

The Feast of Tabernacles

preached by Rev. Paul Sakasov on August 19, 2018

This morning we are concluding our seven part sermon series on the seven Old Testament feasts. The seven feasts are as follows: Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Pentecost, Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles. Our text for this morning, is Leviticus chapter twenty three, verse thirty four and Deuteronomy chapter sixteen verses thirteen through fifteen.

Leviticus 23:34, Deuteronomy 16:13-15

34 Speak to the people of Israel, saying: On the fifteenth day of this seventh month, and lasting seven days, there shall be the festival of booths to the Lord. 13 You shall keep the festival of booths for seven days, when you have gathered in the produce from your threshing floor and your wine press. 14 Rejoice during your festival, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, as well as the Levites, the strangers, the orphans, and the widows resident in your towns. 15 Seven days you shall keep the festival to the Lord your God at the place that the Lord will choose; for the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all your undertakings, and you shall surely celebrate.

In the gospels, Jesus tells the story commonly known as the Parable of the Prodigal Son. In that story we find a young man who had everything going for him, and yet was deeply dissatisfied with life. Even though he grew up in a loving home, even though he possessed wealth, even though he enjoyed high status in the community where he dwelt, it was not enough. So, he left his home, he left his family, he left his community, and he entered a season of exile where he wandered in darkness for a long time.

Finally, when he came to his senses, and realized the madness of what he was doing, a yearning began to well up within him. The Prodigal began to dream about home. And so began the uncertain journey.

Leaving the land of exile, the Prodigal returned to the land where he was raised, not knowing whether he had a home left. After all, he had burned his bridges, when he left years ago. However, as the story goes, the Father seeing his son far off in the distance, ran to greet him. With joy, the Father welcomed his son back. And a great feast was held in the community to celebrate that a lost son had been found, and that a dead son was now alive. The journey was now complete. The Prodigal Son had found his way home.

In today's Scripture reading we encountered the seventh and final feast that God instituted for His people Israel, the Feast of Tabernacles, also known as the Feast of Booths. While there were many lessons this sacred feast was intended to teach, above all, it foreshadowed a time when prodigal children of Adam would return from their exile from Eden and be restored in the Father's house, as rightful children of God in the new heaven and new earth. In other words, the Feast of Tabernacles is about our ultimate quest for home.

Now, how in the world did I possibly get that out the texts we just read. Great question! Let us take time to reflect on some background information regarding the Feast of Tabernacles, and hopefully, once we are done, we will see how it informs us about our journey home.

The Feast of Tabernacles or Booths, gets its name from the tents that the people of Israel dwelt in during the forty years they wandered in the desert after the exodus from Egypt and before they permanently settled in Israel. The name also makes reference to the Tabernacle, or tent, where God dwelt from the time of Egypt until the Temple was built by Solomon nearly five hundred years later.

During the feast, the people of Israel were instructed to live in tents for seven days. Of course, when the feast was established, that wouldn't be an issue as everybody was living in a tent already. However, once the Israelites settled into the promised land, they had houses. This meant that for the seven days of the feast, the people went without the comfort of their homes so that they could engage in a community wide act of experiential remembering. Through this act they shared in the journey of their ancestors, who lived in sparse conditions in the desert for forty years while waiting to enter the promised land; which is another way of saying home.

In other words, the Feast of Tabernacles acted like a fast from material comforts. When entering this season, the people were reminded that God was the source of their joy, not their possessions. During this time, they were reminded that God was their provider, and God was their protection, just as He was to their ancestors: delivering them from slavery, leading them through the Red Sea, raining down manna from heaven, causing water to come from the rock, and then ultimately leading them to the land of milk and honey that future generations would know as, "home."

In addition to this, the Feast of Tabernacles was the culmination of the three fall feasts that occurred at the end of the harvest season. Having commenced fifteen days earlier, the fall feasts began with the Feast of Trumpets, which was a national time of repenting in preparation for the judgement of God. Then, on the Day of Atonement, God removed the residue of all the atoned sin which had been confessed throughout the year in such a way that the people, the House of the Lord, and the land were completely free of sin. All this in preparation for the final Feast in the religious calendar, which occurred at the end of the harvest season, where the people enjoyed the bounty of the harvest, together with the whole people of God, in the presence of their holy God, who could dwell with His people because all the sin of the nation had been atoned for during the spring feasts, and it had been permanently removed from the land during the fall feasts.

This brings us to a key point that can be easily missed. The one thing that made the people of Israel unique, and their land unique among the nations, was that the God of the universe dwelt among them. During the exodus, God was among His people as a cloud by day and as a pillar of fire by night. In the Tabernacle that housed the Ark of the Covenant, the glory of God was

present between the wing tips of the cherubim. And then, when the Ark was relocated to the Temple in Jerusalem, the fire of God came down from heaven, and the glory of the Lord filled the Temple to such a degree that on the day of its dedication the priests could not enter.

All this to say, that God was with His people. And that above all things is what made the promised land home. And this is what makes the Feast of Tabernacles important. Because it reminds us of what makes a house a home. It reminds us what makes a country a home. It reminds us what makes heaven a home. It is the presence of God. As John records in Revelation twenty one when describing the new heaven and earth, “Now the dwelling of God is with men and He will live with them. They will be His people and God himself will be with them and be their God.

This means that in the age to come, it is not the streets of gold or the other splendors of heaven that will give heaven its great value. Anymore than the fine houses, the fertile fields, and the splendid city of Jerusalem made Israel great. No, it is the presence of God, the creator of all good things, that will give heaven its worth and make it a home. And it was God’s presence that made the land of Israel a home for His people.

This is a key lesson to be learned from the Feast of Tabernacles. To make the case even stronger, consider the following. When King Solomon dedicated the Temple to the Lord, he did it on the last day during the Feast of Tabernacles. As we have already noted, it was at this time that the glory of God filled the Temple, lit the altar, and the candles within the Holy of Holies.

Since that day, within Israel the expectation was that God’s glory would descend again on the Temple on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles. Now notice how John records in his gospel, in chapter seven, verse thirty seven, that Jesus was in the Temple on the last and greatest day of the Feast of Tabernacles. It was while he was in the Temple on that day that Jesus said, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.” For those who had eyes to see and ears to hear, they would have noticed that the glory of God had indeed returned to the Temple during the Feast of Tabernacles, just as in the days of Solomon.

By why did Jesus say what he said? In Jesus’ day, there was a tradition known as the water libation ceremony that was performed daily during the Feast of Tabernacles. During this ceremony the High Priest would pour two golden pitchers filled with living water taken from the pool of Siloam on the altar at the Temple. The purpose of this ritual was to petition God, through an enacted prayer, for rain for the following season. The ceremony was also a prayer for God to release faith in the people that God would send them His living water that very day.

Now consider the words that Jesus spoke in the Temple on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles. “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” By saying these

things, Jesus was declaring to the people that he was the Messiah, in much the same manner as he did to the Samaritan woman at the well.

Here is another insight worth sharing. In Jesus' day there was another ceremony called the "Illumination of the Temple" that also occurred during the Feast of Tabernacles. During this ceremony, the four large menorahs (they were seventy feet tall) in the court of the Temple were lit every day. Apparently, the light given off from these menorahs was so great that it was said that every courtyard in Jerusalem was lit because of them.

Now notice how Jesus enters the Temple court the next day, as seen in John chapter eight, where the Menorahs were present. At this time he declares, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

By saying these things Jesus was telling the people that he provides the light that we need to find our way home. He is the water, the source of life, that makes home a place worth living. He is the person who fulfills the law and the prophets making it possible for children of Adam to return from exile and dwell in the presence of God in the new Eden that God is preparing for those who want to be with Him.

By saying these things, Jesus is demonstrating that he is the fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles, just as we have seen him be the fulfillment of all the seven feasts. As we have noted throughout the sermon series, Jesus was slaughtered as the Passover Lamb of God during Passover. He was wrapped and buried during Unleavened Bread. He was resurrected on the morning of Firstfruits, and when the Day of Pentecost came, he sent the Holy Spirit to write God's laws on our hearts. This is how he fulfilled the first four spring feasts.

With regards to the last three feasts we have seen how Jesus is waiting for people to repent during the season of Trumpets. When the season expires, Christ will come as the judge and permanently cleanse the world of all sin on the Day of Atonement. With the cleansing process complete, the repentant and redeemed children of Adam will be welcomed by Jesus into the kingdom of his Father.

This is what the Feast of Tabernacles symbolizes. It is a feast that anticipates the redemption of God for a fallen creation. It is a feast that foreshadows the redemptive work of Christ who is the light of the world and who is the source of living water. It is a feast that anticipates that glorious day when the people of God will enjoy eternal, joyful communion, surrounded by the presence of God on the mountain of the Lord. It is a feast that declares the love of the Father for prodigals lost in the land of exile and calls them to come home. May we hear the call.