

He Fasted, We Benefit

Mental and Spiritual Preparation!

Wednesday, 2/26 at 11:00 & 7:00

Ash Wednesday – 2020

Lenten Wednesdays: Services 11 & 7; Meals 12 & 6 – beginning 3/4

Introduction: Dear friends in Christ: Our focus today is on **fasting**, not for weight loss, *but for mental and spiritual preparation!* Today we will touch on **7 key Bible passages**, which are laid out below in **chronological order**.

1. **Return with Fasting** (835 BC; **Joel** 2:12-14 ESV): A call for Judah to repent: **“Yet even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;¹³ and rend your hearts and not your garments.”** Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he **relents over disaster.** // It’s easy to say, “I’m sorry.” When our sorrow is accompanied by sincere fasting, weeping, and mourning, *then we express the grave matter of our sin.* And why should we? Because the LORD is **“slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.”**
2. **Much Concern and Fasting** (539 BC; **Daniel** 6:16-18 ESV): **Then the king commanded, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. The king declared to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!”¹⁷ And a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den...¹⁸ Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; no diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him.** // The king was tricked into condemning Daniel; however, when he had Daniel

put into the den of hungry lions, *he focused on Daniel, not on food, and rejected all diversions.*

3. **Horrible News and Fasting** (474 BC; **Esther** 3:13 – 4:3 ESV):
Letters were sent by couriers to all the king’s provinces with instruction to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month [*the day after is now a celebration called Purim; celebrated this year on March 9*]...¹⁵ **The couriers went out hurriedly by order of the king... And the king and Haman sat down to drink** [*to celebrate their plan to get rid of the trouble-making Jews*], **but the city of Susa was thrown into confusion.** // The king didn’t know his queen was a Jew, but Haman, *who hated Mordecai – the Jew*, was happy.
^{4:1} **When Mordecai** [*the uncle of Esther*] **learned all that had been done, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and he cried out with a loud and bitter cry....**³ **And in every province, wherever the king's command and his decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and many of them lay in sackcloth and ashes.** // How do we respond to bad news; say a quick prayer and then go on with our regular routine? Back then and today, *the practice of fasting can aid our mental and spiritual preparation for very serious prayers.*
4. **Great Sorrow, Fasting, and Confession** (458 BC; **Ezra** 9:1-6 ESV):
These things happened after many returned to Judah from exile in Babylon: **...the officials approached me** [*Ezra, “a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses” ((7:6))*] **and said, “The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations...² For they have taken some of their daughters to be wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands. And in**

this faithlessness the hand of the officials and chief men has been foremost.” // As recorded in Deut. Ch. 7, the LORD said through Moses, “You shall not intermarry with them... for [those foreign women] would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods” (3-4 ESV). The participants were officials, chief men, and others.

³ As soon as I [Ezra] heard this, I tore my garment and my cloak and pulled hair from my head and beard and sat appalled. ⁴ Then all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the faithlessness of the returned exiles, gathered around me while I sat appalled until the evening sacrifice. ⁵ And at the evening sacrifice I rose from my fasting, with my garment and my cloak torn, and fell upon my knees and spread out my hands to the LORD my God, ⁶ saying: “O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads...” // Think of iniquity as water; *they were drowning in their sins!* Part of Ezra’s preparation to pray included fasting; *he was focused on the sin and shame, as he confessed to his God!*

5. **Sorrow, Fasting, and Prayer** (445 BC; **Nehemiah** 1:2-6 ESV):
...one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I [Nehemiah, an exile who had become the cupbearer of the king of Persia] asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile [in Babylon], and concerning Jerusalem. ³ And they said to me, “The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.” // Many exiles had gone back to rebuild the wall and gates of Jerusalem, but they were failing.

⁴ As soon as I [Nehemiah] heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. ⁵ And I said, “O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his

commandments, ⁶ let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you....” // The prayer of Nehemiah was joined with weeping, mourning, and fasting; *he was not distracted by food!*

6. **Jesus Fasted** (**Matthew** 4:1-4 ESV): **Then** [*right after He was baptized and anointed*] **Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.** ² **And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.** ³ **And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”** ⁴ **But he answered, “It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.””** // Sometimes our stomachs can become our gods. As Jesus used fasting to aid His mental and spiritual preparation for the devil’s temptations, so let us do the same!
7. **Prayer and Fasting** (**Acts** 14:23 ESV): **And when [Paul and Barnabas] had appointed elders** [*pastors*] **for them in every church** [*in all the places where they had done their missionary work*], **with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.** // The Word and Sacrament work of those men was very important for eternal souls, so *fasting accompanied the prayers offered on their behalf.*

Let Us Pray: Dear Father, fasting can be foreign to us, yet it was common in the OT and practiced in the NT. With thanksgiving for Your forgiveness, let us be serious about Your Word and sin, and sometimes accompany our prayers with fasting!

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