

The Fast that I Choose (Isaiah 58:1–14)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (6/2/2019)

Introduction

1. God's plan to send His Servant, Immanuel, is clearly revealed in Isaiah. This plan included how His Servant would suffer for the sins of His people (ch. 53). The work of the Servant would also establish the new eternal covenant of peace (ch. 54). Salvation is *offered* to all with the glorious pro-mise of blessing, joy, and peace for all who trust in the Savior/Servant, Jesus Christ, including Gentiles (ch. 55, 56).
2. Verse 9 of chapter 56 begins an interlude with Yahweh's rebuking the leaders of Israel for their selfish and sinful ways resulting in Israel's apostasy and betrayal in idol worship (ch. 57). Chapter 57 closes with a promise of comfort for the contrite—the righteous remnant within the nation preserved by grace—to further God's plan to restore all things in Christ. Chapter 58 focuses on *how* salvation works to transform His people for His glory.
3. Notice that God calls the prophet to point out the sins of "*my people*" (v. 1).
 - a. The judgment of charity is employed here. Verse 2 shows that the nation outwardly *professed* loyalty to Yahweh and His ways. Profession employs *religion*—the outward appearance of conformity to God's rules while inwardly rejecting the Lord in the interest of self. The Lord calls them His people because of their profession and then proves that the profession is empty.
 - b. *Fasting* is employed to show the people's response to the message of the prophet. It is this phony response of fasting that reveals the falseness of their profession. Genuine salvation is a work of God, not the effort of the sinner, by conformity to rules, to get God to change His mind about judgment of them.
4. This passage reveals what real *revival* looks like. While *revival* results in a true believer's obedience, it is *not* a result of human response to the divine message. "If only we would take Him seriously and truly repent, pray, and seek His face." Revival is God's working through His people to bring righteousness to the nation by divine power. Revival brings glory to God alone through the humble, joyous, and Christ-honoring worship of His people.

I. A False Response

1. The charge to the prophet (v. 1)
 - a. Personal and national transgressions must be confronted. The natural timidity of the prophet is rebuked by the command to "*Cry aloud; do not hold back; lift up your voice like a trumpet.*" The nation, professing to be loyal to Yahweh, persists in its transgressions. The reference to Jacob points to the natural corruption of the soul because only the grace of salvation makes an Israel out of a Jacob.
 - b. The Lord's problem with Israel was the disparity between meticulous religious observance and ruthless oppression of those in need of ministry. This is heart of Christ's message (Matthew 22:37–40)..
 - c. This empty worship was nauseating to the Lord as revealed in His lack of response to their prayers (v. 3a; James 4:3–11).

2. In the negative exposure of the hypocrites, there is a clear definition of what real worship should look like (v. 2).
 - a. They *seek* the Lord daily in Scripture and prayer.
 - b. They *delight* to know His ways by careful study.
 - c. They love to practice *righteousness* through holy and sanctified living.
 - d. They will not *compromise* God's righteous stand-ards to be accepted in the public eye.
 - e. They do all this because they delight to *draw near* to God.

II. Faithful Fasting

1. The Lord desires to use humble servants in selfless and sacrificial service (vv. 6, 7).
 - a. There is a natural tendency to read these verses as instruction for the believer to act in a way that gets divine approval. This is a serious mistake.
 - b. True obedience is the consequence of Spirit-enabled grace working in the believer by which God's will is accomplished through foreordained works (Ephesians 2:10; Romans 7:6).
2. The fast that the Lord chooses is described: (1) to free the bruised and oppressed, and (2) to supply the needy—the hungry, the homeless, the poorly clothed, and the neglected family, Jesus revealed that these things will be the criteria at the final judgment (Matthew 25:31–40).
3. Reward for faithful sacrificial service is promised (vv. 8, 9a): (1) clear guidance comes as light shining out of darkness (note vv. 10, 11a), (2) spiritual healing will come, righteousness will lead the way, (3) the glory of Lord will protect, (4) prayer will be answered, (5) there will be fruitfulness (v. 11b), (6) restoration will be evident (v. 12).
4. Verses 13 and 14 summarize the whole argument.

What Can We Take Away?

1. Is your relationship to Christ dependent on your performance or grace-enabled obedience?
2. Do you see revival as the consequence of exerted effort (confession of sin, earnest prayer, fasting, pleading, etc.) or are these the fruit of revival?
3. Do you delight in the Lord, drawing near in simple, true, humble, and Christ honoring worship for the glory of God?
4. How much to you value keeping the Lord's day?