

You Shall Delight Yourself in the Lord, Part 1

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Bible Text: Isaiah 58:1-7

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Isaiah 58:1-7,

1 "Cry aloud, spare not; Lift up your voice like a trumpet; Tell My people their transgression, And the house of Jacob their sins. 2 Yet they seek Me daily, And delight to know My ways, As a nation that did righteousness, And did not forsake the ordinance of their God. They ask of Me the ordinances of justice; They take delight in approaching God. 3 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?' In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, And exploit all your laborers. 4 Indeed you fast for strife and debate, And to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, To make your voice heard on high. 5 Is it a fast that I have chosen, A day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, And to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, And an acceptable day to the LORD? 6 Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke? 7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the naked, that you cover him, And not hide yourself from your own flesh?"

Let us pray.

O heavenly Father God, great God, magnificent God, O God, we come before you today, Father, and we ask that you would open our ears to hear; that you would open our eyes to see your goodness' O God, that you would instruct your people, your body, on what is pleasing in your sight; that you would instruct us in fasting; that you would instruct us in loving our neighbor as ourselves; that you would instruct us how to love you more; O God, that you would help Mr. Brown as he comes now, that you would fill him to overflowing with your Holy Spirit, Father, that he would bring forth your word, Father, that he would make it plain; that we would understand what you expect of us; what you desire of us; O Father, God, that you would do these things for us; that you would have mercy; that you would show us grace. Father, we ask these things by the blood of Jesus. Amen.

In this chapter of Isaiah 58, we find again a loving God who is urgently appealing to his people. He is calling his people over and over again in this section of Isaiah to abandon everything that doesn't satisfy you. Go back to Isaiah 55, he cries out and he says, "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat." Then he says, "Why do you eat the things that are not bread? Why do you eat the things that don't satisfy?" This is Isaiah's urgent appeal and he's been contrasting the absolute disappointing and defiling matters of idolatry and comparing them with the beauty of the Lord and really his goodness to call us to abandon everything that does not satisfy. And here in this passage, God commands Isaiah to lift his voice like a trumpet to call us away from everything that deprives mankind of the blessings that God has created him for that are a result of God dwelling with man.

So these verses here, they really have their center in a phrase that you don't find until the end and it's in the form that God is calling for and that is, "You shall delight yourself in the Lord." And he's contrasting two kinds of delight. There is the kind of delight that we find in the first part of this text; and then there's the kind of delight that comes from really delighting in the Lord, finding all of your pleasure in him, finding all of your hope in him and delighting in the Lord.

So in Isaiah 58, in the first verses, God is identifying areas of misplaced delight because we often find ourselves with a kind of a delight but it's not much, and this is the question of this section in Isaiah. In the previous chapter, we saw that God was the high and lofty one and he inhabits eternity and that he dwells with men. You have this picture of the highness of God and then the profanity of man, but God dwells with man and what kind of man does he dwell with? He dwells with the humble and the contrite. He dwells with the broken man or the broken woman. He dwells with the one who sees his own sin and desires the holiness and the beauty of the Lord. Why? And we'll find out why at the end of this text in Isaiah 58: God desires his children to ride on the high hills of the earth. But they can't ride on the high hills of the earth unless they first see their sin; unless they hear the trumpet sound; unless they examine themselves to see what might not truly be delightful to their souls so that they could partake of his heavenly glory.

And what we find in Isaiah 58 is a picture of a people that are full of themselves and because of that, they have no room for God. They're filling themselves up with all kinds of other desires and they're actually acting like they're delighting in the Lord. You'll see this in the first three verses, but it's not a true delight. It wasn't delight in the Lord, it was delight in themselves and Isaiah 58 dissects a people who are full of themselves and he gives two illustrations of how you know if you're full of yourself or whether you're desiring the finest of wheat from heaven.

He first brings the illustration of fasting and then he brings the illustration of the celebration of the Sabbath and he's saying basically that by looking at these two kinds of things that you do in your life, you can know if you're just full of yourself or whether you really are feeding on the finest of wheat. So these first verses are a diagnostic for the people of God and these are very busy religious people, but they're busy for all the wrong

reasons and so the prophet Isaiah is telling the people of their transgression and the heart of the matter, I'll just tip you off to it, is stated in summary form in Zechariah 7:5, "Say to all the people of the land, and to the priests: 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months during those seventy years, did you really fast for Me - for Me? When you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink for yourselves?'" They are so full of themselves. He's talking about in the Babylonian captivity when the people of God reinitiated their practice of celebrating the Sabbath feast and he says, "Did you do it for me or did you do it for you?" That's the whole question of this entire chapter.

So here we are, we've met today on a Sabbath day. Why are we here? What will happen as a result of why we're here? It's such a critical matter and do you know what hangs in the balance? Delight. Delight in the Lord. Being fed. Being nourished. Being helped. Being healed. Being made rich from heaven. That's what's hanging in the balance of it all. So we've all come, probably many of us, from difficult and confusing weeks and what will this time be for us? Well, it will either be a time of one kind of delight or it will be a time of true delight, so I pray God will give that to us today.

You can see an outline in front of you, we've broken up this chapter into two sections. I'm calling today's sermon part 1, and next week, part 2. The illustration of fasting is the focus of part 1 and then the blessings that come as a result of truly delighting in God are spoken of in verses 8 through 14, and you find that very famous passage on the Sabbath day.

Okay, so let's jump into the text. Let's look at verse 1. First of all, there's a command from God to Isaiah to cry out against the transgressions of his people. Verse 1, "Cry aloud, spare not; Lift up your voice like a trumpet; Tell My people their transgression, And the house of Jacob their sins." So these words directed from God himself to Isaiah the prophet are a command for him to use his mouth, to use his voice literally to cry aloud with his throat with intensity, with vehemence. In other words, it's a message that he is commanded to declare in a loud way, in a highly distinctive and particular way. These verses are all connected as well to what we read in Isaiah 56:9-10 where there is this picture of the people of God and they're like sitting ducks and the beasts are going to come in and devour them and Isaiah is telling the people that their watchmen are like dumb dogs. They're blind. They don't bark. They're just lying down and loving slumber. They're not saying what they ought to say. They're not putting their finger in the wound. They're not talking about the sins of the people, but they are required to do that. Now Isaiah is being commanded to actually fulfill this in his own life.

So like this person in Isaiah 56:14 and 15, Isaiah is doing the same thing and he's being commanded to pinpoint the sins of the people. Why? Because you cannot know healing until you know your sin. Until you turn, you cannot know the river of delights, and God's design in this entire section is to turn his people's heads to the river of delights. There is enough water in the river of God and he's saying, "Turn to me. Trust in me. Feed upon me."

Notice the words that he uses here. There are three images that describe it. Cry out, and this is a term that speaks of using the full stretch of the voice, as if there are like thunderbolts coming from heaven. And regarding sin, bring the sin to light. Don't hide it. You know, one of the marks of our own corrupt hearts, one of the marks of the modern church, is that we want to hide sin. We don't want to bring it out. We don't want to talk about it. If you talk about it too much or if you talk about the wrong things, people will stop showing up because you'll be making them feel uncomfortable. God, though, has a different kind of church in mind where sin is actually brought to the surface. The people acknowledge the root of sin and the depth of it and the remedy of it. The people of God recognize that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. There is not a single holy person here, just a bunch of struggling people to get free of their sins and so one person's sins shouldn't be too surprising.

But all of this is to draw us back into the river of delights and one of the ways that this happens is by this crying out. He also says, "spare not." In other words, don't hold back because sin needs resistance and without a very clear confrontation of sin, hypocrisy will continue on in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ and God uses voices to destroy hypocrisy so that when the sins are pointed out, that hypocrisy dies in the church and as it continues to try to raise its ugly head, it dies again and again and again, dying a thousand deaths in the church because the voices are constantly speaking about it. It's the right thing for ministers to do. He's speaking of a vehement voice that's not afraid to speak and the question is: how much should we hold back when we're talking about sin?

Then he says "lift up your voice like a trumpet." Now he's using the terminology of volume. It's like a trumpet. It's appropriate to be loud and he uses the word "shofar," this loud Hebrew trumpet that was blown in the time of the feasts to gather the people and to declare the glory of God. It's a loud voice and it's reminiscent of this terminology of the watchman that we encountered in Isaiah 56 and also what the prophet Ezekiel spoke of in Ezekiel 33:3 when he speaks of the watchman and he says, "he sees the sword coming against the land and blows the trumpet to warn the people." He sees the sword. He sees the implications of the sin of the people and so he cries out. Why? To save them. To save them from the sword. To bring them to the river of delights. To walk them by the waters of life so that they would drink there and they would quit eating the things that are not food and drinking the things that aren't really drink that satisfies.

Then he says very specifically what Isaiah should cry out about, "Tell my people their transgression." That's the responsibility of shepherds and I just want to take this verse to encourage us together as a church: don't despise the person in the church or the preacher who loudly makes a commotion about the sins that exist in the church. It's actually the duty of shepherds to do that. There is a command from heaven and to neglect it would be to neglect the presence of God in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it hurts the church when we don't allow the conscience to be touched. This is one of the great sins of ministers, to be afraid to touch the consciences of the people who are gathered there and so ministers have to be very careful not to be manipulated by people, not to be afraid, threatened by anything, but to attempt to declare the glory of God.

You know, all of us know here how imperfectly the pastors declare the glory of God in this church and I think that has always been true of every shepherd who has ever lived and so you also have to have patience with your shepherds as well. Sometimes shepherds bark at wrong things. Sometimes they bark too much. Sometimes they bark too softly. Sometimes they bark too loud. This is why God has sent his Holy Spirit so that when the shepherds bark, the Spirit works and people cry out to God and say, "O Lord, is this me?" and then God works in that way. But as a church and as all churches do, there is always a need to learn how to respond to the cries of the shepherds who would bark and who would put their finger on the sins that exist in that time.

So I want to say two things: first of all, please listen to us; please listen, and on the other hand, have mercy upon us as well and cry out to God that the Holy Spirit would give you a sense of what is true about the matter. We are all under that Great Shepherd of the sheep and God has given us this help from voices that cry out.

Now, there are many things that ministers ought to be doing. They ought to be feeding the flock as it says in 1 Peter 5. They are to be comforting the flock as we read in 1 Thessalonians 5:14. We know that they don't only cry out, they often must be patient as it speaks of in 2 Timothy 4:2. We also know that in their crying out, they cannot be lording it over the congregation as it declares in 1 Peter 5:3. And they ought to be mature and gentle and not quarrelsome as we learn in 1 Timothy 3:2-4. We know that they cannot be brutal or angry or quick tempered as it says in Titus 1:5-9. It also means that they should wisely be willing to yield as it says in James 3:17, "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits."

This is how a shepherd both cries out and declares the transgressions of the people and at the same time fulfills what Isaiah spoke of at the end of chapter 40, "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd. He shall gather the lambs in his arms and carry them in his bosom and gently lead those that are with young." Think of the difficulty of doing all of these things well that I've just mentioned, to both cry out to the transgression on the one hand, to comfort with the other hand and to carry in your arms with both hands. You know, how does one do something like that? And yet that's the calling of a shepherd of God. There are many things that a shepherd should be. He should be gentle as you see in the pattern of Paul and Silas and Timothy in Thessalonica in 1 Thessalonians 2:7, "But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children." And not quarrelsome, as it says in 2 Timothy 2:24.

So here as God commands Isaiah to cry out for the transgressions of the people and to be very pointed about it and to lift his voice up and to speak it loudly and distinctively, at the same time he's not calling Isaiah to beat the sheep, but rather to feed them. At the same time, there's a wider context that's here. This is a direct command to Isaiah but in the context that we've seen and the flow of thought that Isaiah is presenting to us, these responsibilities are also for the people of God to perform with one another, that we cry out to one another as well. This is the whole matter of speaking the truth in love. This is how brothers and sisters operate together as true brothers and sisters. They speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs and they care for one another and they

speak to one another. After all, we are a kingdom of priests, all of us, the whole church is. We are the watchman, all of us together. All of us have a particular duty. While pastors have particular highly distinctive, well defined duties, there is a sense that many of these things ought to be operating as we deal with one another as well as we speak the truth in love.

So why? Why this command to cry out against transgression? Well, it's really for one reason: to deliver the people of God from what doesn't satisfy: to bring them to that river of delights so that they might find true satisfaction in Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ alone, the only place in which it can be found. So then the Lord turns from his admonition to Isaiah, to a description of the condition of the people. God is going to tell Isaiah what's happening so Isaiah is going to receive insight into the true condition of the people of God and this really forms what Isaiah is supposed to be crying out about. Now we get the content of what Isaiah is crying about and before we read this, I just want to say these things are written for our learning. These things happened in the past for us. That's what 1 Corinthians 10 says, these things happened so that we would avoid idolatry, because idolatry looks the same, pretty much, in any generation and so this passage is sitting before us to help us to examine ourselves to see if there's any kind of idolatry that they had here and, of course, it was the idolatry of the self.

So he speaks of their false profession in verse 2, "et they seek Me daily, And delight to know My ways, As a nation that did righteousness, And did not forsake the ordinance of their God. They ask of Me the ordinances of justice; They take delight in approaching God." Now, in verse 2, there is a very clear acknowledgment of their passion for religious life, for their profession of delight and desire. But the key to understanding this verse is in the phrase "as a nation," as it is in the King James and the New King James version, or "as if they were a nation that did righteousness," as the ESV translates it. So he's saying they're doing these things as if they were. They aren't really. It's just as if they were. They're pretending to be someone that they're not so they're doing all these things as if they were a nation of righteousness, but God is helping Isaiah to see through the sham, the smoke and the fire, to deliver them from the waters that are poisoning them.

So he's exposing their religious shows. They act like they're delighted. They act like they're seeking the ordinances of justice. They're crying out, "Justice! Justice! Justice! Righteousness! Righteousness! Righteousness!" but it's not really the righteousness of God so here God is unmasking their outward appearances and he's correcting them and he's treated them like hypocrites and it is like a thunderbolt and it's what they need to hear. It's the way that they need to hear and they know but they don't have it in their hearts. They learn but they don't act. They enjoy discussing the theory and the practice as if it was on paper, but not the heart of the theory. Not the heart of the practice do they love. They just love to think about it. They love to think they delight in it.

It's a valid question for all of us: have we just been going through the motions in any of this and we sort of thought we were delighting in it but somehow we're not anymore? It can happen to a people and drift. You establish these patterns and then all of a sudden the pattern becomes the principle; the pattern becomes the life, not the life that inhabits the

pattern. This is what had happened to them and they did not genuinely delight in his ways, even though they appeared to do such a thing.

Now, Isaiah is bringing something out here that he has already brought out in chapter 1. He says, "What is the multitude of your sacrifices to me?" as he says in 1:11. He says, "I've had enough of your burnt sacrifices. Don't come. Don't bring them anymore. I'd rather you not show up than just show up like a zombie whose just going through the motions." He says that they appear to seek, they appear to be delighted, but they're drawing near to God with their lips but their hearts are far from him.

You know, this is often a problem among people that embrace reform theology. They love to debate doctrine and they'll debate doctrine until they're blue in the face but there's no love in their hearts. They're theology wonks, but the love of Jesus Christ somehow in the midst of all the discussions is suppressed. But do you what you find often in those young reform theology wonks? If they're really Christians, over time they'll realize what's happened to them and they'll recover the love of Jesus Christ again. That can happen. It's happened many times. I've seen it.

You know, this is just another revelation that you can have church membership and not be a member of Christ. That you can give your money away and not have treasures in heaven. You can have all the morality you can stand and not have a righteousness that is by faith. So that when you come into the church, your heart is just thinking about all these issues and Jesus Christ is gone. He's tiptoed out of your life and then when you come to church and if very many of those people gather, then you find Jesus Christ has tiptoed out of the church. Not that God is not omnipresent, I'm not saying that. I'm saying that the sense of the glory and the beauty of God, the hunger for God, the delight in God, is gone. You can put on sackcloth and look sad, but it doesn't really make any difference.

Then he gets more detailed in his analysis in verse 3. He really uncovers their true motivations in verse 3, "'Why have we fasted,' they say." Remember, this is God. God is speaking. "'Why have we fasted,' they say," God is hearing them. He's hearing the discussion in their minds, "'and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?'" Well, they're blind to their deadness and their hypocrisy. They can't even see it and they're not clear that they've been putting on a show and they're boasting in their outward appearances. You know, they're straining out a gnat and swallowing the camel. They're like the Pharisee in Luke 18:12 where he stands up and he says, "I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all that I get." You know, the Lord Jesus Christ said that, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heave but only those who do the will of my Father in heaven." He said, "Many will say to me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name? Cast out demons in your name? Done many wonders in your name?' And then I will say to him, 'I never knew you. I never knew you. Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.'" This is the condition that Isaiah is addressing here. They wanted a functional God. You get what you put in. He's like a slot machine, you push the buttons, you fast, you pray, but nothing is coming out. That's the whole deal because the chief end of their religion was to glorify themselves.

Then in the next phrase, God gives the reasons why their fasting is futile. In the middle of verse 3, the real reason they're fasting, he says, "In fact," now this is sort of the wake up call. Here's what it really is, "You say it's delight. You say it's passion. In fact, actually, it isn't." He says, "In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, And exploit all your laborers." Verse 4, "Indeed you fast for strife and debate, And to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, To make your voice heard on high." So there is this reality check, "In fact, you are not as you appear." Then he speaks of various reasons why they fast, why they do what they do, or actually while they're fasting, they're exploiting their laborers. They're unkind to people. There's no love in their hearts for people. They're not kind to their workers and in that economy maybe it was the people who worked in their house because people had household servants who worked in their houses. Or it could be on other kinds of scales. It could anyone who is doing something for you.

So while you're lifting up your hands and praising God and closing your eyes in the worship, you're actually mean to the other people who are helping you. Maybe if you're an employer, maybe it's your wife. It may be someone who is working so hard to be a blessing to you and you're not being very nice to her. I recall one time when I was dealing with something and Deborah, she came to me and she was really trying to encourage me as she does all the time, and she said something, I don't remember what it was, and I kind of kicked back at her, you know. She said, "Scott, don't beat the cheerleaders. Stop beating the cheerleaders, okay?" This is what happens. You come in, you're reading the Bible and you're so intent here in this church but you've been beating the cheerleaders. What's that all about? Well, that's what he's pinpointing here.

Not only exploiting the laborers but "for strife and debate." "You fast for strife and debate, And to strike with the fist of wickedness." Now, what does that mean? How do you fast for strife and debate and strike with the fist of wickedness? There are probably different ways that this can happen. Perhaps it was, as someone suggested when we were having men's Bible study on Tuesday, it was just to prove how holy they were. They just wanted to be so superior; just so righteous; so well put together. They're just doing everything, they're out there having family worship, they're doing what they're doing because they really are one-ups men. They just want to be superior. They just want to be so godly. They want everyone to know about it. You've got your sackcloth and you just want to make sure your sackcloth is dirtier than the next guy. It's had more dirt on it. You've got tears streaming down your face because you put a little dirt on them and now everybody can see it. It's spiritual pomposity, trying to prove something. Or it could be just trying to win; trying to dominate others. Using your fasting for your selfish ends; to be first; to get your way; to put yourself in the position to dominate. There is someone against you or something happening and you fast really because you just love yourself. You want them dead and you on top. That's why you're fasting and you're fasting out of anger. You want to destroy them and so you fast and you pray these prayers, "O God, destroy my enemies," and you're fasting against them. It's fasting for success, for your own glory.

I don't know how the Holy Spirit would be helping us understand this each individually in this church where we find ourselves doing things but for the wrong reason. Is it for love? Is it for the glory of God? Or for the glory of self? And I think there are so many levels we can think about this. We have three elders in this church. We have three deacons in this church. And this passage should cause all the elders and all the deacons to ask this question: why are you doing this? Why? And to let the Spirit of God to smoke out anything that contradicts it; to continue to make progress in purity and integrity; to love the Lord our God with all of our hearts and souls and minds and strengths; to deliver us from all the things that are hurting and harming us; to do what we do for the love of God and the love of the saints.

And it's for all of us as well, for every one of us who stand at the level ground at the foot of the cross. Why are we doing what we do? I've had to ask myself: why am I doing anything I'm doing? And I pray that all of us will sort of be sent through a dark night of the soul on that today, like right now; that we would be before God and we would be asking, "Why? Why am I doing this? Why did I show up here today? Why do I have the job I have? Why do I do the things I do? Is it for love? Is it for the delight of God?" That's the question.

The Lord Jesus Christ speaks of this so clearly. The parallel passage for this in its fulfillment and further explanation and exposition is in Matthew 6 where the Lord Jesus Christ, he speaks of fasting in Matthew 6. He talks about your charitable deeds in Matthew 6. He says, "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men to be seen by them, otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven." Then he turns to prayer in Matthew 6:5 and he says, "And when you pray, do not be as the hypocrites for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets that they may be seen by men." Then he speaks of fasting in verse 6 where he says, "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites with a sad countenance, for they love to disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting." He says that they do it to receive glory from men. So Jesus Christ is still dealing with this in his own day over 700 years later with the people of God and he's fulfilling it.

Then God rejects their fasting in verse 5. He explains what it really is. He tells them exactly what they're doing in verse 5 and he does this by asking kind of a mocking, incredulous, rhetorical question, "Is it a fast that I have chosen?" Is this what I asked you to do? "A day for a man to afflict his soul?" Is this it? And then he says, "Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush," to bow your head, whatever you do, is it just for the outward appearance? "And to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast?" All you're doing is you're laying out clothes and you're bowing your head. You're throwing dust. It's nothing. It's nothing to me and he's saying, "Is this what you call a fast?" No, it's not. He's just talking about they're going through the motions and he's hearkening back to Leviticus 16:29-30; it's the only place in Scripture where we really find fasting as some kind of requirement. It was on the Day of Atonement only and read that later on today, but fasting had a purpose, to make a man or a woman's voice heard on high, but here God is not hearing and the question really is: why are you doing this?

Why? That's the question and the Lord, he so desires to deliver them, to deliver them from these things that don't delight at all.

Then he gives instructions in verses 6 and 7 and he reveals the kind of fast that God chooses. He says, "Is this not the fast that I have chosen." Then he tells you what kind of fast he has chosen. Now, when I read this, I want you to try to somehow think on two levels. Maybe I should read it twice so you can think on one level and then another. But think on two levels: think of, first of all, your own sort of religious life; and second, think of Jesus Christ because in every single one of these in this list, you find the love of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ fulfilled these perfectly. Jesus Christ does all of these things all of the time for his people so on the one hand, consider both of these at the same time, that this is God's desire for us, but the Lord Jesus Christ is an embodiment of all of these things and you'll see the beauty of the Lord. You'll see what a kind and good Shepherd he is here. "Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the naked, that you cover him, And not hide yourself from your own flesh?"

Is this the fast of gaining for yourself? Is this the fast of strife? Is this the fast of exalting yourself and doing what you do to raise your reputation in the world? Not at all. It's a fast for love, the love of God for mankind. And in every one of these, we find such a beautiful calling for the Christian. I don't know how in human language you can explain the beauty of justice and love in the world any better than what's here in verses 6 and 7. You know, people today long for justice. We need justice. Now, this ordinance of justice which Isaiah calls, which is fasting and the Lord's Supper, and I think prayer is probably included in that. He uses this term "the ordinances of justice" and so he sent his Son to perfectly perform all of his ordinances of justice for the souls of the poor and the wretched and the naked and the blind.

So there are seven reasons why we ought to fast; seven things that Jesus Christ did; seven things that we ought to do with our fasting. First of all, for freedom from wickedness, to lose the bonds of wickedness. This has to do with getting free of wickedness in your life. Fasting to deal with wickedness. Wicked things, ways we have tied ourselves to the unprofitable and wicked things. It's not just for other people's wickedness but it's also for our own. It is for the wickedness of this world. It's appropriate to fast and pray for many, many things in this world, for the ending of so many of the soul destroying things that are happening in our world. I know many of us have fasted and prayed many times for the end of abortion in this land, so it's appropriate to pray for wickedness in the culture and it's appropriate to pray for your own wickedness. There are many different interpretations of this: to lose the bonds of wickedness. John Gill says "to dissolve the obligations of violent contracts." Another author says, he's referring to unjust bonds in the civil sense.

Then there is relief from burdens, that's the second of the seven. To undo the heavy burdens. To pray that God would lift the burden of sin, the burdens of unrighteousness in our own lives and in other's lives.

Then to remove oppression. To let the oppressed go free, that you break every yoke. And I think we should take this both literally and figuratively. There are some who are oppressed and need to be relieved from oppression and how would God use us to lift our voices for those who are being oppressed in different ways. God has his people in the world to cry out against oppression whenever they see it and it's for all of us to do that together so that we're not an oppressive people.

Then to share our food, number 4. "Is it not to share your bread with the hungry?"

Then fifthly, to bring in the poor, "And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out." He's talking about providing lodging for those who need it, being poor and thrown out of their accommodations. Here's a problem: when people are like this, when people are poor, often there's a reason and so often Christians don't want to bring them into their house because they're afraid. Maybe we should fast and pray that God would give her a greater sense of wisdom about it.

To clothe the naked, number 6, "When you see the naked, that you cover him." For clothing, for various needs that maybe his lifestyle has deprived him of.

Then to take care of your own family, "And not hide yourself from your own flesh." You know, often because of broken relationships in families through offenses, divorce, different things like that, nobody takes care of family anymore. It's one of the great tragedies of our times. When you have a broken down family, you have all kinds of people who don't have care. There is nobody to care for them. Right now in my generation, there's nobody to care for them because they busted up every moral category and now it just has dissolved care in the culture. Who is going to take care of all these old people of whom I am chief? Well, my family is going to take care of me. I'm throwing myself on their doorstep. Well, often because of offenses, families don't take care of each other, but the Lord is so clear about it. In 1 Timothy 5:8 he says, "If anyone does not provide for his own, he's worse than an unbeliever, especially for those of his own household." He has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. I think one thing that means is don't let your offenses get in the way of taking care of your family.

You know, there are so many examples of fasting in Scripture. I'm just going to really quickly give you ten of them just to consider because as we're on this whole subject of fasting, really just for this Sunday, I thought it would be helpful just to give some other examples in Scripture.

The first is David in the Psalms and write down Psalm 109:24 and you'll read about how David prays out of his despair from the pressure of his enemies. In Psalm 69:10-20, David prays for the nearness of God in a very difficult time. In Psalm 35:13-15, David is actually fasting for his enemies. Not against his enemies. He says, "As for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth. I humbled myself with fasting." His enemies were sick and he fasted for the blessing of his enemies. Have you ever done that? That's the opposite of fasting for strife and contention.

Here's another example: in Joel 2:15, Joel calls for a fast in the face of impending judgment the day of the Lord.

Number 3: in Esther 4:15-17, Esther asks Mordecai to call for a fast among the Jews and she says, "If I perish, I perish."

Number 4: in Nehemiah 9:1-3, there is fasting for repentance and rededication to the Lord. These are all godly and acceptable reasons to fast.

The next one, number 5: in Luke 2:37 we read about Anna who served God with fastings and prayers night and day in the temple. In Matthew 6, Jesus assumes that people will be fasting. He says, "When you fast, don't put on a sad face." In Matthew 9, the Pharisees ask why Jesus' disciples don't fast. In Acts 13, we see how the church fasted before they laid hands on Paul and Barnabas. In Acts 14:21-23, the apostles employed fasting and prayer when they were appointing elders in every city. In 1 Corinthians 7:4-6, husbands and wives are fasting and praying, dedicating time. In Matthew 17:18-20, the Lord Jesus Christ was dealing with his disciples who could not cast a demon out of a boy and he said, "This kind doesn't come out except by prayer and fasting." They just hadn't been fasting. It wasn't, "Hey, fast right now and the demon will come out." No, you haven't had a lifestyle of prayer and fasting.

So there it is, part 1, delighting yourself in the Lord. True delight. Finding yourself being delivered from the things that don't delight. Now, as we go on, you'll see in the next verse is the beginning of many promised blessings and then the final example of the Sabbath itself. Delighting yourself in the Lord. Maybe you could divide this according to the Ten Commandments. This first part is about love for man. You fast because you love the poor and the downtrodden. You love your neighbor as yourself. You don't love yourself so much. Then the second part on the Sabbath has to do with loving God. You celebrate the Sabbath. You delight in him and you regard him as your greatest delight.

Now, perhaps in application a New Testament illustration of the problem that God identifies with fasting and keeping the Sabbath can be illustrated with Jesus in his conversation with Peter at the end of Jesus' ministry where he asked Peter three times, "Do you love me?" Do you love me? In other words, "Why would you do all this?" And he says, "If you love me, then tend my lambs." I think this is consistent with the whole teaching of Scripture and the entire purpose of the law of God. It's a law of love that God desires to create a people like Peter who will love him and they will tend his lambs. They will love him and they will keep his commands. They will hear from the Apostle Paul that the goal of our instruction is love. That in all of our religious activities we would remember one element of what the heart of it is and that is to love one another. Our religious observances like the one we have today is designed for love and that means that we fast for one another and we're not just throwing sackcloth around and trying to look holier than the other person, but that our hearts are delighting in what is truly delightful, the Lord our God. Love from a pure heart.

You know, Isaiah is going to continue to talk about this and when you get to chapter 66, in the first two verses you have very similar language than what we've heard before. Remember in the previous chapter the Lord said, "I live in the high and the holy place. I inhabit eternity but I dwell with men and who do I dwell with? I dwell with the humble and the contrite. I dwell with them." Then in 66 he says, "Thus says the Lord, heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool." Then he says, "But on this one I will look, on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit and who trembles at my word." This is the picture of the person who loses his life for Christ's sake and he enters into an understanding that all his lifelong he's been called by God to remove the wounds, to heal the wounds, of his selfishness and to create a church full of love, not a church that is involved in all of its strivings for self-exaltation, but it's delight is in the Lord.

So Isaiah 58 is standing in our way to help us to delight more than we ever have before by, first of all, crying out against any of our transgressions in any of these matters. And I pray that today would be a good day to consider: why am I doing what I'm doing? Why am I saying what I'm saying? Why am I fasting? Why am I praying? Why am I having family worship? Why am I doing what I'm doing? God is so kind to deliver us from all of our unprofitable and foolish ways and so God sends prophets like he did Isaiah for us today, to put the finger in the wound and then mark the transgression so that we can be free. Okay? Does that work?

Let's pray.

O Lord, Lord, we thank you that you tell us a story of our lives, you penetrate into the deepest recesses of our hearts. O God, I thank you that you so desire to remove the impurities of our lives. There are many in my heart, in my life, in all of ours and I pray that you would turn us today toward your love. Amen.