Feasting and Fasting
Dan 1:5, 8-17; Matt 6:16-18
SS Lesson for 02/01/2015

Devotional Scripture: Isa 58:2-7

OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW AND KEY VERSE OF THE LESSON

Key Verse: Matt 6:17-18

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

LESSON INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

FEASTING CONVICTIONS ABOUT FAITHFULNESS TO GOD (Dan 1:8-13)

Faithful to God through being resolved (8)

- Be resolved to God because He is holy and good (Josh 24:19-22)
- Be resolved to God because He is the King, everything he does is right and all His ways are just (Dan 4:31-37)
- Be resolved to God because it should be desirable and the right choice (Josh 24:15)
- Be resolved to God because He is the only one who has eternal life (John 6:66-69)
- Be resolved to God because He has delivered and will continue to deliver from deadly peril (2 Cor 1:8-10)
- Be resolved to God because those who endure will reign with Him (2 Tim 2:12)
- Be resolved to God because to stay steadfast brings rewards from God (Rev 3:9-13)

Faithful to God in spite of resistance (9-10)

- Resistance where God helps the powerless against the mighty (2 Chron 14:9-12)
- Resistance that cannot be overcome by strength and size (Ps 33:16-19)
- Resistance that may seem to be overbearing, but reliance on God will always bring deliverance (2 Cor 1:8-10)
- Resistance by people who have been captivated by Satan (2 Tim 2:24-26)
- I should expect frustrations and resistance and therefore test all things by the Holy Spirit (1 John 4:1-3)
- Always be prepared to face resistance (Luke 10:3)

Faithful to God through testing (11-13)

- Testing to bring out humility (Deut 8:2)
- Testing to determine love (Deut 13:3)
- Testing of the heart (Prov 17:3)
- Testing so that God will lead into righteousness (Ps 139:23-24)
- Testing refines (Ps 66:10)
- Testing proves faith genuine (1 Peter 1:7)
- Testing aids in receiving God's inheritance (Heb 11:8)

FEASTING CONVICTIONS ABOUT FAITHFULNESS OF GOD (Dan 1:14-17)

God grants endurance (14-16)

- God provides endurance through grace (2 Cor 12:9)
- God provides endurance through His presence (1 Cor 5:4)
- God provides endurance through strength (Col 1:11)
- God provides endurance to us from within (Eph 3:20)
- Endurance that displays that one is living worthy of the kingdom of God (2 Thess 1:3-5)
- Endurance of hardships (2 Tim 2:3)
- Endurance that is rewarded by reigning with Jesus (2 Tim 2:12)
- Endurance that proves one is a child of God (Heb 12:7-9)
- Endurance that is counted as being blessed (James 5:11)

God grants wisdom (17)

- God provides wisdom because His word contains it and through obedience it will provide wisdom (Deut 4:5-6)
- God provides wisdom because God can fill with all knowledge, wisdom and understanding (Col 1:9)
- God provides wisdom because His wisdom is pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere (James 3:17)
- God provides wisdom because He teaches it to those who seek it (Ps 90:12)
- Wisdom comes through the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:8)
Wisdom is in Jesus (1 Cor 1:30)  
Wisdom that comes from the fear of the Lord (Prov 3:7-8)  
Wisdom that comes from God (Prov 2:6-7)  
Wisdom that keeps and preserves  (Prov 4:5-7)  
Wisdom through prayer (James 1:5)

**Fasting Convictions About God's Guidance (Matt 6:16-18)**

*Guidance to avoid hypocrisy (16)*  
Avoid hypocrisy because it shuts the kingdom of heaven from others (Matthew 23:13)  
Avoid hypocrisy because it causes divisions and obstacles (Romans 16:17-18)  
Avoid hypocrisy because it neglects important things (Matt 23:23-24)  
Avoid hypocrisy because it says one thing, but does another (Matt 23:2-7)  
Avoid hypocrisy because it is just going through the motions (Isa 58:2-4)

*Guidance for secrecy (17-18)*  
In secrecy so that total honesty and openness can be expressed and examined (Matt 6:6)  
In secrecy to be alone with God (Matt 14:23)  
In secrecy to come to terms with sin and its indignation (Isa 26:20)  
In secrecy to wait on God's answer in patient expectation (Ps 5:3)

**Conclusion and Other Thoughts**

**Commentary Thoughts from Chip Bell**  
What is Fasting?  
Ostentatious Fasting  
Secret Fasting  
Always “in secret”?  
What “reward”?  
Secret Fasting

**Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

**Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator**
Feasting and Fasting

Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson examines Feasting and Fasting. The study's aim is to understand the difference between indulging ourselves and denying ourselves as well as to recognize how an indulging mentality hurts our spiritual life. The study's application is to limit or deny ourselves some things so that we can devote more time to important spiritual matters. (Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary).

Key Verse: Matt 6:17-18

16 "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 17 But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

The Lord then turned from the Pharisees’ teachings to examine their hypocritical deeds. Jesus first spoke of the Pharisees’ almsgiving. Righteousness is not primarily a matter between a person and others, but between a person and God. So one’s acts should not be demonstrated before others for then his reward should come from them (vv. 1-2). The Pharisees made a great show of their giving to the needy... in the synagogues and on the streets, thinking they were thus proving how righteous they were. But the Lord said that in giving one should not even let his left hand know what his right hand is doing, that is, it should be so secret that the giver readily forgets what he gave. In this way he demonstrates true righteousness before God and not before people, so God in turn will reward him. One cannot be rewarded, as the Pharisees expected, by both man and God.

Jesus then spoke about the practice of prayer, which the Pharisees loved to perform publicly. Rather than making prayer a matter between an individual and God, the Pharisees had turned it into an act to be seen by men—again, to demonstrate their supposed righteousness. Their prayers were directed not to God but to other men, and consisted of long, repetitive phrases (Matt. 6:7). Jesus condemned such practices. Prayer should be addressed to your Father, who is unseen (cf. John 1:18; 1 Tim. 1:17) and who knows what you need (Matt. 6:8); it is not “to be seen by men.” But Jesus also presented a model prayer for His disciples to follow. This prayer is commonly called “the Lord’s Prayer,” but it is actually “the disciples’ prayer.” This prayer, which is repeated by many Christians, contains elements that are important for all praying: (1) Prayer is to begin with worship. God is addressed as Our Father in heaven. Worship is the essence of all prayer. (In vv. 1-18 Jesus used the word “Father” 10 times! Only those who have true inner righteousness can address God in that way in worship.) (2) Reverence is a second element of prayer, for God’s name is to be hallowed, that is, revered (hagiasthētō). (3) The desire for God’s kingdom —Your kingdom come—is based on the assurance that God will fulfill all His covenant promises to His people. (4) Prayer is to include the request that His will be accomplished today on earth as it is being accomplished in heaven, that is, fully and willingly. (5) Petition for personal needs such as daily food is also to be a part of prayer. “Daily” (epiousion, used only here in the NT) means “sufficient for today,” (6) Requests regarding spiritual needs, such as forgiveness, are included too. This implies that the petitioner has already forgiven those who had offended him. Sins (cf. Luke 11:4), as moral debts, reveal one’s shortcomings before God. (7) Believers recognize their spiritual weakness as they pray for deliverance from temptation to evil (cf. James 1:13-14). Jesus’ words in Matthew 6:14-15 explain His statement about forgiveness in verse 12. Though God’s forgiveness of sin is not based on one’s forgiving others, a Christian’s forgiveness is based on realizing he has been forgiven (cf. Eph. 4:32). Personal fellowship with God is in view in these verses (not salvation from sin). One cannot walk in fellowship with God if he refuses to forgive others.

Fasting was a third example of Pharisaic “righteousness.” The Pharisees loved to fast so that others would see them and think them spiritual. Fasting emphasized the denial of the flesh, but the Pharisees were glorifying their flesh by drawing attention to themselves. The Lord’s words emphasized once again that such actions should be done in secret before God. Nor was one to follow the Pharisees’ custom of withholding olive oil from his head during fasting. As a result, God alone would know and would reward accordingly. In all three examples of Pharisaic “righteousness”—almsgiving (vv. 1-4), praying (vv. 5-15), and fasting (vv. 16-18)—Jesus spoke of
hypocrites (vv. 2, 5, 16), public ostentation (vv. 1-2, 5, 16), receiving their reward in full when their actions are done before men (vv. 2, 5, 16), acting in secret (vv. 4, 6, 18), and being rewarded by the Father, who sees or “knows,” when one’s actions are done secretly (vv. 4, 6, 8, 18).

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

As a teacher at a Bible college, I have noticed that students are interested in food! This interest causes those who take Old Testament classes to ask a lot of questions about the dietary restrictions of the ancient Israelites. Leviticus 11 sets forth many such restrictions, but God did not wait for the nation of Israel to become a reality before he gave guidelines about food. The subject of food restrictions is mentioned as early as Genesis 2, where God commanded Adam that he could eat from any tree in the garden except “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (2:16, 17). Since only trees are mentioned, this has caused some to conclude that God intended for Adam and Eve to eat only nuts and fruit from trees and the seeds of plants. The instruction for Noah in Genesis 9:3, however, causes most to conclude that the initial diet also included green herbs. After the great flood, God declared that “everything that lives and moves about will be food for you” (again, Genesis 9:3). An important restriction was that meat with the blood still in it was not to be eaten (9:4). With the advent of the Law of Moses, God placed limitations on the foods that an Israelite could eat. Many of the animals used for sacrifices were eaten, and guidelines in this regard were given. The only purpose stated for the complex restrictions for the Israelites was that they were to “distinguish between the unclean and the clean” (Leviticus 11:47). The Israelites had to evaluate whatever they ate or did each day against that standard. Today we have great freedom of food choice under the new covenant according to Mark 7:19; Romans 14:14; 1 Corinthians 8:8; 10:25; and Colossians 2:16. The few restrictions are noted in Acts 15:20, 29; Romans 14:1-4, 15, 20, 21; and 1 Corinthians 8:13.

Is a person somehow superior by being a vegetarian or a vegan? No—that is merely a personal choice. It is not mandated by God; consequently, it should not be mandated by others (1 Timothy 4:3-5). Even so, the Bible has things to say about dietary choices for today.

The first part of our lesson comes from Daniel 1. The year was 605 BC, and Daniel and others had been taken from Jerusalem to Babylon as hostages by King Nebuchadnezzar. To the Babylonians, having the best and brightest (Daniel 1:4) as hostages would weaken the resolve in Judah to rebel, and the captives would be taught to respect the power of Babylon. Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, evidently had decided to surrender rather than resist, and the subjugation was symbolized by royal captives being taken to Babylon (2 Kings 24:1; 2 Chronicles 36:5-7; Daniel 1:3). After making the 900-mile trip, some captives were selected to be immersed in Babylonian culture. This involved a three-year program in receiving the best education that Babylon could provide (Daniel 1:3-5). The indoctrination undoubtedly included being taught Babylonian literature, history, mathematics, astronomy, and religion. Would the Hebrew captives remain true to their religious convictions in the process, or would they compromise those beliefs? Daniel and his three friends chose their battles wisely in this regard, one of which involved dietary choices.

Major Theme Analysis

(SCRIPTURAL TEXT FROM THE NEW KING JAMES VERSION; CROSS-REFERENCES FROM THE NIV)

Feasting Convictions About Faithfulness to God (Dan 1:8-13)

8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.
9 Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs.
10 And the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your food and drink. For why should he see your faces looking worse than the young men who are your age? Then you would endanger my head before the king."
11 So Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, 12 "Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink.
13 "Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants."
Faithful to God through being resolved (8)

Be resolved to God because He is holy and good (Josh 24:19-22)
19 Joshua said to the people, “You are not able to serve the Lord. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. 20 If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you." 21 But the people said to Joshua, "No! We will serve the Lord." 22 Then Joshua said, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the Lord." 23 "Yes, we are witnesses," they replied.

Be resolved to God because He is the King, everything he does is right and all His ways are just (Dan 4:31-37)
31 The words were still on his lips when a voice came from heaven, "This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. 32 You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes.” 33 Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird. 34 At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation.

Be resolved to God because it should be desirable and the right choice (Josh 24:15)
15 But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

Be resolved to God because He is the only one who has eternal life (John 6:66-69)
66 From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. 67 "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. 68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69 We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

Be resolved to God because He has delivered and will continue to deliver from deadly peril (2 Cor 1:8-10)
8 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. 9 Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. 10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us.

Be resolved to God because those who endure will reign with Him (2 Tim 2:12)
12 if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us;

Be resolved to God because to stay steadfast brings rewards from God (Rev 3:9-13)
9 I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars — I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. 10 Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. 11 I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. 12 Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming
Feasting and Fasting

down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. 13 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

**Faithful to God in spite of resistance (9-10)**

*Resistance where God helps the powerless against the mighty (2 Chron 14:9-12)*

9 Zerah the Cushite marched out against them with a vast army and three hundred chariots, and came as far as Mareshah. 10 Asa went out to meet him, and they took up battle positions in the Valley of Zaphathah near Mareshah. 11 Then Asa called to the Lord his God and said, "Lord, there is no one like you to help the powerless against the mighty. Help us, O Lord our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this vast army. O Lord, you are our God; do not let man prevail against you." 12 The Lord struck down the Cushites before Asa and Judah. The Cushites fled,

*Resistance that cannot be overcome by strength and size (Ps 33:16-19)*

16 No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. 17 A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save. 18 But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, 19 to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine.

*Resistance that may seem to be overbearing, but reliance on God will always bring deliverance (2 Cor 1:8-10)*

8 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. 9 Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. 10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us,

*Resistance by people who have been captivated by Satan (2 Tim 2:24-26)*

24 And the Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. 25 Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, 26 and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

*I should expect frustrations and resistance and therefore test all things by the Holy Spirit (1 John 4:1-3)*

1 Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

*Always be prepared to face resistance (Luke 10:3)*

3 Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.

**Faithful to God through testing (11-13)**

*Testing to bring out humility (Deut 8:2)*

2 Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.

*Testing to determine love (Deut 13:3)*

3 you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The Lord your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul.


**Feasting and Fasting**

3 The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tests the heart.

**Testing so that God will lead into righteousness (Ps 139:23-24)**

23 Search me,  O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. 24 See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

**Testing refines (Ps 66:10)**

10 For you,  O God, tested us; you refined us like silver.

**Testing proves faith genuine (1 Peter 1:7)**

7 These have come so that your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

**Testing aids in receiving God's inheritance (Heb 11:8)**

8 By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

**Feasting Convictions About Faithfulness of God (Dan 1:14-17)**

14 So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days.
15 And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies.
16 Thus the steward took away their portion of delicacies and the wine that they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.
17 As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

**God grants endurance (14-16)**

God provides endurance through grace (2 Cor 12:9)
9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

God provides endurance through His presence (1 Cor 5:4)
4 When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present,

God provides endurance through strength (Col 1:11)
11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully

God provides endurance to us from within (Eph 3:20)
20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,

Endurance that displays that one is living worthy of the kingdom of God (2 Thess 1:3-5)
3 We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. 4 Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. 5 All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering.
Endurance of hardships (2 Tim 2:3)

3 Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

Endurance that is rewarded by reigning with Jesus (2 Tim 2:12)

12 if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us;

Endurance that proves one is a child of God (Heb 12:7-9)

7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? 8 If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. 9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!

Endurance that is counted as being blessed (James 5:11)

11 As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

God grants wisdom (17)

God provides wisdom because His word contains it and through obedience it will provide wisdom (Deut 4:5-6)

5 See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. 6 Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people."

God provides wisdom because God can fill with all knowledge, wisdom and understanding (Col 1:9)

9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

God provides wisdom because His wisdom is pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere (James 3:17)

17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

God provides wisdom because He teaches it to those who seek it (Ps 90:12)

12 Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

Wisdom comes through the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:8)

8 To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit,

Wisdom is in Jesus (1 Cor 1:30)

30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God — that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

Wisdom that comes from the fear of the Lord (Prov 3:7-8)

7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil. 8 This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.

Wisdom that comes from God (Prov 2:6-7)

6 For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. 7 He holds victory in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless,
Wisdom that keeps and preserves (Prov 4:5-7)

5 Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them. 6 Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. 7 Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.

Wisdom through prayer (James 1:5)

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

Fasting Convictions About God's Guidance (Matt 6:16-18)

16 "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 17 But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly

Guidance to avoid hypocrisy (16)

Avoid hypocrisy because it shuts the kingdom of heaven from others (Matthew 23:13)

13 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

Avoid hypocrisy because it causes divisions and obstacles (Romans 16:17-18)

17 I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. 18 For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.

Avoid hypocrisy because it neglects important things (Matt 23:23-24)

23 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices — mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law — justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. 24 You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.

Avoid hypocrisy because it says one thing, but does another (Matt 23:2-7)

2 "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. 3 So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. 4 They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. 5 "Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; 6 they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; 7 they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.'

Avoid hypocrisy because it is just going through the motions (Isa 58:2-4)

2 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. 3 '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. 4 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.
Guidance for secrecy (17-18)

In secrecy so that total honesty and openness can be expressed and examined (Matt 6:6)

6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

In secrecy to be alone with God (Matt 14:23)

23 After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone,

In secrecy to come to terms with sin and its indignation (Isa 26:20)

20 Go, my people, enter your rooms and shut the doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until his wrath has passed by.

In secrecy to wait on God's answer in patient expectation (Ps 5:3)

3 In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Chip Bell

Today we come to fasting. Jesus says, let’s not just talk about what you do to show your devotion to God. Let’s talk about why you do it. Let’s talk about your motives for fasting.

What is Fasting?

Before we go any further, I think it would be good to talk about what fasting is and why people do it. Some of you might not be familiar with fasting. And even if you are, there are a lot of different ideas out there about what it is and why you should do it. So I thought it would be good for us to take a look first at what the Bible says about fasting itself. Fasting means to give up something that you normally enjoy. Usually it refers to skipping one or more meals, or limiting the kinds of food you eat. Now, unfortunately, we are probably all too familiar with this concept of passing up food. But here in America, we call that dieting, not fasting. Really, the idea isn’t much different. Fasting from food simply means not eating what you’d normally eat when you’d normally eat it. It might last part of a day, all day or several days. It might mean abstaining from all food and water, or just certain foods or beverages. Sometimes the word “fasting” is used in the Bible of missing a meal because you simply don’t have a choice. For example, some people don’t eat more because they’re poor and they can’t afford it. Sometimes people stop eating because they just don’t feel like eating. That’s especially true when people are weighed down by some tragedy or anxiety. They are so sad or so worried or so upset that they simply forget to eat. Food is not the most important thing on their mind, because they are completely preoccupied with a huge problem. I bet you’ve experienced that. Have you ever been so troubled by something that you felt sick to your stomach? Or, so focused on a problem that you lost your appetite? That is the kind of fasting most frequently mentioned in the Bible: people so preoccupied with problems that they just didn’t think about eating. Compared to whatever they were worried about, food was unimportant.

In the Bible, fasting is often about expressing deep sorrow or mourning. In the cultures of that day, someone who was terribly sad would set aside their regular clothes and wear sackcloth—kind of like a gunny sack. In fact, feeling extreme sorrow, some of them would actually rip up their clothes into shreds and then put on these burlap rags. They would take ashes from the fire, shake it on their head, and smear it on their face, their arms, and their legs. And that told everybody that they were incredibly sad and worried about some terrible news. It might have been the death of their closest friend, the death of a beloved national leader, or a major defeat in battle where a lot of soldiers were killed. It might have been terrible news of some impending disaster. But this wasn’t the normal reaction for an everyday tragedy. This was something sparked by a special, deeply significant event—something on the order of the attack on 911. In the Bible, fasting is very often associated with wearing sackcloth and ashes. Fasting is another expression of deep pain, sorrow and regret. People were so upset, they just didn’t think about eating. There are many times in the Bible where these drastic expressions of deep sorrow are the result of people realizing the depth of their sin—finally understanding
the horror of what they have done and what they deserve. And their response to that new insight into their own vile depravity is fasting, sackcloth and ashes. In several passages in the Old Testament, fasting is associated with humbling yourself before God, turning from your sin, and seeking his forgiveness and protection. When people are in pain, or in trouble or when they recognize how ugly their sin is, it’s natural for them to turn to God and pray. And in the Bible, we also see fasting associated with prayer. This is especially true when someone had a very critical, deeply emotional request (like Hannah who wanted a baby, but couldn’t get pregnant, or David whose infant son lay dying). The idea wasn’t that their prayers were more powerful if they fasted. The idea was that they were so occupied with praying to God for their needs, that food was just no longer important to them. They were so concentrated on prayer, that they had no interest in eating. The other time fasting is mentioned in the Bible has to do with the beginning of a significant new spiritual movement or ministry. For example, Moses fasted for 40 days before receiving the 10 commandments. Jesus fasted for 40 days before choosing his apostles and starting to preach. The church in Antioch fasted and prayed before selecting and sending Barnabas and Paul to evangelize Galatia. And they fasted and prayed before appointing elders in the new Galatian churches. In the experience of the early church, there were many, many new ministries started and many new spiritual movements. I’m sure that they all began with prayer. But there are only a handful that began with prayer and fasting. It was an unusual event and in the New Testament, it seems to be much more spontaneous than planned. People were just so wrapped up in talking to God about spiritual things that they simply stopped thinking about food.

Now that might be a little different picture than what you’d expect to hear about fasting—especially if you’ve read any Christian books or articles that encourage people to fast. It’s easy to get the impression that fasting is a program that you can follow to super-charge your prayers. Somehow when you don’t eat, God is bound to listen to you better. Some think of fasting as a way to earn spiritual brownie points with God. It’s a sacrifice that we might make in order to be really spiritual or mature. I’ve even read articles that promote the physical benefits of a regular fasting regimen and one that touted fasting as God’s solution to America’s problem of obesity! It might surprise you to hear that none of those ideas come from the Bible. Some of them originated in Greek mythology; some came from the ancient Jews; other ideas crept into the church after the second century; and we even added in some of our own modern health theories. I’m not here to say whether or not fasting is healthy. I have no idea! I know it doesn’t FEEL healthy to me! But fasting in the Bible doesn’t have anything to do with better physical health or racking up points with God or empowering your prayers. Fasting in the Bible happened when people were so occupied with how much they needed God that they simply failed to remember that they also needed to eat. Jesus fasted before his ministry began, but we never hear of him fasting after that. Jesus assumed that his followers would fast, but he never instructs us to do so. We see a handful of examples of fasting in the experience of the early church in the book of Acts, but the New Testament epistles are completely silent about the subject. Fasting in the Bible is something that is described, not something that’s commanded. There is one example in the Old Testament of God commanding Israel to fast. That was the Day of Atonement, an annual, national day of mourning about sin. But the ancient Jews were lovers of holiday tradition and so over the course of their history, many more organized days of fasting were added to the calendar. By the end of the Old Testament, there were at least four national days of fasting every year. Through the prophets, God told the people that he wasn’t at all interested in their fasting if they didn’t bother to obey him. The way they treated the poor, the way they massacred justice—these actions spoke much louder about their spiritual devotion to God than their repeated days of fasting ever could. In addition to the national days of fasting, some of Jews practiced a regular regimen of personal fasting. The Pharisees, who were the conservative religious leaders in Jesus’ day, fasted twice a week. And apparently when they fasted, they must have also put ashes on their heads as a sign of sorrow and penitence. These are the people Jesus is talking about as he begins to speak with his disciples about their motives for fasting.

Ostentatious Fasting

[16] "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting.

Jesus uses a couple words here to describe the way these showoffs were fasting. First the word “somber” means simply that they put on very sad faces. They looked terrible. It also says they “disfigured” their faces which sounds like they cut themselves or something. But literally the phrase means that they made their faces “invisible”. You know what that’s probably talking about is the ashes that often accompany mourning and fasting. In other words, they smeared ashes all over their faces, which made their faces invisible, but made their fasting very visible. It was obvious to everyone what they were doing. And that’s the point. They wanted it to be obvious they were fasting, so that people would notice them
and recognize what wonderfully spiritual people they were. But Jesus says, they are completely missing the point of fasting:

*I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.*

When people noticed them fasting, that was the only reward they got. They wanted the recognition of men and that’s what they got. That’s all they got. Their fasting was not sincere worship; it was ostentatious. They were showoffs. And that’s not the kind of worship God desires. That is ostentatious worship, religious acts designed to impress people instead of serving God. Notice the key elements in this type of fasting:

**Ostentatious Fasting**

Action: It is public suffering: visibly sad and pitiful.

Motive: It is done for man’s praise.

Result: The reward is paid in full. You receive human praise.

By contrast, Jesus tells us in verse 17 how we **should** fast:

**Secret Fasting**

[17] But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, [18] so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen;

The point here is the opposite of letting everyone know you’re fasting. The oil he’s talking about here is just a regular part of hygiene in that day. It means basically that when you fast, wash your face and comb your hair. Don’t try to make sure that everyone knows you’re fasting, like the guy in the video. Are you fasting to concentrate on God? Great! Then it’s really just between you and him. No one else needs to know. So don’t be obvious about it.

Always “in secret”?  

Does that mean that you must keep all fasting a secret? I don’t think so. I don’t think this verse means that all fasting MUST be done in private. There are examples in the New Testament of groups fasting together. And as we saw earlier, Jesus doesn’t mean that there’s anything wrong with people knowing that you give, that you pray, or that you fast. The problem is when you do those things **SO THAT** people will know you’re doing them. Jesus is not saying that you have done wrong if people know you’re fasting. He’s not saying it’s wrong if people are impressed by your fasting. What he’s saying is that it is wrong to fast for the purpose of impressing people. It’s not an issue of who knows about it or what they think about it. It’s all about your motive. Why did you do it? For people? Or for God? So, even if you’re fasting with other people, keep your fasting a personal thing, just between you and God, and then your motives won’t be in question. God sees even what no one else can see. The reason it’s so important to guard our motives in fasting is because the reason WHY we fast will determine how it effects our lives. Jesus urges us to fast in secret, so that our motives will be completely pure.

*and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*

Those who fast from pure motives will be rewarded by God.

**What “reward”?**

Just what is this reward? The Bible doesn’t promise a specific reward for fasting. But I think we can make a pretty good guess. In the Bible, the thing that drives people to fast is their deep concern, their profound need for God to hear them and act. Perhaps that is the reward of fasting. If you are so intent on connecting with God that you skip a meal or two, then you will connect with God. It’s not because you were fasting. It’s because you were sincerely seeking God. And those who really seek him will find him. However, those who pretend, those who put on a show of seeking God, just so that people will admire them, they won’t connect with God. All they get is human admiration. The one who fasts will
be rewarded. But that reward is only for those who fast with a pure motive. Now we can see the complete contrast between ostentatious fasting and secret fasting:

**Secret Fasting**

Action: is not a public performance, but a private discipline. You are so focused on God that you’re not thinking about eating. It’s fasting for an exclusive audience of one.

Motive: The reason for fasting is not to get recognition from men, but rather to honor God and concentrate on him.

Result: The result is not praise from men, but rather a reward from God. You really do connect with him.

(Adapted from URL: https://bible.org/seriespage/grrrr-ohhh-matthew-616-18)

**Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

The feasting and fasting episodes of this lesson may seem unrelated, even opposites. Daniel’s feasting on certain foods while fasting from others was designed, in part, to achieve a certain outward appearance. Yet Jesus instructed that one’s outward appearance should be unchanged while fasting. Even so, the two episodes have this in common: they represent spiritual tests for the person who eats or does not eat. Daniel was tested regarding the compromise of a core element of his spiritual heritage, and he passed the test. The hypocrites of Jesus’ day were tested regarding whose approval was to be sought, and they failed the test. The Christian will have to work through many tests in his or her spiritual walk, and selective use or nonuse of food may be one type (Romans 14:1-3, 15, 20, 21; etc.). “Trials of many kinds” are certain, and the secret is to rejoice and handle them so as to develop patience or steadfastness (James 1:2-4). Blessings result when we handle trials with the strength God provides. A tested faith is a stronger faith. When eternity begins, we will know the tests were worth it (Revelation 7:17; 21:4).

**Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator**

1. Nebuchadnezzar intended to turn the Jews into Babylonians (Dan. 1:5)
2. Daniel was committed to obeying God before man (vs. 8)
3. God was sovereignly working to preserve Daniel (vss. 9-15)
4. God provided a way for Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah to obey God and serve King Nebuchadnezzar (vss. 16-17)
5. It is wrong to flaunt your obedience to God (Matt. 6:16)
6. We should practice spiritual disciplines without attracting attention to ourselves (vs. 17)
7. We should seek God's rewards, not man's (vss. 17-18)