

The Fast that God Chooses

Isaiah 58:1-12

Introduction

In Isaiah 58, the people were fasting and praying to God, but they were getting no response. While they were doing what they thought would bring about God's forgiveness and blessing, they were not getting their desired outcome. God told them that He was not pleased with their kind of fasting where they did what they wanted to do. Instead, the type of fasting that God chose (vs. 6) represented the heart, humility, and service toward others. The Israelites acted in religious ways and maintained a variety of rituals, but they did not demonstrate authenticity and humility in their worship and relationship with God. When the people questioned God about His lack of attentiveness (vs. 3a), God pointed out that they weren't going about getting His attention the right way.

God admonished the Israelites for their lack of sincerity in their attempt to seek Him. While participating in religious rituals, they were also mistreating and misusing others (vs. 3b-7). God further explained to them that when they align their priorities with what He desires, they will see Him operate in their lives (vs.8-12). God's admonishment and encouragement to the Israelites remain true for us today. When we seek God first—living our lives in obedience to Him and seeking to love others well—then we will experience God working on our behalf. The fast that God chooses for us reflects the same order of priority detailed throughout the rest of the Scriptures—God first, others second and then personal benefits and blessings third.

You must take an honest look at your expectations of God's response to your prayers in light of your actions and the impact of those actions in God's economy - God first and others second. When you are serious about seeking God for something you need, make sure that you are approaching God on His terms of putting Him first and others second.

Getting Started

1. This is the last sermon in the "First," "Second" and "Third" series. What has been your biggest take-a-way from the sermons this spring?
2. According to the passage, what is fasting? In your own words, define fasting for your group.

Let's Get Personal

1. Have you ever felt like you were "doing all the right things" and not getting a response from God?
2. Do you typically include fasting as a part of your effort to let God know how desperately you want to hear from Him? Why or Why not?
3. The purpose of fasting is to deliberately abstain from some physical gratification for a period of time in order to achieve a greater spiritual goal. Is there an issue in your life for which you think a fast is appropriate? Share with your group.

Take the Next Step

1. Read Zechariah 7:5-6. Discover the key question asked of the Israelites in this passage. Rephrase the question and redirect it to yourself and others in your group. Share your answers honestly with one another.
2. Take stock of your religious involvement and activity. Are you doing what God has asked you to do in the way that He's asked you to do it? What will you begin to do or change today as a result of this message?
3. In light of the "First," "Second" and "Third" sermon series, what do you have to rearrange in your life to operate according to the biblical principle of God first, others second and you third?

Renew Your Mind

"Is this not the fast which I choose: ..." Isaiah 58:6