

"The Danger of Hypocrisy"

Part 19

Matthew 6:1-18

Introduction: Last week in our study of the Sermon on the Mount we began to look at a subject that Jesus addressed very briefly in Matthew 6:16-18.

Notice Matthew 6:16-18

The subject is "fasting" and in these 3 verses Jesus really does not tell us much about "fasting" because His focus here is on the danger of hypocrisy during "fasting". So these 3 verses raise a question to us who are of the body of Christ today, "Is "fasting" to be a part of our lives today?"

There are a couple of verses that will help us to understand the answer to that question if we look closely at the words within the verses.

Notice Matthew 6:16

The second word in the verse helps us to understand that Jesus assumed that His disciples would fast as subjects of His kingdom. Therefore, since we are subjects of His kingdom we can be safe in saying that fasting should be a part of our lives.

But this still does not tell us much about the subject of fasting. We know that to fast is to abstain from food but when should a person fast and what is the reason behind the fast?

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Jesus gives to us some insight into fasting when He spoke with the disciples of John the Baptist. In these verses we see that fasting must be connected with the proper attitude.

Matthew 9:14-15

¹⁴ Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?

¹⁵ And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.

These verses are so important when it comes to understanding the attitude which always is connected with fasting. The attitude is really twofold:

- a. **Sorrow**
- b. **Longing**

When John's disciples asked Jesus why His disciples did not fast He explained there was no reason for sorrow but there would be when He was gone and then they would fast. So from this we can understand that fasting is connected with sorrow and with longing because the disciples would long to be with Him once more.

Therefore, the proper attitude for fasting is sorrow and longing. Now when I understand this I also understand that there is a time for fasting. For believers to get together and say they are going to fast without the proper attitude is not Biblical fasting.

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Today many people practice fasting during what is known as "Lent". There is absolutely no spiritual value in "Lent" and that practice of fasting is not Biblical. Let us also remember that fasting does not make us more spiritual. Fasting was a regular practice of the religious leaders and their fasting was covered in hypocrisy.

Luke 18:9-12

⁹ And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

¹⁰ Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

¹¹ The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

*¹² **I fast twice in the week**, I give tithes of all that I possess.*

Last week we saw how there is only one time in the Bible when God commanded His people to fast and that was on the Day of Atonement when they were to confess their sins as the high priest offered the sacrifice for their sins.

Therefore we can conclude that fasting is completely voluntary but it must be done in the proper spirit.

When we stopped our study last week we were looking at the occasions for fasting in the life of the believer.

I. Occasions for Fasting

1. Sorrow

We looked at this in our previous study. As we search the Bible one of the occasions for fasting was a heart full of sorrow.

Nehemiah 1:1-4

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace,

² That Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem.

³ And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.

*⁴ And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and **fasted**, and prayed before the God of heaven,*

2. Fear

Let us step into the middle of a journey with Ezra and a group of people he is leading back from the Babylonian captivity. Now before he and those with him departed he rejected any military assistance from the king for their journey because he stood firm on the ground that God would protect them in their travels. But when they found themselves in the midst of the journey fear began to set in. Travel then was very dangerous for there were thieves and robbers waiting for unprotected people which they could prey upon.

Ezra 8:21-23

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21 Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.

22 For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him.

23 So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us.

When Ezra found himself in the middle of the journey the fear began to close in and to go back to the king and ask for a military escort Ezra felt would cast a shadow of doubt upon God's faithfulness and protection so they fasted and prayed. It was the fear which surrounded Ezra which became the occasion to fast. Food was far from their minds because their focus was upon reaching the throne of God and petitioning His protection.

From this we can see as we did last week that fasting is connected with the heart. When there is sorrow or fear in the heart and the spirit is right there will be no concern for food until the throne of God is reached.

Application:

I am sure that we have all been at this place in our lives. We see the storm clouds begin to build on the horizon and no matter how strong we think we are there is a wave of fear that begins to cover us. It can happen when a loved one is sick and you begin to fear what the end

result will be. At that time the thought of food is far from your mind and you just want to reach God on behalf of the one who is sick.

3. Brokenness

Another occasion for fasting which we find in the Bible is when someone is broken over their sin. I believe we see this in the conversion of Paul.

Acts 9:3-9

³ And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:

⁴ And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

⁵ And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

⁶ And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

⁷ And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.

⁸ And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.

*⁹ And he was three days without sight, and **neither did eat nor drink.***

Paul had been brought face to face with his sin and I believe that was the occasion for not eating or drinking.

Jonah 3:1-9

And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying,

² Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.

³ So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.

⁴ And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

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

⁶ For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

*⁷ And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, **Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water:***

*⁸ But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, **let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.***

⁹ Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?

This passage is very interesting. This is a pagan people who have set food aside because of their brokenness over sin. If that is the case

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with the unsaved people of Nineveh how much more should it be true of God's people who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit?

Let me show you another passage where fasting was a result of brokenness and it will shine some needed light on the church today.

Nehemiah 9:1-2

Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them.

² And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers.

In this prayer we can see the people were broken over their sins and the sins of the nation and their brokenness led them to fast as they sought the forgiveness of God for their sins and the sins of the nation.

Application:

When is the last time we were so broken over the sin of others that we could not eat or even consider food? There is a lack of compassion in the body of Christ today.

This goes back to what I said last week in the conclusion that we are getting to be desensitized in our society. We are exposed to so much that we begin to grow cold to what others are going through and what they are practicing.

4. Longing for knowledge.

This can be seen in the words of Daniel.

Daniel 9:1-3

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans;

² In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.

³ And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes:

As Daniel studied the Word he came to understand the captivity of Judah would be 70 years but he knew there was more and he wanted to know more of this revelation from God. Therefore he fasted, confessed his sins and prayed to know more of the revelation.

Daniel 9:20-27

²⁰ And whiles I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy mountain of my God;

²¹ Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation.

²² And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding.

²³ At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to shew thee; for thou art greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision.

²⁴ Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to

make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.

²⁵ Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.

²⁶ And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.

²⁷ And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.

Daniel had such a desire to know more of God's Word that he had no desire for food. Notice another time in Daniel's life he did the same thing.

Daniel 10:1-3

In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a thing was revealed unto Daniel, whose name was called Belteshazzar; and the thing was true, but the time appointed was long: and he understood the thing, and had understanding of the vision.

² In those days I Daniel was mourning three full weeks.

³ I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.

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Application:

If you do any Bible study you can relate to what Daniel went through. I have been into a study in preparation for Sunday or Wednesday and God begins to open up a passage. I can just see bits and pieces of the Truth in the passage and I just want to continue to dig until I understand what He is revealing. It may be lunch time or dinner time but that means nothing. I don't want to walk away from my study until I understand the Truth I am searching for.

Conclusion:

There is so much to be said here. First of all don't think if you give up food you will understand more of God's Word. That is not the point. **Fasting is not a means to an end.** In other words we don't fast to get something from God. Fasting is a revelation of the condition of the heart. When we are close to God and when our hearts are right fasting will be a part of our lives. But it is not something we will schedule to do but it will just happen when the proper occasion presents itself.