

In the last chapter we saw two very different paths that we could take in life. One led to peace and the other a complete lack of peace (Isaiah 57:21). If the reader might have mistakenly thought he or she was in that category of the righteous, but had deceived their self, this chapter helps us see hypocrisy. There is a difference between religion and relationship. Religion is done out of duty to supposedly earn favor with God or man. Relationship comes from the heart and results in genuinely caring about the things that God cares about. This chapter asks us to examine our ways and see if we are religious or if we are in a relationship with our Creator (Jeremiah 9:24).

¹ *"Cry aloud; do not hold back; lift up your voice like a trumpet; declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Jacob their sins.* Isaiah 58:1 Judah had not yet gone into captivity. While still practicing temple rituals, they also worshiped other gods that promised them wealth and strength. The people being addressed in this chapter were not necessarily those engrossed in idolatry as much as they were in outright worship of mammon (Matthew 6:33). They had the American dream long before the pilgrims struggled with it. They thought that if they just kept up the religious routine that God didn't mind what they did to get ahead (Isaiah 29:13). That is why God tells Isaiah to cry aloud and not hold back. It's not about attacking individuals for their hypocrisy, but is addressing a nation for this mindset that allows them to be comfortable with sin (Micah 3:8). A few voices today are being lifted up like a trumpet. Is anyone paying attention? When we declare the transgression of the nation, we are looked down on as ignorant, self-righteous nuts. And that may be the case if we simply have religion and not a relationship with the living God.

Of course the other extreme of not saying anything about sin can be just as evil. If we so long to fit in and be accepted that we refuse to declare the transgressions of the nation, we are guilty as well (Ezekiel 3:18). This chapter is going to give us a litmus test to see if we have discovered true faith, a life lived in relationship to God.

² *Yet they seek me daily and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that did righteousness and did not forsake the judgment of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments; they delight to draw near to God.* Isaiah 58:2 This is a description of a sense of righteousness that is abhorrent to God. They had prayer, religious language, a call for righteous judgment, and delighted to go to the temple (Isaiah 1:11). Notice that it is **"as if they were a nation that did righteousness."** In other words all this religious behavior was hypocritical. It is spiritual routine without surrendering to the will of God. It is declaring God to be the one true Lord while living as they pleased.

Paul had to defend against the idea that grace meant you could live as you want. He wrote, ¹ *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?* ² *By*

Commented [PW1]: Isaiah 57:21 (ESV)

²¹ There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked."

Commented [PW2]: Jeremiah 9:24 (ESV)

²⁴ but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD."

Commented [PW3]: Isaiah 29:13 (ESV)

¹³ And the Lord said: "Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men,

Commented [PW4]: Micah 3:8 (ESV)

⁸ But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin.

Commented [PW5]: Ezekiel 3:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ If I say to the wicked, "You shall surely die," and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked person shall die for his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand.

Commented [PW6]: Isaiah 1:11 (ESV)

¹¹ "What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.

no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Romans 6:1-2 To be in relationship with God results in a hatred of sin. Our renewed minds see things as they truly are. The destructive deception of sin is clear and we avoid it like a plague. We may fall back at times, but we are convicted rather than seduced to go further with it. It is often difficult to tell the religious from the redeemed because the religious can appear so delighted with the things of God. By their fruits you shall know them (Matthew 7:20). Many churches fall under the influence of the religious who gain influence over the church as an organization. They encourage others to do be religious, but the way they treat others reveals that their hearts have not been redeemed. They will point you to duty rather than a relationship with God (Matthew 15:9).

^{3a} *'Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?'* Isaiah 58:3a This is the religious person's attitude toward God. "Why doesn't He see all I've done? Why doesn't He answer my prayers like He has promised to do? Surely God should answer me after all I do!" (Malachi 3:14)

God gives the answer that they usually refuse to hear. This is what Isaiah was to cry aloud. This is the tune that his voice like a trumpet declares. ^{3b} *Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers.* Even while they go through their religious routines such as fasting with sackcloth and ashes, bringing a sacrifice to the temple, singing the psalms of worship, they were seeking their own pleasure and oppressing all their workers. They were withholding good from him to whom it was due when it was in the power of their hand to do it (Proverbs 3:27). Their fasting was not for God. It was to manipulate God to get what they want. "If I do this for God, then surely He will answer my prayer!" That idea is a form of paganism. God will not be manipulated (Isaiah 45:11). He needs nothing from us. God doesn't need us to fast. We need to fast for our own sake. We need to sever our bondage to our desires and driving influences so that we can give ear to the one influence we need the most.

⁴ *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 to be heard on high.* Isaiah 58:4 In the midst of the fast they are acting out of anger, quarreling and fighting. That kind of a fast doesn't invite God to hear you. It invites His judgment on you. Men often struggle with anger. There should be a correlation between humility and a reduction in anger. The greater our awareness of our own imperfections, the less likely we should be to lash out at someone for theirs (Matthew 6:14). The greater our awareness of God's abundant grace upon our lives, the more ready we should be to extend that grace to those who offend or wound us. A true fast is a time of humbling ourselves before the Lord. To quarrel and fight with others while fasting are contradictory actions. It shows our fast is

Commented [PW7]: Matthew 7:20 (ESV)

²⁰ Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

Commented [PW8]: Matthew 15:9 (ESV)

⁹ in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."

Commented [PW9]: Malachi 3:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ You have said, 'It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the LORD of hosts?

Commented [PW10]: Proverbs 3:27 (ESV)

²⁷ Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.

Commented [PW11]: Matthew 15:9 (ESV)

⁹ in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."

Commented [PW12]: Matthew 6:14-15 (ESV)

¹⁴ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you,
¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

not really before our holy God. It is just going through the motions for the respect of others or to attempt to manipulate God. That is false humility.

⁵ Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it 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? Isaiah 58:5 There is genuine humility of the heart under conviction before God, and there are outward expressions of humility for the respect of men. Perhaps Jesus had this passage in mind when He told people to not appear outwardly to fast. Instead, He said to wash your face and anoint your head with oil so that only God knows you are fasting (Matthew 6:17-18). We have such a tendency to seek respect from others that we should be careful that our worship is for God alone. The outward show is rewarded by man's respect, not by God's favor (Matthew 5:16). It's not even acceptable to God.

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?" Isaiah 58:6 This is the kind of fast that God has chosen. It's that fast that Jesus chose (Isaiah 61:1). He chose to go to the cross so that the bonds of wickedness would be loosed from our hearts. He undid the straps of the yoke this world places on us and invited us to take up His easy yoke (Matthew 11:28-30). He lets those oppressed by sin go free through the power of His Spirit. That is the fast He wants us to choose. It doesn't mean that we don't fast from time to time to draw near to the Lord. It means that our relationship with Jesus should result in a life that aims to be like His. We don't die on a cross, but we do take up our cross to show the love of Christ (Matthew 16:24).

We do this as a congregation through our mission giving, but that doesn't mean God won't give us the opportunity to do this personally. I know a number of you have taken up this fast. The real needs we see around us are broken hearts and confused lives. Discipling others is a way to loose the bonds of wickedness and undo the strap of the yoke. Sharing Christ with the lost breaks every yoke (John 8:32).

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? Isaiah 58:7 There is a difference between professional beggars and the genuinely hungry. Don't give cash that can be misused. Take the person somewhere for a meal. Then you can sit with them and make sure they know the Lord and His love for them. We can meet that clothing need by helping with the Hope Cottage Christmas gifts. Our support for homeless shelters does that as well. The generosity of this congregation shows you have a relationship with Jesus and have chosen His fast.

Commented [PW13]: Matthew 6:17-18 (ESV)

¹⁷ But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,

¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Commented [PW14]: Matthew 6:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ "And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

Commented [PW15]: Isaiah 61:1 (ESV)

¹ The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;

Commented [PW16]: Matthew 11:28-30 (ESV)

²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Commented [PW17]: Matthew 16:24 (ESV)

²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Commented [PW18]: John 8:32 (ESV)

³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Hiding yourself from your own flesh means to divorce yourself from the needs of your relatives. God is warning us that we should care for our own (1Timothy 5:8). What does it say about our relationship with God if we won't even help our own family members with necessities? **This is all about seeing our fellow man as created in the image of God and as those for whom Christ died (1John 3:17).**

Commented [PW19]: 1 Timothy 5:8 (ESV)

⁸ But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Commented [PW20]: 1 John 3:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

Now God moves to the reward of the fast of caring for others. If the religious people thought they would get something from God for their ritual service, He tells them the reward is for those who serve their fellow man from the heart. ⁸ *Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.* Isaiah 58:8 This is the way to truly be righteous. If they were praying for healing, here is the way to have the ear of the Lord for that request. They would have a truly godly reputation, and the LORD will cover their back. Already in Isaiah God has said He would go before us and be our rear guard (Isaiah 52:12). When the Israelites left Egypt, the Lord went before them in a pillar of cloud. The Amalakites would pick off the stragglers in the rear who couldn't keep up (Deuteronomy 25:17-18). Here and in chapter 52 God promises to be our rear guard as well. That means that if we should fall behind, He will keep us safe. If our walk with the Lord is delayed, we know that when we share God's love with others we have a Protector who will be with us and help us catch up.

Commented [PW21]: Isaiah 52:12 (ESV)

¹² For you shall not go out in haste, and you shall not go in flight, for the LORD will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard.

Commented [PW22]: Deuteronomy 25:17-18 (ESV)

¹⁷ Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you came out of Egypt,
¹⁸ how he attacked you on the way when you were faint and weary, and cut off your tail, those who were lagging behind you, and he did not fear God.

⁹ *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, Isaiah 58:9 If you choose the fast that God has chosen instead of a self-righteous display, then the LORD will hear your prayers. If you remove the yoke from others when given the opportunity, and if you don't gossip about others (Proverbs 26:20), and if you refuse to speak wickedness, then the LORD will hear your prayers. He'll be there when you call out to Him. You'll know His presence. These are conditional promises. A few more conditions with promises are given in the next verses.

Commented [PW23]: Proverbs 26:20 (ESV)

²⁰ For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, quarreling ceases.

¹⁰ *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.* Isaiah 58:10 This "if" includes giving to the physically and spiritually hungry, as well as helping the afflicted. Then your gloomy situations will become as bright as anything you've experienced (Isaiah 61:3). Then your righteousness will be seen, not because you want others to see it, but because you are acting at the leading of the Holy Spirit instead of your selfish desires. You are sharing God's heart for the needy.

Commented [PW24]: Isaiah 61:3 (ESV)

³ to grant to those who mourn in Zion— to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified.

I'm reading the biography of Adonirum Judson. He gave himself completely to the Lord in the hardest field on earth, Burma. His beloved wife and child died, and he suffered immensely. He was rejected by those who supported him because it took so long to

make progress in that difficult field. The Lord was with him. When he returned to New York for his only return visit from the mission field, the orphans in the streets called him Ol' Glory Face, because of the way his face shone (Ecclesiastes 8:1).

But that is not all the LORD will do for those who give themselves to the needs of others. 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.* 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.* Isaiah 58:11-12 God so loved the world! Why does He promise such blessings to those who care for the needy? It's because He loves each and every one of us (Romans 5:8). He hurts with each one. He wants to minister to the needy through you. I don't know how many we've helped physically or spiritually and the number doesn't matter. Their response doesn't matter. **What matters is that we show the heart of God. When we do, He promises to guide continually and satisfy our desire.** When His desires become our own, we do these things from the heart. We can never be more satisfied than when we are satisfied with Him. He is the source of those waters that never fail (John 7:37-38). For the Jews, verse 12 meant if their relationship with God was right they would return and rebuild Jerusalem. For us it means churches and families will be restored to what they should be.

¹³ *"If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly; ¹⁴ then you shall take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."* Isaiah 58:13-14 We've seen that the Lord is our Sabbath rest. His holy day is now every day (Romans 14:5). We can walk with the LORD every day, or we can walk in our own ways seeking our own pleasure. The LORD truly becomes our delight, not the false kind of delight we saw in verse 2. These promises are for those who are truly in relationship with Him and seeking His pleasure. You will ride on the heights of the earth and have the heritage of Jacob (Genesis 27:39-40). Remember, Jacob got the blessing, the birthright, *and* the promises given to Abraham.

While the religious were trying to get God to hear their prayers through ritual forms of worship, those in relationship with God who serve Him from the heart are promised more than they could ever ask. There is a fast of religion that is somber and selfish. There is a fast from selfishness to serve the God with whom you are in relationship that is joyful and full of glory. How strange that in giving up our selfishness to serve the Lord out of love, we'd find a pleasure that surpasses all others. Have you found it?

Commented [PW25]: Ecclesiastes 8:1 (ESV)

¹ Who is like the wise? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom makes his face shine, and the hardness of his face is changed.

Commented [PW26]: Romans 5:7-8 (ESV)

⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—
⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Commented [PW27]: John 7:37-38 (ESV)

³⁷ On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.
³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"

Commented [PW28]: Romans 14:5 (ESV)

⁵ One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.

Commented [PW29]: Genesis 27:39-40 (ESV)

³⁹ Then Isaac his father answered and said to him: "Behold, away from the fatness of the earth shall your dwelling be, and away from the dew of heaven on high.
⁴⁰ By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother; but when you grow restless you shall break his yoke from your neck."

Questions

- 1 What was to be loudly proclaimed?
- 2 What's wrong with the religion of verse 2?
- 3 Why are the religious upset?
- 4 What was wrong with their fast?
- 5 What are the two ways to fast?
- 6 How can we best do verse 7?
- 7 What are the rewards in verse 8?
- 8 What is the condition of verse 9?
- 9 What are the rest of the conditions and promises?
- 10 Which fast have you chosen? How can you be sure?