

Fasting: Hungering for God, Longing for Christ, Denying Our Flesh & Experiencing God's Grace

Mark 2:18-22

As we open to Mark 2:18-22 we are examining the Biblical topic of:

Fasting: Hungering for God, Longing for Christ, Denying Our Flesh & Experiencing God's Grace.

This is our study because we all need to ask ourselves an honest question. By doing a personal inventory we can see whether we are paddling against the current of our culture or just floating along with the flow of everyone around us in life.

What's the question? Simply this:

HOW'S YOUR HUNGER FOR GOD TODAY?

Several weeks ago we began to study about Hungering for God and saw this longing after Jesus with a heart of love and devotion is called Biblical Fasting. And Biblical Fasting, or the voluntary abstinence from good and right things such as food, is a spiritual discipline, which has fallen upon hard times in modern Christianity. So this morning I repeat our task:

In the Old Testament we can see that Biblical Fasting was an urgent call to get serious about Knowing God.

In the New Testament we see Biblical Fasting was an ancient spiritual discipline to reschedule my life with God at the center instead of dining, relaxing, amusing, accumulating, advancing, securing, and a multitude of other things that are not wrong - just deadly to intimacy with the Almighty.

In the Early Church of Acts and the Epistles we see demonstrated that this Hunger for God shaped their lives, their ministry, their worship, and their outreach.

In the Early Church we see Biblical fasting is a powerful way to yield every part of my life to God's supremacy.

Conclusion: Biblical Fasting is an immediate way to declare your allegiance to God's way and glory in every day of your life!

Listen to this brief glimpse from Early Church History as we jump into our study this morning of God's Word's New Testament portrait of the Early Church's Hunger for God.

EARLY BELIEVERS FOCUSED ON ETERNAL MINISTRY

About A.D. 133 Aristides¹, a teacher of philosophy in the Roman Province of Asia (modern Turkey), presented a defense of Christianity to Emperor Hadrian (AD 117-138). From it we get a glimpse of what the early Christians were like and why the church grew the way it did—like wildfire—in those centuries.

Now the Christians, O King...have the commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ himself engraven on their hearts, and they observe, looking for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. They do not covet men's goods; and love their neighbors; they despise not the widow, and grieve not the orphan. He that hath distributeth liberally to him that hath not. If they see a stranger, they bring him under their roof and rejoice over him, as if it were their own brother; for they call themselves brethren, not after the flesh, but after the spirit and in God.... **And if there is among them a man that is poor and needy, and they have not an abundance of necessities, they fast two or three days that they may supply the needy with their necessary food.** For Christ's sake they are ready to lay down their lives. So it was spread abroad, "Behold how they love one another." What shall we be known for? Let it be that we are willing to die for Christ and, even more, that we are willing to live for him in loving his people—and his enemies. The early Christians fasted so that they would have more to give to the needy, which means they did not have a lot stored up. O Lord, help us see Christ, be satisfied with Christ, and to show Christ as they did.

Accounts like that from history are interesting, but how do we know that we need to fast as a born again Christian? Jesus gives us the answer in our text we have been studying for the past few weeks. In Mark 2:20-22 Jesus said His children would long for Him until His Return.

So when do we need to fast? When we have lost the intense longing for Christ's Return!

THE ORIGINAL SETTING: LONGING FOR CHRIST'S RETURN

Then, Christ's words this morning are for you. Our text contains **the most important words in the Bible on fasting.** And these words can change your life if you understand them!

Mark 2:20-22. Lets read them as you follow along in your copy of God's Word.

20 "But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them,

(Here is one of the many prophecies Jesus made pointing to the Cross, and His ascension to the Father's right hand for the period of time we call the Church Age. Jesus was away and we await Him.)

And then they will fast in those days

(Now comes the New Testament fast, it is for those who await the One they love, who is taken away to Heaven. While we wait for the Son we fast. Because we long for Him, we fast!)

21 "No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth

(Christianity of the New Covenant Church after the Cross)

¹ Drawn from the Godward Life.

on an old garment;

(The Old Testament Judaism)

or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and the tear is made worse. 22 “And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins.”

FIRST CENTURY FOCUSED SAINTS

How did the 1st Century saints live that way and we so often don't? Do you remember from our study of 1st Thessalonians a couple years ago, what was the heartbeat of the early church? Expecting Christ's Return. Do we ever grow weary and lessen that passion? Yes. So what is Christ's way to get us to long for His Coming? Look for His coming? Wait for His Coming?

Stop eating, fast, deny ourselves, feel the pain of deprivation, show our allegiance to Him (demonstrated in fasting) as higher than even life (demonstrated in eating). Think with me about these verses, and ask yourself, do you really long for Jesus every day? If not, fasting is for you!

One of the key attitudes we find displayed by God's saints is that they were exiles on earth, and citizens of Heaven. This produced not a detachment from earthly life or other people, rather it led to such a lacking of love for things that these early saints actually had abundant time to love and seek and win their neighbors. Think of all the time we spend gathering, protecting, and caring for our THINGS. Then think of what value that collecting, protecting, and caring will have in Heaven at Christ's Throne versus the same time, energy, and strength poured out in loving passion for the souls of our neighbors.

Would Kalamazoo be shocked if the hundreds of families at Calvary Bible Church started thinking of others more than their own THINGS!

BIBLICAL FASTING REFLECTED THEIR LONGINGS FOR HEAVEN

As one man well stated, "The absence of our fasting is the measure of our contentment with the absence of Christ."²

Listen to the fasting minded hearts of the New Testament saints:

Philippians 3:19-21 whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things.²⁰ For our **citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ**,²¹ who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

1 Thessalonians 1:10 and to **wait for His Son from heaven**, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

² Piper, Hunger for God, p. 93.

2 Timothy 4:8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to **all who have loved His appearing**.

Titus 2:11-13 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, 12 teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, 13 **looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ**,

Hebrews 9:28 so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. **To those who eagerly wait for Him** He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.

SOMETHING DULLED THEIR PASSION

Most of us have caught the enthusiasm of the Early Church in Acts and the Epistles.

They were contagiously in love with Jesus, and fearlessly proclaiming His truth. Most of us also have caught that by the time two generations passed, we find that the grandchildren of Pentecost were different.

Note with me the drastic change as we go to the very end of your Bibles.

Revelation 3:15-20 “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 So then, **because you are lukewarm**, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. 17 **Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’**—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— 18 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. **Therefore be zealous and repent.**

The secret to what deadened, dulled, chilled, and dissipated the power of the early church is found in the Doctor’s Report of Revelation 2-3. Jesus the Great Physical came to visit the churches of Asia Minor.

He went to see how the grandchildren of the Apostles and early church were doing and found a very weak pulse. Why? He tells us that they were:

THEY FOCUSED ON THIS WORLD NOT THE NEXT

They were very active, very busy, very wealthy: but spiritually anemic, sickly, powerless, and distracted. They had lost sight of why they were here.

They had lost their longing for Christ to return.

They began to feel, live, and think like: Heaven Can Wait, we need to live for now.

They lost the pilgrim mentality. They no longer felt like strangers on earth. They were rather at home and comfortable on Earth.

One of the key attitudes we find displayed by the 1st Century editions of God's saints is that they considered themselves exiles on earth, and citizens of Heaven.

This attitude didn't produce a detachment from earthly life or other people, rather it led to such a lacking of love for things that these early saints actually had abundant and overflowing time to love and seek and win their neighbors.

THE DANGER OF MISPLACED DESIRES

Jesus warned that a great enemy to His children would be "desires for other things" (Mark 4:19). Jesus left us with the only weapon that will lead us into a victorious deepening hunger for intimacy and daily fellowship with our Creator. That weapon is Biblical fasting and we can measure our hunger level for God by our hunger after those other things. God is only glorified by seeking Him first!

Matthew 6:33 "But **seek first** the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and **all these things** shall be added to you.

Philippians 3:8 Yet indeed **I also count all things loss** for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom **I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish**, that I may gain Christ

ENEMIES OF HUNGERING FOR GOD

Insightful author and pastor John Piper says,

"The greatest enemy of hunger for God is not poison but apple pie. It is not the banquet of the wicked that dulls our appetite for Heaven, but endless nibbling at the table of the world.

It is not the x-rated video, but the prime time dribble of triviality we drink in every night. For all the evil Satan can do, when God describes what keeps us from the banquet of His love, it is a piece of land, a yoke of oxen, and a wife (Luke 14:18-20)

The greatest adversary of love to God is not His enemies but His gifts. And the most deadly appetites are not for the poison of evil, but for the simple pleasures of earth. For when these replace an appetite for God Himself, the idolatry is scarcely recognizable, and almost incurable".³

PRAYING DAILY FOR SPIRITUAL HUNGER

So the Kingdom of God, the reign of God as Supreme over all of our lives is our goal in fasting. We want Him to rule our appetites, we want Him to rule our affections, we want Him to rule over our choices not.

We want God's Rule in this church, not ours. Then we come before Him seeking His Glory not ours in praying, asking and fasting it changes how we pray.

³ Piper, Hunger for God, p. 14.

Now when we ask for Him to lead us into the conquest of those old habits that grip and enslave us, the roadblocks that stand in our path to spiritual maturity - **it is so that He may rule in our lives and be glorified.**

When we cry out for wayward or unconverted children or spouses to come back maturity - **it is so that He may rule in our lives and be glorified.**

When we prepare for growth and plan for needs in our church as we fast and pray - **it is so that He may rule in our church and be glorified.**⁴

THE BENEFITS OF HUNGERING FOR GOD

The more we experience intimacy in fellowship with Jesus Christ the more we hunger for Him, and the greater our longings become to be with Him in Heaven.

Then we see our focus in our lives begins to change, the more we long for our Great God and Savior:

Hunger for God prompts Hating any beachhead of sin in our lives,
Hunger for God stirs our Investing our time in Christ's Body, His Church,
Hunger for God focuses us on Evangelizing of Lost People around the World,
Our Hunger for God fills us with the Knowledge of His Will

And on and on it goes in our lives. Actually, anything less than this growing surrender to the Lord through spiritual hungering and thirsting after God, means that our appetite has been ruined through all the little things that have filled us up. It means we have neglected the greatest food - Our Father and His Kingdom for the lesser food of His gifts in life. That spells spiritual famine, weakness, and failure.

FOCUSED ON WHY WE ARE HERE

Biblical Fasting can help us refocus on what we are doing with our time and energy.

Now for a moment, think of all the time we spend gathering, protecting, and caring for our THINGS.

Then think of what value that collecting, protecting, and caring will have in Heaven at Christ's Throne versus the same time, energy, and strength poured out in loving passion for the souls of our neighbors.

Would Kalamazoo be shocked if the hundreds of families at Calvary Bible Church started thinking more about the spiritual needs of PEOPLE; and less about their own THINGS!

MASTERED ONLY BY CHRIST

⁴ Piper, Hunger for God, p. 14.

God's Word says we must be Mastered only by Christ and nothing else. The evidence of being brought under the power of something is that we need it to make it through our day.

Biblical Fasting uncovers and exposes what ever it is that has mastered our lives in place of Christ.

1 Corinthians 6:12 All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, **but I will not be brought under the power of any.**

What do you need to make it through a day? That will be a list of the items that have cast their influential mastering power across your life.

What pushes out your hunger for experiencing the intimacy of fellowship with the Lord in your life?

Do you seek food or entertainment first?

The latest news or the status of your investments first?

The web and your computer first?

The television, radio, music first?

Your sports, body building, health needs first?

All of these are alone good and worthy of time but not at God's expense, He is to be sought first and deepest of all!

WHAT ARE YOU LONGING FOR?

Are you incurably hungering after God or this world?

Are you incurably delighting in God's Word or trivial pursuits?

The greatest destroyers of intimate hunger for God may be things that are good and right in their place like coffee and lawns and hobby and travel and retirement planning and mall walking and TV watching and computer mastering.

But any that take God's first place, and become easier to turn to than God and His Word and His intimate communion, they are then deadly destroyers of our hungering and thirsting after God⁵.

Would you like to revitalize your spiritual life?

Would you like to heighten your awareness of God?

Would you like to experience God in such a deep and intimate way that you find yourself absolutely satisfied and contented in a way God's Word calls perfect peace?

Start longing for Christ's return so much that it draws you to deny other good things, so that you may focus more and more of your life upon seeking, knowing, enjoying, and pleasing Christ!

⁵ Piper, Hunger for God, p. 14.