

Better Way Apostolic Church- Bible Class

Subject: Fasting Moves Me Out of the Way: Matthew 17:15-21

(Matt. 17:14-21) We move from the mountain of glory to the valley of need. The sudden appearance of Jesus and the three disciples startled the multitudes (Mark 9:15). The distraught father had brought his demonized son to the nine disciples, begging them to deliver him; but they could not. The scribes had noticed their failure and were using it as a reason for argument. And while the disciples were defending themselves, and the scribes were accusing them, the demon was all but killing the helpless boy.

When we compare the Gospel accounts of this dramatic scene, we discover that this only son was indeed in great trouble and danger. Matthew recorded that the boy was an epileptic (lunatic), very ill, and suicidal, falling into the fire and the water. Mark described him as a mute, who often fell to the ground foaming at the mouth and grinding his teeth. After this display, the boy would go into a kind of rigor mortis. Dr. Luke said that the boy was an only son and that he would scream as he went into these convulsions. While some of these symptoms can have natural causes, this boy was at the mercy of a demon. The disciples had been helpless to do anything. No wonder the father rushed to Jesus' feet.

Our Lord's first response was one of sorrow. As He beheld the embarrassed disciples, the arguing scribes, and the needy father and son, He groaned inwardly and said, "How long shall I be with you, and put up with you?" (Luke 9:41, NASB) Their unbelief and spiritual perversity were a burden to Him. What must our Lord feel as He looks at powerless believers today?

Jesus delivered the boy and commanded the spirit never to return to him (Mark 9:25). The demon tried "one last throw" (as Spurgeon put it) so that the crowd thought the boy was dead (Mark 9:26). But Jesus raised the lad up and gave him to his father, while the crowds marveled and gave glory to God (Luke 9:43).

The nine disciples should have been able to cast out the demon. Jesus had given them this power and authority (Matthew 10:1,8). But somehow, they had lost their power! When they asked Jesus the cause of their shameful failure, He told them: their lack of faith (Matthew 17:20), their lack of prayer (Mark 9:29), and their lack of discipline (Matthew 17:21, though this verse is not found in many manuscripts).

The nine were perhaps jealous because they had not been called to go to the mountaintop with Jesus. **During the Lord's absence, they began to grow self-indulgent. They neglected prayer, their faith weakened. Then, when the crisis came, they were unprepared.** Like Samson, they went out to battle without realizing that their power was gone (Judges 16:20). From their example, we see the importance of staying spiritually healthy.

"Faith as a grain of mustard seed" suggests not only size (God Will honor even a little faith), but also life and growth. Faith like a mustard seed is living faith that is nurtured and caused to grow. Faith must be cultivated so that it grows and does even greater exploits for God (1 Thessalonians 3:10; 2 Thessalonians 1:3). Had the nine disciples been praying, disciplining themselves, and meditating on the Word, they would have been able to cast out the demon and rescue the boy.

Biblical Fasting - Is there a proper method to fasting?

Biblical fasting, unlike fasting for medical or health reasons, must be done with an attitude of

seriousness and sincerity. When we fast, we willingly deprive the body of nourishment and the pleasurable taste of food. The body requires food for sustenance; therefore our hearts and minds must be totally focused and directed towards God so that He may be the full source of our strength during our period of fasting.

Fasting must also be done in an attitude of humility. It is not necessary for others to know we are fasting; it is directed towards God. "But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (Matthew 6:17-18).

In addition to our attitudes towards God and our stance before man, our motives must also be correct. We should fast in order to further the building up of God's kingdom by seeking to minister to others.

The right Fast

The prophet Isaiah received from the Lord the acceptable motives for our fasts: "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter -- when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?" (Isaiah 58:6-7).

Fasts may last for varying lengths of time -- one day, three days, seven days, and more. We should prayerfully seek the Lord about the length of our fast. **Fasting should have an object in mind; we should have a clear idea of the need and purpose. One of the most pressing reasons for Christian fasting may be revival -- "Will you not revive us again..." (Psalm 85:6).**

Biblical Fasting - What are the benefits of Christian fasting?

Biblical fasting brings us into a closer union with God. While our bodies are being deprived for the purpose of drawing near to God, He has promised in return to draw near to us. This is a spiritual certainty. As we decrease, the Spirit increases. As individuals we are strengthened and renewed. "...Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16).

While this verse applies to our eternal destiny, the principle applies to our daily sojourn; as we humble and deprive our bodies through fasting, our spiritual man is made stronger and our senses more acute. This principle served the apostles well during the early church days. Their decisions were made through fasting and prayer; God gave them instructions and directions. "While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off" (Acts 13:2-3).

Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting (Matthew 17:21). There are many who feel Biblical fasting is unnecessary because Jesus paid for all at Calvary. This, however, is not according to the Word of the Lord. The Bible teaches fasting for all God's people; never will you have real power with God unless you fast.

In Matthew, the ninth chapter, we read that John's disciples came to Jesus asking why they fasted while Jesus' disciples did not. Jesus answered, **Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.** After Jesus was taken from them, His disciples did fast.

It is recorded in Mark 9 that a father brought his son, who was possessed by a devil, to the disciples. They were not able to deliver the boy, but Jesus was. Later, the disciples wanted to know why they could not cast out the devil. They were told by Jesus that **this kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting** (Mark 9:29). In my services the sick are healed by the numbers, devils are cast out. How is it done? Through fasting, prayer and living in the Word.

They Fasted in Old Testament Days

In Exodus, the thirty-fourth chapter, it is recorded that Moses did not eat for forty days and nights. He was on the mount with God and lived right in His mighty presence. **When Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone** (verse 30). Fasting truly brings one into the glory of the Lord!

Elijah, in I Kings 19:1-8, ran from the enemy and went a day's journey into the wilderness. Twice an angel served him food, and then he ate nothing for forty days and nights. In the power and strength of the Lord he traveled 150 miles to the mount of God. If you want to reach the mount of God, fasting will help you do it.

We read of Daniel's fast of twenty-one days in Daniel 10:2,3: **I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth.** Then in the twelfth verse we read of an angel saying this about Daniel: **from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words.** Daniel's prayer, backed up by the power of fasting, was answered.

In Esther 4:16, Esther sent word to Mordecai, asking him and all the Jews to fast three days and nights while she and her maidens did likewise. She then went in before the king and won deliverance for her people.

The people of Ninevah fasted and God spared the entire city, saving over 120,000 souls (Jonah 3:5-10).

Christ, Our Example

And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered (Luke 4:1,2). True Biblical fasting brings the anointing of God. In verse 18 Jesus cries, **The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me.** After fasting forty days, Jesus began to heal the sick, cast out devils and perform many mighty miracles. As the Son of God He did not need to fast, but as the Son of man He fasted to show us how we can have power with God over all devils.

The Early Church Fasted

They ministered to the Lord, and fasted (Acts 13:2). Men of God fasted and then carried out the command of the Lord. In Acts 9:9-17, Paul fasted for three days after his conversion; then he not only

received his sight but also was filled with the Holy Ghost. Paul, in II Corinthians 11:27, **was...in fastings often**. Paul recommended periods of **fasting and prayer** (I Corinthians 7:5).

When to Fast

God honors any sacrifice we make for Him and He does not set down rigid rules of contacting Him. Fast with a definite purpose. Don't fast just for the sake of fasting, but fast for the purpose of contacting God about a definite concern. The fast may be short or long: there are things we receive from God on a short fast while other prayers are answered only by a long fast. Your fast should always edify you and glorify God, for when it fails to do so it is not the kind of fast God wants. Use the wisdom God has given you.

How to Fast

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 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 (Matthew 6:16-18). Don't appear downcast when you fast or boast about how long the fast has been. Fasting is not for show but to afflict your soul so that your Father in Heaven will answer your prayer.

Always drink plenty of water when you are fasting. God never asks us to do anything that will harm our bodies and people have hurt their bodies by not drinking enough water on a fast. Water flushes the poison from your system; many doctors feel that fasting is beneficial so long as you drink plenty of water.

God is concerned about the good health of your body. Spend as much time in prayer, reading the Word and meditation as possible. It is important to draw greatly on the strength of the Lord during your fast.

How to Break a Fast

There are some who can drink juices when breaking a fast. If you cannot take juices on a weak stomach, however, then corn flakes or a cooked cereal with milk and NO sugar will be fine. Gradually you may take a little broth at short intervals with a little cooked rice added. The length of the fast determines how slowly you should get back to solid foods. After a long fast, for a number of days treat yourself as you would a baby because your stomach will have become tender and delicate. NEVER overeat when coming off even a short fast. Do not give vent to your appetite.

Results from Your Fast

Fasting will put self more under subjection to God. Doubts will be dispelled and faith will take their place. Jesus, speaking of faith to remove mountains, said to the disciples, **nothing shall be impossible unto you. Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting** (Matthew 17:20,21). Come to Grace Cathedral and see God's miracle power in operation through fasting and prayer.

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