

ASTONISHED prt 13

Matthew 6:16–18

MPS: Man's recognition fades but our Father's reward is forever.

INTRO:

We are in a series on Jesus sermon on the mount where He is teaching kingdom principles

- The crowds were astonished, that's why we named this series Astonished – we want that too
- We are in the section where Jesus says on 3 occasions, WHEN YOU... (give, pray, fast)
- Today is about FASTING... WHEN YOU FAST.
- The big idea that is conveyed in all three of these is...

Man's recognition fades but our Father's reward is forever.

- We don't want to do the right things for the wrong reasons – we innately desire the Father's rewards and the Son tells us how to go about receiving them.

OPEN:

What is biblical fasting, are we expected to fast as Christian? Jesus says there are rewards for fasting with the right motives... what are those rewards? What can we expect when we fast? Can the Lord do something special in our lives through our fasting?

Vs 16 *“And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.*

- ‘When you fast’ not if you fast.
- **Matthew 9:14–15 (ESV) 14** *Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” 15 And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.*

What is fasting?

- Abstaining from food and/or water for a specified time for a specified spiritual purpose
- Fasting means hunger for God
- John Piper says, fasting is “the hungry handmaiden of prayer,” who “both reveals and remedies.”
- Fasting is an exclamation point at the end of your prayers
- Difference between abstinence of things and fasting from food

- Pharisees typically fasted on Mondays and Thursdays

Luke 18:9–13 (ESV) 9 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: **10** “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. **11** The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. **12** I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’

- **Hypocrite:** someone who “wears a mask;” they’re in “character;” not their true selves; putting on a fake personhood for personal gain
- Jesus has already used giving & praying as examples of common Jewish piety, and now FASTING as the third example of a common element of Jewish piety.
- Piety is the quality of being deeply religious, devout - typically shown through acts of worship, faith, and moral behavior. It implies a strong dedication to religious principles and dutiful respect for God.
- Jesus doesn’t say stop doing these acts... He is correcting the motives for practicing them.
- In other words, the religious were doing the right things with the wrong motives – Jesus wants to make sure we get what our motives should be for our spiritual practices.
- *for they disfigure their faces ...* This didn’t mean self-mutilation or extreme distortion. Instead, it referred to deliberate neglect and exaggeration of a sorrowful appearance so everyone would notice their fasting
 - **Unwashed and unanointed faces** — Normal Jewish custom included washing the face and anointing the head with oil (a simple cosmetic and refreshment, like lotion or perfume). They skipped this to look dirty, unkempt, and haggard.
 - **Gloomy/somber/sad countenance** — They walked around with long faces, drooping expressions, and possibly unkempt hair or ashes on the head (a common sign of mourning or repentance).
 - **The goal:** To broadcast, “Look how holy and self-denying I am! I’m suffering for God!” So people would admire their piety and devotion. *that their fasting may be seen by others*
- The **reward** for those who don’t do it for the Lord is that they lost a couple pounds.

What would be an example of people doing this in today’s time?
ILL: SM Post image.

Vs 17 *But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,*

In 1st-century Jewish culture, these were everyday acts of basic hygiene and courtesy:

- People washed their faces and hands regularly.
- Anointing with oil was the standard way men and women freshened up — it kept hair from looking dry/dusty, smelled pleasant, and was a sign of joy and normal life (like putting on deodorant or cologne today).
- In other words, when you fast - Just act normal

Vs 18 *that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

- This doesn't mean you can never tell someone you are fasting – remember it is the motive. If no one ever finds out you fasted, then that is good.
- Jesus doesn't say stop fasting on Mondays and Thursdays – EVERYONE knows you will be, but he said, don't broadcast it to get man's recognition.
- One reward of our Father when fasting is that it becomes a means to defeat temptation and sin.
- If I'm used to saying 'no' to my hungry flesh, then I will most likely overcome my flesh when tempted to sin when those times come.

How do I fast?

- Read the fasting guide
- 24 hour fast is a great place to start

What are the rewards?

- Since Jesus is getting to the heart/purpose of fasting, He does not go into application of fasting or what happens when we fast (the rewards).
- But, we can go to other parts of Scripture to find that out – Isaiah 58 is a great place to discover the reward of fasting.
- This was written to the Jewish people who had returned from Babylonian exile around 539 BC. They had come back to a ruined Jerusalem, rebuilt the temple (though it wasn't as glorious as Solomon's), and resumed religious practices like fasting and Sabbath-keeping. But life was still hard—economic struggles, poverty, and social division were rampant. The people were doing the external religious routines but living with the same

old sins: exploiting workers, fighting among themselves, ignoring the poor, and oppressing the vulnerable.

Isaiah 58:6–12 (ESV) 6 *“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? 7 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?”*

- The same people who disfigured their faces for applause were often the ones exploiting workers and ignoring the poor (see Isaiah 58). Jesus and Isaiah both expose the same problem: fasting that impresses people but grieves God.

1. He brings light into our darkness

Vs 8a *Then shall your light break forth like the dawn,*

2. He brings healing in our life

Vs 8b *and your healing shall spring up speedily;*

- Friend did a 3-day fast to break cig addiction

3. He gives us protection by His presence

Vs 8c *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.’*

4. He brings guidance

Vs 11a *And the LORD will guide you continually*

5. He will satisfy us in times of hardship

Vs 11b *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.*

6. He rebuilds us

Vs 12 *And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in.*

- Are there other places in Scripture that show us the Father’s reward that comes from fasting? YES. Here are a few more.

7. He will lead us in discerning God’s direction

Acts 13:2 *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.”*

- Jaye and I fasted and prayed for 2 weeks before planting GB – we needed to know what to do! We fasted and prayed and He answered – what a reward and you get to enjoy the reward as well.

8. He will give us grace through humility

Psa 35:13 I humbled myself with fasting;

James 4:6 “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Conclusion

9. He heightens His presence in our lives

Luke 5:33-35 *Then they said to Him, “Why do the disciples of John fast often and make prayers, and likewise those of the Pharisees, but Yours eat and drink?”³⁴ And He said to them, “Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them?³⁵ But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast in those days.”*

- Prayer and fasting unleashes God’s rewards – namely Himself and all He brings through His presence.

Matthew 9:14–15 (ESV) 14 *Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” 15* *And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.*

- Jesus came to us, practiced this discipline, lived perfectly, then had to go away via his substitutionary death, grave obliterating resurrection and the glorious ascension.
- Having salvation and the presence of God forever is not via religious piety – remember the pharisee and tax collector?

Luke 18:13 *But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’*

Luke 18:14 (ESV) 14 *I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.*"

- We have HIM when we humble ourselves, confess we are sinners, and ask for his mercy.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUPS:

1. Jesus warns us against fasting like the hypocrites who 'disfigure their faces' so others will notice their spirituality. In our culture today, what are some modern ways we might be tempted to 'disfigure our faces' or broadcast our spiritual disciplines (fasting, prayer, giving, etc.)? Why is it so tempting to do the right things for the wrong reasons,
2. Isaiah 58 shows us that God's favorite kind of fasting is not just skipping meals, but actively loosening chains of injustice, feeding the hungry, and caring for the oppressed. Looking at the list of rewards in Isaiah 58 and the other verses we studied (light, healing, guidance, God's presence, etc.), which reward stands out to you most right now, and why?

A Simple Guide to Understand and Practice Fasting

*“Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!”
Psalm 34:8*

As we take time to pray, we would also like to encourage you to consider taking time to fast. Many of us have either rarely or never participated in a fast and thus have various questions about what fasting involves and why it is important. While Jesus never commanded us to fast, he clearly expected his followers to fast (*Matthew 6:16; 9:15*). Fasting was also a vital part of the early church (*Acts 13:2-3*).

The fundamental purpose of fasting is to seek God. Jesus warned against improper motives for fasting (*Matt. 6:16-18*) and we would do well to remember that success in prayer, being filled with spiritual insight or power, or even physical benefits are not the main reason(s) that we fast.

We fast because we want God. Fasting is a central expression of our hunger for God. Fasting is an intentional decision to abstain from the nourishment of this world in order to feast on the nourishment of God alone (*Matt. 4:4*). When we fast, we truly feast on God’s Word and God’s presence in a way that reminds us of His sufficiency and satisfaction.

Fasting also reveals to us the desires that control us. We have a tendency to cover up what is in our hearts with food and other good things, but when we fast these things come to the surface. God uncovers our pride, He exposes our self-sufficiency, and He reveals many areas of our life where we have compromised in our relationship with Him. He also brings to light our dependence on His presence and His power to accomplish His purposes in our lives (*John 4:31-34*).

So how do you fast? It’s not necessary to jump immediately into a 30-day journey with no food; instead, begin slowly! You might start with a meal or two and progress to a day or more from there in the future. Drink plenty of water and fresh fruit juices. If you have a medical condition that prevents you from fasting completely from food, consider eating much smaller portions of food than usual for a certain time and/or eating only a few simple foods (see *Daniel 1:12*). [HERE](#) is a more helpful and detailed guide to Greenbriar’s Corporate times of fasting.

As you fast, you will feel hunger pangs or discomfort at various points, but let this simply focus you on the inner attitude of your heart. If you are able, devote the time that you would normally eat or snack to prayer, meditation, or Bible study. Use the prayer guide offered by Greenbriar Church during Seek Week as a tool to let your heart meditate on the Scriptures and follow your meditating on God’s Word with prayer. In addition you could also focus on specific people or needs that God has placed on your heart and use that time to intercede for those people or needs.

In one sense, fasting is intended to be a personal and private observance hidden from others

(*Matt. 6:16-18*). At the same time, evidence of God's work in and through His people throughout history show that God's people have many times come together for a corporate and more public fast (*2 Chronicles 20; Esther 4; Joel 2; Acts 13*). Fasting together as followers of Christ is a way to express not only personally but corporately that we are dependent on God and hungry for more of Him.

May God use our time of prayer and fasting to open up the gates of Heaven and pour out His Spirit on His church so that we might prepare our hearts for drawing closer to Him and glimpse His great glory in our families, church families, community, country, and among the nations!

A Simple Way to Remember FASTing:

Focus on God.

Abstain from food.

Substitute the time with meditation, prayer and study.

Taste and see that the Lord is good. (*Psalm 34:8*)