

*Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins. 2Yet day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God.*

*3“Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?” Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers. 4Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high. 5Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? 6Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? 7Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?*

*8Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. 9Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, 10if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. 11The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. 12Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.*

When God wants to punish us, God leaves us to ourselves. God does not need to call down lightning from the skies, give me a dread disease, take all my money from me. No, to make me miserable all God needs to do is to let me think about me, be concerned about me, try to build security for me, and I'll be miserable. Just as God allowed Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of the tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil God allows me to do the same. Remember the serpent's words, "You will be like God if you eat this fruit." And so I nibble at being God.

I try to guarantee my children's future.

I try to prop up my sagging self-esteem.

I focus my attention on how my health is, thinking that my health depends on me.

I make goodness my goal and monitor myself to see how I am doing.

Everything I should turn over to God I carry on my own back, and soon I'm bent down and not sleeping nights and finding life a greater burden than I can bear.

God has done nothing to punish and I'm miserable.

If you do not know what that is like surely you have seen in in another. Someone is just obsessed with herself - can't stop thinking about herself. Everything is done for her happiness. And there is none - only endless complaining.

Like the complaining of Israel to God: "Why have we fasted if you are not aware of it? Why have we inflicted pain on ourselves if you don't pay attention?" God said of this people:

"They look for me every day and want to know my ways. They act as if they were a nation that has done what is right and as if they haven't disregarded God's judgement on them. They ask for just decrees. They want God to be near them."

In their minds they are doing their part, but where is God? I go to church every Sunday, I watch out that I don't sin, I pray regularly, so why am I not happy? Why am I lonely, Why am I not at peace? Why do I have pain?

Maybe if I cut out deserts during Lent it will make a difference. Or make a special effort not to swear or use profanity. Maybe if I make a point of doing daily devotions for the forty days, or cut out going to movies. Maybe I just need to try harder.

And God answers: "Is this the kind of fasting I have chosen? Should people humble themselves for a day? Is fasting just bowing your head like a cattail and making your bed from sackcloth and ashes? Is this what you call fasting? Is this an acceptable day to the Lord?"

Well, is it? Is God concerned that you not eat chocolate or meat? Is God delighted if you beat yourself up by finding fault with yourself, constantly examining yourself? Listen.

"This is the kind of fasting I have chosen: Loosen the chains of wickedness, untie the straps of the yoke, let the oppressed go free, and break every yoke. Share you food with the hungry, and take the homeless poor into your house, and cover them with clothes when you see them naked. Don't refuse to help your relatives."

God wants us to forget about ourselves and serve our neighbors. Forget about your holiness, and take time to listen to the one who has lost a loved one. Forget about your sins and be a friend for the one who has just moved in down the street. Forget about whether you are good enough for God and let your undeserving neighbor be good enough for you - stop judging and start loving.

Think of it: In Jesus Christ God declares you righteous. Justified. What an insult to God when you think that skipping deserts will somehow add to what God has given you as a

gift in Jesus Christ! What an insult to God when I think my sorrow over my sin means more for my forgiveness than Jesus' dying for me! My forgiveness is a gift. Your wholeness, your salvation is a gift, freely and completely given.

You are taken care of, complete in Christ. But here in this place are people who need you, need you to listen, need you to receive what they want to do for you. Be rich for them, generously rich to supply all their needs, be poor and needy for them, if there is anything they would give you hungrily receive it.

Hear the promise to a people who care for one another: “Your light will break through like the dawn, and you will heal quickly.” “Your righteousness, (Christ) shall go ahead of you and the glory of the Lord will guard you from behind. If you give your own food to feed those who are hungry and to satisfy the needs of those who are humble then your light will rise in the dark and your darkness will become as bright as the noonday sun. The Lord will continually guide you, and satisfy you even in sunbaked places. He will strengthen your bones. You will become like a watered garden and like a spring whose water does not stop flowing.”