

## **This is the Fast the I have Chosen**

**Annie**

### **Scriptures:**

Matthew 17:19-21

Isaiah 58

Matthew 6:16-18

What springs into your mind when the subject of fasting is raised? Do you automatically think about how long you can go without food? Or, if not food, maybe which mode of technology you can bear to not touch, which seems to be a popular choice these days? Does your heart sink just a tiny bit, be honest, does it? In even more honesty, do you regard fasting as an observance that is part of what being a Christian means, one of the duties we need to perform?

One of the most famous verses that is so often quoted is Jesus' explanation of why the disciples were unable to heal the demon possessed boy. It is frequently used as a kind of rallying cry, exhorting Christians to "increase their faith" so that signs and wonders may be accomplished. This is how, in our understanding, we are to be able to demonstrate to the world that we are true followers of Christ.

Do you recall what Jesus tells us about how to fast? It is by no means supposed to be a religious observance, or an imposition placed upon our shoulders as a directive from leadership. It is a private, personal part of our walk with God, solely between us and God. No-one is meant to look at us and be able to recognise that we are fasting. And we are most certainly not meant to broadcast it to all and sundry almost as a badge of honour.

Let us look at how our Father God regards fasting. Chapter 58 in the book of Isaiah is a cry from the heart of God. God knows how easily we become side tracked into turning a trait that is such an integral part of His Nature into a tool we can use to further our own desires. This chapter lays out so clearly that the whole essence of fasting lies with Him, it does not begin with us. It is to be an outpouring of love, compassion and provision for those who do not have enough, who are hungry, dispossessed, lost and alone. It's not about us giving up food and leaving it in the pantry, it is about us sharing what is in our pantry with those who have nothing. And if that means we go without, then so be it.

And, remembering the words of Jesus, the adjunct to fasting is prayer, first and foremost. We do not fast so that we can pray more effectively, we pray so that we know what it is that God in His infinite wisdom, wants us to do, where He wants us to direct our energy and outpouring of our fasting. As we lay aside our preconceptions, let go of our will, draw closer in prayer and worship to Him, He will show us where the needs are, where to extend His love in our community.

I wonder how different the outcome would have been if the disciples had looked at that poor, troubled boy through God's eyes, the eyes of tender love and compassion. If they had taken their tiny mustard seed of faith and, out of pure love, given it to God for Him to use through them. If their prayer had come from hearts that remembered Isaiah 58 and seen the helplessness of

that father and son. If their motive had been compassion not a desire to get the job done.

Fasting is a difficult topic. And through this I have only spoken about it on a personal level. We know in the book of Esther that she calls for a national fast as a cry to God to save her people, and God honoured this. This was a critical time in the history of the nation so the need was to focus on God, to, in essence, remind Him of His promises. Always, when our focus is solely upon Him, we are so much more able to see that His focus never wavers from us and His blessed assurance wells up within us and hope flourishes.

**Prayer:** Father God, prompt us to always search our motives, to come before You with pure hearts, desiring only to perform Your will and show forth Your compassion through Christ who lives within us. Amen.