

Matt 21:21 “Jesus answered and said to them, truly, I say to you, if you have faith, and doubt not, you shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if you shall say to this mountain, be removed and be cast into the sea; it shall be done.”

Story of two lumberjacks:

There was an older & a younger lumberjack who worked together. The younger lumberjack decided he had learned enough skills and prowess that he would challenge the older lumberjack to a contest to see who could fell the most trees in a day. They began the contest. In time the younger lumberjack noticed the older man would cut wood for an hour and stop and rest for fifteen minutes. He would chop for another hour, than another fifteen minute break. The younger man was convinced the victory was certain for him. He worked hard all day long with no breaks. At the end of the day – it was found that the older lumberjack had felled 1/3 more trees than the younger man. How can this be? The younger lumberjack asked mystified. I worked non-stop and you stopped and took breaks every fifteen minutes. The older man replied – True, but while I was taking a break every hour; I was also sharpening my ax, so I was able to cut more wood in quicker time than you could by working nonstop all day long.

A lot of us have been working hard, but with dull axes; and wonder why the trees aren't falling?

We made resolutions last year that after two months, the ax got dull and the trees stopped falling.

You look at somebody who seems to be trying half as hard as you are, yet are moving much farther in their spiritual life than you are and you are wondering why they are progressing and you aren't.

Maybe they have taken time out to sharpen their lives so they are more effective.

That is what fasting and prayer is about:

- It's about sharpening the ax of the inner man so that we are able to move through the gateway to spiritual victory.
- Fasting is a time you set aside when you need God to breakthrough in your life on some spiritual level.

- Matt 9:15- “Jesus said, the attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them. But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and they **will** fast.”
- The day will come [and has,] when Jesus is physically not with us and we have a need to make a link with Him spiritually – Fasting is the way to make that link with Jesus.

Fasting is the way to get through the gateway to get to God during the crisis or need in your life.

Four things about fasting:

1. **The Principle of Fasting-** In the Bible, fasting when the burdens of life demanded a spiritual breakthrough.

What is fasting? **Fasting is the deliberate abstinence of physical gratification to achieve a greater spiritual goal.**

It is a denial of the flesh in order to gain a response in the Spirit.

It is a renouncing of the natural in order to invoke the supernatural.

Zechariah 7: 5-6 “Say to all the people of the land and to the priests; when you fasted and mourned in the fifth and the seventh months these 70 years, was it actually for Me that you fasted?”

And when you eat and drink, do you not eat and drink for yourselves?

And do you not eat for yourselves and do you not drink for yourselves?”

When you eat after service today, who will you be eating for? Nobody but you – guaranteed!

We don’t eat with somebody else in mind wondering what they are doing.

We eat with ourselves in mind – this sure is good!

Our stomachs cry out – FEED ME, and we respond – I am your servant!

We become obedient servants to serve ourselves. And to satisfy ourselves.

Zechariah says: “When we fast, it’s for God; and when we eat it’s for us.

When we give up food, we get God’s attention, just like we get our own attention when we eat food.

What food does for us – fasting does for God!

Food satisfies you – Fasting satisfies God!

What is there about fasting that satisfies God like food satisfies us?

When we are hungry there is a desire within us to address the cry of the flesh to be satisfied.

When we fast, we are saying – “The cry of my soul is greater than the cry of my belly – and since my soul can only be satisfied by God; I’m going to give up the cry of my belly in order to feed the cry of my soul.

So the reason we get God’s attention in fasting is that we place the emphasis on the inner man as more important than the outer man.

You are saying: “More important than my belly and my body is my broken spirit and soul; so it’s more important to feed my relation with God than I feed myself.

It is a choice of what comes first – what is your priority?

To love yourself and flesh or to love God more?

To seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness – or to love you own flesh?

Your value is not in your body:

The earthly value of your body is approximately \$3.75 and will return to the dust of the earth.

We overstuff the body [the cheap part of us] while we neglect the soul which begs to be fed.

The way you feed the spirit/soul is by **not** eating – the way the spirit/soul is fed by not eating is that the spirit is placed on a higher priority than the body.

It is the matter of priority that gets God’s attention about fasting.

You cannot build a skyscraper on a chicken coop foundation:

Many want to be powerful Christians but are not willing to build the solid foundations.

You cannot be the powerful Christian you say you want to be and not be willing to make the sacrifices of making God your priority.

Here’s the question: Are you willing to give up steak and potatoes to gain spiritual riches?

Are you willing to give up that which gratifies the flesh in order to make an investment in that which builds up the spirit?

Fasting is a test of how serious you are by what you are willing to deny yourself of!

Ex: Some of you in business or work are so willing to close the deal you skip eating because you are so intent on the deadline.
You won't stop to eat because of the value of the deal. Cutting the deal is so important that you are willing to miss a meal.

God is saying: The same thing is true in the spiritual life. Are you willing to give up the cry of the flesh because this crisis of the spirit is so critical that it's more important than the meal?

So the Principle of the Fast is the giving up of the craving of the body because you have a deeper need of the soul or of the spirit.

2. **The Purpose of Fasting-** **Isa 58** the most comprehensive explanation of what true fasting is.

Why do we fast – “To make our voice heard on high?” **Isa 58:4**

Fasting with the proper motivation causes your voice to be heard on high – God wants to know if we're willing to have a concentrated time to make sure that we are in His presence.

When we are hungry:

We make a way out of no way.

We make sandwiches out of that which is un-sandwichable.

We go out of our way to go to a certain place because we are desperate to be satisfied.

When you fast – you are desperate to make your voice heard on high.

v. 5- “This is the fast that I choose, a day to make a man humble himself.

It is for bowing ones' head like a reed. It is for spreading out sack cloth and ashes as a bed, will you call this a fast even an acceptable day to the Lord?”

It is supposed to be a humbling experience – to say NO to food – No to sex for a married couple during the fast – NO to TV, the internet, games, leisure activities, the things we normally do to find pleasure and take our time away from the Lord.

It is only a fast if you are giving something up – if you don't care about something it is not really fasting because there is no loss.

Fasting always means **humility** and humility always means **self-denial**.

Jesus said: “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”

Fasting acknowledges our spiritual nature by saying there is more to me than just the physical realm.

1Thess 5:23- “Man is spirit – soul – body, NOT body – soul – spirit.”

Get the order right:

If you look at yourself from being **Body – Soul – Spirit**; you will live your life from the outside in.

If you look at yourself from being **Spirit – Soul – Body**; you will live your life from the inside out.

The way God created us was to live life from your spirit to your soul then to your body. The reason we have messed up bodies is because we have messed up souls. The reason we have messed up souls is because we are not under the Spirit’s control.

When you come under the influence of the Spirit, the Soul and the body come under control and the Spirit fixes the Soul and when the Soul comes under the influence of the Spirit, the Soul fixes the body.

Fasting brings us to this way of living.

In the Bible it teaches we must die in order to live!

God is telling us for the outer man to do right; the inner man must be set free.

Illus: Popcorn – the kernel you place in the microwave is ineatable.

Every kernel has moisture in it that when heat is applied the kernel expands and breaks open allowing the popcorn to escape. What was ineatable now becomes a favorite snack.

God applies the heat of the Holy Spirit to your life when you fast and you are broken and the righteousness of God comes forth from your life and you and others are benefited from the process occurring during your time of fasting.

It’s because you came into His presence and bowed before Him in humility and He broke you.

To be broken means to be stripped of your self sufficiency –

Some of us don’t come humble – we don’t mean to be that way; we just are.

The major affront to God is when we determine that we can or will accomplish something on our own without trusting God to help us. **New Year’s Resolutions!**

If you could have overcome that issue; you would have done it by now.

God wants to hear – “Lord, I can’t, will You give me the strength and help me overcome this area of my life?”

I can't get rid of the cigarettes, this drug addiction, this cursing, this pornography, this over-eating, this ... WHATEVER!

Lord, I throw my inability at your feet –

God says – “Now we are ready, now we can do it; as long as you realize you are broken, I can work in you to bring victory over those issues.”

If you don't humble yourself; God has some things He can bring into your life to help you humble yourself.

Your flesh cannot help your flesh defeat the flesh.

3. **The Practice of the Fast** - Psa. 69:10 “I wept & chastened my soul with fasting.”

Fasting is when your soul cries, not just abstaining from food with your body.

Fasting is an intentional abstinence related to a burden of the soul.

v. 13- “My prayer is to You, O God at an acceptable time in the greatness of Your loving kindness answer me with Your saving truth. Deliver me from the mire and do not let me sink. May I be delivered from my foes, may the water not overflow me, may the deep not swallow me up, and may the pit not shut its mouth on me.

When your world is closing in; you can't go to people – they can't help you – GO to God, the one who can help and deliver.

Joel 2:12- “Even now declares the Lord, return to Me with all your heart and with fasting, weeping and mourning [a serious time], rend your heart and not your garments & return to the Lord for He is compassionate and slow to anger abounding in loving-kindness, relenting of evil. Who knows whether He will return and relent and leave a blessing behind?”

He will not only bless, but will leave some extra behind for the future.

v. 15- “Blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast and proclaim a solemn assembly.”

A solemn assembly is a very serious gathering of God's people to get God's attention.

The question is: How Bad Do You Want His Attention?

- Deliverance from your addictions.

- Deliverance from your carnal temperament.
- Deliverance from the bondages that have held you for years.
- To have your marriage saved and functioning as a Christ centered relationship.
- Bad enough to give up dinner or some meals?
- Bad enough to throw yourself before God and cry out: “I can’t?”

Fasting is a powerful tool to use when your world is closing in on you and you need answers and deliverance.

There are some here today about to give up on themselves – their situation.

But you haven’t done all you can do until you have given yourself to fasting and prayer for the situation.

The option is available for you to throw yourself on the mercy of God and seek Him with all your heart which includes fasting.

III: This week begin a notebook [for 21 days] and write on one side what you need to happen in your life or the needs of another.

Be specific: I want God to heal this... or I need this ... to happen.

I want you to bring my mother to Jesus Christ.

I want you to deliver me from this weakness.

Put that paper before the Lord and declare: **“Lord, this is why I’m giving up food; I need this to happen in my life or the life of those I am praying for.”**

Make up your mind – You are not going to let God go until He blesses you with the answer.

On the other side of the paper; write it down when God brings the answer.

Write it down so when God answers the request – you can tell somebody when He did it and what He did.

4. The Expectation of the Fast- Isa. 58:6- “Is this not the fast that I have chosen?”

- To loosen the bonds of wickedness.
- To undo the cords of the yoke.
- To let the oppressed go free.
- To break every yoke. Every addiction, bondage, oppression, everything you can’t shake off yourself.

Is this not why you fast? So that I might break the bondage you are bond with, to break the oppression you can’t break off yourself, to deliver you from those habits and things you haven’t had the strength to do.

Have you tried Me this way?

You haven't tried MY program yet! I AM the right program!

God can save you money from all the programs you get involved in to get control of areas of your life:

Diet – health – thinking right – getting rid of bad habits – self discipline to make better choices.

Choose His program of prayer with fasting to bring your flesh under the control of the Spirit to overcome the physical nature to the good of the spiritual man.

Freedom from bondage and captivity:

From habits, strongholds, other people, circumstances we are locked in and live with spiritual handcuffs on us.

We can't dance or shout to the Lord because when we wake up the enemy speaks to us and reminds us of our failures - our weakness and our bondages.

We can't raise our hands because of our handcuffs.

We know when we walk out of church; we are going straight for that bondage because satan has handcuffs on us.

Satan owns us – when we wake up in the morning, he brings the thought across our mind, he locks our feet down – strongholds – oppressed in your minds –

God says: “Have you fasted yet, this is why you fast; to set yourself free and be loosed from all this.”

v. 7 - “Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry and to bring the homeless and poor into your house, when you see the naked to clothe him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?”

You can't divide your bread unless you have bread to divide.

You can't bring the homeless into your house unless you have a house.

You can't clothe the naked unless you have clothes to give them.

Not to hide yourself from your own flesh – some are hiding from their own family members, not wanting to see them, not wanting your parents, kids, brothers & sisters around. – hiding from your own flesh.

God asks: “Have you fasted yet?”

If you will fast: I can bless your business so you have bread to spare to feed the hungry.

I can bless you with a nicer home so you can have a home to share.

God will only bless you if you are willing to be a conduit to bless others.

If you aren't willing to share His blessing with others to advance His Kingdom, then that is not the fast that God is interested in and He will not bless you even though you are going without food.

Is it not to change your circumstances to bring a blessing to others?

v. 8 - "Then your light will break out like the dawn."

Then all the spiritual resources the Lord has given to you will come out into the open like the butterfly coming out of the cocoon.

We have hidden the light because we have been trapped in the flesh and not the spirit realm.

When we starve the flesh – you shrink! The flesh gets weak.

You are going to get weak when you fast more than one meal.

But that's a good thing. Because when you get weak in the flesh – the flesh doesn't buck up anymore.

The battle between the flesh and the spirit becomes dominated by the spirit.

The flesh no longer has the say so in your walk with God.

v.9- **"Then you will call and the Lord will answer."**

This is the bottom line of why we are fasting Jan 2 – 22nd

You may have been calling on Him all the time – maybe; but not with the fast.

Ill: Since 1937 planes have been pressurized so they can fly above the clouds.

It is this pressurization that allows aircraft to go above 30,000 feet and a person still survives. Before that, aircraft had to fly low beneath the clouds so we could still be in the atmosphere to breathe.

But once pressurized, the planes could go higher and inside the plane could hold the oxygen so we could breathe at those heights.

When you start this fasting & prayer, satan and all of hell will come against you at cloud level to keep you below the clouds.

They will determine that you don't get higher into God's presence close to the Throne of God. They will attempt every temptation and discouragement to keep you below the cloud level.

But if you will fast and pray and throw yourself on the mercy of God, you will break through the clouds.

You may wonder, how will I be able to do this – I won't survive, I can't do this. – but God will sustain you by pressurizing your soul so you can make it to the heavenly places where God's blessings are-
Where Gods' power is –
All of God's spiritual blessings are located above the clouds in Christ Jesus – in heavenly places.

Don't allow satan to keep you on the ground – it's time to rise up and ascend and go up to the places in the heavenlies and bring those needs and blessings to earth to yourself, your family and to those who need them.

So you will decide whether you want to sit on the spiritual sidelines or enter the game, you will either decide if you want the bread on the table or the bread of life;

The choice is up to you – But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.