

THE BIG IDEA: The \_\_\_\_\_ part is \_\_\_\_\_ if the  
\_\_\_\_\_ part isn't \_\_\_\_\_.

1. The background

2. The message



NOTES

### The Take-Off

Last week we started what will be a quick, 4 week ride through the topic of fasting, and if you missed it, you might want to catch it on the website. There's lots of good stuff in that teaching that can help you clear up some common misunderstandings about what fasting is and isn't, but for today, let's just restate how we defined fasting last week.

**Fasting is creating a physical void** (from food, or media, or relationships) **and trusting God to fill it spiritually.**

We saw this played out in the scriptures for the first time with Jesus when he was ministering to the woman at the well in John 4.

After he had spent time with her, Jesus' disciples came and encouraged him to eat, but he said that he had food they didn't know about, and that's when he taught them what we learned last week: doing the will of God was food for him. It can be for us, too.

So, we pick up there today, and we'll be taking a close look at 2 passages - Zechariah 7 and Isaiah 58 - that contain very similar messages for the people of Judah then, and for the people of America (and The Gathering) today.

If last week was an overview of how fasting is to be spiritual more than physical, then today will be like having a probe going deep into your soul. If it feels a bit uncomfortable, take hope in the fact that all of us feel your pain! We'll be getting probed, too!

Now, you've got some blanks at the top of your note page, but I think we'll leave them blank until the end, and then we'll let that big idea wrap this whole thing up like a ribbon and a bow.

First, let's take a quick look at the context of the time when these messages were first given, and then we'll look at each message before we wrap it up.

### 1. The background

Isaiah ministered in Judah and probably wrote the book with his name somewhere around 700 BC.

Interestingly enough, though, is the culture in which he ministered. See if it reminds you of another culture we know.

#### **SOCIAL CONDITIONS:**

- There was the usual chasm between the rich class and the poor.
- The rich got richer and the poor got poorer.
- Abuses, resentment, unrest, class feelings, and profiteering were evident.
- The gravest problem in Isaiah's day was land grabbing.
- The city government was corrupt. Bribed judges made life miserable for the poor people.
- Drunkenness, luxury, idleness, and indifference were rampant

#### **RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS:**

- The religious leaders were too busy drinking corn mesh to listen to the voice of God.
- It has been said that you can tell how low a nation falls by how low the women of the nation stoop. The women of Jerusalem were coarse, sensual, drunken, thoughtless, given over to wickedness.
- The people were ignorant of their spiritual need.
- They falsely assumed:
  1. That the Mosaic covenant could not be broken. (We're special)
  2. Israel could fulfill her obligations by observing rituals and sacrifices. (We're churched)
  3. The Day of the Lord would be a day of triumph for Israel. (We win)
  4. God would never allow Jerusalem to be destroyed. (We're safe)

It was into this cultural environment that Isaiah spoke what we're about to read, and it couldn't be more timely for our culture, either.

Let's just move through Isaiah 58 slowly and really hear what God was saying to them, and us.

### 2. The message

- v. 1 - I love how this starts! So many times we approach sensitive subjects softly, but not God (or Isaiah)!
  - "Shout" means "with the throat" - loud enough to attract attention
  - Bad things happen when we don't understand what was said. God didn't take that chance.
  - We've all had conversations that weren't clear (Reservations at Cheesecake Factory) (Seinfeld - Puffy shirt)
  - What makes you lower your voice? God's truth should never be one that does (in fact, we value clear truth)
  - We speak softly about sin, but God speaks loudly about it
  - Not to embarrass us, but to engage us

- v. 2 - Contrary to some people, these guys didn't struggle with regularity!
  - It appears that they did all the right things, not just once a week, but daily
  - They sought God and even asked for His decisions (wisdom)
  - They seemed eager to know God and to be near Him
- v. 3 - Their devotion wasn't limited to just prayer, but it also included fasting
  - This verse is the one that is most pivotal
  - Their questions betray their motives
  - They saw fasting as a tool, a way to twist God's arm
  - Without sounding too harsh, it's safe to say that they felt about fasting the way many of us do
  - "I went hungry for this? Nothing's even changed! I mean, I didn't even lose weight!!"
  - It seems pretty obvious that they were fasting to get God to serve them, and we'll find that He wanted them to fast in order to get them to serve others.
  - The saddest phrase in the whole chapter? "Yet on the day of your fasting, **you do as you please...**"
  - That one phrase reveals a lot about the human condition, doesn't it?
  - How quickly we try to "write off" our sinful nature as if it has no power now that we're followers of Jesus
    - makes no common sense - we're to take up our cross daily
    - even the disciples revealed themselves to be very human as they followed Jesus (Peter denied Him!!)
    - Paul wrestled with his sinful nature (Romans 7)
    - And so do we. Need proof? Let someone cross you, take from you, shoot, just pick a quicker line at Walmart than you and you'll find out just how quickly the sin nature can raise its ugly head!
    - Let's not be too quick to judge these guys, because given the same opportunity, we'd be just like them.
- v. 4 - A list of stuff that was wrong with their fast
  - Exploiting workers, arguments and strife, even fistfights.
  - The Word is clear: we can't fast like this - purely physical hunger - and expect God to hear us
- v. 5 - God isn't interested in one-night stands
  - This doesn't mean that one day fasts are necessarily wrong, just that a fast should not simply **inconvenience** our day, but instead it should **influence** our lives.
  - Fasting is more about us getting God's heart than us getting God's help (although He does give that, too)
- v. 6 - Isaiah describes the heart that God is after
  - It is a heart to see men and women set free, and fasting softens our hearts toward them
  - Without a doubt, fasting can be an antidote to the self-centeredness that creeps into the church
- v. 7 - If verse 6 describes the heart of fasting, then verse 7 describes the actions that follow
  - It's easy to see that our religious activities mean very little without active sharing with those in need
  - It requires that we seek them out and act when we find them ("When you see," not "If you see")
  - This verse sounds very similar to Matthew 25, where the only difference between the sheep and the goats, the saved and the cursed, was what they did or didn't do for the hurting (or for Jesus, as they found out)
- v. 8 - Verse 6, the heart of fasting, verse 7, the action of fasting, and verses 8-14, the blessings of fasting
  - Look at the number of blessings that are promised here if we fast the right way:
    - God's light (or favor), healing, right standing with God, God's glory, and God's protection (v. 8)
    - God's response and God's presence (v. 9)
    - God's guidance, God's provision, God's power (v. 11)
    - A Kingdom reputation as repairers and restorers (v. 12)
    - Joy, a prominent place, and abundance of provisions to practice verse 7 (v. 14)

### The Landing

All of us would agree that we'd like to live the life verses 8-14 describe, yes?

Just like the people of Judah, our culture - esp in church - can mistakingly assume that we'll get it by performing certain rituals. We assume God "owes" us that because we went without food and endured hunger for a time.

But that's "doing as we please" and verse 3 made clear that God isn't moved by cold rituals, and that leads us to the big idea about fasting for today: **the stomach part is pointless if the heart part isn't practiced**

As we move toward a time when we'll fast as a church, this is a time for you and me to ask God to examine our hearts and show us whatever is in us that could hinder vv. 8-14 from becoming a reality for us personally and corporately.

Our desire is a life lived for God and for others, and it only happens when we move Beyond Hunger Games.