

Justice Rather Than Ritual

Description

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Isaiah 58:1-14

The people addressed by the prophet in Isaiah 58 have perverted the real purpose of fasting. They believed that by denying themselves food God was put into their debt. He must therefore do what they want. They failed to recognize that God did not have to be induced into acting by bodily mortification. Fasting became their way of bargaining with God. The real purpose of fasting is not to influence God to act but to demonstrate the seriousness of one's repentance.

God, through the prophet, declares that what He is really looking for is the kind of behavior that should characterize His chosen people. He is expecting the kind of relation between persons that is like His treatment of them. This means releasing fellow human beings from unjust slavery.

We think we have eliminated slavery in our civilized world but the truth is that many today are enslaved under the yoke of poverty as the result of the greed of others. True fasting might entail seeking to address the structures of society that result in many experiencing injustice.

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