

surrendering his inheritance to him. But Jacob had wrestled with God for deliverance, and God had renamed him Israel.

Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed (Genesis 32:28 KJV).

Jacob was no more the supplanter, he left Peniel as Israel, a prince of God with power and lived in peace and at peace with God. Israel had God's ear, Who answered his petitions and he had influence with men, as would a prince. The simile would certainly not be lost on Isaiah and strengthens the message he had to deliver to God's people, the transformation that repentance and obedience would bring.

2 Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God.

There appears to be a note of contempt, even sarcasm, in God's phrasing of these words. The Lord is plainly declaring: 'it is all an act'. Like all religious men, from the outside, from what they say and do, they look good, but it is no more than skin deep. There is no love relationship there.

Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men (Isaiah 29:13).

It was no different when Jesus walked the earth. He quoted this scripture to the scribes and Pharisees, the religious men of His day (Matthew 15:8). In many of the discussions He had with them He talked of their hypocrisy:

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness (Matthew 23:27).

King David recognised the need for truth in the inward parts (Psalm 51:6) as being a fundamental for a right relationship with God. The Jews had no fear of the Lord, it did not even occur to them that God could be unhappy with what they were doing. After all they were doing the best they could and keeping the letter of the Law, most of the time. But as Paul points out in Romans, the law is only effective when we keep all of it, all the time. The Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus brings us into direct fellowship with God through the Holy Spirit. We are made righteous by the Blood of Jesus and He suffered, died and rose again that He might take upon Himself our sin, so that we could be blessed with His righteousness. However, the blood is only effective if we walk in the light², in close

² 1John 1:7.

communion with God. It is obvious then that love is has to be the basis of our experience with God and with one another³.

3 Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours.

In the first sentence of this verse, the Jews complained that they were keeping their part of the bargain, they were fasting and praying, covering themselves in sackcloth and ashes, but they were getting nowhere. They were getting no answers, God was not blessing them and the heavens were as brass. No presence, no blessing, it felt as though they were on their own. God's response, in the second sentence, was straight to the point. Yes you do fast, but your fast is insincere, it did not meet the criteria God had set. They made sure that all of their servants were working hard on the day of their fast, that their wealth would not be affected. They may have rent their garments but they did not rend their heart. They should have been interceding for their sins and for a closer walk with God but instead they were enjoying themselves just mechanically going without food, not really fasting, not waiting upon God. They made their servants work so that their earthly needs were being met.

4 Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high.

What is more they were fasting to get a scheme together, asking God's help, letting them win an argument, to get one up on those they debated with in the market place. Scheming to make them appear more intelligent, more spiritual than their opponents. Their ego, their need to be right on some scriptural point was more important than their relationship with God. God was not playing their game. He plainly told them their voice would not be heard if they conducted themselves dishonestly. That is a surprising statement given that there are two instances that immediately spring to mind when what was happening on earth cried out to God to such an extent that He decisively intervened. The first was Cain's death: his blood cried out from the earth to God. Secondly, there was the sin being perpetrated in Sodom and Gomorrah. The sin shrieked at God and drew Him to take action.

What was obvious from what God told Isaiah was this. The dishonesty and disunity put the Jews at a disadvantage - He would not hear them. They were all the same because they were all engaged in doing the same thing. He could hear sinners but He could not hear them.

5 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?

³ John 13:34-35.

God referred them back to His intent in respect of fasting: so that they could humble themselves before God, seeking repentance and forgiveness. asking them to compare what they were doing with what He instituted. When the Scribes and Pharisees fasted in Jesus' day they would make it obvious they were fasting but Jesus told His Disciples to make it so no-one else knew: dress and prepare yourselves just like any other day but sincerely fast asking God to meet your need. Fasting is not an ego trip, on the contrary it is a humbling before God. When Daniel fasted for three weeks the Angel of God appeared to him, the Angel's first words were:

Then he said to me, "Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words (Daniel 10:12 NASB).

Daniel fasted according to God's command, humbling himself before God, God heard him and he received an answer. In fact our whole life needs to be a humbling before God: teachable and obedient.

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?

God goes on to tell the Jews what is the fast He has ordained. Fasting is a preparation for deliverance in the Spirit. Our focus when we fast is not only on ourselves that we might come into a closer walk, but also on the needs of those around us. God undertaking and make the way open for Him to move. We cannot use fasting to twist God's arm, we do not need to do that anyway. God is much more ready to give than we are to receive and in greater abundance than we could ever dream of. When we pray and fast in obedience it intensifies God's hearing. We have submitted our flesh to the Spirit, we have humbled ourself. That should bring us to a greater understanding of why it is so vital that we live by the drawing of God's spirit rather than the demands and inadequacies of our flesh. Fast and pray that the bands of wickedness are broken. Satan has to loose the devices that hold people's lives in captivity if we fast and pray. Speak in Christ's authority over the bondage in people's lives. We do not need to know about individual cases, it is enough to break those bonds in the name of Jesus and to set everyone free who comes to the meeting that night. Equally we fast and pray that God will release the burdens from people's hearts. That the oppression of the enemy will be totally shattered and broken, completely brought to nothing through the precious blood of Jesus. That every yoke of bondage will be shattered. Yokes are used to tether beasts of burden to their heavy loads, to the hard labour of the flesh, to control them and keep them in slavery. But God has come that we might be set free, for he whom the Son sets free is free indeed.

In summary our fasting and praying is primarily to set the captives free, to intercede for their deliverance. It is often used as preparation for a gospel or revival meeting. I know the fashion is to have healing meetings and gospel meetings. Meetings to meet special gospel

needs. Every meeting should be a revival meeting where souls are saved, people healed and delivered. Where the Holy Spirit has free course and lives are changed.

7 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?

It goes beyond spiritual needs. God knows if we have earthly needs before He actually saves us and as a Church we should be addressing these issues too. God is interested in all of us, not just our Spirit. Human beings comprise Spirit, Soul and Body: God gave it all to us and we must give it back to Him. He wants us to worship Him with our whole body. That is why Jesus and the Disciples went to such great lengths to tell us the extent of the benefits of having God's manifest presence living within us. Just as the Shekinah Glory filled the Holy of Holies and sanctified the whole Temple, God has filled our Spirit, our Holy of Holies with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Father, sanctifying us, making us holy.

General Booth often said it is no good preaching the gospel to a man with an empty stomach. Fill his stomach first and then he will listen to your gospel message. Or words to that effect.

We should provide spiritual and natural shelter to the homeless and the dispossessed. Nakedness is linked to sin. This phrase means that we should not see a man bound in sin without preaching the gospel to him and constraining him to give his heart to the Lord. The power of God setting him free from the bondage of sin. We should also be careful to meet the needs of those around us. Man is Spirit, soul and body and we must minister to him on every level.

8 Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rereward.

If we do this then God is going to bless us, more importantly He will bless those we minister to. Our blessing is not the reason to do it, or we fall into the trap of being insincere, but there is a reward. Modern Churches would put on a mask of being self-effacing but if we know and declare the blessing is not from us, then we will not take God's glory but give all the glory to Him.

This is the recompense of reward that we will receive:

- We will not stumble around in darkness but God will be a lamp unto our feet. His light will also enlighten those people we speak to;
- His revelation will take root in us and we will bring us into greater truth and release the power and presence of God within us;

- God's presence will restore us. Not only will we have physical health but we will be fed and restored every day. The joy of the Lord will be our strength, the peace of God will guide us and the love of God will be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit;
- Our testimony will be the righteousness of God. The righteousness of God will sustain us and give us entrance right into the throne room of God. We will prevail with God and be princes in the Kingdom;
- The Shekinah Glory will be our rereward as He was the rereward of the Israelites as they were led out of Egypt to Canaan. God was with them, provided for them, talked to them. worked miracles on their behalf and defeated all their enemies. The extent of God's presence dwelling with us is this:
 - *But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you (Romans 8:11).*
 - We are sanctified, protected, restored and made alive again: Spirit, soul and body. It is a complete and perfect work. There is no part of us that is 'owned' by satan, Jesus paid the full price to redeem us - every part of us. That is the extent of our salvation. The power of the Spirit of God, the Shekinah Glory did not just fill the space in the Holy of Holies, He filled every atom of material that surrounded it: the whole Tabernacle was infused with God's presence and He sanctified the whole structure because of His indwelling presence. We are sanctified, made holy, in exactly the same way.

9 Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity;

We return again to the story of Israel. God changed Jacob's name, He called him Israel:

And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed (Genesis 32:28).

Strong's Dictionary defines the word Israel to mean 'he will rule as God', which provides us with a much better description of the mighty transformation that had taken place in Jacob. The given name represented the person's character - Jacob had been given a new name, a name that described who he was in God. It also gives an insight into the inheritance we have in God if we are prepared to seek Him until we are filled with all the fulness of God. The component parts are already in us if we are born again of the Spirit of God and baptised with the Holy Spirit. For salvation brings the Spirit of Christ and the baptism of the Holy Spirit brings the presence of the Father, for He is the Spirit of the Father. Baptised actually means pickled, marinated in the Holy Spirit. So that indicates to me that we take

on the character, the nature, the smell and taste of the Holy Spirit. The aim is that He should not just be restricted to our Spirit but pervade our whole being: Spirit, soul and body.

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:17-19).

Strongs Dictionary defines reconciled as 'to compound a difference'. That means to make two things one, eliminating the difference. How wonderful is that? The common theme that runs throughout the descriptions of what God has ultimately done through Jesus is that we become one with Him - we take on His image - God's image. John 17 is all about the oneness that Jesus has with our Father and their oneness with us. The Apostle Paul also plainly states God's ultimate intent behind all He has done for us:

Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him (Ephesians 1:9-10).

We have to understand that if Jesus and our Father have come to live within our spirit the fulness of God is already in place. Next we have to get filled with all that fulness, losing the things that bind us to the earth. They will also know everything there is to know about us. They will know every thought, every word, everywhere we have been and everything we have done or not done. They also know the motivation that is driving us to all those things because it comes out of our spirit. Now some might find that intimidating but I will just say this, that God loves us with such a great and unbounded love that He came to die for us before we received salvation, before He cleaned us up and put His righteousness within us. Jesus was not born in a palace - it was a stable. If you have had to clean out a shed in which animals are kept you will know that it is not a palace. He knows everything about us and He has taken up residence within us and made us His tabernacle, that dung and urine perfume the place. I understand why we could be misled into thinking we are unworthy. In the flesh we are, but His Spirit has come to enliven and quicken our spirit into LIFE and made us His beloved, His CHOSEN dwelling place. He has made us worthy with His worthiness.

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy (1 Peter 2:9-10).

So having defined what it means to have God's ear and His fulness abiding within us, we also have to acknowledge that God has put a condition on it. He says: 'I will give you full

access to Me and the authority to use My power in My name⁴ but you must: *'take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity.'*

Wagging our finger in people's faces, using the scripture to bind people up with religion to prove how spiritual we are is not the ministry that God has given us, it is a ruse of the devil to bring division into the Church. Our ministry is to bring people into the freedom to have a relationship with God for themselves. We must not speak the ministry of the Accuser of the Brethren, nor must we bend the scripture to fit what we think or would like to think, no matter how high minded it might seem. God pronounced a verdict of death upon those Israelites that mixed with other races and took on their mindset and idolatry. It kills us too!

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves (Matthew 23:15).

Not only does that relate to those who would seek to bend the gospel to fit their fleshly thoughts but also to those who generate these conspiracy theories and try and link them to the scripture. It is not truth. If you seriously consider some of these doctrines and the conspiracy theories they are all centred on fleshly understanding and directing our efforts to things of the earth.

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places (Ephesians 6:12).

It is not the governments of this world we need to fight, but the rulers of darkness and their hordes. It is not the prosperity of the world we should seek but the treasures of heaven found in Jesus. Do not let satan aim your prayer and worship at a false target. Do not seek for things; blessing, answers, even riches; but seek God. Ask Him to reveal Himself to you and in you, so that He who is the light of the world may take away every speck of darkness and break down those strongholds. He is our All in all. We do not need more than Him.

10 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:

What we have to do then is give of ourselves, feed those that are hungry, be they hungry for food or hungry for more of God. We cannot all fulfil the same ministry, that is not what God has called us to do⁵ but we can all serve God and minister to those in need. I spent many years feeling guilty that I was not a full on evangelist. I do fulfil the role of evangelist from time to time but that is not what my calling is. Do not let people force you into a mould of what you are not. Our ministry gift should seem natural to us, by that I mean there needs to be a flow, an unction to it. If we are having to struggle and force ourselves to

⁴ Revelation 3:20-21.

⁵ Ephesians 4:11-16.

minister it feels awkward and we telegraph that to those on the receiving end. When you love the ministry that God has given you, when you are at peace and joyfully express what He has put within you it draws people to you. I know a man who is an evangelist. It is a gift, something he so naturally does. There is no strain and the power of God flows from him. I am not an evangelist, although I do get opportunities to evangelise, my ministry is around the oral gifts.

The significance of seeking God for our ministry is to ensure that we are filling the correct role in the Body of Christ. When we are we will fit into our rightful place and the ministry of the Holy Spirit will just flow from us bringing light and blessing to all around us. We keep returning to this theme that God wants to have a close relationship with us so that we can hear Him and draw from Him all that we need to fulfil what He has planned for us. We will be a bright light, bringing light into the world - the Light of Christ.

11 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.

God took Israel from the enforced labour and cruelty of the Egyptian exile, through the wilderness to Canaan, the promised land. We have much to learn from their experience. We see God's instruction to Moses, Aaron's part, Joshua's part and how the people reacted to what God took them through. Human nature has not changed but neither has God, nor the rewards for those that are prepared to follow God whatever it takes. No matter where God takes us, whatever circumstances we may have to enjoy or endure, He will sustain us and we will feast off His abundance. God's love and power will bubble and flow out of us like a river of living water⁶.

12 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.

We may not set out to build anything, just to meet the vision God has nurtured within us. But the reality is that those people who were quickened by God's ministry through you will form the bedrock for those they minister to, bringing about an exponential growth for the Kingdom. The common practice of modern churches is to build something for themselves, to gather together a large group of people and become spiritually and economically prosperous. Filling a building with clones of the leadership or some ministry model. However, the main ministry of the Church is to direct people to God, so that they can be conformed to Christ's image. Someone once said to me that one thing God did not want was a lot of little Jesus' running about. Sorry to disappoint, but that is exactly what He does want, read Romans 8:29. In fact read the four Gospels and Acts, particularly the significance

⁶ John 7:38.

of Jesus sending out His disciples to minister as He did. He showed them how to do it every day for some time, and eventually sent them out on an outreach. What do you think they did? How do you think they went about it? They did what they saw Jesus do, they copied Him, and it worked.

13 If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words:

We are not saved to do as we like. Either in how we live or in what we do. I have heard some preachers say that it would not matter if you sat in a seat and never did anything. I do not agree. That is what the servant did who buried the talent his master gave him⁷. The ministry of Jesus was based on a fundamental tenet, Paul spoke of it in Philippians 2:5-8:

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Because Jesus submitted Himself to the will of God, not for honour and glory but for the glory of His Father and because of His love for us, God blessed Him beyond measure. What is more He blessed the whole of creation with the same unction. All we have to do is believe it and receive. We are servants too. Servants to the people who God brings us into contact with. We are God's friends (His best man) if we have listened to Him and accepted His teaching, moulding us more and more into His image.

14 Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

God is our delight. It makes our day when we see men and women, boys and girls saved healed and delivered. It becomes an overwhelming desire to see God work and change men and women's lives. There is nothing better! When we see all the good things God has done we are filled with love, joy and peace, worshipping God for His goodness which brings us even more into His presence and the abundance of His blessing. So it goes on, that wonderful circle of life in the Holy Spirit.

Wait though, there is Jacob again. What is the heritage of Jacob? The blessing that God gave him after he wrestled with Him sparked off that heritage: first the relationship and then out of Jacob came Israel. Hundreds of thousands of people who settled in Canaan and grew into a mighty nation that today numbers over 8.7 million, despite the horrors of WWII and centuries of persecution and pogroms against them. God has continued to bless

⁷ Matthew 25:14-46

them. They have not stopped being God's Chosen People but we Gentiles have been added to the Vine. The nation of Israel is being blessed and the land they have been granted will be the centre of Christ's reign upon the earth during the millennium.

In conclusion

Through Isaiah 58 the Lord clearly demonstrates that we are not to trample the truth of God in the scramble to put one over on our Brothers and Sisters in the Lord. Nor are we to use the scripture to bring fear and doubt into people's minds or undermine the truth of God's word through false doctrine. We must carefully and prayerfully read the scripture to understand what God is saying to us. It is the Word of God, not words put together by a man but the Word of God Himself, so we cannot bend it and manipulate it to form another gospel.

The key reason that the Jews missed the Messiah was that they had 'adjusted' God's words to fit their current circumstances. They had been invaded and occupied by the Roman army so they were looking for a political leader to deliver their flesh from tyranny, not their spirit from sin and return their heart to Him, as God had promised.

God clearly tells us in Isaiah 58 that to misuse the word of God in this way is sin: it brings upon us God's displeasure. It pollutes our relationship with Him and once we get out of His will, out of His presence we get hard hearted and religious. Everything we do, including fasting and prayer is no longer a heartfelt sacrifice to God, driven by love but a mechanical habit. This is the word that the Lord spoke to the Church in Ephesus⁸, they had done the right thing but they had become hard hearted, they had lost their first love and were mechanically keeping truth but it was not enough.

What is more this attitude, this spirit, this mode of living stems the anointing. It is not until we repent and start to minister simple truth, the promises of God, and worship God through our words and actions that we see the presence and power of God in operation. The light of God breaks through into our experience and we become a watered garden - we start to flourish and blossom. God is right there with us, attentive to our every word. Jacob's blessing is upon us, we have become Israel: we have wrestled with God and become a Prince in the Spirit. God hears us and answers our petitions to Him.

The purpose of the scripture is to build us up and strengthen us.

So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10:17).

Faith is the very substance of our experience in God⁹, without faith it is impossible to please Him¹⁰. Everything we receive, we receive through faith. Furthermore, the word of God has a

⁸ Revelation 2:4-5.

⁹ Hebrews 11:1.

¹⁰ Hebrews 11:6.

very specific ministry in the redemption of the purchased possession¹¹. His ministry of cutting away all that is of the flesh in us¹², is paramount in bringing us to the fullness of the stature of a man in Christ Jesus¹³. What Spirit we are of is of crucial importance. God has to know us, we have to be of His Spirit, bone of His bone, flesh of His flesh, one with Him¹⁴, His betrothed that we might be His Bride. The Apostle Paul tells us that we need to know one another after the spirit¹⁵, not after the flesh. That is because that is how God knows us.

But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out (Luke 13:27-28).

The primary purpose for us is to glorify our Father, to worship Him not only with our mouth but with everything we are. God inhabits the praises of His people. We are worshipping when we sing and rejoice together and we also worship God through obedience, the greatest expression of love.

If you [really] love Me, you will keep (obey) My commands (John 14:15 AMP).

So take strength my Brother and my Sister let the love of God be shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Spirit, partaking of His wonderful divine nature. Go and set the captives free with the freedom you have freely received of God and He will bless you with more than you ever thought possible.

Lean on, trust in, and be confident in the Lord with all your heart and mind and do not rely on your own insight or understanding. In all your ways know, recognise, and acknowledge Him, and He will direct and make straight and plain your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; reverently fear and worship the Lord and turn [entirely] away from evil. It shall be health to your nerves and sinews, and marrow and moistening to your bones (Proverbs 3:5-8 AMP).

© Mike Copeman, Omega Ministries, 2021.

¹¹ Ephesians 1:14.

¹² Hebrews 4:12-13.

¹³ Ephesians 4:13.

¹⁴ Ephesians 5:32; Genesis 2:23.

¹⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:16.