



A Practical Exposition of Isaiah 58
...and some CRCC Goals for 2016!
December 27, 2015

Scriptural Text: Isaiah 58

- This text, in the view of many, is one of the best in the Bible that describes God's heart on fasting and consecration. There are others of course:

*Joel 1:13-14 - Gird yourselves, and lament, ye priests: howl, ye ministers of the altar: come, lie all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my God: for the meat offering and the drink offering is withholden from the house of your God. **Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD your God, and cry unto the LORD... (KJV)***

*2 Chr 20:1-4 - It came to pass after this also, that the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them other beside the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle. Then there came some that told Jehoshaphat, saying, There cometh a great multitude against thee from beyond the sea on this side Syria; and, behold, they be in Hazazontamar, which is Engedi. **And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.** And Judah gathered themselves together, to ask help of the LORD: even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD. (KJV)*

- Lest we think this is an Old Testament concept alone...

Matt 6:16-18 - "And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

Acts 13:1-3 - Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

- I must admit to being very humbled by this chapter in Isaiah, as I've personally failed to obey its principles often.
- Every year, we call a three-week fast in January (this year, January 3rd-23rd). The goals are to get closer to God, kill our flesh, and renew habits of holiness.
- But we lament the all-to-often way we return to old habits shortly after the month is finished.
- We make **Revolutions** (going around and around) instead of **Resolutions** (having a fixed purpose; determined; hence, bold; firm; steady; constant in pursuing a purpose)!

Isaiah 58 declares God's heart for permanent change through fasting...His heart for His people to be Holy...His heart for life to be qualitatively and quantitatively different as a result of time in His presence!

A Practical Exposition of Isaiah 58

Prophesying during a period of great decline in Israel and Judah (about 740-700 B.C.), Isaiah preached to people who, by and large, would not listen. His message is filled with warnings, but also much beauty, as he prophesied not just a restored Israel after an earthly captivity, but also the coming of the Messiah!

The goal today is to allow God to truly change this church; to get past any unbiblical formalism in our hearts. This upcoming consecration is about forming Godly habits from the INSIDE OUT; habits that will take us through the year in power and humility, and setting Godly goals that will push Christ's Kingdom forward.

Verse 1

- Speaking to a people filled to the brim with ritualism but often **dead** inside, God commands Isaiah to “not hold back.”
- Oh, how we need this! How we need the prophetic voice lifted up like a trumpet!
- **CRCC, how do you respond when your sins are declared? What does it do in your hearts?**

Verse 2

- Verse 2 sounds like a wonderful testimony, except that its backdrop is that of dead faith.
- There is this **external** “delighting” in God’s ways that doesn’t seem to result in long-term action.

Isa 29:13 - And the Lord said: "Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men..."

- God said they “delight” “as if.” In other words, it’s fake! It’s a form of godliness that denies the power thereof. (2 Tim 3:5)
- **CRCC, what is truly happening in your hearts before the Lord? Do you truly delight to know His ways?**

Verse 3

- The Lord’s people wonder in the midst of their religious rituals, “Where is God?” “Doesn’t He see our efforts?”
- God responds. Essentially, “It’s fake. It’s false. It’s empty. It isn’t true humility. Even your fasting is all about you!”
- A Godly fast is supposed to produce authentic, practical **change!** Even those we work with should see improved integrity and justice!
- **CRCC, we’ve taught recently that “pride is a beast!” (Messages on James 4) Are you willing to truly submit to God?**

Verse 4

- Somehow, even while fasting, God's people were **deceived!** How could they think fasting and quarreling go together? How could they think consecration and "hitting with a wicked fist" makes any Kingdom sense?
- CRCC, before we jump on the folks in Isaiah's day too badly, are we really any different? Remember James rebukes the same mindset in the church (see Jam 4:1)! Is our daily living commensurate with our profession and worship?
- **CRCC, only true fasting (a truly submitted heart which is the goal of fasting) results in increased intimacy with the Lord!**

Verse 5

- Understand what is being questioned here. It isn't that physically humbling oneself is wrong, or bowing one's head, or using sackcloth and ashes (a sign of mourning, particularly over one's sin, in ancient Israel).
- **CRCC, the issue here, as always, is the heart!** The question from the Lord is this: "**How can you do all these things, and still act the way you do? How can you do all these things, and still fail in good works?**"

Verses 6-7: Godly Fasting!

- God is about to give a list! To be clear, God isn't saying don't pray, don't abstain from certain foods or actives, etc. He's saying that out of submitted hearts will come those things AND others:
 1. Loose the bonds of wickedness: **help people emerge from evil!**
 2. Undo and break yokes: **help the oppressed go free!**
 3. Share your bread: **feed the hungry!**
 4. Bring in the homeless: **be hospitable and serve the homeless!**
 5. Cover the naked: **literally to clothe others and not hide from family and friends in need! Wow!**
- **CRCC, can you see why this kind of ministry requires fasting and consecration? Are you willing to push beyond personal prayer time into this sort of work?**

Verses 8-11: 10 Blessings from Godly Fasting!

1. Increased **light!** This suggests a greater cultural "seeing" of the light of true church and her true Lord!
2. Speedy healing! Of the land? Our families? Our hearts? Our joy? Our worldview?
3. A righteous testimony! When our praying leads to good works, our lives match our words!
4. Divine protection! When God's people move out in faith and serve, the glory of the Lord protects them from attack!
5. Answered prayer! Why? Because this sort of fasting and ministry suggests a heart that prays according to the Lord's own heart...His will!
6. Less bondage! True fasting means less yokes!
7. Controlled tongues! True fasting produces less corrupting talk and more of that which builds up! (Eph 4:29)
8. Verse 10 gives a wonderful key for **depressed** believers: serve others! No more gloom!
9. Greater guidance, clarity, and **strength** from the Lord! Confused? Serve! Weak? Serve! In a dry place? Serve! :)
10. Multigenerational **restoration** and reformation! (v12)

Verses 13-14: The Sabbath

- In the New Testament, we are given some freedom as it relates to particular days. (Col 2:16)
- But we also see the early church honor the first day of the week (Sunday), or what came to be called “The Lord’s Day.” (John 20:19, 26; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2, Rev 1:10)
- Regardless of the day you select, we believe God desires one day in seven to be set apart. And He promises to bless that obedience!
 1. Let us not forsake it!
 2. Let us not do our own pleasure upon it!
 3. Let us delight in the beauty of the Lord on His day!
 4. Let us esteem the day as honorable!
 5. Let us not seek pleasure or talk idly on His day!
 6. God promises to increase our delight in Him!
 7. God promises to bless our provision!
- The Lord’s Day is essentially a “mini-consecration”: a day to remember Him and focus on Him, and a day to worship and do good to others (Matt 12:9-13).
- Embedded in every week is a reminder of all the blessings that come from allowing Christ to saturate our hearts with His word! We miss out on so much when this day isn’t esteemed!

2016 CRCC Goals

Reaching

1. Allow God to burden your heart for lost souls and making disciples.

- ✓ Engage in some form of evangelism each week (conversations, tracts, street preaching, etc)!
- ✓ Set the godly goal of better church attendance personally and bringing others!
- ✓ Set a godly goal of bringing at least ONE family into our fellowship in 2016!

Teaching

2. Allow God to burden your heart for His presence.

- ✓ Develop the habit of morning prayer!
- ✓ Develop consistency and fun in your regular family worship!
- ✓ Read through the Bible in a year as a congregation!

Releasing

3. Allow God to burden your heart in an area of community ministry.

- ✓ Engage in that ministry at least monthly (feeding the homeless, fighting for life, serving the elderly, etc.)!
- ✓ Set aside time to serve your local church!
- ✓ Become truly generous as we seek to prepare to serve others better through a building expansion!

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In keeping with our goals, during our three weeks of consecration in January, let’s do it a bit differently to develop different habits...

- Sunday - View the day differently. See it as the Lord's day. Come to prayer at 9:30. Bring someone with you.
- Monday - Friday. Rise early to pray and study scripture. Aim for at least 30 minutes. Then engage in family worship. Come to corporate prayer on Thursday from 7-8 pm (Care Group Time). The church will also be open at 12-1 pm Mon-Fri for quiet prayer.
- Shut out worldliness and engage in some form of food fast. How you do that is up to you.
- Arm up with tracts and prayer. Engage in some kind of evangelism weekly...daily if possible!
- Consider how you might be more generous and help your church serve more people. Get back to budgeting! :)
- Select a place to volunteer in your local church and serve!
- Select a place to volunteer in your neighborhood or community and get rolling!

As you can see, our 2016 fast is different. So much of it is "on your own time." It is meant to break yokes. **IF YOU DON'T ACT, THIS TIME WON'T BE WHAT GOD INTENDS FOR US.**