

MARK 2:18-22

WHY HUNGER FOR GOD?

This morning we are going to study a fascinating area of God's Word - BIBLICAL FASTING. How is your appetite this morning? I'm not referring to the consumptive society in which we live where more food is thrown out each day that half the rest of the world has to eat. No, I'm talking about your Hunger for God. How is it?

1. In the Old Testament we see Biblical Fasting is **an urgent call to get serious about Knowing God.**
2. In the New Testament we see Biblical Fasting is **an ancient spiritual discipline to reschedule my life with God at the center** instead of dining, relaxing, amusing, accumulating, advancing, securing, and a multitude of other things that are not wrong - just deadly to intimacy with the Almighty.
3. This morning we narrow our focus to this one thought, How did the Early Church of Acts and the Epistles demonstrate this Hunger for God? We shall see that their Hunger shaped their lives, their ministry, their worship, and their outreach. **In the Early Church we see Biblical fasting is a powerful way to yield every part of my life to God's supremacy.**
4. So we can study and learn about Biblical Fasting in God's Word: in the Old Testament, in New Testament, from the Early Church, and then tonight as those who live for Christ in 21st Century America. In Tulsa Y2K we see **Biblical Fasting is an immediate way to declare your allegiance to God's way and glory in every day of your life!**

How are you doing in the Total Yielding of your life to Christ this morning?

Most of us would say as we look around at our life and others, that we are all right. But Jesus gave a different test. He said don't look around at others, look inside. He asks, "Does your hungering after God cause you to choose to abstain from food?" This practice is called fasting.

Fasting, or the voluntary abstinence from food, is a spiritual discipline, which has fallen upon hard times in modern Christianity. In fact a look

at the Library of congress computerized list of all books known to be published in America shows that not one Christian book on fasting was published from the 1860's or Civil War era to the start of the Space Age in the late 50's! That is a Century in the English-speaking world that neglected entirely **the discipline Christ said would characterize His Church's hungering after God.**

Isn't it amazing that perhaps the greatest tool to grow intimate with God, and dispel spiritual apathy is so neglected?

Isn't it tragic that what may be the key to seeing wayward children and grandchildren come back to God, is so neglected?

Isn't it hard to believe that God's described way to see Him move upon oppressed and afflicted in a liberating way is so neglected?

Probably we don't think about fasting, hear about fasting or practice fasting because we are indulging ourselves in America like no nation has ever done in the history of the planet earth! And that is the very reason we need to fast.

Jesus warned of an end times church that would think they were rich (materially) and forget that they were impoverished (spiritually). Is this idea Jesus presents in Mark 2 relevant? You decide as we think about 21st Century America in Tulsa, July 2000!

One gifted¹ writer has described our society's problem as OVERLOAD. See if you can see what he meant. And then think with me where you show up on a diagnostic test that detects this deadly condition called overload. Do you have any of these symptoms?

- CHOICE OVERLOAD - "In 1975 there were 9,000 supermarket items on the shelves; in 1978, there were 11,767 items in the average supermarket; in 1992 the number rose to 24,53; and by 1996 30,000." This includes over 186 different choices of breakfast cereal you can find at your grocery store. A satellite dish can serve you up 1,500 movie choices per month. Futurist Allan Toffler warns, "We are , in fact, racing toward 'over choice' ". One thing have I desired of the Lord...Ps 27: 4; God says seek Me first and most Mt. 6: 33
- DECISION OVERLOAD - "every day we have more tough decisions to make and less time to do it in. The trivial ones are objectionable just because of how many there are [what flavor,

¹ Richard A. Swenson, M.D., *The Overload Syndrome*. Colorado Springs, Colorado: NAVPRESS, 1998, p. 161-169,216.

- which topping, mint or tartar control, low fat, low sodium, diet or regular...] But we also are facing new choices generations past never dreamed of: whether or not to wait to have children; whether to move and change jobs; whether both dad and mom should work outside the home; whether we should put grandma in the home or not. Too many decisions trivial or not in too short a time is vintage overload." If thine eye be single...Mt 6:22
- **FATIGUE OVERLOAD** - we are a tired society. Even leisure is often exhausting. With our generator indicator flashing discharge it's little wonder our batteries are drained. Our weary, withered state is not God's plan. It's not the fault of activities or friends; it's the result of overload. Jesus said rest for our souls...
 - **FOOD OVERLOAD** as the Surgeon General reports more Americans are overweight today than at any time in history, at the same time 40,000 children die each day from starvation and preventable disease around the world. These are among the one billion fellow humans who live in conditions of absolute poverty (no adequate food, shelter, clothing, or medical care); 400 million severely malnourished including 200 million children!
 - **HURRY OVERLOAD** - "haste is a modern ailment. It is also fashionably American. Our lives are nonstop, lived at a breathless pace. We walk fast, talk fast, eat fast and then excuse our selves by saying, 'I must run.'" Alexander Solzhenitsyn accusingly said, "Hastiness and superficiality - these are the psychic diseases of the 20th century". Wait patiently for the Lord...Psalm 25:5; 27:14; 37:7,9,34; 62:5; 123:2, Be still and Know Me!
 - **INFORMATION OVERLOAD** - a single edition of the NY Times has more information than a seventeenth century Britisher would have encountered in a lifetime...there are new periodicals coming out faster than one per day; there are over 30 TV channels and stations for every night of the year! And 98% of Americans have TV; the average US home has 2 and both are on 7 hours a day...
 - **POSSESSION OVERLOAD** - We have more 'things per person ' than any other nation in history. Closets are full, storage space is used up, and cars can't fit into garages. Having first imprisoned us with debt, possessions then take over our houses and occupy our time. This begins to sound like an invasion. Everything I own owns me. Why would I want more? Jesus said care of things makes your heart grow cold...

Now let's be specific. When was the last time you fasted? Not for medical reasons, not for weight loss, not because you were too busy to

make a meal - no, when was the last time you practiced the Biblical Discipline of Fasting for purely the **spiritual** reason God designed it for, because you were so much in love with the Lord you wanted to spend extra, precious time with HIM?

Before we jump into our text of Mark 2:18- this morning, may I ask you some other questions?

- Would you like to revitalize your spiritual life?
- Would you like to heighten your awareness of God?
- Would you like to experience God in such a deep and intimate way that you find yourself absolutely satisfied and contented in a way God's Word calls perfect peace?

Then Christ's words this morning are for you. Our text contains **the most important words in the Bible on fasting**. And these words can change your life if you understand them!

Mark 2:18-22. Lets read them as you follow along in your copy of God's Word.

Fasting as described in the Bible is not to be confused with the Peaceful Political Protests of Gandhi or others. Spiritual fasting is also nothing like the Monastic hermit who tortured his body with no food, and laid out in the sun and rain, hoping for some spiritual merit to be earned by all that. No, fasting was rather a spiritual exercise or discipline. Note with me what the Bible records

Biblical fasting was part of SEEKING GOD'S DIRECTION AND PROTECTION BY PRAYER as noted in Ezra 8:21-23 Then I **proclaimed a fast** there at the river of Ahava, that we **might humble ourselves before our God**, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions.²² For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, "The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him."²³ So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer.

Biblical fasting was part of ACKNOWLEDGING SIN BEFORE GOD in Ezra 10:6 Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib; and when he came there, **he ate no bread and drank no water**, for he mourned because of the guilt of those from the captivity.

Biblical fasting was part of INTENSE PRAYER in Nehemiah 1:4 So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; **I was fasting and praying** before the God of heaven.

Biblical fasting was part of DAVID'S HUMBLING HIMSELF BEFORE THE LORD in Psalm 35:13 But as for me, when they were sick, My clothing was sackcloth; I **humbled myself with fasting**; And my prayer would return to my own heart.

Biblical fasting was part of GOD'S REQUIREMENT FOR THOSE GENUINELY REPENTING AND TURNING TO HIM WITH ALL THEIR HEART in Joel 2:12-13a "Now, therefore," says the Lord, "Turn to Me with all your heart, **With fasting**, with weeping, and with mourning. 13 So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the Lord your God".

So, Biblical Fasting has many purposes. Is it commanded? Yes to those under the Old Testament, once a year at the Day of Atonement. No, to us this side of the Cross. It is not commanded, but it was expected as we saw by Jesus. And it was practiced as we see, by those of the New Testament Church era. So how about it. What was Christ teaching in our text? Let's go over these five verses and see.

Mark 2:18-22 **The disciples of John and of the Pharisees were fasting.** (We know that the Pharisees did this on Mondays and Thursdays [market days in Biblical Israel] to be seen by the crowds. So this question was probably asked on a Monday or Thursday) **Then they came and said to Him, "Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?"** **19 And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast.** (Wow, Jesus here calls Himself the promised Groom as in Matthew 25 coming to betroth His Bride and then returning later for the marriage. Biblical weddings were marked by an entire week of feasting. Brides and Grooms were treated like kings and queens and often given crowns to wear. For a poor country person, weddings were often the greatest days of their lives. And, in Christ's words, those were what the disciples were experiencing in His earthly ministry) **20 "But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them,** .(Here is one of the many prophecies Jesus made pointing to the Cross, and His ascension to the Father's right hand for

the period of time we call the Church Age. Jesus was away and we await Him.)

and then they will fast in those days (Now comes the New Testament fast, it is for those who await the One they love, who is taken away to Heaven. While we wait for the Son we fast. Because we long for Him, we fast!)

21 “No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth (Christianity of the New Covenant Church after the Cross) **on an old garment;** (The Old Testament Judaism) **or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and the tear is made worse. 22 “And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins.”** (In the context of Fasting, this means that there was a whole new attitude and action surrounding fasting on this side of the Cross. It surrounds our waiting and longing for Jesus.)

Next week, How to be Hungering for God through Biblical Fasting.