

# *Who Do You Say That I Am?*

## Seeing and Delighting in Jesus through an Expository Journey through the **Gospel of Matthew** 88- Hungering for God through Fasting- Part 9 Reasons to Fast in the New Covenant- Part 4

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Church February 25, 2024

### **Matthew 9:14-17**

**14 Then the disciples of John came to Him, asking, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?"**

**15 And Jesus said to them, "The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.**

**16 But no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear results.**

**17 Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved."**

*To the Glory of God the Father; God the Son;  
and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

We are continuing to determine if Fasting is the "**unshrunk cloth**" and the "**old wineskins**" of verses 16&17- as some teach. In other words, are the people who say that Fasting was an "Old Testament Truth" that has been made *obsolete* by the entrance of the New Covenant, teaching the Truth? Is it true that Fasting has gone the Way of Sabbath observance; going to the Temple in Jerusalem once a year; the Levitical Priesthood; Tithing; the Sanhedrin Court; animal Sacrifices; and the dietary and ceremonial Aspects of the Old Covenant?

And one of the main Reasons to *reject* such thinking is what Jesus Himself said at the end of verse 15:

**... the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.**

... but then three weeks ago- we also began to look at five *more* Reasons that the New Covenant teaches us that Fasting is still a viable “Means of Grace”:

1. New Testament Believers Should Fast for “*God to raise up Ministries that will Change the World*”
2. New Testament Believers Should Fast for “*Waters that do not Fail*”
3. New Testament Believers Should Fast for the “*Safety of the Little Ones*”
4. New Testament Believers Should Fast for the “*Father’s Reward*”
5. New Testament Believers Should Fast for the “*Return of Jesus*”

... and last week we looked at #3- so, let’s look at #4 together:

#### **4. New Testament Believers Should Fast for the “*Father’s Reward*”**

##### **Matthew 6:16-18**

**16 "Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.**

**17 But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face**

**18 so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.**

I was introduced to the *Means of Grace* called, “*Fasting*” when I was 16 years old after having read the Bible. Then after being born again for a little over 1-1/2 years- I read a book written in 1946 by an Assemblies of God Pastor named, Franklin Hall (4 October 1907- 13 January 1993) entitled, “*Atomic Power with God through Fasting*”.

Hall was a *prominent* part of the “*Healing and Tent Revivals*” that swept over the United States immediately after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. And as a Pentecostal Pastor- Hall was also caught up in what became known as the “*Latter Rain Movement*” that introduced men like Oral Roberts; Jack Coe; AA Allan; RW Shambach to the world; as well as a man named, William Branham.

Hall developed what he called, “*fasting Techniques*” that he taught would *benefit* the entire Human- Body; Soul; and Mind. Hall believed and taught that, when fasting correctly- a person would receive what he called, “*body-felt Salvation*” a term for physical Healing where the “*Fire of God*” would eventually protect the individual from ALL Sickness and Diseases. Hall also taught that Fasting- in the manner he prescribed- would free the individual from physical Exhaustion; as well as body odor; and would empower the individual to be able to raise the Dead.

Now at 18 years of age- not only did I NOT know much about the Bible; or Christianity; or the Difference between a Charlatan and a true man of God- I didn't understand much about Life. And so, needless to say- that Book really fired me up- and so Fasting became a very important part of my Walk with God.

Now people have asked me why I fell so hard for people who were, at best, misguided; and, at worst, were Heretics. And the Answer is simple- I had NO adult Leadership to help guide me. But the Truth is I didn't go to the questionable people *first*. I went to the Preachers and Pastors and Elders and Deacons of "main stream" Churches *first*. And, at least here on the Coast- there was not one single Church leader in 1971-72 that I personally spoke with- who had any idea about Fasting. They *personally* did NOT fast; they NEVER taught about it; and they really didn't know that much about it, either.

Now keep in mind, this was way before the Internet made acquiring Information relatively easy. So, what was I to do? I had already read what Jesus taught about Fasting in the Gospels and I knew that Fasting was as fundamental and normal to the average Christian as Prayer and Bible Study. And yet, besides the Pentecostal people, there was not a single Church Leader- on this Coast- that I was personally aware of- that could help me begin an obedient and humble Life of Fasting- except a few people who were Roman Catholics; and two young men who were members of the local Hare Krishna group over in Bay St. Louis.

I knew that in the Church I grew up in- the Episcopal Church- that they, at least, made an Attempt at Fasting. But outside of that- not a single Protestant Church from Biloxi to Gulfport could teach me about this important Subject. I also soon realized that the biblical "Means of Grace" of Fasting was almost unheard of; and almost never practiced with my Christian Friends at School- who attended Baptist; Presbyterian; and Methodist Churches.

Beloved, that should NEVER have happened. I *should have* been able to go to most *anyone* who is in a Position of Leadership in ANY Church to learn about a Subject that has such a rich History in the Christian Church. But there wasn't anyone- so, I went to people who were not only *personally* fasting themselves- but who were very *eager* to teach me about it.

So, one of the Reasons I am going into this Issue as deeply as I am- is so that no one in this Church; or no one who even reads what I have written about this Subject- will have to get involved in shady and wayward Teachings about a Subject that EVERYBODY who leads in the Church should know in great Detail.

Now Hall and a slew of other Full-Gospel; Charismatic; Pentecostal; Latter Rain; or New Apostolic Preachers and Teachers all agreed- Fasting should be a *regular* Part of our daily Life in Jesus Christ. And, even though they were and are wrong about a whole host of Issues- I think their

Understanding about Fasting is an accurate representation of what the Bible teaches.

The Reality is that during the first 30 years of my Journey with Jesus- for me to find out anything about Fasting *required* that I ask people who were either in outright Cults; or people, who although *very* sincere, belonged to very dubious religious Groups. And that is really a shame- because along with some very Good Information- I was also given some real Bad info on Fasting.

For example, the man who taught the most about Fasting to me- was a man, who, as far as I could tell- went on a 40-day Fast- on nothing but water- three separate Times! And yet, this man's Theology was a cross between Roman Catholicism; Mormonism; and Pentecostalism. In other words, his Teachings on Communion; Baptism; Adoption; the Holy Spirit; and even Salvation itself- was as off-base; unbiblical; and just plain weird as anyone I have ever met. In addition, he was a "serial Adulterer" and didn't seem to be opposed to lying- *repeatedly*- about very important Subjects. So, all his Effort at Fasting didn't seem to help him with even the Basics of the Christian Faith or even the Basics of human Morality. But he sure did push away from the table a lot.

But I'm offended that the people who teach and practice Fasting the most- seem to be the people who are the *least* biblical. And that really bothers me; and has caused me to want to "set the Record Straight" about this very biblical "Means of Grace" called, Fasting.

The Reality is that God created the human Body- in such a Way- that we HAVE to eat to live. And so, God honors ANY attempt at Fasting- for ANY length- because we simply CANNOT fast continually. But there are Issues about our Bodies and our unconverted Flesh that can be brought into alignment with the Word of God- in NO OTHER WAY- other than by Fasting. And so, as people who have experienced the Miracle of the New Birth- we should humble ourselves- *joyfully*- to the inspired, inerrant; and infallible Teachings of God the Holy Spirit Himself- through the Writings of over 40 different men; over a 1500 year Time-frame- in the 66 Books of the Holy Bible. And when we do that- we will find that Fasting should be a part of the normal daily Life of EVERY genuine Believer.

Now with many of our Friends, who attend Roman; Episcopal; Orthodox; Anglican; and other religious Groups and Churches- we are now in the Time of the year called, "*Lent*". And Lent represents the 40 Days that Jesus fasted. And so, the Custom in many of these Groups- is that their Followers will fast during Lent to prepare themselves for Easter.<sup>1</sup> So, the 40 Days beginning on "*Ash Wednesday*" and going all the Way to "*Maundy Thursday*" or "*Holy Saturday*" is a Time of

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<sup>1</sup> I know of no one who practices Lent, who actually fasts the entire 40 days. Most will fast one meal a week; one day a week; or even one week during the 40 days of Lent. Some will "fast" by not watching their favorite TV show; or they will not eat peperoni pizza and will only eat sausage pizza during this time, etc.

Sacrifice; Mourning; Grief; Contemplation; and Prayer- to prepare themselves to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus.

And this Custom began very early in the History of the Church. For example, Athanasius- the hero of the Council of Nicaea- who God used to almost *single-handedly* rescue the Church from the Heresy of *Arianism* said that Lent was,

“...a forty-day fast that the entire world observed.”

... Augustine said,

“Our fast at any other time is voluntary; but during Lent, we sin if we do not fast”.

... but during the Reformation, the “Protestants” were very wary of joining in with the others in remembering Lent- *especially* about the Fast during Lent that was *commanded* and *expected*. So, in 1536, John Calvin said that the idea about *forcing* people to fast during Lent was...

“... not a true Imitation of Christ”.

... because neither Jesus nor the Apostles taught about specific times to fast.

Now keep in mind that when Calvin wrote this- the Leadership of the visible Church at that time had compelled people to fast twice each week as well as during Lent for Centuries. But even about Lent itself- Calvin said it represented,

“... a false zeal, replete with superstition, which set up a fast under the title and pretext of imitating Christ”<sup>2</sup>

... and yet, Calvin personally fasted all the time.

The Puritan, John Owen criticized the Roman System for the Lenten practice of Fasting, saying,

“The truth is, they [the Roman Church] neither know what it is to believe nor what mortification itself intends...Such men know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God”<sup>3</sup>

... and yet Owen fasted frequently himself.

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<sup>2</sup> Calvin; *Institutes*; IV.12.20.,p. 760

<sup>3</sup> Calvin; *Institutes*; IV.12.20.,p. 290

In 1885, the “Prince of Preachers”, Charles Spurgeon said this about Lent and the *obligatory* Fast associated with it,

“It is as much our duty to reject the traditions of men, as to observe the ordinances of the Lord. We ask concerning every rite and rubric, ‘Is this a law of the God of Jacob?’ and if it be not clearly so, it is of no authority with us, who walk in Christian liberty.”<sup>4</sup>

... and yet, Spurgeon fasted all the time.

Today, we are bombarded with information about Fasting in order to lose weight; and to help our bodies get healthier. And that is *exactly* what Franklin Hall and others taught over 80 years ago. But Jesus taught something quite different about Fasting. And I want to explore what He said this morning. In **Matthew 6:16b** Jesus gave us a Promise,

**... your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you**

... so, yes, there are great Benefits to a disciplined Life that includes periodic Fasting. But those Benefits will go way beyond losing weight or having a healthier body. Jesus has promised us that God the Father will reward us when we fast in Secret.

So, in the Passage of **Matthew 6:16-18**, Jesus *assumed* that Fasting was a good thing; and that it would be done by His Disciples. This is what we see in **Matthew 9:15** where Jesus said,

**... the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they [the Attendants of the Bridegroom] will fast.**

In other words, while Jesus is in Heaven; while He is sitting at the Right Hand of the Majesty on High; and while He is interceding for God’s elect- His genuine Disciples will fast.

So, Jesus is NOT teaching about *whether* we should fast or not. He is *assuming* that we *will* fast. Jesus is teaching us *how* to fast; and, even more specifically, Jesus is teaching us how NOT to fast.

Dear friends, if Fasting is going to become a common and normal “Way of Life” for us here at Covenant- in addition to learning *how* to fast- we also need to know how NOT to fast. And that “Learning” would include *practical* Teaching on how NOT to endanger our Bodies; as well as spiritual Teaching on how NOT to endanger our Souls.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://groundworkonline.com/a-short-version-of-the-long-history-of-lent/>

But more important than all that Learning and Teaching is the Warning that Jesus gave about the spiritual Danger of Fasting in the “wrong Way”. And that's what **Matthew 6:16-18** is about. Jesus warned us what NOT to do; and then tells us what to do instead.

He warned us in verse 16 to NOT be like the Hypocrites:

**"Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full."**

Now I have already told you that, in Context- the “Hypocrites” that Jesus was talking about here were the Scribes and Pharisees. But the Application of this verse is that ANYONE who carries out their “*spiritual Disciplines*”; or anyone who “*avails themselves of the Means of Grace*” for the Purpose of being “seen by men” is also guilty of this.

This is the “*Reward of the Hypocrites*” that Jesus warned us about. These Hypocrites *want* to be seen praying; or studying their Bibles. They *want* to be seen taking the Lord's Table. They *want* to be seen giving or serving. Or they *want* to be seen fasting.

But *why* do they want to be seen by other people engaging with the “Means of Grace”? So that other people will think highly of them; so that other people will praise them; so that other people will think they are very spiritual.

And Jesus warned us about this terrible, hypocritical Sin. But then He also gave us God's Judgment that follows the Sin of doing godly and spiritual Things in order to be seen by other people:

**... Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full**

Striving to be seen by other people when you engage in the “Means of Grace” will *guarantee* that you WILL be seen by other people. So, the Hypocrites will achieve what they work so hard to obtain: the “Praise of Men”! They WILL get the “Praise of Men”. But that is ALL they will get. God will NOT honor their Efforts- AT ALL! And as far as any *spiritual* Benefit goes- it will be as though they had not fasted at all.

But getting the “*Praise of Men*” is what our fallen Flesh *craves*. Few things in this Life are more *appealing*; or more *gratifying*; or more *satisfying*; or more *rewarding* than to be recognized; or praised; or “made much of” for our Accomplishments- *especially* our *religious* Accomplishments!

And to be recognized as a godly person was the Goal of EVERYTHING the Scribes and Pharisees did! That WHY they did EVERYTHING they did. These

men did NOT love God; they were NOT saved; and they were NOT interested in doing ANYTHING for the Glory of God. And that is *why* Jesus condemned them to their face.

But today, being *recognized*; or *acknowledged*; or *praised* as a “spiritual person”; or as a “godly person”; or even a “good person” is the Goal of EVERY lukewarm and unsaved person in the modern Church. It is what drives them to do what they do. It is the Fuel that keeps them doing their “*spiritual Duties*”.

So, these people may pray and read their Bible- but they do NOT love God. They may give money to the Church- but they are NOT saved. And they may even fast- but they are NOT interested in doing ANYTHING for the Glory of God. And that is *why* Jesus will condemn them to their face- as they hear Him say,

**... I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS. (Matthew 7:23b)**

But *why* did Jesus say that Fasting like this- was “Hypocrisy”? We need to remember that these were *very* religious people. And they *voluntarily* chose to fast. But instead of *hiding* the Fact they were fasting- they made it plain- so other people could see. So, *why* was that called, “Hypocrisy”? *Why* isn't it Hypocrisy to fast, but then hide that Fact by anointing your hair; washing your face; and not letting anybody know that you are Fasting? Isn't the very Definition of Hypocrisy- trying to look better on the *outside* than you are on the *inside*?

So, all those religious Leaders were doing- was to allow Reality to show, right? So, they were, actually, the very *opposite* of Hypocrites. They fasted, and they looked like they were fasting. NO sham. NO hiding. They were being Real and Genuine. So, this Logic would say that if you fast- you should NOT look any different on the *outside* than you are on the *inside*. So, if you fast- you should *look* like you are fasting!

But Jesus called them, “Hypocrites”. Why? Because the Heart that *motivates* Fasting is supposed to be a Heart after God. That's what Fasting means: a “heart-Hunger” for God. So, Fasting is when the spiritual Hunger of the Heart *overwhelms* the natural Hunger of the Belly.

But something is wrong here- because the Heart that was *motivating* this Fast by the Scribes and Pharisees was the SAME Heart that craved human Admiration. So, in one sense- they were being “Open”; “Honest”; and “Transparent” about what they were doing. Yet that very “Openness” is what deceived them.

Because if they wanted to be truly “Open”; “Honest”; and “Transparent”- they would have worn a Sign around their necks that said,



**"The bottom- line Reward I am Seeking in this Fast- is the Praise of Men and NOT the Glory of God!"**

... and that would have *eliminated* them from being Hypocrites. They still would have been terrible Sinners- but they would NOT have been Hypocrites.

Because then they would have been *openly and transparently* Vain; Self-centered; and Arrogant! So, there are actually two great Dangers that these "fasting religious Hypocrites" have fallen into:

1. They are seeking the *wrong* Reward in their Fasts: the Praise and Admiration of other people. And they seek that "false Reward"- precisely because they are Lost and yet in their Sins.
2. They *purposefully* hide this "wrong Seeking" with an *outward* Pretense of Love for God.

You see, Fasting is *supposed* to mean there is a Love for God in that individual- a deep-seated *Hunger* for God. And with their *outward* Actions those religious Leaders were saying that they *had* a Hunger for God! But that wasn't true- because on the *inside*- they were only hungry to be admired and approved by other people. And that's the "god" that satisfied them.

But we are NOT deceived by the Roman religious System. And so, we have to remember that all of the various "Means of Grace" are Gifts that God has given to people- who have *already* experienced the Miracle of the New Birth; people who have *already* been justified by Faith alone; and people who have *already* been adopted by the Father. These wonderful Gifts are NOT, however, the Way that lost people are saved. They do not CAUSE a lost person to be saved. And they *do not* do this- because they CANNOT do this. Because ALL lost people are saved the SAME WAY:

1. They MUST *hear* the Gospel
2. They MUST *accept/embrace/believe* the Gospel
3. They MUST *obey* the Gospel (Repent and Believe)

... and the "Means of Grace" simply do NOT give the Lost person what they NEED: "new, spiritual Life"- in, by, and through the Miracle of the New Birth!

So, NOBODY is born again or Justified; or Adopted because they pray; or because they read their Bible; or because they fellowship with godly people; or because they are baptized; or because they partake of the Lord's Table; or because they give; or because they serve; or because they fast.

No, we are born again by a sovereign Act of God. And we are “Justified” by the Gift of “saving Faith” (which we received in the New Birth) where we repent of Sin and trust in Jesus and in His finished Work. And we are Adopted by a sovereign Act of God alone! Where the “Means of Grace” come into play- is during the Time when already born again/justified/adopted people are being progressively sanctified!

Because what the “Means of Grace” provide is Strength; Encouragement; Correction; and Truth- that will *enable* and *empower* the *already* born again/justified/adopted Soul- to be both Able and Willing to “*Walk this World in White*”! So, now look again at verses 17&18:

**But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.**

Here, Jesus gave them and us an Alternative to the Way of Fasting the Hypocrites engaged in. So, this is the Way Jesus wants Fasting to be done.

So, this talks about Fasting to be seen by God and NOT by other people. Yet in the Bible- we read about all kinds of “public Fasting”- even in the New Testament (**The Acts 13:1-3; 14:23**). And we went over that- earlier in this Series. So, what that teaches us is: If someone finds out you are Fasting- you haven't sinned. The Value of your Fast is not *diminished* because somebody noticed that you skipped Lunch. It is possible to fast with other people. So, we must always remember:

**“Being seen Fasting” and “Fasting to be seen” are NOT the same**

Being seen Fasting is simply an *external* Event. But Fasting TO BE SEEN- is a Self-exalting Motive of a dark and hard Heart.

So, Jesus gives us Instruction that will test and try our Hearts. He said to us when we are Fasting, “*Don't make any Effort to be seen! In fact, make many Efforts in the other Direction- so, you are NOT seen. So, wash and fix your hair; wash your face- so that as far as it lies within you- people will never know you are Fasting.*”

But please notice that Jesus DIDN'T stop there. He went way beyond this and said, that our Goal in Fasting- is absolutely to be seen by God!

**But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.**

What Jesus did here was to expose either the Reality of God; or the Absence of God- in our Lives. Because He knows how easy it is- for human beings to do “religious Things” as long as other people are watching- *especially* as it pertains to the “Means of Grace”.

But the Reason Jesus warned us so severely was NOT merely the “Praise of Men” we might get from Fasting. That is a great Danger. But what is *equally* dangerous- is that we might begin to think and believe that the *highest* and *best* Effectiveness of our spiritual Acts- is on the “*horizontal plain*” among other people and NOT on the “*vertical plain*” with God. “If my Children see me pray at meals- it will do them good. If the people of the Church see me Fast- they may be inspired to Fast. If my Grandchildren see me read my Bible- they may be inspired to read theirs.

In other words, the Danger is that we might begin to feel that the Value of our Devotion is *primarily* on the “*horizontal plain*”- the Impact my Actions have on others as they see me engage in the “Means of Grace” and NOT on my own genuine Hunger for God- for myself!

This is the Pitfall that many in the Ministry make. And it is *why* the Apostle Paul wrote this in **1Corinthians 9:27b**:

**... I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.**

I’ve actually known people in the Ministry- who didn’t think they could ever admit a Fault or even repent- because it would be a “*bad Testimony*” to the people they were shepherding. And so, they kept it all quiet as Sin continued to eat their Souls- until it not only destroyed their Ministry- but destroyed their Families as well.

So, the Danger is that all of our Life starts to be justified and understood simply on the “*horizontal plain*” for how it affects others. And when that happens- God becomes a *secondary* Person in the “living out” of our godly Lives. And the longer this Danger goes on- the further away God gets.

Many times, Church Leaders think God is important- *ONLY* because He wants us to do all kinds of Things for other people. Yet God Himself- is gradually falling out of the Picture with those people as being the Focus of *EVERYTHING* they believe and teach and do.

So, in His Mercy- Jesus tries and tests our deceptive Hearts (that *NO ONE* can truly know) to make sure that God- just God; only God; that God Himself- is our Sufficiency; our Joy; and our Crown! And nowhere is this more important than when nobody else knows what we are doing- like Fasting. So, when no one

asks, “Hey Brother Blair- how are you getting along with your Fast?” No one even knows- no one except God!

So, I see Jesus calling us all into a “*radical Orientation*” on God Himself! Just God! Another Way this could be said in how the unknown writer put it in **Hebrews 12:1-3:**

**1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,**

**2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**

**3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.**

... so, the Way we can live in this World filled with Sinners and Injustice; Pain; Agony; Shame; Fear; and Wickedness- and NOT allow secret Sin to destroy us; and NOT grow Weary; and NOT lose Heart- is by constantly:

**fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith...**

I believe that God is pushing us to have a real, utterly Authentic, personal Relationship with the one, true, and living God. So, if God is not “real” to you- it will be utterly *miserable* to endure something difficult (like Fasting) with God as the only One who knows. It will all seem very Pointless because the whole range of “*horizontal Possibilities*”

will be nullified- because no one knows what you are experiencing.

So, God desires that, as a Church- we reach a Place where all that matters is God; and Who He is; What He thinks; What He has spoken; and What He has done and will do! That is the “Father’s Reward” and NOTHING will help us receive that Reward any better than by Fasting!

So, now let’s focus on the last part of verse 18 where Jesus promised:

**... your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you**

Now Faith testifies that we do NOT believe that Jesus is a Liar. Faith also testifies that we have become persuaded- through many Dangers; Toils; and Snares that Jesus is “Good for His Word”! And the Promise Jesus makes here about what God will do for those who focus “vertically” on Him alone and those

who do NOT need the “Praise of other people” to make their dedication to God worthwhile. The Lord Christ said,

**... your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you**

Now, in my Opinion, the word "reward" in the NASB95 is a little too impersonal. Because it seems to suggest a business deal:

We do the “Work” of Fasting and God rewards us with the Benefits

... and if we are not careful- we might begin to think that we *earn* this Reward- which would also mean two other things:

1. God *owes* this Reward to us
2. We *deserve* to receive this Reward

... which would mean things like Grace; Mercy; and even Faith would take a backseat at best; or be non-existent at worst.

I categorically reject that Understanding. Yes, the Promise has been made and is irrevocable. But the ONLY reason we achieve ANYTHING in God- is by borrowing MORE of His Grace; Mercy; and Faith. In other words, we should believe and trust that the Promise Jesus made here is FOR us. Yes! But we should also believe and trust that NOTHING can be done for God; or for our own Benefit IN God- that is done any other Way than BY His Grace; THROUGH His Gift of Faith; EMPOWERED BY His Mercy; and TO His Glory!

So, we do NOT need for God to merely tell us what to do. We also need His Grace and Mercy- along with His Gift of Faith to be both Able and Willing to actually do what He has told us to do!

So, Jesus is telling us that God sees us Fasting. And He sees that we have a deep Longing that is *compelling* us to Fast. And He sees that our Heart is NOT seeking after the ordinary Pleasures of human Admiration and Applause. He sees that we are acting- NOT out of our own Strength to impress others with our Discipline- but we act in abject Weakness- crying to God about our Need and our great Longing- begging Him to move on our Prayers. And when Almighty God hears and sees all this- He responds! He acts!

But just what is the "reward" that Jesus promised from the Father? Might it be "the praise of men"? We would make a Clown out of God- if we tried to use Him as the Tool to get what we really want instead of Him- the praise of people. So, that's NOT the Reward that God gives.

Well, what about Money? No, because the very next verse (v. 19) warns us against laying up Treasures on the earth (whether God gives them or not) and says for us to lay up Treasures in Heaven- where there is no earthly Currency except Faith; Hope; and Love.

I suggest that the best Place to find out the Reward of our Fasting is to look right here in what has come to be called, the “Sermon on the Mount”. For example, the Prayer that Jesus just taught us to pray in **Matthew 6:9-13** begins with four main Longings:

1. That God's Name would be hallowed or revered
2. That God’s Kingdom would come
3. That God’s Will would be “done on earth the way it's done in Heaven”.
4. That we would be so empowered to forgive those who have wronged us- to the SAME extent we want to be forgiven by God for the Wrongs we have done

... so, I would suggest that these Things are the main Rewards that God gives for our Fasting.

We fast out of longing for God's Name to be known and cherished and honored. We long for God’s Dominion to be extended and then consummated in History. And we long for God’s Will to hold sway everywhere- with the same devotion and urgency that the inexhaustible Angels show sleeplessly in Heaven forever and ever! And then the Proof that we are truly saved and are on the right path as it pertains to Fasting is that we are able (and willing) to forgive those who have wronged us!

Yes, God gives us many, many specific things through Fasting. And it is not wrong to seek specifically for His Help- in EVERY Area of our Lives through this Means of Fasting. But those four Petitions: The hallowing of God’s Name; The seeking of God’s Kingdom; the doing of God’s Will on the earth; and the Ability to forgive- these four administer the Test that will determine if all the other things we long for- are Expressions of these.

So, do we want our sons and daughters saved because this would hallow God's Name or make us look Good? Do we want North Korea and Iran to open for the sake of the advance of the Kingship of Jesus? Do we want upright and godly Leaders in our Government because God's holy, revealed Will for His Creation is at stake? Do we want the people of the Covenant of Peace Church to be revived and awakened with Divine Power; Love; and Joy because it glorifies the Name of God and advances His Kingdom and brings about His Will in the earth?

That is what Jesus is calling us to- a radically “God-oriented Life- that will include radical God-oriented Forgiveness and Fasting. So, for the Sake of your

own Soul; and in response to Jesus; and for the Advancement of the Kingdom of God's great saving Purpose; and to glorify His Name:

1. Fast
2. Fix your hair
3. Wash your face
4. Do NOT appear to men as though you were Fasting

... and let the Father- Who sees in secret- see you open your Heart of Yearning to Him and for Him- with Fasting!

And the Father- Who sees in secret- the One who is brimming with many Rewards for your Joy and his Glory- WILL reward you!

**Amen. Let's pray.**

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.