

THE TIME IS NOW

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Mark 2:18-22

Every time we enter into the season of fasting, we question the real benefit and/or reason behind fasting. Self-denial is not what we are interested in nowadays. We are into self-gratification. Food satisfies our craving for comfort. With food we bless every occasion. In some of our minds it is impossible to fully enjoy extracurricular activities (skating, movies, dates, etc.) without food. Christians are the biggest eaters and it shows. In the text, fasting was a sign of repentance and asking God's forgiveness. It was a way to consecrate one's way to God and His will. Jesus was not opposed to fasting. He fasted for forty days for his earthly ministry. **Matthew 6:16-18**

The Pharisees' way of fasting was to display that they were fasting. They felt like they could manipulate God and get Him to do what they wanted. It became an empty custom. Jesus wants us to be aware of the motive of our fasting. Fasting is the expression of the feelings of our hearts. It is all about you and God. It must be God-focused. You must have the mind, heart, and will to fast. You don't fast as a custom of the church at a certain time of the year. Fasting is turning one's plate down and turning to God. We set the things of this world aside to go after God. It is a desired devotion to pursuing and seeking God. It is worshipping God. Some of us come into this temple Sunday after Sunday and Wednesday after Wednesday but have never had an encounter with God. It is because you have made it a custom and have not denied yourself. The power, peace, and satisfaction that you are looking for from other people and other things are found in the presence of God. Jesus came to bring joy; especially to those who love him. There is joy in the presence of God. In the most difficult and trying times we aren't without joy because we have God. 'Weeping may endure for a night but joy comes in the morning.' Joy comes when you have Christ in your life. Joy makes you dance when there is no music.

Fasting is not meant to put you in bondage. It has become just that to some of you who are trying to live up to the Pastor and the church leadership. Fasting is meant to set you free. It is meant to release you from everything that binds you. It will reveal the truth that has been eluding you. When you fast, the shackles begin to fall off. There will come a time when the Disciples of Christ will fast but not like the Pharisees. It will be at a different time, of a different spirit, and for a different reason. It is time out for trying to patch up old wineskins by putting a fast in the middle of it. You need the new wine of Christ. You keep expecting God to do a new thing but He cannot until the old things are dead. There is a time for feasting and a time fasting. There is a time for constancy and a time for change. Now is the day of salvation. Now is the time for the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. Now is the time for you to do something radical.

Fasting is a time of getting rid of the old stuff (sins, the attitudes, the relationships, etc.). Fasting is the time of loosing the hold these things have on us. Aren't you sick of roaming around looking for the right church, job, or person, and missing the mark every time? Aren't you tired of wondering if God cares about you when you are in trouble? It is time out for doing and going through the same old stuff just

because you don't want to be inconvenienced. The time is now to have victory in a sustained way in your life. If you learn how to pray, you have to keep on praying. If you learn how to worship, you have to keep on worshipping even in the bad times. Fasting is radical discipleship. Radical is a departure from the normal. You have been eating all your life and it hasn't done anything for you. When you fast to God, who sees in secret, He will reward you. Fasting gives wings to our prayers. **Ezra 8:23**

Some of you have been fasting for years but only at your level of comfort. Fasting is not a diet. It is a time to die to self. Fasting is a way of detaching so that we can become sensitive to the Spirit. Eating constantly and responding to the demands of the flesh causes us to have a leakage of power. The flesh has taken over. When you get out of your bed in the middle of the night to get something to eat, your flesh has taken over. When you pick up the phone to respond to a booty call when you know it is a booty call, your flesh has taken over. When you have committed to giving up an addiction but you consciously relapse, your flesh has taken over. How do deal with the flesh? Starve the flesh and feed the spirit through worshipping, giving, and serving. You will gain back the power to put the flesh back in its place. Do you want to live His best? Then fast and pray not because Pastor is asking you to but because God is calling you to. Fasting takes faith because the opposition is going to come up against you. The enemy has already peeked into your future and he knows what God has for you.

Peace.