

LESSON 11

FASTING.

I

BLOW the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly : gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts : let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet. Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thy heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them : wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God ?—*Joel* ii. 15-17.

Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning : And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God : for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him ; even a meat-offering and a drink-offering unto the Lord your God ?—*Joel* ii. 12-14.

Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labors. Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high.

Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I have chosen—to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thy own flesh?

Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward. Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shalt say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity;

and if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul ; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday : and the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones : and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.—*Isa.* lviii. 3–11.

II.

Sanctify ye a fast: call a solemn assembly : gather the elders, and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God, and cry unto the Lord.—*Joel* i. 14.

So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing : let them not feed, nor drink water : but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God : yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will

turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not ?

And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.—*Jonah* iii. 5-10.

Moreover, when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.—*Matt.* vi. 16-18.

And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast: and they come and say unto him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not? And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bride-chamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.—*Mark* ii. 18-20.

END LESSON 11