

## MONDAY 16 May 2022 "Fasting" (Matt. 6:16-18)

Good Monday morning to you my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

When you were a child did you play "hide and seek"? When a teenager, did you attempt to hide some of your behavior from your parents? *As an adult, are there some secrets in your life you have worked diligently to keep secret?* In fact, do you have some secrets you intend to take to the grave with you, determined they will never be known by anyone? *But when you and I stand before God, will He know those secrets, and do you suppose He might want to discuss those secrets with us personally and privately?*

We're spending these days with Matthew, a disciple of Jesus, in the weeks following the Passover/Easter weekend when Jesus was crucified and rose from the dead. Matthew is reflecting deeply on the first major message he ever heard Jesus speak to a large crowd of people. Matthew wrote it down for us in his book, chapter 5,6,7. *I notice three times Matthew records this statement from Jesus that day: "your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." (Matt. 6:4, 6, 18)* In the home of your childhood and in your many years in school, did you learn that repetition means significance? *So how significant do you suppose something is if GOD repeats it three times in one chapter?*

Do you believe **God SEES everything**, even those things done in the dark? What about plans made but never actually put into action? Do you believe **God HEARS everything**, even whispers, even words unspoken while they are only thoughts? So, what do you suppose God means when He speaks of **"what is done in secret"**? Oh my, that causes us to hit the brakes in our life journey and ponder deeply, doesn't it? If you are like most everyone else, there's a lot that goes on in your mind and heart that no one ever knows anything about and you in fact never actually put into words or action. But is God watching as those ideas roll around in your head and mine? *What does this statement, made by Jesus, repeated three times, tell us that God will do about the 'secrets'?*

This third time Jesus said, **"your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you"**, He was talking about "Fasting". Now that's something most people connect with dieting and weight loss, but that's not at all what 'fasting' was about in the first century, did you know that? In fact, you may know every year Muslims around the world 'fast' or abstain from food and beverage, from sunup until sundown for 30 consecutive days during what they call 'Ramadan'. *That is what 'fasting' was all about in Jesus' day also. People abstained from food and drink for the purpose of spending more time in prayer and drawing near to God.* Sometimes they did it out of desperation, seeking help or an answer from God in a difficult situation. Sometimes they simply wanted a closer relationship with God. But sadly, too many people in Jesus' day were using what should have been a private spiritual exercise as a public prideful activity drawing attention to themselves.

Matthew records that Jesus said: **"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do...to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you they have received their reward in full."** (Matt. 6:16)

We understand that don't we? This happens in all types of ways as people draw attention to themselves hoping for the applause or sympathy of people. Jesus is saying, when someone does that, rather than going to God with their concern, whatever they receive from people is their reward. *But for those people who bring their concerns to God in private, trusting HIM to know their need, even better than they know their own need, God's response will be far more than what people in public might have done for them.* So, in regard to 'fasting', Jesus said: **"when you fast, wash your face so it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you."** (Matt. 6:17,18)

Since the days of Jesus this spiritual discipline of fasting and prayer has been something very significant in the lives of many people. You see my friends, abstaining from something you enjoy, desire or maybe even depend on will leave a significant void in your life. And your hunger, your desire for that thing, will grow the more you fast or abstain. Food is an obvious thing many people 'fast' from. A prolonged 'food fast' can be dangerous of course, for your body needs nutrition. But you probably know what it feels like to go a day or two or maybe three without eating, right? Remember that gnawing hunger you feel inside? Liquid is a much more dangerous fast, for dehydration can set in quickly since God made our bodies to need liquid. I do NOT recommend you attempt any type of liquid fast.

But in 2022 may I suggest some other types of 'fasting' which may be even more effective in providing you the time to meet with God, and the rapidly growing hunger abstention will create in you? What about 'fasting' from TV or all forms of social media for several days? How would that affect your life? You'd probably feel isolated, totally cut off from information, and even isolated from humanity, am I right? *But can you imagine how that sense of isolation could feed in you a deep hunger for closeness with God?*

*The key to 'fasting' is what you do with the TIME that you gain by not engaging in whatever it is you are abstaining from. If your 'fast' has spiritual purposes, the best use of that time is reading Scripture, praying and worshiping God, for in that spiritual interaction, God will do what Jesus promised: "...reward you".* That 'reward' will be a significant closeness you will feel with God. You will likely also feel the work of the Holy Spirit convicting you of things which God wants to deal with in your life. That provides you a great opportunity to be honest with God in repentance and the cleansing you will experience, as God forgives and removes the residue caused by sin and secrets, will be amazing to you. God may also give you great clarity about questions you have been wrestling with or decisions you are trying to make or even a renewed purpose in your life, a God honoring purpose.

*But 'fasting' is also a battle for your deep desire for whatever you are fasting from will intensify the longer you fast.* You can understand that, right? If you are fasting from food, your mind will be filled with images of your favorite foods and it will be difficult to focus your heart on God, that's the battle. If you're fasting from social media, of course your mind will imagine all that you are missing or all that people are saying about you, right? *Fasting is a battle my friends, for the dark kingdom does NOT want you drawing any closer to God and certainly not dealing with the secret stuff in your life that Jesus would like to clean out!* But can you see how "Fasting" with worship, Word and prayer, my friends, may be one of the greatest experiences in your life? In fact, I can assure you that you may have such a significant spiritual experience you will want to make fasting a regular experience with Jesus! Now we are beginning to understand what Jesus meant when He said three times: ***"Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."***

The Bible, of course, has many examples of fasting, both in the Old and New Testaments, and maybe you even know some people who fast, worship, pray and dig deeply into God's Word regularly. I wonder, is God stirring in you a desire to attempt a spiritual fast, seeking a deeper and more significant relationship with Jesus? To help you more fully consider this matter of fasting and how it might help you in your spiritual maturity friends, I'm including a link to a summary of fasting that is used by the church that my wife and I currently are part of. Many of us participate in a 21-day period of fasting and prayer twice each year as we seek more maturity in our spiritual journey with Jesus.

For today, may I challenge all of us to consider that Jesus is wanting us to probe deeply into the implications of this powerful, three times repeated statement of Jesus: ***"...your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you."*** (Matt. 6:4,6,18) *But also is Jesus inviting you and me to consider integrating some type of regular fasting into the maturing of our spiritual journey with Jesus?* Take some time right now to speak with Jesus about this. I wonder what He's going to say to you.

**Today's Scripture is Matthew 6:16-18.**