

How Does God Want Biblical Fasting to Impact Our Lives?

Isaiah 58:1-14

How do you reach a godless culture, moving away from God? With Christlike Compassion.

Our study from God's Word today may be one of the most relevant to the culture we currently live in, than any other topic we could study. As we open our Bibles to Isaiah 1, let me ask each of you a series of five questions, that explains how God describes the moral and spiritual collapse that precedes:

THE DEATH OF A NATION

1. **What happens when a nation with a long and deep Biblical Heritage** turns its back on God? How about a group of formerly devout followers of the Lord who mostly have abandoned genuine worship, and godly behavior?
2. **What does God's Word prescribe when a nation** that formerly honored Him, slips into Eastern mysticism and new age errors, accepts and dabbles in witchcraft and occultic errors, plunges into materialism and greed, and allows idolatry and false worship to thrive?
3. **What does God's Word prescribe when a formerly God honoring nation** chooses the pathway of greedy over development of its land, allows and enables a culture of alcohol and drug fueled addictions, with a bent towards unrestrained spring-breakish partying among its people?
4. **What does God's Word prescribe when a nation that was built upon the moral law of God** descends into a place where injustice towards the poor and helpless reigns, and where the land becomes a place of growing lawlessness?
5. **What does God's Word prescribe when a nation that formerly revered God's Word** becomes a place where truth is replaced with lies, and absolutes with relativism, where cultural and educational elitism begins to rule as pride and arrogance are promoted at the highest levels, and national heroes are actually people who are sexually immoral and often addicted to substances that control their minds and actions?

EERIE SIMILARITIES

Doesn't that sound like the land that watches the Baltimore Riots of 2015, and the current moral condition of the United States of America?

The similarity is eerie, but actually every one of those five questions are behind what God Almighty Himself is asking to His Chosen People of Promise, the nation of Israel. The primary targets of these questions were the people that God Himself confronts in Isaiah 1-5.

As you sit with Isaiah open before you, may I ask a quick question? Why would we: in the New Testament Era, the Church Age, the time of Grace, turn back to the Old Testament, and start there as we study an important Biblical topic? Is there authority for our lives in the Old Testament?

THE MAGNITUDE OF ISAIAH IN GOD'S WORD

As you reflect on just the book of Isaiah, I think you will be able to answer that question yourself!

Isaiah is the **fifth longest book in the Bible**, with 66 chapters, 1,292 verses, and 37,044 words.

Isaiah is **quoted from or alluded to 472 times by 23 New Testament books**.

ISAIAH **contains more references to salvation** than any other Old Testament book (The word salvation appears 33 times in the writing of the prophets, and of these, 26 instances occur in Isaiah.)

Isaiah contains the **only Old Testament prophecy concerning the virgin birth of Christ** (cf. Isaiah. 7:14 with Matthew. 1:21-23).

Isaiah contains **the two furthest reaching events in all of history**: The most ancient event is the fall of Satan (14:12-17) and the most future event, the creation of the new heavens and earth (66:22).

Isaiah has **more to say about** the greatness of God (40,43), the horrors of the Tribulation (24), the wonders of the Millennium (35), and the ministry of Christ (53) ***than any other book in the Bible***.

Isaiah also contains one of **the Old Testament's clearest statements on the Trinity** (48:16).

Isaiah 53 is probably **the most important chapter in the Old Testament**, as it is quoted from or alluded to 85 times in the New Testament. Jesus said that Isaiah saw His glory and spoke of Him (John 12:41).

SHOULD NEW TESTAMENT SAINTS KNOW ISAIAH?

Certainly we should if we want to be grounded in Biblical doctrine! So what does Isaiah 1 say? Please stand, follow along and hear the Voice of God as we read Isaiah 1:1-4 (NKJV):

1 The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, *and* Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

2 Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth!

For the Lord has spoken:

"I have nourished and brought up children,

And they have rebelled against Me;

³The ox knows its owner

And the donkey its master's crib;

But Israel does not know,

My people do not consider."

⁴Alas, sinful nation,

A people laden with iniquity,

A brood of evildoers,

Children who are corrupters!

They have forsaken the Lord,

They have provoked to anger

The Holy One of Israel,

They have turned away backward.

Pray

Walk back through the text of God's Word with me this morning, starting in Isaiah 1. What we see is a description by God Himself of what it looks like:

WHEN A NATION ABANDONS GOD

Here are those five questions in the context of God's Word:

What happens when a nation with a long and deep Biblical Heritage turns its back on God (Isaiah 1:3-6)? How about a group of formerly devout followers of the Lord who mostly have abandoned genuine worship, and godly behavior (Isaiah 1:11-14)?

What does God's Word prescribe when a nation that formerly honored Him, slips into Eastern mysticism and new age errors (Isaiah 2:6a), accepts and dabbles in witchcraft and occultic errors (2:6b), plunges into materialism and greed (2:7), and allows idolatry and false worship to thrive (Isaiah 2:8)?

What does God's Word prescribe when a formerly God honoring nation chooses the pathway of greedy over development of its land (Isaiah 5:8), allows and enables a culture of alcohol and drug fueled addictions (5:11), with a bent towards unrestrained spring-breakish partying among its people (5:12,18)?

What does God's Word prescribe when a nation that formerly revered God's Word becomes a place where truth is replaced with lies, and absolutes with relativism (Isaiah 5:20), where cultural and educational elitism begins to rule as pride and arrogance are promoted at the highest levels (5:21), and national heroes are actually people who are sexually immoral and often addicted to substances that control their minds and actions (5:22)?

What does God's Word prescribe when a nation that was built upon the moral law of God descends into a place where injustice towards the poor and helpless reigns (Isaiah 5:23), and where the land becomes a place of growing lawlessness (5:24)?

GOD CALLS HIS PEOPLE TO RESPOND SPIRITUALLY TO A UNGODLY CULTURE

The whole book of Isaiah is about salvation. That is also what the rest of the Bible is about.

God is appealing to the people that He has transformed. He explains to them how they can impact any culture.

No matter when in history we live, God's Word explains God's desires for our lives.

No matter how dark, how evil, how morally decadent any people become, God's plans for His [people are always the same.

God wants us as spiritually healthy and fit as possible. That is the only way to serve Him anywhere and anytime. But a key that ties Israel's declension back then, and our eroding, post-Christian America together is in this passage.

WHAT IS GOD'S PLAN FOR BELIEVERS OPERATING IN AN UNGODLY CULTURE?

As we open to Isaiah 58:6 we find a remarkable statement from God Almighty to the people of Israel in the 8th Century before Christ. He says: "Is not this the fast that I have chosen". God had designed a fast to shape their lives. They had chosen to ignore and replace God's plan with their own.

But God continues and explains for those who have ears to hear, just how God wants to impact our lives through Biblical fasting. This morning, before we read Isaiah 58, trace with me the way we got here.

We have been examining Biblical Fasting as Hungering for God over the past few weeks.

We have seen Christ's explanation of fasting, that it would characterize the longing hearts of His church as they lived, awaiting His Return.

We also have seen how Biblical fasting frames the lives and ministry of the early church at Antioch, as well as Paul's life and ministry.

Then we saw how the early church guarded their longings for Christ's return as they fasted and denied their flesh the upper hand.

Now, look down at this amazing explanation of what true believers, living in the time of Isaiah's 8th Century BC words were expected to do for the Lord. This list is amazing, given by God Himself.

Most important is the clear emphasis in the New Testament on the results of fasting, not the methods of fasting.

THE COMPASSION GOD WANTS TO SEE IN OUR HEARTS

Isaiah 58:6-12 gives a Divine Prescription for what Biblical Fasting is to do inside of us by the power of the Spirit of God.

God wants to stir us inside so that we are Christ-like in these areas that He was:

Compassion for the Captives in Oppression (6)

Compassion for the Hungry (7a)

Compassion for the Homeless (7b)

Compassion for the Naked (7c)

Compassion for those Suffering (7d)

Compassion for the Prejudice (9b)

Compassion for the Needy (10)

Now go back to the very first one in Isaiah 58:6. What brings this full circle, and right back where we started is this verse. This verse contains the very same word that Jesus used to launch His ministry. Look there with me in Luke 4:18-19.

JESUS MINISTERED TO THE OPPRESSED

Jesus explains the Gospel He came to proclaim. What is amazing is that in His reading from Scripture He ties together the words of Isaiah 61, with Isaiah 58:6, and explains the way we are to look at those we live around. Everyone needs the Gospel no matter what they look like on the outside. Everyone is born oppressed, impoverished, and spiritually blind.

Jesus came as the Messiah to those who were bankrupted and impoverished spiritually and they know it. Jesus came to rescue those who know they are on God's death row for their sins awaiting eternal execution. Jesus came to heal those who know that they were born handicapped by spiritual blindness. That is the first part of v. 18. But the last line is where we need to look.

SEEING PEOPLE THROUGH CHRIST'S EYES

Jesus came finally to those who are "oppressed". The word Jesus uses here speaks of not someone in jail or prison. Rather it is used for someone that is imprisoned by life. People overwhelmed by the pains of life. Someone overwhelmed by abusive relationships. Someone overwhelmed by illness, financial woes, and all the other endless struggles of life. They are overwhelmed, afflicted, joyless, hopeless, and empty: and they know it.

Those are the ones that Jesus came to save as Messiah. The poor, bankrupted spiritually sinners who know their lives, their choices, their sins have made them worthy of eternal imprisonment in God's maximum security pace of punishment facing the vengeance of a Holy God.

Jesus left us to share the Gospel of salvation. We point people to Jesus who said in Matthew 11:28, "Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."

GOD WANTS US FOCUSED ON WHY WE'RE HERE

Today we represent Jesus. We go to people and see them as He does.

One of the things a Messiah does is come to the person who is overwhelmed and oppressed. And what is that oppression? It is sin. It is sin. It is the burden of sin, the wearying burden of sin, the weight of the law being unable to keep the law. Jesus will come, the Messiah will come, take the whole burden of sin, the whole burden of trying to keep the law off and give you rest...rest.

To those who are spiritually bankrupt, to those who are in the dungeon of their own sinfulness awaiting final execution and hell, to those who are blind to truth and reality, to those who are oppressed by the heavy, heavy burden of sin and all the issues of life that come with it, the Messiah comes.

He comes to poor prisoners blind and oppressed by sin and He comes to make them spiritually rich, to bring the forgiveness that sets them free from death and hell, to give them sight and to deliver them from all the issues of life that oppress them and give them rest.

Paul said it, "Today is the day of salvation." (2 Cor. 6:2) It's the time for the poor prisoners, blind and oppressed, to come to the Messiah and be forgiven and receive God's salvation.

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has come to rescue us forever from our spiritual poverty, our spiritual prison, our spiritual blindness, our spiritual oppression.

He has come to give us riches, freedom, sight and deliverance. That's what He said to the people that day, and that's what He says to the people today.

He's still the preacher, for it is His sermon that we have heard this morning.

Maybe in this congregation some poor who cry out in recognition of their destitution, some prisoners who cry out in recognition of their doom, some blind who cry out in recognition of their darkness, and some oppressed who cry out in recognition of the seriousness of their distress as they bear the burden of sin.

God will hear and will save because that's why He sent Jesus Christ.

Do that mighty work, we pray, for Your glory. Amen.¹

¹ <http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/42-54/Jesus-Return-to-Nazareth-Preaching-in-the-Synagogue-1-of-2>