Fasting as Feasting
Matthew 6:16-19

Big Idea:
Fasting is a form of feasting upon Christ. We fast in order to draw near Him.

Introduction: The Context of the Sermon on the Mount (6-7min)

A King and His Kingdom
The Sermon doesn’t make any sense unless we first realize the Identity of the sermon giver and His relation to what He’s preaching. Jesus is the King and His authority/ submission to His authority is what actually allows the sermon to work.

Living in the Kingdom for the King
What is the Kingdom of God like? It’s upside down!
Ex.) The poor are seen as rich, the weak are found to be strong, the last are first and the first are last, the humble are exalted and the self-exalted are humbled. It’s an upside-down kingdom. Nothing would seem to be more upside down that the notion of fasting.

Context of our passage
Jesus has been talking about the vitality of living unto God rather than for the praise of man. The approach of refusing religion (to attempt to earn God’s favor and love/ the praise of men) and irreligion where spiritual discipline and practices are thrown off entirely. He shows that following Him affects our motives and actions. It’s WHY and WHAT.
- Giving
- Prayer

Now in Fasting

Matthew 6:16-19
"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. "But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,"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.

Big Idea:
Fasting is a form of feasting upon Christ. We fast in order to draw near Him.

Outline: What is fasting-Why do we Fast-How can we put this into practice?

1.) What is fasting?
Definition:
1.) Foster “Abstaining from food for Spiritual purposes”
   a. Abstinence (Intentionally withholding from a good gift given in order to foster a greater purpose and hunger for Christ.

2.) McKnight “fasting is the natural inevitable response of a person to a grievous sacred moment in life” (xx). Therefore, we are wrong to see fasting as a manipulative tool that guarantees results. It is instead a response. We do not fast to get something. We fast as a response. And if we receive something after or during the fast, it is because God has used the yearning in our heart (expressed through the fast) in order to grace us with more of his presence.

   It can be an expression of repentance, a response to a moment in which we feel we must earnestly seek God, a response to grief (Scot sees grief as the thread that connects all the various fasting practices). Fasting can sometimes be a response to our need for spiritual discipline, a response to our corporate life together, even a response to poverty and injustice.

Biblical Examples:
- David: Fasted as display of sorrow, repentance, and intercessory prayer
- Nineveh: Fasted corporately because they fell under conviction of sin. Fasting displayed the true inner brokenness and contriteness of heart (Compared to simply an external fast).
- Esther: Asked for a corporate fast that God might grant her favor before the King to save His people.
- Jesus: Fasted for 40 days to draw near God and prepare for spiritual attack/battle. Jesus shares certain strongholds and enemies are unable to be defeated in our lives except for fasting and prayer!
- Paul: Fasted as a result of encountering the risen Christ and His life being changed.

Fasting also reminds us that we are spirit and body. We can’t be dualists that believe it doesn’t matter what we do with our body as long as we keep our spirit clean. The Bible teaches that our body and spirit are intertwined and affect one another.

2.) Why do we Fast?

Why we don’t fast:
To be praised by men and receive our reward from them.

Hypocrites-Actors. Why? Aren’t we supposed to be “real, transparent”? They’re fasting and their letting other people know. Their hypocrisy is that the motive their fasting for is wrong. Doesn’t it feel good to be praised. To be thought of as good, as holy, as knowing what you’re doing and talking about. Nothing puffs us up and hinders true obedience than the desire to please other people.
Being seen fasting isn’t wrong it’s fasting IN ORDER to be SEEN.

Fasting is an outward display of an inward hunger and longing for something more than food! If fasting simply is an external act separated from an internal hunger for God, disaster will follow. Isaiah (58:3-12) warns of this by contrasting a true fast from a false fast.

False Fast: External Display while seeking our own pleasure, ceasing to eat food while oppressing other people, fasting while quarrelling and fighting

Why we fast:
To be seen by God and rewarded by Him.

Living for an Audience of One

-Fasting to fuel longing

“Fasting reveals a physical reliance on food that points to the ultimate dependency — the fact that you’re dependent on God for things far more important than food.”

John 4:32 But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.”

Matthew 9:14-15

14 Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” 15 And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.

We fast in this life because we believe in the life to come. We don’t have to get it all here and now, because we have a promise that we will have it all in the coming age. We fast from what we can see and taste, because we have tasted and seen the goodness of the invisible and infinite God — and are desperately hungry for more of him.

True Fast: (Isaiah 58)

Internal Hunger for Righteousness that leads to action for those marked and oppressed by the evil in this world. Opposing injustice (Racism-bigotry-selfishness-greed-lust). Is marked by generosity with your resources (food-home-clothing-relationship).

-Fasting to kill Idols

Romans 8:12-13

12 So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.
Phil 3:19 Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.

What does fasting reveal about your heart? Pride, Selfishness, Jealousy, Need to be recognized. Fasting will help reveal the heart and also bring God’s grace to crucify those areas.

Being Rewarded by God

Hebrews 11:6 “And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”

The Gospel and Fasting. We’re saved not because of our fasting but in order to fast and yearn for God. We give up food to respond not to achieve. God gave up His life to gain us and bestow His grace upon us. We give up food temporarily to better focus and connect with Him and His purposes. He IS the reward of our fasting. His presence, relationship.

3.) How can we begin to practice fasting?

1. Start small.
2. Plan what you’ll do instead of eating.
   Without a purpose and plan, it’s not Christian fasting; it’s just going hungry.
3. Consider how it will affect others.
   Good fasting mingles horizontal concern with the vertical. If anything, others should even feel more loved and cared for when we’re fasting.
4. Try different kinds of fasting.
   personal and communal, private and public, congregational and national, regular and occasional, absolute and partial
5. Fast from something other than food.