

LOVING GOD! LOVING PEOPLE! A loving kind of lifestyle. 5.1.2020

One of the finest Old Testament pictures of Jesus is found in the book of Isaiah and one of the finest illustrations of the impossibility of separating God's great love for us **from** His great love for **all** humanity is found in chapter 58.

Last week: Why we fast and how we fast; consolidated fasting as a right thing from the Word, we see this not as a legalistic obligation but a Godly response. No matter where we consider we are on our walk – starting out right through to mature - there is always another step next. Fasting brings order; greater awareness of what needs to happen, whether we need to recalibrate, re-prioritise, stop some bad habits or start some new; whatever it is the same steps apply: choose what you will fast; don't procrastinate but make a start; keep in step by keep going and pace yourself realising that life is a long strong journey. We are changed from glory to glory on a daily basis and out of a fast there will be some personal benefit: sharpened vision; greater spiritual sensitivity and awareness; spiritual power; some physical benefits too, and/but beyond that, we see the godly **outcomes** of a true fast, the way God sees it in Isaiah 58, a clear understanding of fasting not only being controlling what goes in but also what comes out.

We've looked intently at prayer connected with fasting – setting our heart to gain understanding, humbling ourselves before our God – our words being heard and God coming in response to them; Daniel's fast **proved** a hunger for God out of his deep concern for the nation – and humbling himself was a great part of that. Daniel's words were heard, and God came in response to them – this is a comparison to those described as fasting in Isaiah 58. On prayer, we know that Jesus is manifestly present when two or three gather in His Name; that we are creating our world future by the words we speak/pray; that we are reshaping a **national future** in fasting and prayer. At base prayer is speaking with God; at base fasting is abstaining from something/s; can see how beautifully they fit together. **Letting go of some things making room for better things.** Fasting always leaves others better off.

KEY PASSAGE: ISAIAH 58

Context: Isaiah – major prophet to Israel; kings: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz & Hezekiah; his name means 'Jehovah is salvation' – last few chapters centre around the reign of the Messiah ... glorious future of Israel – chapter 58 could well be entitled God's Chosen Fast – He clearly lays out the markers, the purposes – personal benefits do come but there is a **right order**. If God follows an 'if' by a 'then' there is a correct order, but sometimes we get things a bit upside down.

God speaks to Isaiah directly: *"¹Cry aloud, spare not; Lift up your voice like a trumpet; Tell My people their transgression (revolt), and the house of Jacob their sins (where they are missing the mark).*

What was their sin? What did God identify? Although the religious trappings were there, God sees through any veneer.

²Yet 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?'

Somehow false religion has a way of creating a step/distance between God and us. E.g. we don't have faith in faith; we have faith in God. We don't worship worship; we worship God. We don't believe about God; we believe on God. Someone said this crew might have been loving 'loving God' – see Father move from "Me" to "God" Verse 3 gives something up to ... whose benefit were those words for?

See from this chapter that God not only studies the intents of the heart but the outcomes:

"In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your laborers. ⁴Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness (venting unsubdued passions of the soul). You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high.

One version says, *'you don't fast like this to get your voice heard'* God obviously did hear what they said because He is repeating it back to them, but obviously their behaviour was hindering His ability to answer.

*⁵Is 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?** (See Luke 4).*

*"Is this not the fast that I have chosen: A fast that God has chosen; **this would be one that pleases Him.** He lays out the purposes straight up – the end from the beginning. **To loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke?***

Freed people are God-loosed people; God has broken believers in Christ, out of fetters and chains; wickedness simply means wrong – He has freed us from our wrong; Jesus removed everything that stood contrary to us; He removed the heavy burden of sin and in doing so He removed the heavy burden of guilt and shame; He removed every heavy burden; He not just let us free, but set us free – we were oppressed and He let us go – free – He removed the oppressor and truly we go free; He removed every wrong yoke. This is why He said ²⁸ ‘Come to Me, all *you* who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.’ Matthew 11:28.

Isaiah is painting a really sad picture of His people – instead of waging war with their own sin, they were waging war with each other; instead of subduing their passions, they were venting. John Piper said **“Fasting that is not aimed at starving sin while feasting on God is self-deluded.”** Instead of drawing near to God, they were trying to ‘justify’ the distance, and make it God’s fault.

Is this not the fast God has chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke?

I believe Father is addressing two things here:

Firstly: us personally: ‘For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son (greatest fast ever completed) that whosoever believes in Him, should not perish but have eternal life.’ John 3:16 On the whole, we use this verse correctly to lead people to Christ; in the light of fasting we understand that God gave up something, that we could have something better than what we had/have, here and now, and eternally later, better. Think on this verse – and Isaiah 58 in the light of prophecy of Christ – anyone who believes in Jesus, **should not perish** No child of God – **should perish** – come to ruin; come under again a yoke of slavery, be diminished, be destroyed in any way ... Galatians 5:1 Stand *fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.*

Believers are not bound by wickedness; by what is wrong – everything around us might be wrong but we are loosed; we have burdens but they are the right ones and Paul instructs us that each one must carry our own; but they are never given/intended or meant to bow us down like a bulrush or cause us to sway like a reed in the wind; we must again find our true reality in Christ Jesus, this is not found in self.

Secondly, these few verses: *Is this not the fast God has chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke?* Speak of the results and expectation of our true identities in Christ; of our freedom – we are blessed to bless, loosed to loose, lightened to lift weight off others; liberated to let the oppressed go free; if we’ve taken Christ’s yoke upon us we can surely recognise and lift the wrong yokes off others.

Which others? Luke 4: Jesus’ declaration after His 40 day fast: as from Isaiah 61:

*“The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to **the poor**; He has sent Me to heal **the broken-hearted**, to proclaim liberty to the **captives** and recovery of sight to the **blind**, to set at liberty those who are **oppressed**;¹⁹ To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.”*

This is the day of the Lord; this is the day of salvation. **This is the acceptable year of the Lord** – as Isaiah 58 describes. **2020.**

Which others: ⁷ *Is it (this fast that pleases God) **not to share your bread with the hungry**, (taking what I would ordinarily put in my mouth and give it to another), and that you bring to your house the **poor who are cast out**; (our House) **When you see the naked**, that you cover him, Restored and not hide yourself from your **own flesh**? Family*

The question ‘is it not?’ means the answer is provided. Fasting is a **response**. So, we could rephrase v7 to this:

If you share your bread with the hungry and bring those who are cast out into our house, and when we see the naked, cover them and look after our own families...

⁸ **Then** If and then; God is not the author of confusion. There is a right order and He is teaching us this order. Firstly, He addresses the personal outcomes:

Then: *your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. You shall call, and the LORD will answer; prayer answered you shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.'* Comfort, solace given

He takes it further: **Social outcomes:** our life amidst others; family, work, community, Church...:

"If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,¹⁰ you extend your soul to the hungry (not bowed down – self affliction, but putting something in another's mouth) and satisfy the afflicted soul, of another

Then Right order: takes it further

"Your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday.¹¹ The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.¹² Those from among you (take up the call and) shall build the old waste places; these are places that once were alive and strong; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; (we believe it is God's heart here somehow to build in to the hearts of little ones to have strong foundations... little ones who perhaps will not have the opportunity for this in their own homes...) and you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, (we perhaps use the term 'bridge the gap' now) – outside of miracles, to repair injuries we need medical know-how; to repair buildings we need builders' know-how; to protect freedoms we need defence; to protect law we need good law enforcement; there is a breach – there is a moral break in our communities and in what our communities see of God but He calls us the repairers – Christ made a way for people come back to God; we make a way for God to be seen and known. Our lives, our speech, our witness, our personal lifestyle, what we are involved in, what we contribute to, what we stand for, who we help: -our life in Christ repairs the breach; the Restorer of Streets to Dwell In. Aaron Close – a beautiful example – not just the buildings but people growing and changing as they live in those restored dwellings...

Now Father brings it gently back to the religious side, if you like ... He has provided the beautiful correction ... rather than religious observance or a veneer of religious behaviour displayed for others ... He brings it to truly loving God, setting apart those things He loves, finding our pleasure in the things He chooses, finding His words to speak ... He addresses the true ordinances – a right way to fellowship with Him;

¹³ "If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honourable, and shall honour Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, or speaking your own words,¹⁴ Then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken."

"Then shall we delight ourselves in the Lord... positioned to see things as He sees them... being totally satisfied on a daily basis with what He brings to us."

So, we have built into true fasting. We have consolidated the why and the how last week; we have consolidated today, that a fast that God chooses is a lifestyle – His life flowing through us. 2 Corinthians 2:14. 'By their fruit you will know them' said Jesus. Isaiah prophesied the most comprehensive picture of Jesus in the Old Testament. He spoke of His coming, His virgin birth, His proclamation of good news, His sacrificial death and His return for His own. In 58; the difference between relationship and ritual is displayed; what it looks like when we get it wrong – or pray amiss if you like. The first five verses show a religious fervour but suggest outward activity and not really loving God first – God's basis for saying this was in His observation of how they were treating others; He sees through it but in His kindness makes it so plain what it looks like when we get it right.

So, then we come to the point that truly loving God first is always the point. His heart is that the proof of that is demonstrated in how we love the world. **We cannot separate His great love for us from His great love for humanity.**

Fasting itself is not the focus; God is. Fasting definitely scans the radar and detects those things that are detracting from our relationship first with God and then with others. It is a courageous thing to do, a right thing to do, a humbling thing to do, definitely a replacing thing to do and as His House – corporately?

*"If **My people**, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land." 2 Chronicles 7:14.*