

Place: Lurgan Baptist: 29: 1: 2008

Reading: Leviticus 23:1-14

FOCUS ON THE FEASTS

4. THE FEAST OF FIRST-FRUITS

The feast of first-fruits was closely associated with the Passover and it was observed when the feast of unleavened bread was being kept. Passover would take place on the 14th day of the first month, and then the feast of unleavened bread would take place from the 15th day until the 21st day. *The day following the Sabbath after the Passover was the feast of first-fruits.* Now if the Passover speaks to us of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, then the feast of first-fruits points to the next event in God's prophetic calendar, following the death of Christ, namely His resurrection from among the dead. Now while it is true that this third feast in the series of seven is intimately connected with the feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread nonetheless it is still a separate feast. Some Bible scholars have stated that the waving of the sheaf of first-fruits was an essential feature of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and is therefore not to be considered as a separate feast. There was also an overlapping as far as time was concerned,

However each of the three feasts was designed to teach and emphasize a different doctrinal and practical truth. Will you notice the words in (23:9) “ *And the Lord spake unto Moses saying.* ” While the use of these words does

not necessarily suggest a break in the structure of the chapter, they do indicate a fresh spiritual division. A. J. Holiday has suggested that “ *here the Lord is only adding a further instruction as to something to be done in that week when His people arrived in Canaan. But a new subject is being set forth altogether in type by this additional ordinance and it is therefore introduced by the distinctive words, ‘ And the Lord spake unto Moses.’* ” One big difference did exist between this feast and the two which preceded it. While Passover and Unleavened Bread could be held in the wilderness during the journey from Egypt to Canaan (Num 9:1-11) first-fruits could only be celebrated in the promised land after the children of Israel had possessed the land. Look if you will at (23:19) This feast could not be observed in the wilderness where grain could not be sown or harvested. Israel had to be in the land before this feast could be celebrated.

After the wilderness had been traversed, after the Jordan had been crossed, after the people had been established in the land they offered the sheaf of first-fruits and reaped their harvests year after year. Now what are the lessons to be learned from this Feast of First-Fruits ? Victor Buksbazen has suggested “ **No Christian can fully understand his own spiritual heritage without going back to the Jewish feasts with their solemn rites and God-appointed observances.** ” That being so, what can we learn from this feast ? Well, I want to try and gather up our study under three simple words.

(1) RECOGNITION

Now keep in mind they could not keep this feast until they in the land, but once they were in the land, in the place of plenty, in the place of God's bountiful provision "*a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey,*" (Deut 8:8-9) then they could celebrate this feast. Canaan was for Israel a place of plenty and prosperity, and first-fruits applied to harvest time. During that first month it would have been the beginning of the barley and the flax harvest and the Lord wanted His people, brought out of Egypt by the blood of the lamb to recognise two important principles. The Lord wanted them to recognise,

(a) THE PRINCIPLE OF DIVINE OWNERSHIP:

The Israelites possessed the land and were enjoying its fruits, but the land did not belong to them. They held it in trust for God, it was His. When the Israelite brought his wave sheaf to the Lord he recognised the principle of the divine ownership of everything he possessed. My is this not a fundamental principle in all of our giving to the Lord ? David recognised this when he said, "*All things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee.*" (1 Chron 29:14) Did you know that all of us live "**hand to mouth.**" We live from His hand to our mouth. God is the Creator and Sustainer of the earth and its contents. The Psalmist says, "*the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof.*" (Ps 24:1) The sheaves were brought to the Lord as an acknowledgement of His goodness. There would not even have been a harvest were it not for the goodness of the Lord. Israel would not even be in their land were it not for the faithfulness of the Lord. The feast of first-fruits

was a reminder to them that everything they had came from God. Now do we not to be reminded of this ? Of course we do, for some even believers are so filled with a sense of their own importance that you would think, that the wealth they possess is the result of their genius. Yet the Word of God says, "*But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God for it is He that giveth thee power to get wealth.*" (Deut 8:18) We sing it do we not,

**We give Thee but thine own
What'er the gift may be
For all we have is Thine alone
A trust o Lord from Thee**

My should we not be praising the Lord for His goodness ? Were it not for His goodness we would have nothing ? Some may have more than others but whatever we have has come from the Lord. Paul says, "*What has thou that thou didst not receive ?*" (1 Cor 4:7) My do you recognise the principle of divine ownership in your life ? You see, you may accumulate great wealth but you cannot keep it, for while the Lord might not take it from you one day He's going to take you from it. (1 Tim 6:7) (a) But there's another principle here,

(b) THE PRINCIPLE OF HUMAN STEWARDSHIP:

You see, in the feast of first-fruits God is saying to us, "*Bring Me the best. Bring Me the first of everything, I must get first place in your life.*" The Lord was to have His portion first. Before the people were allowed to eat of the harvest, or bake any bread, they had to bring the first

sheaf to the Lord and wave it before the Lord in dedication. Look if you will at (23:14) Do you recall the promise that God gave to the Old Testament saints ? The wise man in Proverbs says, “ *Honour the Lord with Thy substance and with the first-fruits of all thine increase, so shall thy barns be filled with plenty and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.* ” (Prov 3:5-10) God gave the promise that if His people were faithful in their giving putting God first He would abundantly bless them. Do you recall the promise God gave to the New Testament believers ? “ *But my God shall supply all your need* ” (Phil 4:19) The Lord has not promised riches in return for obedience, we are not promised that our barns will be filled to running over. Some of God’s choicest saints in this world are poor. The Lord Jesus was poor. Paul wrote, “ *As poor yet making many rich.* ” (2 Cor 6:10) This is not a wealth and health gospel.

There is no guarantee that if you are faithful in your giving, you will become a millionaire, but there is a guarantee that the Lord will always take care of you. The principle here is plain, pertinent and personal, the Lord must have first place in our lives. Did you ever notice some of the things that God puts first.

- In (Matt 5:23-24) **First your Brother then your Gift:**

“ *Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee. Leave therefore thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother and then come and offer*

thy gift. ” Do you need to do that ?

- In (Matt 8:21-22) **First what Christ wants then what you want:**

Do you see what this would be follower of Christ says ? “ *Lord suffer me first to go and bury my father.* ” “ *Me first,* ” is that what it has come to in your life ?

- In (Matt 6:33) **First the Spiritual then the Temporal:**

“ *But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.* ” Are you giving the Lord the first place ? This feast declares God gets the first and God gets the best. The people in Malachi’s day were accused of robbing God because they not only withheld from Him, what He was entitled to, but because they offered Him what they did not want for themselves. In thus robbing the Lord of His rights they were depriving themselves of blessing. (Mal 1:6) The prophet indicated to then the way of enrichment and blessing, “ *Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.* ” (Mal 3:10)

Do you see what Malachi was saying ? The only road to blessing was in recognising the divine claims and giving God His rightful dues. My Christian work would

never suffer from lack of funds, or be barren of fruitful results if everything was held in trust for God. (1)

(2) RESURRECTION

The Lord Jesus, our true Paschal Lamb was slain on the 14th day of the month dying as we are told about the ninth hour. (Lk 23:44) A little later the friends of Christ, took Him down from the cross, laid Him in Joseph's new tomb, and then went home to prepare for the coming Sabbath. About the same time the delegates of the Sanhedrin crossed the brook Kedron, and cut down a sheaf of wheat from the standing grain and, taking it to the Temple left it there to be waved before the Lord " *on the morrow after the Sabbath.*" (23:11) *There the Lord lay in His tomb, and there the sheaf lay in the Temple.* The morning after the Sabbath, the first day of the week arrived and what happened ? The high priest waved the wave sheaf in empty form before the Lord, ignorant of the fact that earlier that day, the true sheaf had been waved before the Lord. The Lord had risen from the dead and become the first-fruits of them that slept.

Just as the Lord had honoured the Passover by offering Himself as the true Paschal Lamb, now He honours the first-fruits by presenting Himself alive from the dead, " *on the morrow after the Sabbath.*" (23:11) Now all that I have said is seen in type in this feast of first-fruits presented to us in (Lev Ch 23) Notice for example,

(a) *THE DAY THAT IS SPECIFIED:*

Look if you will at (23:11) Just as there was a date in connection with the Passover, so there is a day in connection with the first-fruits. It is specifically stated that it was to be waved on the morrow after the Sabbath. The Sabbath Day is always the seventh day. This means that first-fruits took place on the first day of the week. Our Lord Jesus arose from the dead on the first day of the week. Do you recall how beautifully tells us that " *Upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning they came unto the sepulchre bringing the spices which they had prepared and certain others with them.*" (24:1) Do you recall what they saw ? The stone was rolled away, the tomb was empty. The angels said " *Why seek ye the living among the dead ? He is not here but is risen.*" (24:6) the stone was not rolled away to let the Lord out, the stone was rolled away to let the disciples in. But mark the day.

You see, today we do not worship on the Sabbath Day, rather we gather to worship on the first day of the week as the New Testament church did. It was on the first day of the week that the disciples came together to break bread. (Acts 20:7) Do you recall that Paul giving instruction to the Corinthian saints said, " *Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him.*" (1 Cor 16:1) This convinces us that the church met on Sunday for worship, and that its worship included the regular gifts of the believers. Do you see that Christ not only died according to the Scriptures, Passover, but He rose on the third day according to the Scriptures, First-Fruits. He arose to fulfil the type, and that day had to be the first day of the week, " *the morrow after the Sabbath.*" (a)

(b) THE DOCTRINE THAT IS SIGNIFIED:

For the Feast of First-Fruits surely speaks to us of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Paul says “ *But now is Christ from the dead and become the first-fruits of them that slept.* ” (1 Cor 15:20) So this sheaf of first-fruits speaks of Christ risen from the dead. Now resurrection was a truth that was known in the Old Testament as the Scriptures indicate. (Matt 22:31 Acts 23:6) But it was a resurrection **of** the dead. But this sheaf of first-fruits speaks of a resurrection **from** the dead, it suggested that only sheaf should be presented to the Lord and the others left on the field. Now this was a distinct truth, wholly unknown in the Old Testament which only spoke of a general resurrection. That’s why the disciples could not understand what the Lord meant when He spoke in (Mk 9:9) about the Son of Man rising **from** the dead. They wondered what the rising from the dead should mean. My they are not the only ones to wonder. Christendom today thinks too of a “ general resurrection, ” when all men shall stand before God to be judged.

This is not true. The New Testament reveals that Christ would rise from the dead first, hinted at in this feast of first-fruits, and afterward they that are Christ’s at His coming. First Christ, then all the believers in Christ at the Rapture (1 Cor 15:20 1 Thes 4:16) You see, believers only are raised at the coming of the Lord Jesus in the air according to (1 Thes Ch 4) they join in what is called “ *the first resurrection.* ” The wicked dead are not raised until at least a thousand years later. (Rev 20:5) Now the

importance of the resurrection of Christ in New Testament teaching is significant. It was foretold by the Lord Himself. In,

- Matthews gospel 5 times (16:4, 21 17:23 20:19 26:32)
- Marks gospel 1 time (9:9-10)
- Luke’s gospel 2 times (9:22 18:33)
- John’s gospel 3 times (2:19 10:17-18 16:16)
- Acts, its mentioned 16 times
- In Epistles and Revelation over 30 times

My there can be no Christianity without a risen Christ. It is the miracle of human history, an incontrovertible fact. Look at (1 Cor 15:1f) Notice the word “ *vain,* ” appears 3 times in the English although Paul uses a different word each time.

In (15:2) Our Faith would be **Valueless** if Christ is not risen.

In (15:14) Our Faith would be **Powerless** if Christ be not risen.

In (15:17) Our Faith would be **Meaningless** if Christ be not risen.

You see, the resurrection of Christ Verifies the Scriptures (1 Cor 15:4) It Vindicates Christ’s Claims (Rom 1:4) It Validates His Death (Rom 4:15) and it Proclaims His Victory over Satan and Death. (Heb 2:14 2 Tim 1:10) Now there are 3 wonderful truths that I want to share with you about the resurrection that I believe we see in type in (Lev Ch 23) The Resurrection speaks to us of,

1. OUR ALLIANCE:

Look if you will at (23:10) Or “ *Bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest.* ” Now this sheaf was identical in kind with the rest of the harvest yet to be brought in. My is there not a close alliance, resemblance between Christ and His people ? The writer to the Hebrews says, “ *Both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one, for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren.* ” (Heb 2:11) Do you recall that this new relationship between Christ and His people was revealed to Mary on resurrection morning when Christ appeared to her and said, “ *Touch me not for I am not yet ascended to my Father, but go to my brethren.* ” (Jn 20:17) This name given to the disciples for the very first time, was the direct result of the resurrection of Christ. You see, the resurrection of Christ establishes a link that before was unknown between the Lord and His people. My we are now nearer and dearer to Him than ever before. 1.

2. OUR ACCEPTANCE:

Look at (23:11) That is the waving of the sheaf was to be accepted for the children of Israel. So Christ was “ *raised again for our justification,* ” (Rom 4:25) and a risen and ascended Christ is the ground of our acceptance with God. In that great resurrection chapter in (1 Cor Ch 15) Paul reasons that if Christ be not risen we have nothing worth having, but if Christ is risen we have everything for time and eternity. You see, the resurrection is the divine pledge that God is satisfied with the ransom price our Lord has

paid and with the work He is accomplished on our behalf and if God is satisfied we may rest satisfied also. You see, just as the acceptance of the sheaf of first-fruits presented before the Lord was for the whole of Israel’s harvest, so the acceptance given to Christ in glory as the representative of all His people is the pledge of our acceptance there. My we are “ *accepted in the beloved,* ” and the Father’s love to Christ is the measure of the Father’s love to us. (Jn 17:23)

**So dear so very dear to God
More dear I cannot be
The love wherewith He loves the Son
Such is His love for me**

3. OUR ASSURANCE:

It is the pledge of the resurrection of all who trust in Him. You see, the wave sheaf was only the first part of the harvest, not the harvest itself. It was the first-fruits of the harvest yet to be brought in, the first of many sheaves to be reaped from the fields of standing grain. So Christ is the first-fruits of them that sleep. (1 Cor 15:20-23) he is the firstborn from the dead. (Rev 1:5) Now the very word “ *first,* ” suggest others. Mind you others were raised from the dead previous to His resurrection. For them, Lazarus, the widow of Nain’s son, Jairus daughter, the sentence of death was only temporarily repealed. In the course of time, they died, returning to the grave. But when our Lord Jesus Christ rose, He rose never to die again. My He is alive for evermore. (Rev 1:18) He conquered death and opened up a way for Himself and for all His

people. Do you recall the days of the miners strikes in England when Arthur Scarkill was pitted against Mrs. Thatcher. Do you know what the motto of the miners was ? “ **One out all out.** ” That’s what the resurrection of Christ means for us. He says, “ *Because I live ye shall live also.* ” One of these days there is going to be a resurrection, a harvest, when the redeemed of this age will be gathered home. When is it going to take place ? Noone knows. We don’t know when our Lord will come back again, but when He comes He will reap a glorious harvest, for “ *what a gathering, what a gathering in that summer land of love.* ” (1 Cor 15:23) My this our assurance, “ *the dead in Christ shall rise first,* ” (1 Thes 4:16) and we know “ *that when He shall appear we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is.* ” (1 Jn 3:2) (1) (2)

(3) REDEMPTION

Did you know that in the feast of first-fruits we have the assurance of heaven ? We know we are going to heaven because the Holy Spirit is the “ *first-fruits,* ” in the life of the believer. In other words we have the,

(a) PROSPECT OF TOTAL GLORY:

Look if you will at (Rom 8:22-23) The redemption of the body takes place at the coming of Christ when we shall be raised and the assurance of that final stage of our redemption is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit called here “ *the first-fruits of the Spirit.* ” Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit has sealed us and is the earnest of our inheritance. (2 Cor 1:21-22) In Bible times, when you bought

something, you put your seal on it and nobody would touch it. It belonged to you. So the Holy Spirit is God’s seal in our lives to the day of redemption. He is the down payment, the earnest. The Holy Spirit has been given to us as the guarantee that the rest is going to follow. Do you recall when the 12 spies returned from spying the land of Canaan ? Do you remember what they brought back ? They brought back the first-fruits of the land.

Num 13:23) Do you know something ? The first-fruits of the Spirit is just a foretaste of the glory to come. My if we have tasted the blessings of heaven through the ministry of the Spirit here, what will it be like when we get there ? Oh, one of these days our bodies will be redeemed. When the Saviour comes we shall be changed and “ *our vile body will be fashioned like unto His glorious body.* ” (Phil 3:20) Warren Wiersbe says, “ ***Today God is not specializing in redeeming bodies, He does heal bodies in answer to prayer, but that is not His main work today. His main work is saving souls and making people more like Christ.*** ”

But when Christ comes we shall be changed. But what do we do in the meantime ? Is it just “ *pie in the sky bye and bye ?* ” When we are going through suffering, difficulty, and trial do we just pacify ourselves by saying, “ *Well, the Lord is going to come back some day so I will look ahead.* ” Thank God, there is more to it than that, (a)

(b) ASPECT OF PERSONAL GLORY:

For we have “ *the first-fruits of the Spirit.* ” (Rom 8:23) The Holy Spirit in us today is the beginning of the

harvest. Many of us I trust are enjoying the “*fruit of the Spirit*,” not just “*the first-fruits of the Spirit*.” The fruit of the Spirit is “*love, joy, peace*,” and that whole cluster of spiritual graces. (Gal 5:22-23) The first-fruits of the Spirit simply means that what the Holy Spirit is doing now is a foretaste of heaven to come. Charles Spurgeon used to say, “***Little faith will take your soul to heaven, but great faith will bring heaven to your soul.***” My the Lord Jesus has not returned yet. We are not in heaven yet. We may going through times of hardship and trial, with problems and concerns. What is the answer ? The answer is the first-fruits of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit wants to give you a foretaste of heaven to day, and as you walk with the Lord and as the Holy Spirit ministers to you, you enjoy heaven on earth. (a) (b) But what about,

(c) THE SUBJECT OF OPTIONAL GLORY:

I have called it optional because there are many believers who have decided not to go in for this glory. What glory ? The glory that Paul talks about in (1 Thes 2:19-20) when he says, “*For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing ? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming ? For ye are our glory and joy.*” Here Paul says that the saints themselves would be his “*crown*,” his “*glory wreath*,” when he met them at the judgement seat. Can you see the sight that thrilled Paul ? His people by the side of Christ in the glory. You see, Paul recognised that believers themselves were first-fruits. He says to the Christians at Rome “*Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Salute my well beloved Epaphroditus, who is the first-fruits of Achaia unto Christ.*”

Do you know when you were saved you became “*firstfruits* ?” James says, “*Of his own will begat He us with the word of truth that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*” (James 1:18) What does this mean ? It means that you are the beginning of the harvest. Paul won Epaphroditus to Christ, and Epaphroditus became the firstfruits of Asia. He was the beginning of the harvest and he assisted Paul in winning others to the Saviour. Is this not what the woman at Sychar became ? She trusted the Lord and then she became the first-fruits, for “*she went away singing and came back bringing others for the water that was not in the well.*” She was the firstfruits, she was the beginning of the harvest. Perhaps you’re saying, “*Well I am the only Christian in my family, in my office, in my class, on my ward, at my bench.*” That’s a great opportunity is it not ? You are the first-fruits, the harvest ought to follow.

Tell me, will Paul’s glory be your glory ? When you stand in the presence of the Lord will you be able to say, “*Lord here am I and the children you have given me.*” As Samuel Rutherford lay in the prison in Aberdeen, he was thinking about his old congregation in Anwoth. He expressed his thoughts like this.

***Fair Anwoth on the Solway
To me thou art still dear
Even from the verge of heaven
I drop for thee a tear
O if one soul from Anwoth
Meet me at God’s right hand
My heaven shall be two heavens
In Immanuel’s land***

