

MARK 2:18-22

WHAT IS HUNGERING FOR GOD?

This morning we are continuing our study a fascinating area of God's Word—BIBLICAL FASTING. To best understand fasting in God's Word we may need another way to describe Biblical Fasting, and that would be to ask:

"How is your Hunger for God?" or, "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 Jesus Christ, His Word, His Way, His Coming, His Righteousness, His Will, and His Supremacy in your life cause you to joyfully and willingly choose to abstain from food?"

This longing after Jesus with a heart of love and devotion is called Biblical Fasting. And Biblical Fasting, or the voluntary abstinence from good and right things such as food, is a spiritual discipline, which has fallen upon hard times in modern Christianity. So this morning I repeat our task:

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!

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 back 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. **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.)

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

What is the best way to look forward to a good meal? Stop eating!
What is the best way to get hungry for food? Stop eating.
What is the best way to get your taste buds all mouth wateringly ready to eat? Stop eating!

Now, do you remember from our study of 1st Thessalonians a couple years ago, what was the heartbeat of the early church? Expecting Christ's Return. Do we ever grow weary and lessen that passion? Yes. So what is Christ's way to get us to long for His Coming? Look for His coming? Wait for His Coming? Stop eating, fast, deny ourselves, feel the pain of deprivation, show our allegiance to Him (demonstrated in fasting) as higher than even life (demonstrated in eating). Think with

me about these verses, and ask yourself, do you really long for Jesus every day? If not, fasting is for you!

Philippians 3:19-21 whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things.²⁰ For our **citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ**,²¹ who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

1 Thessalonians 1:10 and to **wait for His Son from heaven**, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

2 Timothy 4:8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to **all who have loved His appearing**.

Titus 2:11-13 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,¹² teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age,¹³ **looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ**,

Hebrews 9:28 so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. **To those who eagerly wait for Him** He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.

1 John 3:2-3 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.³ And everyone who **has this hope in Him** purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Revelation 22:20 He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. **Even so, come, Lord Jesus!**

WHEN DO WE FAST? God has not laid down lengths, days, manners, and details. Rather He says to us that His Grace teaches us. Where did the Lord say that? In Titus 2:11-13 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, ¹² teaching us (this is an ongoing process, it is called sanctification) that, denying ungodliness and

worldly lusts (both of which will be attacked by genuine Biblical fasting), we should live soberly, righteously, and godly (benefits of being more in tune with the Lord than the world) in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope (the basis of Christ's call for us to be fasting) and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ (that for which we hunger the most - Our Great God).

Biblical fasting was part of A NORMAL LIFE AS A CHRISTIAN in Matthew 6:16 "Moreover, **when you fast**, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

Biblical fasting was part of WORSHIPING THE LORD in Luke 2:36-37 Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; 37 and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, **but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.**

Biblical fasting was part of CHRIST'S METHOD OF PREPARATION FOR FACING THE DEVIL'S TEMPTATIONS in Luke 4:2 being tempted for forty days by the devil. And **in those days He ate nothing**, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry.

Biblical fasting was part of SEEKING THE GUIDANCE OF THE LORD in Acts 13:2 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."

Biblical fasting was part of SENDING OUT MISSIONARIES in Acts 13:3 Then, **having fasted and prayed**, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.

Biblical fasting was part of APPOINTING SPIRITUAL LEADERS in Acts 14:23 So when they had appointed elders in every church, **and prayed with fasting**, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Biblical fasting was part of THE REGULAR LIFE OF SPIRITUAL MINISTRY in Paul's account of his life in 2 Corinthians 11:27 in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, **in fastings often**, in cold and nakedness—

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.

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".

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

The Lord's Supper is a look back where we remember the great work of Christ's Cross nearly 2,000 years ago. Note these past events: Christ died, Christ rose, Christ ascended to God's Right Hand, Christ took my penalty upon Himself, Christ imputed His righteousness upon me, sin was dealt with, guilt was passed away, sins shackles were broken, Satan was defeated, the fear and power of death was

destroyed, eternal life was given, and the destiny of Hell was blotted out of the future for all who came.

Biblical Fasting on the other hand looks ahead, on the basis of the past work of Christ's Cross to the Future of His Return. And we who love our Bridegroom long for His Coming and express that loving, longing, delight by declaring nothing but Him can satisfy!