

Lenten Devotional

Bible Reading -Isaiah 58:1-14

The theme of today's passage is "True Fasting". In this passage, the Lord explains the true meaning of fasting. The message is broken down into 3 parts.

How did the Israelites fast?

To the Israelites, fasting was nothing more than a ritual. They gave up food and spread out sackcloth and ashes to lie on. However, they did not attempt to bring about any change in their behavior or lifestyle. They continued to oppress others and pursue their own selfish interests. Their fasting made them suffer, which in turn made them violent and they quarreled and fought. The Lord asks "*Is this what you call fasting? Do you think I will be pleased with that?*" (Isaiah 58:5)

The kind of fasting the Lord wants

In this passage, the Lord is very clear about what He considers "true fasting". The Lord says, "*Remove the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice and let the oppressed go free. Share your food with the hungry and open your homes to the homeless poor. Give clothes to those who have nothing to wear, and do not refuse to help your own relatives.*" (Isaiah 58:6-7)

This reminds us of what Jesus said were the greatest commandments, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'* All the Laws and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Mathew 22:36-40)

No amount of fasting and prayer can ever replace the need to help others in need.

The Reward

If we practice "true fasting" - combining prayer and devotion with helping the needy - the Lord has said that he his "*...favor will shine on you like the morning sun...your wounds will be quickly healed...always be with you to save you...my presence will protect you...when you pray I will answer you and when you call I will respond*" (Isaiah 58:8-9)

When fasting is observed in the right spirit and with a true heart, the Lord promises to guide and satisfy us with good things. He promises that our lives will be like a garden that has a spring of water that never runs dry. The Lord is never in favor of false pretenses and vain attempts to keep up appearances because the Lord "*...does not judge as man judges. Man looks at the outward appearance, but I look at the heart.*" (1 Samuel 16:7).

In return for keeping His laws, treating the Sabbath as sacred and for serving him with a righteous heart, the Lord promises joy, abundance, favor and protection to last us a lifetime.