May you receive God’s kindness today

*And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel.*

 Nehemiah 8:1

We get to see here a moment in time when the Holy Spirit worked in the hearts of the people of Israel and they had a sincere desire to hear the word of God and to understand it. They were willing to stand in the square and listen to the whole law that God had given to them through Moses. It had become very precious to them.

For we who are Christians, God’s word is precious to us all the time. We have the gift of the Holy Spirit living within us always and not just occasionally working in us. As part of the new covenant, God’s law is written on our heart.

As the sermon considers the Feast of Tabernacles and all its implications of God dwelling with us, we mustn’t miss the fact that we have become a tabernacle ourselves. We are the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit; our bodies have become His temple. And so, God tabernacles with us even now.

In Christ’s love

John

 10-17-21

Leviticus 23:33-44

Today we consider the seventh and final of the special feasts that God ordained for His people Israel. As we look at them it can be seen that all of them are fulfilled in Jesus. There were four spring feasts: Passover, Feast of Unleavened Bread, Feast of First Fruits, and the Feast of Weeks. All of these have already been brought to fulfillment by the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ and by His sending of the Holy Spirit to indwell us and to be the seal of our being children of God.

There are three fall feasts: the Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Booths. The Bible shows us how Jesus will fulfill all these in the future. There will be trumpets sounding when Jesus makes His glorious reappearance to collect His church and establish His Kingdom here on earth. By His death on the cross, He has atoned for our sins and gone into the true Most Holy Place in heaven. One day, He will return from the Most Holy Place to His people.

The Feast of Booths was the third feast time that the Lord required all the men of Israel to travel to the temple; be it the Tent of Meeting that had been built under Moses while the people wandered in the desert or the temple in Jerusalem. The other two were Passover combined with the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost.

It is not unusual for the feasts to have different names, which is sometimes very confusing for us. The Feast of Booths actually had several names, but the most common one was the Feast of Tabernacles. Both these names were very important as we will see later.

The Feast of Booths celebrated the end of the grape harvest; in fact, all the harvesting was over and the rainy season was about to begin. The rainy season was, of course, also a very important time for the farmers. This feast was about thanksgiving; remembering that it was their God who had blessed them with crops during the previous season. There would also be the hope of the coming rain and future harvests.

The account here in Leviticus briefly mentions that the appropriate sacrifices were to be made. A full set of instructions is given in Numbers 29:12-38. The instructions begin:

*Then on the fifteenth day of the seventh month you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work, and you shall observe a feast to the Lord for seven days. You shall present a burnt offering, an offering by fire as a soothing aroma to the Lord: thirteen bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs one year old, which are without defect; and their grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah for each of the thirteen bulls, two-tenths for each of the two rams, and a tenth for each of the fourteen lambs; and one male goat for a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering, its grain offering and its drink offering.*

This set of instructions is then repeated for each of the remaining six days of the feast. All the numbers stay the same except for the number of the bulls. On the first day it is thirteen bulls, on the second day it is twelve bulls, and so on down to the seventh day where it is seven bulls. All of these were burnt offerings given entirely to the LORD. The point of all these sacrifices is to show gratefulness to God, giving Him all the credit for increase. Yes, the people worked, but they were still to give God the glory for all they received knowing that it all came from Him in the first place. It was also an act of faith, believing that God would certainly make up for any sacrifice they made for Him.

God still calls us to this today. While we may work for what we have, it is ultimately God who gives us the abilities and opportunities to provide for ourselves and our families. We need to be grateful to God for any good thing we have. We are also called to sacrifice. But for the Christian, it goes far beyond a few cows and sheep. Romans 12:1 calls us to present our bodies as a holy and living sacrifice to God. This refers to our lives and everything God has blessed us with.

Now, this calls for wisdom and discernment. This does not mean running yourself ragged doing things for others. As we read through the Bible it is clear that rest is very important. The Lord provided many, many Sabbath days of rest. It does not mean that we give away every cent we have, leaving ourselves destitute. God provides us with the ability to earn so that we can provide for ourselves and not be a burden to others. It does not mean the we shouldn’t save for the future or emergencies. Part of God’s provision is giving you the means to save for what is necessary.

What it does mean is sacrificing some of our own time to help others who need it. It does mean being generous with our money even if we may have to deny ourselves something. It does mean we don’t hoard money so that it becomes our consuming thought and becomes our god. And even more deeply, it means that we live every moment of our lives with the idea that we are citizens of heaven and that Jesus is our King. Our King whom we love and want to please. We live in gratitude to Him not only for this short life on earth, but for that eternal life that He has made possible for us.

The three fall feasts happen close together in the seventh month of the year. The Feast of Trumpets is on the first day; the Day of Atonement is on the tenth day; and the Feast of Booths begins on the fifteenth day of the month. The first day of the Feast of Booths is to be a holy convocation. It is a day of doing no laborious work; in other words, it is a Sabbath regardless of the day of the week it falls on. The feast lasts seven days and then on the eighth day there is to be another holy convocation or Sabbath. The whole time of the feast is a time of celebration and thanksgiving to the LORD.

The really unique feature of this celebration is the booths. When the people came to the designated worship area, they were to gather branches and boughs to build themselves little huts to live in. They would live in these booths for the duration of the feast. This was once again a reminder to the people of their escape from Egypt and it offered another opportunity to explain the wonders of the LORD to the younger generation.

God ordained several occasions where the people were to specifically remember that God had brought them out of the land of Egypt; out of the land of slavery. This was important because God deserves glory for what He did. But it was also very important for what it foreshadowed. It, of course, foreshadowed Jesus. By His work and by following Him, we too can be led out of the land of slavery. We are born slaves to sin; and it is only by Jesus that we can be freed from its tyranny and eternal death. Jesus brings us into the promised land of heaven.

But there is more. Again, by Jesus’ work on the cross and by the mighty power of God, there will be new heavens and a new earth. We can live there bodily, free from all sin and evil. While we remember the works of God on behalf of His people in the past, there are even more awesome works promised to us in the future. We look forward to these events; being led through the turbulent, chaotic waters of our times by the hand of God to an eternity of peace and life beyond what we can conceive.

Let’s consider the word “Tabernacle” a little. As I mentioned earlier, the Feast of Booths is also called the Feast of Tabernacles. When we think of a tabernacle, we tend to think of some kind of holy structure; and often times it is. We think of the Tent of Meeting that the Israelites built while in the desert; we think of Solomon’s Temple. The point of these tabernacles was not simply to have a place to offer sacrifices; this was God’s dwelling among His people.

In the first part of the Gospel according to John 1:14 it tells us, “*And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us”*. The word “dwelt” can also be translated “tabernacled”. This sounds strange to us, but just as dwelling is a noun and dwelt is a verb, so tabernacle is a noun and tabernacled is a verb. A tabernacle is a dwelling although it has the nuance of a temporary dwelling or even a tent. In His first advent, Jesus, the Word of God, became a man and He lived with us.

Here we can see how Jesus will fulfill this Feast of Tabernacles by returning to the earth to establish His Kingdom. He will once again dwell with us; He will tabernacle with us.

There are some other distinct passages in the Bible that relate to the Feast of Tabernacles. One is John 7:37-39. *Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’” But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*

The feast referred to here is the Feast of Tabernacles. A couple centuries before Christ, the Jews had added a daily ceremony involving water to the ordained sacrifices of this feast. A pitcher of water was taken from the pool of Siloam and, amongst much celebration, was poured out as an offering before the alter of the Lord. It was thanksgiving to the Lord for provision and for the rainy season that was about to begin. It recalled the water coming from the rock while the Israelites were in the wilderness and even at that time, it had some idea of the Spirit of God.

This is the background to Jesus making the Messianic claim that He would provide the Holy Spirit to any who would come to Him.

There is another name for this feast that has some interesting implications: the Feast of the Ingathering. From Exodus 23:16, “*the Feast of the Ingathering at the end of the year when you gather in the fruit of your labors from the field*.” Obviously, the immediate reference is to the harvesting of grapes. But think of it in terms of a harvest of souls for the Lord; an ingathering of people and of nations under the rule of King Jesus.

I invite you to read Micah 4:1-7 at some time. It speaks of the house of the Lord, which is Jerusalem. These verses tell of a time of peace when all the nations of the earth come here to learn about God. At this time, He will be King of the earth and will judge, or rule, all the nations. But they will be happy under that rule.

We can match that up with Revelation 21:9-27. These verses describe the beauty and spender of God’s holy city that comes down out of heaven. There need be no sun due to the radiant glory of God in the city and nations will walk by this light. This is literal light for going about on the earth, but it is also living under the guidance and rule of Christ. The same is presented here as in Micah of the Old Testament.

The Lord’s eventual rule of the world is well known from the Bible and the nations will come to Israel and Jerusalem. What does this have to do with the Feast of Tabernacles? There is an amazing prophecy in the book of Zechariah and this is 14:16-19. *Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths. And it will be that whichever of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, there will be no rain on them. If the family of Egypt does not go up or enter, then no rain will fall on them; it will be the plague with which the Lord smites the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths. This will be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths.*

This is a celebration of the Feast of Booths during the millennial reign of Christ. The current world system will end with seven years of tribulation. At the end of the seven years, Jesus will come back to the earth to establish His Kingdom and reign for 1000 years. During this time, the Bible tells us that He will rule with a rod of iron. Peace will be established but He will have to keep the nations in line. Jesus was able to control the weather during His first time here; He will certainly be able to do so the next time He comes.

The Feast of Tabernacles is the only celebration the Bible indicates will continue after Jesus establishes His Kingdom. The really interesting thing is that it will be for gentiles. Up to this point, all the feasts were for the people of Israel.

When the LORD God created the world and human-beings, He spent time with the people and fellowshipped with them. But once He makes all things new, He will dwell with His people; He will tabernacle with us.

Prayer

How blessed we are, that our almighty God has chosen to be intimately involved with His creation. You were merciful to Your people Israel when You covered over their sins through blood sacrifice and dwelt in their presence. In Jesus Christ, God became man and again lived with His people; You made it possible for us to be cleansed of our sins.

Lord God, we look forward to the fulfillment of the promise that You will come and be among us again; and we will be clean and evil will be gone. We will be blessed to be in the presence of our incomprehensible God, who will live with us forever.

Blessed Lord, it shows Your glory that You would love and care for Your creatures as You do; that You would take our sins upon Yourself so that we can be with You and You can be with us. May that time of Your presence come so that we may worship before You.

We pray these things in Jesus’ name

Amen