



MATT BLACK, Sun, May 5, 2018
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4 | LEVITICUS 23:9-14 **THE FEAST OF FIRSTFRUITS**

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Announcements

1. Welcome visitors!
2. Men's Retreat coming up – payment due today.
3. Child dedication, May 27

Open your Bible if you will to **Leviticus 23:9-14**. We are in a series called “The Feasts of Israel.” Today we are looking at the third feast, and our message is entitled: “The Feast of Firstfruits.”

We read about it in **Leviticus 23:9-14**, “And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 10 “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land that I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest, 11 and he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, so that you may be accepted. On the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. 12 And on the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb a year old without blemish as a burnt offering to the Lord. 13 And the grain offering with it shall be two tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, a food offering to the Lord with a pleasing aroma, and the drink offering with it shall be of wine, a fourth of a hin. 14 And you shall eat neither bread nor grain parched or fresh until this same day, until you have brought the offering of your God: it is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.”

From Acorn to Oak Tree

When I was a little boy, my older brother David planted the seed for an oak tree in our yard. It started to grow. My dad tried to mow it and get rid of it, but it kept growing back. Finally my dad gave up and let it grow. That little dead seed is a great big oak tree today.

How does a dead little seed become a mighty oak tree? There is a miracle of life. God can make the dead live. That's why Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (Jn 12:24). This is what God does in salvation. He takes we who are dead in our sins and makes us live.

The Feast of Firstfruits is the final feast in the Spring pilgrimage. It is a celebration of the first ingathering of the barley harvest. That's why it's called firstfruits. It's usually the biggest and best of the crop.

Strawberry Harvest in Ponchatoula, LA

Every year as a child I remember celebrating the firstfruits of the strawberry harvest in Ponchatoula, Louisiana. The first ingathering of strawberries was the best. We would have the Strawberry Festival to celebrate. They just celebrated it again two weeks ago. Oh the strawberries were so big! Some of them were the size of my fist when I was a child.

Outline

1. A Picture of **Resurrection**
2. A Picture of **Regeneration**
3. A Picture of **Glorification**

CELEBRATING THE FIRST BARLEY HARVEST

The Feast of Firstfruits took place on the day we Christians celebrate Easter Sunday. Every year the Spring pilgrimage would start with the Passover and then the Feast of Unleavened Bread. At the end of the Sabbath after Passover, on the first day of the week, people were chosen to go after sunset into special barley fields near the temple with sickles.¹ They were going to celebrate the first Spring harvest of barley.

The barley sheaves were cut late in the afternoon, just before sunset. (A sheaf is basically an amount of grain large enough for binding.) When the time for the cutting of the sheaves had arrived, a large, **loud crowd of worshipers** followed representative leaders to the special barley fields by the Temple where the **Firstfruits** were to be harvested. It was almost dark as they **sang, played their instruments, danced, and celebrated the goodness of God**. After the sheaves was cut, the people praised the Lord and went back up the pathway that lead to the Temple² and they celebrated some more in the Temple courts. Singing and dancing! Joy abounded. The harvest had come.

There are three pictures in this feast. It's a celebration of life. And the greatest celebration of life this harvest points to is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

1. A PICTURE OF RESURRECTION (1 COR 15:20)

While the people were celebrating and dancing in the Temple courts, shouting and singing for joy because of the firstfruits of the barley harvest had come in, another kind of harvest was happening.

CHRIST, THE FIRSTFRUITS OF RESURRECTION

Somewhere around AD 30, on the first day after the Sabbath, on the day of Firstfruits, Jesus Christ rose from the dead (Mt 28:1–10). Lest there be any doubt that his resurrection fulfilled the Feast of Firstfruits, Paul tells us explicitly that Christ is the firstfruits of those who will be raised from the dead. “Christ has been raised from the dead, the **firstfruits** of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ” (1 Cor 15:20–23).

We learn in Leviticus 23:11 that the Feast of Firstfruits was to be celebrated on the day after the Sabbath. This means that the Feast of Firstfruits was on the first day of the week, a Sunday.³

Jesus is risen from the dead! **Philippians 3:20** says it all, “Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”

Our King is victorious. He has conquered sin, death and hell. Because of his resurrection, death is dead. He has conquered our condemnation by his love.

¹ Sam Nadler, *Messiah in the Feasts of Israel* (Charlotte, NC: Word of Messiah Ministries, 2011), 63.

² Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 258-259.

³ Richard Booker, *Celebrating Jesus in the Biblical Feasts Expanded Edition: Discovering Their Significance to You as a Christian* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, Inc., 2016), 80.

As the people were in the Temple Courts that Sunday, celebrating the firstfruits, Jesus, conquered death and he came out of the grave! He is the first to be raised with a glorious body. But there is an entire harvest coming. Jesus is the firstfruits, and but there is a massive innumerable harvest of salvation coming. That's the second picture. Jesus is growing a whole harvest of people who begin as "dead" like a seed that goes into the ground. We are all dead in our trespasses and sins. Then Jesus raises us to walk in newness of life.

So that brings us to our second picture: regeneration.

2. A PICTURE OF REGENERATION

REGENERATION IS GOD'S WORK (1 COR 3:6-7; JAS 1:18)

The feast of Firstfruits is the celebration of the first spring harvest (which was barley). But the Bible tells us of a different kind of harvest we should be concerned about: the harvest of souls.

Just as in a harvest, you put a dead seed into the ground and trust God that he will grow it.

Paul says we need to give glory to the God who takes a dead seed, and brings it to life. "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. 7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth" (1 Cor 3:6-7).

"Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures" (Jas 1:18). There is something we cannot do. We cannot regenerate people. God must do it. He brought us forth by the word of truth. Like a dead seed going into the ground. That we should be the firstfruits of his new creation.

The Feast of Firstfruits was an opportunity for God's people to say, "Everything we have is because of you."

Can you say that to God this morning? Can you say: "My salvation is a gift from you. I am a new creation in Christ because of you. I would never have come to you on my own." Thank you Lord! Thank you! You are worthy! I will never be worthy. But you are forever worthy!

REGENERATION IS MAN'S PRAYER (PSA 126:5-6)

Regeneration is the work of God, but man is not off the hook. We can't regenerate people, but we can pray.

We Pray

Regeneration ought to be the prayer of every Christian. We can't transform anyone's heart, but we can pray. The Psalmist said, "Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy! 6 He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him" (Psa 126:5-6).

There is no scientific test for regeneration, but there is a spiritual one: faith and repentance. God can engender faith and repentance through his Word.

We need to be praying with tears that God will do that work of transformation in the hearts of the lost people in our family. That work of transformation is called “regeneration.”

EXAMPLE: I prayed for my sister for 10 years. God’s timing is perfect. Don’t stop praying.

We Give Thanks

And when God answers our prayers we give thanks. That’s what Paul did. He said that the Thessalonian Christian’s were like his Feast of Firstfruits.

“But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the **firstfruits** to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth” (2 Thess 2:13).

Just as God’s people were celebrating and dancing in the Temple courts, so we rejoice and give thanks when someone comes to faith!

REGENERATION IS HEAVEN’S REJOICING (LK 15:7)

In fact, heaven rejoices when one sinner comes to repentance. And I believe since Christ rose from the dead, heaven has not stopped rejoicing. The Gospel is powerful. Jesus said, “I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance” (Lk 15:7).

REGENERATION PRODUCES GREAT FRUIT (PSA 67)

Each day, for 49 days, the people of God would have a tradition of “counting the omer.” An omer is a sheaf or bundle of barley or wheat that produces about a half a gallon of grain.

At the end of the day they would give thanks to God for the omers he had given them and pray Psalm 67. Psalm 67 not only has a theme of harvest, but it also has exactly 49 words in Hebrew.

PSALM 67

May God be gracious to us and bless us

and make his face to shine upon us, Selah

2 that your way may be known on earth,

your saving power among all nations.

3 Let the peoples praise you, O God;

let all the peoples praise you!

4 Let the nations be glad and sing for joy.

for you judge the peoples with equity

and guide the nations upon earth. Selah

5 Let the peoples praise you, O God;

let all the peoples praise you!

6 The earth has yielded its increase;

God, our God, shall bless us.

7 God shall bless us;

let all the ends of the earth fear him!

We may plant the seed, but God brings in the harvest. Paul says, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. 7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth” (1 Cor 3:6-7).

Here’s the point: God gives the growth. God gives us a transformed heart that produces fruit of faith, repentance and good works all our lives until we die or Jesus comes again.

3. A PICTURE OF GLORIFICATION

Finally, the Feast of Firstfruits pictures our **glorification**. That time when the final harvest comes. There is such rejoicing.

THE DEFINITION OF GLORIFICATION

Glorification is a term that means we are given new bodies and we eternally inhabit a new heaven and a new earth.

This old broken world will be wiped away. We will never sin again. I can’t wait for that day, how about you? This is such an important doctrine.

In this life there is some rejoicing, but there is a whole lot of suffering. We pray for blessing. We pray for peace. But most of our prayers are not answered in full until we see Jesus face to face. I love the Jeremy Camp song: There Will Be a Day.

*There will be a day with no more tears, no more pain, and no more fears
There will be a day when the burdens of this place,
Will be no more, we'll see Jesus face to face*

THE GROANING FOR GLORIFICATION (ROM 8:22-23)

Until that day, we will have a whole lot of suffering. You need to have your theology straight. So many people have an over-realized eschatology. They think we have come into the kingdom. Yes, we have. The Spirit is in us. But the full harvest is yet to come.

So in this life we labor, we toil, we wait. But one day, that harvest will come in and we can rejoice.

“For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. 23 And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the **firstfruits** of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8:22-23).

THE TIMING OF GLORIFICATION (1 COR 15:23)

When will glorification take place? At the Second coming of Jesus.

“But each in his own order: Christ the **firstfruits**, then at his coming those who belong to Christ” (1 Cor 15:23).

1 Corinthians 15:50-55, “I tell you this, brothers: **flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. 53 For this perishable body must put on**

the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. 54 When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

55 “O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?”

Romans 8:11, “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”

THE REALITY OF GLORIFICATION (REV 14:14-20)

The feast of Firstfruits celebrates the first of the harvest. Theologically, we are all going to get harvested one day. There is coming a day when this life will be over. What will it be like to live in a glorified body?

The reality of our resurrection bodies is explained in **1 Corinthians 15:35-38**, “But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” 36 You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. 37 And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. 38 But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body....”

Look over at verse 42, “So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. 43 It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. 44 It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.”

C.S. Lewis said our bodies now are like an acorn. What we will become will be so much greater. He said, “Each day we are becoming a creature of splendid glory or one of unthinkable horror.” If we are humble, seeking after God we will become much more glorious like him. But if we are seeking ourselves, we will become horrible creatures in eternity.

THE URGENCY OF GETTING READY FOR THIS HARVEST (REV 14:14-10)

Jesus refers to this when he says in **Matthew 9:35-37**, “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; 38 therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

Revelation 14:14-20, “Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. 15 And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, “Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.” 16 So he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped.

17 Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. 18 And another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over the fire, and he called with a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle, "Put in your sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe." 19 So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. 20 And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress, as high as a horse's bridle, for 1,600 stadia."

Are you ready for the great harvest? If you are without Christ, look to him. He is compassionate. He is ready to save you.

For those walking with Christ, it won't be long. Life is a vapor. In your difficulties, realize he is working in us an eternal weight of glory. And he will appear and harvest us all.

Conclusion

The feast of firstfruits reminds us that Jesus is risen from the dead. What was dead became alive. Have you come alive? Are you ready for him to come again and harvest you?

Last September, I sent my daughter Katie off to college, but we knew she was coming back. We waited for her. We prepared for her. We made space for her. And yesterday she came back! What a wonderful reunion.

But there's a greater reunion coming. Jesus could come back at any time. Are you ready?