

Exod 04-03-07b

Let's resume our study now in Exodus chapter 23. We are looking at the three feasts that are to be kept by all men in Israel. They are to appear before the Lord three times a year.

This is Exodus 23, 14 and following. We have covered the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and I hope shed some light on why that one is one of the feasts to be observed. The first one, the Inception, the one that signifies separation.

God is not interested just in preserving us from death and then saving us from an eternity apart from Him. He wants to separate us. He wants to set our feet on a road.

And it is a road away from Egypt, away from sin, away from bondage and slavery to corruption and toward inheritance. And we are on that road. We have been delivered.

We have not yet received the inheritance. And it is by faith and patience, often in the midst of trial, that we qualify ourselves for taking possession in the land. So, the second feast is the Feast of Harvest or Firstfruits or the Feast of Weeks.

This feast was observed seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath. In other words, 50 days after the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which is a high holy day, according to John. This is what has thrown off generations of church believers who think that Jesus was crucified on Friday because the next day was the Sabbath, missing the fact that the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread is a high Sabbath.

And that is why they had to get the men down off the cross by close of business on Thursday because Friday was a high Sabbath, a feast Sabbath. And 50 days after that Sabbath, you have the Feast of Firstfruits or the Feast of Weeks. This is called Pentecost for that reason, 50 days.

And what does it represent? Well, you remember in our chronological reckoning of what took place from the time of the Passover through the crossing of the Red Sea, what took place at Pentecost? This is a little pop quiz on what we covered a couple of months ago. The provision of manna began on that week, culminating on Friday, the 50th day, with the double portion of manna so that the following Saturday Sabbath was provided for. And we saw the great connection there that the double portion of manna, the first time the Jews saw manna was in that week.

And the first time there was a double portion that required a decision, you've got to lay up for yourself both for today and for tomorrow, would have been on Pentecost. Now, Jewish tradition differs from this. Jewish tradition says that where we are right now happened on Pentecost, that they arrived at Sinai and the giving of the law took place at that time.

But that does not jive. It doesn't reckon if you go through the encampments and where they go and what they do. It just was they wanted something to coincide with Pentecost, and so they

sort of got a conclusion and then pushed the rationale into it.

And unfortunately it kind of changes the significance, if you view it that way, of what Pentecost is because Pentecost was the giving of the law and then 1,470 years later you end up with the church starting at Pentecost. So you sort of have Israel starting on Pentecost and the church starting on Pentecost when in reality it is the double portion of manna that first occurred on Pentecost. And we have the double portion now.

The double portion belongs to the firstborn and it should have belonged to Israel. They missed it. They rejected it.

They did the Esau mess of pottage deal and so the church begins on the double portion day. But what would Pentecost, what would the Feast of Firstfruits have meant without that particular knowledge that we have? It is the Feast of Harvest, the first fruits of your labor which you have sown in the field. There is a growing season that begins in the spring and goes all the way through the end of the fall.

And some of your crops are real quick. If you ever bought grass seed, you got bare spots in your lawn, you say, well, I'm just going to put in some other kind of grass. Bermuda just isn't doing it for me.

I need something else. So you go down and you start looking at the grass seed and reading the labels. There are as many different kinds of grass as there are bugs, practically.

There is just an infinitude, it seems to me. And so you are trying to figure out, well, do I want the thick one that has to have constant water or do I want the thin one that can tolerate shade? And just endless confusion to me on grass. I finally get the bag that says, well, it's a mixture.

If one dies, the others will survive. And just sprinkle it all out there. And you can tell by looking at my lawn.

I've got about six different kinds of grass that I've identified out there, the predominant one being the crabgrass with the runners. But the harvest, some of the crops, you plant them and they spring right back up and they are ready very early. And so these are the first fruits.

You plow, you plant, and just in a matter of a few weeks, here's this stuff springing up and it's ready to be brought in. So it is the first production. It's the first growth.

What was our first feast about? Deliverance, separation, sanctification, set your feet on the road. Why are you on the road? What are you supposed to do? We are supposed to produce fruit. We're supposed to grow.

We're supposed to be nourished and built up. Jesus compares the Word of God to a seed that's planted in a field. And the field should produce 30-fold or 60-fold or 100-fold.

Well, the first production, as soon as you start to produce, as soon as you start to bear fruit,

bring it to the Lord. Acknowledge God at the beginning of that process, at the inception, at the first of it. People get married and in some cases have children, in some cases have a whole house full of children, in other cases maybe a few or one or none.

But if you have a child, a lot of people, when the first one comes, there is a special sense of thanksgiving to God for that child. Hannah with Samuel, just the miracle of it. No matter how many kids you have, it's always precious.

But the first one, it's unique in your experience. You've never seen one before come as the fruit of your own body. And it is no less miraculous.

Being a firstborn child, people say, well, you're just making much of the firstborn, and all the rest of them are just secondary and tertiary. But for the parents, it is initiation into a kind of experience that you have not had before. For us as believers, when God sows the seed of His Word in our souls, when God the Holy Spirit waters it and nurtures it, and when it grows and begins to bear fruit, it is a special and unique experience.

Now you say, well, I was saved years and years and years ago, and I learned a couple of Bible verses and bore some fruit, so my first fruits is long past. I don't have to think about that anymore. Remember that what for Israel was periodic or seasonal for us is daily.

We have new truth that we learn, or truth that we are reminded of that had not been fresh to us. You know, you don't have to plant a different crop every year. Well, last year I did wheat, this year I'm doing okra, next year I'm doing oats, and the year after that I'm doing... I'm just going to grow a field of poke salad.

I'm just going to grow poke, and that's the whole thing. Then maybe after that I'll do turnip greens. I saw... well, I can't even tell you.

You know, I've been buying my own groceries here the last few weeks. I saw a lady driving one of those things, you know, that they have at the grocery store. Turnip greens just piled to the nines, and I thought, you must be having a house full of people coming over that really like turnip greens, because she just about cleaned out the thing, and Albertson's has got no shortage of turnip greens, and she was just piling them in.

But anyway, you know, wheat is a common staple crop, and it's not just the first time you ever planted wheat, and it came up, you take it, wave it before the Lord, it's the first fruits, and then you're done. Every year, the first of the wheat. Every year, the first of the corn.

Every year, the first of the barley. And for us, every time the Word of God has an effect and makes a difference, it sustains us, it strengthens us, it steers us, it protects us, it is the sword of the Spirit, it activates all the rest of the armor of God, and when we are aware of the power of the Word of God in our life, that crop has borne fruit. It made a difference.

We're at the sowing stage right now. Hopefully, God the Holy Spirit is active, and the seeds of

the Word are being sown in our soul, but this isn't it. This isn't the harvest.

This is the planting. The plowing and the cultivating is our meditation on it. Do we go back and revisit that seed and nurture it and make sure it's present and growing and something that's a live issue and option in our thinking? But there will come a test.

There will come a circumstance or a challenge or a decision point where now it's going to bear its fruit. It's going to have its effect. The whole process is going to come to a happy conclusion and fruition at that point.

When that happens, do we come before God? Do we bring the first fruits of that seed of the Word that was sown in our soul and say, Lord, thank you for your Word. Lord, thank you for your Holy Spirit that makes it real to me and has brought it to my mind. Thank you for shining a light on my path, giving me a lamp for my feet so that I will not sin against you.

Are we aware? It ought to constantly be in the back of our mind that we are in a monitored environment. People act differently. What was it? There was a juror on the Martha Stewart trial.

I heard this on the radio driving somewhere. There was a juror that somebody caught him inside the courthouse and said, well, did it make a difference to you that she didn't take the stand? And he said, well, yeah, we really kind of felt like she should have come out and told us because they found her guilty on all of the charges that remained that were not dismissed. And all of this hype and it had kind of leaked in that she had been talking to the press and talking to the public and fighting her battle in the press, but she never did talk to the jury.

And so the jury kind of felt like, well, why aren't you telling us any of this? But then when the guy came outside and the TV cameras were pointed at him, they asked him the identical same question. And he said, oh, it made no difference whatsoever. He was being watched.

The eyes of the world were on him. And so, oh, no, we were totally impartial. It made no difference to us whatsoever.

You know, you can't hold it against a defendant if they choose not to testify and this, that, and the other. But inside, the very same guy had said something different when it was just someone, you know, a reporter with a lapel mic or something. He said, hey, did it make any difference? Well, yeah, you know, come out in the cameras.

Oh, no, no, it made no difference whatsoever. Different when you're being watched. How many people are different? You know, people in private arrange their clothing.

People in private take care of the various orifices in their head that might have something stuck in them that need fixing. You know, something between your teeth, something itching your ear, something itching your nose. And when nobody's looking, you can square that stuff away.

But if you're in front of a room full of people like I am now, I'm not going to, hopefully, unless I

completely lose my sense of decorum, do something like that. It always surprises me. I will say this, and you'll have to forgive me.

But it surprises me that ladies will adjust their undergarments in broad daylight public. I mean, people will grab, you know, reach around behind and something's binding or whatever, and they don't try to get off it. They're just like tugging here and stretching there.

There was a lady that reached in the front of her blouse and just hitched her whole thing up just right there in public. And I just think, you know, you need to be aware when you're being monitored and be on your best behavior. You know, I say things when I'm alone in the car to the inside of my windows that I never say when anybody is around, not anybody.

But in the privacy of just me and God and my car and the people in traffic, I say things. And I find great sweet release in that. But it's just me.

It's just me talking to myself. It's just something that way I can get it out of my system, and it doesn't slip out in inappropriate times when people are around. God is monitoring us.

The seed of the Word has been sown in our souls, and we have to remember we are being watched. We are being monitored. The little electrodes that they put on your head and on your heart, and they say, okay, get on the treadmill and walk, and there's a piece of paper with a pen on it recording.

This is us. This is our life. God is watching.

Is the sown seed of the Word bearing any fruit? And when it does, do you say, well, you know, I've got this wisdom thing all figured out. I know how to navigate the rocks and shoals. Or do we say, Lord, thank you for giving me the knowledge, for giving me your Word.

That is the feast of firstfruits. When the Word of God first has an effect in this situation, and it may be a promise you claim many other times, just like the Israelites may have sown wheat year after year after year. It's not just way back then.

It's every time the Word of God preserves us, strengthens us, comforts us, encourages us, directs us in the way, do we come before God. That's our feast of firstfruits. That's our feast of weeks.

That's why the church began at Pentecost, because we're on an everyday presence of God basis. We're always in His presence, and we should always be acknowledging the fruit of His Word in our souls. This is what I think the feast of harvest means.

The firstfruits of your labors which you have sown in the field. This is what you apply. This is what you bring to fruition because you have cultivated.

The seed is sown. You cultivate it. What is our cultivation? You don't get a good crop unless you cultivate the Word.

This is taking time to think, time to meditate, time to water that Word and think, well, so what? What were we studying last Tuesday? Something in 1 Samuel, something about David. He's out there, and he saves Keilah, and they turn on him. They're ready to deliver him up to Saul, and he's got to leave from there.

But David is consulting God the whole time. David is going to the Urim and Thummim. He's got to be with the ephod.

So David is not making the mistakes that he made when Saul was hunting him in the previous chapter where he was running and fleeing in fear and letting the spit run down his beard. Now, even though he is still a fugitive, and he is still taking great pains to preserve himself, he's doing his six days' worth of work. He's resting in God.

He's going to God for guidance. And God preserves him and delivers him. God says, you need to get out of Keilah.

They're going to give you up. And he is preserved from the plotting and scheming of Saul, who, by the way, will not come to deliver Keilah when they're attacked by the Philistines, but will gladly assemble an army and come to Keilah if he thinks he can kill David. And this is the kind of enemies that we face.

And so I say, so what? Interesting story. Nice for David, but what about me? Well, which David am I going to be? Am I going to be the David dragging Goliath's sword into Gath, scrambling on the gate, spit on my beard, or am I going to be the David who goes to a beathar and says, inquire of the Lord, should we stay or should we go? What is God's will in this matter? And then to do it. This is watering the Word.

This is cultivating it, thinking about it, asking ourselves that so what question, because it is totally pointless for us to claim to be a Christian and to sit in a Bible class and then to close the book and straightway forget until the next time class is in session. Class is not our spiritual life. Our daily decisions, our daily thought patterns, our priorities, values, goals, that's what it is.

So that's the feast of harvest. The first fruits of your labors. We have to work to make this happen.

We have to do our six days. Then the third feast, the feast of in-gathering at the end of the year. When you have gathered in all, this is surveying and reviewing the entire season.

The first fruits harvest was at the inception. The first of it is coming in. You continue to work through the summer and you finally have harvested everything and you're ready to do threshing and storing and getting ready to sustain yourself through the winter.

And now we're at the feast of harvest and first fruits. You're looking forward. You're saying, Oh, Lord, thank you for this first bounty.

I'm looking forward to a lot more. This is what I want to do for all of my summertime. Now you're at the end of the harvest and you're saying, Lord, thank you for everything you've done.

And now you're looking to be sustained. One of the things that has struck me about fruitfulness and fruit bearing is how relatively short the fruiting season is for any given plant, any given crop. 12 months in a year, and yet maybe only in one month, is wheat actually in the ear, in the stalk.

Apple tree. You've got a tree there 12 months out of the year that apples are only hanging on it for about a month. Peaches, anything you want to look at.

The visible fruit is only there for a relatively small percentage of the year. And the rest of the time, the tree is doing tree things. It's respirating.

It's sinking its roots. It's getting the water. It's doing photosynthesis.

It's putting out leaves. It's repelling bugs. It's recovering from broken branches.

Maybe it's getting pruned or whatever. But we tend in modern Christianity to hear a lot about your visible fruit. Where is your impact? When is the last time you led someone to the Lord? What? Not in a year? Not in two years? Not in five? What? You claim to be a Christian and you haven't led anyone to the Lord? Many people, this is their measure.

Because to them, the mission is evangelism. If you're not evangelizing, you have no mission. You have no success.

You have no fruit. When is the last time you fill in the blank? Visible fruit. Let no man judge you, Paul says, by a day or a season or a feast or what you eat or what you don't eat.

A new moon or a Sabbath. Let no man judge you. It is not the visible fruit that measures your spiritual life.

Visible fruit is great in its season. And here at this Feast of In-Gathering at the end of the year, you gather in the fruits of your labors from the field and it's all gathered. Now the wheat is in the barn.

The fruits and the grains and things are going to be put up and they're going to sustain you through the winter. And they're going to sustain you through the spring. And they're going to give you the wherewithal to plant a fresh crop next spring.

And so you thank God in prospect at the Feast of Harvest and you thank Him in retrospect at the Feast of In-Gathering. And you're looking ahead to being sustained in the time when there is no visible crop. Most of our life is spent in invisible production.

In doing the sustaining things. Taking in that which keeps the plant alive. Storing up that which will be used later at some time in the future.

And to be thankful to God for that. You look around and you say, well, you know, it isn't a holiday. Nothing special has happened today.

But I'm going to go to the Lord and thank Him for what I have in my soul. For what I've got stored up. Thank Him for the stability that I enjoy at this present time.

Thank Him for the opportunity that I have to reach into my soul. All of us get in situations where we miss Bible class. And we think, well, we're liable to step down a little.

We're going to lose momentum. We shouldn't. There ought to be barns and silos.

How many hours of Bible instruction have we been exposed to? How many times have we heard some of these truths? It's a great opportunity. Let's go through a winter where there is no crop to go out and harvest. Let's pull something out of the silo.

What's in the barn? What do I remember? It's great exercise. God will put us in different situations where we don't have the usual support. We don't have the usual relationships.

We're separated from our family. We're separated from our routine. We're dislocated.

Something comes up and we're out of kilter. Well, go to the feast of harvest. What do I have in the barn? What has God given me that will sustain me through this time when things are not sunny and bright and there's standing stalks in the field? Also, if you think about the correspondence here, the feast of unleavened bread, you have the inception.

You have the feast of harvest, the first fruits. And then you have the ingathering at the end of the year. And this looks forward to the receiving of our inheritance.

We are sort of living in the feast of harvest. We're living in the time of first fruits right now. The ingathering and the full harvest and what we put in our future barn is going to happen at the judgment seat of Christ.

We are in the growing season. We are in the harvesting season right now. Jesus said to the disciples, lift up your eyes and look at the fields.

They are already white for harvest. And he wasn't talking about a harvest of souls for evangelism. He was talking about a harvest of righteousness.

The field is always the world. The seed is always the word. And the fruit is always righteousness.

That's what God's word produces in us. The ground by itself is worthless. The ground can get hard-packed.

The birds can come and pick the seeds off the hard-packed soil. The soil can harbor rocks and brambles and that which chokes and makes the word unfruitful. When the word is fruitful, what is the crop? Righteousness.

When Jesus says, lift up your eyes and look, and yes, there are people screaming out from the Samaritan city there, Sychar, where the disciples went in, and Jesus is looking at the woman that had gone in and all the people are coming. Jesus says, lift up your eyes to the field. They are white for harvest.

But what he's talking about is, are there people, there are people who, when they hear the word of God, will respond to it, will cultivate it, and will produce a crop of righteousness. This is why he says, pray to the Lord of the harvest that he will send. He doesn't say, go thou forth and swing the shining sickle and cut the ripened grain.

Gather in the corn ears gleaming everywhere. Gathered is the harvest for another year. Now our day of gladness.

Thanksgiving day is here. He doesn't tell the disciples, get out your sickle and cut the white fields. He says, pray to the Lord of the harvest that he will send workers to gather.

Pray that there will be believers who will recognize the potential for that crop of righteousness and will gather it, will ingather it, so that at the end of the year they will have gathered the fruit of their labors from the field. Three times in the year, all your males shall appear before the Lord God. We appear before the Lord when we go to Him initially to begin our life of sanctification.

We go to the Lord when our spiritual life begins to bear fruit. And we go to the Lord when we see something come to fruition and completion. There is a broad picture that looks ahead to the judgment seat of Christ and to the millennial kingdom.

But this is also something that applies on a daily basis. You say, well, I can see about sanctification and separation, I can apply that daily. I can see first fruits, applying the Word of God and doing what is pleasing in God's sight and coming before God and thanking Him for that.

But what about this ingathering? How does that happen in my daily life? Well, what are the three Christian virtues? Faith, love, and hope. Hope does not disappoint because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, Romans 5.5. Hope is our expectation. Hope is our motivation.

Faith is the means of living our life as believers. Hope is the motivation for living our life. If we only had hope in this life, we are of all men most miserable, Paul says, 1 Corinthians 15.

We have hope in the next life. It's our motivation. What's going to motivate us to keep going? What's going to motivate us to sow more seed, to reap more righteousness, to live a life of faith when it doesn't seem to produce humanly attractive outcomes? You may do the right thing and lose your job.

You may do the right thing and have to pay extra on your taxes. You may do the right thing and lose money. You may turn the other cheek or whatever and someone just takes advantage and

you wind up short of this world's earthly store, whatever it may be.

What is the motivation? What's the encouragement? It's our hope. It's our expectation that that full crop is going to come in. The farmer who plants and plows, plows in hope, he says in the New Testament there.

He says the ones who sow, sow in hope, expectation. Why does someone work hard in their job? Why does someone work hard in their marriage? Why does someone work hard with their children? Because you have a forward-looking expectation that you are going to reap the peaceable fruit of righteousness. It's going to be worth it.

It may be hard now. There may not be any gratification now. Boy, all you have to do is read those little house books and you see old paw angles out there just literally scratching survival out of the ground, planting and plowing and going out there just breaking himself trying to get in a crop.

And then the day before they harvest, a big hail storm comes or the locusts come and eat it all up and he has to go into debt and he's got to start all over and try to dig himself out of that hole and just literally trying to extract life out of the ground. And why does he do it? It's not gratifying when you're there pulling the 100,000th weed out of your crop. It's looking forward to a fruitful harvest.

That's what this feast represents for us. And we come before the Lord and we express to Him our hope. We come before the Lord for our sanctification.

We come before the Lord for our application. And we come to the Lord for our expectation. We have a confident expectation that He who has begun a good work in us will continue it unto the day of Christ Jesus.

Three times a year the Israelites came before God to recognize these three phases of their existence. And these are three aspects that we can bring with us when we come to God every single day. If you have trouble coming up with content for prayer, you say, well, I don't just want to come to God with a laundry list of people to pray for.

You know, God bless this and God bless that. And when you're a child, you just list off all your relatives. God bless grandma, God bless grandpa, God bless, you know.

There's no real thought involved. When we come before God, what do we bring? Do not come to Him empty-handed. What do we bring? We bring our knowledge of what it means to be sanctified.

We bring our knowledge of what it means to apply the Word of God and reap righteousness. We bring our knowledge of what our confidence and our hope and expectation is. So the challenge is, when we come before God in prayer, in our souls, are these elements of our thinking? Are these areas that we recognize and bring the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving

to God for what He has done, what He is doing, and what He will do? It's a powerful reminder to us of the opportunity we have and the content that should flesh out and widen the bandwidth of our relationship with God.

Sometimes it seems like we're just talking through a couple of cans and a string. You know, God seems very far away, and it's kind of hard to hear Him, and we're not real sure He's hearing us. This is what should make up our conversation with God.

This is what we have in our hands when we come to Him. This is the substance, this is the fleshing out and the fulfilling of what it means to have a relationship with God, what He has done. Unleavened bread, Passover, what happens in the middle of that week, going through the water, coming out on the other side, deliverance, security, provision, the beginning of the harvest, the fruits that we can see now, the things that make a difference to us now.

Many times that's where we stop. We say, you know, I really just want my instant results. I was in a jam, went to God, God bailed me out.

Thanks a lot. See you later. And we don't move forward to that third feast, which is the feast of hope, the feast that is celebrated looking at that full harvest and everything that we're going to take into the next life with us.

So hopefully this has given us a little more light, a little more understanding of why God has preserved these three feasts of the many feasts that existed in Israel as those where they were to come before the Lord. These specifically relate to relationship and conversation and fellowship with God. This constitutes our conversation with Him.

Well, this sounds like a good place to stop. Let's close in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you for so clearly illustrating for us the nature of our relationship with you, the nature of our walk before you. We thank you for the light of your word that shines on our path. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will bring it to our minds, help us to understand it, help us to make application, help us to see that field that is ripe for harvest and to bring in the fruit of righteousness that is completely a product of your grace, your word and your spirit in our souls.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.