

## The New Reformation

### The need for Fasting – Isaiah 58:5b-12

#### Introduction:

1. The disciplined person is the person who can do what needs to be done when it needs to be done – this is crucial for life
2. This is even more central in the life of a Christian
3. In a world dominated with pizza temples and shrines to the golden arches, fasting seems out of place, out of step with the times.
4. Richard Foster says, *"Fasting reveals the things that control us."*
5. *Billy Graham describes fasting, by using an illustration. "If you've ever been out on a boat and when you draw closer to the shore you attach a rope to something, you turn off the motor, and you pull yourself in. You're not pulling the shore to you; you're pulling yourself closer to the shore."*
6. That's what happens when we fast, we're not pulling God closer to us.
7. We're being drawn closer to him.
8. **James 4:8 says, "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you."**
9. In March of 1863 President Abraham proclaimed a national day of fasting. He wrote, *"It is the duty of nations as well as of men to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God; to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon."*
10. In the modern church, there are at least two things that have mitigated against fasting

#### Fasting is a valid biblical Tradition:

1. There has been a reaction to the excessive abstinent practices of the Middle Ages
2. The prevailing philosophy in the church that it is a positive virtue to satisfy absolutely every human passion
3. We've even developed it into a theology today using verses of Scripture to justify such a teaching.
4. Churches have been created around these little tin gods of good feelings and affluence.
5. The bible lists the who's who of people who fasted
6. Then many of the giants of the church also fasted extensively

#### Why we Fast:

1. The first answer to that, and perhaps the only adequate answer, is an urging, a sense of call to it, a prompting, a sense of rightness.
2. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, **"When you pray" "When you give" "When you fast"** He did not say "if"
3. It has always amazed me that we will unquestionably accept giving as a Christian discipline and not fasting.
4. I have wondered if the reason that we do this is because in an affluent culture it involves far less sacrifice to give money than it does to fast.

#### Fasting reveals what controls us:

1. We fast because it reveals the things which control us
2. As I fast it reveals things in me and I forced to deal with them
3. When we fast, we can break the patterns of thought and deeds

### **Fasting should be our response to urgent needs:**

1. There is a need, an urgency for the Lord to intervene
2. The central idea in fasting is the voluntary denial of an otherwise normal function for the sake of intense spiritual activity.
3. This morning I do not want to speak specifically about fasting from food, which is the normal way Scripture speaks of that subject – although it is part of fasting

### **We need times of fasting from people:**

1. We need to learn how to take times to fast from people
2. Thomas Merten observed: *It is in deep solitude that I find the gentleness with which I can truly love my brothers. "The more solitary I am, the more affection I have for them. It is pure affection and filled with reverence for the solitude of others. Solitude and silence teach me to love my brothers for who they are, not for what they say."*
3. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a book called *"Life Together"* The first chapter was "The day together" – the second chapter was entitled "The day alone"
4. Until we have learned to be alone we cannot be with people in a way that will help them because we will be bringing to that relationship our own stuff, our own ideas – our own way of doing things and we can't listen to them.
5. There were many in the bible who needed time alone with God and so do we

### **We need times of fasting from media:**

1. All of the media is such an intrusion in our lives – no wonder we feel fractured
2. For some here if we took away your ability to see your Facebook page you would have withdrawal symptoms

### **We need to fast from the telephone:**

1. Let me challenge with this – use your cell phone for business only
2. What about letting it ring and doing nothing about it

### **We need times of fasting from conversations:**

1. The discipline of silence is one of the most needed disciplines in our culture.
2. Francis of Assisi reported said this ***"Preach Jesus, and if necessary use words."***
3. The tongue is our most powerful weapon of manipulation.
4. Silence is one of the deepest disciplines of the spiritual life
5. James tells us that the ***tongue is a fire***, and it is indeed.
6. Bonhoeffer wrote that *when the tongue is under our authority much that is unnecessary remains unsaid, but the helpful and essential thing can be said in a few words.*

### **We need times of fasting from our consumer culture:**

1. For our soul's sake, we need times when we can go among Christ's favorites, the broken, the bruised, the dispossessed, not to preach to them but to learn from them.

### **Finally:**

1. Do you picture someone on a hunger strike to protest some global injustice?
2. Or do you picture someone who is vibrant, alive, with a new light in their eyes and a bounce in their step? - That's really what fasting should produce.
3. The Hebrew word for fasting is to *"put your hand over your mouth"*
4. A fast will affect our body, soul and spirit
5. I believe we have come full circle, and as the first century church practiced fasting, the end-time church is now practicing fasting.