Knowing God's Ways

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Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins. 2 Yet day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God. 3 "Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?" Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers. 4 Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high. 5 Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? 6 Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? 7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? 8 Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. 9 Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, 10 if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. 11 The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. 12 Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in. (Isaiah 58:1-12)

1. What Am I Missing?

Last Thursday, I was walking on the canal. It was raining and I was holding an umbrella. While walking, I saw a beautiful scene and stopped to take a picture. When I looked up my umbrella, it was gone. The wind had blown it into the canal.

I tried to get the umbrella, but soon had to give up on bringing it out. A few minutes later, I saw the umbrella drift towards the service road. I used a stick and was able to pull the umbrella out! After I got the umbrella out of the canal, a question came to mind. Am I missing something from God? Like the

umbrella, is there anything that God might be wanting to tell me but I just don't listen?

2. True and False Fasting

In today's scripture, Isaiah 58, we notice that God was not happy with the Israelites. God says, "***Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins***." What was wrong with the people? Why was God so upset?

The people thought they were doing the will of God and drawing near to God. But God asks the prophet Isaiah to tell the people of their sins. The people complain to God. "***Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?***"

The historical context of Isaiah 58 can be found in Zechariah 7:3-5. When the Israelites were in Babylon, they fasted twice a year on the fifth and seventh months. While fasting, the people commemorated the fact that they had lost their home and their temple in Jerusalem. They fasted and prayed for forgiveness and restoration. When the people were fasting, they thought they deserved God's praise for their fasting, but God was not pleased with what the people were doing. Why do you think God was not pleased with their fasting?

God says in verse 3 & 4, "***Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers. 4 Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high***." God points out that the Israelites are fasting for selfish reasons. If the people wanted the Lord to listen to their prayers, they needed to take care of the poor, the helpless, and the oppressed with the genuine compassion that God does.

In verse 6 and the following, God says to the people what the Lord wants, "***Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? 7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them and not to hide yourself from your own kin***?"

While fasting, God wants His people to free the oppressed, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and house the homeless. Why do you think such acts of mercy were emphasized? In the Old Testament, only one fast was commanded on the day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29, 31). After the fall of Jerusalem, more fast days were instituted. When the Israelites were fasting, the other commands from God were often not followed.

Isaiah stressed that God's desire is for his people to show kindness, generosity, care, and hospitality. These acts would bring God's light through

his people. In verse 8 & 10, God says through the prophet that the light from God's people will break forth like the dawn and their light will rise in the darkness.

3. Jesus is the Light of the World

This light is interpreted in the New Testament as the light of Jesus. John 1:4 says, "***In him was life, and that life was the light of men***." John affirms that in the ultimate sense, life is in Jesus. Our spiritual and physical life come from him. Jesus is the source of life and also the light of men and women. Light in the Bible means salvation, life, knowledge, and union with God. So the term, "Jesus is the light of the world," means that Jesus is the Messiah. He gives salvation and eternal life. Jesus helps us to be in union with God. Jesus gives us hope and a future.

Matthew 5:14 says, "***you are the light of the world***." And verse 16 says, "***let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven***." Those who follow Jesus are called to reflect his light. Wherever we go, we are called to share Jesus' light so that the people around us experience the presence and grace of Christ.

I'm sure many of us may have enjoyed the Super Bowl last Sunday. The Kansas City Chiefs celebrated a Super Bowl win. Christine and I lived in the Kansas City area for 8 years. We were happy to see them win. What made me happier was that both Norma and Clark Hunt, the family that owns the team, are Christians. Clark thanked the Lord for such a blessing. The quarterback, Patrick Mahomes, also gave God the glory in the win.

He said, "Before every game, I walk the field and I do a prayer at the goalpost. I just thank God for those opportunities and I thank God for letting me be on a stage where I can glorify Him. The biggest thing that I pray for is that whatever happens, win or lose, success or failure, that I'm glorifying Him." Mahomes certainly reflects the light of Jesus in the world.

4. Fasting during Lent

In about two weeks, the Lenten season will get started. Beginning on Ash Wednesday (February 26) during Lent, we will reflect on our life, confess our sins, and ask for forgiveness. We will read scripture and participate in the Bible study and make sure that we live our lives according to God's will.

As we meditate on Isaiah 58, we learn that we need to grow not only in our relationship with God, but also in the relationship with other people. God wants us to take care of those who are in need. Isaiah 58 says that if we take care of others, God promises many blessings. Verse 11 says, "***The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a***

spring of water, whose waters never fail." What I really like is the promise in verse 12, "***you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in***." When we share the love of the Lord, God pours out his abundant blessings.

5. Knowing God's Ways

Today's scripture tells us what true fasting is and reminds us that we are called to be the light of the world. How do we know God's ways? We often assume that we know what God wants and we obey the will of God. However, as today's scripture says, we often forget and misunderstand what God wants. Therefore, we need to be reminded over and over again of God's calling. How can we be reminded? Reading and studying of the Bible is the best way for us to learn and remember God's will for each of us.

I am grateful to Sara Connelly, Ann Burnham, and Susan Scott as they help with our Bible study classes during this year's Lent season. I want to encourage everyone who wants to learn or be reminded of God's will for each of us to join the class. We will draw closer to God's word and God's will for our lives.

6. Conclusion

Why do we need to study the Bible? As we learn from Isaiah 58, it is easy to miss the point of our lives without knowing the will of God. Jesus says in Matthew 7:21 and the following, "***On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?' 23 Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers."***

I am sure no one would want to hear what Jesus says here. We would want to hear from the Lord, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

7. Application

One of the really great aspects of our church is that so many of us truly love God's word. It is a great joy for me to see our Wednesday Bible study group every Wednesday morning.

Do you have any specific plans for Lent this year for your spiritual discipline? God calls each of us to draw close to him so that we would know who God is and that we would become true disciples, sharing God's light and the hope of Christ in the world. I pray that this Lent would give us a renewed opportunity to learn and follow after God's will. Amen.