

Matthew 6:16-18

Introduction

I. “And when you fast”

A. Fasting seems “suspicious”

B. And yet Jesus puts “And when you fast” in the same list with “And when you _____.”

C. Leviticus 16:29 “And it shall be a statute to you forever that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall **afflict** yourselves and shall do no work, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you.

1. The only *required* fast in the Old Testament was once a year on the Day of _____.

2. “Afflict” was a word used for the practice of fasting and so it emphasizes the fact that fasting was a means of self-_____ (connected with the confession of sin).

3. *But* this was not the *only* goal of fasting!

4. On the day of their fast, the people were actually seeking something *for* _____!

5. They were seeking for _____.

6. On the one hand, we have *physical self-denial*. On the other hand we have the enjoyment of a *spiritual* _____.

7. As God’s people fasted, it was meant to be a statement of _____.

a. 1 Kings 21:27-29 – And when Ahab heard those words, he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his flesh and fasted and lay in sackcloth and went about dejectedly. And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, “Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the disaster in his days; but in his son’s days I will bring the disaster upon his house.”

b. Nehemiah 9:1-2; 1 Samuel 7:6

c. Joel 1:14; 2:12 – Consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD... “Yet even now,” declares the LORD, “**return to me with all your heart, with fasting**, with weeping, and with mourning.”

D. Deuteronomy 8:2-3 – And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

1. God wanted His people to know that _____ was the ultimate sustainer of their lives – not _____, and not even the natural, God-given processes of growing or hunting food!
2. If this is true, then God Himself should be desired _____ all other physical necessities for life!

E. Matthew 4:1-4 – Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” But he answered, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

1. Jesus’ fast comes immediately after His baptism and immediately before He begins His public ministry.
2. I believe that Jesus fasts for 40 days as an expression of His willingness to spend His life _____ Himself in order to do the _____ of His Father.
3. To cut His fast short by turning stones into bread would have been a statement that He hungered _____ for bread and the satisfaction of His own needs than He did for the will of God. (Cf. Matthew 26:53 and 26:39, 42)
4. John 4:31-34 – Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, “Rabbi, eat.” But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” So the disciples said to one another, “Has anyone brought him something to eat?” Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.
5. Jesus fasted as an affirmation of the fact that He _____ most of all for the bread of His Father’s word and that He was _____ most of all with the food of His Father’s will!
6. See Matthew 4:11; cf. Philippians 2:5-11

F. The PROBLEM

1. Our _____ are all out of order. We long more for the _____ than for the _____.
 - a. Philippians 3:19 – Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.
 - b. Mark 4:19 – The cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.
 - c. 1 Corinthians 6:13 – “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food.”
2. Ephesians 4:22 – Put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through *deceitful desires*.

3. "The nature of this deceit is to lure us subtly into living for the fleeting pleasures of body and mind, rather than the spiritual delights of knowing and serving God. These pleasures start as *innocent* delights in food and reading and resting and playing, but then become ends in themselves and choke off spiritual hunger for God." (Piper)
4. "Fasting is an intensifier of spiritual desire. It is a faithful enemy of fatal bondage to innocent things." (Piper)
5. "Innocent" things = _____
6. 1 Corinthians 6:12 – "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be *enslaved* by anything.
7. We talk about the difficulties of being spiritually sensitive when all the while we are _____ ourselves with the "innocent" pleasures of body and mind – _____ our senses and _____ our appetite for God!
8. *When we fast, then* we may learn better to pray:
 - a. Psalm 73:25-26 – Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.
 - b. Philippians 3:8 – Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.

II. Matthew 6:16-18

- A. Jesus reminds us for the fourth time that we are not _____ to do _____ for the praise of men. (Compare 6:17 with Ecclesiastes 9:7-8)

- B. God knows that we crave _____. More than this, God knows that He made this craving to be satisfied only _____.
 1. Fasting doesn't merit anything from God (cf. Luke 18:12), but God has graciously *chosen* and *promised* to _____ and _____ the sincere fast of His people.
 2. The reward of our fast is ultimately a greater _____ in God.
 3. When we fast, let's be joyfully conscious that God *sees* us, *though we never merited His attention*.
 4. When we fast, let's be *amazed* that God has promised to reward us with *Himself* and a greater satisfaction in Him, *though we have never once in our lives earned even a moment of His favor*.

Teaching our Children

Q. On the Day of Atonement in the Old Testament what did God's people give up or do without?

A. On the Day of Atonement, God's people gave up food (they didn't eat).

Q. On the Day of Atonement, what did the people receive from God?

A. God's people received forgiveness and a renewed relationship (closeness) with God.

Q. Why do you think God's people didn't eat food on the day that they were looking for God's forgiveness?

A. They were saying that they were more *hungry* for God's forgiveness and "closeness" than they were for even their breakfast, lunch, and supper (see Scriptures under I. C. 7.)!

Read Deuteronomy 8:2-3 (I. D.)

Q. Why did God let His people be hungry and then rain bread out of heaven for them to eat?

A. God wanted His people to know that HE was really the one who kept them alive – not really the food.

God wanted His people to learn that they should hunger for Him even more than for food.

Read Matthew 4:1-4 (I. E.)

Q. Why did Jesus not eat food for 40 days?

A. Jesus was showing that He was willing to give up His own wishes and desires in order to do His Father's will.

Q. Why did Satan tempt Jesus to turn stones into bread? What would have been wrong with this?

A. If Jesus had turned the stones into bread, He would have shown that He was more "hungry" for His own needs to be met than for doing His Father's will.

Q. When Jesus fasted and when He refused to turn the stones into bread, what did He show us about what He was *most hungry* for?

A. Jesus showed us that His greatest hunger (and His greatest *satisfaction*) was to do His Father's will. (**READ John 4:31-34**; I. E. 4.)

Point out that in the end, God provided for Jesus' hunger for physical food (Matthew 4:11).

Discuss with your children how fasting (whether from food or from other "innocent" things) can help us to remember that our greatest hunger should be for God. (Review the points under I. F.; **especially the Scriptures under 1. and 8.**)