

Series Series: DIFFERENT/ Sermon on the Mount

Sermon title: Fasting in Secret

Scripture reading: Matthew 6:16-18

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There was an old tradition that started out as a good thing but became something really bad.

It was the habit of wearing your '*Sunday best*' to church on Sunday. People would ditch their common work clothes for whatever they had that was the best. It was a change from the normal clothes of the working class.

Men would put on a suit and comb their hair nice and neat. Ladies and young girls would put on a nice dress. Why did people do this?

As a way to set Sunday apart as a sacred day.. a day to be '*different*'.

But what happened?

It became a fashion show to some and many felt they didn't belong because they didn't have as 'nice' of clothes to wear than others had.

Wearing your '*Sunday best*' became a '*best-dressed*' contest.

Now, most churches just say, 'wear whatever'.

We've been seeing in the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus cares about the motives of everything we do. Even when doing good things like giving to the poor or praying or fasting, we can take a good thing and make it into a show.

Remember the **General Principle** in **Matthew 6:1**, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven."

Well, today we take a look at our 3rd **Specific Example** and that is the example of 'Fasting'.

Let's first read the passage.

Matthew 6:16-18

16 And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. **17** But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, **18** that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

What is fasting?

Fasting: *to abstain from all or some kinds of food or drink, especially as a religious observance.*

Breakfast comes from... 'break--fast'.

Biblical fasting is not eating food at all for a period of time for spiritual nourishment.

"I am fasting from chocolate"....

"I am fasting from Netflix"...

"I am fasting from the internet"....

Is that fasting? We will address this later.

As in giving and praying....most religions practice 'fasting' in some way, perhaps except maybe Protestant Christians.

John Stott says that, "I suspect that some of us live our Christian lives as if these verses had been torn out of our Bibles. Most Christians lay stress on daily prayer and sacrificial giving, but few lay any stress on fasting."

Well, that's certainly true for me!

In fact, I wish I could tell you that this is a regular practice in my own life, but if I told you that I would be creating 2 errors:

First, I would be lying to you.

Secondly I would be telling you that I fast and disregarding the whole point of what Jesus says here. To be honest, most of what I hear from people about fasting isn't really fasting at all but more asceticism or just not eating.

So, Jesus tells us in this passage what NOT to do and then what to DO.

NOT	DO
Don't look Gloomy	Anoint your head
Don't disfigure your faces	Wash your face
Don't do it to be seen by others	Seen by the Father
No reward	Reward

Jesus again emphasizes his main point from verse 1. Don't do things to be seen by people! Hide that you are fasting from the view of others the best you can.

Wash your hair, brush your teeth, don't look all weak and sad.

The Pharisees did this when they fasted on Mondays and Thursdays. They covered themselves in rags and ashes, which was very Old Testament but the catch was that their motives were wrong.

It was a show.

What is the purpose of fasting?

Why should we do it?

Jesus does say, "[When you fast](#)" 2x.

I. Personal time with God and fasting.

In Matthew 9, the disciples of John the Baptist asked Jesus about why his disciples did NOT fast and this is what he said...and in answering he tells us something about what fasting is.

Matthew 9:14-15

14 Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" **15** And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.

So, the key words here are 'bridegroom is with them'. Jesus is with them and there's no need to fast. Fasting happens to be with Jesus.

The essence of fasting is to spend extra time with God as you humble yourself, do without food and spend time with him in prayer and Bible reading.

So, to go without food and drink only water and spend no time with Jesus is called '*not eating*'. It's not fasting.

We skip meals in order to take time away from physical food to feed our souls with spiritual food.

Beware of trying to abstain from food in order to impress God. Your not eating chocolate or ice cream for a week may help you with control but it won't earn you anything with God. That's *asceticism*.

Mainly, fasting is to spend extra time with God as you humble yourself, do without food and spend that extra time with him in prayer and Bible reading.

And there may be many reasons why we need to do it.

Humility goes hand in hand with fasting. So, we fast to humble ourselves.

Perhaps you have big decisions to make or God is calling you to do something. Fasting is a good way to prepare.

Jesus fasted before beginning his ministry.
In Acts 13, the church in Antioch prayed and fasted before sending out the missionaries, Paul and Barnabas.

So fasting is a good way to seek the Lord for answers as you take some extra time to pray and read God's word as you fast.

Another reason to fast is to do without so that you can provide more for others. **Isaiah 58:6-7**

6 "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?"

7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?"

So Isaiah says that we could fast from food and then take that money and give it to the needy.

But of course, we wouldn't tell anyone about the giving or the fasting. :)

In summary, fasting is doing without food primarily in order to humble ourselves before God...and go to him in prayer and bible reading to seek the Lord for spiritual nourishment, his will, direction or empowerment for ministry.

APPLICATION

The first application that we need to make is simple: We should fast. We should abstain from food for a time in order to be fed spiritually.

Secondly, when we fast, we are not to broadcast it (though some will know, like my wife) but are to do everything in our power to only do it for the Lord.

Thirdly, it would do us some good to fast from things besides food.

I asked the questions earlier about fasting from other things, like:

Chocolate

Netflix or movies.

Alcohol

Internet

Mobile phone use

Sex (1 Corinthians 7:5)

What about these things?

Would it be helpful or honor the Lord to do this?

Perhaps it could be very helpful, providing that we do 2 things:

1. Seek God in prayer and bible reading **INSTEAD** of those things and not just abstain. That would only gain you confidence in your will power.
2. Don't do any of these things to be seen by others but do them for the Lord only.

Here's a little test for all of us.

Fast from something and the degree to which we struggle will show us just how much we love that thing.

Is there anything in your life that you know has a hold on you? It masters you? It eats your time.

What do you run to when you are tired, frustrated and want to escape work and stress?

Is it the Lord...in prayer and soaking in the Bible?
Perhaps you should fast.

Let's take some time to pray today.