

Fasting is For Feasting

Matthew 6:16-18

Main Idea

Fasting is voluntarily and temporarily abstaining from something good to express humility before God and deepen hunger for God.

Overview

- **Context**
 - The overarching theme of Matthew 6:1-18 is to not practice your righteous acts to be seen by others
 - Jesus applies this teaching to giving, praying and fasting, but we can equally apply to the whole of our Christian lives
- **What is Fasting?**
 - Throughout Scripture “fasting”, strictly speaking, refers to voluntarily and temporarily abstaining from food for spiritual purposes.
 - We can broaden that definition to include abstinence from anything which is good in itself, we give it up for the sake of some spiritual purpose.
 - Notice the definition has two parts:
 - First, fasting is the absence of something legitimate
 - Second, fasting has the presence of spiritual purpose
 - Scripture lists numerous purposes for fasting; however, they could all be summed up by saying fasting expresses humility before God and deepens hunger for God
 - Fasting is feasting; feasting on all that God has given us in his Word (Mt. 4:4) and looking forward to the heavenly feast (Rv. 19:6-7)
- **How Should We Fast?**
 - We should fast because Jesus expect his disciples to fast
 - Notice the he says, “When you fast” not “If you fast” (cf. Mt. 9:14-15)
 - This comes in the context of Jesus saying “When you give” and “When you pray” which are normal Christian activities
 - We should fast humbly and intentionally
 - Humbly
 - We shouldn’t fast *to be* seen by others
 - It’s not seen to be seen by others; but it is sin to want to be seen by others
 - Absolute secrecy is not required, but a spirit of humility is
 - Intentionally
 - We should fast to be seen by our Father in Heaven
 - This is an act of faith, intestinally turning our hearts and minds toward the things of god
 - This seems to be best done by coupling fasting with prayer (cf. Luke 2:37; Acts 13:2-2; 14:23)
- **What is the Result of Fasting?**
 - Humbly, intentional fasting will be rewarded by our Father in Heaven

- With every craving of every fast, we turn our hearts toward God declaring that we would rather feast at His table in His kingdom of Heaven rather than feed on the finest delicacies of this world
- The reward of fasting is God himself

Questions

Discussion Starter: *Why do you think fasting is such a neglected topic in our culture?*

1. Read Matthew 6:1-18. What patterns do you see in Jesus' words in verses 1-18? What does this tell us about the main idea about this passage?
2. Why do you think Jesus applies this teaching specifically to giving, praying and fasting?
3. From Jesus words here in Matthew 6:16-18 and from Matthew 9:14-15 build a case that Christians should still fast? Why don't you think the Bible commands us to fast on a certain day or with specific frequency?
4. Read a some/all of the following verses to help determine the spiritual purposes of fasting:
 - a. Judges 20:26
 - b. Ezra 8:21-23
 - c. 2 Chronicles 20:1-4
 - d. Johan 3:6-9
 - e. Nehemiah 1:1-5
 - f. Acts 13:1-3
 - g. Acts 14:19-23
5. Read Isaiah 58:3-4. In this situation they were fasting, but with no physical purpose. Why is it important to understand fasting is *both* the absence of something good and the presence of a spiritual purpose?
6. What's wrong with the way the "hypocrites" were fasting? What does Jesus mean when he says, "They have received their reward?"
7. How does fasting tangibly express humility before God and deepen a hunger for God? How does fasting actually help you enjoy the gifts of God even more?
8. In verse 17, how does Jesus expect us to fast?
9. In verse 18, what is the reward for our fasting?
10. Share any personal experiences from fasting and what you've learned from them.

Accountability Question: *Where are you hungering more for the world than for God? OR Where has the Spirit given you an increasing hunger for the things of God?*