

SERMON XLIX

A SERMON OUTLINE FOR THE PREPARATION OF A THE FAST, JULY 8, 1640.

Tobias Crisp

*"Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel; and because I will do this unto thee,
prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." {Amos 4:12}*

When bodies are distempered, that nature in its ordinary course, cannot make its own way to uphold it, men usually seek to a violent course of physic; which, although it be very troublesome to nature for a time, yet for the purging out of dangerous rooted maladies, men will not stick at the present disquiet. Now, wise physicians deal with such bodies, as surgeons do with teeth they would draw; they first loosen them before they give the main pull; so they give preparatives a day or two before a purge, to make way for the better working of it, when it is taken. You are not ignorant, that within these few days, this whole nation hath a great purge prescribed; even a solemn day of humiliation in an extraordinary manner, by reason of many good rooted dangerous distempers, both of sin and misery, wisely and providently observed by our great physician of church and state, the king; which our ordinary way of seeking God stirs, not; and, that we may be prepared for it, he hath published a royal decree beforehand. In my deepest thoughts of contriving this great work for the best advantage, I find that seasonable directions for a wise and religious preparation, will much further the happy desired issue of it. I have, therefore, allotted this opportunity to put you upon a seasonable and useful preparation for that fast, from this text; in which you see expressly, that, in case of provocation, God doth not only expect that his people come forth and meet him, but also that they prepare themselves for such a meeting.

In furthering you to a preparation I shall endeavour to show you what is requisite for a due preparation for a fast; of what necessity such a preparation is, and then apply it. Two things are mainly requisite unto a preparation for a solemn meeting of God, especially by fasting; preconsideration and redisposition.

Some things, concerning the fast, are to be considered, or thought on beforehand; without which the business will prove but a rude, confused, and vain labour. Now, these are, the nature of the business we are called to that we may know what we have to do; the end of it; the need of it, and the means how it may be well done.

A fast is more talked of, I mean a religious one, than well understood, and therefore most sordidly kept of too many, who cannot forecast what to do, because they are ignorant of it. Be therefore, attentive to hear, and understand what a fast God requires. There are divers sorts, as natural, compulsive, civil, and religious; our business is with the last, which is either ordinary or extraordinary; this last is when it consists of many days, as that of Moses, Elias, Christ, and Daniel; ordinary is that one whole day, and this is our fast. Now, although in the strict signification of the word fast, it imports simply abstinence, yet in all religious fasts, there is something positive as well as privative. For the privative part, it must not be only abstinence from meat and drink, which is all that the vulgar regard, but a universal abstinence, as well from all natural and useful things of the world, as from sin. Note, how the scriptures express a fast; "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;" {Joel 2:15,16;} here implying a matrimonial abstinence. Men must also put off their ornaments, they must not stand trickling and trimming themselves, but must show a kind of neglect of their attire. Of old, they rent their garments, and put on sackcloth. There must be

abstinence from common labour, pleasure and talk. The latter is little observed by most that fast, but you find all this strictly required. Ponder Isaiah the 53rd chapter for must needed instruction. But, besides this, there must be the internal abstinence of the mind; the mind must fast from all worldly contrivances, thoughts and affections. In brief, the whole man, in fasting, must forbear all things, which concern not the furtherance of the positive work in fasting, for the former is but subservient to the latter; that is, to the positive work, either public or private.

The public fast is a timely joining with the congregation, both with outward reverence, and inward intention of mind; but most specially there must be each man's several confession of heart in the public confession. So of application of all things, in praying, reading, or preaching, which concerns him in particular; and this joining must be constant throughout all. It must be an affectionate working like physic, making the soul sick; for which cause it is called a day for a man to afflict his soul. {Is.58:5} The private business is a recollection of the public reasons and concerns; and a supplying in a man's thoughts, what most concern his particular case, either not sufficiently enforced, or not met withal; as day-laborers, when the task is over, will do a little for themselves. About this matter must the meditations, confessions, supplications, and humiliations of the soul be employed. This business of the fast must we rub up and survey, as men do against a training day; they will take down their arms, and view them over.

We should pre-consider the ends of a fast, why God looks for it; he that hath not the mark in his eye before he shoots shall never hit it. The ends to be considered of are, the humbling of the soul; the pleasing of God; and the averting of God's wrath. In this we should ponder what wrath is on foot, or breaking out, whence it proceeds, how it may be pacified. We should pre-consider what end there is of fasting, both with respect to the public and other private concerns; as what sins abound, and with how high a hand that God calls for it, and hath oft made it effectual for much good. We should forecast the means of fasting; we should do as workmen, that look out and lay in readiness their several tools before they fall to work, so that each may be in readiness at need; as that prayer may frame the spirit and secret self-examination; but especially, there must be recourse to the promises of the Spirit for assistance.

The second branch of preparation follows; predisposition, and that of other affairs; of a man's own spirit, and of the work itself. He that will not be curbed in the work of fasting, must take such an order beforehand, with other common occasions, that they may not lie in his way to stumble at them, which without predisposing, he shall never avoid. Now this is no more but a provision of what is needful, that it may not be left to be then provided; and a dispatching things, that they may not be then to be dispatched; that so the world may not encroach upon this time, but keep within its own bounds; as ordering journeys, bargains, payments, and such like, that they may not be troubled with them that day. You may say, things of necessity, or dangerous, which cannot be avoided, may be then done. I answer, consider whether the careless want of fore-disposing cause the danger and necessity, if so, the fault is in defect of preparation; but more especially a man's own spirit must be prepared by a predisposing of it to this work; and that you may so do I will show you, what this predisposition is; how needful unto a fast, and show how it may be done.

This predisposition is nothing else but such a breaking of spirit beforehand, as to make it frame unto this yoke, and to draw handsomely at the time. Our spirits are like wild heifers to any service, especially to such a self-tormenting exercise as a fast; they will be rising and kicking even at the forethought of it, and grumble at the tediousness of it; and certainly we shall find them very sullen and deadish at it, if we rouse them not to it beforehand. Why so? Because it is an unbeaten and unusual road, a work seldom handled; therefore men will be to seek, as suppose a man be to do business he is not used to do, as mowing, it will be harsher to him than daily work; for use makes perfect. Because it is a longer lesson, a great deal than usually is set us; this being as long as the whole day, others being but an hour long. Because a more thorny, prickly work, and requires much more labour of the soul. Because it cuts deeper, and launches wider, and ransacks more narrowly than other service. Now this disposing of our spirits is no more but such a skillful winning of them, as to make them pliable and apt to the work; and this is necessary to be set about beforehand.

Because a little time and labour will not break them; as it is not an hour's work that will break a colt for the saddle, that he may be pliable when he is to be rid; and our spirits being naturally more wild than colts; he therefore, that would not be thrown, or disappointed of his journey in the fast, must take his spirit to task beforehand. The more dull a boy is, the more time he must take to learn, especially an hard and long lesson, if he mean to say it perfect.

The fast-day is a day of arraignment, our day of trial. If we expect to come off without loss, had we not need to get our wits about us beforehand? To bespeak our judge? To get all our plea in readiness? Without preparation, something or other may be forgot, or neglected, which being then to seek, may mar all; as the foolish virgins were cast for lack of preparing oil before-hand. It is a good rule, *praemonitus, et praemunitus*; that is, forewarned is forearmed. Now if our minds be a wool-gathering, and we be as bad husbands, that leave their cause at sixes and sevens, till the very trial, whilst the adversary is fortifying his accusations against us; shall we not then be left speechless, and be foiled? If men be but to travel a journey, will they not provide over-night? If to wash or brew, will they not get things in a readiness beforehand? How much more in so weighty a matter? When horses are to run a hard race, will not men pull up their bellies, and diet them before, that they may not fail in the race? If men be to make speeches, will they not whet their wits and study beforehand? In brief, are men unfit for anything of moment, till they consult and pause afore-hand? And can such a work, as a fast, be done without predisposition?

But how shall a man get his spirit fitly disposed? Let him take a survey of the present indisposedness of it, whether it be ignorance, faintness, or averseness; let him give an evaluation of his corruptions, by which he may feel what rooting they have. Let him resolutely tie himself to the work. Let him enter the plough of examination and humiliation. Let him earnestly seek Christ to bring his Spirit to it; to mortify his corruptions, and to quicken his own spirit.