

**CALVARY PANDAN
BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 58

ISAIAH

CHAPTER 58

Theme: "The end does not justify the means!"

THEME VERSES

Isaiah 58:5-6 (KJV) "Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? *is it* to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes *under him*? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? **6** *Is* not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?"

INTRODUCTION

Every believer is supposed to desire a right relationship with God. This is one of the clearest evidences of a born again believer. When the sins are grievous, a mere apology or saying sorry to God will not be sufficient. When the sin is national in nature, a national fast is required. Israel, being a nation of God's people, was required to accompany their repentance of sin with a national fast. The nation of Israel did fast on this occasion as Isaiah ministered to them. Fasting

seems to reflect a successful ministry as fasting was one of the biblical responses of genuine repentance or so we thought. Isaiah ought to be jumping with joy when Israel fasted as a nation before the LORD.

That was the point. The fast was before the LORD and not any man. Since it is the LORD that Israel must please with her fast then the fast must be done God's way. Any other way is unacceptable to God. Fasting is good. Many other religions also teach their followers to fast. Atheists also fast in their own way and for their own perceived altruistic reasons. Others who fast do so for slimming purposes or for health reasons. But the fast that God wants from Israel is not of man neither is it of the flesh. It is spiritual.

Therefore the mere act of fasting is not acceptable to God even when it is done with the right motive. The standard of God is and will always be the Holy Scriptures. The end will never justify the means. Both the end and the means must be acceptable to God. This standard is not only applicable and true when applied to fasting but all things done in the Name of Christ by God's people. Any other way that is short of this standard is sinful and is rejected by God. This standard is the standard of holiness. God's people are holy. As holy people, this holy standard must apply always. fGod's people are always holy in His sight.

Thank God that He did not keep the acceptable way to Him from man. He has revealed His standard of acceptability in the Holy Scriptures.

The more the Word of God is studied by God's people, the more they will live their lives in accordance with Holy Scripture. Therefore their lives would be pleasing in His sight. This is what Isaiah 58 is all about.

OUTLINE

1. Spiritual Delusion Exposed! (vv.1-2);
2. Two Kinds of Fasts (vv. 3-7);
3. The Fast that Brings Blessings (vv. 8-14);

COMMENTARY

An OUTLINE

Spiritual Delusion Exposed! – 58:1-2

The conclusion in the previous chapter of Isaiah was that there is no peace to the wicked. The wicked must take to heart their wickedness and repent. The call by the LORD to Isaiah was to show Israel all her sins. Isaiah is to cry out loud to Israel to repent. Isaiah is to show Israel her sins. They have to be made known to Israel clearly in order for Israel to realize what sins she had committed against God and to repent of them. If sins were not pointed out clearly, the people would not know that they have sinned against God. The "thy" is Isaiah. Israel is called "the house of Jacob" here. The reason is that Jacob means "usurper". Israel has usurped God by what she has done.

Yet Israel seemed to have repented of her sins. The LORD said

that Israel seek Him daily. They also seem to delight i.e. find joy in knowing God's ways i.e. the Word of Truth. Israel did this as a nation. The people of Israel appear to be righteous. This external facade of righteousness and hearing and studying God's Word made Israel look like a godly nation. They like to study God's Word. All these externals are only good if they are lived out in the lives of the people. Filling the mind with God's Word but merely having the appearance of righteousness are rejected by the LORD. They did not forsake the ordinances of God. They seemed to observe all the feasts according to the Bible. They even asked the LORD for the ordinances of justice i.e. the judgements of justice. The people of Israel wanted to do right according to the laws of God in their dealings with those who have broken them. Israel even delighted in approaching God, which meant that they would follow the Levitical laws very rigidly.

But God was not pleased with Israel!

Two Kinds of Fasts! – 57:3-7

The Israelites said that they fasted. As long as they fasted, the LORD ought to accept, right? Fasting is an expression of the affliction of the soul. The body is starved of food and this symbolizes affliction. Just as feasting symbolized happiness and celebration, fasting symbolized sorrow and mourning. But the mere affliction of the body without the affliction of the soul is meaningless. It is hypocrisy. True fasting is a genuine and sincere expression and reflection of an internal

soul wrenching in repentance for sins committed with the promise to God never to sin that same sin again with God's help.

But the fasting of the Israelites was filled with pleasures. Since fasting means no food then the pleasures here cannot refer to the consumption of food but some other kinds of carnal pleasures. It will have to be pleasures that would include sexual pleasure, wickedness, bullying as well as other pleasures that delight the flesh. They also made money i.e. exact all the labours from their servants or their own labour. They made money while they "fasted". Sacrificing one kind of pleasure and indulging in other kinds of pleasures is not fasting as far as God is concerned.

Furthermore, the Israelites fasted for strife and debate. They probably did it as a form of challenge to outdo one another! It was to see who could be "lower" than the other person by the fasting. The symbol used by God is the bulrush. Barnes' apt observation on the use of the imagery is quoted for easy reference. He wrote, "A bulrush is the large reed that grows in marshy places. It is, says Johnson, without knots or joints. In the midst of water, it grows luxuriantly, yet the stalk is not solid or compact like wood, and, being unsupported by joints, it easily bends over under its own weight. It thus becomes the emblem of a man bowed down with grief. Here it refers to the sanctimoniousness of a hypocrite when fasting - a man without real feelings but who puts on an air of

affected solemnity, and "appears to others to fast."

The fast that God accepts is one where the inward and the outward are one and the same. It is a broken and contrite heart backed up by a life of justice and genuine deeds of righteousness that are done according to Holy Scriptures. Wickedness and oppression of others must stop immediately. These were the crimes and sins of the powerful Israelites who "fasted" for show without genuine cessation of sins. Then there is also the performance of the good deeds after the cessation of the sinful deeds. They must help the poor and give bread to the hungry and clothes to the naked. This is the kind of fasting that the LORD wants from His people.

The Fast that Brings Blessings – 58:8-14

When Israel fasts according to Holy Scriptures, the LORD is ever ready to bless Israel. The blessing from the LORD is immediate. It is described as light breaking forth in the morning. The darkness disappears immediately. Health would return immediately and quickly. The righteousness of the Israelites would be in front of them and the glory of the LORD follows behind. The LORD would answer the call of the Israelites. The LORD would say to Israel, Here I am! Help from the LORD would come and flow immediately into the lives of the Israelites. Israel will no longer be afflicted but will rise out of obscurity. Her darkness would disappear like the noonday. The LORD will guide Israel continually and will satisfy her soul.

There will be no more famine or drought in Israel. Israel will be strong again. There will be economic prosperity and the foundations of the people would be established for generations to come. The generation that fasts biblically will be known as the repairer of the breach and the restorer of paths to dwell in.

Out of so many statutes and ordinances that the LORD could cite, He cites the Sabbath as the way back to the LORD and the keeping of the Sabbath as evidence of obedience and walking right with God. It is not to keep the Sabbath day on our own terms such as finding our own pleasures and speaking our own words but to keep it holy and call it a delight as a holy day kept unto the LORD, and the LORD would be pleased with Israel. Then will the LORD bless Israel with His mighty protection and Israel would be invincible to all enemies and afflictions. The LORD has spoken this and He meant every word of it. Amen.

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Isaiah 58:1-14

TUESDAY: Isaiah 58:1-14

WEDNESDAY: Isaiah 58:1-14

THURSDAY: Isaiah 58:1-14

FRIDAY: Isaiah 58:1-14

Discussion Questions

1. Is it good to point out the sins of the congregation during the morning message? Will this not offend the people who come to worship? Should the pastor preach only what the people want to hear?

2. Do you like to study God's Word, like the people of Israel in Isaiah's time? Although they liked to know the ways of God and displayed righteousness, the LORD rebuked and rejected them. Why did God reject such "righteous" deeds?

3. Do you think that it is acceptable for a believer to fast and then go to work also forgo lunch? Is it biblical for a church to have a regular monthly or yearly fast?

opinion about keeping the Sabbath Day holy?

4. What are some of the reasons for believers to fast today? What could be some reasons that a church would fast?

7. What lessons have you learnt from this chapter about God's Word and about yourself?

5. Have you ever fasted before? What was the reason behind your fast? *Please share.* What kind of blessings will the LORD bless His people with as individuals and as a church when there is genuine biblical fasting?

6. Why is keeping the Sabbath holy such an important aspect of a believer's life to God? What in your