

Series: Isaiah

Title: God's Chosen Fast

Text: Isaiah 58:8-12

Date: March 29, 2015

Sinners without Christ are full of darkness and cruelty—especially in religion. Religion without Christ is damning. Sinners strive and debate with one another. They smite one another with the fist of wickedness. In religion and out, they impose heavy burdens and oppress the weak. In religion, they do all sorts of religious exercises such as coming to church, afflicting themselves, acting humble, feeding and clothing the poor. But all the while sinners boast and glory in their flesh and their works. Sinners expect God to acknowledge all this.

Whether in religion or out that is the defiled heart and self-righteousness of every sinner God saves by grace. But when Christ gives a new heart and sanctifies us, Christ teaches his child to love one another as he has loved us and to live the rest of our days by faith, trusting his precious promises. “For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.” (Gal 5: 6) Please understand what that verse means. It is not your lawkeeping nor is it your lawlessness that has a bearing on whether or not you are saved. Salvation is through faith in Christ. It is Christ alone who makes his child to differ and saves us. Those saved by grace are not motivated by law nor are they without law. We do all from the single constraint of Christ's love for us.

A PERPETUAL FAST

God asked a question, “Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?” (Isa 58:5) The children of Jacob, like millions in our day, thought that observing the Sabbath was to do so on one day of the week. They thought it meant afflicting their soul, mourning and fasting as they ate only the manna from heaven.

But God said, “Is not this the fast that I have chosen?” (Is 58: 6) It is not afflicting the soul for a day. God's true Sabbath rest is the perpetual fast and the perpetual rest every believer is sanctified into in Christ by God's grace through faith.

When Christ enters the sinner in Spirit, Christ turns us from the corrupt bread that we once thought was life: our oppressive sin nature, the bondage of vain works, from yoking and condemning others. All of that was only vain self-exaltation and trampling under-foot the blood of our Redeemer. Christ brings God's elect into a never-ending fast from those vain works by bringing us to rest in Christ our Sabbath by whom we feast on Christ, the true Bread from heaven.

THE WORKS OF CHRIST

Then Christ teaches us to deal mercifully with one another, even as God has dealt with us in Christ, “Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?...And *they that shall be* of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in.” (Isa 58:6-7)

All of the things listed in verses 6-7 are the great spiritual blessings Christ works for his people. Notice how verses 6-7, along with verse 12, compares with Isaiah 61: 1-4. This is the scripture which Luke tells us that

Christ read in the synagogue when he entered his public ministry. Christ declared this is the work he came to accomplish:

Isaiah 61: 1: The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; 2: To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; 3: To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified. 4: And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations.

Luke 4: 17: And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, 18: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, 19: To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

Christ took the place of his people on the cross bearing our wickedness and heavy burdens, our oppression and our yoke. He bore the full penalty God's elect deserved. Doing so, Christ loosed us and set us free. God said, "I have raised him up in righteousness...he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the LORD of hosts." (Is 45: 13) Christ said, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." (Jn 8: 36) The songwriter wrote,

Free from the law, O, happy condition
Jesus has bled and there is remission
Cursed by the law and bruised by the fall
Grace hath redeemed us once for all

For every believer, born of the Spirit of God and brought to faith in Christ, Christ is our living Bread and we shall never hunger again: for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification or redemption. We are members of his household, covered in his righteousness. (Jn 6: 35; Eph 2: 19-22)

In the new birth, Christ writes his law of faith and grace and love on our new hearts and says, "Now go forth my child and do for your brethren what I have done for you: loose the bands of wickedness, undo the heavy burdens, let the oppressed go free, break every yoke, deal thy bread to the hungry, bring the poor that are cast out to thy house, when thou seest the naked cover him and hide not thyself from thine own flesh."

FAITH WHICH WORKS BY LOVE

By only the constraint of Christ's love—not by the yoke of the law—believers deal our bread to the hungry by telling others how Christ our Bread broke our yoke by bearing our sins on the cross. The gospel is Christ our Bread, the living Bread. We bring the poor to our house—Christ's church—to hear the good news of our Redeemer. The gospel is the means God has chosen to reveal that Christ is the covering for the nakedness of his people. (1 Cor 1: 21)

Seeing what great things Christ has done for us in his great mercy and grace, we rejoice to show mercy rather than deal harshly with others. When others deal harshly with us, we deal mercifully back. It may be difficult, but remember how merciful and kind Christ deals with us constantly.

Therefore the word of grace says, “Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” (Eph 4: 32); “Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.” (Col 3: 13)

Also, literally, believers are to take the burden off others anyway we can. We literally give them bread and a coat and whatever they need. Christ does it for us every day. He says to every believer, “And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind...your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. 31: But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.” (Lu 12: 29-33)

By God’s grace, Christ’s child will certainly do these things, yet never see himself as having done anything. Notice in the following passage how the believer never knew that he did these things, while the self-righteous man thought he did them all. Christ said,

Matthew 25: 34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: 36 Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. 37: Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? 38: When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? 39: Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? 40: And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. 41; Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: 42: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: 43: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. 44: Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? 45: Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did *it* not to one of the least of these, ye did *it* not to me. 46: And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

Here is the point: to rest in Christ from all our works, to use everything he has given us to promote his gospel, to sacrificially seek the good of his people, all the while trusting that Christ has and shall provide everything we need here and hereafter, this is living by faith, motivated only by Christ’s love.

LIGHT AND HEALTH

For every believer, compelled by God’s grace to take up the banner of Christ, here are a few of the exceeding great and precious promises that our Redeemer makes to us.

Christ promises all who repent and believe on him, Christ will be our Light and our Health, “Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily.” (Is 58: 8) When the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ shines into our hearts, we have Light and Life. The moment Christ makes us willing to turn from the darkness of this world to Christ the Light, immediately, the Light of his joy, and peace, and comfort breaks forth in our soul like the morning and, speedily, we are made whole in Christ!

He never says he will take his Light from us, but as we walk in his light, he promises we shall see his Light more and more, “the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” (Pro 4: 18)

LEADERSHIP

Christ also promises to lead us, “and thy Righteousness shall go before thee.” (Is 58: 8) This is not righteousness performed by us that shall go before us but it is Christ the believer’s Righteousness. Remember, Isaiah 57: 8, “I will heal him: I will lead him also.” Christ our Righteousness shall go before thee.

Christ went before us in the everlasting covenant of grace. When he agreed to become the Surety of all God’s vessels of mercy! He went before his people when he lived and died to reconcile us to God. Now, Christ has gone before us to claim heaven for us as our Mediator and Forerunner. He said, “In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” (Jn 14: 2-3)

Christ promises to lead us and guide us by his example. The night the disciples were bragging that they each should be greatest in heaven, they were defiling their feet. They were exalting themselves over Christ their elder Brother. While they boasted, Christ stripped himself, lowered himself and washed the disciples feet. The example he left us is that when our brethren are exalting themselves over us, we are to wash their defiled feet rather than reject them. He said, “If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.” (Jn 13: 14)

REAR-WARD

Also, Christ promises those who repent from their works to rest in his works that Christ will come behind us and be our rear-guard, “the glory of the LORD shall be thy re-reward.” (Is 58: 8)

It means Christ will be our rear ward to gather up those who are weak and feeble in faith. He said, “For ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight: for the LORD will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your re-reward.” (Is 52: 12) Notice in the twentieth Psalm how that Christ leads us and also follows the believer all our days:

Psalm 20: 1: « A Psalm of David. » The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2: He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. 3: He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. 4: Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. 5: Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. 6: Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

The great promise Christ makes to all God’s chosen vessels of mercy is this, “I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish!” (Jn 10: 28)

The night of Hurricane Sandy. We were huddled in the basement. My little ones were afraid. I kept saying, “Don’t be afraid. The Lord is ruling that wind. Don’t be afraid.” Our Lord God constantly assures each of his children, saying, “Fear not!” But some believers still fear. I want to encourage you not to fear. Our Lord God

promises he will take constant care of each child, who puts their trust in him, even the weakest and most feeblest among his saints.

Have you noticed, those who thought themselves too weak or too sinful or too fallen to be useful are the ones recorded in scripture, still used of the Lord to minister to us today: the widow with her two mites, the harlot who poured out the ointment, and Naaman's little maid for instance.

Brethren, if a brother or sister stumbles in sin, never encourage the sin or make excuse for it. But pick them up, wash their feet, and remind them, God says to the weakest most feeble, most fallen who believe on him, "The Glory of the Lord shall gather you up!"

Lot lingered but the Lord gathered him up. David fell but the Lord gathered him up! Peter denied the Lord Jesus but the Lord Jesus gathered him up! God will correct but not cut off; he will discipline, but not destroy one sinner for whom Christ paid justice. (Ps 89:27-37) Christ's blood is too precious to lose one for whom he satisfied justice!

CONSTANT COMMUNION

In Christ, God promises that every believer shall have constant communion with him, "Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am." (Is 58: 9)

In the beginning of Isaiah, the Lord said of those who were playing games in outward form, looking to their church-going and their condemning others, "When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear, your hands are full of blood." (Is 1: 15)

But to his broken and contrite child who is too needy to condemn his brother, too dependent upon Christ to boast of self, who draws near in heart through faith in Christ, God says, "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." (Is 65: 24)

THE POINT

Do you understand the meaning of our text? It is not the outward formalist, the self-righteous, self-exalting, unbelieving, condemner that God has saved, and enlightened, and leads and protects and has communion with. It is the sinner whose only hope is Christ Jesus our All! It is the sinner who walks by faith alone constrained by Christ's love alone. It is the sinner whose heart is so thankful for God's mercy that he delights to draw out his soul to poor sinners like himself! Our God is the God of mercy; who saves sinners too oppressed to save themselves. But he hates the self-dependent, self-made religious hypocrite!

Therefore, God says, "If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday: And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in." (Is 58: 9-12)

I have tried to help you see what God says about himself in this text. He delights to show mercy to real sinners. So now believe and rest in Christ and follow him from the one motive of Christ's love and you will find it is so, "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." (Gal 5: 6)

Amen!