



Men's Discipleship Class – Week 8
November 8, 2018

Verses:

Matthew 9:14-15

Acts 13:1-3

Acts 14:20-23

Esther 4:12-16

2 Samuel 1:11-12, 25-26

Ezra 8:21-23

Exodus 34

1 Kings 19

Matthew 4

Slide over to Matthew 9. We are going to talk today about fasting. We ended the other day with the idea that you need to be able to hear God. You need to particularly be able to hear the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit. We are going to discuss how to accentuate that. I want you to listen to Matthew 9:14-15. Before we read this, remember the argument Jesus made. When he was going back to heaven, they were really upset about that. He told them it is beneficial for you if I go. If I go, I am going to send the comforter. He was exactly right obviously. The argument is that if you are with Jesus physically and he is in this room with you, you can ask him a question. If he goes over to my office, you have no contact with him. So while he was here, he was special. He was locked in a body. You can only be one place at one time. When the Holy Spirit comes inside us, he is in all of us that know Christ. Now, we can all hear Jesus no matter where we are at any given time. His argument was right. It was beneficial that he went away. You then have this statement that does not seem to fit that. Listen to Matthew 9.

14Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast,^c but your disciples do not fast?” 15And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.

He says there is coming a point when I leave and the Holy Spirit comes. At that point, they will fast. They will not fast while I am here. When I am gone and he comes, that is when fasting will occur in their life. I am not going to ask you to hold up your hand, but when is the last time you fasted? We do not do that. As a matter of fact, it is interesting. Richard Foster wrote a book entitled The Celebration of Discipline. I think I am pretty clear with what he said. If I remember right in the first chapter, he talked about the fact that from the time of the reformation which is about 1500 until 1954. There is not a single book written on fasting. We do not do that. My bet is

most of you do not do that. Yet, he said when the Holy Spirit arrives and he is gone that we would. We do not. That is a telling statement for us. It may in fact be one of the arguments why we pray our list instead of his list when we step into a prayer room.

I want to walk through a couple of things with you. Go to Acts 13:1-3.

1Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, a Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." 3Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

You have two things here. They are worshipping and fasting. They hear God's voice as a church based on a combination of worshipping and fasting. Now. How they heard we do not know. What we do know is that as they are doing these two things in a combination factor, God speaks to them. When they hear God speak to them and they respond to that and they send Paul and Barnabas out, they then fast as they execute their ordination and calling. You have these two things that occur here. The church is able to hear in their worship the voice of God in connection with fasting. Then again when they execute God's call in their life, they fast before they send Paul and Barnabas out

Look at a similar thing in Acts 14. Look in verses 19-23. Now you have to remember something. They do not have the situation we have today. Listen to this.

19But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.

So he goes down this road in Rome. He will step into a city. Some of them are receptive of the gospel. Some of them are not. He goes city to city. He will spend a year and a half in Corinth. He will spend three years in Ephesus. For the rest of it, he is just going city to city starting churches. Now look at this.

20But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. 21When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, 22strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. 23And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

So again, they fast in connection with elders and their appointment. Now. This is important because you have got to remember something. These are brand new Christians. Every person in the church has been saved at the same time. It is not like today. If we need an elder in the church, there is someone who has been in the church twenty-five or thirty years. They know the scripture. These guys do not know anything. They fast as they appoint them because somehow they think this fasting will enhance the appointment and the calling they have for which they know nothing. It is an interesting concept.

Look at Esther 4. Go to the book of Esther. What is unique about the book of Esther? God is never mentioned in Esther. Go to Psalms and then hang a left. There you will find Esther. When I grew up before we had these massive study Bibles, we were taught that if you open the Bible in the middle you went to Psalms. If you opened it at a quarter, you went to Kings. If you opened it at

the back quarter, you went to Matthew. Now if you open it in the middle you are probably in Genesis, so it doesn't work much anymore. Again, this is the most coincidental book where all of the coincidences happen. You basically got a guy Haman who hates the Jews. Mainly, he hates Jews because there is a guy Mordecai who will not bow down to Haman. Haman is like the number two guy in the land. He is important. Mordecai will not bow down. It hacks him off, so he cuts a deal with the king. The king does not understand and says to wipe out and kill all of the Jews. The king signs it in. It is not like today's government. It is signed and done. It has to be executed. He signs this deal. Mordecai comes to Esther who has been married to the king. He says that he has a little issue here. Here we go. They told Mordecai what Esther has said. Matter of fact, he comes to her and says, 'Listen, you have got to deal with this.'

12And they told Mordecai what Esther had said. 13Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. 14For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" 15Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, 16"Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish." 17Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

Now. They are facing extermination as a nation. She says to tell everyone to fast. What is missing from that command? Prayer. Why doesn't she tell them to pray? If you do not pray when you fast, you are dieting. Okay? So she assumes if they fast that they will pray. Fasting is basically you taking the time you would eat and do not eat. In that timeframe, you spend that entire hour that you would have spent eating in prayer without the food. That is the essence of fasting. If you just do not eat and skip meals that is not fasting. Fasting is skipping a meal and taking that time to seek the heart of the Father. Otherwise, you are simply dieting. She argues for a fast because she knows when that comes it will work.

Look at 2 Samuel 1. We are we are going to look at 11-12 and 25-26. David had one friend his entire existence. His family despised him. They did not value him. His brothers did not value him. His father did not value him. If you remember when Samuel comes to anoint David, Jesse pulls out all the sons except David. He then asks if there is anyone else. Jesse tells them that they have another kid but he is out with the sheep. Shepherding was not a wonderful thing to do. It still is not. They bring David in, and Samuel names him as the guy. The family does not value him. He has one friend in his life. One. Jonathan. The friendship they have is incredible. Who is Jonathan's dad? Saul. Who is supposed to be the next king when Saul dies? Jonathan. He says to David at one point in his life when Saul is trying to kill David that Saul knows. Saul even tries to kill Jonathan. Saul knows that in the day he dies, you will be king, and I will be next to you. Jonathan gives his kingdom to David. They had an incredibly rich friendship. Jonathan was the only friend he had. Jonathan has such integrity that even though his father has tried to kill him, he hangs with his father. They both die on Mount Gilboa. Listen to how important this is. Look in 2 Samuel 1:25-26.

25"How the mighty have fallen
in the midst of the battle!
"Jonathan lies slain on your high places.
26I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan;
very pleasant have you been to me;

your love to me was extraordinary,
surpassing the love of women.

That is not a homosexual statement. We will talk about marriage next semester. I am always careful when I say this to the women. I am careful about everything I say to the women. It is easier to hang with men than women. Ed and I deer hunt together. We have for a number of years. We are abusive to one another at the deer lease. If I said the same thing to my wife that I say to Ed at the deer lease, it just would not translate the same way. So. You can hang with guys. It is a little easier. David had a little bit of trouble in his marriage. He had Michael, for example, who he was married to who was Saul's daughter. Remember he is dancing when they bring the Arc of the Covenant in. She rails on him. He says I will do it anytime I want to. I am doing it for God. Matter of fact, the Bible says that from that moment on she is barren. So, he had a tough road with wives. Jonathan's friendship was just deep in his life. It ripped it when he lost it. So, listen to what happens in 1:11. So, they now know he is dead.

11Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him.12And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son and for the people of the LORD and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.

We have a guy in deep grief. One of the things he has everybody do is they fast. Now normally, and I certainly do not do this. I have a funeral tomorrow of a guy that just died out of the blue the other day. Matter of fact, he and his wife were planning to go boating on Lake Sommerville. He had gone to get some stuff at the store. She is packing up. He has not come home. She calls him. She texts him and gets no response. There is a knock on the door. A police officer is standing there. Her husband died. He had a heart attack and put his truck in the ditch. I do not go to people in those moments and tell them they need to fast. In point of fact, David loses the only friend he will ever have. What he has them do in the moment of this deep grief and the loss of the king of the kingdom is to spend the rest of the day fasting. So, fasting also accentuates my walk with him in the times when I am facing the hardest thing I face.

Look at Ezra 8. Go back to Psalms if you can find it. Look at Ezra 8:21-23. Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalm, Proverbs. Look at chapter 8. He has just told the king that they are going back to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls in the city and the temple. They are going to try and put this back together. The king asks if he needs anybody to go. He replies 'No' that our God has really got this, and we do not need your help. So, then look at what he says.

21Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods. 22For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king, "The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him." 23So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty.

We have intercession here. He asks God to honor what he has told the king. As part of that prayer of intercession, they fast. Now. When you look at all of these, it is interesting. It enhances our worship. We should do it when people are called, and we send them out. We should do it to know which elders to appoint. To place their blessing on the elders, they fasted. They are facing great danger. She has them fast because this is an intercession. You fast in the middle of deep grief. Again, you fast when God has made a promise. You fast to stand in an intercession on that promise. It is interesting to me that we have all these places. If I want God to honor my prayer

life, I want to handle the grief in my life, I want to make sure I am in the right place, and I want to hear him when he speaks, fasting accentuates every single one of these. It is interesting. It has this impact. Jesus said we do it. Yet honestly for the most part, we do not do it at all. We do not talk about it. We do not exhibit it. We do not bring it into our life.

My bet is as dads and as husbands, you have never done this with your family. You have never pulled your family aside and said, "Look, we have an issue we are facing. I am changing jobs. I am not sure what to do. We are going to fast and ask God to tell us what to do." My bet is that as dads and husbands, you have not done this. Yet, scripture is clear on it and including our Lord saying once the Holy Spirit comes, that is when you will fast. Yet, we do not.

Matthew 6:16-18. We will not go there. This is how you do not fast. What did Jesus say? Do not do it where everyone can see you. This has no bearing on your life anymore. You fast. You go to lunch with someone and you are fasting. You do not get anything to eat. They will ask why you are not eating. You will answer that you are fasting. They will laugh. They have no idea. You can tell the truth and nobody is buying it. This does not have any application anymore. You can be honest with people and tell them you are fasting. Nobody will buy it. Honestly, you do not fast for other people.

There are a couple of ways to fast. Look up these passages later. Do not go there now. Exodus 34. 1 Kings 19. Matthew 4. All three of those passages are forty day fasts. Now. (Laughter) That would be my response, John. I am thinking after forty days I will look like my wife stepping into the pulpit. It is interesting. If you read the texts, all three show God pushing them into it. It was not their decision. Moses was up on the mountain. He goes forty days hanging out with God with no food. In 1 Kings 19, God tells Elijah when he is running from Jezebel to eat now because he has a long walk ahead of him. It is going to take forty days to get there. Jesus in Matthew 4 spends forty days fasting. All three are commanded by God. I am just going to tell you this. If you go home and you are in the bathroom reading Guns & Ammo and all of a sudden there appears on the wall, fast for forty days. Then you should fast. If you do not have that, then do not do that. Okay? This is no applicable to you unless God absolutely forces you into it.

When you look at Esther, it is a three day fast. That is obviously what happens here. There is no magic thing to three. She simply says to pray for three days. It may have been that she knew it would take three days for her to get the courage up to go and see the king. It does not matter. There was exactly that.

I am going to give you the simplest way to fast. You can do a one day fast once in a while. What you do is a twenty-four hour fast. You eat breakfast on Monday morning. You do not eat lunch on Monday. You do not eat supper on Monday. You eat breakfast on Tuesday. You are fasting for twenty-four hours. It is a simple way to begin fasting. It is a simple way to start it. Three days I a little hard to just start. Forget forty days. You can do this. This is simple. Some of us need to do it for more than the spiritual exercise. At any rate, I am talking to the guy I see in the mirror. This is a simple way to do it. Obviously, I need to do it. Here is what we are going to do in the group. We have November, December, and January. We are going to fast one day in each one of those months. When you fast, do each one of those fasts as a one day. You skip lunch and dinner. I want you at lunch and dinner to take the book 1 Timothy. I want you to read it. I want you to ask God to give you insight out of the book for two things. I want you to ask for insight for your life and for your family. Ask God to show you in this book what He wants from you and what He wants from your family. When we come back, we are going to take one Thursday in February and probably will still have a lesson, but once finished, we are going to share in here what we think God taught us. Okay? We are going to go November, December, and January. The first thing in

February after the lesson we will share what you think God taught us out of fasting. It is a simple fast. It is an easy fast. We are going to base it on Acts 13. We want to hear what He says to us. I think it will enhance your intercession. If you want to pray God's list not your list, you have to hear his voice. One of the best ways to hear his voice is to fast. If you are going through deep loss, fasting is critical because it accentuates that. We are going to fast simply. We are going to 1 Timothy and see what it says.