

Freedom's Covenant Midrash on Isaiah 58:6-14

Isaiah 58:6-14 HCSB Isn't the fast I choose: To break the chains of wickedness, to untie the ropes of the yoke, to set the oppressed free, and to tear off every yoke? (7) Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, to bring the poor and homeless into your house, to clothe the naked when you see him, and to not ignore your own flesh *and blood*? (8) Then your light will appear like the dawn, and your recovery will come quickly. Your righteousness will go before you, and the LORD's glory will be your rear guard. (9) At that time, when you call, the LORD will answer; when you cry out, He will say: Here I am. If you get rid of the yoke from those around you, the finger-pointing and malicious speaking, (10) and if you offer yourself to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted one, then your light will shine in the darkness, and your night will be like noonday. (11) The LORD will always lead you, satisfy you in a parched land, and strengthen your bones. You will be like a watered garden and like a spring whose waters never run dry. (12) Some of you will rebuild the ancient ruins; you will restore the foundations laid long ago; you will be called the repairer of broken walls, the restorer of streets where people live. (13) "If you keep from desecrating the Sabbath, from doing whatever you want on My holy day; if you call the Sabbath a delight, and the holy *day* of the LORD honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, seeking your own pleasure, or talking too much; (14) then you will delight yourself in the LORD, and I will make you ride over the heights of the land, and let you enjoy the heritage of your father Jacob." For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Sometimes religious acts, even fasting and self-humbling, can be a form of self-indulgence. It can become a way to luxuriate in our own feelings of religiosity. Witness the emotional orgies that often characterize contemporary Christian music concerts. The people close their eyes, wave their hands, and many are not even pretending. They really do feel ecstasy. Yet the rest of the week finds them unchanged. They were emotionally moved, but ethically unchanged. Some use religious acts as a form of magical amulet. They think "If I will just fast so many days, God will answer my prayers." Or "If I just read the right books or follow the right spiritual guru, I will be spiritually 'successful'" Whatever that means.

Against this Isaiah strikes at our consciences and presses upon us the inexorable demands of social justice, sympathy and compassion, of love of neighbor and identification with him.

Isaiah also speaks against the prevailing American view that the angst of material wealth inherited can be removed by simply throwing enough money at enough little black babies overseas. He moves through three phases of responsibility, starting worldwide with broad strokes and moving steadily inward toward personal *d'vekut* with God. In a sense He's reflecting Jesus' admonition to begin with Jerusalem, to move out to Judea and Samaria and then finally reach out to the whole world.

I propose that this should be seen as hard-core strategy for our congregation. Let's begin where Isaiah does, world-wide.

Worldwide: (Isaiah 58:6-9a)

Break the chains of wickedness; untie the ropes of the yoke; set the oppressed free; tear off every yoke

1. Share bread with the hungry
2. Bring the poor and homeless into our house
3. Clothe the naked when we see him
4. Not ignore our own flesh and blood

Result

1. Our light will appear like the dawn
2. Our recovery will come quickly
3. Our righteousness will go before us
4. The Lord's glory will be our rear guard
5. When we call the Lord will answer, when we cry out He will say 'Here I am.'

Local: (Isaiah 58:9-12)

Get rid of the yoke from those around us

1. Get rid of finger-pointing
2. Get rid of malicious speaking
3. Offer ourselves to the hungry
4. Satisfy the afflicted ones

Result

1. Our light will shine in the darkness and our night will be like noonday
2. The Lord will always lead us
3. He will satisfy us in a parched land
4. He will strengthen our bones
5. We will be like a watered garden
6. We will be like a spring whose waters never run dry
7. Some will rebuild ancient ruins and restore foundations laid long ago
8. We will be called "Repairer of Broken Walls" and "Restorer of Streets" where people live.

Personal: (Isaiah 58:13-14)

- **Romans 14:5-6 HCSB** One person considers one day to be above another day. Someone else considers every day to be the same. Each one must be fully convinced in his own mind. (6) Whoever observes the day, observes it to the Lord. Whoever eats, eats to the Lord, since he gives thanks to God; and whoever does not eat, it is to the Lord that he does not eat, yet he thanks God.
- **James 4:11-12 HCSB** Don't criticize one another, brothers. He who criticizes a brother or judges his brother criticizes the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. (12) There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?

Keep from desecrating the Sabbath

1. Doing whatever we want
2. Consider it a delight
3. Consider it honorable
4. Honor it by:
 - a. Not going our own ways
 - b. Seeking our own pleasure
 - c. Talking too much

Result

1. We will delight ourselves in the Lord
2. We will ride over the heights of the land
3. We will enjoy the heritage of our father Jacob

Cf. Matthew 25:35-40. Also: Hosea 6:4-6; Micah 6:6-9; Isaiah 1:11-20; Ezekiel 18:5-9, 14-17; Zechariah 7:8-10; Job 31:13-40