



If my people . . .

PRAYER + FASTING

***“If my people, who are called by my name,
will humble themselves and pray and seek my
face and turn from their wicked ways,
then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive
their sin and will heal their land.”***

- 2 Chron. 7:14

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

If my people...

Humble themselves

Pray

Seek my face

Turn from their wicked ways

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

Then I will...

Hear

Forgive

Heal

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

***“Seek first the kingdom of God and his
righteousness, and all these things will be added
to you.”***

– Matt 6:33

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

Main Idea:

Fasting and prayer is a time of preparation for God's people.

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

A Time of Preparation: Joshua 3

Question:

Have you taken the time to ready yourself with the Lord for the next part of your journey?

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

A Time of Preparation: Joshua 3

“Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over.”

- Joshua 3:1

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

A Time of Preparation: Joshua 3

“After three days the officers went through the camp, giving orders to the people: ‘When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the Levitical priests carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it.’”

- Joshua 3:2-3

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

A Time of Preparation: Joshua 3

***“Then you will know which way to go,
since you have never been this way before.”***

- Joshua 3:4

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

A Time of Preparation: Joshua 3

Watching

Waiting

Following

God will lead us where he wants us to go.

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

A Time of Preparation: Joshua 3

“We ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.’”

- James 4:15

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

A Time of Preparation: Joshua 3

“Joshua told the people, ‘Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you.’”

- Joshua 3:5

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

A Time of Preparation: Joshua 3

Consecrate:

Heb. “Qadas” (pronounced “kaw-dash”)

Meaning:

To make or declare sacred
To purify or devote (to the Lord)
To prepare oneself before God

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

A Time of Preparation: Joshua 3

Consecration in the NT

“Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, well pleasing (holy and acceptable) to God, this is your true and proper worship.”

- Rom. 12:1

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

A Time of Preparation: Joshua 3

Our desire is that January would be a time of consecration, of preparation for us.

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

Reflection Questions:

- 1) What things in your life keep you from the Lord and hinder his ability to use and work through you?
- 2) Where are the idols that need to be laid down if tomorrow the Lord wants to move?
- 3) What things or practices do you need to “wash” from your life in order to be wholly devoted to God?
- 4) Where have you tried to run out ahead of God instead of following him?

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

Sunday Sermon

1/1/23

Series: If My People

Passage: Joshua 3:1-5

Title: A Time of Preparation

Series Intro:

Thank you, Maryann and Al! I am so excited for the New Year. We can't ignore life liturgies, life rhythms we all have. We often think of the New Year as a fresh start, as a time to get some things right, make some resolutions, some changes. It's a clean page, a new chapter. But as I said in the connect this week, I don't want us to think of the New Year as a time of resolution, but as a time of preparation.

[PRAY]

Resolutions are all about our flesh, our striving. I'm going to try harder. I'm going to be better. That is why so many resolutions made end up in failure. According to a recent study, about 2 in 5 people make New Year's resolutions. That's about 40% for those brought up on common core math. After 1 week, 75% of those people feel successful in keeping their resolution. After 1 month that number drops to 64%. By the end of the year, only 9% of people feel they've done a meaningfully better job and kept their resolution to some extent. If that doesn't show us the futility of our striving, I don't know what will.

Now, should the Christian be concerned with betterment and change and growth and health, and all the other stuff that usually is at the core of New Year's resolutions? Absolutely! But the Christian should also understand where their help comes from. That the Lord is our source for life and strength, that he is the one who supplies all our needs, that he is the one who brings significant change in us, to our lives, to the lives of others. And that is why he tells us that apart from him we can do nothing. But there is also the promise, that with him, he can do exceedingly more than anything we could ever ask or imagine.

That is why we are launching this series for the month of January on the disciplines of prayer and fasting. We are calling the series: If My People...

It's based on passage in 2 Chronicles 7. King Solomon finally built the temple and the glory of the Lord came down and rested in that place. But in that God said to Solomon, "Listen, just because I'm here doesn't mean that the people will always experience success. It also doesn't mean that there won't ever be any hardship or struggles or trial. I'm going to allow those things, and your success and the success of our people is going to be in their ongoing response and attachment to me. That's when he says to Solomon this iconic verse in 2 Chronicles 7:14, ***"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land."***

Humility – laying yourselves down for the sake of another. Thinking of ourselves less. Getting off our agendas and onto his.

Prayer – Attaching ourselves to God in relationship. Laying everything before him. Listening to his voice, his will, his wisdom. Letting him speak.

Seeking his face – Going after his will. Living in obedience to him. Prioritizing our relationship with him in our lives as being of more importance than other things.

Turning from sin – Throwing off the things that entangle. That hold us in bondage. That pull our eyes off of him and give us cheap substitutes of the true life he has for us.

If my people...the Lord says...are doing that, then I:

...will hear – Hearing is more than being attentive, although that is pretty great right? That God would hear us when we call. Hearing also include response. That God will respond to us, to our prayers. That there would be movement on God's part because of his hearing. Several times throughout the OT we have this phrase "the Lord heard their cry" and because of that he provided deliverance for them. God wants to do that for you. If my people...

He also says, "I will forgive." This is where Old Covenant and New Covenant dynamics can be a bit tricky for us to understand. Even as followers of Christ we live in an Old Covenant understanding of forgiveness. We think, "If I sin, my sin separates me from God, I need to then repent and confess my sin, and then God will accept me back into his good graces."

But listen, that is a Law-based understanding of sin and a misunderstanding of our New Covenant relationship with Jesus. Paul tells us that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ. Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. All of our sins – past, present, and future – have already been nailed to the cross, paid for by Christ's death. We stand before him justified. We stand before God clothed in his righteousness. Our sin no longer separates us from God, that is why even if we are not perfect God can still use us in powerful ways.

Listen: that doesn't make the sin right, ok, or acceptable for the Christian, but it gives us a new understanding of what sin does. Sin robs us from our source. Sin removes our cup out from under the spicket from the well that never runs dry and it puts us back into our old ways of striving for life in the flesh – ways that could never fill us which leads to brokenness and emptiness.

The New Covenant Christian should look at this verse through his relationship with Christ and say, "Thank you God that I have been forgiven. That my old life has been put off and this sin no longer a part of my true identity. It is no longer who I am. My new life desires to follow you, so I offer myself as a living sacrifice to you and ask that you would bring your transformation to my mind and heart about where my life comes from."

You want true life change? Get yourself on that program, because I am convinced that it's only in that place that God can begin to bring his healing to us. To allow his truth, his Spirit, his life to begin to renew us and our relationship with him ourselves and others.

And that's where disciplines like prayer and fasting begin to have power. It's easy for us to view them as rote, religious practices. I heard it said once that fasting puts an exclamation point on

your prayers to God. Nope. That would be like a parent whose kid is asking for a new iPhone and the kid is like, "See how much I'm suffering? I'm not eating any dinner until you understand how much I want this from you!" Is that why we fast? Nope. As if our works somehow can convince God or impress him enough for him to move?

Fasting, abstaining, is meant to bring us to the heart of the father. It's to remind us of who he is as our source. It's meant to release us from dependence on our flesh desires and refocus our desires back on him. It's all about our attaching ourselves to the vine, for His sake. From that, everything else comes. Jesus says, **"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."** – Matt 6:33

This brings us to our main concept this morning. ***Fasting and Prayer is a time of preparation for God's people.***

Turn with me now to Joshua 3. In Joshua 3 the people of Israel are on a journey. God has delivered them out of Egypt. They have wandered in the wilderness now for 40 years because they didn't believe God's word the first time around. Now they are turning the page and entering a brand-new season. Kind of like us with our new year. God had brought them here and now they were readying themselves for the next part of their journey.

Question: Have you taken the time to ready yourself with the Lord for the next part of your journey?

Israel was in a time of transition and movement.

- 1) Transition in leadership – Moses had died and now Joshua was leading the people.
- 2) Transition from bondage in Egypt/wilderness. They could look back to see where they had come from. How God had brought them this far.
- 3) But now there would be the transition to what God had for them. They didn't have the plan. They probably knew it wasn't going to be an easy road. It was new territory for them. And in that they had a choice. They could either head into the next season putting their hope and trust in themselves for their success, or they could put their hope and trust in the God who had brought them this far, that their blessing and victory would be found in him.

Joshua 3:1, ***"Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over."***

In between the transition from and the transition to, they are found waiting.

The truth is that many of us have often find ourselves in the waiting. We can look back and see all the Lord has done or has been doing. We can look forward to the goal, a time of future blessing, the laying hold of what God wants to give. But currently we find ourselves in the in between place, the waiting.

Now the Israelites are there for three days. But sometimes God calls us to wait for week, months, or even years. What are they waiting for? They are waiting for God to move.

v. 2-3: ***“After three days the officers went through the camp, giving orders to the people: ‘When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the Levitical priests carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it.’”***

The ark was a symbol of God’s presence with the Israelites. And the command to follow the ark was significant. You see, often times we find ourselves running out ahead of God, don’t we? Or conversely, God moves and we decide to stay where we are. “I like it here. It’s safe. It’s known. It’s doesn’t cost me anything.” But from the beginning God’s command to his people is to follow him. Even Jesus in his call to his disciples, what did he say? Oh yeah, “Follow me.”

A life of faith and faithfulness is one of following the Lord’s leading. Not running out ahead. Not staying behind. But watching, waiting, and following.

And I love what it says next, this is my favorite part of this passage – why do we watch, wait, and follow?

v. 4 – ***“Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before.”***

Every year is a new year, every day is a new day. The Lord has been doing incredible things in and through this church this past year. He has been moving us. But where are we going? What does he have next? I don’t know. We’ve never been here before. We are living by faith. Watching, waiting, following. God will lead us where he wants us to go.

The same is true of our personal lives. You don’t know what this year will bring. We make plans but the Lord directs our steps. James says, ***“We ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.’”***

A faithful people - humble, praying, seeking his face, waiting for God to move, ready to follow
The question becomes: What do you do in the waiting?

Answer: Prepare. Make sure you’re ready.

v.5 – ***“Joshua told the people, ‘Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you.’”***

Is this a promise for us today? I believe so. Jesus, in the great commission tells us to “Go make disciples.” We read in Ephesians that “God can do exceedingly abundantly above anything we can ask or imagine.” Paul in Philippians, tells us that, “It is God who works in you to will and to act on behalf of his good purpose.” Ephesians again, “We are his workmanship, created to do good works, which God has prepared in advance for us to do.”

So the answer is, Yes! And while “tomorrow” may not be a literal tomorrow, the truth is that God has a divine purpose for every one of us – whether the work is big or small, it doesn’t matter. It will be amazing/miraculous because God will be in it. The question is are we ready to follow him?

What does it mean to consecrate ourselves?

Hebrew word for consecrate is “qadas” – pronounced “kaw-dash” – which means: “to make or declare sacred. To purify and devote someone or something to the worship of God. To prepare oneself wholly before God. Consecration in the Old Testament included the physical acts of washing, both a person’s body as well as their clothes, as well as abstinence for a time from sexual activity.

But the question we should be asking is not the “what” but the “why?” - “for what purpose?” Many of the concepts of the OT include physical pictures of a deeper spiritual reality. Washing is not only a sign of being or becoming clean, but it is a physical picture of the abandonment or getting rid of that which defiles or makes us unclean. Abstaining from something, whether it’s food, sex, or otherwise, was done as a denial of a fleshly desire, not because it’s a bad desire, but because releases us from the enticement to make that desire an idol - something we go to in place of God for filling, identity, or life.

Where do we see the idea of consecration in the NT? Paul, in Romans 12:1, tells the Church to **“Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, well pleasing (holy and acceptable) to God, this is your true and proper worship.”** OT sacrifices were consecrated (set apart) for the Lord. Pure and spotless. Where do sacrifices go? On the altar.

Listen: In offering a sacrifice, the owner of that sacrifice was relinquishing ownership of that item. Instead, it belonged to God, for his use and his satisfaction. Consecration is a releasing of ourselves to God. It’s an act of putting ourselves on the altar, to give up ownership and say to the Lord, “Not my will but yours be done. Not my rights. Not my desires. Not my plans – yours.”

Our desire is that January would be a time of consecration, of preparation for us. Because if the Lord is going to continue to work in this place, we must devote ourselves to him. We must, first, be willing to lay ourselves down.

The truth is our will, our rights, our desires, our plans will and often do get in the way of his plans if we have not first prepared ourselves and laid them down.

As followers of Christ, we are called to be free. First and foremost, our freedom comes from putting our faith in him as our Lord and Savior. He offers you freedom from your sin and new life through his death and resurrection. Jesus is the only way we are truly made clean in the sight of God. Would you believe it and follow him this morning?

As we conclude the message and ready ourselves for the Lord’s table, the truth is that even as forgiven Christians, we still allow the junk of this world to take up residence in our lives. Sin that binds and hinders us in our relationship with the Lord. To prepare us, I have a few practical questions to reflect on.

- 1) What things in your life keep you from the Lord and hinder his ability to use and work through you?
 - a. Is it your schedule? Is it your willingness? Is it inconvenient? Does it cost you something?
- 2) Where are the idols that need to be laid down if tomorrow the Lord wants to move?

- a. Fear? Greed? Security?
- 3) What things or practices do you need to “wash” from your life in order to be wholly devoted to God?
 - a. Secret sins? Harmful practices? Coping mechanisms?
- 4) Where have you tried to run out ahead of God instead of following him?

We are going to take a few moments before communion to reflect on these questions. Listen to the Lord. Lay what he tells you before him in prayer this week. Take a meal and fast. Ask him to begin to renew your mind about what he has shown you. Next week we are going to talk about repentance. Today, if you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts. Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord and he will lift you up.

“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

If you need prayer, after service we will have people available to pray with you about what the Lord may be speaking to you this morning.