

God's Chosen Fast: Isaiah 58:1-12

Some people think they can win God's favor by '*doing things for God*'. as the year was ending and the new one beginning, places of worship were so full of seekers for various reasons. At one such gathering, one leader was shown on national TV asking people to give all the money on them except transport back home so they can reap big. Indeed some of the faithful indicated they had sowed seeds so they can get husbands, build houses and so on. Is God bribed?

Fasting is defined by Richard Foster in his book '*Prayer, finding the heart's true home*' as the voluntary denial of a normal function for the sake of intense spiritual activity. Fasting does not draw God's attention or love to us. He has already given us everything by His divine power. 2Peter 1:3. What fasting does is to draw us to the reality of what God is doing and has given.

When you heard about this annual program of prayer and fasting, I hope you did not join in for the wrong reason. Otherwise our fasting will be futile and fruitless like that of Israel as Isaiah shouts out. The prophet does not just speak but raises his voice like a trumpet because God was tired of the nation's claim to belong to Him yet their character was not like His.

They were notoriously religious but only outwardly!

Day after day they seek the Lord.

They seem eager to know his ways

They fasted and outwardly humbled themselves; put on sackcloth and ashes, wearing a somber mood, so they could be noticed

But God had gone quiet on them because their hearts were not in the right place

- They did as they please
- Exploiting workers. Bosses grew richer by paying peanuts to laborers who had earned the millions
- Quarrelling and striving against each other. They were pulling each other down with malice, not wanting anyone to be better than themselves
- Fighting whoever has a different way of understanding or doing things

These acts shut the heavens above them, that there was no response at all. Please understand that it is the attitude of the heart as we fast that determines whether we will be accepted or not.

God expects us to fast, but cares about the condition of our hearts as we fast and pray. And thankfully, He has chosen for us what we can handle

1. Loose the chains, cords and yokes of injustice and oppression

A chain is a symbol of slavery for the individual while chords and yokes represent the enslaving of whole communities, or families (corporate bondages). It is possible that even Christians treat other people as slaves or as non-persons. Stop oppressing the weak, the voiceless, the least and the forgotten.

I know one man of God for whom Mercy and justice form the core of his theological framework. His favorite scriptures are Micah 6:8, Isaiah 42:1-4 and Luke 4:18-19. The chief end of Jesus' ministry and ours is to bring God's justice. I agree with him that there's no Kingdom of God without justice.

The word '*Mispa*' translated Justice appears more than 200 times in the bible and refers to all aspects of civil or religious government function including the judicial process. It is also the act of deciding litigation brought before a magistrate. It is rooted in God's Character to which we must adhere (Psalm 37:30; Isaiah 30:18). As a God of justice, he is compassionate. To administer true justice is to show compassion to one another. 'The widow, the alien, the orphan and the poor you shall not oppress, and don't think evil of each other.' Zechariah 7:10 this is justice – Loving mercy then we can act justly.

Another word for justice is *Sedaqa* which is translated as righteousness. It has to do with a fidelity to a covenant relationship. Matthew 6:33 thus reads '... seek ye first the kingdom of God and all his justice ...' Jesus' acts of mercy in Luke 4:18-21 are tied to his judgment of those who oppress God's people.

2. Share your resources with the hungry, homeless, and naked.

God is not asking us to give what we don't have but to share the little or much we have. He has placed all such people within our reach, some are our very relatives. Some of us had the opportunity to go to the village met many that are not as endowed with resources as ourselves. Did we see them as a bother or did we grab the opportunity to be a blessing?

3. Return to care for your family; your own flesh and blood.

There are people who are so nice, kind and generous only to outsiders and not to their children, and spouse. And for us Africans family extends beyond the nucleus family members. What shall your family miss about you when you depart this life?

When our fasting and prayer is mindful of other people and not just selfish, then its impact shall be tangible. When we follow God's choice fast, it is us who benefit in these ways.

- a) Your works will speak for you and reflect the glory of God. (Vs. 8). Light shines most in the darkness of injustice. When people experience our good works, our light shines before them and God is glorified. Matt 5:16
- b) Your healing will come swiftly. The one who has regard for the weak opens the door for the Lord's help in times of trouble and sickness. Psalm 41:1-3
- c) Your prayer will be answered. You will call on Him and he will not only answer but also avail Himself to and for you.
- d) You will receive guidance
- e) Your needs will be supplied well even in times of lack elsewhere around you
- f) You will be fruitful in all seasons
- g) The blessing will spill from the individual to those related to him or her. Your people will be empowered to:

- Rebuild ancient ruins. Things and foundations that once existed but were destroyed shall be reconstructed to the original glory.
- Repair broken walls. Having dealt with foundational issues, we will communally close the cracks in our security. Whatever kept us insecure like a broken wall will be done away with.
- Restore community life where people dwell in the streets together in harmony.

Considering the benefit of heeding to the fast that God has chosen, we do well to put our hearts in the right place and practice it.