Fasting: At the foot of the Cross

Open your Bibles with me if you would please to Luke 5

Briefly by way of background we’ve seen:

1. The HS announce that Jesus would be born in chapter one
2. Christ’s birth in chapter 2
3. John the Baptist preparing the way for Christ’s arrival in Chapter 3
4. Satan’s temptation of Jesus in chapter 4
5. Luke has made it clear that Jesus is claiming to be God and that he is quite Amazing
6. And now is Chapter five the excitement is really about to begin.

We will see in coming weeks that he:

1. Heals a man with leprosy and another who is paralyzed
2. Chooses his 12 disciples
3. Gives the most famous speech the world has ever known
4. Raises a man from the dead
5. Sends demons into a herd of pigs
6. Calms a storm
7. Heals a woman who has been bleeding for untold years
8. Feeds 5000

…and this all before we barely get through less than 1/3 of the book where in chapter 9 Peter will proclaim (for all mankind) that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the Christ, the Savior of the World.

Last week we saw that The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were in a sparring match with Jesus and then he heals a paralyzed man…vs. 26 says: everyone was amazed and gave praise to God…saying we have seen remarkable things today.

Our text today re-introduces us to the subject of fasting.

***In today’s verses 33-39 we read:***

***They said to him, “John’s disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking.” Jesus answered, “Can you make the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, in those days they will fast.”***

***He told them this parable: “No one tears a patch from a new garment and sews it on an old one. If he does, he will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, ‘The old is better.’ ”***

I’d like to suggest that something seminal is mentioned in Luke 5 and occurred in Luke chapter four (that has a direct corollary effect on the incredible power of Jesus’ amazing ministry) that we don’t want to miss.

***Let’s read Luke 4.***

***Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit,******returned from the Jordan******and was led by the Spirit******in the desert, where for forty days******he was tempted by the devil.******He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.  The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God,******tell this stone to become bread."  Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'******” The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world.******And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me,******and I can give it to anyone I want to.  So if you worship me, it will all be yours."  Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'******” The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here.  For it is written: “‘He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'******” Jesus answered, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'******”When the devil had finished all this tempting,******he left him******until an opportune time.***

At the very outset of his ministry, Jesus did what he’s always done.

1. He took time to be away with God.
2. In this case 40 days…without food.
3. Jesus fasted

* In his fasting he tapped into the most amazing power ever known to mankind

We are going to:

1. Define what fasting is
2. Site some biblical examples of ordinary people like us who fasted before the Lord.
3. Provide some practical applications that we might take away
4. Hopefully move you to consider employing this practice in your own life for spiritual growth and the advancement of the KOG here on earth.
5. Mike has asked me to periodically share some of my fasting experiences with you

Quick to say:

1. The discipline of fasting is not nearly as important as the disciplines of reading God’s Word and praying daily.
2. Speaking to Adults/ not students
3. For some food is not an alternative but media is
4. Consult physician

* Power and all else pointing to Christ and his love for us. No so we get power but so that we get plugged into the power.

That’s my desire for you:

1. That as you consider emptying yourself before God—that you willing step into the void that only he can fill that you get plugged into the power of God.
2. My ideal outcome is that you’d be intrigued but not burdened to step towards God
3. Have a clearer picture of how fasting can help strengthen your prayer life
4. We want to be a people moved to action for things that matter to God

By way of definition: At its core fasting is *not*:

1. A way to earn salvation

* We don’t buy favor with God

1. The practice of the elite
2. A way to lose weight

What it is:

1. Putting God first in your life

* Fasting is a way to make space for God
* John: 15 I am the vine you are the branches, if a man remains in me….
* Removes potential idol or mentally consumptive entity

1. Learning got listen to God

* Life slows down
* Hear whispers from HS
* Position our lives in such a way to be sensitive to deeper levels of wisdom, discernment, from God.

1. Fasting brings order out of chaos

* I am not sure if this is true for others or not, but for me,
* It seems like my life is filled with more “chaos” than “order”.
* The discipline of fasting grew out of a desire to see if my life could be *less* “chaotic”
* And more “ordered”… *and it has*.

1. Fasting is a pathway to freedom

* Freedom is costly; it requires sacrifice, discipline and commitment.
* God’s Word says in Hebrews:
* *No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful.  Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Hebrews 12:11*

1. Fasting tenderizes our heart toward God

* *This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word. Isaiah 66:2b*
* Identity with his suffering

1. Fasting gives us boldness before God
2. Fasting is like a ribbon that you tie around your finger to remember God

* The natural by-product of fasting is that it interrupts our routine
* Naturally forces us to slow down eliminating the non-life giving things we are attached to
* Realigning our hearts and minds and bodies to the things of God.

Let me pause here and explain what I mean when I say fasting is like a ribbon. I take great comfort in Jeremiah 29:11 and knowing God has a plan for my life. But when I read further, I discover, part of that plan is revealed when I seek God with my whole heart. The problem is my heart is often pulled in many directions and tempted by many desires. So rather than wholehearted, I am half-hearted at best.

I painfully resonate with Apostle Paul who says: I am Chief among sinners

This past week….

And for those who know me, you know that the growth in my spiritual life has been hampered by all kinds of struggle.

* Immorality
* Deceit
* Sometimes I’m too vain
* Sometimes I feel inferior
* All coupled with a desire for the approval of man.

God calls these competing demands *“high places” or “idols”*

* When I am halfhearted the other half competes for my heart.
* Those things placed higher than him.
* For some of us, these high places manifest in:

1. Out of control spending
2. An addiction to drugs, alcohol, pornography
3. More subtle…a jealous and covetous spirit
4. Gossiping lips
5. Insurmountable fear

The “high places” or “idols” for me

* Iif left to my own desires

1. without the disciplines of prayer, reading God’s word and fasting
2. Flagrant worshipping of food
3. Inherently deceptive nature
4. Desire for the approval of man.

Contrasting these High Places:

*Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he mediates day and night.  He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. . Psalm 1: 1-3*

I say to myself: *I want to be that kind of a man.*

For me, Fasting is the voluntarily denial of something for a specific period for the spiritual purpose of addressing the high places in my life...

Most often, we associate fasting with a denial of food.

Yet, I’ve been instructed by my children as I’ve witnessed my daughter declare a 45 day fast on *shopping*, and I know that she and our other children have fasted from *media* periodically realizing the “high place” this is in their lives and our culture.

*John Piper writes:*

*Fasting in American culture and many other prosperous western nations is almost incomprehensible because we are brainwashed by a consumer culture.  We are taught to experience the good life by consuming, not by renouncing consumption.*

We are often confused into thinking that this world is our home and that life is about us.

*Nothing could be further from the truth*.  The earth is simply our temporary dwelling place and our homes, for those of us who recognize our sin, realize we are eternally separated from God and in desperate need of a Sacrifice for our sins, realize that it is only in Christ and Christ alone (not ourselves, not sacrifices like fasting) that we can earn our way into heaven…but that it is the free gift of God to those who will repent of their sins and turn to God.

So far I have said, fasting is….and I paused on fasting is a ribbon…let’s continue…

Fasting lets us plead the case of our loved ones before a holy God

* David therefore sought God on behalf of the child. And David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground… (2 Samuel 12:16-23)

1. Fasting gives us the opportunity to see God sustain us and help us flee from our enemies

* And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God (I Kings 9:18)

1. Fasting causes a resolve to seek God and plead his mercy

* Then I turned my fact to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.
* Daniel 1:8, 15: 9-13???

1. Fasting gives us the opportunity to humble ourselves before God and plead for his protection

* Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava that we might humble ourselves before God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods. For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of solders and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king, “The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him.” SO we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty. Ezra 8:21-23

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is- his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:1-2*

Beyond the simple answer that Jesus fasted and therefore we should follow his example. He fasted to hear God and draw near to God to find strength and power in his time of need, therefore, how much more is that true of me. Fasting is an opportunity for us to draw near to God and find strength and power also.

As counter intuitive as it may seems, scripture is quite clear on the fact that fasting can have a much more powerful impact on our lives than most of us might imagine.

*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.  Ephesians 3:20-21*

*I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Philippians 3:10-11*

*That power, that explosive power that brings back life from death….I want to know that power in my life here on earth and I want to suggest that fasting is one of the most effective ways to tap into the supernatural power of God.*

*When I look at the stars and imagine the size of the universe and the God who created it, it amazes me that he would want to know me. Psalm 8*

It is hard for me to wrap my mind around the magnificence of God but I want to be touched by this God, THE GOD OF THE UNIVERSE.

My sense is that fasting is his invitation for us to move from ordinary strength, power and insights into extraordinary strength, power and insight.  That is, strength power and insight not of ourselves but of him.

TAKE AWAY LINE: FASTING IS SAYING NO TO YOURSELF TO SAY YES TO GOD

Before you say you can’t:

1. Phil. 4:13 I can do all things
2. Gal. 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ

Precedent for fasting:

1. As Paul established churches in the cities he visited, he would fast before selecting leaders for those new churches. (Acts 14: 23)
2. Pleading with God (Daniel 2, 2 Sam. 12:22-23)
3. Jesus Matt.17:21, Mark 9:29, Luke 2:4
4. Anna (Luke 2:30)
5. Moses Ex.43:28, Elijah 1 Kings 19:8,

Purpose in fasting

1. When you are facing impossible circumstances

* Nehemiah 1:4 So it was when I heard these words that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days. I was fasting and praying before the God of Heaven I Samuel 31:13

1. To change the destiny of a people, a city, or a nation

* Nehemiah 9:1 Now on the 24th day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads I Samuel z;6, Jonah 3:5

1. To hear from God fresh and new, and seek His direction Ezra 8:21 Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions.

* To receive God’s aid in battle and the defeat of the enemy 2 Chronicles 20:3 And Jehoshaphat feared and set himself to seek the Lord and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. Ester 4:16

1. To get ahold of God to receive specific answer to prayer Acts 10:30 So Cornelius said, Four days ago, I was fasting until this hour, and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold a man stood before me in bright clothing, and said Cornelius your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God. Hebrews 5;7
2. To seek the mind of God

Let’s take a brief glimpse at three Old Testament Characters all who fasted before God

1. Jehoshaphat
2. Elijah
3. Esther

* Esther 4:10 records that as Queen Esther prepared to approach the King of Persia to ask him to spare the Jewish people from destruction…at the risk of her life, she fasted and prayed for God’s help, and she asked all the Jewish people in her city to fast with her.
* She didn’t want to go before the Kind…but she did
* This is what a person of God did. What was she looking for?
* She didn’t want to go before the King…but she did
* Common response to big things: Fasting

Get into head, heart, experience, outcome of their fasting

Here’s what’s at stake:

1. Isaiah 41:10 (His “Withness)
2. 2 Chronicles 16:9a (His desire to strengthen us)
3. His resurrection power
4. 2 Cor. 12:9 For my power is made perfect in weakness and certainly fasting reminds us of our weakness and dependence on God for everything, every day.

I want to suggest that fasting turbo charged our prayer life. Again, in some mysterious way:

* We are too busy to pray, and so we are too busy to have power. We have a great deal of activity, but we accomplish little, many services, but few conversations, much machinery but few results. R.A. Torrey
* As we still the noise and lean into the silence
* As we cut the clutter and begin to obtain order
* As we move beyond the superficial and into the supernatural we see the promises of God ring true time and time again. (Isaiah 30:15)

So I have applied the discipline of fasting over much of my entire adult life…to gain some degree of order in my life, to address my sinful nature and to do what I can to align myself with the will of God.

A time when I was fasting (in Plymouth) longing for a breakthrough on a number of fronts and a woman (out of the blue) gives me this letter she had written, sensed I was to have it—she didn’t know me, was embarrassed to give it, but was obedient.  It was PRECISLEY what I needed to hear.  (I will read part of the letter) Your busyness has kept you from me, one thing I require of you, seek me with your whole heart…..)

Over the past 23 years I have tried to fast once a week for my children and although the jury is still out, listen to the excerpts from my most recent birthday cards from each of them (or story about phone call from Hannah last spring.)

Illustration:

1. I also fast asking (begging) God that:

* My kids would walk with Christ all their lives
* That I would never foul up my marriage with an adulterous or inattentive relationship.
* That I would hunger and thirst for God and his word (because I so often find myself so lukewarm), that I would have wisdom, favor, productivity and insight at work.

Hannah

Joel

Not to be confused…I am not suggesting that God is some cosmic dial up genie in a bottle but rather He is a compassionate and loving father who wants the absolute best for his children.

Just like any other discipline…the more you do it the stronger you get at it.

* No different from weight lifting, running etc…

Cadence and imagine the power….

* Like Esther: Fasting helps me ask others for help and gives me confidence and boldness (Esther 4:3, 16, 9:31)
* Like David: Fasting lets me pleads the case of my children before a holy God (2 Samuel 12:16-23)
* Like King Jehoshaphat: When I am afraid or don’t know what to do I fast. (2 Chronicles 20:3-4)
* Like Jesus’ disciples, Fasting puts me in a great place to dwell upon and longingly look forward to the return of Christ (Luke 5:34-35)
* Like Ezra I fast for protection and a safe journey for myself and my family (Ezra 8:21-23)
* Like Saul and Barnabus Fasting helps me to be set apart for the work God has called me into. (Acts 13:2-3)

Jesus Question- What do you want me to do for you? (Earnest payment- not genie)

1. Matthew 20:32 records Jesus saying to two blind men begging for him to heal them: What do you want me to do for you?
2. I’d ask the same question of you: What do you want Jesus to do for you?
3. Back to the question of the beggar Jesus asks:  What do you want me to do for you?
4. So how is it with you?
5. Do you want vibrancy in your prayer life?
6. Do you want to hear the still small voice of the HS?
7. DO you want to experience fullness in Christ?
8. Do you want to have God write on the tablet of your heart?—Moses
9. Do you truly want to draw near to God-sit with him?
10. Do you want to identify your sin
11. By way of protection/provision?
12. For family, work?
13. In the conquering of sin?
14. For the deliverance or salvation of another?

Small challenge –real specific would you skip a meal as a reminder to and opportunity to pay for a loved one? What if you were the one being prayed for?

Put another way:  What do you desire in regards to the things of God in your life? Peace? Tranquility on the home front? An ability to see yourself clear of an insurmountable debt you owe?

* Write it down: Listen to HS in regards to what you might do
* Have courage to do it…ask God to help you in your unbelief.

1. Some of you may be thinking, great….but what am I supposed to do with this…is this really for me? Let me try and make it really clear….

Practically Speaking

Fasting is almost always accompanied by accelerated prayer (in lieu of eating or being saturated with some form of media or amusement)

HOW DO YOU FAST

1. Choose the sort of fast
2. Choose the reason (don’t ever fast without a reason or Satan will make one for you…fill the emptiness with God and God alone
3. Find accountability, but otherwise keep it to your self
4. Start Small—building a muscle; think marathon not sprint

Different Kinds of fasts:

1. Food (water only)/Complete For frequent and intense times of prayer Liquid only: water/ water and juice
2. Selective: removing certain elements meats, sweets, bread, pasta Dan 10:3 taking “no pleasant food” for an extended period of time Different kinds of Foods: Daniel fast (Daniel 1:8) fasting from fancy foods and drinks (Vegetables and water)
3. Sex (I Corinthians 7:5)
4. Media/Entertainment/Technology---noise/sports/hobbies

Lengths Vary

1. One meal
2. One day
3. Three days
4. 10 days
5. 14 days
6. 21 days
7. 40 days (Jesus, Moses, Elijah)

God’s response to our humility

1. Joshua 1:5 As I was with Moses so I will be with you
2. 2 Chronicles 16: 9a For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him2 Chron. 20:15-18

* His promise to fight the battle for us v.15
* His clear instruction in our lives v. 16
* His vantage point to see the victory v. 17
* His promise of Withness v. 17
* Our response to God’s mercy?
* Worship and praise v. 18

I encourage you not to fast if you are not prepared mentally and physically to do so.

When you fasted…was it for me you fasted?  Zech. 7:5

1. Fasting provides a paradoxical experience as we embrace a kind of emptiness in fasting we remarkably experience fullness and hope in Jesus Christ.
2. It seems like I am more attuned to the spiritual warfare that goes on inside my home or at my work place and I can fight in the spiritual realm accordingly.

* For sure when I am fasting, I sin less…it is a matter of fact
* Sin loses its grip on me when I fast.
* When I fast, I walk more humbly before man and the Lord…
* Fasting helps to chip away at the cold and hardened heart of mine that so rarely thinks of the homeless, the prisoner, the orphan, the nine year old little girl who is in bondage to human trafficking…

As I said at the outset, everything in the universe points to Christ and even in fasting, giving up something small reminds me of what Jesus Christ gave up for me on the Cross.

Come, let us return to the Lord; for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us; he has struck down, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; and the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord; his appearing is as sure as the dawn; he will come to us like the showers, like the spring rains that water the wrath.” Hosea 6:1-3

I’d like to close with a story….

Let’s Pray

Sabbath Next Week

As we conclude our fasting, we are reminded that at each step along the way we are drawing closer to the cross. Each hunger pang, every reminder of food, even our very feeling of faintedness, reminds us that we’re taking another step towards the cross of Christ. This is the goal and destination of our fast; to come close to the foot of the cross, to realize in our own finite ways, THE SUFFERING OF THE Master, his infinite mercy and love for us, and his call for us to bear our own crosses, to suffer as he did for the benefit of all men., So then, my brother, as you come to the end of this journey within your journey, look up, gaze at him hanging there…see the spattered blood, the abject spectavcle of his lifeless body, willingly sacrificed and in plain view for all to see.

Realize that your fasting provides an avenue to better understand the heart of Christ. A trail to a rocky precipice called Golgotha…where sin and death and devil were defeated forever. Where Jesus Christ emerged victorious.

As we complete our time of fasting we then are the new wineskins, cleaned and made anew by the rejuvenating power of the Holy Spirit, that we may carry the new wine of the gospel to our brethren.

Announcements