**“Life in the Kingdom: A Higher Hunger”**

Matthew 6:16-18 (NIV); Isaiah 58:2-8 (The Message)

(Notes based on the sermon by Pastor Steve Massey, Hayden Bible Church, 3/12/23)

 What kind of people do good things simply to be seen by others? Jesus flat out calls them hypocrites. Their actions are an offense to God. God is not honored nor impressed by good things done for selfish reasons. As we learned in Matt. 5, the Kingdom of Heaven is not populated by posers. A repentant sinner finds righteousness in Christ alone!

 A Christian’s hunger for God at times displaces her hunger for lesser things. Fasting is abstaining from food or some other good thing for the sake of seeking God. In Matt. 6, Jesus shows us how not to be self-seeking, but God-seeking in our giving, our prayers, and our fasting. Jesus assumes His people fast, just as we give and pray.

 The Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) was a day of fasting in the Old Covenant (Lev. 23:27). Fasting was associated with repentance and contrition. The scapegoat that was let loose on that day represented the casting off of sins. These Old Testament symbols point to Jesus in the New Covenant. Now fasting is a response to an intense need, sorrow for sin, or a hunger for God’s direction. But in Jesus day, what had started as contrition and a need for God had turned into just a show. Jesus responds in Luke 18:11-12 by showing us how NOT to pray. Then in Matt. 6:16 He shows us how NOT to fast. It’s as if God is saying, “That kind of behavior makes Me sick!”

 Some think fasting is the key to unlocking God’s blessing. But God cannot be manipulated! Some think fasting can be a religious diet plan for our health. But fasting is NOT dieting! Look at Isa. 58:3. The Israelites were complaining about not getting what they wanted. Their “Divine Vending Machine” was empty!!! Then in Isa. 58:6-8, God answers with what kind of fasting He really wants. Here’s the key: before you start fasting, stop sinning. Fasting is a response to intense contrition, devotion, and need for God… NOT a substitute for those things.

 The early church fasted in seeking God, as well as in sharing Christ with the world. They fasted before they sent out missionaries (Acts 13:2-3). They fasted when they sought to appoint elders (Acts 14:23). Notice that fasting is commended, but not commanded in scripture. Notice that fasting is a personal discipline between a believer and God. How frequently should you fast? It’s between you and God. Beyond food, some choose to set aside entertainment for a season to seek God. Some choose to set aside social media for a season to seek God. We set aside things so we aren’t distracted and self-focused. We set things aside so we can seek God.

 Finally, notice in Matt. 6:4,6,18 that proper giving, praying, and fasting is rewarded. And what is that reward? God Himself! We fast and pray and give for God’s name to be know in His family and across the world. We fast and pray and give for God’s will to be accomplished in our lives and in our community. We fast and pray and give to grow as followers of Christ. We fast and pray and give because we long for God’s Kingdom to extend to every single corner of our lives.

**QUESTIONS**

1. How do you know when you should fast?
2. When I read Isa. 58:3 I thought of **ME**! I complain when God is slow to answer my prayers of salvation for a loved one. What advice do you have for me as I wait?
3. Pastor Steve said that when we fast, “we set things aside so we can seek God.” Prayer and fasting get me to the point where I can once again trust God’s goodness and faithfulness. Sometimes singing hymns (old and new) does the same thing. Which hymns help you rest in Him? (the two below help me rest in Him)

**“I Am Thine, O Lord” (Fanny Crosby)**

 I am Thine, O Lord, I have heard Thy voice,

 And it told Thy love to me;

But I long to rise in the arms of faith,

 And be closer drawn to Thee.

 **Draw me nearer, nearer, blessed Lord,**

 **To the cross where Thou hast died;**

**Draw me nearer, nearer, nearer, blessed Lord,**

 **To Thy precious, bleeding side.**

 Consecrate me now to Thy service, Lord,

 By the pow’r of grace divine;

Let my soul look up with a steadfast hope,

 And my will be lost in Thine.

**“Fairest Lord Jesus” (Anonymous)**

Fairest Lord Jesus, Ruler of all nature,
O Thou of God and man the Son,
Thee will I cherish, Thee will I honor,
Thou, my soul’s glory, joy and crown.

Beautiful Savior! Lord of all the nations!
Son of God and Son of Man!
Glory and honor, praise, adoration,
Now and forevermore be Thine.