



Fruitful Fasting (Mat. 6:16-18)

I. INTRO

- A. During the 14th century there was a duke in what is today Belgium named Raynald III.
1. Quite overweight, Raynald was commonly referred to by his Latin nickname, Crassus, which means, "fat."
 2. After a violent quarrel, his younger brother Edward led a successful revolt against him.
 3. Edward captured Raynald but did not kill him. Instead, he built a room around Raynald in the castle and promised Raynald he could regain his title and property as soon as he was able to leave the room.
 4. This would not have been difficult for most people since the room had several windows and a near normal sized door none of which were kept locked. The problem was Raynald's size.
 5. To regain his freedom, Raynald needed to lose weight. But Edward knew his older brother, and each day he sent a variety of rich and delicious foods.
 6. Instead of dieting his way out of prison, Raynald grew larger. When Edward was accused of cruelty he had a ready answer, "My brother is not a prisoner. He may leave whenever he wills."
 7. Raynald stayed in that room for 10-years and wasn't released until after Edward died in a battle.
 8. But by then his health was so ruined he died within a year...Raynald was a prisoner of his own appetite.
- B. Our appetites can drive us can't they?! We have appetites for food, water, sleep, sex, information, entertainment, pleasure, and (sometimes even) exercise. Our appetites will dictate the direction of our lives.

- C. We live in a culture that promotes the idea that true happiness comes from the unmitigated satisfaction of our appetites.
- D. Yet the lesson of Raynald III reminds us that our appetites, even those that are good, and healthy, and necessary, can dull our sensibilities, diminish our wisdom -- and even ruin our life.
1. As you know, if we over-indulge, the very food we need to survive can also be the cause of a host of diseases and disorders.
 2. Our appetites, to the degree that we surrender to them, can also turn down the volume of God's voice in our lives.
 3. And here is, perhaps, the most interesting point of all: This lethargy that drowns out God's voice is accomplished not by what is evil or sinful, but by what is good and necessary – food, in Raynald's case.

"The greatest adversary of love for God is not [God's] enemies but [God's] gifts. And the most deadly appetites are not for the poison of evil, but for the simple pleasures of earth." --John Piper ¹

- E. Today, as apart of our series on the SOTM -- and in preparation for our upcoming church-wide fast...

We are looking at Matthew 6:16-18...

"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. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

II. BODY

- A. I have three questions to ask. If I set them up well in the context of the SOTM the answers can come quickly...
- B. We've been studying the SOTM since early April. It is the first extended public discourse of Jesus where He unveils of the counter-culture core teachings of the New Covenant, which we now know as the NT.
1. Moses went up the mountain to receive the core teachings of the Old Covenant (i.e., the 10 Commandments) and here in Matthew chapters 5-7

¹ John Piper. *A Hunger For God*, Crossway 1997: 14.

we see Jesus -- a new and better Moses, going up a mountain to teach the core principles for a New (and better) Covenant.

2. The life of Jesus fulfills the requirements of the Old Covenant (or Testament) and His teaching supersedes the teaching of the Old Covenant (or Testament) with brand new, radical, subversive teaching of a salvation by grace through faith. [see blog]

The followers of Jesus are to be different from both the nominal church and the secular world, different from both the religious and the irreligious. --John Stott ²

- C. So, what's the bottom line, what's the essence of this SOTM Kingdom of God teaching? If we had to reduce all three chapters into a single sentence what would it be? We can't live the Christian life in our own strength and power!
1. The goal of the SOTM, is to set us free by showing us our need for a right relationship with God that we cannot attain on our own – it's an un-earnable righteousness that is beyond our human reach.
 2. "...*Those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ*" --Romans 5:17b
 3. The SOTM is NOT a set of achievable goals, it's more like a WALL we crash into so that we finally surrender and admit, "I can't do this Christian thing in my own strength and willpower!"
- D. Matthew 6:1-24 addresses the issue of our devotion to God and identifies the three primary expressions³ of our devotion (commonly referred to as "spiritual disciplines"):
1. Generosity (vs. 2-4). In response to God's generosity, we are invited to be generous with our time, our energy, and our resources.
 2. Prayer (vs. 7-15). In response to the Father heart of God⁴ we are invited into communion with God. Prayer is a dialogue not a monologue.

² Kurt Jurgensmeier. *Introducing Apologetics Cultivating Christian Commitment, Book 5*, Baker Academic 2006: 53.

³ In Mat. 6:1 Jesus describes it as "*practicing your righteousness.*"

⁴ The secret of a growing, deep, and abiding prayer life is a growing understanding of the Doctrine of Adoption. We either have a tenant-landlord relationship with God or a child-parent relationship with God.

3. Fasting (vs. 16-18). In response to God's sacrifice, we are invited to periodically sacrifice portions of our daily routine in order to humble ourselves before God.
- E. The Jews that Jesus was speaking to considered these three expressions to be the three great pillars of a dynamic spiritual life – and it's import for us to see that Jesus is not disagreeing.
- F. It is interesting to note that the remainder of Matthew 6 (vs. 25-34) address the cure for anxiety. Notice v. 25, "For this reason I say to you, do not be worried..." --Matthew 6:25
- G. Today we are looking at the third primary expression of devotion to God (spiritual discipline): fasting. Now we're ready to consider three questions from the text:
1. **What is fasting?**
 2. **What is Jesus asking us to fast for?**
 3. **What is our "reward"?**

H. (1) What is fasting?

1. "American Evangelicals have shown little appetite for the practice of fasting." --Gospel Coalition Website
2. Fasting is Ritalin for spiritual A.D.D.
3. Some descriptions/definitions:
 - a. Fasting is designed to [focus] and express our desire for God and our holy discontent in a fallen world. It is for those not satisfied with the *status quo*. For those who want more of God's grace. For those who feel truly desperate for God. --David Mathis
 - b. Fasting is heart hunger for God. --John Piper ⁵
 - c. Fasting is a test to see what desires control us. --John Piper ⁶
 - d. "*I humbled my soul with fasting*" --David, Psalm 35:13b

I. (2) What is Jesus asking us to fast for?

1. The prayer that Jesus just taught the disciples to pray in Matthew 6:9–13 begins with three main longings:

⁵ John Piper. *A Hunger for God: Desiring God Through Fasting and Prayer*, Crossway 1997:83.

⁶ *Ibid*: 19, 58.

- a. That God's name be hallowed or revered
 - b. That God's kingdom would come
 - c. That God's will be done on earth the way it's done in heaven.
2. These longings become the main objectives God gives for our fasting.⁷ We fast for:
- a. God's name to be known, cherished, and honored
 - b. God's kingdom to be extended [people to be awakened to the gospel]
 - c. God's will to be accomplished – IN us and THROUGH us

J. (3) What is our reward?

1. There are two different Greek words used in the text for the word "reward."
 - a. *"Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full."* –Matthew 6:16
 - 1) This word is a noun and means "wages."
 - 2) Jesus is saying that if we have a pretentious preoccupation with looking good and seeking the praise and admiration of others, that will be all the wages we will receive. Nothing more.
 - 3) Being seen fasting is one thing, but fasting to be seen is a whole other deal. Fasting TO BE SEEN is a self-exalting motive of the heart that has no reward other than some people being momentarily impressed with your spirituality.
 - b. *"But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face ¹⁸ so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you."* --Matthew 6:17-18
 - 1) This word is a verb and means to "heal" or to "restore."
 - 2) It is the promise of greater and greater access to the presence and power of God.⁸

⁷ Adapted from material by John Piper.

2. The reward of fasting is not striving to receive something from God but to respond in adoration to the gospel taking hold in our heart. It is, first and foremost, an act of devotion to God.

III. CONCLUSION

- A. To conclude, I would say, “How we fast depends on who we want to impress.” Let’s seek to impress God this week...
- B. I invite you to join in our all-church fast as we seek for the longings spoken in the Lord’s Prayer to be more entrenched and established here at KHC:
 1. For God's name to be known, cherished, and honored – in your own heart, in your family, and here at KHC.
 2. For God’s kingdom to be extended – through KHC into the South Bay and beyond.
 3. For God’s will to be accomplished – IN us and THROUGH us.
- C. Finally, there is an appetite for God in every human being on the planet. The main message of the SOTM is that we cannot live the Christian life in our own strength and power. I invite you to surrender your life to God...

⁸ Adapted from Roy B. Zuck, ed. *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, Moody 1994: Chapter 1.