

Fasting for the King's Coming

by John Piper

We should fast regularly for the end of history as we know it to long for the King's coming and to yearn for his return.

Duration: 29:46

Scripture: Deuteronomy 8:3, Ezra 8:21, Matthew 4:4, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 9:15, Luke 2:39-40, Acts 13:2

Topics: "Spiritual Discipline", "Eschatology"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of fasting as a spiritual practice. He explains that fasting is not just for times of crisis, but can be done out of a longing for the presence of God. The speaker references Luke 18:7, where Jesus promises to vindicate those who cry out to him day and night, and suggests that fasting is a means by which we can bring about the return of Jesus. He concludes by encouraging the congregation to participate in a month-long fasting challenge and shares his desire to hear testimonies of God's intervention in their lives.

Transcript

Luke chapter 2 verses 21 through 40. If you are using a pew Bible, you can find it on page 1,216. Luke 2 verses 21 through 40.

And when eight days were completed before his circumcision, his name was then called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. As it is written in the law of the Lord, every firstborn male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord, and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.

And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel. And the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

And he came in the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the child Jesus to carry out for him the custom of the law, then he took him into his arms and blessed God and said, Now Lord, thou dost let thy bondservant depart in peace according to thy word. For my eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou has prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of thy

people Israel.

And his father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed. And a sword will pierce even your own soul, to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.

And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with a husband seven years after her marriage, and then as a widow to the age of 84. And she never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers.

And at that very moment, she came up and began giving thanks to God and continued to speak of him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. And when they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth. And the child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.

We come to the end of January, and the call as a church to fast one day a week. And I wish there were a time soon, and we'll try to find a time when we as a church could tell each other what God has done. Because just listening to the staff last Tuesday during our prayer time talk about the surprising interventions of God in our lives and in the people's lives that we are aware of, it fills me with a longing to want to press on in our pattern of fasting.

And in fact, I do have a proposal for how to press on, which I'll tell you in just a few minutes as we come to the end of this sermon. In this series of messages on fasting, we have seen from Acts 13, in the city of Antioch, how history was changed through a group of leaders fasting and worshiping and hearing the Holy Spirit say, set aside Barnabas and Saul to the work to which I've called them. Then we saw Jesus in Matthew 9, 15 say, the reason my disciples are not fasting is because you don't fast at weddings.

The bridegroom is here, but the days are coming when the bridegroom will be taken away and then my disciples will fast. And then we saw Jesus in the wilderness say to the devil who tried to interrupt his fast, man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes out of the mouth of God. And we learn that we're to feed on God and to feed on his word when we're fasting and nurture our lives, not first on physical food but on spiritual food, namely God revealed in his spoken word.

And then last week we saw from Ezra 8, 21 that through fasting and humbling and the praying of it, God delivers his people, even the little ones. Next week, I'm going to jump ahead and tie it back into this week. Next week we're going to go to the Sermon on the Mount and in Matthew 6 we're going to see Jesus connect the Lord's Prayer with fasting, praying and then fasting.

And the two or three main preeminent petitions of the Lord's Prayer are, Lord let your name be hallowed, Lord let your kingdom come, and Lord let your will be done all over the world the way the angels do it in heaven. Kingdom come, come Jesus, and fasting is connected with that. Fasting in the Sermon on the Mount is linked with a prayer for the kingdom to come.

Come King Jesus, and you fast. Now that should not be surprising if you jump back two weeks to Matthew 9, 15 where the King had come, the bridegroom was there, they quit fasting, and when they were asked, why don't they fast? He said, you don't fast when the King is here, when the bridegroom is here, when the wedding is on, you don't fast. But the days are coming when the bridegroom will leave or the King will go

back to his kingdom on a long journey, as one of the parables says, and then they will fast.

Why? So he'd come. Fasting is a physical expression of the measure of our longing for the coming of the bridegroom or the King. That's why it's linked up with thy kingdom come.

Fasting for the coming of the King is the name of this message, and it's a remarkable and fresh insight for me. I wonder, here's a thought for you to think about, I wonder if the Lord means for fasting to be a kind of counterpoint to the Lord's Supper, because in the Lord's Supper he taught us to say, do this in remembrance of me. That is, when you eat, when you feed on the bread, which is my body, and when you drink the wine, which is my blood, remember, I came, I died, I rose, I will come, so that when we are eating, we are celebrating the doneness of it.

It is finished, and he has come, and we have seen him, and we have known him. But brothers and sisters, he is gone. And it says in the Bible, we walk by faith and not by sight, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord if we could.

He is not here in a profound way. He's not here like he once was. You can't touch him, you can't see him, you can't hear him speak his own voice.

Everything is mediated, mediated by his spirit, mediated by his word, mediated by his church. But one day, he will stand forth again in glory, and to signal that, we fast. When the bridegroom is taken away, then they will fast.

So the Lord's Supper, the eating, the feasting of the Christian church is a great celebrative yes to the already of what he's done. And the waiting and yearning and longing that he would come again is expressed with hunger and fasting. Luke 18, 7, Jesus says, Will not God vindicate his elect who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will vindicate them speedily.

Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth? Have you ever thought that Jesus has appointed means by which we will bring him back? Will God not vindicate his elect who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over those? I tell you, he will vindicate them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth? Cry what? Day and night. What do you cry to the Lord day and night? Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done all over the earth. Come. Take your reign.

Come back to the wedding. Come back to the bride. Come.

That's what we're supposed to cry day and night, day and night. And it may well be that the Lord has delayed and that some of the other prerequisites, like the finishing of world evangelization, the reviving of God's church, delay because we just eat. We just eat.

We just go on as though this is the way it's supposed to be. You know, if you have eyes to see the world the way it is, in its pain, in its misery, in its brokenness, to see the bride of Christ in her besmirched, imperfect form, and you have eyes to see the way it's supposed to be under the magnificent lordship of Jesus, you got plenty to groan about and to long for and to fast for. So, what I'm introducing this morning is a plea to fast for the coming of the king regularly.

And that will be a measure of our contentedness in the world the way it is. I'm calling for something that's not new. I want to direct your attention now to Anna in Luke 2. In this text, here's an old woman.

She's about 84. Could be that she's much older, depending on how the text should be actually translated. She's at least 84.

Her whole life almost has been spent in this sacred ministry of fasting for the coming of the king. Let me read these verses, starting at verse 36 of Luke 2. There was a prophetess named Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with a husband seven years after her marriage, and then as a widow to the age of 84.

It may be translated 84 years after her husband died, which would make her over 100. But at any rate, a very old, old woman who's been fasting for at least 60 years. And at that very moment, namely the moment when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus into the temple and Simeon began to recognize him, at that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God and continued to speak of him, of Jesus, namely to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

So Mary and Joseph have just come into the temple, the infant Jesus in their arms. Luke tells us about two very old people, Simeon and Anna, and what marks both of them is yearning for the king to come, for the Messiah to come. They'd read their Old Testaments, they were immersed in them, they knew all the prophecies that he was going to come one day, and he would be consolation to Israel, he would be redemption to Jerusalem, he'd triumph over his enemies, he'd bear the sins of his people, he would establish his kingdom, he would reign forever, the government would be upon his shoulders, there would be peace and righteousness, and oh, she wanted that.

She wanted it so bad that she almost never, maybe I should say never, left the temple. She lived in it and she fasted night and day. I don't know how, but for 60 years, roughly, she's been fasting because she wants the king, she wants him to come.

Verse 37, with fastings and with prayers, it says she never left the temple. Simeon was longing for the Messiah, too. You see that in verse 25, it says he was looking for the consolation of Israel and the Holy Spirit was on him.

For her, it's expressed with fastings and with prayers, night and day. And then in verse 38, she comes just at the right moment to see Jesus, she's a prophet, prophetess, and so the Holy Spirit communicates things to her that don't come in ordinary ways, and she recognizes that this is the Christ. She begins to open her mouth and speak of Jesus to those who were also, notice the wording, looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

That's the kind of woman she was. She was looking, longing for the redemption of Jerusalem. And I think one of the points of Luke, who's weaving this chapter together, in choosing a Simeon and describing him the way he does, and choosing an Anna and describing her the way he does, one of the points of Luke is to say, God precedes the coming of his king through expectant people who yearn for him and long for him and look for him and fast for him, and he gives special, wonderful glimpses of his glory to people like that.

Wouldn't that a remarkable thing for Simeon to be chosen to see and Anna to be chosen to see two old, old people who had longed for the coming of the king and God in his sovereignty says, well, we'll, before Simeon dies, we'll let Simeon see and we'll let, there's old Anna, she's been fasting for 60 years to see the

redemption of Jerusalem, I'm gonna let her see before I take her home. God looks down on people who long for the king with a special favor in revealing to them the glory. Now, let's compare.

Here we are, you and I, on the other side of the coming of the king. Jesus has been revealed in his glory, the Son as of the only begotten of the Father. We've seen him live and teach and we've seen him die, we've seen him rise, he reigns at the right hand of the Father, he's poured out his Spirit, the Spirit dwells within us, regenerating and sanctifying and indwelling and he's commissioned the church to evangelize the nations and he's given us the promise in John 14 3, I will come again.

So we live on the side where we know a hundred times more than Anna knew. Do we long like Anna longs? Measure your longing for the return of our king whom we know a hundred times better than she knew him, for whom she longed with 60 years of fasting. Do we long more or do we long less for the coming of our king? If we say less, what a sad commentary on our sight of his glory.

How does our situation compare with Anna's? Just measure it. How much more of the Messiah have we seen? She never saw the 33 years of loving compassion toward people, she never saw the words or heard the words of authority and wisdom and love, she never had seen him give sight to the blind or hearing to the deaf or cleansing to the lepers or healing to the lame or raise a dead person, she never saw his agony of love in the garden, she never saw him hang in love for us and for our sins on the cross, she never heard those tender words, today you will be with me in paradise, she never heard those authoritative words of it is finished, she never saw him laid in the grave, she never saw him rise out of that tomb and for 40 days give many infallible proofs of his resurrection, she never saw him ascend bodily into heaven and speak back from the angels, he will come again, she never saw the Holy Spirit out poured and the wonders that the Apostles worked, she never saw any of that and she fasted day and night for 60 years to see this king. We've seen it, we know him, how do we long for him? How are we doing folks? Let's be like Anna, shall we long less or shall we long more? Does the fact that we know him lessen our longing for him to be here? What a dishonor to the Lord if that were true.

What a dishonor to the Lord if our knowing what we know of him made us long for him less than Anna longed for him in her fastings and prayings for 60 years, night and day, never leaving the temple. I say let us long for him and yearn for him and look for him more intensely than Anna did. We have beheld his glory.

Paul said in 2 Timothy 4, 8, the righteous judge will give to me a crown of righteousness and not only to me but to all who have loved his appearing. Do you love the appearing of the Lord? Do you want him to come or are we settled into the world so comfortably that the thought of fasting regularly for the end of history? Give me a break Piper. Is that what you're really asking? I am.

I am asking you to fast regularly for the end of history as we know it because you want the king to come. The wedding got interrupted folks. Jesus is standing right here.

He's standing right here. It's where all the grooms stand unless we do one of these modern fandangle weddings and the bridegroom is coming and he's gone. He's out of there.

There we are and we're looking around. Hey this was a wedding going on here. You loved us.

You showed yourself to us. You said you would love us to the uttermost and now poof and the wedding is interrupted. I'm asking you to fast for the bridegroom.

That's all. Jesus said the days are coming when the bridegroom will be taken away and then they will fast. They will look all over the building.

They'll go all through the town. They can't find him and they'll get out on their faces and say please come back so that the wedding can happen. It was a happy time and it will be happy again.

Older people can you taste the glories of the Lord better now because you're getting close to them and do you not feel a longing welling up inside of you to fast as much as your older body will allow periodically to say come, come, come. Kids, let me ask you this, little kids, teenagers, young adults, is your love for Jesus strong enough so that you want him to break in to your life? Last night in the kitchen I was putzing around with barmaid's dishes or something. I can't remember what we were doing and I heard this chant or song or something, tomorrow is the Super Bowl, tomorrow is the Super Bowl or something like that and I said would it be okay if Jesus comes back tonight? And he said oh yeah, fine, it'll be alright.

And then we speculated for a little while about how the coming of the Lord will be 100,000 times greater than whatever you've got planned around the Super Bowl tonight. And if you don't feel that, get on your face folks and plead for an awakening from God because you're blind, blind, blind. Middle-aged people or those of us pushing the upper end of the middle, are we resistant to hearing a call to fast for the end of our careers, the end of all the plans for how it's supposed to wind up in 15 years and the retirement and the grandchildren and slowing down? Are we resistant to fasting that all of that would be broken into, ended just by the return of the bridegroom? God help us if we say not now Lord Jesus, not this decade, not until they have children, not until we can do that thing that we've been dreaming about for so long.

God help us if that's the way we think. I am calling you to fast for the end of history. I don't think I'll ever be the same after January 1995.

I've seen too much about fasting, about hungering for God and hungering for his word and hungering for the safety of the little ones and hungering for revival and hungering for the coming of the bridegroom. I've just seen too much now. It'll never be the same again.

It's got to be in the warp and whoop of my life and I will be a hypocrite if I do not weave this into my life and I believe we will be hypocrites as a church having heard this word if we do not weave it into the life of our church. So how shall we do it? I close with a recommendation and a call to keep biblical discipline of fasting before us as a church, to give more and more of you a chance to grow into this. For most of you, I realize this is an almost totally foreign reality.

You didn't grow up in churches probably or in a family where fasting was a regular thing and you're sitting there saying, oh my goodness, if he's anywhere near the mark, I have been off the mark and I just join you and say, I believe I've been off the mark. I believe we've been off the mark as a church. I believe there's a more biblical way to weave it in.

In order to avail ourselves of all the ordained empowering that God wants our prayers to have, in order to be unrelenting in our pursuit of revival in world evangelization and in order for us to long for and express our longing for the King, I'm going to recommend a simple ministry called the Fasting Forty. The Fasting Forty is a group of 40 people who in every month of the year will fast for one day a week. A different group of people perhaps each month of the year or if some want to do it more often, then they can be included more often.

What I'm going to do, as I have done today, is on the last Sunday of every month I'm going to produce a card, the Fasting Forty, and I'm going to make 40 copies of the card and I'm going to put a word of encouragement and guidance and a Bible verse on the card and I'm going to put them on the information table with numbers 1 to 40 in the upper right hand corner and I'm going to say every final Sunday of every month this year that they are there and 40 of you will be called by God to go pick one up and God will know who you are. That's all. Because the Lord Jesus said, beware of fasting to be seen by men.

I have number one here so I can hold it up to you. In fact, I'm going to to ask David to do something for me, David Livingston. I'm realizing that if I don't do this, these people are going to snatch these cards up and the people in the Second Service aren't even going to get a chance.

Would you take the bottom 20 off of that pile and hold them, okay, and then put them out just before the Second Service begins? Okay, so there are only going to be 20 cards there at the end of the service. Now this is for people who this month of February, for the month of February, would like to just keep going and of course it can be anybody keeping going. But my thought is that if there were a team or a core of 40 people, like 40 days or whatever just sounded right to me and we prayed about it as a staff, that seemed to be a good core, a kind of leavening, a kind of percentage that if there were 40 people every month this year continuing what we've been doing, we might see some of the same things we have been seeing.

So it's all written up in the star this week. If it didn't make sense quite right now, you can read the star and try to understand it better. And I would ask 20 of you to prayerfully do not do this if your heart is not calling you to be one of those 20 people because others would look for the cards and they won't be there anymore, and then tuck it in your Bible.

What we've seen this morning is that you don't need a crisis in your life in order to fast. All you need is longing for the bridegroom to come. And may the Lord increase our longing for the bridegroom and the King to come.

Let's stand for closing prayer. The prayer teams are here. I'd like to stay here.

I'd really like to hear in just a minute or two that I have between the service of anything God's been doing in any of your lives and pray with you. So if you need prayer about anything or if you want to share what God's been doing, come on up and tell us about it. Father, I commend to you this simple ministry of the Fasting 40.

I ask that 20 people out of this service would quietly make their way to the information booth, take a card and put it in their Bibles and pick a day, one day a week, in the month of February and fast. And I pray that the power that spreads through our church through regular fasting for the coming of the King would be a great honor to you, King Jesus. Dismiss us under your wonderful authority and we do celebrate and feast as well as fast because you have said not only that you will come but that the work is finished.

You're dismissed. God bless you as you go.

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