

## The Church at Myrtle Lake

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### The Power of Fasting

*“Presenting the Whole Counsel of God and the Truth of the Gospel  
In the Time of Christ’s Soon Return”*



*Watchmen  
On the Wall*

### Lesson 2 Notes

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The King James  
Bible is used  
throughout this  
study series.

Sunday  
February 18, 2024

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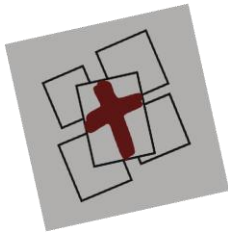
Let’s pick up from Lesson 1 (Feb 11, 2024) on the subject of fasting, and what the Bible has to say about it.

The book of Isaiah is commonly called the “gospel (entire Bible) in miniature”. The book of Isaiah, part of God’s Holy Word, contains the most vivid descriptions of the first and second advent of Jesus Christ to be found in the OT. There are thirty-nine chapters of God’s righteousness, justice, and holiness are followed by 27 chapters of compassion, grace, and glory. The parallel to the 39 books of the Old Testament and 27 books of the New Testament is obvious. The entire Bible can be taught from Isaiah! This includes God’s direction and guidance with regard to fasting.

In Isaiah chapter 58, we see how the nation of Israel is perplexed. As a nation, they ask God why their cries are seemingly ignored, especially while engaged in fasting.

For context, let’s look at what has been happening. At this time (~720BC), there have been a series of judgements by God against the northern 10 tribes of Israel. God has sent them one prophet after another – and the nation of Israel is not listening to the calls of repentance and turning back to God, so God, in his righteousness, needs to “bring out the stick” – this “stick” comes in the form of the Assyrian Empire, located just to the north of the northern 10 tribes of Israel.

Isaiah is commanded by God (Is 58:1-4) to *“Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.”* God is telling Isaiah “I want you to shout this one”. Continuing, *“Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the*



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*ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God. **Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge?** Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours. **Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high.**" (Emphasis added)*

Note: The phrase "afflicting your/our souls" means fasting. See Lev 16:29.

Israel (aka: northern 10 tribes) were so rebellious, so entrenched in sin, "living the lifestyle" that the time arrived for God's judgment.

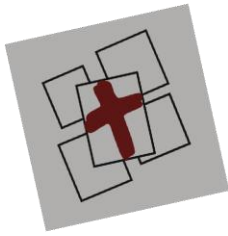
In verse 2, we see that Israel was going through the motions, had appearances of righteous living on the outside, learning about God, but they were not interested in obeying. They were all appearance, and no substance. They have forsaken God and were unfaithful to Him - they took for granted their unique nearness to God.

Discussion point: As the church, are we all appearance and no substance? Do we go through the motions and appear to be living a God-fearing life on Sunday, but from Mon-Sat, we behave like the rest of the world? "*That was a great sermon pastor...for somebody else, that is...*" How can we expect God's blessings with behavior like that? Also, discuss the church of Laodicea in Rev Chapter 3 as it pertains to this subject.

God saw Israel's fasting for what it was – hollow and meaningless. Further, the Israelites had managed to turn their fasting into a competition while simultaneously treating their servants poorly. This was a big "no-no", as God commanded the Israelites to not exploit their laborers (see Deut 24:14)

God instructs that true fasting must be from a pure heart in Isa. 58: 5-7. We read "*Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? 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 that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?"*

God is telling the Israelites, they are doing it (fasting) wrong and for the wrong reasons. In the NT, Jesus expounds on this truth. Refer to Jesus's teaching in Matt. 6:16-18 "*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*



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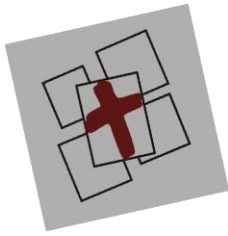
*have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.”*

Further, in Is 58: 6-7, we see that better than fasting, is feasting, so that the believer can rejoice in the Lord’s provision, and share with those in need.

Then, we see God’s promises in Is 58: 8-12: *“Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward. Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon day: And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in.”*

Bottom line: the entire purpose for any spiritual activity, including fasting, is to set aside our own pleasures, desires, and cravings and seek to be pleasing to God. *“If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.”* See also Col 1:10 *“That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God”*

Fasting was still practiced during the time of Jesus. As we discussed earlier, Jesus taught about the proper practice of fasting and prayer (Matthew 6:5-18). Members of the church at Antioch fasted and prayed before sending Barnabas and Paul on mission (Acts 13:2-3). When descending the mount of Transfiguration, Jesus and His disciples encountered a man who brought his son who was possessed by an evil spirit. We read in Mark 9: 14-29 *“And when he came to his disciples, he saw a great multitude about them, and the scribes questioning with them. And straightway all the people, when they beheld him, were greatly amazed, and running to him saluted him. And he asked the scribes, What question ye with them? And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth*



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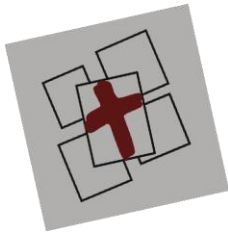
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*away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not. He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me. And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming. And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child. And oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us. Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief. When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him. And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose. And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out? And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by **prayer and fasting**. (Emphasis added). Apparently, Jesus was fasting at this time, but remember, Jesus made fasting to draw close to the Father part of His lifestyle. Note: we know that the spirit inhabiting the man's son was evil/unclean due to its obsession with death. For more details on this encounter, reference Luke 9:37-43 and Matthew 17:14-21.*

Not only was fasting still practiced during the time of Jesus, over the years, the Jewish people had instituted their own days for fasting (beyond the one fast commanded by God on the Day of Atonement).

### Fasts instituted by Jews as sorrowful, mournful observances:

- The fast of the fourth month (Tammuz); where the city of Jerusalem was captured by the Babylonians, who on the ninth day of this month broke into the city. See Jer 52:6-7; Jer 39:2 and 52:6-7
- The fast of the fifth month (Av/Ab); on the tenth day the temple was burnt. See Jer 52:12-16.
- The fast of the seventh (Tishri) month; where Gedaliah was killed. See Jeremiah 41:1 Zech 7:5 and 2 Kings 25:22-26.
- The fast of the tenth month (Tevet/Tebeth); on the tenth day the king of Babylon's army sat down in front of the city and besieged it.



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### Types of Fasts:

#### Absolute or Complete:

This is where a person abstains from all food and drink. The fasts that the biblical figures Jesus, Moses, and Elijah endured serve as examples. See Ex 34:28 and 1 Kings 19:8.

#### Normal:

This is where a person abstains from all food but still drinks water. This was the most common type of fast mentioned in the Bible and was often undertaken as a sign of repentance, mourning, or as a means of seeking guidance from God. Although there is no set period to commit to this fast, many agree to fast from sunrise to sunset, 1 full day, 3 days, 7 days, or 21 days. See Joel 2:12, Psalm 35:13, and Ezra 8:21-23 for examples in Scripture.

#### Partial:

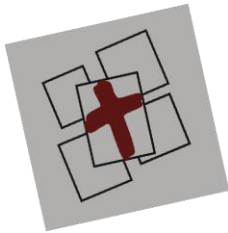
This is where a person abstains from certain types of food or drink but consumes other foods. Daniel undertook an example of this fast: he abstained from all rich foods and only ate vegetables, pulse, and water. Daniel fasted for 21 days, and many Christians launch this 21-day fast every year, especially at the beginning of the year. It is a great way to dedicate your life, plans, and year to the Lord. See Dan 10:2-3.

#### Corporate:

A group of people may decide to fast as a show of remorse or repentance. Another way is for the group to consult God about making a significant life decision. The story of Esther is a great example of a corporate fast. See also Joel 1:14 and Neh 9:1-2.

### Practical Application:

When fasting, we must practice obedient living. In Zechariah 7:4-10, God rebukes Israel for fasting without the accompanying righteousness. The text says, *"The word of the Lord who rules over all then came to me, "4 Then came the word of the Lord of hosts unto me, saying, Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me? And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did not ye eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves? Should ye not hear the words which the Lord hath cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity, and the cities thereof round about her, when men inhabited the south and*



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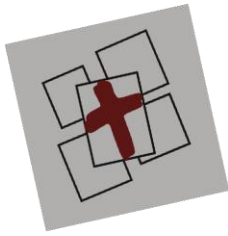
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*the plain? And the word of the Lord came unto Zechariah, saying, Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother: And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.”*

To seek the Lord by fasting or any other religious act and yet to continue in unrepentant sin is worthless. Why seek the Lord in fasting if we plan to continue in sin and unrighteousness? That is exactly what the Pharisees were doing. David said if he cherished iniquity in his heart the Lord would not hear him (Ps 66:18).

### **Reasons to Fast:**

- To humble (deny) ourselves (Ps 35:13).
- To draw closer to God (James 4:8).
- To help us understand God’s Word.
- Fasting is appropriate when mourning over sin. In Ezra 10, when the Israelites were intermarrying with unbelieving Gentiles, Ezra confessed their sins and mourned with fasting. Ezra 10:6 says, *“Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib: and when he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water: for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away..”* He was hurting over their sins and desiring for them to repent. At times, we also see fasting with national repentance. When Jonah called Nineveh to repent, they responded with mourning and fasting. The Ninevite king commanded for both people and animals to abstain from food and water, as they called upon the Lord and repented (Jonah 3:7-9). In addition, when Ezra and Nehemiah led Israel in repentance, the nation corporately fasted and confessed their sins together (Neh 9:1-3). Similarly, when our family members, churches, and nations are in great sin, it is appropriate to mourn, confess their sins, and fast—seeking for God to turn them back to himself. It is also appropriate to mourn and fast when we are struggling with habitual sin. Fasting is a natural response to mental, spiritual, or physical pain. Our problem is that sin often doesn’t deeply affect us. Sadly, we’re often too comfortable with it; therefore, we eat, drink, and continue as if nothing is happening.
- Fasting is an appropriate means of seeking to conquer sin and temptation. We should fast as a means of conquering sin and temptation in our own lives. Christ was fasting when he conquered Satan’s temptations in the wilderness (Matt 4). We should consider this when constantly plagued by a reoccurring depression, a

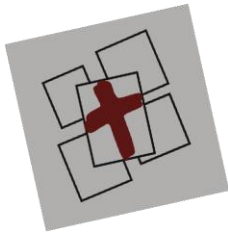


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stronghold of lust, or an addiction. Fasting is also a great way to confront cultural and societal evils.

- Fasting is appropriate when mourning over some great pain or loss. Often when people are hurting over the loss of a loved one or some great pain, they don't desire to eat. This is totally normal. But to biblically fast while mourning, we must direct those emotions and thoughts to the Lord, as we mourn in hope.
- To find God's direction in our lives (Ezra 8:21).
- Fasting is appropriate when seeking wisdom and revelation from God. In Daniel 9 and 10—on two separate occasions—Daniel fasted, and God gave him revelation through an angel. Also, in Exodus 24, Moses received the law from God while fasting on Mount Sinai. Similarly, it was while the elders in Antioch were fasting that the Holy Spirit called Paul and Barnabas to global missions (Acts 13). It was that revelation that led to much of the Gentile world.
- To seek healing.
- To seek deliverance from evil (spirits).
- To seek God's intervention in some particular crisis or problem which seemingly cannot be handled by ordinary means.
- To intercede and pray on behalf of others.
- Fasting is appropriate when preparing for some great ministry or task. In Luke 4, Jesus fasted for forty days before beginning his ministry. After finishing, he left the wilderness in the Spirit's power (Luke 4:14). In addition, when elders were set apart for ministry in the early church, it was commonly done with prayer and fasting. Acts 14:23 says, *"And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.."* Fasting and prayer was preparation for their great work—it was a recognition that ministry could not be effectively done in human power. We need God's grace for ministry, and we should seek it through prayer and fasting. We often lack power for ministry because we lack intense times of prayer and fasting.
- Fasting is appropriate for developing self-control. In describing how Christians must be like spiritual athletes, Paul said, *"I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."* (1 Cor 9:27). Fasting can help us avoid becoming slaves of our desires, and instead have control over them. Remember, a fruit of the Spirit is self control (temperance) (Gal 5:22-23)
- Fasting is appropriate in helping us extend mercy to others. This might be implied by Isaiah's rebuke in 58:6-7: No, this is the kind of fast I want ... I want you to share your food with the hungry and to provide shelter for homeless,



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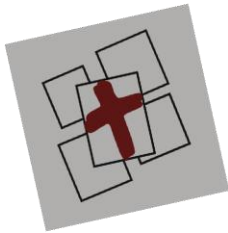
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oppressed people. When you see someone naked, clothe him! It is appropriate to not eat out or abstain from some other luxury, so we can share with those who have needs. It seems Israel was fasting and yet there were people around them without food and clothes. God says that type of fasting is useless. We should fast in order to practice mercy.

### **Examples of people fasting in the Bible:**

- Moses: Before receiving the Ten Commandments from God at Sinai, he fasted for 40 days and nights (Exodus 34:28).
- To get direction from God, Elijah spent 40 days and nights in the wilderness fasting (1 Kings 19:8).
- Daniel only ate vegetables and drank water for 21 days while fasting and praying to God for direction (Daniel 10:2-3).
- Anna, a prophetess at the temple, is said to have spent nearly all her time praying and fasting (Luke 2:37).
- To prepare for His ministry, Jesus fasted in the wilderness for 40 days and nights (Matthew 4:2). Jesus was obviously fasting when he cast the demons out after coming down from the mount of transfiguration. (Luke 9:37, Matt 17:14-21; Mark 9:14-29)
- The followers of John the Baptist fasted to demonstrate their sorrow for sin (Matthew 9:14).
- When it came time to find Judas's replacement, the apostles fasted and prayed (Acts 1:14).
- Paul: Before making major decisions or setting out on missionary missions, Paul would fast and pray (Acts 9:9, 13:2-3).
- Cornelius, a Roman centurion, was visited by an angel after he fasted and prayed (Acts 10:30).
- Esther: Before going to the king to beg for her people, Esther fasted and prayed for three days (Esther 4:16).





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### Summary:

Fasting does not appear to be as common today but the spiritual discipline of fasting is still appropriate.

When believers fast, it should be done in a biblical and responsible manner:

- The purpose of fasting is to focus on Jesus, not impress others.
- People with medical conditions should consult their physicians before fasting from food and ease into the practice gradually.
- If unable to fast from food, believers should practice other spiritual disciplines that will help them stay focused on Jesus. A person can engage in a fast from media or other activities.