May the Word of God dwell richly in your heart.

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart
And do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He will make your paths straight.*

 Proverbs 3:5-6

In this life, we must use our own understanding and knowledge to make decisions and for plans. But we are admonished here to make sure we involve God in all these things.

First, we do trust God. As Christians we can be sure that He will work out all things for His glory and for our good. This is a constant test in our lives: Do we trust God even when things seem to be absolutely differently than we would like? We must.

Spending a lot of time in His word is a good way to develop understanding that accords with the Lord. It is a way to be granted His wisdom that is so much better than the world’s.

Dedicate anything you do to the Lord. Do it for His glory and honor. No matter what we do, if we “work as unto the Lord”, we will be acknowledging Him.

He will make our paths straight. Notice that this is different from “working everything out the way we want it”. This goes back to trusting Him. We do the best we can, depending on God and trusting Him; and in the end, we will see how His hand was guiding us all along in the right way.

In Christ’s love

John

 9-5-21

Exodus 12:14-20

Last week we began a series on the seven feasts or holy convocations that the LORD God ordained for Israel. These feasts belong to older covenants that God made with His people and we who are under the new covenant in Jesus Christ aren’t held to them. They are still important to us because they point to Jesus and they are fulfilled in Him. We also get to learn some things about God from studying these feasts.

Last week, we considered the Passover. The Passover was the first holy convocation the Lord ordained for His people. The Passover involves a meal with lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs. The important part of this first Passover was the placing of the lamb’s blood on the doorposts of the houses. In doing so, the destroying angel would pass over the houses of the Israelites as he went throughout the land of Egypt killing all the firstborn people and animals.

The lamb was an innocent substitute for the firstborn of the house and it was a blood sacrifice that redeemed from death. Jesus became the ultimate Passover sacrifice. He was the innocent lamb that suffered in our stead and took our place. He atoned for our sin by taking the bitterness of our deserved punishment; cleansing us of the infiltrating effects of sin; and redeeming us by His blood. God told His people to celebrate the Passover yearly on this same day so they would never forget. This is the day that Jesus was crucified and died; the perfect Passover lamb.

As we just read in the scriptures, God ordained another feast that took place immediately after the Passover called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Feast of Unleavened Bread lasted for seven days and began on the day after Passover; so there is a total of eight days. This feast was to commemorate their escape from Egypt. They had to move in a hurry, so they didn’t have time to let their bread rise.

There is an interesting difference in this feast as opposed to the Passover. In verse 19, the LORD says “*whoever eats what is leavened, that person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is an alien or a native of the land*”. While only those circumcised were to partake of the Passover meal, all were invited to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread. A demonstration that all could be cleansed of sin by the sacrifice of Christ.

In Leviticus 23:6-8, the LORD reminds the Israelites about this celebration. “*Then on the fifteenth day of the same month there is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the Lord; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work. But for seven days you shall present an offering by fire to the Lord. On the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work.*”

It is extremely important to the Lord that His people remember Him. This is because He wants the glory that is due to Him. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was a time for Israel to remember how miraculously God had gotten them out of Egypt. It was a time for them to remember that it was only by the power of their God that they escaped. It was also a time for them to think about how Yahweh passed judgement on all the gods of Egypt and established His superiority as the only true God. Further, He demonstrated that His strength was far above that of the Egyptian army.

It was also important for the people of Israel to remember who God is. To know that they should not take Him lightly or to treat Him with disrespect. They needed to remember to honor God in all the ways He commanded them. It is the same for us. The accounts of God’s power in the Old Testament are true. Although we aren’t required to keep these feasts, we are required to worship God and hold Him in high regard. These accounts help us to keep in mind who God is. Yes, He is love and one of His attributes is great mercy; but He is also a jealous God who will not tolerate anyone or anything in our lives coming before Him.

God decreed that the feast would begin and end with special days. The first and seventh days of the feast were to be holy assemblies where the people would gather at the place God designated. At first that was at the tent of meeting while they were in the desert. Later, when they came into the Promised Land, it was still at the tent of meeting, but it stayed in one place for a long time; such as Shiloh. Eventually the permanent place was established at the temple in Jerusalem. In addition to the assembly, the people would do no work. In other words, these first and seventh days were Sabbaths. So, in addition to the weekly Sabbath, which is our Saturday, the Jewish calendar contained other special Sabbath days.

Of course, the main provision of this week was that the people were not to put leaven in their bread. In fact, on the first day, they were to utterly remove all leaven from their house. The complete removal served a couple of purposes. One was that there would be no temptation to use the leaven or put it in the bread by accident due to habit. The other was a sanitary consideration that would have only been known to God. As one continued throughout a whole year to pinch off a piece of the dough to set aside for the next loaf, chances would increase that impurities could gather and cause sickness. Starting over fresh once a year would cut down the chances of this happening.

As I mentioned before, the point of the unleavened bread was to remember that God had brought them out of Egypt. While it was good for them in the long run to have their freedom, it was also a time of suffering. They had to pack up everything and haul it out of there. They were chased by Pharoah’s army. They had to keep moving through the Red Sea carrying their heavy loads into a new land where they had never been and having to deal with a new environment. For a while, they didn’t even have time to prepare their meals properly. In Deuteronomy 16:3, this unleavened bread is referred to as “*the bread of affliction*”.

I assume that the unleavened bread wasn’t as good as bread that had been allowed to rise because they apparently ate leavened bread when they could. I don’t know if the problem was taste or texture, but it was less pleasant to eat. Throughout their history, this unpleasant bread would remind them of the affliction they endured leaving Egypt. But also consider who Jesus is. Jesus mentioned several times in John chapter 6 that He is the Bread of Life or the Living Bread. And this Bread of Life suffered affliction.

We must also keep in mind that the Bible often uses leaven as a metaphor for sin. As I mentioned last week, leaven itself is not evil. It is not wrong to use leaven. In fact, Jesus uses leaven as a parable for the kingdom of heaven in Matthew 13:33. *He spoke another parable to them, “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened*.” He used it in another context in Matthew 16:6, ‘*And Jesus said to them, “Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”*’ In this case, Jesus was using the idea of leaven to describe the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

The whole idea is that leaven permeates the dough it is put into. In the same way, the kingdom of heaven arrived with Jesus, spread to and through His disciples, and continues to spread throughout the world. The teaching of the religious leaders was false, but because they were considered authorities, what they taught spread throughout the Jewish people and led them astray. Leaven is a metaphor for sin because one little sin never stays a little sin; it grows and permeates a person’s life, their family, their church.

Paul has to deal with this in the Corinthian Church. It is recorded in chapter 5 of 1 Corinthians. It had come to Paul’s attention that a man in the church had married his own father’s wife. Meanwhile the church was ignoring the situation.

This was not a case of someone in the church committing occasional sin; this was a case of a professing Christian living in sin. That this act was evil goes clear back to Genesis when Ruben had an affair with his father Jacob’s concubine, Bilhah. It is later spoken of specifically in the Mosaic Law that this kind of thing is not to take place. While it is true that Christians are not under the Mosaic covenant, those laws show what is pleasing to God and what is not. They are a good way for us to judge our actions. Christian liberty does not give us leave to do as we please; we must consider God first.

So, Paul let the Corinthian church know that they should not be tolerating this. In 1 Corinthians 5:6 Paul tells them, “*Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough*?” Paul lets us know that no church should tolerate this level of living in sin in a church body. Why? Because it will eventually infect the whole church. Whole churches fall apart because one person, especially a person in a leadership position, engages in an adulterous affair. It cannot be tolerated.

The same can be said for tolerating false teaching as when Jesus warned about the leaven of the religious leaders. How many of the major denominations and independent churches have turned away from the Bible and can no longer even be considered Christian? It always starts with one step away from the teaching of Scripture to try to satisfy the culture; usually allowing women pastors. Once the church steps onto that slippery slope, it’s easy to slide right out of Biblical teaching.

As Christians we must always, with the help of the Holy Spirit, keep in mind how horrible sin is. Certainly, we don’t consider stealing a pen from work or cheating on tax returns as a big sin. But sin begets sin; it flows and moves throughout the world increasing and multiplying. It turns into human trafficking and child abuse and murder of the unborn and of whole people groups. It acts like leaven and permeates the world.

When we see how sin works and how terrible it is, we have the motivation in Christ to avoid it. It is important in our own lives for our relationship with Christ and it is important in church for the unity of the church body. Paul wrights to the Corinthians and to us in chapter 5 and verse 8, “*Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*”

The feast is the Lord’s Supper which should be the ultimate unity of the church. As Christians, we are new creations in Christ, so we shouldn’t be dragging in our old leaven; the life of our old man, the man of the world. Nor should we allow ourselves malice; any kind of evil thoughts or intentions against other members of the body. And we should not allow any wickedness of sexual immorality. We come to the Lord’s table and into His body with sincere and genuine love.

Paul’s other use of leaven in chapter 5 is verse 7, “*Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed*.” Christians want to clean the old sin out of their lives; it tries to cling to us but we must be rid of it. The thing is, we are unleavened, our sins have been forgiven and washed away. And that is because “*Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed*”.

The Jews sacrificed the Passover lamb and then had no leaven for a time thereafter. Jesus, the perfect Passover lamb, the perfect sacrifice for our sins, causes us to be without leaven, cleansed of sin. While we live in this world, we still have to deal with sin. But because we are clean in Jesus, only our feet get dirty; and Jesus takes care of that too.

The day of the Passover, Jesus was crucified. On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, His body lay in the tomb. But see how in dying Jesus removed the leaven, the sin, from our lives. Jesus fulfilled the Feast of Unleavened Bread not only for seven days; but for eternity.

Prayer

We worship You Lord God for Your wisdom and power; You explained Your only begotten Son in the feasts You ordained for Your people; and then He fulfilled them. What we saw darkly in the old convents, are more brightly illuminated in Your Son. We look forward to that day when He arrives to establish His Kingdom that we will be able to see with complete clarity and praise You even more.

Thank You Lord, for redeeming us from sin. We acknowledge that we are sinners and that we deserve nothing good from our own merits. By Your great grace, when we accept Jesus, You pour out on us undeserved blessings and benefits beyond our ability to comprehend.

Holy Spirit, help us to take advantage of these favors we have been granted during this life, that we may be used to build the Kingdom of Christ; and be humble and faithful servants of His. Guide us to resist temptation and avoid sin. And for those times we fail, bring our sin to mind so that we may quickly run to Jesus for forgiveness, so that the sin is torn out of our lives and doesn’t continue to grow. Care for this church body; unite us in Your word.

We pray these things in Jesus’ name

Amen