

"FASTING"

WHAT IT "IS" AND WHAT IT "DOES"

MATTHEW 17:14-21



FASTING WORKS TODAY

- ◆ It Adds Force To Your Praying
- ◆ It Increases Your Sensitivity
- ◆ It Builds Faith In Your Spirit
- ◆ It Humbles You Before God

"Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting."(Matthew 17:21)

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“FASTING: THE CURE OF UNBELIEF”

Text: Matthew 17:14-21

Subject: How Fasting and Prayer Add Faith To Your Heart

“Then came the disciples to Jesus apart and said; why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, because of your unbelief; for verily I say unto you, if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, nothing shall be impossible to you. Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.”
(Matthew 17:19-21)

Introduction

- God places a special value on prayer when it costs us something.
- Those who seek Him in earnest will know a power with God that cannot be denied.
- Remember, prayer that cost nothing is worth nothing. But the opposite is just as true.

The Scriptures often link prayer with fasting. Abstinence from food can be a valuable aid in spiritual exercises. On the earthly side, it promotes clarity and concentration; from the heavenly side, it seems that the Lord is anxious to answer prayer when we put that prayer before food.

Case In Point

- In the story before us, we go from the mountain of glory to the valley of need.
- Jesus suddenly appears with His three disciples and startles the multitude (Mark 9:15).
- A distraught father has brought his demonized son to the nine disciples asking for help.
- The scribes have noticed the failure of the nine and were using it as a reason for argument.

I. The Problem (Vs. 14-16)

The father’s son is in great trouble and danger.

- A. Matthew tells us that the boy is epileptic, ill, suicidal and falling into the fire and the water.
- B. Mark tells us that the boy is mute and would often fall to the ground foaming at the mouth and grinding his teeth.
- C. Luke tells us that the boy was an only son and would scream as he went into convulsions.
- And the disciples “could not cure him”, (v. 16) even after Jesus had given them power and authority over demons. (Matthew 10:1, 8)

Fact: The disciples were embarrassed.

Fact: The scribes were arguing.

Fact: The father was desperate.

Fact: The son was in need of help.

- And Jesus was grieved over the unbelief and spiritual lack of His disciples:
“How long shall I be with you and put up with you?” (Luke 9:41)

II. The Power (Vs. 17, 18)

“And Jesus rebuked the devil, and he departed out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour.” (v. 18)

Fact: Jesus delivered the boy and commanded the spirit never to return to him again.
(Mark 9:25)

Fact: Jesus raised the boy off the ground and gave him to his father. (Luke 9:43)

Fact: Jesus cured the boy from that very hour. (Matthew 17:18)

III. The Priority (Vs. 19-21)

Question: “Why could not we cast him out?” (v.19)

Answer: “Because of your unbelief” (v. 20)

Question: Where does this mountain (v. 20) moving faith come from?

Answer: “This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.” (v. 21)

Fact: While Jesus was absent on the mountain top, the disciples grew self-indulgent.

Fact: They neglected prayer and fasting and thus, their faith weakened.

Fact: Had the disciples been disciplining themselves, they would have been able to rescue the boy in need.

Fact: Like Samson, they did not realize that their power was gone. (Judges 16:20)

Fact: When the crisis came, they were unprepared simply out of spiritual neglect.

IV. The Principle Of The Story

Question: What are the two things Jesus is teaching us in this setting?

1. Faith needs a life and a **heart of prayer** in which to grow strong.
2. Prayer needs the **discipline of fasting** for its fullest development and usefulness.

In Other Words

- Faith is born and made strong in prayer.
- Faith is ignited in the place of prayer.
- Faith is developed as we learn to pray.
- Faith is underscored through the spirit of prayer. (And)
- Prayer is then made strong by **fasting**.
- Prayer is then supported by **fasting**.
- Prayer is then more effective by **fasting**.
- Prayer is then increased as we...
 1. Live in moderation and practice temperance.
 2. Deny the flesh that craves for food.
 3. Seek after the unseen, not the natural.
 4. Give up the flesh cravings to separate ourselves unto God.

What Is Fasting?

1. To “**fast**” simply means “not to eat”.
2. It is abstinence from food (denying yourself) to draw closer to the Lord.
3. It is denying something temporal to focus attention on the eternal.
4. It is a willingness to deny the natural man to feed the spiritual man.
5. It is a tool the Lord uses to help us live a life of moderation and temperance, to give power to our prayer life.
6. It is sacrificing gratification of the senses to deepen our communion with God.
7. It is laying aside what satisfies fleshly cravings, to put attention on what satisfies spiritual hunger.

What Fasting Is Not

1. Fasting is not earning God's grace by works.
2. Fasting is not twisting God's arm till He moves.
3. Fasting is not bargaining with God.
4. Fasting is not making God servant to our wishes.
5. Fasting is not to get God's attention as to our need.

(Instead)

Fasting is you and I getting into the place where God can do what He has wanted to do all along. It is you and I aligning ourselves to the purpose of God, preparing ourselves for what He desires to do! It is giving God opportunity to channel His grace and power in and through our lives.

Three Types Of Fasting

So many wonder if it is scriptural to fast partially or to fast certain foods. Others question as to drinking liquids (not milkshakes) during times of fasting.

1. The Partial Fast

"I ate no pleasant bread (delicacies) neither came flesh (meat) nor wine in my mouth till three whole weeks were fulfilled." (Daniel 10:3)

Here we learn of a restricted diet instead of a total abstinence from food. Many feel this is a good way to begin fasting, by omitting certain foods or meals to bring the body under subjection to your spirit and increase spiritual sensitivity. Some people have circumstances that make the total fast impossible; this may be the way to fast for them.

Is it profitable? For Daniel it resulted in a great spiritual victory over the powers of darkness. It also brought him wisdom and understanding.

2. The Normal Fast

"And in those days he did eat nothing, and when they were ended, he afterward hungered." (Luke 4:2)

Jesus ate nothing, but probably drank water. He was hungry not thirsty, following His fast. Without supernatural intervention, no one could live too long without water (without food yes, without water, no). This fast is beneficial as well as the other two.

3. The Absolute Fast

"And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink." (Acts 9:9)

This fast must be undertaken only under exceptional occasions, mostly emergencies or crisis situations. It must be God initiated as the human body must have water after a short time. Most times, this fast was never more than three days. It is abstinence from all solids and liquids. Other fasts of this nature are seen in Exodus 34:28/ Esther 4:14 / Ezra 10:6.

"When" Should I Fast?

"Can the children of the bride chamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast." (Matthew 9:15)

The “then” in verse 15 is this present age. We, the church, are awaiting the return of the bridegroom (Jesus).

The apostles began to fast (Acts 12:3, 3) after the ascension of Jesus to the Father. From his ascension until He comes again, Jesus teaches us the time to fast is **now!**

“How” Should I Fast?

“But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.” (Matthew 6:17, 18)

- Washing the face and anointing the head were forbidden in the Jewish canon on days of fasting and humiliation. Hypocrites availed themselves of this ordinance so they would appear to fast in public. Jesus cautions us against getting our attention off of Him and on man when we fast. He warns us to fast secretly before God alone, never seeking the praise of man. Otherwise we void the whole purpose of fasting unto God.

“Why” Should I Fast?

“Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry and to satisfy the afflicted soul? Thou shalt call and the Lord shall answer, and thou shalt be called; the repairer of the breach, the restorer of paths to dwell in.” (Isaiah 58:6-12)

- Our fast must be God initiated and done only unto God for true results. It must not be for selfish motives or desires but done before God to receive the benefits he has provided and promised. Our fasting must be motivated with a desire to accomplish His sovereign will. That’s it!

Why Fast?

1. **To rid us from pride** *“I wept and humbled my soul with fasting.” (Psalm 69:10)*
2. **To bring answers to prayer** *“So we fasted and besought our God for this, and he was entreated of us. (Ezra 8:21-23)*
3. **To withhold God’s judgment:** *“The people of Nineveh proclaimed a fast, and God repented of the evil that He said he would do unto them, and He did it not.” (Jonah 3:4-10)*
4. **To set others free:** *“Is not this the fast that I have chosen, to let the oppressed go free.” (Isaiah 58:6)*
5. **To increase our sensitivity to the Holy Spirit.**
 - (Luke 4:1,2) Jesus fasted in preparation to fulfill His divine call.
 - (Acts 13:2, 3) Prophets and teachers after fasting and prayer sent Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journey.
 - (Acts 14:23) When elders were ordained, fasting and prayer were paramount.

- (Daniel 9:1-22) Daniel prayed and fasted and the heavenly messenger came to bring wisdom and understanding.
- (Isaiah 58:11) To those who practice the fast God chooses, "The Lord will guide you."
- (Acts 10:1-10) When Peter becomes very hungry, it is then that the Lord gives him a vision. (v. 10)
- (Acts 10:30-33) Cornelius receives divine direction, resulting from prayer and fasting.
- (Acts 27:1-24, 33, 34, & 44) Following Paul's abstinence, it is then he receives an angelic message during the raging storm. (V. 9 & 10) Word of Knowledge (Vs. 21-24) Angelic Message

We clearly see that God manifests himself to those who earnestly seek Him in prayer and fasting. We do not fast to seek visions and revelations; these are simply by-products of those who live in close intimate fellowship with God. Our fasting and praying simply aligns us to the will and purpose of God, bringing us into the place where God can do what He wants to do. It is in fasting that we let go of the temporary (food) and in praying we take hold of the supernatural ability of God.

Dangers Of Fasting

1. Fasting to **impress** others.
2. Fasting for **selfish** reasons only.
3. Fasting without being **led by God** to begin.
4. Fasting without preparing your **heart** before God.
5. Thinking you can **force** or make God subservient to your demands.
6. Feeling you earn or **deserve** answers to prayer by the act of fasting.
7. Breaking your fast by eating too much too soon and **harming your body**.

Conclusion

Fasting is for now! Prepare your heart and experience the joy of drawing closer to Jesus. You will see...

1. Greater force in your praying.
2. Greater sensitivity to God's Spirit.
3. Greater increase of faith in God's ability.
4. Greater control over the physical man and victory over the lust for food and an uncontrolled appetite.
5. Greater consecration to do the will of God.
6. Greater results in interceding for lost souls.
7. Greater awareness of God's guidance, direction, presence and sanctifying power in your life.

Amen!
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