

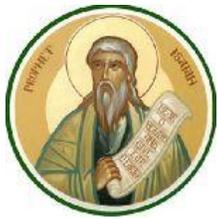
Isaiah 58

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In Isaiah 58 God commands the prophet to tell the Israelites that external worship alone is not effective as intercessory prayer unless it is joined with internal sincerity. This message is as important to us today as it was to the Israelites then.

In what follows we consider we summarize the prophet's advice indicating

What we need to do ++++++ *What God does when we obey* ++++++ *What we receive*



God speaks through Isaiah bringing the Israelites to task because of their wicked and sinful ways. They wonder why their fasting and self-afflictions are not being heard but are told they simply carry out their own pursuits, are hard on their workers, and even are quarrelsome among themselves. Furthermore, Isaiah gives God's response to what a meaningful fast is all about:

*Releasing those bound unjustly,
Freeing the oppressed and untying the thongs of their yokes.*

At a much later time the scribes, Pharisees, and religious leaders question Jesus as to why he and his disciples do not fast¹ not realizing that when Jesus heals the people and frees them from oppressing spirits he is accomplishing the fast that the Father prescribes in Isaiah! Jesus is clear; "Come to me, all of you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you."² Consider, for example the woman who was under the yoke of a demonic spirit that drained her strength causing her to be badly stooped³ or the man with the withered hand⁴; in both cases release from subjugating spirits is accomplished and they are freed from oppression.

Isaiah also indicates that all are also called to be generous in

*Sheltering the homeless, bringing help to the afflicted,
Sharing bread with the hungry and clothing the naked.*

¹ Mark 2:18, Matt 9:14

² Matt 11:28

³ Luke 13:11-13

⁴ Mark 3:3-6

While we may not be in a position to directly accomplish these things we are called to be helpful to those who are in a position to do so; in *response God will send light, healing, and vindication our way.*

*Our light will break forth and rise in the darkness,
Our wounds will be quickly healed,
We will be vindicated and God's glory shall be our rear guard,
And the Lord will answer our calls when we cry for help.*

Furthermore we are *told our attitudes must not oppress others and our words are to free from false accusations with malicious speech and gossip.* In return we will receive *the Lord's guidance, our gloom will be dispersed by God's light, and our strength renewed by his Spirit.* All these things yield *the basis to build on the foundation of goodness thus enabling us to repair breaches and restore relationships.*



Along with these requirements Isaiah also emphasizes *we are to honor the Sabbath as a holy day by holding back from following our own pursuits and seeking our interests, and to be especially careful that our speech brings out only the good and honorable.*

In return *we will find delight in the Lord and be nourished with the heritage of our ancestry, receiving all things necessary for life and growth, passed down as graces and spiritual gifts.* In summary we can become better persons doing better things.

Isaiah then reminds us: *"The mouth of the Lord has spoken!"*

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