Sermon series on the Book of Isaiah
"The Gospel in the Old Testament" | Part 63

The Fast That Opens Heaven

Isaiah 58:1-12

I. Why Should We Fast?

Is. 58:5-6 Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the LORD? "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?

> *Fasting is the intentional, temporary abstinence from food, pleasures, and entertainment for the purpose of humbling oneself before God, expressing dependence on Him, and earnestly seeking Him through focused prayer, repentance, and worship, as well as seeking His help and guidance.*

Lev. 16:29-31 And it shall be a statute to you forever that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict yourselves (humble your souls (LSB) and shall do no work, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you. For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you. You shall be clean before the LORD from all your sins. It is a Sabbath of solemn rest to you, and you shall afflict yourselves(humble your souls (LSB); it is a statute forever.

Joel 2:12-15 Yet even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. Blow the trumpet in Zion; consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly.

A. Understanding Our Complete Dependence on God

Acts 17:24-25 The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

Acts 17:26-28 And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for 'In him we live and move and have our being'.

2 Tim. 2:24-25 And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth.

1 Cor. 3:6–7 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

John 15:5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Prov. 21:1 The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.

B. Understanding the Seriousness of Our Need

Neh. 1:3-4 And they said to me, 'The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.' As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

Ezra 8:21-23 Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods. […] So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty.

Jonah 3:5-6 And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

Jonah 3:7-9 And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, 'By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.

Acts 13:2-3 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

II. How Should We Fast?

Is. 58:1-2 Cry aloud; do not hold back; lift up your voice like a trumpet; declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Jacob their sins. Yet they seek me daily and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that did righteousness and did not forsake the judgment of their God;

Is. 58:2-3 They ask of me righteous judgments; they delight to draw near to God. 'Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?' Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers.

A. Genuine Humility

Is. 58:3 Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers.

Is. 58:5 Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him?

Matt. 26:38-39 Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." [39] And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."

Is 58:3,5… Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers."…"Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him?

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B. Heartfelt Obedience

Is. 58:6-7 Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

Dan. 9:2-3 … I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.

Dan. 9:4-5 I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, 'O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules;

Dan. 9:16 O Lord, according to all your righteous acts, let your anger and your wrath turn away from your city Jerusalem, your holy hill, because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and your people have become a byword among all who are around us.

C. Fervent Prayer

Is. 58:9-10 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, if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday.

> ***"You shall call" – תִּקְרָא (tiqrāʾ)*** *Root: קָרָא (qārāʾ) – to call, summon, address, proclaim.*
>
> ***"You shall cry" – תְּשַׁוֵּעַ (təšawwaʿ)*** *Root: שָׁוַע (šāwaʿ) – to cry out for help, plead for deliverance, call for assistance.*

Is. 58:8 Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.

Is. 58:11 And the LORD will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.

Questions for spiritual reflection

- How often do you fast?
- What place do fasting and prayer have in your spiritual life?
- Why don't you fast?