

Fasting God accepts
Is 58:1-11

Over the last several years we have been starting our year off with a time of prayer and fasting.

This Sunday will be January 1, 2012 and we will be starting our time of prayer and fasting.

As we get ready to go into this, I wanted to take tonight and maybe even Sunday morning to teach on fasting and tonight in particular, we are going to focus on the Fasting that God accepts.

I. One of the most important things you need to consider when beginning a fast is your motive.

Too many times we focus on the method or strategies used in fasting and give very little thought concerning our motives and the attitudes of the heart.

There are some things you need to understand about fasting...

First, true biblical fasting is more than a religious exercise.

Second, fasting is more than an act of self denial

Thirdly, fasting is not a manipulative tool to get something from God.

Fourthly, we do not fast to earn something from God, but to make a divine connection with Him.

Fifth, fasting is not just a spiritual discipline for bringing problems to God to be fixed.

Sixth, fasting must be first and foremost an expression of the heart's longing for a greater intimacy with Him.

Finally, fasting involves true humility and repentance.

Tonight I wasn't us to focus on the motives and attitudes of our hearts that are so important to God when we fast and the type of fast that pleases Him.

God isn't as concerned about the outward observance of fasting as He is with our hearts.

1 Samuel 15:22 And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. KJV

If our fasting is to be acceptable to Him, our motives must first be pure resulting in a life that is dedicated and committed to Him.

We can't expect our fasting to move God's hand on our behalf or on behalf of our cities or nations, if our hearts are not right before Him and if we are not living in accordance with His word.

II. Don't get Hung Up!

It's so easy to get caught up with the mechanics that we miss out on what God can and will do through us while we fast and pray.

The fast that pleases God and moves His hand isn't dependent on the length or extent of your fast.

He isn't impressed with how many days you fast.

Whether you fast three days, twenty-one days, forty days or just one day isn't the most important thing.

Let me encourage you tonight, God doesn't consider the person that fasts forty days more spiritual or stronger than the one that fasts a shorter period of time.

Listen to what Mike Bickle, the founder and director of the International House of Prayer in Kansas City says...

“we will sustain a life of fasting only by God's grace, not by our own strength.

Fasting is more than gritting our teeth as we endure it. Instead, we ask God for grace to enter into the mystery of connecting with Him in fasting.

As we embrace the voluntary weakness of fasting, we receive more spiritual strength in our walk with God. His grace multiplies to those who pursue it.”

When we fast, it's important to be led by His Spirit and draw upon the strength of the Lord.

As I was preparing for this lesson tonight, I really had to ask myself some hard questions...

Why did I want us to fast for 21 days...I got thinking on that and I really felt the Holy Spirit was speaking to my heart this afternoon and showed me that I wasn't calling for 21 days of fasting because God wanted me to, but I predetermined the amount of time because that was what others was doing.

So I began to search my heart and I felt like the Holy Spirit was saying for us to fast the first seven days of the year.

Give Him the first week of the year, that I was to challenge you to join me on the Sun up to Sun down fast from January 1 to January 7th.

For some of you, this will be a challenge, for others, it might seem easy, but it was like the Lord spoke to my heart that 21 days would seem too hard and overwhelming to the people, and I really feel as the Pastor of this fellowship, that the Lord wants as many of you to join with us in this as possible.

But don't get hung up on the number of days you fast, or try to fast in your own strength.

Maybe God will only give you the grace to fast on January 1st, then do it and do not feel condemned for not going on, or maybe every other day...the important thing is that you participate in some way.

I feel it in my spirit, God wants everyone to participate in this.

The seven days that I've set forth for us to fast is the number I truly feel God wants us to strive for, and as I give you the bigger vision, the role you play in that might not be the whole seven days, but all I ask is that you draw upon the strength of the Lord.

So I want you to experience the power of fasting like you never have before, and I give you the freedom to take the trip with us in such a way you don't fall under condemnation for not "being perfect" while you fast.

I don't believe that Moses, Elijah, Daniel, or most of the other saints in the bible who fasted had a predetermined set amount of time they were going to fast.

Their major motive was to connect with God.

I want you to realize what God did for them He will do for you.

So often we look at these spiritual giants and how God used them and think that we could never be used by God like that.

But let me tell you tonight, if you think that way, you're wrong...

God can and will use our prayers and fasting to move God's hand on behalf of our family, our church, our city and nation if we are willing, obedient and you are fasting according to God's purposes in a way that is pleasing to Him.

So let's look at Isaiah 58 and see the fasting that God accepts.

III. First things first

Before revealing the type of fast that is pleasing to Him, God exposed the hypocrisy of the people and clearly showed them the type of fast that is unacceptable.

If you were to look at those God was addressing here, to all outward appearances, the people looked like they were walking in obedience and were serving Him.

Look what God said in Is 58:2

Isaiah 58:2 Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God. KJV

The NIV says it a little better I think...

Isa 58:2 For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them. NIV

What was going on, they were going through the forms and rituals, but they continued in their sins.

They even got puffed up with pride and asked God “*why have we fasted...and you have not seen it?*” (Is 58:3 NIV)

Their eyes were blinded from seeing their true condition and they were pointing their fingers at God because He had not answered them.

The reason why their fast was not acceptable to God; they had not fasted unto Him.

Look at Isaiah 58:3-4 *'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?' "Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. 4 Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. NIV*

Here's where they were messing up...

1. The people fasted but they continued to do their own pleasures...though it appeared they were doing the right thing, they still gratified the lusts of their flesh.
2. They were contentious and spiteful. On the day they should be grieving for their sins, they were misusing their workers.
3. They fasted for strife. Instead of judging themselves, they actually ended up in a fight.

As long as they continued doing their own thing, their “fasting” was offensive to God. What they were doing was nothing more than empty actions and words.

So what we see here, it’s not enough to go through the actions of fasting while there is still sin in our life that we refuse to deal with.

You’re going to see that the fast that pleases God involves more than just afflicting our souls by abstaining from food.

The fasting that God accepts is where prayer and fasting are accompanied by righteous acts and righteous living through the power of the Holy Spirit.

IV. What will God do through a fast He accepts?

1. Loose the bands or chains of wickedness
2. To undo the heavy burdens
3. To let the oppressed go free
4. To break every yoke.

While we are fasting His way, God directs us to do some things...

1. Share our food with the hungry
2. Provide shelter for the homeless
3. Provide clothing for those who have none.
4. Do not hide from relatives who need help.

The theme of our 2012 fast is Breaking the Yoke of bondage off your life, the church and those around us.

We see here in Isaiah 58 the major purpose of God's chosen fast is to loose bonds of wickedness, undo heavy burdens, to set captives free and to break every yoke!

The yoke is what was placed on an animal to pull a plow or cart or some sort of load.

For us, the yoke refers to any burden, obligation or hardship that we might carry.

Yokes hinder Christians from reaching their full spiritual potential in Christ.

Sickness, disease, and physical handicaps are yokes of bondage.

Lack of finances, debt, and poverty are yokes of bondage!

Nicotine, drugs, alcohol and other harmful habits are yokes of bondage!

Family turmoil, broken family relationships and marital problems are yokes of bondage.

No matter what yoke of bondage you may be under, as you fast and pray God will turn the battle around!

Not only does God want to see the yokes broken off your life, but God wants to use us to help break the yokes of bondage off people in His Name!

Isaiah 10:27 And it shall come to pass in that day, that his burden shall be taken away from off thy shoulder, and his yoke from off thy neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing. KJV

There is a yoke breaking anointing released when we fast and pray God's way.

10 Major Blessings to those who choose to fast His way!

1. Illumination – God promises, “Then your light will break forth like the dawn” verse 8

2. Healing and wholeness – God promises “you healing will quickly appear” verse 8

3. Righteousness – God promises “your righteousness shall go before you” Verse 8

4. God’s presence and glory – God promises “the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.

5. Answered prayers – God promises “Then you will call, and the Lord will answer, you will cry for help, and He will say:
Here am I. v 9

6. Continual guidance – God promises “The Lord will guide you always” v 11

7. Contentment – God promises “He will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land” v 11

8. Strength – God promises He will “strengthen your frame”
v 11

9. Continual supply – God promises “you will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail” v 11

10. Restoration – God promises, “Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundation; you will be called repairer of the broken walls, restorer of streets and dwellings.