

“Spiritual Fasting”

Ash Wednesday, February 25, 2009

Isaiah 58:1-12

Introduction:

As most of you know, today marks the beginning of the season of Lent, which is 40 days (not counting Sunday's) of penitence for Lent was Jesus' 40 days of fasting in the wilderness after his baptism. At the end of that extended period of fasting the devil came to him to test him. If Jesus had fallen in to temptation then, we wouldn't be here now because Jesus would never have come to the Cross, and we would still be spiritually dead in our sins.

Lent is therefore a season of penitence, of introspection, of struggle against habits, attitudes, hatreds, bigotries, and additions that keep us from realizing the fullness of the life God intends for us. For some Lent is a time to lay down what is interfering with God's grace in our lives.

Lent is also a season for looking up something new that God wants us to experience, or participate in, as a method of growing us in grace and service towards others.

Since fasting was such an integral part of the beginning of Jesus' ministry, Lent is also a season in which Christians are challenged to fast as a way of

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de. e\$oin a dee+er s+iritua\$ awareness and sensiti .ity to the a"tion of 1 od in our \$i .es() here is somethin about sayin 3no4 to our bodies that a\$so frees our s+irits to as"end(

In today's \$essons there is mu"h said about fastin , and 1 od's mer"y and 5ud ment(

6efore I +ro"eed I shou\$d say that fastin is abstainin from eatin (It is not "uttin ba"k on the amount we eat at(It is not a diet(It is a s+iritua\$ dis"i+\$ine(It is not eatin % e .en when your body is sayin , 3feed me, !eroy4(It is a way to in"rease the stren th of your eterna\$ s+irit and free you from the demands of your tem+ora\$ f\$esh() here are se .era\$ ways to fast(

*esus fasted by not eatin for #0 days(7e +robab\$y drank water as he found it(I ha .e fasted for 12 days(I "ou\$d ne .er o \$on er than that(

&ome +eo+\$e fast one day a week durin !ent, su"h as Wednesday or Friday(&ome +eo+\$e fast one or two mea\$s ea"h day durin !ent(&ome +eo+\$e i .e u+ eatin "ertain foods durin !ent, but I'm not "on .in"ed that is fastin (It is 2\$ayin somethin 'down', and that has its own .a\$ue() hat said,

Fasting Is A Template For Spiritual Growth.

Isaiah and *esus discuss two motivations for fasting : one is temporal (It has to do with us, and the attention fasting brings us (We get strokes being miserable and having +eo+e make over us because we are being so brave by fasting (Isaiah and *esus weren't very impressed with fasting for temporal gain () they promised that to be in under God's judgment (

) the second motivation for fasting is spiritual (It is a way of denying the flesh and seeking a deeper spiritual encounter with the Father in God () the gain is personal (It is between you and God (It is not for show and tears and savings on the bank (Isaiah and *esus promised that motivation to be in under God's mercy (

&o Isaiah and *esus present a temporal motivation for fasting with being in under God's judgment, and a spiritual motivation the same as being in under God's mercy (

!ikewise, there are two pathways for seeking recognition to God () the first is through the temporal way of doing good works (Good works are good, they help +eo+e () that is not the issue (

The Issue About Good Works and Fasting is Our Motivation.

Are we doing these things to impress +eo+e or

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to draw "user to God & if we do good works as a means to earn our way into heaven then we are "outin on God's judgment, instead of "likewise, if we fast to impress +e rather than to draw "user to God we are under judgment, not mer"y(

When I say we are under judgment I mean that in the sense of evaluation, or a+raisa(If we want God to judge us and our actions then we need to "om+rehead that God's standards are e, "eedin "y diffi"u(If we are oin to earn our way into heaven then we need to be "ome as good as God is % name\$y, +erfe"t() hat is the standard God will be judge in us by(In : atthew 5:#8, *esus said to the ;harisees, who were tryin to make themse\$.es +erfe"t: *3Be ye, therefore, perfect even as my father in heaven is perfect*". & the standard is God 7imse\$() hat is a tou h +air of shoes to row into(

/ on.erse\$y, if doin good works is our way of demonstratin how mu"h we so.e God, and we are thankfu\$ for God's mer"y< and if we fast % not to impress anyone, but to draw "user to God % then we are not under God's judgment, we are under God's mer"y(

By the mer"y of God, *esus went to the /ross to +ay the +ena\$ty for a\$\$ our sins(=ow that the debt has been +aid by God 7imse\$, God is free to be mer"ifu\$ to

Everyone who desires mercy and is willing to rely on Jesus as his/her savior and the Lord of their destiny (In that merciful relationship with God, God +ours +ra +e upon us, which means we don't have to be +erfe +t to +ain entrance into heaven)

We are given assurance of heaven through the work Jesus / Christ did on our behalf () therefore, we owe Jesus a debt; but, it is a debt we cannot possibly repay (

We can't repay Him but we can willingly +artici +ate in His ministry of redemption by helping others become reconciled to God through / Christ; reconciled to other +eo +s; and reconciled to themselves if they are oppressed by guilt or shame or any other negative imprint from others (

Lent Can Be A Season for Us to Draw Closer To God.

By a +te +in these ashes on our foreheads we are intentionally identifying with Jesus (In +a +tism the ceremony says we *are marked as Christ's own* (Ash Wednesday makes that marking .ery .isib +e, doesn't it (

) he ; +a +mist today says there are a +tua + benefits to be +on in to God: :8 % *He forgives all our sins. He heals all our infirmities. :# % He redeems our lives from the grave. He crowns us with mercy and loving-*

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kindness. :5 % He satisfies us with good things. Our youth is renewed like an eagle's(:10 % We are not rewarded according to our sins or our wickedness(:12 % As far as the east is from the west, so far has God removed our sins from us. Wow?

It a\$\$ has to do with what we treasure in our hearts(If it is a " " \$amation from others that is what we wi\$\$ find, whate .er it "ost us(*esus "autions us in the 1 os+e\$ \$esson not to o that route(Instead, store u+ treasure for ourse\$.es in hea .en by seekin first the @in dom of 1 od knowin that e .erythin we abso\$ute\$y need in this world 1 od wi\$\$ +ro .ide us sim+\$y be"ause 1 od \$o .es us and is mer"ifu\$ towards us(

: er"y A(, or *ud ment9 What wi\$\$ you seek this !ent9)he "hoi"e is yours()he different +aths are before ea"h of us()his I know % &+iritua\$ Fastin wi\$\$ +rodu"e s+iritua\$ rowth(Whi"h wi\$\$ you "hoose9