

Bible Study – God will build His Church (Isaiah 58:1-59:1) and Matthew 16:13-20
(In preparation for Sermon on 31st May 2020 by Mick Alley)

Before we begin: What is fasting? And what is its purpose?

Dictionary definition: abstain from all or some kinds of food or drink, especially as a religious observance.

The question is though, what is the purpose of this fasting?

So, we feel good?

So, we feel holy?

Or is it showing our devotion to God, and so we feel closer to Him?

In the Roman Catholic Church & some Anglican churches – people fast during Lent – to somehow “mimic” in some way what Jesus went through. People, during Lent, focus on penance, repentance and prayer, along with giving up certain “luxuries” in life, to depict Jesus’ sacrifice?

Is this what God wanted?

Read Isaiah 58:1-5

1. What are the people doing? And what is their complaint? (verses 1 to 3)

V1 – According to this verse, the people are in rebellion against God

V2 – They seem eager to know God’s ways – and “appear” like they are a nation that hasn’t forsaken God’s commands (whereas in fact they have!). They want God to make decisions for them.

V3 – And they complain that they’ve fasted and humbled themselves – are God’s not paying any attention.

That’s because it’s just lip-service – and not fasting and devotion from the “heart”

2. What are the people doing on the day of their fasting? (verses 3 to 4)

V3 – They do as they please – and they exploit all their workers.

V4 – And they are quarrelling and there’s strife amongst them – and there’s fisticuffs.

Their fasting does not line up with the wicked and disobedient behaviour.

The word for that is hypocrisy!

3. What is God’s complaint about their fasting in verse 5?

It’s just “going through the motions” – just one day of humbling themselves – bowing their heads in pretentious praise of God – lying in sackcloth and ashes like it’s a day of mourning

God says this is not acceptable or true fast.

Read Isaiah 58:6-12

4. What is the kind of fasting that God wants?

God wants true fasting – giving up stuff which will show love, mercy and compassion

a. In verse 6?

Loose the chains of injustice = bring justice to those mistreated

Untie the cords of yoke = lift the burden on those who are oppressed

Set the oppressed free and break every yoke = no slavery and mistreatment and cruelty

b. In verse 7?

Share their food with the hungry = feed the homeless and the poor

Provide shelter for the poor wanderer = provide housing for the homeless

Clothe the naked = give poor clothes to wear

Not turn away your own flesh and blood. Charity also applies to our family!

5. What will be the result of this type of fasting?

a. In verse 8?

Others will see the "light" (Godly actions) of the people of Israel, when they help the oppressed. And want to copy that mercy.

The people of Israel will experience healing (both physical and spiritual) - and be blessed - if they were to shine their light on those less fortunate.

So, by showing true fasting of love and mercy and compassion - we will show the Gospel of Jesus in action - and people will be called into the light of Jesus!

b. In verse 9?

When they call - The Lord will answer.

When they cry for help - the Lord will say "Here I am"

c. In verse 10?

If they show mercy - and are sacrificial in their helping of others - then they will be like a shining light in the darkness of the world - and metaphorically even night time will be like noon day - because the light of Israel will be shining on all people.

People will be attracted into the light.

d. In verse 11?

The people of Israel will receive blessings:

a. *The Lord will satisfy their needs in a sun-scorched land (provide rain for the drought)*

b. *The Lord will strengthen their frame = make them strong by providing food.*

c. *They will be a picture of health = like a well-watered garden or a spring that never fails*

e. In verse 12?

Israel will be able to rebuild the ancient ruins of the land, repair and restore the city walls. A picture of what happened when they returned from Babylon, during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Read Isaiah 58:13-14

6. What "Ifs" does God state in these verses?

If they don't break the Sabbath and keep it holy

If they follow God's way on the Sabbath - rather than doing what they please

7. What promise does God give in verse 14, if the people do the "ifs" of verse 13?

They will find joy in the Lord.

They will triumph in the land = prosper

Read Isaiah 59:1

8. What does this verse say to you, especially in regards to Mick Alley's mission work in Africa?

V1 says "surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save"

Translates to "nothing is impossible for God"

V1 also says "nor His ear to dull to hear"

Translates to "God is always listening to our cries for help - especially when we're doing His work and bring the Gospel"

So in Mick's situation - where he's faced with numerous cultural difficulties - including worship of false gods and idols, and people set in their ways; and faced with climatic challenges and geographical challenges and financial challenges, nothing is impossible for God - He will save people in all situations, if people are prepared to show "true fasting" of MERCY.

Note: Save here in verse 1, is not just saving people from their circumstances - but saving their souls for Heaven!

Read Isaiah 55:8-11

9. What do these verses say about mission work? Ultimately, who's doing the work?

God works differently to humans (His thoughts are not our thoughts; His ways are not our ways; His thoughts and ways are higher than our thoughts and whys)

Just like rain and snow fall to the earth - and water the earth before returning back to the sky again (as in the hydrological cycle)

So, when God's word "rains down" on people - it "waters" and "grows" people into a knowledge of Him

God's Word is never wasted - It always achieves the purpose he planned.

Therefore, God's Word will not go out in vain - to the folk in Toukley or the folk in Kenya.

Read Matthew 16:13-20

10. What question does Jesus ask His disciples? What answers does He receive?

Jesus asked - "Who do people say the Son of Man (Jesus) is?"

Replies:

- a. John the Baptist
- b. Elijah
- c. Jeremiah
- d. One of the prophets
- e. Peter says - "You are the Messiah (Hebrew) - The Christ (Greek) = Son of the Living God"

11. What's the correct answer to this question?

Peter's answer is the correct one.

Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah/Christ - and Jesus is also fully human and fully God

12. Who is building Jesus' church (v18)? And what is the rock the church is built on? (Eph 2:20)

I (God) will build His church

Jesus uses a play on words - Petros=Peter = small stone and Petras = big/giant stone

Roman Catholics will say church is built on Peter.

Protestants will say church is built on Peter's confession of Jesus being the rock/cornerstone.

The rock is Jesus - and the rock is the statement of faith that Peter made that Jesus is the Messiah and Christ - and the Son of God. As Ephesians 2:20 - Jesus Himself is the chief cornerstone - and we are the living stones attached to the cornerstone, Jesus (1 Peter 2:4-8)

13. What/who can overcome Jesus' church?

Nothing and nobody can overcome Jesus' church - not even COVID19!

The Devil is a defeated enemy - he just tricks people into thinking he has power.

14. In what way would the promise of verse 18, be an encouragement for someone like Mick Alley?

Mick can be encouraged that:

- a. God will build His church in Kenya
- b. Jesus is the cornerstone of this church in Kenya
- c. Mick and his colleagues are living stones attached to Jesus, the cornerstone
- d. Nothing and nobody can wreck this church - it's not a building - it's people
- e. Mick and his colleagues are not on their own in this work

15. What promise does Jesus give to His disciples in verse 19?

Jesus promises the keys of the kingdom of Heaven

There are no barriers between Heaven and Earth

God/Jesus are involved in the Kingdom Work on Earth

16. Why does Jesus tell His disciples not to tell anyone that He is the Messiah?

- a. *Not the time yet - time is when Jesus rides into Jerusalem on the donkey on that 1st Palm Sunday, that's when Jesus reveals His identity to the masses.*
- b. *The disciples need to fully understand who the Messiah is*

17. Think it through: Who is building the Church/Mission/Church Plant/Bible College that Mick Alley is involved in? (cf. Isa 40:8; 45:23; Matt 5:18; 1 Cor 3:7; Heb 4:12)

God is building the work in Kenya because:

Isa 40:8 - God's word endures forever

Isa 45:23 - God's word will not be revoked; every knee will bow; every tongue will swear who God is one day

Matt 5:18 - not one letter of God's word will disappear

1 Cor 3:7 - Neither the one who plants, nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow

Heb 4:12 - God's word is alive and active; sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul [part of humans that lasts eternally] and spirit [inner force that animates a person in one direction or another], joints and marrow, it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart

Finish by praying: for Mick Alley's health; and for discipling; Bible studies; Bible college work; MTS (Ministry Strategy Training); Water projects and building projects that Mick Alley is involved in, in Africa.