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P.O. Box 182218, Chattanooga, TN 37422-7218
1-888-734-7707/ www.preceptsforlife.com

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SERIES: Isaiah, Part 2 (Comfort For His People)

TITLE: Program 32 – The Fast God Chooses

TUESDAY

OPEN

Are you, My Friend, going through the rituals with God, doing the Christian thing, the church thing, and yet you feel like God is far away? Do you suppose that might be because truth has stumbled in the street? (See Isaiah 59:14) And maybe it's because you have not embraced truth and gotten it beyond your head into your heart. We'll talk about it today.

PART ONE

I love it, Precious One, that you want to know God's precepts for life, that you want to know: What are His standards? What are His teachings? Because [it's through His precepts that we get understanding]. (PARAPHRASE, Psalm 119:104) Well all this week we're looking at Isaiah chapter 58, 59, and 60. And we're looking at what happens when truth stumbles in the streets. (See Isaiah 59:14) And if you want to look at a society where truth has stumbled in the streets, you look at the statistics about the church in the United States of America and you will see that we

are so like the world in our statistics, in our divorce, in our immorality, in our lack of a biblical world view, etc., etc., etc., that we can easily see that in the United States of America, **“...truth has stumbled in the [streets].** (**Isaiah 59:14**) You see it in England. I was just there, and you see it in England. Truth has stumbled in the streets. And what about your country? Because I know that this program goes far beyond the borders of the United States of America. Or maybe you’re in a country where truth never was. But you look at Greece; truth was in Greece. Of course they started off with all this idolatry, but truth arrived because God said to Paul, **“...Come over to Macedonia...,”** through a vision **“...and help us...,”** (**Acts 16:9**) and truth came and many came to know truth. And because of that they were set free. And yet, you know what? You can know the truth, you can walk in the truth, but then if you don’t keep growing in the truth, and if you allow the culture to come and woo you and seduce you and you don’t give time to studying the Word of God, then truth will stumble in the streets. So God is writing to His people. God is writing to His elect nation. God is writing to the nation of Israel to whom belong the fathers, the covenants, the promises, the Law, the commandments, the ordinances; all of this. And yet truth has stumbled in the streets. We see that in Isaiah 59, verse 14, just in case you didn’t get yesterday’s introductory message to this passage. Now we’re looking at ten things that happen when truth stumbles in the streets. The second thing that I want you to see— the first thing we saw is when truth stumbles in the streets: God’s people are walking in iniquity. They have turned their back on righteousness and they are living unrighteously. They are transgressing. They are sinning. They are committing iniquity. They are forsaking the ordinances of God. The second thing we see is that when you do this your religious activities are of no avail. In other words, they aren’t gonna profit you anything. And this is what you see happening in Isaiah chapter 58, because they’re saying to God, “Look, we’re fasting, but You’re not hearing. Listen to what he says. He says in verse 2 of Isaiah 58, **“Yet they seek Me**

day by day....” (Isaiah 58:2) They’re in their sin. They’re in their iniquity. **“Yet they seek Me day by day and delight to know My ways, as a nation that has done righteousness and has not forsaken the ordinance of their God. They ask Me for just decisions, [and] they delight in the nearness of God.”** (Isaiah 58:2) What He’s saying is this, you’re going through your religious form; you’re going through your ritual and you’re delighting in your religiosity and the sense of the nearness of God, and yet you are in sin. They are saying to Him in verse 3: **“Why have we fasted and You [don’t] see...?”** (Isaiah 58:3) I’m fasting and You’re not doing anything about it. **“...Why have we humbled ourselves...?”** (Isaiah 58:3) ’Cause that’s what fasting is supposed to be. **“...Why have we humbled ourselves and You do not notice? Behold...,”** He says, **“...on the day of your fast you find your desire...,”** and not only that, you **“...drive hard all your workers.”** (Isaiah 58:3) He says, **“Behold, you fast for contention and strife and to strike with a wicked fist....”** He says, **“...You do not fast like you do today to make your voice heard on high.”** (Isaiah 58:4) He says, “Hey, you want to be heard? You want to be heard by Me? You want Me to respond to your fasting? You don’t fast the way you’re doing it. You’re going through the ritual, but your heart is wrong. Your religious activities are to no avail.” Listen to verse 5: **“Is it a fast like this which I choose, a day for a man to humble himself? [Or] is it...bowing one’s head like a reed...,”** like a reed that just droops over, or **“...for spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bed? Will you call this a fast, even an acceptable day to the LORD?”** (Isaiah 58:5) Do you think that your fasting is acceptable to Me when you come along and you spread out your garment? When you put the ashes on your head? When you bow your head or when you say “No, ah no thank you, I’m not eating today or for the next whatever,” and you’re drawing attention to yourself? He says do you think that’s what it’s all about when in your heart, in your heart.” Get it? [“In your heart what you are doing is you are fasting for contention. There’s contention. There’s strife.

You're striking with a wicked fist. Your heart is not right before Me.] (PARAPHRASE, Isaiah 58:4) It's an external performance that you're going through." I just want to ask you a question. When you go to church, when you go to church and you delight in the nearness of God, is it because the music has gotten you whooped up? Is it because you just want to stand there and sing praises to God? But when it comes time for the sermon or for the message, you want it over. You want it done quick, you want to be out of there? Why? Because you've got your kicks. Because you've got your thrills. Because you feel spiritual. O Precious One, if you prefer the singing of the music to the exposition and the explanation and the digging in of the Word of God you can know this, **"...truth has stumbled in the street."** (Isaiah 59:14) And your religious activities, even your fasting and really it seems like of all the disciplines, the hardest discipline, the most difficult discipline is fasting. It's going without food. Why? Because our tummies growl. Because we get weak or we get a headache and that. And yet these people were fasting, but it was of no avail. Why? Because it was external, but not internal. All right. The next point covers Isaiah 58, verses 6 to 14. When truth stumbles in the streets there's sin in your life; you are not loving your neighbor as yourself. You are in darkness and ah, and you really don't even take delight in giving God His day—giving God His Sabbath. So what is contrary to that? Well if you want truth to not stumble in the streets then you're gonna get rid of sin. Well if you want truth to not stumble in the streets then you're gonna love your neighbor as yourself. You're going to look for light and not for darkness, and you're gonna delight in the Lord. Let's look at it. Let me read it to you and I'll walk you through the passage, Isaiah 58, verse 6. He says, **"Is this not the fast which I choose...."** (Isaiah 58:6) Now at this point, at this point you learn the true heart of fasting. You learn that it is not just an external going without food, but it is something that causes you to get your heart right with God. So in this passage you're gonna learn, although He's gonna talk about the fact that they're fasting but

they're not getting anywhere. He's gonna also show us what our hearts should, be like in true fasting. So let's look at it. Verse 6, **"Is this not the fast which I choose, to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke...."** (Isaiah 58:6) What is yoking you? What has harnessed you in something that is not right, that is not holy, that is not pure? What relationship are you in that you are yoked in? You're yoked together as 2 Corinthians 6 says, with an unbeliever, or what do you have in common with these people that you're hanging around with? He says, **"...And to let the oppressed go free..."** (Isaiah 58:6) In other words, here you are oppressing someone, putting them down. And if you're really going to fast with a right heart you're gonna **"...let the oppressed go free and [you're gonna] break every yoke. Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry and [to] bring the homeless poor into the house...?"** (Isaiah 58:6-7) In other words, if you really have a heart for God and truth hasn't stumbled in the streets, but you're walking in righteousness and truth, then it is going to affect your relationships with other people. It says, **"...[And] when you see the naked, to cover him; and [to] not hide yourself from your own flesh?"** (Isaiah 58:7) Here's a daughter, here's a son, here's a mother, here's a father, here's an uncle, an aunt and you're their hope. What are you going to do for them? Are you just going to push them away? Before you do we better talk about it, but we'll talk about it in just a minute.

PART TWO

Welcome back, Beloved. As we look at this third point, what we're looking at is: The manifestation in a person's life of their attitudes and their relationships, when truth stumbles in the streets. And He's going to show us this by saying, "This is the kind of fast that I choose." And see, they're fasting, but they're not getting answers because they're not doing the kind of fast that God chooses. And the fasting has to do not with just the external doing without food. The external picture of humbling yourselves and putting

ashes on you and spreading out sackcloth and sitting there so that everybody knows that you're fasting, but it is what's going on in your heart. And so what He shows us in these verses right here is this is the fast that He chooses. It's a fast that causes you to deal righteously with others. And He says **"Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry...[to] bring the homeless poor into the house; when you see the naked, to cover him; and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?" (Isaiah 58:7)** In other words what He's showing is that if truth has not stumbled in the streets then you're gonna love your neighbor as yourself. Then you're going to manifest that love in tangible forms. But if truth has stumbled in the streets then you're not going to really care about other people because it's all about "moi"; it's all about me. Now when you have to stop and think about Jesus in Matthew, and if you'll go there to Matthew chapter 22, in Matthew chapter 22 they are trying to trap Jesus. And they are trying to get Him to go against the Word of God. And so it says in Matthew chapter 22 in verse 35, **"One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, 'Teacher, [what] is the great commandment in the Law?'" (Matthew 22:35-36)** I love the way Jesus handles this. **"And He said to [them] 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart...with all your soul and...,'"** catch this, **"...with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Matthew 22:37-39)** And then He says, **"On these two commandments...,"** summarizing them, **"...depend the whole Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:40)** It all boils down to two things: loving God with everything and loving your neighbor as yourself. You do that and you're gonna keep the Law, you're gonna keep the Prophets because you have captured the heart of God. And yet, in Isaiah 58 they're saying, "Why have we fasted and You haven't noticed?" And He's saying "Because you're not fasting with a proper heart, a proper mind." And under this third point what I want you to see is: When you fast with a proper heart **"...then your**

light will rise in darkness....” (Isaiah 58:10) You see when “truth stumbles in the streets” we’re walking in darkness. (See Isaiah 59:14) We’re groping. We can’t find the way we’re going because we can’t see. So watch what He says in verse 8. He says, **“Then your light...,”** and you want to watch “light” and “darkness”, as I said all the way through these three chapters. **“Then your light will break out like the dawn, and your recovery will speedily spring forth; and your righteousness will go before you; the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer....” (Isaiah 58:8-9)** You say you’re fasting and God’s not hearing, He’s not answering. He says if you fast in truth. He says, **“[Then] you will...cry, and He will say, ‘Here I am.’ If you remove the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger and speaking wickedness.” (Isaiah 58:9)** Now I want to ask you a question. Who are you pointing at? And are you giving them the finger in traffic and you call yourself a Christian? You are to be absolutely different. And so he says if you will get rid of this, **“...If you will give yourself to the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted...,”** you see these people that are afflicted, you see them in need and so you satisfy them. **“...Then your light will rise in [the] darkness and your gloom will become like midday. And the LORD will continually guide you, and satisfy your desire in scorched places....” (Isaiah 58:10-11)** You can be where everything is burned, but God will satisfy your desire. **“...And give strength to your bones; and you will be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail.” (Isaiah 58:11)** He says, **“Those from among you will rebuild the ancient ruins....”** Your life will have purpose. **“...You will raise up the age-old foundations....”** You will take them back to what it was like before truth stumbled in the streets. **“...You will be called [a] repairer of the breach, the restorer of the streets in which to dwell.” (Isaiah 58:12)** Listen; do you want your life to count? Do you want it to have impact? Do you want to be a restorer? Do you want to be a

rebuilder? Then truth cannot stumble in the streets. Then you have to have truth not just as an external I know, but as an internal—it has affected my heart, it has affected my life. The third point under this third point is: That you will take delight in the Lord. You will take delight in the Lord. If you recover from truth that has stumbled in the streets, if you have truth in your innermost being, and remember we saw that in “**...You [God] desire truth in [your] innermost being....**” (Psalms 51:6) Well watch what He says in verse 13 and 14 and remember this, that the sabbath was a sign between Israel and God. It was not only a sign, but it was their day of rest. It was their day when they were not to do any work, they were not to plant any crops, they were not to be doing anything but trusting in God. He says, “**If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot from doing your own pleasure on My holy day, and [you] call the sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and honor it, desisting from your own ways, [and]...seeking your own pleasure and speaking your own word,**” if you will make God’s delight your delight. (Isaiah 58:13) “**Then you will take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; and I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.**” (Isaiah 58:14) And what He’s showing is this: Truth has to be internal as well as external. And if you will make God your delight, if you will make His holy day your delight; in other words, if you just want to do what pleases God, even if it does not please you, then, He says, “**...you [will] ride on the heights [above] the earth; and [you] will [be fed by God]....**” (Isaiah 58:14) O Beloved, this is what it means to walk in truth. This is what keeps truth from stumbling in the streets. And you say, but others are going to laugh at me. What does it matter as long as God smiles at you, as long as He smiles on you with favor? Oh, Paul said you cannot be a bondservant of men and a bondservant of the Lord. (See Galatians 1:10) So no matter how truth has stumbled in the streets, Beloved, you need to embrace it in your heart and live in the light of it.