

Introduction:

- "A fast is not necessarily something we offer God, but it assists us in offering ourselves"

I. When Jesus Repeats Himself Listen

- A. When Jesus repeats himself it must be important.
1. *"You have heard but I say"* – found in chapter 5 was about having a right heart before God. Because a right heart produces right behavior by design.
 2. *"When you give,... when you pray,... when you fast... don't be like the hypocrites."* in chapter 6, Jesus leads us to how actual spiritual disciplines are to be practice. The three he mentions are: giving, praying, and fasting. He is directing the people to understand what 'righteous' religious practices look like.
 - a) giving deals with possessions
 - b) praying deals with relationship with Father
 - c) fasting deals with appetites
- B. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is after the heart of the people not the behavior! When the heart is right the actions will then be of a righteousness that exceeds the religious people of the day.
1. Jesus does not want the people to practice religious behaviors that draw attention to themselves. Those who do such practices he calls 'hypocrites'. They are actors and not the 'real deal.'
 2. The hypocrite is concerned in how he looks by putting on a front for the external to be seen.
 3. Jesus is looking at the heart, and wants the people to know that what God sees in secret He rewards. Those who put on the show for men have already received their reward. (Paid in full, nothing more to be expected.)
 4. Jesus does not have an issue with people doing these discipline. Rather, He expects them to do them, He wants them to be done but with a right understanding.

II. What is Fasting?

- A. Simply put, fasting is the voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes. I also like what Mike Bickle says, "Fasting is the intentional afflicting of ones self for the purpose of encountering God."
1. It is important to note that fasts have a spiritual purpose – it is not just missing lunch because you are too busy. A fast can last anywhere from one meal to 40 days without food.
 2. There are different types of fasts – the most typical is to go without any food, some people will fast from food and water – although you can only do this for a short time. There are limited fasts, when people will allow themselves juice or other liquid sustenance during their fast. There are partial fasts, where you will give up certain types of food for a period of time.
 3. We fast the first MTW of each month. We also encourage people to fast on Wednesdays. We usually start the year with a 21 day fast.
- B. The majority of Biblical fasting focuses on:
1. Repentance - *"But when Ahab heard this message, he tore his clothing, dressed in burlap, and fasted. He even slept in burlap and went about in deep mourning."* (1 Kings 21:27, NLT)
 2. Crisis - Jehoshaphat 2 Chron 20:3 Jehoshaphat - singer and musicians out front.

3. Hunger for God - Mt 9:15 When Bridegroom is away then they will fast. John Piper writes in his book, A Hunger for God, "If you don't feel strong desires for the manifestation of the glory of God, it is not because you have drunk deeply and are satisfied. It is because you have nibbled so long at the table of the world. Your soul is stuffed with small things, and there is no room for the great. God did not create you for this. There is an appetite for God. And it can be awakened. I invite you to turn from the dulling effects of food and the dangers of idolatry, and to say with some simple fast 'This much, O God, I want you.'"
 1. This is the basis of all fasting.
 - a) Humility - *"Yet when they were ill, I grieved for them. I denied myself by fasting for them, but my prayers returned unanswered."* (Psalm 35:13, NLT)
 - b) Repentance

I. When You Fast

- A. When you fast do not make it obvious. 6:16
 1. The hypocrites do this. The actors want to be seen by a big audience.
 2. They want to be admired for their religious effort.
 1. They disfigure their faces. The word used there is aphanizo – to make invisible, to destroy.
 2. That is all the reward they will get...admiration by the fickle crowd.
- A. When you fast...
 1. Comb your hair – literally reads, "anoint your head with oil".
 2. Wash your face – means what it says. The point is: if you anoint your head and wash your face you look just like the next person who is going to work. There is no reason for you to stand out to the crowd. By doing this you are living to an audience of One! There is only one crowd you want to see you fasting - GOD! Ie. Again, don't be legalistic about this either. Your fast is not ruined because somebody else knows unless your purpose is to draw attention to yourself.
 3. Then no one will notice you are fasting...except Father
- B. And Father who sees in everything (including what is done in secret) will reward you openly.
 1. 'Reward you openly' – *phaneros* can also be translated as visible, reveal,
 2. The hypocrite hides his face but God visible reveals Himself in rewarding the faster, the giver the prayer.