

"Pentecost: Celebrating Soul Harvests"

Leviticus 23:15-22; Acts 2

When God established Israel's Holy-days, it was for the purpose that His people would honour Him because of the way He impacted their lives by saving them from past difficulties, meeting their needs in the present and looking forward to His future blessings. God established 7 major Feasts with His people Israel to reflect and commemorate His active role in their lives. We've been learning about the Feasts of Israel as the Holy days fall on the calendar today.

All seven major Feasts were agricultural holidays, intended to honour the true God who was sovereign over their lives and who controlled the rain, sun and earth which provided for their daily needs.

But we've also seen in each Feast that they prophetically foreshadowed a chronological event concerning Jesus' life and future ministry. This is intentional on God's part. Paul told us in Col. 2:16-17,

Therefore 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.

So far we studied the first 3 Spring Feasts which all fell within days of each other. The Passover signified the start of the Jewish agricultural season but also the historic salvation even in Israel's life, when God saved His people from the Egyptians through the shed blood of a lamb applied to their doorposts. The next day began the weeklong observance of Unleavened Bread. Leaven symbolized sin in their life. They were not to eat leaven for a week and remove it from their homes. The Feast of First Fruits was held the day after the Sabbath that followed Passover/Unleavened Bread. This was the day that Israel's first grain crops were ready to harvest (barley). You could not eat from it until you took a portion from the best looking crop you had and presented that to God.

These all clearly foreshadowed consecutive events in the life of Jesus. Jesus is our Passover Lamb (1 Cor. 5:7) , who shed His blood for us and if we believe He shed His blood for us we are saved from God's judgment. Jesus was the unleavened /sinless sacrifice. 'Holding up the unleavened bread at the final Passover, Jesus said 'This is my body [sinless] which is broken for you.' Jesus died and was buried but not for long. Because 3 days later Jesus rose from the dead on the Day of First Fruits (1 Cor. 15:23). Just as the presenting of the first fruits of your barley harvest was a sign of trusting in God to provide the rest of the crop, so belief in Jesus' resurrection is our assurance that God will resurrect us one day and we will be with Jesus when we die.

The next Holy day was actually still connected to First fruits. Weeks (Pentecost) and First fruits were tied together because you had to count off 7 full weeks plus a day starting with First Fruits. What happened 50 days from the Sabbath that fell prior to Jesus' resurrection on First Fruits? Pentecost, the birth of the church. So prophetically,

Pentecost foreshadowed the birth of Jesus' Church

Here in Lev. 23:15, we see that the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost was the conclusion of counting 50 days from the First fruits of the barley harvest until the "new grain" (v.16) of wheat. The presenting of the first bundle of barley grain was a sign that you were

Trusting God to Provide a [Greater] Harvest (23:15-16a)

. . . 50 days later. Of course all harvesting must start with a seed. God says, trust me for the harvest but

God expects us to first plant the seed (v.15a)

You can't have a harvest unless you planted seed before – that's obvious. The seed was planted in the winter (which is our early spring) and the early barley harvest which you gave to God first before you enjoyed any (First Fruits) was a sign of faith on your part that you believed God would produce a healthy harvest.

When we count 50 days after Jesus died the church was born on Pentecost. We read there was a spiritual harvest of 3000 souls. What was the 'seed' planted? Jesus' death. Jesus Himself said His death and burial was the seed that would produce a harvest for God. Just days before His death, Jesus said

The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified. I tell you the truth unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a seed. But if it dies it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in the world will keep it for eternal life. . . But when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself. [John 12:23-24, 32]

Jesus compared His death to a planted seed, which results in new life for those who come to Him because He rose from the dead. Jesus went on to say here and many other places that we have to die to self in order to live. Death to self leads to service for God and life for others. Spiritual harvests cannot happen without planting of seeds, which is a dying process, in order for new life to come.

Here in Lev. 23:15 the Jews were to begin counting the days or weeks until the 50 days were over. By obeying God in giving Him the first of your barley harvest [first source of income that year], you believed He would produce a crop in 50 days of wheat and other things you planted. So in faith the 50 days of omer [counting] was when you should be . . .

Watching for God to work (v.15b-16a)

It's no wonder the Bible uses the word picture of sowing seed for God's work. We share the Word/plant the seeds, water the seeds believing God's Word will silently (and hidden from our sight) work in people's hearts.

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed or the sower and bread for the eater, so is My Word that goes out from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, but it will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which is sent it. [Is. 55:10-11]

Jesus assured His disciples the night before He died that even though He was going away, another like Him, the Comforter would come who will live with you and will be in you. After He rose and before He ascended to His Father,

Jesus pointed them to these days of counting. We read in Acts 1:4 that Jesus had appeared to them over a period of 40 days. 40 days counting the day He rose (First Fruits). When they asked Him if He was going to restore the kingdom to Israel He told them to wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. . . you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses.” (Acts 1:4-5, 8)

When we do share His Word and serve Him with all our heart, we can faithfully expect for Him to work – even though we can't see it at the moment – anticipating the day when He reveals to you what He's been doing. Answers to prayer, the Word helping people make godly decisions or the gospel opening someone's heart. The principle of agriculture that God wants to us to be 'grounded in' is reaping always follows sowing. Trust God.

And when He reveals a harvest of some kind,

Thank God for Harvest Blessings **(23:16b-22; Deut. 16:9-12)**

The 50th day was a holiday where you came and thanked God through offerings for . . .

Material blessings

You presented an offering of new grain from your wheat harvest along with various sacrifices. The burnt offering symbolized your giving of your self to God, the sin offering making sure you were right with Him in order to worship. The two leavened loaves of bread and peace offerings were shared with the priests and the people in celebration that you, leavened people (sinners) were at peace with God. It was the only time you gave an offering of leavened bread, thanking God as sinful yet forgiven people that we as His people were thankful for meeting our needs day to day.

And Pentecost also was a time where God's people thanked God for His . . .

Spiritual Blessings

Like what?

The Gift of **God's Word**

When the Jews left Egypt the day after the Passover in the first month, they arrived at Mt. Sinai in the 3rd month when God gave Moses the Law. The Jews believe that God gave Moses the 2 tablets and all the laws on Pentecost. While we can't be 100% sure, the date would definitely been very close. It is also interesting to note that when Moses came down from the mountain with the 10 commandments and saw the people worshipping the golden calf, God judged the people and 3000 died (Ex. 32:28). Many suggesting that the 3000 souls saved at Pentecost was a reminder that 3000 people who rejected God died at the first 'Pentecost'. So many Jews give thanks to God for His Word at Pentecost.

We know for sure that God's gift of **The Holy Spirit** came at Pentecost. The Spirit had been involved in various ways and through individuals in Israel's history. But Jesus promised something new – the baptism of the Holy Spirit. 'Baptism' means immersed. When the Spirit came at Pentecost He came into the disciples filling them and gifting them to communicate God's truth. The speaking in languages was a sign that God was reversing the curse He made in Gen.

11 at the tower of Babel. Back then the world rallied behind a man named Nimrod, building a tower that reached 'heaven' so that they could leave their mark on the world. God saw this and confused their language, forcing them to disperse.

But here, God was uniting His people together through the gospel of Jesus Christ by enabling them to hear the gospel in their own language from the lips of the apostles who did not speak those languages. Now each person who puts their faith in Jesus Christ for their salvation is baptized/ immersed by the Holy Spirit. We need to allow Him to fill us or control us each day. His indwelling guarantees our eternal dwelling with God. Paul calls this indwelling of the Holy Spirit in Rom. 8:23 the 'firstfruits of the Spirit . . . as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.' We can only wait eagerly if we have all the Holy Spirit *"Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit guaranteeing what is to come"* (2 Cor. 5:5).

Another of God's great gifts we should celebrate at Pentecost is the gift of **God's People**.

In Acts 2:37-41 we read that 3000 souls believed the gospel and were baptized. In vv.42-47 we read how the church grew in spiritual maturity, worship, sharing and in numbers. We are a gift! If salvation is a gift given to people, so then are the people who have received it. The body of Christ is God's gift to all of us to serve together with, to pray for, to help grow until we all reach that final hope the Spirit has guaranteed for us.

Why does Paul begin almost all his letters thanking God for His gift of the church, God's people? Let's make sure we're giving thanks to God regularly for each other.

Pentecost not only ends the time frame between harvests it is also designed to help us . . .

Prepare for God's Final Harvest **(Acts 2:17-21)**

When Peter and the disciples spoke in the different languages on Pentecost – languages they had never learned but the Spirit gifted them to speak – and the people understood, many asked 'What does this mean?'

Peter answered by quoting the prophet Joel 2:28-32 saying,

"In the last days God says I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on My servants, both men and women, I will pour out My Spirit in those days and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heaven above and sign on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

The prophecy in Joel points ultimately to the future return of Jesus – the glorious day of the Lord – which will be accompanied by signs and wonders in the heavens, as also stated by Jesus in Matt. 24. Jesus returns as He assured His disciples in Acts 1, to restore the kingdom to Israel. Peter noted at Pentecost that the Spirit's coming on believers acts as the first fruits of the spiritual harvest of the church now. He said we are now in the last days.

Paul talks about the last days being ‘terrible times’ when people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful , proud, etc. (2 Tim. 3:1) A time not unlike our day. We are in the last days and have been since Jesus left the earth. Because we are in the last days we need to prepare for the final end time harvest.

Jesus told a number of parables concerning the end using the harvest analogy. In Matt. 13:24-30 he told the parable of the wheat and tares. Later on His disciples asked Him to explain it (v.36). In explaining the parable Jesus said it was about the end of the age. At the end a final harvest will happen.

³⁷ He answered, “The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸ The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, ³⁹ and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

⁴⁰ “As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. ⁴² They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

Pentecost reminds us that the last days’ countdown is on to the end of the age harvest. How do we prepare ourselves for that?

First, are we wheat? Has God saved you through faith as evidenced by the fruit of the Holy Spirit growing in your life? Once the end comes we will not have another chance. We must decide in our lifetime what we will do with Jesus.

Secondly, if we are saved, are we sowing the seed of the gospel ourselves? Who has God placed in our lives whom He wants us to reveal Jesus to? The end is closer than we want to think so we must warn others.

Pentecost was a day in which God’s people thank God for providing our material and spiritual needs. It’s a time to trust God and plant the seeds of the gospel in people’s lives and step out in faith to serve Him, believing He will do the work that we can’t see right now through His Word and Spirit.

Be assured God is always working out His good purposes for us. He who began a good work in us will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Phil. 1:6). That’s the point of Pentecost. God began the work in the past through our acts of faith and we must trust God to complete it. He’s given us the Holy Spirit, the guarantee of our future but also of God’s presence in our lives. Sow the seed of His Word because we know it will produce a spiritual harvest.

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

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