

Sam Storms
Bridgeway Church

Sermon Summary #8

Fasting is Feasting! Mark 2:18-22

Introduction: The contemporary disdain for fasting . . .

*Fasting is **Not** Primarily about **Not** Eating*

One thing that will help us in our attitude toward fasting is to distinguish it from other reasons why people don't eat: hunger strikes, health dieting, anorexia, fasting in pagan religions, etc.

Are we commanded to fast? No. But according to Matthew 6:16-18, Jesus simply *assumes* that we will. Twice Jesus says, "*when you fast*" (vv. 16,17). See also Mark 2:20.

The point is that the Messiah has come like a bridegroom to a wedding feast. Such a moment is too joyful and stunning and exciting to mingle with fasting. Groomsmen don't fast at the bachelor party! The rehearsal dinner is no place to be sad. Jesus is present. The time for celebration is upon us. When the wedding feast is over and the bridegroom has departed, then it is appropriate to fast.

The parallel between fasting and the Lord's Supper . . .

Fasting is always motivated by deep *desire*. Fasting is *not* the *suppression* of desire but the intense *pursuit* of it. We fast because we *want* something more than food. . . .

Biblical reasons for fasting:

1) *Fasting, as an expression of conviction for sin, was practiced to avert God's judgment and displeasure against his people* (1 Sam. 7:6; Joel 2:12; Jonah 3:5-8; Jdg. 20:26; cf. Esther 4; 1 Kings 21:9; Jer. 36:6,9).

2) *The people of God often fasted in preparation for war, with a view to seeking God's protection and blessing.* See 2 Chron. 20:1-4; Joel 2:15.

3) *Fasting was one way of seeking God's help for deliverance from personal troubles and oppression.* See 1 Kings 21:27-29.

4) *Fasting was often an expression of sincere and heartfelt repentance from sin and humility before God* (Lev. 16:29-31). See also Neh. 9:1-2; Ps. 35:13; Dan. 9:3; Joel 2:12-13; Jonah 3:5-8.

5) *Fasting also signified or expressed mourning, sorrow, deep grief, and sadness.* See especially 1 Sam 31:13; 2 Sam. 1:12; 2 Sam. 12:15; 1 Sam. 20:34.

6) *Ezra fasted as part of his request that God provide him with a safe journey* (Ezra 8:21-23).

7) *Fasting is a way of expressing one's concern for the success of God's work* (Neh. 1:3-4; Dan. 9:3).

8) *Fasting serves to humble and rebuke us as it reveals how much of our happiness depends on the external pleasures of eating.* See Ps. 69:10.

9) *Fasting teaches us self-control and self-discipline.* See Phil 3:19; Rom. 16:18; Ps. 69:10; 1 Cor. 9:25-27.

10) *Fasting is a powerful weapon in spiritual warfare.* See Mt. 4:1-11; Mark 9:29; Mt. 17:14-21.

11) *Fasting opens our spiritual ears to discern God's voice.* See Acts 13:1-3.

There is much to learn here about the importance of fasting. Note four things in particular (Piper, 106-08).

(1) *They were fasting **after** the death and resurrection of Jesus.* This is important for the simple reason that some argue that fasting was an OT practice no longer relevant for people in the church age.

(2) *They fasted together as a group.* Clearly they did not believe that Jesus' warning about fasting to be seen by men (Mt. 6:17-18) precluded corporate fasting. **To be seen fasting is not a sin. Fasting to be seen is.**

(3) *Their fasting became the occasion for the Spirit's guidance to be communicated to them.* Don't miss the obvious causal link that Luke draws. It was *while* or *when* or even *because* they were ministering to the Lord and fasting that the Holy Spirit spoke.

(4) *What God said to them in the course of their fasting changed history.*

12) *Fasting sharpens and intensifies our intercessory prayers.*

13) *To fast is to worship.* See Anna in Luke 2:36-37; Acts 13:1-3.

14) *Fasting can be an expression of our generosity and compassion toward those in need.* See Isa. 58:1-12.

15) *Fasting is feasting! Or, what to eat when you're on a fast!* The ironic thing about fasting is that it really isn't about not eating food. **It's about feeding on the fullness of every divine blessing secured for us in Christ.** Fasting tenderizes our hearts to experience the presence of God. **It expands the capacity of our souls** to hear his voice and be assured of his love and be filled with the fullness of his joy. See John 4:31ff.

The point is, ***we are always driven to fast because we hunger for something more than food.*** As strange as it may sound, ***fasting is motivated by the prospect of pleasure.*** The heart that fasts cries out, "This I want more than the pleasure of food!" And "this" can be the admiration that men give to people with will power, or it can be the reward we seek from God alone without regard to the praise of men.

The dangers of fasting

The threat of religious hypocrisy – see Matthew 6:16.

How should we fast?

Five types of fasting: (1) Regular (2) Partial (3) Liquid (4) Total (5) Supernatural.

How to fast: one day or part of a day (Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 7:6; 2 Samuel 1:12, 3:35; Nehemiah 9:1; Jeremiah 36:6); a one-night fast (Daniel 6:18-24); three-day fasts (Esther 4:16; Acts 9:9), seven-day fasts (1 Samuel 31:13; 2 Samuel 12:16-23), a fourteen-day fast (Acts 27:33-34), a twenty-one day fast (Daniel 10:3-13), forty-day fasts (Deuteronomy 9:9; 1 Kings 19:8; Matthew 4:2), and fasts of unspecified lengths (Matthew 9:14; Luke 2:37; Acts 13:2, 14:2-3).

Finally, never lose sight of the fact that *what* you don't eat or *how long* you don't eat isn't paramount. What you *do* eat, spiritually speaking, is critical. Feed on God. Don't simply taste, don't nibble, don't snack. Feast on him! Seek him. Cry out to him. Focus on him. Invite him to fill you up "to all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:19). Entreat him to sustain you and supply you and succor you. Then, when your fast is finished, rejoice in the food he has provided and give him thanks for all good things.