

Providence Reformed Baptist Church - Sunday, August 15, 2021

Sermon Series: The Gospel of the Kingdom – Matthew

Message 44. When You Fast – Matthew 6:16-18

Pastor Phillip M Way

This third topic of personal righteousness, following Jesus' instruction on giving and praying, continues to reinforce the theme in Christ's teaching that when we obey God, while men may see, we do not do it for men to see. We practice righteousness for an audience of One, with a motive of love, obedience, and being pleasing to our Heavenly Father. "What our Lord says about fasting is equally applicable to the whole question of discipline in our spiritual life." – DM Lloyd-Jones

- I. Old Testament Fasting
 - A. Mourning Over Sin – Joel 2:12
 - 1. The Hebrew word means "repentant humbling of the soul before God"
 - 2. The People of Nineveh - Jonah 3:5
 - 3. As a Prelude to National Revival – 1 Sam. 7:6
 - B. The Day of Atonement: National Day of Affliction for Sin – Lev. 23:26-32; Num. 29:7-11
 - C. Days of Disaster
 - 1. After a Civil War with the Tribe of Benjamin – Judges 20:26
 - 2. At the death of Saul and Jonathan – 1 Sam. 31:13
 - D. Sad and Bad Fasting – Matt. 9:14-15; Isa. 58:1-7
- II. Pharisaical Fasting – vs. 16
 - A. Piety as Performance
 - 1. Hypocrites – play acting
 - 2. Fake Faces – sad and marred with ash and even cosmetics
 - 3. "To appear to men to be fasting"
 - 4. "If we snatch the minor reward, we lose the major." – CH Spurgeon
 - B. A Miserable Holiness – "To look miserable in order to be thought holy is a wretched piece of hypocrisy; and as it makes fasting into a trick to catch human admiration, it thereby destroys it as a means of grace." – CH Spurgeon
 - C. Adding to the Word of God – Luke 18:11-12
- III. New Testament Fasting – vs. 17-18
 - A. Jesus Transforms Fasting
 - 1. Fasting is not a form of outward piety
 - 2. Fasting is not an exercise to bring the body into subjection by neglect
 - 3. Fasting is not a means of social protest
 - 4. Fasting is not a means of getting God's attention
 - 5. Fasting is a personal exercise between the individual and God, "setting aside the normal, daily distractions of life in order to seek God's clear direction in their lives as they wait upon God" – JM Boice – 2 Cor. 6:4-5
 - B. Rejoicing and Consecration - Two Great Gospel Advances
 - 1. The Gospel to Gentiles – Acts 10:30-33
 - 2. The Start of Paul's Missionary Journeys – Acts 13:2-3
 - C. Fasting From Things
 - 1. Not commanded but expected – "Voluntary abstinence for a time from various necessities of life (food, drink, sleep, association with people) in order to focus more strongly on the one needful thing – our relationship with Christ." – Hallesby
 - 2. A period of abstinence for the purpose of drawing closer to God, to watch and wait to know Him and His will better
 - 3. Using time for prayer, Scripture reading, etc., for growth in grace
 - D. "Soul Fattening Fasting" – CH Spurgeon

1. Nourish the soul while denying the body
 2. Normal is normal
 - a. Wash your face
 - b. Dress like you typically do
 - c. “Forget your face; forget yourself” - MLJ
 3. Not about me – “Forget other people” – MLJ
- E. Conclusion: For God’s Glory and Honor Alone (vs. 18) - “The interest and opinions of other people and your impression upon them does not factor into your standing before God at all. Be concerned only about God and about pleasing Him. Be concerned about His honor and His glory. Even though the world may never know what we are, God knows, and at the Great Day it will be announced before the whole world.” – MLJ

Cross References

Joel 2:12

12 “Now, therefore,” says the Lord, “Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.”

Jonah 3:5

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

1 Samuel 7:6

6 So they gathered together at Mizpah, drew water, and poured it out before the Lord. And they fasted that day, and said there, “We have sinned against the Lord.” And Samuel judged the children of Israel at Mizpah.

Leviticus 23:26-32

26 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 27 “Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the Lord. 28 And you shall do no work on that same day, for it is the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the Lord your God. 29 For any person who is not afflicted in soul on that same day shall be cut off from his people. 30 And any person who does any work on that same day, that person I will destroy from among his people. 31 You shall do no manner of work; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. 32 It shall be to you a sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict your souls; on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall celebrate your sabbath.”

Numbers 29:7-11

7 ‘On the tenth day of this seventh month you shall have a holy convocation. You shall afflict your souls; you shall not do any work. 8 You shall present a burnt offering to the Lord as a sweet aroma: one young bull, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year. Be sure they are without blemish. 9 Their grain offering shall be of fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah for the bull, two-tenths for the one ram, 10 and one-tenth for each of the seven lambs; 11 also one kid of the goats as a sin offering, besides the sin offering for atonement, the regular burnt offering with its grain offering, and their drink offerings.

Judges 20:26

26 Then all the children of Israel, that is, all the people, went up and came to the house of God and wept. They sat there before the Lord and fasted that day until evening; and they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord.

1 Samuel 31:13

13 Then they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.

Matthew 9:14-15

14 Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?” 15 And Jesus said to them, “Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.

Isaiah 58:1-7

58 “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?

Luke 18:11-12

11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men— extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’

2 Corinthians 6:4-5

4 But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, 5 in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings;

Acts 10:30-33

30 So Cornelius said, “Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, 31 and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God. 32 Send therefore to Joppa and call Simon here, whose surname is Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea. When he comes, he will speak to you.’ 33 So I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come. Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God.”

Acts 13:2-3

2 As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” 3 Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.