

Stop Messing Around – Is 58:1-14

Is 58:1-14; (Intro) I don't remember every game in my basketball career, and certainly not every practice; In fact, there are a few I'd like to forget
But I do remember one in particular, about mid-way through the season, when we were just flat-out messing around
Not only was there no intensity, or focus, or energy – but we acted like there was nothing at stake; It was all just fun and games

And as we were going through the drills, we suddenly realized that our coach hadn't said anything for like 10 minutes; Which wasn't normal
And though we were clueless at first, there came a point when we could almost *feel* his disappointment and anger

And the first words out of his mouth when we finally stopped and gathered around him, were – “When are you going to stop messing around?”
“You want to lose, fine; Just keep on; You want to waste your time? Go ahead; But you're *not* gonna waste mine; So stop messing around”
And we did; And went on to win a lot of games b/c of it

And the gist of this passage, from God to us, is the same – stop messing around; Stop acting like you're devoted, when you're not
Stop acting like you're all in, when you're just going through the motions
That's the message; And I want you to see if for yourself, so take a look at v1

➤ “*Cry aloud* [God says to Isaiah]; *do not hold back; lift up your voice like a trumpet; declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Jacob their sins.* 2 *Yet they seek me daily and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that did righteousness and did not forsake the judgment of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments; they delight to draw near to God.*

3 *‘Why have we fasted, and you see it not [they say to God]? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?’* [And then God responds] *Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers.* 4 *Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high.*

5 *Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the LORD?*

6 *“Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? 7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?*

Yes; Yes, yes, and yes; It's rhetorical question after rhetorical question to address the issue of our devotion, our devotion to God
And he uses a *fast*, the practice of abstaining from food – to illustrate it
That's not to say that this passage is *about* fasting – it's not; It's about devotion
And he basically says – stop messing around

B/c first of all . . .

God hates phony façades (v1-2)

Which comes from the strength of his words in v1

Cry aloud; do not hold back; lift up your voice like a trumpet; declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Jacob their sins.

IOW get on this, and say it like it is; B/c I am *not* happy; I hate what I see

Even though *they seek me daily* [v2] *and delight to know my ways*

And, ask of me *righteous judgments* – want me to intervene on their behalf

And even *delight to draw near to me*

They do all *that*, but they don't follow through

Rather, they do it as if *they were a nation that did righteousness*

They do it as *if* they *did not forsake* my judgments or decisions God says

They seek me as *if* they want to abide by my guidance

They ask of me, as *if* they do what they're told; As *if* they walk their talk

But they don't; They're living a lie; A great big hypocritical façade; And I hate it

➤ And God's people that we are, the same is true for us; There's nothing about the New Covenant that changes God's view of phony façades; Look at the Pharisees
Or how about when your intent is not backed up by your action?

For instance, when you say you'll pray for someone, and don't – that's a phony façade
Or when you act like you read your Bible, but rarely open it – that's a façade
Or when you seek God's will, but don't follow through – it's a façade
Or worship in church, but don't draw near to God – it's a façade; A phony façade
And God hates it; Which means you better stop messing around

Second, this passage tell us that . . .

God ignores fake followers (v3-4)

In v3, the people say – ‘*Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?*’

IOW “why is it God, that our acts of devotion have gone unnoticed by you? Why are you ignoring us? We're doing the right things”

And God answers in v3b – *Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure*

IOW you're disingenuous; You're fake; At the very time you're supposedly focusing on *me* – you're thinking about yourself; It's all about you!

That's why you're not being heard or noticed

Not only that, but you *oppress all your workers* God says (3b) – you treat them poorly, you put them down; Instead of living by the *golden* rule in your relationships . . .
You treat people like they're expendable
Instead of living at *peace* as far as it depends on you – you fight, bicker, and hurt each other, v4

All at the very time that you're *supposed* to be showing your devotion to God

➤ And then you have the gall to ask why he doesn't notice?

Let me tell you something God says in v4b – *Fasting like yours this day* [as in, *faking* it in life; and going through the *motions* in church] . . .

Will not make your voice to be heard on high. Will not make God take notice of you and your requests

That's not to say he doesn't *know* what's going on; Or that he doesn't care
He just doesn't answer b/c you've turned your back on him
Which Isaiah clarifies a few verses later in chapter 59, where he says in v1-2. . .
Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; 2 but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.
It's not that he *can't* hear, it's that he *chooses* not to hear

Here's the deal – If you're a fake follower, you're in sin; And if you're in sin, God ignores you; B/c you're disingenuous
And the only way to change that, is to stop messing around
If you want the ear of God, if you want the attention of the Almighty – get real

3rd . . .

God rejects half-hearted devotion (v5)

After exposing the error of their fast in v3-4, God continues in v5, saying – *Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself?*

IOW is that the act of devotion I want from you – a day of not eating?

Is that the extent of your devotion? Is that the life to which I've called you?

Is it [for a person] to bow down his head [v5] like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him?

Is it just convenient *forms* of worship that I seek? No more significant than a reed that bends in the wind?

Is it just *outward* displays of piety, like sackcloth and ashes, apart from inward feelings of *devotion* to back them up?

Is it just empty *rituals* that I'm looking for, that cost little and mean less?

Will you call [that] a fast? Is that what you consider a legitimate expression of your devotion? *And a day [just a day] acceptable to the LORD?*

- I hope not; B/c God wants your *whole* life; He wants a *life-style* of devotion, not a series of convenient moments here and there
Not a Sunday check-off and a Wednesday drop-off, but a pattern and practice of going all out, b/c you're all in; Of loving him with *all* your heart
Of doing your best to present yourself to God as one approved, 2 Tim 2:15

Which I see all over the place in our church

Like those who just recently finished our First Principles discipleship curriculum, after 3 years of study and work and diligence; That's devotion
Or those who have been quietly serving week in and week out in various ministries, for even longer – with love in their heart and joy on their face
Or how about the marriage of the couple Becky and I had lunch with this week – who are getting ready to celebrate 55 years together
55 years of loving devotion – to both God, and each other

That's the fast *he* chooses for us; That's the act of devotion *he* wants
Not some half-hearted, half-way outward display that he *rejects*
He wants us to surrender *all* like the old hymn says
Which means if you're messin' around, you have to stop

And then in v6-7, the tone begins to change a bit; And we find that . . .

God expects dedicated doers (v6-7)

He hates phony facades, he ignores fake followers, he rejects half-hearted devotion, and he *expects* dedicated doers; *Dedicated* doers

Saying in v6 – *Is not this the fast that I choose* [the act of devotion I want to see in you]: *to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?*

Isn't *that* what I'm looking for, God asks? It is

He wants to see us *counter* the effects of sin; He wants to see us *fight* injustice; And break bondages – *every* bondage

Far from lazy slackers, God expects dedicated doers

- When I was a commodities trader, I used to work with a guy who everybody called a “slacker”; In fact, it got so bad, that people called him that to his face every now/then
And rightfully so; B/c he moved slow, he disappeared for hours at a time, he did as *little* as possible, and schmoozed his way into every favorable position he ever had
It was pathetic; And far from what our employer *expected*

And the same is true of God when it comes to the things of life; He expects dedicated *doers*, not slackers; People . . .

• Who bring justice to bear when it's lacking (v6)

That's the idea of v6; God wants us to work for the release of those in bondage to sin – those bound by *the bonds of wickedness*

Or those enslaved by the straps of life – like poverty, or disability

Or those *oppressed* by the evil of man; Or those captured by the *yoke* of Satan

God expects us to be dedicated doers who bring justice to bear when it's lacking

Which could mean speaking up for those who *can't*, or supporting those who *do*

It could mean protesting at the capitol, or praying at a clinic

It could mean lobbying in *person*, or with the crowds on the internet

It could mean advancing a cause, or causing a stir

It could be *behind* the scenes, or making a scene

Whatever the case, blending in to the background is not an option; We've seen this before

Quiet prayer alone, is *not* what God expects; Injustice has to be *addressed*

And he expects us to do it; To bring justice to bear when it's lacking; And . . .

• Who show compassion where it's needed (v7)

That's v7, where God *continues* to describe the act of devotion he expects, saying . . .

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? That's compassion; Or as we call it, local outreach

And none of us are exempt; None of us are exempt from taking care of our own families, our own *flesh*; None of us are exempt from clothing the *poor*

Or opening our homes; Or sharing our food

Far from *hiding* ourselves from those in need, or *insulating* ourselves from uncomfortable situations . . .

God expects us to get *involved* with them; And *meet* their needs

- Does that mean you have to do everything? No; That would be impossible
Does it mean enabling those you help? Absolutely not
Does it mean working alone? Only if you have to

What it *does* mean, is that doing *nothing* is not an option
And working *together*, is best; And pooling our resources, *necessary*
The very thing we do as a church with our local outreach partners
We strive to show compassion where it's needed by partnering with others who are doing the same – in our neighborhoods, our city, our nation, and our world

But it's important to remember that money alone won't do it; And neither will programs;
Or handouts; They need us
They need someone to show them the love of God, *first-hand*, and hand-to-hand
It's what God expects – dedicated doers

And then last, and best of all . . .

God blesses those who respond (v8-14)

Those who heed his admonition to stop messing around; If you keep it real, go all out, and do what he wants . . .

Then shall your light break forth like the dawn [v8]; *Then* will your righteousness, and glory, and impact burst on the scene

Respond like you should, *and your healing shall spring up speedily*; Your healing from the effects of sin

[8b] Your righteousness shall go before you [like the beam of a flashlight – preparing the way, announcing your entrance, and making your presence felt]; *the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard* [your protection]. *9 Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer* [as opposed to when you're fake]; *you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.'* *If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, 10 if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted* [if you respond like that], *then shall your light rise in the darkness* [wickedness] *and your gloom be as the noonday* [bright and joyful].

11 And the LORD will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail [you'll be a place and source of life].

12 And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt [your former glory as my people will be restored]; *you shall raise up the foundations of many generations* [as in, you'll prepare the way for more and more, just like yourself]; *you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in* [the ones who bring the effects of salvation to bear].

With a whole host of physical object lessons from their day, he conveys a spiritual truth for all time; That God blesses those who respond
With things like hope, healing, influence, protection, restoration, guidance, satisfaction, strength, provision, purpose, value – they're all there

- But they're not automatic; The blessings that God bestows, don't happen just b/c you're one of his own
They come **by living right, giving of yourself, and honoring the Sabbath** according to this passage; 3 prerequisites

The first of which, **living right**, is found in v9b – *If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness* – you'll reap the benefits
It's a summary of all that he's just been saying
Get rid of the sin in your life, and God will bless your life; It's that simple
It doesn't mean the absence of hardship, but it definitely means the presence of blessing

Second, God blesses those who **give of themselves**

V10 says – *if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness*; Then God will extend his blessings

And 3rd, he blesses those who **honor the Sabbath** – the very thing we talked about 2 weeks ago at length
[13] "If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day [IOW if you stop making the Lord's day all about you], and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly [as if there's nothing special about the Lord's day]; [14] then you shall take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth [I will exalt you]; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father [IOW I'll make sure you're the recipient of the promises I made to them], for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

- God blesses those who respond; Those who respond by living right, giving of themselves, and honoring his day (**Summary**)
And those who throw the facades away and keep it real
And those who go all out, instead of half in; And those who do what he wants, just like he expects (**Summary**)
It's one more reason, God's blessing, and a really good one – to stop messing around
Just like my coach said

Pray – God, wherever necessary would you remove our facades, and expose our fakery, and increase our devotion, and find us doers of the word and not just hearers only?
Forgive us for messing around; Forgive us for surrendering little
And receive our tithes now as an expression of our devotion – our devotion to you, and our dedication to your work