

Isaiah 58:1-14

"Fruitful Fasting"

It was a troubling time in Israel's history. They wanted to transition from an era of judges to kings. They wanted to be like other nations. It wasn't what God wanted for *them*, but it's what they wanted from *God*. So He gave them what *they* wanted. Their 1st king. He was tall, he was handsome, had a certain "kingliness" to his stature & appearance. He was *outwardly* everything they could've hoped for. But inwardly there was a problem... he didn't really have a heart for God. His name was Saul... The short story is that Saul didn't work out.

So, God sent the prophet Samuel to the house of Jesse to anoint another king. But this time, God wasn't going to give them what *they* wanted *from Him*, but what *He* wanted *for them*... So there Samuel was, at the house of Jesse, sizing up all of Jesse's sons & he came to a young man named Eliab. Evidently, he really *looked* the part. Because as soon as Samuel saw him, he cried, "Surely the LORD'S anointed is before Him!" You know, "I've found the guy! He checks every box!" & In that moment God gave Samuel (& by way of application) you & me & all of humanity some invaluable insight. He said to him, "*Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.*"¹

But what I've discovered is not only does man look to the outward appearance of *others*. He tends to look to *his own* outward appearance & measure *himself* through outward ritual rather than inward reality. He has his list, does his deeds & tends to think God owes him based on the works he's *done* or the ritual he's *kept*. God addresses that in Isaiah 58.

Vs 1-3a

When you study the gospels you discover that Jesus wasn't a "beat around the bush" kind of a Guy. He didn't mince words, He didn't dance around the issue at hand, He wasn't afraid to address the elephant in the room. He was a "heart of the matter", "don't have time to play games" kind of Guy. Now, how many of you realize that God remains the same, yesterday, today & forever? He is the Lord (Malachi 3:6), He doesn't change. & What we discover (& we'll see it here as well) is that the heart of the matter always comes back to a matter of the heart.

¹ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (1 Sa 16:7). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But I find this fascinating. *God tells Isaiah, “Cry aloud, spare not; lift up your voice like a trumpet (sound off), tell My people their transgressions, & the house of Jacob their sins...” Btw, can I just say this wouldn’t have been (& still isn’t) the kind of preaching that was going to win friends & influence people ☺. Meaning, most generally, people don’t like having all their sins being pointed out & public attention drawn to them!

Especially if it’s a group of people who consider/claim or would purport themselves to be “religious”. Isaiah is doing the kind of thing that wins you a smear campaign! That causes you to be canceled & viciously criticized! It’s the kind of preaching that gains you a quick character assassination & sends people on the warpath to quickly dismantle your credibility! But God tells him, “Don’t hold back, let them have it w/both barrels!”

Imagine, “The Title of my message, ‘The Hypocrisy Of The Congregation Of Calvary Chapel Of Joplin’”. Then a systematic dismantling of how things *look* verses how they really are (if that were the case ☺). That’s not too unlike what God tells Isaiah to do!

Yet, in reality we *need* this don’t we? People *need to know* that they’re suffering from the fatal disease of sin (what it is that *constitutes* sin, *regardless* of what the law says or how man feels about it or anything else), that it will result in eternal separation from God & how they can find forgiveness & new life in J.C. *

But *what’s fascinating is that directly following God’s instructions to shine the flood light of truth on the sins of His people, He then proceeds to list all these (what would seem to be) wonderful works & things we’d love to see in *any* church!

He says, “They seek Me daily.” Sounds good! “And delight to know My ways.” Fantastic! “They ask of Me the ordinances of justice.” (That God would right the ways they’ve been wronged). “They take delight in approaching God.” – They’re fasting... We read these things & sort of scratch our heads... We think, “What’s wrong w/*any* of these things”?

Maybe nothing... maybe everything. & I don’t know how to talk about this w/out letting the cat out of the bag (& I basically already have in our time of introduction) so I’m just going to say it. Things looked really good outwardly, on the surface they seemed to *love* God & devote themselves *to* God. They carried themselves as a people w/a reputation of righteousness, & by all appearance’s things were *seemingly* great.

Remember the church of Ephesus, Revelation Ch 2? God said to them, “I know your works, your labor, your patience, & that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles & are not, & have found them liars...”

You've persevered & have patience, & have labored for My name's sake & have not become weary..." Hey, they were firing on all cylinders! Everything looked great, they were doing things that *were* great & they refused to quit, they just kept on keeping on! If you went to that church your 1st impression would've been, "Man, this place is great!" Then the Lord said this, **"Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love."**²

What does that mean? It means that these things were no longer the overflow of a love relationship *with* the Lord. They had become legalistic rituals *before* the Lord. Listen, right things, for the wrong reason, makes them wrong things. Someone probably needs to hear this (I know I need the reminder myself). *Ritualism is not righteousness. God does not want rituals, He wants relationship.* *

They ask the question, "Why have we fasted, & You haven't seen it? We afflict our souls & You take no notice?" (BTW God never appointed fast days for the nation. He did appoint *feast* days. They had 1 day [the Day of Atonement] in which they were to fast. Outside of that it was purely voluntary, nothing of that nature required at all). But they have this, "God, You owe us", "God, we've done our part, we feel like You're not doing Your part" frame of heart & mind. "We're fasting, we're doing all these things, but You're not answering our prayers!" "God, You're not fair! – We've worked really hard at being miserable! And for what?" ☺

(& As long as we're on this point let me just say, there will never come a time when we're able to obligate God in any way. God owes us nothing, & any good thing that comes to us *from* God is the result of *grace*, not *obligation*.)

But what Vs 2 reveals to us is the fact that * people can look, talk, act & even delight in the *things* of God & still not be the *people* of God. Just having good moral conduct, being conservative in your convictions, being able to go through the motions in a religious environment doesn't make anyone right w/God. We can go through outward acts & not be rendering inward obedience. & Here's the bottom line take home of Vs 2-3. **God knows what's really going on. He knows when you're genuinely seeking Him & when you're simply trying to go through motions that you hope will somehow or in some way pacify Him.** * He begins to tip His hand in Vs 2 when He says that they delight to know His ways "As" a nation that did righteousness. They were going through the motions as a righteousness nation would, but it wasn't the result of relationship, it was ritualism... What then *was* really going on?

² [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Re 2:4). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Vs 3b-5

Perhaps you'll remember what we read in Isaiah 29, "*...these people draw near with their mouths And honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me,*"³

*Listen, you can bow your *head* before God all you want, but if you don't bow your *heart* it's not going to make a bit of difference.

God is saying, "You're pointing out ritual, I'm going to point out reality." He says, "In the day of your fast you find pleasure..." What's the point of fasting? It's to deny the flesh, to focus the things of the Spirit. To seek the Lord, pray & worship, set your heart & mind on the things of God... But if you're fasting, & to take your mind off the hunger or to make it a little easier you're watching a movie, or spending time on your social media app of choice, or watching some sporting event, shopping online or looking for a great meme to share later, or *whatever*... You're nullifying the whole point of the fast! You're starving the flesh *physically* yet feeding it (giving it pleasure) *simultaneously*. *

He says, "You're still ripping off your employees, you're fasting for selfish reasons. 'God I need help to win this debate' & you're fighting w/others..." Guys, fasting & fighting don't go together! But how common is it for families to walk out of a church service, hop in the car & proceed to fight & argue all the way home!

Here's what the Lord is leading up to. Our time spent seeking *Him* should have a direct impact on how we treat *others*. True godliness affects our relationships... He says, "You're not to fast anymore as you do this day (like you are now), to make your voice heard on high (to try & get something from God, like rubbing a Genie's bottle or something, obligating God through empty rituals).

Vs 5

The essence here is, instead of making a show & putting on a display that makes you all filthy on the outside, how about you focus on what's needed to be clean on the inside. Repentance, not ritual... Jesus talked about this in His Sermon on the Mount. He said, "*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. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 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.*"⁴

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Is 29:13]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Mt 6:16-18]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

The Pharisees would go around w/these long faces, head hanging down, “Oh wow, they’re really spiritual, look at them, they must be fasting... Man I wish I could be like that.” It was an empty ritual meant to garner to the praise & adoration of man.

& It’s not that God is down on fasting. He’s not. He’s down on a hollow empty show w/no true spiritual substance behind it. *If you’re spending time seeking the Lord & the people around you are still being beaten up rather than built up, there’s a problem.

You’re coming to church, you’re doing the things (giving an offering, serving here & there) but you still have no filter on your mouth, exercise no self-control, you’re dishonest in your business dealings, immoral socially... You want to know why God doesn’t seem to hear your prayers? You’re dotting “I’s”, you’re crossing “t’s”, you’re engaging in empty religious ritual, not pursuing a relationship w/God from the heart... Because it’s impossible to honor God from the heart & that not affect our relationship w/others...*

Vs 6-7

Let me summarize this for you, “Kindness Matters”! At the risk of redundancy, being right w/God involves being right w/others! Don’t oppress others, encourage & assist others! It’s as if God is saying, “How about instead of trying to look *spiritual*, you stop *sinning!*”

We’ll see in Vs 9 where God says, “Stop pointing the finger, stop gossiping, watch your mouth, stop speaking wickedness!” Again, let’s not focus on being afflicted outwardly, let’s focus on being clean inwardly! – *I wonder how many churches today that if God spoke to them directly; He would say something to the effect of, “Listen, just knock it off. Quit going through these motions, you’re not drawing near to Me, you’re not leading lives pleasing to Me, there’s bitterness in your heart, gossip spews from your lips... just stop pretending!”

He says, “If you want to be pleasing to me, then loose the bonds of wickedness.” & Of course, this could’ve had to do w/how they were treating one another physically, but I also believe it can apply to the principle of setting people free from the bondage of wickedness... Meaning, you have a message that will set people free from the bonds of wickedness! It’s called the *gospel!* When’s the last time you shared the gospel w/anybody? That you allowed God to use your life in a way that set someone free from the bondage of sin & wickedness? (& This isn’t condemnation, but perhaps a healthy exhortation, be intentional about sharing the hope of salvation by grace through faith in J.C.)*

But again, if you want to be right w/God, you can’t act wickedly toward others.

John said that like this, *"If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also."*⁵ Don't be ripping people off, don't treat others harshly or unfairly.

& It's not only about *not* doing something wrong, it's about actively *doing* something right. "Share your bread w/the hungry..." Don't just withhold from *yourself*, actively *bless* someone in need. Do an act of kindness for someone, love them in a tangible way. Let them see & experience God's love for *them* through *your life*. Set the captives free...

"Man, that piece of cake looks good. But I'm fasting today, I'll enjoy it tomorrow." That's not necessarily bad. But what if instead you said, "That piece of cake would be delicious. Not only will I fast from it today, I'm going to give to someone else that they might be blessed." See the difference? One denies self, the other turns the self-denial into an opportunity to actually serve someone else...

Here's the idea; when you have a heart for God, you'll have a heart for others as well.

Vs 8-12

You see? God *wanted* to answer them, to respond to them, but their meaningless ritualism (religion) actually prevented it. God wants to manifest His glory, shine through us, be a blessing & bless others through us... but so often (although we go to church) the way we lead our lives actually prevents that.

God says, "If you'll walk in love, deny yourself & be a blessing to others... you'll lead a life filled w/light, healing/wholeness, righteousness will go before you (people will know that kind of genuinely godly individual you are) & My glory will follow after you."

(Righteousness will go before you, & as you move forward God will have your back). "Then you shall call, & the Lord will answer. You shall cry, & He will say, 'Here I am'".

"The Lord will guide you continually & satisfy your soul in drought & strengthen your bones..." God will strengthen your inner man & satisfy you in way that quite frankly is impossible for the *superficial* follower of God to even know.

"You shall be like a watered garden, & like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail." You'll lead a fruitful life & when people come to you; they'll be refreshed. Remember what Jesus said? *"He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."*⁶ The Holy Spirit flowing into/out through you, refreshing the inner man of others around you.

⁵ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Jn 4:20-21). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁶ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Jn 7:38). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

In Vs 12 he speaks of building, raising up foundations (of many generations), repairing & restoring. Things will be getting done for the kingdom of God through your life. *Think about the broken world we live in today... Any direction you look there are breaches, broken hearts, broken homes, broken lives. God wants to use you to bring repair, restoration, to lay foundations in people's lives that will carry through to subsequent generations... Don't you want that? I want my life to have a productive value for the kingdom of God. I want to invest into others the things that God has invested & entrusted into me. I don't want to just bury it & give it back, I want God to have an incredible R.O.I. (return on investment) when it comes to my life (& when it comes to your life as well). Lay hold of that for which Christ has laid hold of you...*

Vs 13-14

We've spoken recently of the fact that God gave the Sabbath to the nation of Israel as a sign of His covenant w/them. It's not a commandment for the church. We find our rest in the finished work of J.C. – But the application remains, that we're to honor God, that we're to understand seeking Him as a delight, not a drudgery. That we're lead our lives *His way* rather than seeking our own way. Close

* Listen, at the end of it all, God is saying, "Not religion, not empty rituals... but a meaningful love relationship. Lead a life that's set apart to Me, that seeks to honor Me. It'll lead to blessing, to victory..." & Realize that a heart/life that's right w/God will lead to kindness & active intentional love toward others. (Humility before God & ministry to others).

One day a lawyer, asked Jesus a question, testing Him. He said, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?" *"Jesus said to him, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."*⁷ That's Isaiah 58. Love God, love others, wait & watch how God will bless *your* life, & bless others *through* your life. *

Prayer Points

Father we want to be those who honor You, love You & serve You from the heart. Guard us from rituals, religious routines void of a heart that's truly seeking You. Have Your way *in* us, bless others *through* us & be glorified by our lives.

⁷ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Mt 22:37-40). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

It starts with total surrender. Turning from your ways, trusting in Him & His ways for your life. God's not willing/wanting that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Believe on the Lord J.C. & you will be saved.