon others.
- C. v. 7 – To share with others.
- D. vv. 8–9a – Then God would hear when they fasted and He would heal them.
- E. vv. 9b–10a – The blessings would come if they continued fasting
1. from putting the yoke on others,
  2. from point the finger at others,
  3. from speaking wickedness, and if they
    - a) had compassion on the hungry, and
    - b) satisfied the afflicted soul.
- F. vv. 11–12 – Revealed still more blessings for fasting from sin:
1. The Lord would guide them continually,
  2. He would give them spiritual health,
  3. He would give them bodily health,
  4. He would make their lives prosperous, and
  5. they would rebuild, repair, and restore what needed fixing.
- G. v. 13 – They had to make sure that they fasted
1. from doing their own pleasure on the Sabbath, and
  2. call the Sabbath a delight for honoring God.
- H. v. 14 – If they fasted in these things, He promised
1. that they would truly find God delightful, and
  2. they would enjoy the best of the earth.
- I. Therefore,
1. fast from doing the wrong thing and
  2. feast on doing the right thing.

**Exhortation:**

**I. Concerning your body:**

- A. If you fast from the good things, and feast on the bad things,
  - 1. your body will never be what it could be and
  - 2. you will die early.
- B. If you fast from the bad things, and feast on the good things,
  - 1. your body will function at its best, and
  - 2. you will live long.

**II. Concerning your spirit:**

- A. If you fast from the good things, and feast on the bad things,
  - 1. your spirit will never be what it could be and
  - 2. you will die in your sins.
- B. If you fast from the bad things, and feast on the good things,
  - 1. your spirit will function at its best, and
  - 2. you will live forever.

**III. Brethren,**

- A. do what you need to do to perfect holiness before God.
- B. If that includes asking us for prayers for strength, come forward.