

Sermon Title: True Fasting and the Glory (Scripture is from ESV)

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 58:3-12

Introduction

Good evening everyone. It's my pleasure to speak on our first Friday Fire during our 21 day fast. Interestingly, I had the privilege of speaking at the Friday Fire just before our last extended corporate fast back in 2008 when we did the 42 day fast. During that fast most people were fasting once a week with some of them doing 10 day fasts during the 42 days, and then all of us finishing the fast with the three days of only water.

Our church has changed quite a bit since our last extended corporate fast. I can remember in the summer of 2008, after Christian had just become the pastor of our church, we seemed to go through a honeymoon stage as a church. We began to have our extended services where the Holy Spirit would really mess up different people. Some people were getting visions for the first time and others were just beginning to step out into the prophetic. I can remember at most of our Sunday Swims that summer people would often share about seeing a lot of water above us that seemed about to be poured out. There were many encouraging visions, but we were very raw in our experience with the Holy Spirit and very young and inexperienced as a church.

And then we began the 42-day corporate fast... and what happened? Perhaps the opposite of what people expected. It got very dry. There was less sharing of visions or prophetic words about water or glory. We had less extended services and things seemed to return to "normal." It wasn't that we did anything wrong; I really believe God was pruning us as a church. It was after the fast that the church began to mature. Discipleship became a focal point of the church. Healthy structure soon became implemented into the church, intern pastors joined the staff and later the deacon board was also formed. God had given us little tastes of His glory in the summer of 2008, but we were in no way prepared to receive any more than He gave us then. We would have collapsed if we had received more. I really believe that through the 42-day fast God was teaching many of us the need for discipline, the need to kill our flesh, and the need to learn how to listen more closely for His voice. Eventually in May 2009 we had our retreat with Brother Michael and then the Andres Bissonni crusades and we experienced some of the outpourings that had been prophesied the summer before.

When Pastor Christian announced this 21-day fast excitement grew in me quickly. God had put on my heart at the beginning of this year that He would do things I had never experienced before and that this year would be the greatest year of my life yet. And not just for me, but for the church as well. As we have prepared for the Niagara Conference I haven't felt that it would be through slick marketing or heavy recruiting that we would get a ton of people. Instead, I have felt it would be more through the Spirit's power being revealed before the conference and many curious, hungry people signing up as a result. We don't have that much time left to see the release, so I feel this fast has come at just the right time.

God has blessed us this first half of 2010. We have obeyed God by going through with the Itaewon church plant and God's hand has clearly been on it. We had Rob Hotchkin from Extreme Prophetic teach us for a weekend and we have been stepping out more in evangelism. We have seen 80+ healings on missions and have also seen some healings here at church. God has been doing a good work, but there is SO MUCH in store for us for the second half of the year. Amen?

Do you all know what day our fast ends on? June 21st. June 21st is solstice, which is the longest day of the year. It marks the end of the first half of the year. I really don't think Pastor Christian set up the 21 day fast with the solstice in mind, but I believe God did. I believe during this fast

there is going to be a shift in our church and we are going to approach the second half of this year in a new way.

In 2008 before the last fast I preached on one of my favorite chapters on fasting, Joel 2. Today, I'm going to preach on my other favorite chapter on fasting, Isaiah 58. Pastor Christian has already been all over this passage, leading the church in prayer through it at Sunday Swim and during our prayer meetings this week. I still felt the Spirit leading me to exegeses it. While preparing the sermon I realized this is a chapter of the Bible I could speak all night about. Good thing tonight is an all night prayer meeting. ;)

Please open your Bibles to Isaiah 58. If you are taking notes, which you should, you can title this message "**True Fasting and the Glory.**"

Before I start, let me say prayer for us.

PRAY

I'm going to start with verse 3...

Isaiah 58:3-5 – Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it? Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice heard on high. Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? It is to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the Lord?

Fasting reveals the flesh

The first point I want to hit is one that Pastor Christian hit on a Sunday Swim and likely most of you have already noticed during this fast: **Fasting reveals the flesh.** "Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist." Have you ever noticed that your worst emotions tend to come out when you are really really hungry? Our true character begins to show.

Did you know that if you were to do an only water fast that your body could last from 21 – 40 days before you would need to break it? And that during the first two days you have hunger pains only because your body is used to being fed. If you were used to eating three meals, then you would get particularly hungry during those three times in the day. You have trained your body. When the hunger comes you realize just how fleshly you are. Just how dependent you are on the things of this world. If you fast consistently, such as once a week, your body actually becomes more disciplined and the hunger pains lessen. You will realize you have greater control over your hunger and your flesh.

During this 21-day fast I want to encourage you to be aware of your flesh, and by that I mean your sinful nature. See what unhealthy emotions come up. During extended fasts God will often reveal things inside His people that need to be taken care of. Just as you are disciplining your body during the fast by not eating, God will also grant you the grace to become more disciplined in our other fleshly areas and become more consecrated to God.

Religious spirit

Another warning in this passage is the danger against the spirit of religion. The Israelites believed that if they fasted, then they deserved answers to their prayers. They were believing in their works, not by faith. The Pharisees in the Gospels sadly were the same. The Pharisees themselves fasted twice a week (Luke 18:12)! But they too were justifying themselves according to their works.

Fasting must be from the heart. Fasting is a beautiful expression of worship to God. It is a cry of, “God so much more than the hunger within me for food, I hunger for you!” That is a beautiful, sincere prayer. And Satan can’t stand it and will try and disrupt our sweet romance with God in any way he can.

Common tactics of the religious spirit against fasting is to set a judgmental spirit into you towards others who are fasting or not fasting. Or to get you so wrapped up into being careful about keeping the fast that you completely miss out on spending time with God. Or to turn your expression of love to God into a lust for reward based upon you simply not eating. But you see it’s not the act of fasting that is going to bring an answer to your prayers. Rather, it is the act of fasting that, if done correctly, aligns us with God’s heart so that we see powerful response to our prayers.

Let me say that again: **It is the act of fasting that, if done correctly, aligns our hearts with God’s heart so that we see powerful response to our prayers.** It’s not the act, or the work, of fasting that makes our prayers heard. It is the shift in our hearts that should happen during the fast that makes our prayers powerful. You will see this point emphasized throughout the next verses...

Isaiah 58:6 – 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?

God’s Throne

Psalms 89:14 and Psalm 97:2 both present the same truth, that God’s throne is established upon justice and righteousness. Many people interpret righteousness as meaning “right with God” and believe that it is through doing good deeds like reading our Bible, praying, and being a nice person that we become righteous before God. Just like the Pharisees in the Bible, many Christians today are more wrapped up in doing everything “just right” in church. Bible studies, seminars, retreats, and meetings tend to fill the church’s schedule. Most of these things center on us “becoming a better Christian.” And just like with the Pharisees in Jesus’ time, I believe God is becoming more and more impatient with the church. While the church is so busy with their agendas, injustice is consuming our world.

We cannot expect God to come down and establish His glory among us if half of His throne is missing. While I know God is honored by our act of fasting, what He desires more is for us to get our hearts in tune with His heart.

Psalm 68:19 – Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears us up.

God bears our every burden. He feels the pain of this hurting world. So often when we fast we think about the hunger within us or the desire to eat a certain food. And this is when we are able to position our bodies to relate to the broken, hungry, and hurting people around us. There are many who are starving for food. But more than food, there are many more starving for love. But their fast isn’t for 21 days, their fast is continual. Their starvation for love leads them into unhealthy relationships or addictions, leads them into the traps of the enemy, and will enslave them until they are finally able to taste God’s love. **There is a starving, desperate generation that has been going through the garbage the world offers to find some sort of love and fulfillment.** They are trapped under the bondages of the enemy. South Korea is overwhelmed with spirits of lust, shame, and idolatry. Before we can begin seeing great changes in the physical, we need to target the strong men in the spiritual.

Pastor Christian said it best last Sunday when he described how fasting is a weapon to destroy yokes and break oppression. By fasting we are denying our flesh and getting ourselves in touch with God’s Spirit. This results in clearer vision and greater focus. This results in us not living for

the moment, but living for eternity. Not living for our own selfish desires, but living for the kingdom. No longer are we living by physical sight, but by faith. Our spiritual eyes begin to open.

I believe Isaiah 58:6 refers to breaking off yokes in the spiritual realm. God is telling us if we want to do a fast that truly honors Him that we need to target injustice with our prayers. As we show we are serious, God will show He is serious. And what should we expect to happen as the yokes and chains of the enemy are broken off? Let's look at the next verse...

Isaiah 58:7 – 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?

Prayer and then Action

What should always follow prayer is action. First you attack the spiritual strongholds in prayer and you break the bonds of wickedness. **It is only after we do our work in the spiritual realm that we are able to effectively do the work in the physical.** (Repeat).

If you study war, a smart military will almost always attack by air first. They target the strongholds of the enemy and bomb them. Once they have crippled the areas the enemy has relied upon, they send in the ground troops to clean up the work. If the air force has done its job well, then the army that is sent will usually face an enemy that is in confusion, fear, and are ripe for defeat.

This is why Isaiah 58:6 has become Pastor Christian's theme verse for North Korea. The issues for North Korea are clearly still in the spiritual. I could go into North Korea with thousands of strong, loving volunteers to take care of the orphans, but if the demonic strongholds are still remaining over the nation then we would have very little effect. Most of our efforts would be in vain.

Japan is a clear example. Missionaries have continually tried and failed in the nation. The spiritual strongholds must be demolished first. The bonds of wickedness must be broken.

I read a powerful testimony of a missionary in Malaysia who lived in the nation for years without seeing much progress at all. He had many missionary friends at the start, but as the years passed they continued to leave in discouragement until he was the only missionary left in his region. His family was struggling and he became desperate. He was ready to quit. But thankfully his wife and kids refused to allow him to give up. As they would hear the chants and prayers of the Muslims each day, their hearts would break and they knew that something had to be done. He then heard God speak... "You need your own army of prayer." The truth became clear to him, he could not expect change in Malaysia unless he had a lot of prayer backing him. He and his family went to America to visit different churches and seek support. After sharing about the dire situation in Malaysia and the great need for prayer at a certain church, one of the leaders of the church responded that they wanted to pray for Malaysia with him. Right at that moment. And so the church, praise the Lord, went into an extended prayer meeting battling on behalf of Malaysia. The next morning there was news from Malaysia. One of the walls of a well known mosque had suddenly fallen and collapsed. It was a mystery to everyone except for the missionary and his family. They knew there had been a shift in the spiritual realm in Malaysia. And sure enough, after they returned their ministry began to thrive and many Muslims turned to Jesus. Soon many other missionaries came out to work in the region and they too were able to be effective.

As we have been praying and targeting the strongholds of the enemy, we need to expect God to begin to send us out to effectively do His kingdom work.

As the prayer movement at New Philadelphia has taken off we have seen His power release people under bondage and strengthen those who were weak in their faith. We have seen His justice already at work *inside* our church. I believe we are now stepping into a new season where God is

empowering us to establish His justice *outside* the church. God would not have us do a church plant in an area overrun with prostitution, transsexuals, homosexuals, Muslims, and other people who don't know God just so that we can do church. God desires to empower us so that we can reach out to His hungry, poor, and naked people. We need to pray for this and expect it.

Flesh and Blood (NK)

Isaiah 58:7 really is a command to the church to act out of love and justice. And the last command of this verse is one that really shakes me up. God basically says, "Do not hide yourself from your own flesh." Or a simpler translation would be, "do not turn from your own flesh and blood" (NIV), or in other words: your own brothers and sisters.

The Korean church has done some beautiful things. Korea sends more missionaries than nearly every other country in the world. Koreans have more prayer meetings than perhaps every other developed country other than China. Some of the biggest churches of the world are here in this nation. **But there is a glaring sin that has crippled the Korean church from receiving the full blessing of God...**

Korea has turned against its own flesh and blood. Their brothers and sisters and relatives to the north have lived under an oppressive regime for decades with millions starving and many others tortured and martyred for their faith. And the South Korean church has barely noticed. In fact, in the recent elections this past week the people of Korea showed that they would prefer peace at all costs and don't want to touch North Korea in any way. Ignorance, apathy, and fear cover this nation.

The Israelites cried out to God, "Why have we fasted and our prayers have not been heard?" God responded, "You have turned from your own flesh and blood. You have shown no care for your brother and sister. You have watched your fellow tribes go into exile and slavery and have merely shrugged your shoulders."

After the exile of the northern tribes of Israel there were only two revivals among the remaining southern tribe of Judah. These revivals were under the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah. What did these revivals have in common? Both kings reached out to the remaining Israelites to the north. They sought a cleansing of their entire land, not just their part in the south. Despite the rough history between the north and the south, these kings chose not to turn from their own flesh and blood. And God rewarded both of their reigns with powerful times of revival.

I believe God is going to pour out His Spirit upon us here in the south to prepare us for His greater work, but the full revival that we seek will not come until North Korea has been redeemed, loved, and delivered. If we want to see the full revival God desires to pour out upon this peninsula, we must seek the cleansing and reconciliation of the people of Korea. We can no longer hide ourselves from our own flesh. This is a strong word that I hope you take to heart. There is a clear reason why we pray on behalf of North Korea. We must pray for the reconciliation and healing of the Korean people in order for us to receive the full outpouring God desires to give us.

Respond With Prayer?

Before we can move on to the rewards we must first respond...

So as we set our hearts on God's heart and seek justice and righteousness in prayer and in action, what should we expect from God? What are some healthy expectations for God's response?

Isaiah 58:8 – Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; and the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.

Moved With Compassion

Right away we should expect breakthrough and we should expect healing. But how? Jesus' life was marked by breakthrough and healing. He turned cities and towns upside down. People stopped everything simply to be able to see Him. But with many of these mini revivals and powerful times of healing the sick there was something that marked Jesus' heart. Compassion. Words like, "Moved with pity" or "he had compassion" often marked the miracles and healings of Jesus. Why is this important?

God is love. If you experience love for someone around you, you are not experiencing a fleshly emotion or something of the enemy. You are experiencing an emotion of God. 1John 4:19 is clear in saying that we love because God first loved us. **When you are moved with compassion towards someone or something, you need to expect God to move.** He doesn't give us such love for nothing. We need to act upon His stirrings in our heart and expect God to move!

Healing should come naturally as we fast. We are setting ourselves into God's Kingdom. We are saying that we don't live by the flesh, we live by the Spirit. The more we do this, the more the identity of the Kingdom consumes us. The identities that we are citizens of heaven and seated with God in heavenly places overtake our identity as people of this world. As this happens we can expect the authority of the Kingdom to be released in us and around us. Healing springs up speedily. It quickly appears. It flows naturally.

"God, take our flesh. Take our earthly emotions. Consume us with Your love. Give us Your heart for our brothers and sisters around us. Give us Your heart for the victims of injustice. Let our hearts be one. Let Your Kingdom be established. Amen!"

Face of God

This verse also says that our righteousness will go before us. The root to the word righteousness really means "godliness" and the most common translations are first justice and then righteousness. But in truth it's a combination of both. It is the character of God. Justice and righteousness. This means that when people look upon us, they see the face of God. This is natural. We are so in tune with God's heart that we are moving just as Jesus did, fully led by the Holy Spirit. As we move together we represent the army from Ezekiel 37. This is the army that Satan cannot face because he cannot dare look upon the face of God. The light of our faces strikes fear into the enemy and he flees before us. You reflect God's glory. His righteousness goes before you. Amen!

The Glory

And now we come to my favorite part: "The glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard." Rear guard. What does that mean? The Hebrew word is pronounced "Aw saf" and means, "Gather" or "Harvest." I like the King James Version the most. It says, "**The glory of the Lord shall be thy reward.**" Amen?

What happens when the glory of the Lord, the "kabod" or "weight" of His presence is present? At creation the Spirit of God hovered over the waters of the earth. As God spoke, life came forth. When the glory of God is present, what we speak comes forth. Jesus turned water to wine, multiplied bread and fish, healed crippled and paralyzed bodies, cleansed lepers, and raised the dead. Peter walked down the street and the lame were healed from his shadow. The glory was so present in Paul's life that handkerchiefs he had touched were sent to the sick and the sick were healed. The glory resting on Paul had rubbed off onto the handkerchiefs. Angels also became more present. They were always there, but in the glory realm we see more through the Spirit than through the flesh.

What is God's **promised reward** for true fasting? His glory. His presence. As we align our hearts in justice and righteousness and set ourselves into the ways of His Kingdom, we can expect His glory to mark our lives. This is His promise. This is His reward!

Glory.

Repeat after me, "Glory." "Give us your glory God." "Glory!" "Let Your glory fall on us now!"

Isaiah 58:9-10 – Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.' If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday.

Hearing God's Voice (Posture of fasting)

Then we will call and the Lord will answer. We will cry, and He will say, "Here I am." Let me restate a point that was made earlier: **I really believe it isn't the act of fasting that causes God to speak and us to hear Him, rather it is the posture of fasting that enables us to hear.** (Repeat). Often we want to hear God in a loud, audible way. We want to hear Him through the fire, through the storm, through the earthquake. But when God spoke to the prophet Elijah He chose not to speak through those ways. He spoke through a gentle breeze, a soft whisper.

When we fast we alter the routines of our life to spend more time with God, to focus on Him more. We remove the distractions of the flesh and posture ourselves before God. As we obey in praying against injustice and stepping out to help the weak, we begin to move in God's heart. If you want to move in the prophetic, you have to draw near to the Lord's heart. It is there that you hear His whispers. It is there that you feel His heartbeat. Scripture says that the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy (Revelation 19:10). As you move in the heart of Jesus, your words, your understanding, your wisdom all come in line with God. You begin to walk right beside Him. He becomes your closest companion.

Take time to listen as your fast. Take time to rest in His presence. Listen to His whispers and let His heart touch your heart.

Isaiah 58:11 – And the Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.

Satisfied in God

As we set ourselves upon God's heart He promises to satisfy us, no matter the conditions around us. When the crowds followed Jesus, they chose Him over their work, their leisure, and even their meals. They were hungrier for God and were willing not to eat just to be with Him. Jesus recognized their heart and had compassion on them. Through the glory, the loaves and fish were multiplied and every person ate and were satisfied. In fact, the miracle overflowed so that there was more than enough for everyone. Just as Jesus saw the hunger among the crowds, He sees the hunger among you. He will satisfy you.

As we move in obedience to God He promises us His Holy Spirit. We might be in the driest, most desolate places, but God promises us that His Spirit will still overflow through us. People can come to us with the assurance that they will receive a drink from the Lord. He will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). Rivers of living water will flow out of us (John 7:38). Please repeat after me, "God, you satisfy me." "I am satisfied in you."

And now the last verse we will cover...

Isaiah 58:12 – And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in.

Kingdom Restored

Simply put: We restore the Kingdom. As justice and righteousness are firmly established among us and we move in the heart of God, His throne becomes established wherever we are. Then He comes in His glory and restores the rightful kingdom, His Kingdom.

God wants to restore North Korea and the revivals that happened there over a century ago. God wants the foundation for the last generations to be strong. God wants His people to dwell in cities where they do not have to fear abandonment, abuse, murder, or rape. Do not think this is too much for you or for the church? If God desires it, it will be done. Amen? With God, nothing is impossible (Luke 1:37).

We need to expect God to be equipping His church for this. And as we are posturing ourselves before Him in prayer and fasting, we need to expect Him to equip us as well. Right now we are targeting the demonic strongholds over Korea in prayer, but we need to expect that soon God is going to send us out to finish the job. Many of us will be used to bring love and healing to orphans, sex trafficking victims, and people lost in darkness. We will not just go with some love and good intentions, we will go with the glory of God upon us and the light of His face shining before us. Expect this church!

2Chronicles 7:14 – If my people who are called by my name humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

PRAY

- Pray repentance on behalf of South Korea for turning from their brothers to the north
- Pledge yourself to the Lord... you are not just fasting you are offering your life to Him...

John 4:34 – “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.”

Your flesh says you are fed only when you eat a meal. Jesus says you are fed only when you do the work of the Father. **We are truly fed as we fast and seek justice.** Pledge yourself to Him!

- Claim the glory of God. Harvest His glory!