

Sermon on the Mount Part XXXI - Fasting

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[0 : 00] Let's go to our main text that we'll be speaking from that really precipitated this subject on fasting, and that is found in the Sermon on the Mount.

So let's go there first and read that, and then we'll go to our insert and read that. So, if you will, let's go to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 6, and verse 16.

This follows hard on the heels of the subject of forgiveness that we have been treating for the last several sessions together. And we will just read verses 16 through 18, just those three verses, and then we will switch to our insert and continue reading there in unison as well.

So, on second thought, let me just read these two verses, three verses by myself, for the simple reason that many of you have different translations out there, and if we're all reading in different translations, someone will think on the receiving end here that we're speaking in tongues this morning, and we won't be doing that.

So, we'll read together. You just follow along as I read from the New American Standard, and then we'll read together on the insert sheet. All right? From the New American Standard, chapter 6 and verse 16, Jesus says, And whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance in order to be seen fasting by men.

[1 : 46] Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that you may not be seen fasting by men, but by your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

All right, now to the white sheet, please. Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

And after he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he then became hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.

But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

Then the disciples of John came to him, asking, Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?

[2 : 58] And Jesus said to them, The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.

Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers, Barnabas and Simeon, who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manan, who had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul, while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.

Then when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

So what we have just shared constitutes a very small percentage of the number of times the Bible refers to the subject of fasting.

And I know some of you are taking notes, and you might appreciate these references, so if you will prepare yourself momentarily, I will give those references if you want to jot them down, and you can give the study a little more research than you might be able to otherwise.

[4 : 37] We cannot begin to cover all of these passages on the subject of fasting because it would take quite a while, and I would like to get on through the Sermon on the Mount, but this subject is what has precipitated our teaching on the subject this morning.

Why fast? What's the point? And if you're looking for a definition, this is probably the simplest one that I have come up with.

At least it seems to work for me in considering the several verses that the Bible offers on the subject of fasting. Essentially, it is this.

Fasting, and by the way, the word fast in Hebrew literally means to close the mouth. The idea, of course, is that nothing gets in. You close the mouth.

That's the fast. In virtually every instance that I have contacted in the Old and New Testament, biblical fasting always appears to be voluntary.

[5 : 49] I cannot think of any place, at least none of the many references that I considered, was there ever an injunction to fast as some kind of a divine directive where God tells the people to fast.

And I still don't have a clear handle on this, but I was thinking, and this goes back many, many years. I probed my memory and got down in some of the deep, dark recesses of my cranium, and it occurred to me that the children of Israel, I don't remember where I heard this, and I tried to substantiate it from the scriptures, and I couldn't.

But it stuck in my mind that the children of Israel were commanded to fast on the Day of Atonement, which is the day in the Jewish calendar.

If you know anything about Yom Kippur, this is the holiest day in the Jewish calendar because that was the day on which the high priest would go into the Holy of Holies and offer blood sacrifice for himself and for the sins of the people, and God would pass over the sins of the nation for another year.

In other words, he cut them some slack for another year based upon that animal sacrifice. And in connection with that Day of Atonement, it appears, I was under the impression, and like I said, I don't know where I got this, if I got it from some other Bible teacher or radio or college that I was in at Cedarville or what, but the phrase that is used is the Lord says, you shall afflict your souls.

[7 : 33] And yet it still doesn't mention fasting, but some, I suppose, are of the opinion that afflicting your souls is a reference to fasting. And sometimes, along with that, there was the wearing of sackcloth.

And I've never worn a piece of sackcloth. You probably haven't either. But the thing I am told about it is that those who did found it to be extremely uncomfortable.

It was itchy and scratchy. And it was a perpetual reminder to your physical body that there was something special about that day.

Sometimes it is the idea of repenting in sackcloth and ashes. It is almost seen as a kind of penance or of self-punishment or of self-affliction.

And yet the Scriptures make it very clear that we are not to abuse our body. That is not honoring to the Lord. We are not to mark ourself or cut ourself or anything like that with some kind of supposed contrition or repentance.

[8 : 46] Scripture certainly doesn't countenance that at all. But when you afflict your soul many have interpreted that to mean that you fast.

Now it is interesting to note that the Scriptures don't refer to afflicting your body but it is afflicting your soul. Your body if I understand this correctly your body is part of your soul.

Your spirit is the other part of your soul. Your soul constitutes the totality of your being. So if you afflict your soul it means that you are doing something voluntarily that affects both your physical body and your non-physical spirit.

And fasting could do that. Going without food could do that. because once you miss a meal you might be able to get by that without noticing too much but when you miss your second meal your body is going to start feeling it and you are going to develop hunger pangs and we all know what that is like.

Well some of us do some of us don't. Some people eat because they are hungry and some people eat to keep from getting hungry. it all depends on how you look at it I suppose.

[10 : 12] But when you go without food for a certain period of time you become very aware of it. There is a possibility that your blood sugar level may drop.

You may start feeling a little weak and wobbly like you are not as strong or as active as you ought to be when you are under a full meal or something like that.

and then it also affects your spirit and if I understand these things correctly and I am not sure that I do because the jury is still out I don't have the handle on it that I would like but I do believe that your

spirit is where all of the immaterial things about your personhood dwell in your human spirit. That includes your intelligence your memory your emotions your creativity your imagination none of those things are physical but they are all very real they are all mental you say that they are in your mind well I think they are in your mind but I think your mind is in your spirit too not to be confused with the brain the brain is the physical part of your thinking the mind is the non-physical part of your thinking and interestingly enough the Bible never once mentions the brain but it mentions the mind repeatedly I mean hundreds of times so there is something there that many of us are not recognizing so when you afflict your soul that means you are voluntarily placing your whole person under duress you are placing your whole person in a position of extremity your body feels it and your body the emptiness of your stomach and the craving for food sends a message to your brain and your brain says you need to eat you're hungry you start feeling that in your immaterial self not only in your material self you feel the pangs of hunger mentally and physically both that is the value of fasting because let me give you this definition now this is just a Wiseman definition so take it with a grain of salt alright this is not a biblical definition but why fast what's the point fasting is doing without a physical necessity because of a greater spiritual need I've tried making that application to all of the instances of fasting that I found in the Old and New Testament and it holds up because in virtually every case where you will find people fasting and there are many many dozens of them in the Old and New Testament in each instance those who were engaging in fasting were dealing with some kind of an immediate crisis they were either in one or they saw one coming like an advancing enemy against which they had no possibility of gaining a victory fasting could be something that is designed to invoke the almighty because of an extremity that one is in or one is on the horizon and is witnessed as very near and it's kind of like accompanying a prayer of desperation with fasting with doing without food and the thinking of it is that you are so engrossed and overwhelmed with the immediate need that food is of no object or consequence the last thing you want to do is eat so you just are devoid of that and you do not take food ordinarily the fasting would consist of a number of days but there is no set period of time we know that our

[14 : 39] Lord fasted for 40 days and 40 nights and we tend to think that that is humanly impossible but we know that it isn't because in the first place our Lord was operating out of his humanity he could have changed the stones into bread but he didn't and he fasted 40 days and 40 nights and there are a number of people during our lifetime who have fasted for 40 days and 40 nights one thing however that really did puzzle me about this and I still can't account for it other than the fact that it just had to be nothing short of divine intervention and that is this whether you believe it or not unless you have some kind of a medical condition that would compromise your body physically you could fast for 40 days it wouldn't kill you you would live you probably think you were going to die but you would live and I cannot tell you this from experience but I can tell you this from many people who have had the experience and that is the first three or four days of fasting are really rough really difficult but after several days believe it or not the hunger goes away you just don't feel the same hunger pangs that you did after doing without the first few meals now I can't justify to that this personal experience but a number of people have mentioned that the hunger pang goes away after a few days and you're not so aware of it and one other thing that is very very important that fasting does per those who have engaged in it and have told me this that abstaining from food sharply narrows and concentrates your focus in a way that you wouldn't believe the sharpness of your focus in your thinking is incredible when you are fasting and by the way let me make this really clear if I can

I am not suggesting that you fast I'm not telling you that you should I'm not telling you that you shouldn't because we do not have a clear directive in the Bible I certainly can't give you one so I'm just going to try and provide some of the guidelines that I have detected that are in Scripture simply because our Lord referred to it in the Sermon on the Mount and obviously it was considered a very important part of Judaism not only that but as we've seen from some of the references already it's in the New Testament as well so fasting always seems to be in connection with something really special and important that is going on and people fast for a couple of days ordinarily a fast to go without food for a normal fast would mean and the Bible always uses morning to evening it would mean this it would mean you eat your evening meal call it dinner or call it supper I guess it depends on where you come from but then you eat nothing that evening and you eat nothing the next morning for breakfast and you eat nothing for lunch and you are not able to eat

again until the evening meal of that next day that is just an ordinary one day fast that's what most of the Jews did in the Old Testament and probably in the New Testament too and remember when Jesus told about the publican and the Pharisee how that the publican smote himself on the breast and said God be merciful to me a sinner and remember what the Pharisee said I thank thee that I am not as other men I give tithes of all that I possess I fast twice in the week most of the Jews fasted just one day in the week this guy is going to fast twice in the week because the thinking is if fasting once a week is good for you then fasting twice a week should be twice as good of course it doesn't always work out that way but anyway he was using that as an element of boast he went above and beyond what the

Jew would consider the call of duty in fasting twice a week and our Lord said it's really important that when you fast that the fast is between you and God don't put on this long face and make yourself appear to be haggard so that you outwardly appear to be in distress and everything and if somebody says hey what's the problem something wrong oh I'm fasting and you come across with this phony spiritual front and the Lord says those who fast for that reason to be seen of men they already have the reward that they're going to have people will go about saying he's fasting twice a week and the credit that he gets is all the credit that he's going to get because fasting is not to be engaged in for a show of your spirituality or how close you are or how much you love the Lord and here you are fasting and doing this great if you're going to fast keep it to yourself don't advertise it don't publicize it just make it between you and the Lord so one of the things that

I mentioned earlier and I interrupted myself about not really getting a handle on more than one regarding this but scripture doesn't say anything about our Lord not drinking any water it just said that he ate no food had no food for 40 days and 40 nights but I am certain that any physician will tell you that that if you have normal physical health you can live for 40 days without dying without food but not without water not without water because your kidneys will shut down you'll go into renal failure and all kind of complications will develop and you're not going to survive you've got to have water you've got to stay hydrated and that's a very very important thing and let me just inject this I don't know how valid it is but

[21 : 19] I've been doing it and I can't say that I notice any difference but I was watching a TV program and this eminent doctor was discussing health and health issues and stuff like that and he said one of the easiest and simplest things that people could do to improve their health in general is just so easy that you wonder why more people don't take advantage of it and I didn't even know what he was talking about and he said before you go to bed at night drink a full 8 ounce glass of water you would be surprised how much benefit that provides for your organs to have that liquid to work with during the night and then of course the problem with some of us is if you go to bed at 10 o'clock at night with a full 8 ounce glass water guess what you're going to be doing about midnight well that but most of us are doing that anyway so you might as well give your body the benefit of it and then when you awaken in the morning before you do anything before you eat anything before you even brush your teeth drink a full 8 ounce glass of water he said it is remarkable what that does for your internal organs and it gives them something to really cleanse themselves with and it's really very important so there's just a little piece of healthy medical advice that you might take to heart and I have

I can't say that I notice any difference but my liver and kidneys might really appreciate it and one thing I know for sure it isn't doing them any harm and one of the problems that we have is staying sufficiently hydrated because so many Americans drink stuff that actually is almost like a diuretic and you get caffeine you load up on caffeine whether it's from soda or coffee or tea or whatever that's a diuretic and actually what it does is it rids your body of water you think you're taking in liquid because you're taking in water because after all there is water in coffee there's water in soda pop it's mostly water but it also contains these diuretic things so bottom line is this the most healthy drink that you can use is H₂O that's the one the Lord provided it just doesn't have the flavor that your cold drinks cold Pepsis and Cokes and all that have so but you don't your body doesn't get the benefit of that that it would get from just plain old water now here's my problem said the Lord fasted for 40 days and 40 nights didn't say anything about water at all so I just assumed that well he probably had water I don't know where he got the water from or there was just supernatural intervention because he was who he was but then when we go back into Exodus and read about Moses going into the Mount of Sinai to receive the tables of the law from the Lord it says that Moses ate no food and drank no water for 40 days wow how could he survive well I'm sure it wouldn't be a

problem for him to survive in so far as the Almighty is concerned because he could have done whatever Moses needed to have done to prevent any danger from coming to him by lack of water and hydration so we're not told and with our Lord in his temptation account both in Matthew Mark and Luke doesn't say anything about water it just says that he fasted for 40 days so I don't know what quite to make of that scriptures specifically say that Moses drank no water for those 40 days and 40 nights in addition to eating no food and then when the Apostle Paul when the Apostle Paul had that Damascus road experience in Acts chapter 9 and he was at at this person's house in Damascus we are told that he neither ate nor drank for three days and three nights and that would be a deprivation but nothing like 40 days and 40 nights so you put all of those things together and what do we have we just have a bunch of questions really but it's still fascinating to me to consider it so think in terms of fasting being voluntary first of all and it is doing without a physical necessity because of a greater spiritual need and it always appears to be voluntary it occurs under extreme or dire circumstances that one is facing and sometimes it was as a nation sometimes the high priest of Israel would call what is referred to as a solemn assembly you call a solemn assembly it means that the nation is facing some kind of a national crisis and we really need God to intervene here so you get all the people together and they pray and they fast and the fasting concentrates the mind because all the while you are fasting and going without food you are feeling this sensation of hunger can't get away from it your stomach rumbles you feel a little weak and wobbly sometimes and you ask yourself without even thinking about it you do it involuntarily you say why am I doing this why am I treating my body why am I not eating oh yes and it keeps you in constant reminder of the situation at hand and why you're doing without this food you are reminding yourself and all the while you are experiencing this hunger you are telling yourself and reminding yourself why you're doing it why you're doing it and why you are doing it and what the crisis is it provides a kind of focus or concentration that I don't think is even possible any other way it will keep you right on task because the hunger remains so it always indicates a profound seriousness of purpose it is an unavoidable focus that is automatically maintained why am I hungry when food is available and you are reminded and it tells us that some things matter more than food and when

[28 : 06] Satan confronted Christ in the passage that we read earlier and said hunger is a very legitimate thing there is nothing sinful about being hungry and here are these stones and you are the son of God and you are hungry why don't you turn these stones into bread you could do that couldn't you and our Lord said man shall not live by bread alone and all he is saying is this there are some things that are more important than satisfying the needs of the body and satisfying spiritual needs before the Lord is actually more important that's what he meant when he said man shall not live by bread alone and in addition he's saying man is more than a body he has another component to his being that needs to be addressed as well and that is the spiritual you do not address spiritual needs with physical food do you get that you do not address spiritual needs with physical food you address physical needs with physical food but not the spiritual so fasting is a reminder to me about priorities fasting reveals to God and myself my seriousness and when they would say let's proclaim a solemn assembly solemnity means seriousness if it is a solemn assembly it means we're going to have a meeting a congregation we're going to get everybody together and it is not for fun and games there aren't any jokes cracked at a solemn assembly a solemn assembly is when people really mean business it means people are desperate they see the threat as very real can you imagine our president or our congress calling for a solemn assembly for this nation are we in crisis we are well aware of the dispensational distinctives that exist in the

Bible and we know that these solemn assemblies were for the Jews Moses called them Samuel called them some of the high priests called them it was a time for the nation to really get serious and mean business with God about the crisis that was at hand and I am not suggesting that we can extrapolate that and lay that on the United States of America but really got serious about the condition our country is in and the direction that it is taking we have an official time once a year I think it's in May Shirley Dobson was the chairperson of the first one we call it a national day of prayer but nobody ever says anything about fasting in fact the national day of prayer is kicked off with sumptuous breakfast go figure so you just kind of what are the possibilities what are the responsibilities is there a valid application here and

I am not about to say that what we ought to do is what Israel did but I wouldn't fuss against it if ever there were a time for the people of the Lord of this nation to mean business with God we might be there right now and I was talking with a friend just this morning about about 2nd Chronicles 7 my

people are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked way then will I hear from heaven will forgive their sin and heal their land and there is absolutely no question that the context demands that this is addressing the nation of Israel and it is a call to God's chosen people to align themselves with the Lord and to get serious about their relationship with him and confess their sins and acknowledge God etc and the Lord said if you do that as a nation I will respond and

I'm not at all suggesting that we are a new Israel or if we do the same thing that the same result will happen but I know one thing there couldn't be any ill come from it there couldn't be any ill from Christian people and you can't expect unbelievers to do this there's no reason why you should expect unbelievers to do this but there is no reason why Christians who love this land and see our nation being a nation in crisis listen unless you've got your head in the sand in a way that is just beyond help we are in a deep moral crisis right now and have been for some time we are in a deep financial crisis right now and have been for some time we are in a deep crisis in every avenue that you want to mention this nation is in trouble well let me conclude this and we'll open it for Q&A; that you might have so fasting appears to be a personal option fasting it would be in error for me to tell you you're supposed to be fasting that's not my place and there's no biblical reference for that at all to demand that anybody else fast it is a personal option between you and the Lord if you want to fast nobody nobody should tell you that you shouldn't fast that too is between you and the Lord and by the way I do want to mention this just just for the sake of safety I do think that there are people who really ought to consider themselves ineligible for this if you have a physically compromised health issue you probably shouldn't even think about fasting it probably would not do you any good and certainly if you are diabetic or you have a medical condition similar to that you ought not to consider fasting it could be ruinous to your health but if you have normal health and you choose to do this that's your option

[35 : 09] I'm not saying you should I'm not saying you shouldn't it's just something that you need to consider before the Lord nursing mothers probably ought not to consider fasting because of the implication that may exempt herself from any consideration of that and those who need to engage in hard physical labor I don't think it would be a good idea to undergo a fast and miss three or four meals and then go out and start cutting a couple cords of wood and that probably would not be a good thing to do so you ought to avoid any strenuous physical activity if you're going to do that there is no question however that fasting has its purpose and I I've never preached about it before I've never heard a message on fasting and I suppose we would if there were clear injunctions to do it but all

I can tell you is there appears to be positive definite benefits that were derived from those who gathered together and fasted and prayed and they did that on behalf of Paul and Barnabas when they sent them forth it was a really serious thing this was a big step these people were taking and they got together this is in Acts 13 the passage that we read they got together and they fasted and prayed and they laid hands on Paul and Barnabas which means they were identifying with them they they were in concert with them and they would support them and uphold them they laid hands on them they fasted and prayed and then they sent them forth and there are numerous other instances I remember when back in the Old Testament and by the way I'm going to give you some references now those of you who were waiting to take down these references and I would encourage you to just go look in the context and ask yourself in connection with fasting that is mentioned there what's going on why are these people fasting and why are they fasting here in this passage read the context and you'll be amazed it'll jump out at you every time they are facing some kind of a do or die situation some kind of a critical issue that requires them to really mean business and I think it is a way it is a way that we have or can have of showing great seriousness of purpose to the Lord and to ourselves as regards what's happening and let me give you well let's I've got a little bit of time let's go to the book of Esther back in the Old Testament Ezra Nehemiah Esther and then Job and then the Psalms Esther chapter 4 and while you're turning to that let me give you some other references Ezra chapter 8 verses 21 through 23 Isaiah 58 verses 3 through 6 Jeremiah 14 verses 10 through 12 and 36 and verse 9 book of Joel chapter 1 verse 14 chapter 2 and verse 15 write faster Jonah Jonah 3 5 now let me give this last few again Isaiah 58 verses 3 through 6 Jeremiah 14 10 through 12 this verses 10 through 12 and Jeremiah 36 verse 9 Joel chapter 1 verse 14 Joel 2 15 chapter 2 verse 15 Jonah chapter 3 verse 5 Matthew chapter 9 verses 14 through 15 Acts 27 verse 9 1

Samuel chapter 7 verses 1 through 6 2

[40 : 16] Samuel chapter 12 verses 13 through 23 1 Kings 21 verse 27 and I've just given you about half of them here are just a few from the Psalms Psalm 35 and verse 13 Psalm 69 verse 10 Psalm 109 verse 24 and there are several others that I will not take time to give you but all of these refer to fasting and let's look at Esther chapter 4 and verse 3 this is a remarkable you talk about a crisis let me just abbreviate this as much as I can the children of Israel are in

Persian captivity they were in Babylonian captivity before but the Persians overrode the Babylonians and now the Jews are captives to the Babylonians and this is in the time of Esther and wicked king Haman you'll recall has got a vendetta against the Jews because he has an ego problem and Mordecai and some of the others didn't give him the honor that he thought he was due and he talked to the king he talked to the king and finagled the king in issuing a decree to eliminate the Jews and by the way the Jews have always been under threat of elimination and they still are today so I want you to look well let's look at the crisis that preceded this let's go to Esther chapter 3 and verse 8 remember Haman he's the guy that ended up on his own gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai remember then Haman said to king

Ahasuerus there is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom who's he talking about he's talking about the Jews and he says their laws are different from those of all other people what does that mean they were obedient to the law of Moses and he says and they do not observe the king's laws so it is not in the king's interest to let them remain Haman is saying your majesty you have got this traitorous element that is living here in our land benefiting from what we have to offer and they are not people of our stripe they have their own laws and their own customs and they don't respect yours and Haman says if it is pleasing to the king let it be decreed that they be destroyed this is nothing more than an ancient attempt at a holocaust that's that's all this is this is annihilation of a race of people this is genocide and by the way we look upon something like this and we say well they wouldn't do that that's that's terrible that's despicable listen these are people living at a time and place to whom life was very cheap especially if it was someone else's life if it is pleasing to the king let it be decreed that they be destroyed and

I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who carry on the king's business to put into the king's treasuries now he's sweetening the pot he's saying you can put a bounty on these people on all their heads and and it will result in his hand and gave it to Haman the signet ring was the official ring of state it was the ring that would be pressed on a wax document they sealed the document with wax they would write on the scroll then they would roll the scroll up and then where the end of the scroll came they would put an amount of hot wax and it would be a blob about the size of a quarter or a half dollar and then the king's ring would be impressed in that hot wax and leave a permanent impression and then when the wax cooled you've got the seal document with the king's ring with the king's signature they did this in addition or in place of signing like we have a president signs a law signs a document into law he does it with his signature well they didn't do it with signatures they did it with the king's ring and the king took off his ring and gave it to Haman he he he handed him his authority as it were to use in his absence and Haman was the son of Hamadath the Agagite the enemy of the Jews and the king said to Haman the silver is yours you can keep that and the people also do with them as you please hey Haman you just handle it do whatever you want with them well that was carte blanche for and and then the king scribes verse 12 were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month and it was written just as Haman commanded to the king satraps to the governors who were over each province the princes of peoples and written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king signet ring and letters were sent by couriers to all the king's province to destroy the thirteenth day of the twelfth month which is the month

[46 : 33] Adar and to seize their possessions as plunder now all of these people who lived there were rubbing their hands because they knew you know a lot of these Jews are pretty well off and we're going to get all their possessions after we kill them we're going to take all of their assets all of their property everything will all the king was in the king and the king was issued in Susa the capital and while the king and Haman sat down to drink the city of Susa was in confusion but it was all legal they had the king's signet and when Mordecai learned all that had been done he tore his clothes that is an expression of extreme grief either grief or anger and he just reached up grabbed the top of his robe and just split it right down the middle that's the tearing of the garments and he

put on sackcloth and ashes and went out into the midst of the city and wailed loudly and bitterly and he went as far as the king's gate for no one was to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth that of course was a no-no and in every province where the command and decree of the king came there was great mourning among the

Jews they knew the contract had been led on them a legal contract and they are all marked for distinction hey Jew tomorrow this time you're going to be dead what are they going to do now this is an extreme circumstance great mourning among the Jews with fasting now stop and ask yourself wouldn't it be kind of hard to eat anyway under those circumstances weeping and wailing and many lay on sackcloth and ashes oh God this thing is serious really serious we're scheduled for elimination tomorrow and this is all going to take place in a 24 hour period it would just be one extended murderous binge Esther's maidens and her eunuchs came and told her and the queen rised in great anguish why she's

Jewish there's no provision in this document to exclude her she sent garments to clothe Mordecai that he might remove his sackcloth from him but he did not accept him then Esther summoned Hayhok and from the king's eunuchs whom the king had appointed to attend her and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what this was and why it was so he went out to the city square Mordecai verse 7 told him all that had happened to him and the exact amount of money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews he also gave him a copy of the text of the edict which had been issued in Susa for their destruction that he might show Esther and inform her and to order her Esther to go into the king to implore his favor and to plead with him for her people Esther was the girl who found favor with the king and she is the king's favorite but she's a Jew she's Jewish so she comes under the edict of this command like every other Jew oh but she doesn't have anything to worry she's the queen never mind you've got to read the edict and the edict says all

Jews you cannot alter and you cannot rescind the king's edict that is impossible the king can't do it himself and if he did if he attempted to say hey I don't know what I was thinking of this whole thing as crazy it's all off I want to recall that edict I want to cancel it if he does that he just put a big bullseye on his back and he would likely be assassinated before the day is out because the Medes and the Persians were committed to the idea that whatever the king decreed was infallible and if he is willing to renege on it and that's exactly what would have happened and he knew it this thing is according to the law of the Medes and the Persians which altereth not it's an expression that's used in the Old Testament so he came back and

Esther spoke to Hathak and ordered him to reply to Mordecai all the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that for any man or woman who comes to the king in the inner court who is not summoned he has but one law that he be put to death unless the king holds out to him the golden scepter so that he may live and all this means is that no one absolutely no one under any circumstances was to come into the king's presence without an invitation well Esther is married to the king she said summoned by the king now we look upon this as crazy and it I suppose it is but it's a cultural thing it's what was ingrained in their society and Esther knew she could not go into the king's presence unless she was summoned it would just be an automatic execution he has but one law that he be put to death unless the king holds out to him the golden scepter so that he may live and

[52 : 34] I Esther says have not been summoned to come to the king for these thirty days you know what all of this depends on it all depends on the mood of the king these tyrants these despots were fickle undependable sometimes maniacal and it all depended on his mood when Esther comes into his presence he could take his golden scepter and just extend it in her direction and she was okay but if he didn't then that was the signal for the guards standing by to take away that person whoever it was and execute them and she doesn't have any idea what's going to happen so they related these words to Mordecai and Mordecai told them to reply to Esther do not imagine we don't know if Mordecai was her cousin or her uncle but he was related to

Esther and he said this to Esther listen Esther do not imagine that you in the king's palace can escape any more than all the Jews for if you remain silent at this time relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place suggesting from God and you and your father's house will perish and who knows and here is this famous line who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this Mordecai says who knows but what God has brought you into this favorite position for this strategic situation at this specific time and Esther told them to reply to

Mordecai okay here's what I want you to do go assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa what she's saying is get them all together let's have a big rally get all the Jews together tomorrow is D-Day get everybody together today and fast for me because in 24 hours you're not going to need any food anyway corpses don't need food you'll be dead fast for me for three days night and day I and my maidens also will fast in the same way is this a crisis or what we will fast in the same way and thus I will go into the king unsummoned by the king which is not according to the law and if I perish I perish if I die I die if they put me to death they put me to death this is the last ditch effort this is the only thing we've got so Mordecai went away and did just as Esther had commanded him without going there and into the details the king could not rescind the decree so you know what he did he issued another decree and that is that the Jews would be able to defend themselves and that of course saved the day so fasting plays into this and it does in other places too there's one that's very significant in Jeremiah and I've already given you several of the references but it is remarkable how the fast comes into play in cases of strategic dire circumstances it is something that the people seem to resort to very quickly fasting and prayer questions or comments okay hold on just a second Joe he's got a microphone here okay Joe when you fast this is science physics physiology of the bible okay first of all when you're eating there's a lot of energy that's taken away from you just to digest food a lot of your energy goes to the digesting of that food that's right your body's working exactly your body is working so when you don't eat then that energy that was going to all that processing of food then can go to something else like the concentration of prayer or whatever the emergency is can really be concentrated on that and your body does not need the energy to live only if it's working like you say heavy physical work it needs carbohydrates but when it's fasting it will use the fats in your body and then the muscle actually in your body which is slowly converted to energy but that's plenty of energy for all your thinking for your mind to work and you don't need energy to work then and so it functions very well without even in the tenth day the twelfth day your mind is good and sharp because it gets all the energy it needs but if you tried to do a physical job no you'd get tired and weak and couldn't do that when you fast and that's physiology that's quite interesting it appears that God has not only made these bodies the way he has for the regular intake of food

I guess would say three meals a day but he's also created the body in such a way that it can refurbish and help heal itself even without food and it gets a kind of rest then too and you know I'm sure it wouldn't do your liver or your stomach or your intestines wouldn't do them any harm to have a periodic rest once in a while so that they're not constantly working that's exactly what animals do when they're a place of rest and they don't eat anymore they don't hunt they just go there and lay down and rest and that's how they heal themselves animals interesting makes you think sometimes maybe some of these animals have more sense than we do another thing when it said no food and he didn't drink water but at that time they probably had wine and it didn't say he didn't drink wine wine will not wine was sometimes used as a purifying element for the water because the water wasn't always that good but the alcohol in wine would help to purify it and make it safer to drink yeah make a request when you ask about a request

[59 : 44] I have a couple that I'm trying to help they've got their grandchildren now to raise twin four year old and a six year old they are in desperate need for a table that will seat six and chairs so if anyone knows I would appreciate if you let me know and they would have a truck to go get it but they are both working their menial jobs but they said I've never taken any kind of relief fund or anything like that and they're struggling to raise these children now well it's interesting that you mentioned that I don't know if this is still available or not but just yesterday Marie and I visited the Salvation Army place the new one that just opened up on Durr Road there where the right aid pharmacy used to be and they had quite a few people there it was like a grand opening they've got a lot of clothes and furniture and stuff that they're recycling for people and they're all really nice for \$149 so why don't you call the

Salvation Army out there see if they're still available and if they are we'll buy it for them it's such a steel price it's hard to believe they're still there but maybe they are Ron also we have a couple tables in the we also have a couple tables out there in the youth building would they accommodate six people they're big round tables yes and there's some like plastic chairs like school chairs well that might be even better I don't know especially if there are kids involved this actually was a really nice dining room table I wouldn't call it a formal but it's close to that with upholstered chairs okay well maybe we can accommodate them right here with what we've got in our youth building out

there we'd be glad to do that somebody else with a comment or question and by the way if you're wondering what my grand conclusion is to fasting

I don't have one I too have been perplexed by the chronical verse if my people and you know that was written to the nation of Israel I understand that but we are a peculiar people we are his people too just a different dispensary the believing element of us at least unless you say so if there's nothing in the Pauline epistles that negates that thinking then we should be doing that as Christians would you not agree well I I don't want to disagree and I guess I don't want to agree I just don't know I just don't know well that that's for sure wouldn't hurt if it did nothing more than awaken the consciousness of a lot of people and you can imagine what would happen with the Christian community fasting and praying you can imagine what would happen on late night TV and the talk shows and all the rest of it of course the whole thing would be the butt of jokes and ridicule but anyway that's what you signed up for when you came to partnership with Christ through his finished work you opened yourself for ridicule criticism make fun of and all the rest of it it goes with the territory being a believer so why should we be exempt anything else yes Rebecca okay I just wanted to say I'm not an expert in this area but I have read books about fasting a while ago not recently but one of the things that I remember is that the body has a tendency to burn off toxins and that's one of the physical health benefits the first thing it does when you stop eating it looks for ways to nurture itself and it rids the body of toxins so that's one of the health benefits

I have heard that I've heard that from other sources that your body your body is a repository of a number of dangerous toxins toxins and they are able to be maintained because there is nothing to force them out so they just live a long and happy life but when you get right down to it and you are not taking in food to be digested or added to it or provide cover for the toxins then eventually they get flushed out and forced out as well it's referred to as a deeper cleansing and I can't speak to that with any authority all I can tell you is that's what I've heard was there another hand someplace yeah when when Esther said she and her maids would fast that that kind of made me think I wonder if because fasting was for the Jew was for the people of God is for the people of God made me wonder

[65 : 25] Esther maybe either had chosen only Jewish women that she knew of as her maids or somehow they became as Ruth did believers in the God of Israel well that's an interesting thought and it's definitely a possibility because she no doubt would have had not only authority but quite a bit of influence over them so that's entirely possible I don't know someone else before we dismiss well thank you for your indulgence you've been very kind in listening to me preach something that I don't know hardly anything at all about but I appreciate the time that you gave me and when we return for our next session we'll be in verse 19 do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth where moth and rust destroy etc but we'll be working on the rest of the chapter so would you stand with me please father we're really grateful for the things of scripture that we really do know about and we're even grateful for the things that we don't know much about because they excite us to further study and investigation and we're grateful for that more than anything else we pray for these people a spirit of wisdom and understanding regarding these issues each of us wants to be available and open to you for your direction and guidance in our lives whatever that might mean including the implications of what we're talking about this morning thank you again for your great love and faithfulness to us and thank you for this body of people who gather together to put themselves under the authority of your word we bless you for them in Christ's wonderful name amen