

# SPIRITUAL MAINTENANCE

## *Fasting*

### *Isaiah 58:1-12*

#### **God's Confrontation**

**Isaiah 58:1 (NIV) <sup>1</sup> "Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet.**

**Declare to my people their rebellion and to the house of Jacob their sins.**

- Isaiah has been given an assignment to go to Israel and show them their sins
- Isaiah is told to cry loud, spare not, and to lift up his voice like a trumpet
- God wants what Isaiah has to say to be loud, clear, strong, and distinct
- God wanted Isaiah to tell His people their sins as it related to their religious rituals
- The people of Israel wanted the blessings of God, but were not interested in allowing God to change their hearts, attitudes, and actions
- What were their sins?
- Their sins were:
  - Hypocrisy
  - Selfishness
  - Formality and ritual
- God wanted Israel to come face to face with their sins

#### **Worthless Worship & Fake Fasting**

**<sup>2</sup> For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them. <sup>3</sup> 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?' "Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. <sup>4</sup> Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. <sup>5</sup> Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?**

- On the surface "it appeared" that Israel loved God and had been fully devoted him
- Israel was worshipping God every day in the Temple
- They had a reputation of a nation that did righteousness
- They even looked like people who would take delight in worshipping God
- To the outsider it appeared that Israel was a nation of *right living* people that obeyed the law and honored God
- They felt "rituals" meant *righteousness*
- You would think this is a righteous nation that would not abandon God
- But then they also complained:
  - God, we fasting why haven't you noticed us?
  - We are doing all the acts of humility and God doesn't even pay attention to us
  - They were complaining because they felt if they fasted God will "automatically" bless them regardless of how they lived
- Israel wanted to know why they weren't getting the results they expected from fasting
- The reason why God was not responding to their fasts was hypocrisy

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- Hypocrisy is play acting
- Hypocrisy is the lack of spiritual sincerity
- Israel was doing the right thing the wrong way
- They were not fasting according to the plan of God ***Leviticus 16:29 (KJV) And this shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourneth among you:***
- A true fast was to afflict one's soul for the purpose of meditation of the seriousness of one's sins and the greatness of God to make atonement for them
- At the time they were fasting, they were also satisfying selfish pleasures
- Fasting is a time of humility, yet they oppressed their workers
- During their times of fasting they would publicly show off their humility
- They would wear sackcloth and spread ashes all around to show the outside world they were in a season of fasting ***Matthew 6:16-18 (KJV) Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. [17] But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; [18] 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.***
- Bowing one's head like a reed is an external sign of weakness and humility
- But there was no inward submission to God and turning from sin, the outside show means absolutely nothing
- They were treating the symptoms and not the root cause
- Because they fasted out of hearts filled hypocrisy, selfishness, and rituals, their prayers remained unanswered
- God asks the question, do you think I, God, would be accepting a day of fasting like this?

#### ***True Fasting***

***<sup>6</sup> "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? <sup>7</sup> Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter-- when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?"***

- God says the kind fast that He's after should yield results for your benefit or the benefit of other people
- As a result of fasting, something should happen *in you* that blesses others
- A God-honoring fast causes us to:
  - Get right with God, repent
  - Be just and fair in our dealing with everyone
  - Break the chains of wickedness or injustice that are on our lives
  - See the heavy burdens on your life or someone else's life
  - See opportunities to minister to those in need; there is someone in your neighborhood, in your family, at work, that needs food

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- Fasting will reveal opportunities to do things that need to be done that you didn't want to do, were too busy to do, or just overlooked
- Fasting will bring to the surface things in your life that you need to repent of and stop doing, do differently, or begin doing
- True fasting is fasting with a *motive* to honor and draw closer to God and obey what He reveals to you to do
- Fasting is emptying our lives of selfish pursuits in order to find what we need in Christ to please God in word and deed

#### **God's Promises**

***<sup>8</sup> Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. <sup>9</sup> Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, <sup>10</sup> and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. <sup>11</sup> The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. <sup>12</sup> Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.***

- God promises to bless those that approach fasting in a God-honoring and sincere manner
- God promises to bless your life when you *stop* doing three things:
  1. Stop oppressing and putting burdens on people
  2. Stop the finger pointer and accusing others
  3. Stop gossiping about other people's sin
- God will bless when we *start* doing these two things:
  1. Be generous to those in need
  2. Give of yourself to those that are struggling
- The light will break forth as the morning
- God will heal you physically
- The glory of God will be your re-reward or your *rear guard*
- A *rear guard* is a part of a military force that protects it from attack from the rear
- You will call for help and God will say, "Here I am"
- Your life will be a witness to those in need
- God will guide you continually
- You'll walk in the provision and strength of the Lord
- You'll use rubble and refuse of your past to build anew and rebuild the foundations
- You'll be called the "repairer of the breach", or the "Restorer of the Streets"
- God through you will make your communities livable again