

Acts 2:29-41

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[0 : 00] I guess we're all familiar with what happened on the day of Pentecost. And I guess also that it's something of an unfortunate fact that the day of Pentecost has become so controversial.

You have arguments between those who believe that similar incidences should be expected today, including the speaking of tongues and arguments.

And on the other side, there are people who say that this was simply for this occasion alone.

Because the fact is, on this occasion, this was the inauguration of the New Testament church.

Now, notice I did not say it was the inauguration of the church. The church was in existence in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. But this was the inauguration of the New Testament church.

This was a new era, a new beginning, a new chapter in God's dealings with humankind. He had sent Jesus into the world. Jesus had been crucified.

[1 : 07] He had risen again. And he was now at the Father's right hand. And according to his promise, the Holy Spirit came upon them. They were filled with the Holy Spirit.

And they spoke in other tongues. They were empowered. And from then on, they went out in confidence and in power. And they spoke the gospel. They told people the gospel.

In other words, this was the moment in which the third person of the Trinity descended. At Bethlehem, 30 years previously, the second person of the Trinity descended into the world, the person of Jesus Christ.

Thirty years on, at Jerusalem, on this occasion, the third person, the Holy Spirit, descended and filled the disciples to empower, to convict, to guide, and to sanctify the church.

This is God coming to accompany his people. So, whilst there is a certain controversy over the day of Pentecost, we should not underestimate its significance.

[2 : 16] Neither should we try to understand it outside of the context of the Lord Jesus Christ. This was his work. He sent out the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

Neither should we try to understand the day of Pentecost outside of its Old Testament context. The day of Pentecost was an Old Testament feast.

And it's in trying to understand it in its Old Testament place that I think that we will come to a fuller understanding of this occasion and we will better understand the day of Pentecost itself.

So, what we're going to do tonight is we're going to go all the way back to that passage we read in Leviticus 23. And, in fact, if we had a time, we'd have read the whole of that chapter because the day of Pentecost was the final stage in a three-stage process, or rather, I should say, in a three-feast process.

There were three feasts, one after the other. And the day of Pentecost, or rather, the Feast of Weeks, as it was otherwise known, was the final stage or the final feast in that process.

[3 : 40] So, let's go back and try and understand what's happening here. The children of Israel are making their way through the wilderness, and Moses is giving the instructions as to how to respond when God gave them their harvest once they got into Canaan.

And he said that there were to be three feasts. The first feast was one which is quite familiar to all of us, which is the Feast of Unleavened Bread or the Passover.

The Passover was to give way to the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Now, I'm guessing that we probably are familiar with the Passover. I'll just encapsulate it in a few moments' time.

But then, the second feast was the Feast of Firstfruits. And the third feast was the Feast of Weeks or the Feast of Passover.

So, what we're trying to do is we're trying to understand what Pentecost was all about. That it was a feast in the Old Testament. And we're also trying to understand what place that feast had in the life

of the children of Israel.

[4 : 52] So, it started off with the Passover. It began with the Passover. Now, you remember how the Passover began when the children of Israel were enslaved in Egypt way back during the time of Moses?

400 years. They were kept as slaves. And the Egyptians treated them with great cruelty. Until that day that their prayer was heard by God. And God descended, if you like, into the flames of the burning bush.

And sent Moses back to lead the people out of Egypt into freedom and deliverance. And you remember how that happened. It was to happen on a particular night.

At the end of a series of plagues. The tenth plague was the plague of the firstborn son. And God was going to send his angel.

And he was going to put to death the firstborn male of every household in Egypt. But this is how God's people were to escape that judgment.

[5 : 53] They were to take a lamb. The lamb was to be one year old. It was to be without blemish. And they were to kill the lamb. I'm summing this up, by the way. I know there's a lot more detail than that.

They were to roast it. And they were to put their coats on. And they were to eat the lamb with their coats on, their shoes on. Ready for God to deliver them from their captivity.

Because that was the night that God was going to do that. But before they roasted it, they were to take the blood. And they were to paint the blood on the doorposts of each house.

So that when the angel of God saw the blood. You remember what he said? He said, when I see the blood, I will pass over that house.

That was to be the sign that inside that house, where the door was painted with blood, was a family that honored and believed and trusted in the God of Israel.

[6 : 51] Now, they were to roast the lamb. And they were to eat the lamb with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. And that was to become a yearly observance.

It was to become a feast. They must never forget what God did for them the night that he led them out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses. That was Passover.

It happened every year on the 14th day of the first month, which I am told is somewhere round about March. But here's the thing.

The Passover didn't end there. It led into, it paved the way for another feast, which is not as well known, at least in our circles.

It's called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And this began on the 15th day of the first month, the day after the Passover.

[7 : 47] And that lasted for a whole week. And this too was to become a yearly symbol, a yearly act of remembrance.

But it was also to be a way in which God was going to teach Israel some important truths. What's happening here is that one feast leads into another.

The feast at which they remember what God did for them when he led them out of Egypt was also to be the feast that led into another feast that was to remind them. What did unleavened bread symbolize?

What did it mean? What was God showing his people by this feast? I'm not sure if we would call it a feast.

Imagine having to eat chapattis for a whole week. That's all they were allowed to eat. I'm not sure if we would describe that. It would be quite interesting for us, especially if you like chapattis. But I'd think that by the end of it, you'd be thinking, I think I'd like something else.

[8 : 57] The reason, of course, behind that was because God is reminding them vividly by forcing them, and sometimes when God forces you to do something, it's not for your harm, it's for your good.

He's forcing them to remember something. The whole point of unleavened bread was that leaven represented corruption in the Bible.

You know that it's leaven. It's another word for yeast. And as you know that that's the, I don't know much about baking. I don't watch Bake Off or anything like that, so I don't know anything about the way this works.

But you know how it's yeast that makes bread rise and makes bread the kind of bread that we have, that we are used to. If you don't have the yeast, it's like chapattis, like flatbread.

Well, the whole point of yeast in the Bible was as a symbol of corruption. The Bible doesn't say that yeast is wrong. It's not sinful to eat the bread that we eat.

[10:00] But God is teaching these people that yeast is like the way that sin works its way through our whole being and affects every part of us.

And this is God saying to his people, you're not to be like that. You are my uniquely chosen, selected people. You are chosen out of every tribe and nation out of the whole world.

And you are chosen with the express purpose of serving me and loving me and worshipping me.

See, what's happening here is right away in this obscure feast, actually, we know what's going on.

We can see what's going on. And it's as relevant to today as it ever was. Because God says exactly the same thing to us tonight. I have chosen you as a particularly holy people.

To be holy. To be set apart. To be different. That's what to be holy means. It's not to go around in black.

[11:08] It's not to go around in a somber face. It's not to have to deny yourself any kind of enjoyment. That's not what holiness is at all. That's a perversion. Holiness means a life of dedication, joyful dedication to the Lord.

What does God say to us tonight? Be holy. Because I, the Lord, your God, am holy. And I say this because I need to be holy. And you need to be holy.

And we need to put our minds to being set apart, joyfully, to serve the Lord. Just like the Feast of Unleavened Bread represented.

So that's the first thing. The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. That was the first in the process. But that's not the end of the story. Because that feast led into another feast, which is the Feast of First Fruits.

Because during those seven days that they ate the unleavened bread, something else took place.

The third day into the Feast of Unleavened Bread, it was the beginning of the barley harvest.

[12:27] And what the people were commanded to do was to take a sheaf of barley that marked the beginning of the harvest, and they were to take that sheaf, and they were to place it before the Lord.

They were to wave it before the Lord. You can imagine how vivid this is, can't you? There's something very visible about these feasts.

They weren't to be done in secret or in private. This was a public exercise. They were to take the feast. Instead of gathering in the first of the barley harvest, they were to take the first sheaf, and they were to ceremoniously stand before God in an act of worship, and they were to wave it before God.

You can imagine this is dramatic. This was a time of anticipation.

It marked the beginning of the barley harvest, but the beginning led into the remainder of the barley harvest.

[13:38] You see, what's happening here is that God has just been reminding the people of what He has done for them in the past in bringing them out of Egypt. And now, He's reminding them that the same God who accompanied them and delivered them and saved them and gave them everything that they need is the same God who will accompany them into the future.

What's happening here is prophetic. By waving the barley sheaf before the Lord, they're not only giving thanks for what God has done for them in the past, they're not only giving thanks for what God has done for them by the first of the harvest, but they're saying that God is going to give them everything that they will need for the future as well.

This is a mark of God's faithfulness, God's generosity. This was an act of faith in the God who had brought them thus far and the God who was going to accompany them into the unknown future.

Now, that again is something that we need to take note of this evening. And this is part of the thanksgiving process whereby the people of the Old Testament acknowledged what God had done for them in giving them everything that they need, but also their trust that as they face the future, what for them was an unknown future, that God was going to accompany them and provide for their every need.

It was an act of dedication to the Lord. It was an act in which they are giving themselves and consecrating themselves to the Lord.

[15 : 41] So, thanksgiving and faith go together. Now, I'm saying that for a particular reason. And that's because I don't know how many times I've spoken to people who have said to me, well, I'm not a Christian, but, you know, I'm thankful.

I'm not, I don't follow Jesus, but, you know, I'm thankful. I pray to God. I thank God for every breath that I take and every night I thank God for my life and for all the good things that he's given to me. And this is what, this is, this is their way of saying to me, I don't need faith in Jesus. All I need is to give thanks to God. Can I say something to you, if you're like that this evening, can I say something to you that will perhaps offend you and shock you?

And what I'm going to say is this, that God doesn't want that kind of thankfulness. If that's all, if that's, if that's all you can say to God, then God doesn't want it.

That's a superficial thankfulness. And it's not really, it doesn't come from a heart that listens to God. What God wants tonight is for you to listen to him and for you to come to faith in his son, Jesus Christ.

[17 : 05] And if you haven't listened to him and if you haven't come to faith in Jesus, nothing else can substitute for that. Your thankfulness thankfulness is just your way of trying to do what you think is enough in order to be okay with God.

That's not good enough. What God has done for us is something absolutely marvelous in sending his own son into the world so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

And instead of believing in him, you can't just say, well I'm going to substitute that by saying thank you to God every so often. real thankfulness in the Old Testament was an act of dedication, an act of commitment to listening to God and to trusting in him and that is what he commands us to do this evening.

So that was the first, the feast of first fruits when the barley harvest was waved, the first sheaf was waved before the Lord. But that's not the end of the story because that led into another feast. And this took place 50 days after the first waving of the sheaf before the Lord. And this was the feast of weeks or the feast of Pentecost.

[18 : 41] Again, this time another presentation was made before the Lord but whereas the last one was a sheaf of barley, this one was entirely different.

This one was the mark of the completion of the harvest. And this one was marked by presenting finished loaves of bread to the Lord.

This time it's not unleavened bread but this time it is loaves of ready baked bread and they were brought to God. This is the finished product.

Remember the last feast was the feast of first fruits. That meant the beginning of the harvest. Now the harvest is finished and they are now bringing the finished product, the loaves of bread and once again they are presenting them before God.

Along with seven male lambs, one young bull, two rams as a burnt offering, along with a meal and drink offerings, one male goat for purification offerings, two lambs as a piece and wave offering to the Lord.

[19 : 52] They had to hold an assembly, they had to do no work and they had to leave gleanings for the poor. Now I don't know as you read this what mood you get out of this, what sense you get, but I get a sense of celebration.

This was a major feast. It was to be a solemn assembly, but it was also to be an act of thanksgiving and joy at which they were to just enjoy what God's provision was for them.

God is a generous God, a loving God, a God who loved his people, Israel, and who provided for their every need.

Now contrast that with the nations around Israel. There were other countries around Israel, they worshipped other gods and their whole point, their religion centered around trying to appease these other gods by trying to do their best and they never knew whether their gods would be satisfied and their religion was one of fear and trepidation and uncertainty.

But here was Israel who rejoiced in the living and the true God who had provided for their every need.

[21 : 27] And so as we come, I said this morning that tonight's service would be a service with a thanksgiving theme. And I hope that's what it is as we examine these three feasts.

I hope they remind us of how thankfulness in the Bible was one of remembering what God had done for the people. It was one of celebration of the generosity of God and it was one in which they were able to look to the future confident that that same God would do in them and for them far more than they could ask or even think.

It was an act of faith, an act of joy, and an act of consecration to the Lord. But it's more than that. These three feasts look forward prophetically to what God was ultimately going to do in the person of Jesus Christ. Let's go back to the beginning, Passover.

What did Passover represent in Jesus' terms? It represented the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

[22 : 53] God was teaching in the Passover what he would one day do in presenting his Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, who died, the Lamb without blemish that died on the cross in order that we might be delivered from the oppression and from the guilt and the condemnation of sin.

but that wasn't the end of the story. You remember as we saw this morning that when Jesus was put to death and when his body was put in the grave three days later, the grave was empty. He had risen from the dead. He was no longer there because he was alive again. And when Paul comes to describe his resurrection, guess what word he uses in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 to describe Jesus' resurrection?

The first fruits. In other words, Paul is recognizing that Jesus' resurrection was a fulfillment of the feast of first fruits.

Now, keep moving 50 days from then. What happens? What happens is the day of Pentecost, the feast of weeks. And what happens on the day of Pentecost?

[24 : 22] It's the incoming harvest, the completion of the harvest. There's a whole mob of people, thousands of them listening to the gospel and being convicted and converted by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And there's an instant harvest right there in front of the disciples. 3,000 people who have come to faith in Jesus Christ on the day of Pentecost.

As a fulfillment of everything that the feast of weeks prophesied. So, all of these feasts looked forward to the coming, to the death, to the resurrection, and to the effect that Jesus would have on an unbelieving world.

And that's why we can have such confidence afresh this evening, as we remind ourselves of what God has done in us, and what he continues to do in others, and will do in time to come.

We want to, every Lord's Day should be a day of thankfulness, a day of joy in the Lord, and a day of dedication to the gospel, to our part in making Jesus known to an unbelieving world.

[25 : 55] So, thankfulness, faith, commitment, consecration are all one in the Bible. That's what we want to do for Jesus this evening, as a people, as individuals, and as a congregation.

We want to bear witness to him. We want his name to be spread widely. We want the power of the Holy Spirit to be manifest in Aberdeen this evening.

We want people to be changed. We want to pray for that as never before, because the same God who filled the disciples in Acts chapter 2 is the same God who fills us this evening.

And who sends us out into the world and says, go and make disciples of all nations, so that his harvest one day will be brought in. What does Jesus say?

Behold, the fields are ripe for harvest. The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Praise, said Jesus, the Lord of the harvest, that he will send out laborers into his field.

[27 : 03] Now, here's the thing. You can't really pray for that honestly without yourself being willing to be part of that labor. And that was the whole point of Jesus' command.

Pray to the Lord of the harvest that he will send out laborers into his harvest field. Let's continue to pray then that in time to come, as we continue with this vacancy, and as we look forward to what God is going to do in a new ministry, and in new ministries, in the years, and the decades, and who knows, maybe even the centuries to come in Bon Accord.

Let's sow the seed. Let's play our part in sowing the seed as our act of thankfulness to what he has done for us in giving his only begotten son, so that whosoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

Our Father in heaven, we pray that we may be forgiven for our lack of zeal, and if that's the case, Father, take that lack of zeal away from us and replace it with the fullness of your spirit.

