

Who Do You Say That I Am?

Seeing and Delighting in Jesus through an Expository Journey through the **Gospel of Matthew** 86- Hungering for God through Fasting- Part 7 Reasons to Fast in the New Covenant- Part 2

Church February 11, 2024

Matthew 9:14-17

14 Then the disciples of John came to Him, asking, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?"

15 And Jesus said to them, "The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.

16 But no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear results.

17 Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved."

*To the Glory of God the Father; God the Son;
and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

We are now in the middle of trying to determine if Fasting is the “**unshrunk cloth**” and the “**old wineskins**” of verses 16&17- as some teach. In other words, are the people who say that Fasting was an “Old Testament Truth” that has been made *obsolete* by the entrance of the New Covenant, teaching the Truth? Is it true that Fasting has gone the Way of Sabbath observance; going to the Temple in Jerusalem once a year; the Levitical Priesthood; Tithing; the Sanhedrin Court; animal Sacrifices; and the dietary and ceremonial Aspects of the Old Covenant?

And one of the main Reasons to *reject* such thinking is what Jesus Himself said at the end of verse 15:

... the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.

... but then last week- we also began to look at five *more* Reasons that the New Covenant teaches us that Fasting is still a viable “Means of Grace”:

1. New Testament Believers Should Fast for “*God to raise up Ministries that will Change the World*”
2. New Testament Believers Should Fast for “*Waters that do not Fail*”
3. New Testament Believers Should Fast for the “*Safety of the Little Ones*”
4. New Testament Believers Should Fast for the “*Father’s Reward*”
5. New Testament Believers Should Fast for the “*Return of Jesus*”

... and last week we looked at #1- so, let’s look at the others, and hopefully, we will finish this today:

2. New Testament Believers Should Fast for “Waters that do not Fail”

One of the things that we must always keep in mind- as we read and study the Bible- and as we strive to apply that Divine Truth to our daily Lives- is that Christianity is NOT new. Christianity is an *ancient* Religion that is now 24 years into its 3rd Millennia.

And one of the largest Criticisms I have with the Pentecostal; Charismatic; full Gospel; or new Apostolic Movement- is their *emphasis* on *individual* Reading; *individual* Study; *individual* Interpretation; and *individual* Application of the inspired; inerrant; and infallible Word of the living God. I DON’T see that as being “Spiritual” at all- but simply another Effort to “sanctify” human Arrogance; Pride and Self-righteousness.

Now I am NOT condemning us reading and studying the Bible by ourselves. That is NOT what I am talking about; and it is NOT what I am against. I want *everyone* to read and study the Bible. What I am *against* is doing all of that- and then coming to a Conclusion- completely *disconnected* from the past 2,000 years of Church History- as though Christianity started with us; and we are the *first* Generation of saved people who are trying to be “biblical”.

It did NOT and we are NOT. There have been literally tens of millions of saved and godly people, who read all of the *same* verses that we read today; and who studied all of the very *same* verses that we study today and who were used by God to teach God’s Word rightly and fully. And yet, for the most part- those godly Teachers are almost completely ignored by many within the modern Church. And that means the Gift that these men were- and the Wisdom they had- lays in the dustbin of History as though it has no connection to us.

That is a Mistake, dear friends, and one I hope I can convince you to NOT partake of. Because in ignoring these great Teachers and Preachers, who led the

Church through many Storms and Challenges- we are being disobedient to the Command of Scripture found in **Hebrews 13:7** that says,

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.

So, we are told in the Holy Bible to have “*Heroes of the Faith*”. And by using the phrase, “**considering the result of their conduct**”- we know that those Heroes are all dead- because it is not until a man is dead that we are able to consider the “**RESULT**” of his Conduct.

So, we are told to have Heroes of the Faith; who are all dead; and who did mighty Exploits for God; and who were used by God to lead and guide the Church in their Day. And the Holy Bible commands us to, “*Imitate their Faith*”.

But there is simply no Way to do this- unless we know these men. And there is no way we know these men- if we do not read about them and read what they wrote themselves. And that used to be both expensive and cumbersome. But with the invention of the Internet- we can download everything that a man wrote, who lived 17, 18, or even 1900 years ago for free or for very little Cost.

And in doing this- we will heed the Warning of the atheistic American Philosopher, George Santayana (16 December, 1863 - 26 September, 1952), who said,

“Those who cannot remember the Past are condemned to repeat it.”¹

You see, we are all “Fallen” and “Finite” “Creatures of the dust”- who DON’T know everything; and we CAN’T see clearly. As “Fallen”- we are NOT qualified to “*Self-diagnose*” our own spiritual “Problems”; nor to “*Self-prescribe*” our own spiritual “Medicine”. And as “Finite”- we have forgotten most of the Past; we are *extremely* limited in our Ability to see and comprehend the Present; and we have absolutely NO Knowledge of the Future.

And you would think that, because that is manifestly true- that Wisdom would dictate that we should all be very Humble; and to NOT consider our own limited Vision as being the ONLY Way to see and understand things.

Now I am NOT talking about; and I do NOT mean that we should not be rock-solid in our Convictions about the Bible. We should. What I mean and what I am trying to warn us against- is the Arrogance of being “Self-taught” as though that was the *highest* and the *best* Way to learn Christ. It is NOT and it has NEVER been.

¹ George Santayana; *Reason in Common Sense*; 1905; page 284; Volume 1; *The Life of Reason*.

In His Wisdom- God gave the Gift of the “Office of Teacher” to the Church that Jesus is building; and over which He alone is “Head”. And He gave that Gift to the people of His Church- 2,000 years ago. So, in the year, 2024AD- we have, at our disposal, literally hundreds of millions of pages of Teaching from literally tens of millions of Teachers to help us diagnose our spiritual Problems- correctly- biblical- and we are insulting God and neglecting this Gift- by not availing ourselves of it.

And so, if we are to be delivered from making horrible Mistakes- all “in the name of” trying- very sincerely- to be biblical- we MUST always look *backward* by consulting with those who came before us.

Now in the early Years when Christianity was young- the Church basically kept within what was called, the “Known World”- meaning the Borders of the Roman Empire. But the Roman Empire had grown to a point where it was almost impossible to manage. The Empire was divided between “East” and “West”- where the Capital city of the West was Rome and the Language of the *western* part of the Empire was “Latin”. The Capital city of the “East” was Constantinople; and the Language of the *eastern* part was “Greek”.

And the Church basically followed this Division. And so, the Leaders of the Christian Church in the *western* part of the Roman Empire did their Work in Latin; while the Leaders of the Church in the *eastern* part of the Empire did their Work for God in the Greek language.

And one of the greatest Preachers and Teachers of the first thousand years of the Christian Church was a man of the “East”- John Chrysostom, who was the Bishop of Constantinople back in the 4th Century. And I mention him here because he left us one of the most sweeping Statements about the Value of Fasting.

Now Chrysostom was known as an “Ascetic” in an “Age of Luxury” in Constantinople. And his humble Lifestyle offended the Emperor Arcadius and his wife Eudoxia so much- that this “golden-tongued” Preacher was eventually banished and died in AD 407. But as it pertained to Fasting- Chrysostom said,

“Fasting is, as much as lies in us, an imitation of the angels, a contemning of things present, a school of prayer, a nourishment of the soul, a bridle of the mouth, an abatement of concupiscence: it mollifies rage, it appeases anger, it calms the tempests of nature, it excites reason, it clears the mind, it disburdens the flesh, it chases away night-pollutions, it frees from headache. By fasting, a man gets composed behaviour (sic), free utterance of his tongue, right apprehensions of his mind.”

Now not all of these Accolades are true for everyone in every time of Fasting. And I am not going to tell you that Fasting will always afford you many earthly Comforts and Benefits as well as make your clothes whiter and brighter. For example, for many- Fasting might actually *cause* a Headache rather than take it away². But I want you to hear Chrysostom and the thousands of saints who have proved the Value of the Lord's Prophecy of **Matthew 9:15**:

... the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.

But then we are to temper the great Benefits of Fasting with what the Bible teaches are great Dangers of Fasting. And I'm NOT talking about *physical* Dangers- but rather *spiritual* ones. In other words, you can fast in a way that will be very *displeasing* to the Lord and spiritually *destructive* to yourself. And last week we heard Jesus warn us that this was so. So, for example, our Lord said this in **Matthew 6:16-18**:

16 "Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

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

18 so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

Now we have already learned that the correct Context of what Jesus was talking about here was the Hypocrisy of the Pharisees- who wanted *everyone* to know they were fasting. And when Jesus taught this during the Teaching that we now call, the "*Sermon on the Mount*"- those religious Frauds were standing right there- hearing what Jesus was saying about them. So, Jesus was telling genuinely saved Jews to NOT be like the Pharisees. No wonder they hated Him!

But the correct *Application* of what Jesus said in that Sermon- 2,000 years ago- is Good for us today. So, in order to prove our hearts are Right- Jesus said we should take Steps NOT to be seen by others- but only by God:

- Comb your hair
- Wash your face
- Do not put on a gloomy countenance

² One of the main reasons people have headaches and even vomit during the first few Days of a Fast- is because their bodies are going through a period of getting rid of all the chemicals and additives that are found in our Food.

Now why was Jesus concerned about our *outward* Appearance? I remember when I was first saved- during the so-called, “*Jesus Revolution*” of the late 1960’s an early 1970’s- great Attention was spent in teaching everybody that God doesn’t care at all about our outward Appearance. And so, everybody stopped caring; and it seemed that the dirtier you could be; and the sloppier you could be- was actually a Sign of great Humility- which God loved. So, if you were dirty; sloppy; and hadn’t taken a bath in awhile- evidently, they thought that gave you extra “bonus points” with God.

But Jesus was NOT talking about being sloppy; dirty; or unwashed. Jesus was talking about Fasting. And when you fast- *especially* when you are on a long, protracted Fast- your physical Body gets *weaker* and *weaker*. And one of the first Casualties of this Weakness- is you stop caring about your outward Appearance. You begin to slump over; and walk slowly; and look for a place to sit down. And the longer you fast- the more you don’t care about how you look.

So, Jesus said to care- in this Sense: you do NOT want to be as the unsaved Jewish Leaders of the 1st Century- who fasted for the express Purpose of “being seen by men”. So, they fasted so that people would notice them and think more highly of them. We are fasting to be seen *secretly* by God. But why? To obtain the Promise:

... your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

But here is another Danger from the opposite Direction. There are those who fast- and as they fast- they say- “*It doesn’t matter if God rewards me or not- I just love God and want to be closer to Him.*” First of all- that sounds very wonderful that somebody could have that kind of Purpose. But it completely ignores two things:

1. God promised to reward us as we fast in secret
2. Being drawn close to God- IS part of the Reward

So, to fast without expecting the Reward is NOT being biblical. Why? Because Jesus promised a Reward! But then to think that God drawing you close to Him is NOT part of the Reward- is simply NOT thinking clearly.

But around 600 years BEFORE Jesus taught us how to fast- God “moved” on the Prophet to teach about both the Danger as well as the Reward of Fasting. So, let’s read **Isaiah 58:1** together:

Cry loudly, do not hold back; Raise your voice like a trumpet, And declare to My people their transgression And to the house of Jacob their sins.

Here, God is telling this Prophet to declare to the Jewish people their Transgressions and Sins- so they might repent and enjoy God's Blessings.

But as we read verse 2- we see that the Jews of Isaiah's Day did NOT think they were sinning. They thought they were being blessed by God:

Isaiah 58:2

Yet they seek Me day by day and delight to know My ways, As a nation that has done righteousness And has not forsaken the ordinance of their God. They ask Me for just decisions, They delight in the nearness of God.

So, the Jews were in the horrible Position of being blind to their own Sins. They thought they were in Right Standing with God and they thought they had several good Qualities like:

- **They seek Me day by day**
- **And delight to know My ways**
- **As a nation that has done righteousness**
- **And has not forsaken the ordinance of their God**
- **They ask Me for just decisions**
- **They delight in the nearness of God**

In other words, these people worship as if they are a Righteous and Obedient Nation. But the Reality is- they aren't! But they have *deceived* themselves into believing that they really love God and desire His Ways.

So, this is the Horror of being deceived about your own spiritual Condition! This is when you are so Self-righteous- you see NOTHING Wrong about anything you are doing! And they were completely bewildered as to why God would tell Isaiah to show them their Sins and Transgressions.

So, these people *love* to come to worship God. They talk the "*Language of the Nearness of God*". They may even have moving religious and aesthetic Experiences in their Efforts to draw near to God. But something is terribly wrong. And they express their Frustration in verse 3, but they don't know what it is. In verse 3 they say to God,

Isaiah 58:3a

Why have we fasted and You do not see? Why have we humbled ourselves and You do not notice?'...

So, *something* is wrong; and they are fasting to make it right- but it isn't working. And that means something is *doubly* wrong. But then God, through the Prophet, begins to answer them by showing them that they fasted wrongly in verses 3b-5:

3 ... Behold, on the day of your fast you find your desire, And drive hard all your workers.

4 “Behold, you fast for contention and strife and to strike with a wicked fist. You do not fast like you do today to make your voice heard on high.

5 “Is it a fast like this which I choose, a day for a man to humble himself? Is it for bowing one's head like a reed And for spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bed? Will you call this a fast, even an acceptable day to the Lord?

So, because they were blind to their own Sins and Transgressions- they were also blind to the fact that their Fasts were carried out “in vain”. So, God begins to show them how their Fasts had very bad Particulars:

- **Behold, on the day of your fast you find your desire**
- **And drive hard all your workers**
- **you fast for contention and strife**
- **[you fast] to strike with a wicked fist**

So, here's the Issue. The ethical, practical, relational Accompaniments of Fasting (or genuine Worship in general)- are the real Tests of the Authenticity of both the Fasting and the Worship.

In other words, Monday is the Proof of Sunday. Because without Sunday being true- Monday would NOT have come. So, the fact that Monday has come- proves that Sunday was already there.

And so, God lists all the religious Forms of their Fasting: humbling or afflicting oneself (no food), bowing their Head like a reed; spreading out our sackcloth and ashes (**Psalm 35:13**). And then the Prophet lists the ethical Accompaniments of this Fasting: you go after your own Pleasure (in some other way besides eating), you drive hard all your workers; you become Irritable and Contentious; you stir up Strife; and even go so far as to get into fist- fights. And these are things that a normal Believer should not do. But these are things that a *fasting* Believer should *certainly* not do. But then God asks the 64,000 Question:

“Is this the fast that I choose?”

... “*You think I want you to fast like this?*” And the Answer was a resounding, “*No!*”

And so, one Principle about Fasting we can glean from this is: If God does not call you to Fast- your Fast is “in Vain”. But if you do not fast as God has prescribed- your Fast is also “in Vain”.

And God could have just left it at that. But in His Mercy- God shows them the Distinctions between a Fast that *honors* God and Fasting that is “in vain”:

Isaiah 58:6&7

6 “Is this not the fast which I choose, To loosen the bonds of wickedness, To undo the bands of the yoke, And to let the oppressed go free And break every yoke?

7 “Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry And bring the homeless poor into the house; When you see the naked, to cover him; And not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

... and then God showed them the Rewards of a Fast that honors God:

Isaiah 58:8-10

8 “Then your light will break out like the dawn, And your recovery will speedily spring forth; And your righteousness will go before you; The glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.

9 “Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; You will cry, and He will say, ‘Here I am.’ If you remove the yoke from your midst, The pointing of the finger and speaking wickedness,

10 And if you give yourself to the hungry And satisfy the desire of the afflicted, Then your light will rise in darkness And your gloom will become like midday.

Over and over the Lord said, “THEN” and after saying that- He gave amazing Promises:

- **Then your light will break out like the dawn**
- **[Then] your recovery will speedily spring forth**
- **[Then] your righteousness will go before you**
- **[Then] The glory of the Lord will be your rear guard**
- **Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; You will cry, and He will say, ‘Here I am. (If you remove the yoke from your midst, The pointing of the finger and speaking wickedness, And if you give yourself to the hungry And satisfy the desire of the afflicted)**

- **Then your light will rise in darkness**
- **[Then] your gloom will become like midday**

But when will all this happen? When we fast in this Way; and for these Reasons:

- **To loosen the bonds of wickedness**
- **To undo the bands of the yoke**
- **To let the oppressed go free**
- **[To] break every yoke?**
- **To divide your bread with the hungry**
- **[To] bring the homeless poor into the house**
- **When you see the naked, to cover him**
- **Not to hide yourself from your own flesh**

And if all that wasn't enough- God went on to say,

Isaiah 58:11

And the Lord will continually guide you, And satisfy your desire in scorched places, And give strength to your bones; And you will be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water whose waters do not fail.

Now again, the correct Context here is the Jews; under the Old Covenant; in the Nation of Israel. But because these Words are inspired; inerrant; and infallible- we are allowed to APPLY these Words to our own lives; under the New Covenant; in the Church!

And one of those Applications of the Promises of **Isaiah 58-** *especially* verse 11 that says,

And the Lord will continually guide you, And satisfy your desire in scorched places, And give strength to your bones; And you will be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water whose waters do not fail.

... had to do with a man named, Doug Nichols, who back in the early to mid-1990's- was the President of "*Action International Ministries*"³. Now in the Continent of Africa- there is a Nation called, "Rwanda". And during the 100 days between 7 April- 15 July, 1994- between 500,000- 800,000 men, women and children were hacked to death with machetes in what is now called, the "*Rwandan Genocide*".

³ www.actioninternational.org

And the primary Motivation for the Slaughter was that the Tusi Tribe was *dominated* by Christianity; while the Hutu Tribe was *dominated* by Islam. And when the President of the Country was assassinated- the Muslim Hutus used that as an Excuse to go through the Nation- killing as many Christians as they could find- in the most barbaric way possible. Many of these people were our Brothers and Sisters in Christ- and they died on their knees- praying. Also, during this Time anywhere between 250,000- 500,000 women were raped and tortured.

And while there were a few outcries against this horrific Violence- yet for the most part- not a single Nation stepped in to help- not even with food, water, and medical care! Meanwhile over in eastern Europe during this same period- around 10,000 Muslims had been killed by Serbians, who were enacting Vengeance on them from the Atrocities the Muslim had inflicted on the Serbs- over 100 years earlier. Every western developed Nation on earth- including the United States not only sent Food; Water; and medical Equipment- but the United States bombed the Serbians until the President could be captured and tried and killed.

But the poor people of Rwanda were slaughtered without Mercy- and not a single Nation on earth lifted their Finger to help. It is one of the bleakest Moments in our Nation's History during my Lifetime. I wrote a Letter to both my Congressman and Senator- begging them to help these poor people- but it fell on deaf ears.

Thanks be to God that "*Action International Ministries*" was right there- in Rwanda during the Genocide- preaching God's Word and offering Help. And when our Government refused to help- Action International contacted several Churches in the United States to send people to help them bury the dead- so that doctors and nurses could do what they were sent to do.

And when thanking those Churches for helping- Doug Nichols usually put a footnote at the bottom of his letter that said:

"In the last 'one minute' that it possibly took you to read this letter, 28 children died of malnutrition and diseases that could have been easily prevented. 1,667 die every single hour, 40,000 children die every day! Please pray with ACTION for more missionaries to take the Gospel to these children."

Now the Reason I bring this up this morning is that Doug Nichols was diagnosed with colon cancer in April of 1993- several months BEFORE he went to Rwanda. The doctors gave him a 30% chance of living after his Surgery and Colostomy and radiation Treatments. So, right as the Genocide was starting, a sick and dying man- with a Burden for God- got on a plane and went to Rwanda. His Jewish Oncologist said he would die in Rwanda. Doug told him that would be fine-

because he was going to Heaven anyway. The Oncologist called Doug's Surgeon to solicit help in talking Doug out of going to Rwanda. But the Surgeon was a Christian and told the Oncologist, *"It's okay, Doug's ready to die and go to Heaven!"*

Doug's Church back in the Philippines received word that Doug was going into a war-torn nation- with his Cancer and his Colostomy. But the saints in the Philippines were led to **Isaiah 58:7&8** and prayed those two verses for Doug:

7 "Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry And bring the homeless poor into the house; When you see the naked, to cover him; And not to hide yourself from your own flesh?"

8 "Then your light will break out like the dawn, And your recovery will speedily spring forth; And your righteousness will go before you; The glory of the Lord will be your rear guard."

... and they told Doug that they accompanied that Prayer with Fasting.

Once the Genocide was over- Doug called his Jewish Oncologist to let him know that he wasn't dead. And when he got back to the United States- the doctor put him through a battery of Tests which resulted in the Diagnosis: NED- *"No Evidence of Disease"*!

As of 2023- Doug Nichols and his Wife, Margaret are Members of Lake Tapps Community Church in Lake Tapps, Washington. And they are still very busy in missionary Work. But Doug credits the Faith and the Prayers and the Fasting of his Church in the Philippines as the Key to his Recovery. And he often relates this Promise from **Isaiah 58:11**:

And the Lord will continually guide you, And satisfy your desire in scorched places, And give strength to your bones; And you will be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water whose waters do not fail.

... as the Key to the success he had as the Muslim Terrorists were running all around him- killing, raping, and torturing as many people as they could.

But they never touched Doug. They never came to where the people of Action International were working- trying to stop the bleeding and praying with the dying.

I want to proclaim to you this morning that a trusting Relationship with Jesus is the way **Isaiah 58** will be *fulfilled* in your own Life. The Burden of this Chapter pervades the entire 3-1/2 year Ministry of Jesus; and I believe it should also pervade our Church and what we do for Jesus- as well.

Now please don't misunderstand me. True Fasting may be a God-blessed Means of overcoming Harshness at work; and Contentiousness at home; and Self-indulgence; and Anger. But please hear me- if Fasting ever crosses over and becomes a "religious Cloak" for *minimizing* or *hiding* those Sins and allowing them continue on and on- then not only is that Fast "in Vain"- but it is also Hypocrisy of the worst sort and offensive to God.

So, please understand that while Fasting is *commanded*- Fasting MUST be ordered by God in each individual Case. And if, by God's Grace, we can escape our own Wickedness; and Fast in accord with Divine Truth- ONE of the Promises from a God, who CANNOT lie is:

the Lord will continually guide you, And satisfy your desire in scorched places, And give strength to your bones; And you will be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water whose waters do not fail.

Amen. Let's pray.

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