

引言 INTRODUCTION

We have to admit that we are pampered by modern comfort. The downside is that we will be in chaos when we are without certain amenities. Early this summer severe storms caused repeated power outages. Some people lost electricity for days. They could not cook, they endured the hot and humid weather, and the food in their refrigerators went bad. It proves that our lives are actually quite fragile. Ultimately, we have to put our trust in God. We can do nothing apart from Him. A little inconvenience in life should make us more thankful to God. Otherwise, we may take His blessings for granted. We should depend on God rather than all that the world can offer. Our lesson today is about fasting. The goal should be to spend more time with God. As we shall see later, we can expand the scope from food to other aspects of life. The bigger issue is to exercise self-control. We lay aside some regular needs and personal desires temporarily so as to put our focus on God.

Let us study the background of fasting in the Bible before we dive into Jesus' teaching. In general, there are three reasons why people fast. First, fasting is a time of **confession**. According to the Law, the Day of Atonement was the only time of the year for all Israelites to fast (**Leviticus 23:26-32**). They refrained from eating for twenty-four hours. Animal offerings would also be made. People should be remorseful of their sins and they would pray to God for forgiveness. Daniel prayed while fasting to repent for the sins of his country (**Daniel 9:1-19**). At that time, he was employed as an official in Babylon. When the Israelites returned to their homeland after the exile, Nehemiah led a huge effort to rebuild the Jerusalem city-wall. He gathered his countrymen for a public confession after the project was completed. People fasted as they asked God for forgiveness of their sins and the sins of their ancestors (**Nehemiah 9-10**). It triggered a spiritual revival and people determined to obey what God says in the Law. Not only did Israel confess its sins to God, even a foreign country did the same thing. God sent Jonah to the Assyrian capital of Nineveh to declare His judgment. People believed in Jonah's message. Every person in the city put on sackcloth and joined a fast (**Jonah 3**). When the king heard the news, he asked everyone to repent. Eventually, God showed mercy and withdrew His punishment. Besides being a means of confession, fasting can also be called for in a time of **crisis**. Judah was once under the threat from three countries at the same time. King Jehoshaphat understood that he needed God's help. Therefore, he announced a national fast (**2 Chronicles 20:1-28**). People gathered at the temple to pray together. God spoke through a Levite that He would save them. At the end, God gave Judah a victory. Another crisis happened when Esther was a Persian queen. Haman intended to get rid of all the Jews out of hatred. A Jewish official called Mordecai then asked Esther, who happened to be his cousin, to plead to the king for mercy. Esther was hesitant because anyone who approached the king without his permission would be subject to a death penalty. Thus Esther requested all the Jews in the capital city to fast for three days and three nights and prayed for her (**Esther 2:16**). The king showed grace and the Jews were delivered. Other than a time of confession and crisis, people fasted in response to a special **calling**.

Moses did not eat and drink for forty days and nights on Mount Sinai when God wrote the Ten Commandments on two clay tablets a second time (Exodus 34:27-28). Jesus fasted for the same duration before He began the gospel ministries (Matthew 4:1-2). Another fast happened in the church of Antioch when some leaders were at a church gathering. The Holy Spirit told the men to send Barnabas and Saul (Paul's original name) out for mission work (Acts 13:1-3). They continued to fast and pray after they heard the instruction. Then they committed the two brothers to the ministries by laying hands on them. Whether it was a confession, a crisis or a calling, the focus was always on God. Believers spent more time to pray to God for repentance, rescue or reconfirmation. However, in our passage today, some people misplaced their attention as they fasted.

解釋 EXPLANATION

1. 顯露的虛偽 Reveal One's Deception

Jesus says some hypocrites revealed their deception when they fasted. They used a religious practice as a way to show off. Jesus is not shy to convict them in verse 16: **“And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.”** Fasting is supposed to be a private exercise. You may retreat to a room and spend time alone with God in Bible reading and prayer. You can also seek the Lord together with a few believers. But how could people know that those hypocrites were fasting? Jesus says they revealed their deception by putting on a sad face. Perhaps they did not comb their hair or tidy up their beard intentionally. They might also spread some ashes on their hair. That was an expression of sorrow over misfortune or sins in those days. In any case, those hypocrites looked miserable because they wanted people to know that they were fasting. They received their reward on the spot. Perhaps people praised those leaders for how religious they pretended to be. Jesus says if that was the only reaction they were looking for, then they were paid in full. Their performance could deceive their audience. But they would not receive any approval from God. We have to agree that we are self-centered in nature. Any form of spiritual pursuit can be a temptation for bragging. We like to compare ourselves with others and see who can do better. Someone called it “holier than thou” mentality. Examples are like Bible reading, prayer, use of gift and talents, ministry involvement and money-offering. A godly action can become an opportunity to show off if we are not careful. There is a thin line between self-confidence and pride. People who have confidence in themselves will say: “I can do it.” That differs from prideful people by one word. Arrogant people will tell themselves “ONLY I can do it,” or “I can do it BETTER.” We need to examine our hearts by asking the following questions. First, do I do it only when people are present? Do I feel bad if there is no compliment? Second, am I willing to step back and let others handle the matter? They may not be as skillful or effective as I am. Do I value team success higher than my personal glory? In a church setting, the more important thing is to get the job done regardless of who takes the credit. You should rejoice when seeing people grow as a result. Third, can I sincerely praise others for their good works? Our hearts will not feel sour or even bitter if others shine. Fourth, can my good deed be used as a motivation for others? Using fasting as

an example. We can of course share our experience in a small group. We can use the opportunity to encourage brothers and sisters to fast and pray together. Fifth, do I thank God at the end? In doing so, we admit that all abilities and resources ultimately come from God. He deserves all the glory. These questions will help us keep our pride in-check.

2. 隱藏的虔誠 Conceal One's Devotion

Jesus condemned the hypocrites because they revealed their deception. Next, Jesus told His audience the right attitude when they fasted. They should conceal their devotion and express it to God only. Jesus says in verses 17-18: **17 “But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”** Two things of note. First, people should maintain their personal hygiene as usual when they fasted. The oil could be a perfume or a lotion. The key was that others could not tell from their faces that they were fasting. Secondly, they should fast only for God to see. God would reward them if they had the right motive. The goal is to draw near to God. The closer we get to God, the more we can sense His holiness and righteousness. The more we will realize our imperfection and even sinfulness. Prophet Isaiah experienced that when he received God's calling. Isaiah saw in a vision that God was sitting on His throne in the temple. Angels were praising God on two sides. Meanwhile, the ground was shaking and the temple was filled with smoke. Isaiah did not say: “Boy, this is cool! Let me take a selfie and post it on Instagram.” Listen to his response in Isaiah 6:5 – ...**“Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”** The prophet immediately realized that he and the whole nation were filthy in sins. How could anyone approach the holy God? Isaiah could do nothing to get rid of his sins. An angel used a burning coal to touch Isaiah's lips, thus cleansing him symbolically. The image points to Jesus' salvation through the cross. He is the bridge that leads us to God. The closer we draw near to God, the more humble we should be. Also, the more we understand His will for us, the more we should surrender ourselves to Him. Fasting is a way to rededicate ourselves to God. It seems foreign to us modern Christians. We encouraged brothers and sisters to try fasting one year when we observed the Good Friday. We set aside a time to remember Jesus' sacrificial love for us. You can try prayer with fasting when you are seeking God's direction on a critical decision. Perhaps you need to decide which job offer to accept, which college to attend or which house to buy, or you are unsure whether or not to marry the person you are dating. Spare some time with God and let Him speak to you. During my college years, I fasted a few times alone or together with fellow believers. Honestly, I found it uncomfortable to fight back hunger. I do not need to eat a lot, but I am a routine person. My stomach will growl when meal time is approaching. Sometimes, I may get light-headed too if I do not eat at the proper time. That is my physical weakness. Fasting and any other spiritual discipline are unpleasant because we cut back our desires to please God. The phrase “afflict one's soul” or similar expressions appear ten times in the Old Testament when fasting is mentioned. For example, Psalm 35:13 says: **But I, when they were sick – I wore sackcloth; I afflicted myself with fasting; I prayed with head bowed on my chest.** To say the least, it is not fun to fast. But there should be joy, because you are spending more time with God. The

apostle Paul uses a similar phrase in 1 Corinthians 9:27 – **But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.** In this chapter, Paul shares his view on freedom in the Lord. Paul controlled his eating and drinking. He did not marry nor did he ask the Corinthian church for financial support. He denied those rights so that he could be a more effective gospel messenger. You may ask: why beat myself up when I can live happily? The marathon runners among us can tell you why. They go through a tough training when preparing for a competition. They monitor their diet and sleep, exercise in the gym to build muscle and control their pace of running. Whether it is sports, career, education, health or anything else, we are willing to make sacrifices until we reach our goal. Growing our relationship with the Lord requires hard work too. There is a reason why disciple and discipline have similar spellings. It takes strict discipline to be a disciple of Jesus. What God asks of us is completely contrary to our nature. The world tells us that we are our own boss. It is your life, your money, your time and your properties. You can do whatever you want with all you have. But the Bible tells us that Jesus has become our Master the moment we received Him into our hearts. Obeying Him is the only way to find joy as His followers. He knows our needs more than we do. All that He requires of us are only for our good, even though sometimes we may not like it or believe it. Therefore, whether it is fasting or any spiritual discipline, we submit ourselves to the Lord. Besides skipping meals, there are other forms of fasting. Recently, a listener shared on a Christian radio station that she tried fasting her pride for a period. She did so by intentionally not being self-centered. Instead of kept talking about herself, she paid more attention listening to others in conversations. She also looked for opportunities to compliment others in public. At the end, she realized that she became more humble. Perhaps that is the kind of fast we should try. Besides, there other privileges we can let go of. For example, you can fast by putting away your phone or credit card, turning off your game console or computer, limiting the time you spend on social media, stream videos or watch sports. The key is to exercise self-control over the freedom God gives you. Instead of letting gadgets and activities be your master, you make God your only Master. You can freely obey Him when it is time to eat or sleep, read the Bible and attend church meetings. You will have more joy when you lead a disciplined life as Jesus' disciple.

結論 CONCLUSION

Fasting is more than not eating. It is about surrendering our will to God. We lay aside some regular needs and personal desires temporarily so as to put our focus on God. In doing so, we practice Jesus' Lordship over us. We switch our focus attention me-centered and others-centered to God-centered. The three topics we studied so far – mercy-giving, prayer and fasting – can easily lead to pride when we perform piety like a show. We can enjoy true freedom in Jesus only when we care more about how God sees us than how people evaluate us. Then all that we do will come from a pure heart. Our goals will be to bless people and honor God.

引言 INTRODUCTION

我們必須承認，我們被現代的舒適所寵壞了。當我們失去某些方便時，我們會陷入混亂狀態。今年夏天，暴風雨導致多次停電。有些人連續幾天斷電。他們無法做飯，他們要忍受炎熱的天氣，冰箱裡的食物也逐漸變壞。事實證明，我們的生命其實是相當脆弱的。最終，我們必須仰望神。離了祂，我們什麼也不能做。生活中的一點點的不方便應該讓我們更加感謝神。否則，我們容易把神的祝福視為理所當然。我們應該依靠神而不是依靠世界所能提供的一切。我們今天會談到禁食。禁食的目的應該是讓我們花更多的時間與神在一起。我們稍後將看到的，我們可以將範圍從食物擴展到生活的其他層面。核心的問題是操練節制。我們暫時放下一些個人的需要和願望，使我們把注意力放在神身上。

在我們探討耶穌的教導之前，讓我們從聖經了解禁食的背景。一般來說，人們禁食有三個原因。首先，禁食是**懺悔**的時刻。根據律法，贖罪日是一年中所有以色列人禁食的唯一時候 (**利未記 23:26-32**)。他們二十四小時不吃東西。祭司會獻上動物。人們為自己的罪感到懊悔，並祈求神的赦免。先知但以理也曾經禁食禱告，為他的國家向神認罪 (**但以理書 9:1-19**)。當時，但以理在巴比倫做官。當以色列人在被擄後返回家園時，尼希米領導群眾重建耶路撒冷的城牆。工程完成後，他召集同胞公開認罪。人們禁食，求神饒恕他們和祖先的罪 (**尼希米記 9-10**)。從而帶來屬靈復興，人們決心遵守神的律法。不只以色列人向神認罪，連一些外邦人也那樣做。神差派約拿到亞述首都尼尼微宣告祂的審判。人們相信約拿的話。城裡的每個人都穿上麻衣並參加禁食 (**約拿書 3**)。王聽到這個消息後，要求所有人悔改。最終，神施憐憫，收回祂的懲罰。除了認罪之外，人們在**危機**的關頭也會禁食。猶大曾經同時受到三個國家的威脅。約沙法王明白他需要神的幫助。因此，他宣布全國禁食 (**歷代志下 20:1-28**)。民眾聚集在聖殿一起禱告。神通過一個利未人說祂會拯救他們。最終，神拯救猶大。另一次的危機發生在伊斯帖當波斯女王時。哈曼出於仇恨，計劃除掉所有猶太人。一位名叫末底改的猶太官員隨後要求伊斯帖懇求王的憐憫。末底改和伊斯帖恰巧是堂兄妹。伊斯帖很猶豫，因為任何未經王允許朝見他的人都會被判死刑。於是伊斯帖請求城裡所有的猶太人禁食三天三夜，為她禱告 (**以斯帖記 2:16**)。後來王施恩，猶太人便因此得救。除了在認罪和危機的時候，人們也用禁食回應特別的**呼召**。摩西在西奈山四十晝夜沒有吃喝，等候神第二次將十誡寫在兩塊泥版上 (**出埃及記 34:27-28**)。耶穌在開始傳道之前也禁食了同樣的時間 (**馬太福音 4:1-2**)。另一次禁食發生在安提阿教會，當時一些領袖正在聚會。聖靈吩咐

他們差遣巴拿巴和掃羅（保羅的原名）到外地傳福音（使徒行傳 13:1-3）。他們聽到指示後繼續禁食禱告。然後他們按手在兩位弟兄身上，差遣他們出去。無論是認罪、危機還是呼召，焦點始終是神。信徒們花更多的時間向神祈禱，祈求赦免、拯救或重新確認。然而，在我們今天的經文中，有些人在禁食時把注意力放錯了地方。

解釋 EXPLANATION

1. 顯露的虛偽 Reveal One's Deception

耶穌說，一些假冒為善的人在禁食時顯露出他們的虛偽。他們利用信仰行為來炫耀自己。耶穌在第 16 節中直接責備他們：「你們禁食的時候，不可像那假冒為善的人，臉上帶著愁容；因為他們把臉弄得難看，故意叫人看出他們是禁食。我實在告訴你們，他們已經得了他們的賞賜。」禁食應該是一種個人的操練。你可以單獨退到一個房間，花時間讀聖經和祈禱。你也可以和一些信徒同心尋求主。但人們怎麼知道那些假冒為善的人在禁食呢？耶穌說他們裝出難過的表情來顯露出他們的虛偽。也許他們故意不梳頭髮或整理鬍子。他們還可能在頭上撒一些灰。那是當時的人為不幸的事件或罪感到悲傷的表現。無論如何，那些假冒為善的人看來很愁苦，讓人們知道他們在禁食。他們當場就得到了獎賞。也許人們稱讚那些人外表很虔誠。耶穌說，如果這是他們所尋求的唯一回應，那麼他們已經得到了獎賞。他們的表演可以愚弄觀眾，但他們卻得不到神的認可。我們必須承認，人總是以自我為中心的。任何的屬靈追求都可能成為吹牛的試探。我們喜歡和別人作比較，看看誰做得更好，誰更加虔誠。例如讀聖經、禱告、使用恩賜和才幹、參與服事和金錢奉獻。如果我們不小心的話，敬虔的行為可能會成為炫耀的機會。自信和自誇之間可能只有一線之差。自信的人對自己說：「我能做到。」這與自誇的人只差幾個字。自誇的人會告訴自己「只有我能做到」，或者「我能做得更好」。我們可以透過以下的問題來檢視我們的內心。首先，我是否只在有人在場的情況下才這樣做？如果沒有人讚賞，我會不會難過？第二，我是否願意退到旁邊，讓別人來處理這件事？他們或許沒有我那麼熟練或有效。我會否為團隊的成功而高興，過於自己得到榮耀？在教會的事奉中，更重要的是完成任務，不論功勞歸誰。當看到別人因此而成長時，你就應該感到喜樂。第三，我可以真誠地讚賞別人的好行為嗎？如果別人被表揚，你的心會否發酸，甚至產生苦毒。第四，我的好行為能否激勵別人？以禁食為例。我們當然可以在小組內中分享個人的經驗。我們可以藉此鼓勵弟兄姐妹一起禁食禱告。第五，最後我感謝神嗎？這樣做，我們就是承認所有的能力和資源都來自神。祂配得所有的榮耀。這些問題能幫助我們減少驕傲。

2. 隱藏的虔誠 Conceal One's Devotion

耶穌責備假冒為善的人，因為他們顯露出自己的虛偽。接下來，耶穌告訴聽眾禁食時的正確態度。他們應該隱藏自己的虔誠，只向神表達。耶穌在第 17 至 18 節說：17「你禁食的時候，要梳頭洗臉，18 不叫人看出你禁食來，只叫你暗中的父看見；你父在暗中察看，必然報答你。」有兩件事值得注意。首先，人們在禁食時應該保持個人衛生。耶穌說他們要照常往頭上抹油。那種油可能是香料或是潤膚膏。重點是不要讓其他人從他們的外表上看出他們正在禁食。其次，他們禁食應該只是為了讓神看到。如果他們有正確的動機，神就會獎賞他們。禁食的目標是要親近神。我們越接近神，就越能感受到祂的聖潔和公義。我們越會察覺到自己的不完全，甚至是罪。當先知以賽亞接受神的呼召時，他就經歷了這一點。以賽亞在異像中看到神坐在聖殿的寶座上。天使在兩旁讚美神。與此同時，地大震動，聖殿內充滿煙雲。以賽亞並沒有說：「嘩，這個場景真爽！讓我拍幾張自拍照然後放在微信上。」聽聽他在以賽亞書 6:5 中的回應：...「禍哉！我滅亡了！因為我是嘴唇不潔的人，又住在嘴唇不潔的民中，又因我眼見大君王萬軍之耶和華。」先知立即意識到他和整個國家都是有罪的。人怎能靠近聖潔的神呢？以賽亞無法做任何事來除去他的罪。於是天使用燃燒的炭碰以賽亞的嘴唇，象徵潔淨了他。那幅圖像預表耶穌在十字架上的救恩。祂是引導我們通往神的橋樑。我們越親近神，就應該越謙卑。而且，我們越了解神對我們的心意，我們就應該越願意順服祂。禁食是將自己重新委身給神的方式。禁食對我們現代基督徒來說似乎比較陌生。有一年我們記念耶穌受難日的時候鼓勵弟兄姐妹嘗試禁食，藉此分出時間來記念耶穌犧牲的愛。當你在面臨重大決定時，你也可以考慮禁食禱告。也許你要決定接受哪份工作、上哪所大學或購買哪棟房子，或者你不確定是否要與正在約會的人結婚。你應該抽出時間與神相處，讓祂向你說話。在大學期間，我獨自或與其他信徒一起禁食過幾次。老實說，我發現飢餓的感覺挺難受的。我不需要吃很多東西，但我是一個很規律的人。靠近吃飯時間，我的肚子就會咕咕叫。有時，如果我不按時吃飯，我也會感到頭暈。這是我身體上的弱點。禁食和任何屬靈操練都會令人覺得不舒服，因為我們放下個人的需要，為了討神喜悅。舊約中提到禁食時，「刻苦己心」或類似的用詞出現了十次。例如，詩篇 35:13 說：至於我，當他們有病的時候，我便穿麻衣，禁食，刻苦己心；我所求的都歸到自己的懷中。禁食本身是一件苦差事。但你在其中能得到喜樂，因為你花更多的時間與神同在。使徒保羅在哥林多前書 9:27 中也使用了類似的形容：我是攻克己身，叫身服我，恐怕我傳福音給別人，自己反被棄絕了。在這一章中，保羅分享了他對在基督裡的自由的看法。保羅控制自己的飲食。他沒有結婚，也沒有向哥林多教會尋求經濟支持。他放棄那些權利，使他能夠成為更有效的福音使者。你

可能會問：既然我可以舒舒服服地生活，為什麼要折磨自己呢？我們中間的馬拉松選手可以告訴你原因。他們在準備比賽時要經過艱苦的訓練。他們控制自己的飲食和睡眠，在健身房鍛煉肌肉並控制跑步的速度。無論是運動、事業、學習、追求健康還是其他任何事情，為了達到目標，我們就願意作出犧牲。培養我們與主的關係也需要花功夫。「門徒」和「紀律」兩個英文字寫法的相似是有原因的。成為耶穌的門徒需要嚴格的紀律。神對我們的要求與人性是完全相反的。世界告訴我們，我們是自己的老闆。這是你的生命、你的金錢、你的時間和你的財產。你可以隨心所欲地運用。但聖經告訴我們，當我們接受耶穌進入我們心中的那一刻，祂就成了我們的主。順服主是跟隨者得到喜樂的唯一途徑。神比我們更了解我們的需要。祂對我們的要求都是為了我們的好處，雖然有時我們可能不喜歡或不明白。因此，無論是禁食還是其他屬靈操練，我們都需要順服主。除了不吃飯之外，還有其他形式的節制。最近，一位聽眾在基督徒電台分享說，她嘗試克制她的驕傲。她嘗試不以自我為中心。在與人談話時，她不再一直地講自己的事，乃是學習聆聽。她還尋找機會在公開場合稱讚別人。經過一段時間之後，她發現自己變得更加謙卑。也許這就是我們需要嘗試的節制方式。此外，我們還可以放棄其他權利。例如，你可以考慮把手機或信用卡收起來、關閉遊戲機或電腦、控制花多少時間在社交媒體、看連續劇或看球賽。重點是有效地控制神賦予你的自由。你不再讓機器或活動成為你的主人，而是讓神成為你唯一的主人。該吃飯或睡覺的時候，該讀聖經或參加聚會的時候，你都可以自由地順從主。作為耶穌的門徒，你過著更有紀律的生活。你便能得到更大的喜樂。

結論 CONCLUSION

禁食不僅僅是不吃東西。重點是將我們的主權降服在神面前。我們暫時放下一些個人的需要和願望，使我們把注意力放在神身上。藉此我們體驗耶穌對我們的主權。我們把焦點從以自我為中心、以他人為中心轉變為以神為中心。到目前為止，我們探討了三個課題：憐憫人、禱告和禁食。如果我們把這三個操練變成表演一樣，很容易會使自己產生驕傲。唯有當我們關心神如何看我們而不是人們如何評價我們時，我們才能在耶穌裡享受真正的自由。我們所做的一切都將出自於一顆單純的心。我們的目標是祝福人們並榮耀神。