

WEEKLY SERMON

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Fasting

Isiah 58:1-12, Matthew 6:16-18

The Church is observing Lent these days. It is a time when Christians all over the world fast for forty days that leads to Easter. We also observe fasting on other times and seasons and could also fast on any times of the year for special reasons. But the question is, what is fasting? Physically it is abstaining from food. In the Old Testament the Hebrew word for fasting means 'to abstain from eating'. The Greek word for fasting in the New Testament means 'to abstain from food, or no food'. So, the basic idea is to go without food. Keeping away from what we dependent on. These days there is tendency to expand fasting to include things like television, mobile phone, movies, or social media etc.

Fasting is a physical discipline which leads us to spiritual discipline. It is a way of moving from our dependence on physical things to our dependence on God. In other words, it is an act of devotion and worship to God. A time when worshipers devote themselves to God without any interruption. Our worship is not an entertainment which is designed to please ourselves. It must be directed to God and must be acceptable to Him. Isaiah 58 tells us what the true fast is and what is not. God says in these verses that people are fasting for themselves (*Isaiah 58:1-5*). They please themselves but not Him. It is all about our motivation behind this devotion. Is it to show that I am a righteous person? If this is the case, then it is self-pleasing. The important thing is, does this devotion change our lives. What is our attitude toward others (6-7)? Do we stand for justice and help those in need? Are we in peace with our brother and sister?

True fasting is about saying no to us and saying yes to God: loving God and loving our neighbour. It is not about self-pleasing but about self-denying. It is about humbling ourselves before God with confession of sin and with meekness to seek Him and his will for us. Let us fix our eyes, hearts and minds on God and worship Him in spirit and truth (*John 4:24*). For God promises great reward of blessing for those who truly worship Him (*Isaiah 58:8-12*). Jesus says, 'Your Father who sees what is done in secret, will reward you'. (*Matt 6:18b*).

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