

SERMON | FASTING LIKE JESUS TO BE FRUITFUL LIKE JESUS

SERIES | PRAYER & FASTING

STUDY GUIDE | DAVID STOCKTON | SUNDAY, JANUARY 14, 2024

SERMON SUMMARY

How do we prepare for what God has in store for us? Jesus is our guide, our teacher, and the One whose Spirit empowers us to all good things. So, let's look at what He did.

In Mark 1:1-13, we find Jesus in preparation for His public ministry. Jesus was baptized, God the Spirit came upon Him, and He received a message from God the Father. Then, the Spirit led Him into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan.

Our hope as followers of Christ is to live like Jesus did. Many people think it's all about miracles, but the miracles were the byproduct of all the other things Jesus did. In fact, there is only one time the disciples asked Jesus to teach them something. They did not ask Jesus to teach them how to walk on water, multiply food, or how to teach with authority. They asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. They knew the prayer life of Jesus, lead to the power life of Jesus. It was the private practices and disciplines of Jesus, that led to the beautiful and powerful public life of Jesus.

This points us to practice the daily and weekly rhythms of Jesus, like prayer, fasting, solitude, fighting the devil, memorizing Scripture, faithfully gathering with other believers, serving, sacrificing, witnessing, hospitality, worshipping, teaching, and resting. In the wilderness, Jesus practiced fasting, solitude, and fighting with the devil. This was an important step in His preparation for ministry, life, and battle.

Another way to divide the practices of Jesus up is by looking at the **Practices of Engagement** = Serving, Justice, Prayer, Study, Hospitality, and the **Practices of Abstinence** = Fasting, Silence, Solitude, Sabbath, Poverty, Chastity.

Jesus fasted, but it seems He didn't do it like everyone else (Mark 2:18-20). They thought fasting and sabbath were things they had to do, or God would punish them, instead of fasting and sabbath as things which help us create space to encounter God. Fasting was supposed to help them see God, notice God more. In this moment, God Himself was standing before them and they are focused on fasting and sabbath instead of Jesus. Obviously, their fasting was all show and had no impact on their hunger for God.

In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:1-18), Jesus teaches about giving to the needy, fasting, and prayer. The people who are citizens of Jesus' Kingdom, give, fast, and pray. They don't do it to earn credit in people's eyes. They do it in secret to connect with God. And God who sees what is done in secret will reward openly. Somehow our secret prayer, fasting, and giving, will help the Kingdom of God show up in people's lives. God's glory in the earth. We, fast to get closer to God, not for approval of man.

Fasting is a Biblical and Christlike way to curtail and form our appetites. We live in a society that's deeply addicted to gratification, addicted to consumption, and self-centered. A practice like fasting can keep us from those natural, society encouraging things. More specifically, addiction to gratification is curtailed by fasting. Addiction to the stimulus and dopamine hits of our incessant consuming is curtailed by silence and solitude. And the worship of the self is curtailed by prayer, when prayer is used to get our hearts in line with what God wants, instead of just telling Him what we want.

When we abstain from food, we abstain from the gratification food brings, the strength food brings, as well as the routine of eating we're so accustomed to. Doing this creates a hunger and urgency in our bodies, which develops a passion and yearning in our souls, creating a perfect space for an encounter with God. Instead of turning to food and other earthly things to satisfy and bring relief, we channel the hunger and desperation toward God. Doing this regularly creates the muscle memory we need to turn to God when temptation and trials come. God is calling us to preparation. Holy, life giving, beautiful preparation.

SCRIPTURE READING

READ THIS WEEK'S BIBLE PASSAGES: 1 Peter 1:13-16; Mark 1:1-13; Mark 2:18-20; Matthew 6:2, 5, 16 (ESV)

Called to Be Holy

¹³ Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, ¹⁵ but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." – 1 Peter 1:13-16

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

¹ The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

² As it is written in Isaiah the prophet,

"Behold, I send my messenger before your face,
who will prepare your way,

³ the voice of one crying in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight,'"

⁴ John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

The Baptism of Jesus

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

The Temptation of Jesus

¹² The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³ And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him. – Mark 1:1-13

A Question About Fasting

¹⁸ Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. And people came and said to him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" ¹⁹ And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. ²⁰ The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day. – Mark 2:18-20

² "Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. – Matthew 6:2

The Lord's Prayer

⁵ "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. – Matthew 6:5

Fasting

¹⁶ "And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. – Matthew 6:16

BIBLE PASSAGE QUESTIONS

What stood out to you in these passages? Did the Lord highlight anything to you? What do we learn about the heart of God from these passages?

Read these passages again (use a different translation if helpful). How did these passages help to convict, correct, or encourage you?

GROUP DISCUSSION

DISCUSS THESE QUESTIONS WITH YOUR GROUP

1. What has your experience from fasting been like? Have you had good experiences or not so good?
2. What do you prayerfully plan to abstain from, and engage in, for the next 21 days of our prayer and fasting season?
3. Is there something you are seeking God about in this fasting season?

PRAYER

Take some time for prayer requests and pray over one another before wrapping up.

