

## “First Fruits: A Test of Your Faith”

*Leviticus 23:9-14; 1 Corinthians 15:20-23*

During this year we are looking at studying the biblical Feasts of Israel historically – what did it mean for Israel at the time the command were given – and prophetically, how do the Feasts point to Jesus first coming and second coming. As we saw last week the Apostle Paul clearly taught that Passover pointed to Jesus being our Passover Lamb, when He died for our sins on the cross, assuring those who place their faith in Him that God will pass over us any final judgment.

The apostle Paul is going to show us how the Feast of First Fruits foreshadowed the resurrection of Christ. That Paul clearly taught these things is important because he was formerly a rabbi-in-training. He grew up observing all the feasts. So if anyone would understand it this way, Paul would. In Col. 2:16-17, Paul said,

*Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a new moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come: the reality however is found in Christ.*

The Passover which foreshadowed Jesus' death, is the first Feast that marks a new spring season. Passover also kicks off the week long observance of the Feast of Unleavened Bread which foreshadows Jesus' sinlessness and the breaking of His body for us (which we'll discuss next week).

To understand the background of why the Feast of First Fruits foreshadows Jesus' resurrection we have to go back to Leviticus 23 and see what the Feast of First Fruits meant. First fruits, we will read, was when you first gave to God a sheaf of your grain harvest before you had any for yourself.

<sup>9</sup> The LORD said to Moses, <sup>10</sup> “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest. <sup>11</sup> He is to wave the sheaf before the LORD so it will be accepted on your behalf; the priest is to wave it on the day after the Sabbath. <sup>12</sup> On the day you wave the sheaf, you must sacrifice as a burnt offering to the LORD a lamb a year old without defect, <sup>13</sup> together with its grain offering of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil—an offering made to the LORD by fire, a pleasing aroma—and its drink offering of a quarter of a hin of wine. <sup>14</sup> You must not eat any bread, or roasted or new grain, until the very day you bring this offering to your God. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live.

Passover is a remember-when-God-saved-you feast. First Fruits is a will-you-trust-God Feast? It really was a test of one's faith. Here God tells Israel ‘When you enter the land I am going to give you ...’ Already Israel had to believe by faith that God was going to get them there one day because this Feast couldn't be celebrated until they were there and farmed the land. First Fruits tested their faith in that they were to

**Give God Your First; Trust God for the Rest**  
**(23:9-12)**

Spring marks the return of life, so to speak. The weather warms up, the ground softens and new life comes from the ground from the seeds you planted by faith weeks earlier. God told His

people that when this new crop of food starts in the spring, that before they can enjoy it themselves, they must give it to Him first.

Why should God get the first of the new crop? Because He's the One who provided it! The first fruits acknowledges God's sovereignty and right to all that we have. Everything we have belongs to God. Every gift and talent and all the knowledge we have that enables us to work so we can earn an income comes from God. God gets the first and best before the people enjoy it themselves. God doesn't want it all nor does he need it. The priests present it to God by waving it and the priests will get to eat it, which provides for their needs. God says present it first to Me so people will acknowledge Him first with the blessings He provides us. That principle is consistent throughout the Bible.

### ***Faith precedes blessing (vv.9-10)***

Under the Mosaic Law, God said to Israel that He would bless them agriculturally and provide rain as long as they obeyed Him. This was to show to the nations around them – who believed other gods controlled nature – that Israel's God was the true God who could hold back or bring down rain. You could tell if Israel was obedient or not to some degree by the rainfall in Israel!

While God does not extend that same material promise to His church today, the basic principle that faith brings God's blessing still rings true. God's gives us His peace when we trust Him during trials. God gives us a Christian family support network, the indwelling comfort of the Holy Spirit, the promise of meeting our needs, contentment when hunger after Him, etc. The more we obey God, the more sensitive we are to God's activity in our life and experience His blessing presence.

God practiced this principle Himself. He gave His first and best in giving Jesus to us. John 3:16 tells us this: *"For God so loved the world that He gave His One and Only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life."*

So to observe first fruits was to obey God in order to trust God for a future greater harvest. We know this from 23:16, in the instructions for Pentecost, which signifies the end of the spring harvest season.

<sup>15</sup> "From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks. <sup>16</sup> Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the LORD.

So First Fruits was a test of your faith. By denying the first grain for yourself and giving it to God, you were believing by faith that God would provide for you. And you were also

### ***Believing God accepts our gifts (v.11)***

<sup>11</sup> He is to wave the sheaf before the LORD so it will be accepted on your behalf; the priest is to wave it on the day after the Sabbath.

God accepted sacrifices because you were giving Him something you owned or controlled. It costs you something. In the New Testament we read in Heb. 13:15,

<sup>15</sup> Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. <sup>16</sup> And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Praise can be a sacrifice when we glorify Him rather than ourselves. We give Him the credit/glory rather than 'luck' or fate, especially in the presence of unbelievers. We sacrifice our reputation when we praise God publicly. And doing good and sharing is a sacrifice because we are denying ourselves our resources and our time by helping others. Paul used this principle to apply to our work as believers:

*Let us not become weary in doing good for in the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. (Gal. 6:9)*

What's the doing good that makes us weary at times? Dying to self to serve others. Saying no to doing what we want to do and yes to what God wants us to do. Dying to self and living for Christ.

Now we can see that there's more to first fruits than just food. By denying yourself and giving to God the first of the harvest you believed by faith that God was going to bless you with a greater harvest. The first fruits was a metaphor that when you by faith, gave to God first you were assured that there was more to come.

Sometimes when we refuse to serve one another, its because we don't have faith to believe our service can make a difference in other peoples' lives. Or we reluctantly serve and speak despairingly of our efforts by saying, 'Oh, I'm not very good but I'll try . . .' or 'Well, if you can't find anyone else I guess I can help . . .' We don't even realize we're showing a lack of faith! How many times have we put ourselves down? Who made you? God. Who gave you gifts to use for God's purposes? God. Who do we really put down when we put belittle ourselves – God.

Give God your first and He will assure you there is a blessing to come. Blessings of His ongoing presence and His using us to meet others needs. God gave Jesus as His first and best. He buried Him in the ground through death on the cross. But Jesus' burial assured us that there's more to come. First fruits taught this principle. What's buried in the ground will produce more. When it comes, give it first to God and watch Him provide more.

The Feast of First Fruits was also a time to worship God and bring special sacrifices. First fruits was a time to .

## **Renew Your Commitment to God** **(23:12-13)**

A burnt offering was a one year old lamb without defect [again you give God your best] that was burnt completely up to God, as a way of saying, I offer myself completely to God. The grain offering with a drink offering of wine added to it to give it a pleasing aroma symbolized one's giving to God what one had been given by God. God Gives us food and drink. Offering it back to God showed you were acknowledging God has a right to it all and you were meeting the needs of the priests who ate of this.

Jesus would give of Himself on the cross to God. We who have believed in Jesus should, especially at this time of year, renew our commitment to God. How are we living for Him? Are we offering Him our life as He offered His life for us? Are we dying to self and living for Him?

V. 14 was an interesting aspect to the Feast. Here you had all this new grain ready to harvest. The day of first Fruits was to be observed the day after the Sabbath that followed the Passover which started the week long observance of Unleavened Bread. So even though the harvest was ready you

not only had to offer it first to God you had to wait until the Feast of Unleavened Bread was done. Essentially you had to..

## **Thank God Before You Can Enjoy It** **(23:14)**

Didn't matter if the grain was ready to harvest for the last 2 weeks; you had to wait until God received His first portion on this special day and until Unleavened Bread was done. You can't eat before saying thank you!

Many people expect to enjoy eternity without properly thanking God. They live their life the way they want without acknowledging God, but seem to think God will let them in to heaven on good behaviour. If you never stopped to acknowledge God or thank God for His gift in Jesus Christ by giving Him your life, you can't enjoy the eternal blessings that God wants to give those who properly thank Him. Enjoying God's blessings must be preceded by offering your life to God.

Jesus and His disciples ate the Passover the night before, beginning the week of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. He died Friday afternoon before the Sabbath began at twilight. Since First Fruits was after the Sabbath that followed Unleavened Bread that means Sunday was the day when the Israelites celebrated the Feast of First Fruits.

Jesus' disciples were far from enjoying the Feast of Unleavened Bread and were probably not even thinking about the Feast of First Fruits. Because the First Fruits was actually the first day of 50 days of . . .

## **Watching and Waiting for God's Future Coming Harvest** **(23:15-16)**

First Fruits marked the beginning of the spring harvest season. It began with the barley harvest and then you were to count off 49 days/seven full weeks and then celebrate the wheat harvest at Pentecost. By asking His people to bring the first of their crop to God, God was assuring them that there was a greater harvest to come. The Israelites literally counted off each day and watched the crops grow. Again it showed the faith involved if you give to God your first He assures you of a greater harvest to come.

What happened 50 days from when Jesus rose from the dead?

### ***A greater harvest of souls (Acts 2:47)***

In Acts 2 we read on Pentecost that there was a harvest of 3000 souls! When God gave His best in Jesus who rose on the First Fruits, God was assuring a greater harvest was coming. Since then millions have come to know Jesus Christ as their Saviour. Jesus told His own disciples in John 10:16 that He had "*other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also.*" You and I are part of the greater harvest. One day the harvest will include:

*"A great multitude that no one can count from every nation, tribe, people and language"* (Rev. 7:9).

Is God producing a harvest today? Yes He is. God is always working (John 5:17). We know that since Jesus hasn't returned then there's more to come into His kingdom. And God uses us to

help produce the harvest. What must we be doing? Planting the seeds of the gospel by faith, watering the planted seeds so that God will cause the growth to occur.

Not only does Jesus' resurrection assure us of a greater harvest of souls but it also assures us of . . .

### ***A Greater Future (1 Cor. 15:20-23)***

Paul says in 1 Cor. 15:20 that Jesus is the first fruits of believers who have died. He uses the metaphor of sleep for the believer because when we die we enter God's rest and are finally at true peace. Jesus' resurrection assures us that we will have a great future with God waiting for us when we die. But like Jesus, we have to die first – unless of course He returns before then. This whole chapter is Paul's defence of Jesus' bodily resurrection which assures us of ours. God laid down the principle in the Feast of First fruits. The giving of the first assures there is more to come. If Jesus has not been raised from the dead, our faith is futile and we are still in our sins. God gave His first and His best. He presented Him to the world in His resurrection appearances. Jesus was seen by many witnesses. The tomb was empty.

Jesus died and was buried. Like a seed planted in the ground, so Jesus' body was in the ground and came to new life on the day of First Fruits. It was His body that rose. People recognized who He was. Likewise, Jesus' resurrection assures us of . . .

### ***A Greater Body (1 Cor. 15:32-49)***

When will that happen? V.23, "*When He comes*". Presently those who are in heaven have not received their new eternal spiritual bodies. That will all happen at once when Jesus raptures His church away. In 1 Thes. 4:16 Jesus will appear in the clouds, a trumpet will sound, the dead in Christ will rise – receive their new bodies and we will be caught up together with them in the clouds". Here in 1 Cor. 15:51-52 Paul says it will happen in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, the dead will be raised imperishable and we will all be changed!

In vv.32-49 Paul talks about how our present perishable bodies will be sown (i.e. in the ground at death) but will be raised imperishable, new and glorious. Recognizable but new, completely whole, made for the new earth and far better.

Phil Callaway likes to use this example from his own life to talk about the hope we have in Christ of our own resurrection:

I remember one Sunday afternoon when my son Stephen was five years old. We drove past our town's graveyard. Noticing a large pile of dirt beside a newly excavated grave, Stephen pointed and said: "Look, dad! One got out!"

I laughed at his words, but the more I laughed, the more I began to hang onto them. You see, every time I pass a graveyard now or every time I see an empty cross, I am reminded of the reason for our joy and hope: "One got out!" Death could not keep our Saviour in the ground. Jesus Christ, the one exception to all the rules, broke the chains of death, shattered our fears, and promised us eternity with Him.

First Fruits was a foreshadowing of the resurrection. Because 'The One got out' all of us in Christ will 'get out'. Death cannot hold us. Jesus frees us from sin's penalty and from sin's presence forever. Jesus' resurrection assures us of our own.

Meanwhile, the harvest is not complete yet. Give God the first and best of your time, talents and resources and watch how He's going to bless. Renew your commitment to Him today as we recall the great sacrifice He made sending His first and best to die so we can have new life. Remember to give thanks to God for our lives and His blessings and we'll enjoy them more. Plant the seeds of the gospel through your life and words. Keep watering the soil around you by continually serving Him, pray, and see how God will produce His harvest in His time. We know He will. Because Jesus the First fruits assures us that there's still more to come.

\* \* \* \* \*  
If you have any questions or comments about this message please contact us  
at [olivet@rideau.net](mailto:olivet@rideau.net)