

Exod 04-03-07a

Let's continue our worship this morning. This is Sunday, the 7th of March, 2004. We're picking up this morning in the latter part of Exodus 23 and into chapter 24.

And as we do so, we always stop at the outset to recognize the two great ingredients that God places in our soul that we did not have access to when we were unbelievers. I always unfailingly think of my epoxy that I keep in my desk drawer when I want to glue something and I need it to be really strong. You get out those two separate tubes.

One is the resin and the other is the hardener. Apart from each other, they have no useful function, but mixed together in equal parts, they make some of the strongest glue that can be had. In the same way, we rely on God the Holy Spirit and the presence of God's Word in our soul in equal measure, one out of balance with the other, one without the other.

The Holy Spirit without the Word of God, you end up as a charismatic. The Word of God without the Spirit, you end up being legalistic or an academician, someone who might thrive in a Bible college or seminary teaching environment, but having no real dynamic, no power to remember and apply. So these things have to be in equal measure.

We're about to study the Word of God, but it does us no good without the presence and ministry of God's Spirit. So it's exceedingly important for us to recognize His presence and His purpose and give Him the opportunity, God having forgiven us and having cleansed us, to impress these truths on our hearts. Because really, our spiritual life is not measured by what we hear.

This is a mistake I used to make and made it for a long time, measuring my spiritual life by how often I attended Bible class or how many lessons I heard, how much of the Word of God I covered. And that's really a mistaken view. It is essential to hear, and it's important what we hear, but the real measure is what we do with what we have heard.

And in that ministry as well, God the Holy Spirit will bring to the receptive mind the truth that has been learned. It will surface a verse, a phrase from a hymn at the point that it's needed that will come to the fore and it will affect our goals, it will affect our values, it will help us set our priorities rightly and make decisions that are in keeping with God's plan and are pleasing in His sight. So I cannot emphasize too strongly that to sit here without the ministry of the Spirit or to go forth from here without listening to the Spirit makes everything we do a waste of time.

So with that in mind, let's take a moment at the outset to go to the Lord in prayer. Father, we are grateful for the day, for the time in which we live, the country in which we live, the opportunities that we have as never before in history to come to an understanding of the deeper truths of Your Word. We recognize that there are many who understand Your Word differently or not at all.

And we pray this morning as we study that You will enlighten us, help us to rightly divide the Word of Truth. We want to grow in grace. We want to grow in knowledge of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we ask Your blessing on us. We pray that You will open the door of understanding that we can see clearly what the application and the meaning of these texts is for us as we move forward into the bulk of our day and our week, which is the daily living of life. We pray for those who are not with us, those who study with us at a distance.

We pray Your special blessing on them. We pray that Christian fellowship will be available and encouragement and that Your plan and purpose will be fulfilled whatever circumstances are at hand. And now we pray once again that You will guide us, give us concentration and insight into the Word.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, our text is going to be our Scripture reading this morning because we have a lot to cover and it is the best commentary on itself.

I want to begin in verse 14 of Exodus 23. We covered a little bit of this last time. This is the concluding section of instructions that God gives Moses on Mount Sinai as the children of Israel are camped below.

We have conveniently outlined this for ourselves under 12 headings. I've given these to you many times. I will just remind you that the law, these instructions cover relationship with God, relationship with peers and relationships with those who are under one's authority or control.

It deals with practical righteousness. It can be summed up as the Lord Jesus did in two simple statements. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your strength and love your neighbor as yourself.

All of these precepts regarding injury to others, property and so on can be subsumed under that guiding principle. We have come now to the 11th of the 12 sections which is Sabbaths and Feasts. This is going to be the next nine verses, 23:10-19.

We've already talked about the Sabbath. One thing I might point out with regard to the Sabbath that I have not mentioned before was in verse 12, it said, 6 days you shall do your work and on the seventh day you shall rest so that your ox and your donkey may rest and the son of your female servant and the stranger may be refreshed. The word refreshed there has a parallel in the New Testament in Acts chapter 3. We covered the sermon of Peter and after rehearsing the history leading up to and including the crucifixion of Christ, he then encourages, Peter does in Acts 3, his audience to repent of their sins so that times of refreshing may come.

The Greek word there is the equivalent of the Hebrew word here. It literally means to be, this is based on the word nephesh which is the word for soul. The idea is that your life itself be renewed.

It's not just refreshing in the sense of lipped an iced tea. This is revival, to be revived. You know, we talk about, oh, I had been mowing the lawn for an hour and a half and I came in and chugged down a big 16-ounce glass of lemonade and it really revived me.

You know what the word revive comes from? The Latin word vivere means to live. And to revivere yourself or revive means I have relived myself. I've brought my life back again.

And that's exactly what this word means. The son of your female servant and the stranger may be revived. Why these people? Isn't anybody else revived? What if I'm a prosperous landowner? Am I revived on the Sabbath? Not in this sense because the ox and the donkey, the son of your female servant and the stranger are in hardship.

They're in dire straits many times. And six days they're at hard labor. Six days they're trying to dig themselves out of a pit.

Six days they're bearing a burden. Six days they are enduring the grind, literally. And one day out of every seven they stop and revive.

Re-nephesh. Their soul is restored. The very same word in the spiritual sense is used, the Greek equivalent I should say, the very same word is used in the New Testament in Acts 3 when we acknowledge our sins.

Remember, Peter is talking to Jews who in that generation are the people of God who are supposed to recognize the Redeemer. I know it's a hard concept for a lot of people to wrap their mind around, but just read the sermons. They say, Return to the God of your fathers.

Confess your sins. What does John the Baptist say? He doesn't say, Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. He says, Bear fruit in keeping with change of mind.

He says, You don't need to become sheep. You need to get back in the fold. You are sheep.

You're the lost sheep of the house of Israel. You need to come back in the fold of the shepherd. Well, so what is the picture there in Acts 3? Repent.

Acknowledge your transgressions. Return to God and be revived. There is a legitimate context for hymns like, Revive us again.

Fill each heart with thy love. May each soul be rekindled with fire from above. Revive us again.

Often sung hymn, but the unfortunate thing about that hymn is, it sounds like a prayer. You're talking to God, Revive us again. Fill our hearts with your love.

Rekindle our souls with fire from above. But revival does not come by request. You don't say, Oh God, revive me.

Revival comes by a series of steps. You have to see the grace of God. You have to acknowledge

the grace of God.

You have to rest in the grace of God. You've got to claim the propositional truth of Scripture that says, Six days I labor and do my work. The seventh day is God's.

Every day for us is a Sabbath, and every day is a work day. We have to figure out what six-sevenths belongs to us. What am I supposed to do, and what am I supposed to leave to God? This is why we see David in the wilderness in our first Samuel study.

God has promised to make him king of Israel. The prophet has anointed him to be king. He is the equivalent of nine feet tall and bulletproof.

Nobody can touch him because God has made a promise. You absolutely will be the king of Israel. So why doesn't David stroll down the streets of Gibeah and dare Saul to throw a javelin at him? Because his six-sevenths is to be prudent and be wise and stay on the far side of the mountain when Saul comes after him and seek to preserve himself and his men and not test or tempt the Lord.

The same temptation was given to Jesus by Satan. Well, don't you have the promise that the angels will bear you up lest at any time you dash your foot against a stone? So just rely on that grace. Do all Sabbath and no work is the temptation.

And that's what is involved in this precept. There are really eleven commandments if you count them. Because six days thou shalt do all thy work and the seventh day thou shalt rest.

That's two commands. So we ought to go with the eleven. I'll write a book.

The Eleven Commandments. Make myself famous. But notice the first imperative, and this is even in the original table of commandments.

Six days thou shalt labor and do all thy work. That is a command of God. We don't have the luxury of just glancing at a calendar and saying, Well, it's Friday.

Today is work day. Oh, it's Saturday. Don't have to work.

We are commanded to work. But the seventh day you shall rest so that these who bear burdens, these who grind through the difficulties can be revived. I just have four more days and I'll have a day to fall back and regroup.

Just three days. Just two days. There is light at the end of the tunnel.

And the interpretation application for us is important because sometimes there are areas... We're not a monolith. We don't have just one area of our life. We're complex.

We have a lot of different things. Some things are going well. Some things are not going well.

When it comes to your marriage or when it comes to your kids, everything may just be rosy and

sunny and 72 degrees, fair winds and following seas. Everything is great. But when it comes to life at work, it's stress and it's anguish and it's conflict and there's backstabbing and people leaving cleat marks in you as they climb over you trying to get to the top and injustice and you're being held accountable and responsible for things over which you have no control or authority and the system is screwed up.

This happens in the military. This happens in civilian life. It happens in school.

And so maybe everything at home is great and everything at work or school is lousy. Well, whatever area of life we wind up being the ox or the donkey or the son of the female slave, this is the principle that applies for us. Do your six days' work and figure out what that seventh-day rest is.

What is it that you have to leave up to God? You know the old saw that's on plaques and refrigerator magnets to grant me the wisdom to accept what I can't change? Well, there's a grain of truth there. We do have to discern. Paul the Apostle prayed for his congregation, I pray that you will come to know the difference, that you can discern between what's good and what's better, between what's better and what's best.

And usually, in increasing levels of good, better, and best, there's increasing levels of self-sacrifice and absorbing a wrong without reaction. And recognizing that, well, vengeance is mine, I will repay, take no thought, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, pray for those that despitely use you, go the extra mile, turn the other cheek, heap coals of fire on their head, You know, that whole coals of fire on the head is an interesting picture because you think, oh well, I can't wait to see the old fire on your top knob there. I'll burn you down from the top down.

But really, what is it? It puts the heat on the other person. Now, if you have coals on your head, you've got to make a decision. You can't just stand there with coals on your head.

It's not healthy. You have to do something. And so it puts the ball in their court.

It forces them to deal with God. They have either got to recognize Christ in you and respond to Him or they're going to bring themselves under considerable wrath and judgment because God doesn't take kindly to people picking on His sheep. But we have to discern that.

We have to figure out the seventh day. It's not on the calendar. It's in the Word of God.

What is my part? I'm out of work. I have got to go look for a job. I have got to beat the streets.

I have got to print resumes. I have got to get interviews. I have got to canvas the web.

I've got to use my network. I have got to do my six days of labor. It is not the Sabbath day when I'm out of a job.

It is not the Sabbath day when it's time for me to earn a living. And I can't just say, well, you

know, God, someone's just going to smile on me and I'll be like Leonardo da Vinci and somebody will be my sponsor and my angel and just finance me so that I can just sit and think deep thoughts. It's not going to happen.

Six days thou shalt labor. Every area of our life, relationship, sometimes we have personality deficits and it winds up being painful to other people, painful to be around you, abrasive to be around us. We can't just say, well, you know, I'm just listening to the Word of God and God will change me.

We've got six days worth of work to do. We have got to look at how to apply the Word of God. We've got to take an active interest in claiming the Word of God to get over this.

Six-sevenths of it is what we are supposed to do in the power of God. That's why He gives us His Spirit and His Word. If He was going to do the whole thing, He doesn't need to leave the Spirit and the Word with us.

He would just up there in heaven, zing down a bolt of lightning, and you wouldn't know me. I'm a different person, different personality, different character. I'm just like Christ now.

I was hit last night at 1030 by a giant bolt from heaven, and I'm transformed. God says, no, I'm going to give you the two tubes. You mix them.

You get the power, and you do the six days of work, and then you figure out the part that you're supposed to leave to me. It requires us to think. Did you know this? We are commanded in the Word of God to think.

It's an imperative. That's what this has in view. So that when you're in a burdened, grinding situation, you can get refreshment.

If you're not finding refreshment, if the grind is going on, and you just are getting like the old pencil. I don't know if they even use pencils in school anymore. They probably type everything on their little laptops or something.

But when you're a child, and you're working through your little workbook there, and your pencil gets duller and duller and duller, you've got to do something. You used to have a little portable pencil sharpener. Go up to the front.

Get an excuse to stretch. Go up and crank the pencil sharpener. Come back and look at all the other kids and what they're doing.

But your pencil wears down, and if it wears down far enough, and if you have no pencil sharpener, you've got to start picking away the wood and doing whatever you can because you've got to have a sharp pencil. Well, we've got to be restored. We've got to sharpen up and let God do that for us.

In all that I have said to you, be circumspect. It says in verse 13, be on your guard is the way the

New American Standard translates this. Be watchful, be careful, be cautious, and make no mention of the name of other gods.

Don't even, you know, they're going into Canaan. They're going to be surrounded by Amorites and Hittites and Perizzites and Hivites and Jebusites, all the other seven different kinds of ites that are going to be in the land, all of whom have their own religion. He says, I'm not telling you don't throw your kids into the fire to Molech.

I'm saying don't even start down that road. If you never mention the name, you're not going to go down that path. You belong to God.

And you've got your hands full doing your seven-day week. Don't even bring up the name of Ashtoreth or Molech or Baal or any of these others. Let it not be heard from your mouth.

This is your testimony. This is your witness. Let it not be heard from your mouth.

This is when you're talking to other people. Now, what does that mean to us? Well, what is the God of this world put out by way of theology for people? We have got so much Oprah wisdom. We've got so much Dr. Phil wisdom.

We've got so much Judge Judy wisdom. And some of what they say is good sound advice because it essentially reflects a biblical principle. But if you're a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and you're trying to figure out how to live your life and how to solve your problems and how to make it through your day and through your week, are you living your life by the biblical principle? Or when someone says, Well, I notice you've tied a green string around your child's finger this week.

What's that for? Oh, well, Dr. Phil said that this would be a good way to... Well, if we do what we do because it's based on the Word of God, then we should say that green string reflects my belief. Train up a child in the way that he should go. It's a part of my child training based on the Word of God, not based on Dr. Phil, not based on Oprah, not based on the plenitude and plethora of other alternatives that represent other gods.

Now, verse 14. Three times you shall keep a feast to me in the year. You shall keep the feast of unleavened bread.

You shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you at the time appointed in the month Abib. We know about this. You remember 14th, Passover, 15th on seven days is the feast of unleavened bread.

For in it you came out of Egypt. None shall appear before me empty or empty-handed. This means that when you appear before the Lord, you bring a sacrifice.

You don't come and just say, well, what a great festival. I sure enjoy the smell of that cooking meat. Everyone who comes brings an offering.

Second one is the feast of harvest, the first fruits of labor which you've sown in the field, and then the feast of ingathering at the end of the year when you have gathered in the fruits of your labors from the field. You have some crops that start very early, and basically the feast of ingathering is Pentecost. Pentecost and ingathering are essentially the same feast, the feast of weeks.

So you've got the middle of Abib there, that week, about the third week in Abib, that's going to hit around April in our calendar. Then about two and a half months, well, not quite two months later, you have the feast of ingathering. So that's going to be June-ish on our calendar.

And then the feast of harvest is going to be October, late September, October, right around in there, which eventually kind of morphed into Halloween for us. These three feasts, three times in the year, all your mails shall appear before the Lord God, not empty-handed. Now here's my question for you.

Why do we need to know this? What is the interpretation of this and what is the application? Well, this is a challenge. I haven't found anybody who has written anything on this in terms of what does a New Testament Christian care about the three assemblage feasts, pilgrimage feasts. But here's what I would offer you as a thought.

Let's start with the first feast. What surprised me initially as I looked at these is that the first feast is not Passover. You would think, well, they'll assemble for Passover.

But it's not just Passover, it's the feast of unleavened bread, which begins with Passover and extends seven days. Why the whole seven-day feast and not just Passover? Well, it's called the feast of unleavened bread. And verse 18 goes on to talk about, you shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with unleavened bread, nor shall the fat of my sacrifice remain until morning.

Fat is the first thing to go rancid. If you want to preserve meat, you've got to get the fat out of it. That's why they make jerky out of lean meat.

But the idea of no leaven in the feast of unleavened bread means purification, separation, sanctification, right? That's fairly obvious. So the first feast is Passover and separation. You think back originally, you have the spilling of the blood of the Passover lamb, which preserves from the death penalty.

What happened originally in Exodus during that week? This is a few chapters back. Hopefully we haven't forgotten. On the 15th, remember the evening of the 14th, they slew the original Passover lamb, put the blood on the doorpost.

Death goes by. The firstborn are not slain in those houses. On the 15th, early, early in the morning, they depart and they head out of the land.

And if you trace the travels that they go through, it corresponds with the original request to Pharaoh. When Moses went to Pharaoh and he said, we want to go worship our Lord in the

wilderness, how many days journey did he want to go? Three days journey. So when does Pharaoh catch up with them and say, hey, you guys aren't coming back like I was expecting? It's three days later, right? Interestingly, and independently of all Christianity or anything to do with the Lord Jesus Christ or Passion Week or anything else, the rabbis have gone back and figured out the day of the week of the original Passover and the day of the week that Israel left Egypt.

Guess what they are? The Passover for that year was Thursday. The departure from Egypt was Friday. Three days later is Sunday.

Sunday is the middle of that Feast of Unleavened Bread week. And Sunday is the day the children of Israel cross the Red Sea. So the death, burial and resurrection picture of baptism, remember it talks about the Jews going through the sea, all of them were baptized in the sea, happens on Sunday, resurrection day for the Lord Jesus Christ.

So if there's ever any doubt in your mind that our chronology that we developed at great pain and mental expense to ourselves and determined that the Lord Jesus was crucified on a Thursday, Israel's history itself shows the picture because they had the Passover on Thursday, they left Egypt on Friday, they went to Sukkot and they picked up the bones of Joseph and then they camped at Etham on the 15th. They camped for the night which starts the 16th and on the morning of the 16th they journeyed to Pi-Ha-Hiroth. Remember that? They went to Pi-Ha-Hiroth next to the sea and here on the evening of the 17th Pharaoh approaches the camp.

So now it is early in the morning on the third day which is Sunday that God parts the waters, across they go and they have new life on the other side of the Red Sea. And it's exactly what the Lord Jesus did for us. It is all about the resurrection.

As I said before, that's my one beef with Mel Gibson. He needs to go back and do part two and call it the resurrection of the Christ because that's the message. If he makes that one, he won't.

But if he did, that's the one I would buy tickets for and take my unbelieving friends to because the gospel is the resurrection. The message is the resurrection. The emphasis at the center of the first feast of unleavened bread is the separation from Egypt, the separation from the old life.

So these three feasts, the first one commemorates the week that began with the blood of the Passover lamb and in its center and at its peak is the baptism and the separation and the sanctification. They're traveling, eating unleavened bread that week because they left in haste. They didn't have time to bake.

So these three assembly feasts or pilgrimage feasts where all the men of Israel are supposed to appear before the Lord, the first one is the inception. It's the memorial to the inception. And notice once again, we were talking about this on Friday night, where does the Bible put the emphasis when it comes to salvation? If it's all about come to the cross, washed in the blood of the lamb and that's it, then the first feast would be a Passover feast.

But the emphasis in scripture is start a new life that begins with separation and sanctification. It celebrates that week that begins with the blood but you've got seven other days of separation, sanctification, remove the leaven, get it out. Start living a new life.

Halfway through the week, you come up on the other side of the Red Sea and you're separated. God has removed the power of the enemy to harm you. The Egyptians never dogged the steps of Israel.

Again, during the 40 years of wandering, it doesn't say, well, 10 years later, Pharaoh, after he resuscitated his army, came back. God dealt with the Egyptians, defanged them, took away their military power, took away their economic power. The Egyptians will not be a force again until the time of David and Solomon.

Because of the devastation of the plates, because of the judgment of God, and because of that separation, God preserves Israel. He takes away the power of the enemy. That's what that first feast of pilgrimage, of assembly before the Lord, means to us.

We don't have to wait for it to come around once a year. There are going to be three points of contact, three points of emphasis that are applicable to us in these three feasts. When we think about our relationship with God, when we think about our life as we navigate our daily circumstances, what should we think about when we come before God? If we remember who we are and why we're here, what do we think about? Well, the first thing to think about is, I am to live a separated, sanctified life.

I am not even to mention the name of other gods, other benchmarks, other foundations to base my life on. You can mention Dr. Phil. People have good advice all the time.

Hints from Heloise is great. You can practically do anything known to man with pantyhose and cotton. It's just extraordinary the things they come up with, little household hints for different things.

The one I remember is how your onions tend to get next to each other and mold where they touch. So you cut the leg out of a pantyhose and you drop an onion in, then tie a knot. Then you drop in another onion, tie a knot.

Drop in another onion, tie a knot. Drop them all in, it keeps them separate. Then every time you want an onion, you just cut the bottom most thing and get your onion out.

Next time you need an onion, cut the next one. Anyway, it's better than MacGyver, you know, making explosives and stuff out of it. But those are, I'm not saying, you know, if it's not in the Bible, we can't do it.

But what is your foundation? A God is something that you look to and place your faith in. This is what I'm trusting to get through. Even Dobson and his Strong Willed Child series of books.

You're going to live your life by Dobson or you're going to live your life by the Word of God. You can get insight into what the Word of God says about children reading Dobson. But if somebody asks me, why are you training your child the way you're training him? I'm not going to say, well, you know, Dr. Dobson says this and Dr. Dobson says that.

The Word of God says this. The Word of God is what I base my priorities and my goals and my values on. And I do not name the name of any other God.

That's a part of our sanctification. It's a part of our Feast of Unleavened Bread. And like the Sabbath, it's an everyday feast.

We love to say that in the Marine Corps. Every day is a holiday and every meal is a feast. Well, every day for the Christian is a Sabbath and every day is a feast day.

So every day we get the chance to observe, to come before God and observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread. We come before God and say, Lord, here is my cleansed, sanctified, separated life. And if it's not so, we acknowledge it and He makes it so.

That's the beauty of confession. But it's our entry point. It's the beginning feast of the year.

But we're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to look at these next two feasts and see what the difference is to us in the Feast of Ingathering and the Feast of Harvest. Let's pause here and take our break.