

The Feast of Firstfruits

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[0:00] The resurrection. I'm going to take a kind of an oblique look at the resurrection this morning Now that is not the order that they're given in but it just seemed appropriate to do the Feast of Firstfruits today because of its connection to the resurrection and we're on Resurrection Sunday, praise God.

The feasts are divisible. Could I have the first of the photos up? The feasts are divisible into seven parts. The first four took place in the spring.

The last three took place in the autumn. And in addition, we need to consider what this split really means and if you get the notes, you'll find that there are some scripture verses that accompany the notes.

But these were all the ones that Jesus fulfilled at his first coming. Now there is a little bit of a tie over to his second coming as well but predominantly fulfilled at his first coming.

These are feasts that will be fulfilled at his second coming. And because we can see the fulfillment of the first, we can depend upon the fulfillment of the second lot. And these were in Jesus' priestly role as a servant and coming are the ones in his kingly role as the coming king, the conqueror, the one who comes to take back the earth for himself and particularly the Jewish nation.

[1:55] So that just gives you an overview and it also gives you some useful scripture references. And it says here we should start with Passover and then progress through them.

They miss out the Sabbath. I'm not quite sure why that is because the Sabbath is a feast. So we will cover the Sabbath as well when we go through. It's obviously a different feast from all the others because it takes place every single week and at other odd times and at one point for a whole year and in fact at another point for 18 months.

So there's a lot to talk about in the Sabbath of God putting aside this time that should be dedicated to him. However, that's preview of coming attractions. Today we're going to do the first fruits.

The important principle to remember is that every single feast celebrated something that God did. So a particular event, series of events or historical happening where God did something notable and so the children of Israel are told to celebrate these feasts so that they do not forget it.

And in that sense, it's very much like our breaking of bread. They did it in remembrance of things that God did. However, all of the feasts have a prophetic aspect to them and they all speak of something that God is going to do.

[3:25] Now, put yourself back in their shoes when things first happened. So today's feast, the Feast of the First Fruits, instructed them about a resurrection to come.

And of course, we are on the other side of that resurrection now. But if we'd have been with them back then, the resurrection would have been yet future. So they all speak of something that God plans to do in their history.

And further to that, something that he plans to do with his people. If you want this image, by the way, it will be on the notes. So feel free to get the notes if you want it.

So there are, I suppose, three different... At our time in history, we can divide these feasts into these two parts.

Those that haven't yet been fulfilled, those that have. We can also group them, those that have been prophetically fulfilled and those that have not yet been prophetically fulfilled.

[4:27] And of course, that gives the unbelievers time to say, well, that didn't happen, did it? No, not yet. But God hasn't finished with us yet.

Praise God. And as we've said, the first lot of feasts were fulfilled at his first coming.

The second lot is second coming. That photo can sit there until we get on a bit. So the Feast of First Fruits, as we can see, was among the spring feasts.

And to understand why it was set up, we need to look at when it was inaugurated and why. And there's definitely a mystical aspect to this in that they were dealing with wheat and they were dealing with crops.

And so how did that speak of a resurrection to come? That's what we need to get to. So what was the special occasion? Now, from this slide, we've got the scriptures in Leviticus 23, 9-14 and Deuteronomy 26, 1-11.

So if we turn to Leviticus 23, the biggest explanation of what they did is described there. And we start in Leviticus 23 and verse 9.

[5:43] Then the Lord spoke to Moses. Now, pause there. What already? Yes. Then the Lord spoke to Moses. What was the occasion of the Lord speaking to Moses?

At this point, the Jews have been through so much. They've watched God do miracles in the wilderness. They've watched, they've followed the pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. They depended upon the Lord to lead them, but they didn't know where they were being led. They crossed the Red Sea and seen the Egyptian army drowned. And they're about to cross the River Jordan, which in itself was an amazing thing, but they haven't quite got to that yet.

This is in front of them. And could I have the next photo? And they came across a rock in the desert when they were all wanting water. Now, this is a cartoon photo.

And I'm going to say, ask yourself, what's wrong with it? Keep in mind that there were about a couple of million people that needed a drink. This is the way it's portrayed in children's Bibles.

[6:54] Could we have the next photo? This is, they believe they have found the rock that was split by an act of God that led to water pouring out so that two million people could have a drink.

And as you can see, it isn't some fiddly little stone. It is a massive rock. Could I have the next photo? There it is. And what they discovered when they looked around it is that there was evidence of massive force of water pouring down here.

And can we prove absolutely conclusively this is the right rock? No. It's in the right place. And a rock in this place shouldn't have evidence of a massive stream of water.

water. And it is split from top to bottom. And to the children of Israel this would have been mind-blowing. And this is the kind of thing, the reason I, this is not to do with today's study, but the reason I put these photos up was because it gives you some sort of an idea of what they had witnessed as God led them through the wilderness.

Utterly phenomenal happenings where they just saw God's miraculous power at work time and time and time and time and time again. And so as we start reading chapter 23 verse 9 they have not yet entered the promised land.

[8:14] They've been through all of this, seen all of this, and the promised land is just across the Jordan. And God is instructing them in the book of Leviticus how they should behave when they get into that promised land and what they should expect.

And so the very first thing he says we can now read on now that we know the context. Verse 10 Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them when you enter the land which I am going to give to you and reap its harvest then you shall bring in the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest. So I'll just read on and then we'll return to it. He shall wave the sheaf before the Lord for you to be accepted on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.

Now on the day when you wave the sheaf you shall offer a male one year old without defect for a burnt offering to the Lord. Its grain offering shall then be two tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil and offering by fire to the Lord for a soothing aroma with its drink offering a fourth of a hin of wine which is about a quart.

Until this same day until you have brought in the offering of your God you shall eat neither bread nor roasted grain nor new growth it is to be a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwelling places.

[9:47] In other words never forget this. You've got to do it as far as you're concerned forever. In fact until Jesus fulfilled this feast.

And it's fair to say that those people who rejected Messiah some of them the Orthodox Jews still carry out this process today. But it's already been fulfilled.

So you have them all ready to enter the promised land and they have to take this sheaf but they have to they have to enter the promised land and they have to wait until they've planted seeds those seeds have grown we have a harvest and we know we've got enough to eat.

So the sign here is that something that has just taken place allows you to survive. The land that I promised you is a fertile land in which you can thrive and you only know you can thrive once you've reaped a harvest that you can then eat and from it you can also plant the next year's harvest. harvest. So this is all linked into their ongoing salvation in the sense that if God hadn't provided it they would have all died.

[11:02] So there's a link there and what we're going to appreciate in all of these feasts is there are many symbolic links but they had to take the first sheaf. Now we just read at the end of the passage we've just looked at that they weren't allowed to eat anything until they had done this.

You can't be stuffing your face while you're waving the sheaf. You've actually got to take a sheaf out before anybody touches anything of it and you wave this sheaf before the Lord before you eat. Now part of that expresses faith because this was done with the very first harvest which would normally have been the barley harvest and by celebrating at that moment the provision of a plentiful harvest you were also celebrating the fact that you expect the other harvests of the other grains that come later in the year plus fruits plus all sorts of produce from the ground to all be plentiful and to all sustain you.

But this was an act of faith. You're thanking God for his provision because you've got a small demonstration of his provision in your hand but you're looking forward to a massive multiplying of that as you go forward.

Hope I haven't lost anybody so far. So the priest takes a sheaf and waves it. Now the priest, you had to take the sheaf to the priest and the priest to wave it.

[12:37] Now the priest was always a type of Christ. Now they knew from their other studies and from some of the previous studies that we've done that the priest was a type of Messiah but he had one big drawback and the big drawback was he had to do this every year.

But eventually when the final sheaf came it would put an end to the need to wave the sheaf before the Lord because it would be good forever. It would make an eternal provision.

So the rabbis would always know, the priests would always know that when this waving of the sheaf took place, the sheaf symbolized Jesus in some way. Of course they rejected Jesus so it symbolized their Messiah.

They are all still looking forward to their Messiah who is to come because they haven't accepted that Jesus was him. But in any event the waved sheaf, you were waving the sheaf before the Lord to say please Lord would you accept this sheaf?

and the connection between the sheaf and Messiah was that when Messiah came and died, now of course this doctrine is developing over centuries and we pick it up mostly from Isaiah 53 which was written long after this was put in place.

[13:55] But God put this ritual in place to say you wave this sheaf before the Lord and that sheaf represents God's provision for you to thrive.

God's provision for you to be saved you might say. And so you have this kind of mysterious link that a sheaf represents a person. Of course they're not fully aware yet that it represents a person but they become aware of that as time goes on.

When other doctrines are introduced by other prophets and so on that this sheaf represents Messiah and I'll come to how it says this but this is someone who is going to die for you and is raised from the dead for you.

How are we going to get there? Well keep watching. Note in verse 11 that it says and depending on your version some versions say this differently and I believe them to be wrong.

Verse 11 says he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord for you to be accepted. Now where does that come from? For you to be accepted. Now some versions say for it to be accepted.

[15:09] In other words for the harvest to be accepted. I believe that's a very incomplete rendering of this. It was the people who were being accepted by God when they thanked him for his provision.

And of course if you think of the sheaf of Jesus for a moment and I know I'm jumping around because it's quite a hard concept to put together into comprehensible form. But if you think of Jesus as the sheaf, God accepts us when we accept that sheaf.

It doesn't accept us any other way. We have to say yes to the sheaf that is Jesus in order to be saved and in order to thrive. So that's where the link is between the sheaf and the fact that the priest waves the sheaf for the people to be accepted because the people that are doing this are registering that they believe in God because they're thanking him for his harvest.

They're expressing their belief that he has provided the harvest and has provided that first sheaf.

So to complete the feast as we read it through, we read that verse 12, now on the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb one year old without defect, for a burnt offering to the Lord.

So you don't do one or the other, you do both and you do them together. We thank you Lord for providing this harvest. At the same time we are sacrificing a sheep as a burnt offering.

[16:48] A lamb always had to be a perfect lamb, one year old, to be sacrificed as a burnt offering. What was true of the burnt offering was this, and I'm going to get so far away from my notes that I'm going to be all over the place, but we have to do it.

The lamb of the burnt offering was entirely consumed by the fire. It was no longer present on this earth, it had gone, and it had gone up in smoke.

Literally, when it talks about the smoke of the offering going up to the Lord, it literally means gone up in smoke. and it says it went up as a fragrant offering to the Lord.

So, for some reason, I mean, burning flesh doesn't smell that good, but for some reason, that burning flesh was a sweet savour in the nostrils of God. So, at the same time that we're waving the sheaf and saying, thank you for this harvest, Lord, please accept it, and please accept us, we are also destroying a lamb that is innocent, and that is the lamb of God, and that lamb appears in many offerings, including Passover and others.

We know that that lamb is a representation of Christ too. So, we've got a representation of Christ in the sheaf, and we've got a representation of Christ in the lamb.

[18:13] And the lamb is fully consumed, and the smoke goes up to God, and is a sweet-smelling savour in the nostrils of God, and then they can rejoice in the fact that they've got a good harvest, their salvation is preserved for another year, and they're going to do the same the next year, and give thanks for the next harvest in the same way.

With me so far? So, we need to just lock into our mind the sheaf is accepted at the same time that the burnt offering is accepted.

The burnt offering, because the burnt offering is also a sin offering, so when the lamb is completely destroyed by fire and ceases to exist on this earth, the symbolism is, so does sin.

Sin ceases to exist. For those making this sacrifice, they lose their sin forever. Isn't that amazing?

The first recorded offering of a burnt offering was by Noah in Genesis 8 verse 20 after the flood, and after God received that offering, he said he would never again flood the earth.

So, in that sense, the sin that caused the flood had been dealt with by the burnt offering. In Genesis 22, the substitutionary aspect of this salvation occurred when Abraham was sacrificing Isaac to God, and God intervened, and provided a sheep instead, provided a ram.

[19:53] And so, the idea that the lamb is a substitute for sinful people, and it's consumed and goes up to God, and is a sweet savor in the nostrils of God, it's a wonderful pictorial illustration of our salvation, and the completeness of it, because at the end of it, all sin is forgiven, and the lamb is no more.

Keep in mind, John the Baptist said, behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. So, the perfect lamb was destroyed instead of the ones making the offering.

There's the fundamental line. Now, the harvest in the Bible, the harvest of grain, is often portrayed as a type of humanity.

The fields are white unto harvest, but the labour as a few, being one well-known quote. I think that's from John 4. You can see this principle in John 4, 32, Matthew 9, 37, Luke 10, 2.

There is a harvest of souls to be made, and it's likened unto a grain harvest. The parable of the sower also likens the salvation of souls to the reaping of grain, where the word takes root like a seed and produces fruit in the person's lives.

[21:23] We also in the Old Testament have the sons of Jacob depicted as sheaves in Joseph's dream. Don't we? We can study that another day, but if you look it up, it's there.

In 1 Corinthians 3, verse 6, we've got the analogy of planting and watering as to the spreading of the gospel. So this is a common thing where the Bible refers to the grain harvest.

It's talking about humanity. And so at the time of the harvest, the first sheaf is cut and it's waved to ensure it's acceptable to God at the same time that the burnt offering is offered as a substitute for humanity.

And I know I'm repeating myself, but I can't keep my own thread if I don't. So the sheaf is a picture of Jesus and the sheaf, the sheaf has to be of the first cut.

So the harvest is ready. We cut one sheaf. We present that to the Lord before we do anything else. We're going to see in a few minutes, assuming I don't run out of time, that there are other aspects to this, which for the sake of keeping me sane, I'm going to deal with it at the end.

[22:33] But Jesus is described in Romans 8, 29, he's described as the firstborn among many brethren. And then in 1 Corinthians 15 and verse 23, he is described as our firstfruit.

So the link there is made for those people, once Jesus is ministering on the earth, they are able to gain this impression that this feast of firstfruits had to do with the firstborn.

the thing about this is that the sheaf that is waved, Jesus has entered human flesh, the sheaf that is waved is the same as all the other sheaves.

You can't tell that sheaf apart from any other sheaf. So as the sheaf is waved, thank you Lord for this wonderful harvest, what is true of that sheaf is true for all the other identical sheaves in the harvest.

What's the phrase that's used? It's prolyptic, is that the one? Where it's a sign for corporate truth, an individual sign of corporate truth.

[23:48] So all of the other sheaves are also covered by the offering of the lamb. So we see Jesus in the lamb, we see Jesus in the sheaf that was waved, if he was accepted as the first sheaf, then we all are as subsequent sheaves in that harvest.

Right? But I think we also see him in the smoke of the offering, in that that smoke rises as a sweet smelling savour in the nostrils of God who accepts the offering.

Turn to Acts 1, I think it's Acts 1 verse 9, what you see there is just a depiction of what I think is Jesus doing exactly that.

And after he had said these things, he was lifted up while they were looking on and a cloud received him out of their sight and they were gazing intently into the sky while he was going.

And two men in white clothing stood beside them. So just as the smoke of the offering went up to God, Jesus himself went up to God. And I think there's a picture of Jesus in the smoke of the offering.

[25:01] And of course, burning the grain is another smelly thing, but they would set fire to this grain, they would put oil all over it, and in other places in Scripture you read that they put frankincense with it, so it becomes a really, what would be a smelly, horrible thing, becomes a fragrant aroma, and that's what goes up to God.

So, he receives the sacrifice paralleled with Jesus. When Jesus ascended like the smoke and entered heaven, Father God accepted that sacrifice on behalf of all the other sheaves.

And in Hebrews 7, 25, turn there while you're in the New Testament, Hebrews 7, verse 25, therefore he is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through him since he always lives to make intercession for them.

So, in being lifted up and entering the throne room of God, he then intercedes for us forever, and therefore we are always accepted. He ever lives and intercedes for us.

And in the book of Jude, he tells us that the Lord will present us unstained, or another way of saying it is he will make us to stand faultless.

[26:33] I can't imagine being faultless. But the first chief was faultless. So I'm rendered faultless. I don't deserve it, but it's a fact. And in Colossians 1, verse 18, Jesus is referred to there as the first born from the dead.

Turn to John 12, verse 24, and Jesus answered them saying, the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

So he's talking about the time when he will be glorified, and when will he be glorified? Well, when he ascends to heaven and is a sweet smelling aroma in the nostrils of God. The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

Truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. So this sheaf has come about because grain fell to the earth and died.

And so what's portrayed in the sheaf is the resurrection of the grain that died. When the farmer first sowed the field, he sowed grain. But unless that grain dies, there is no crop.

[27:46] It has to die to produce sheaves. So what you have is the first sheaf that is waved before the Lord by the logic I've just expressed is the firstborn sheaf from the dead.

I had to go through this about four times because I couldn't believe what I was reading. So this first sheaf was produced from seed that had gone into the ground and died and in that sense the sheaf was the firstborn sheaf from the dead.

This directly parallels Jesus who was sown as a seed of God into the ground where he died. And then he was resurrected as the firstborn from the dead, just like the sheaf.

And so the Bible then expresses in Colossians 1.18 he is called the firstborn from the dead. In Romans 8.29 he's called the firstborn among many brethren to be presented before the father without spot or blemish and because he is presented before the father without spot or blemish so will I be and so will you be.

This is why we celebrate the resurrection and why it should move us to do so it should fill our hearts with both delight and awe.

[29:07] So Paul in this teaching in 1 Corinthians 15 verse 20 tells us he is the first fruit of those who are asleep. He's the first fruit of those in other words who are already dead.

There are lots of people and I don't I haven't settled this to my own satisfaction yet but there is more.

I mean we're destined to be seated at the right hand of the father just like Jesus in Psalm 110 verse 1 and Hebrews 1 verse 3 and 13 and 10 verse 12 and Matthew 24 verse 44 all of these refer to Jesus but whatever's true of the first sheaf is also going to be true of me.

The fact that it happened to Jesus means I can count on it happening to me and Ephesians 2 verses 4 to 6 is unequivocal he has seated us at God's right hand but there is yet more.

There is the offering of a grain offering at the same time as a drink offering at the same time as the burnt offering. The grain offering was a Thanksgiving offering we dealt with that closely tied to salvation as we've seen but what about the drink offering?

[30:17] And they used to take a lot of wine and pour it all over the sacrifice that was on the fire. And the wine in scripture represents usually two things.

Number one it's joy. so it was done with great joy because this was receiving acceptance from God but it was also a picture of the outpouring of the blood of Christ.

And so there is a picture in this of Jesus once again. So we've seen him in the sheaf, we've seen him in the grain, we've seen him in the smoke, now we're seeing him in the wine that is poured out. So the blood of Jesus is poured out all over this burnt offering and the whole thing is then destroyed. In other words it is completely consumed, the offering is completely consumed, just as Jesus' blood was poured out at the time when a spear was thrust into his side and blood and water flowed out together.

So at the time of the sacrifice you have this other picture of Jesus in the pouring of the libation all over the offering. So one more thing, and this is the bit that I'm not totally settled on yet, but it seems to make sense to me.

[31:39] If we come away from this scripture and go to the other one, which is Deuteronomy 26, so we've had the grain offering and we've had the drink offering made together with the burnt offering, and we've seen Jesus in both the grain and the smoke and the wine that's poured out.

And of course, we know from our own breaking of bread, don't we? Luke 22 verse 20, we see a reference to this analogy when Jesus speaks of a cup of wine representing the outpouring of his blood.

But Deuteronomy 26 verses 1 to 11, I'm not going to read all the verses, just enough to get a grasp on what I'm talking about. Then it shall be when you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance and you possess it and live in it, that you shall take some of the first of all the produce of the ground which you bring in from your land that the Lord your God gives you and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place where the Lord your God chooses to establish his name. You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time and say to him, I declare this day to the Lord my God that I have entered the land which the Lord swore to our fathers to give us.

Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the Lord your God. So apart from the sheaf and the waving of the sheaf and all that we've just discussed, it was also the job of everybody who grew something, had some produce of the ground to put it in a basket and take it to the priest and say what we've just read.

[33:23] So they're bringing baskets of fruit, the fruit of their labours, not just baskets of fruit and fruit of the labours, but the very first, the first thing that you successfully grow, that's what they're taking, before they've eaten any of it themselves.

And then all of this is set out before the Lord at the same time that the sheaf is waved, so there are these other sacrifices and offerings present when the sheaf is being waved.

And I skipped over that and I thought, is that really significant? significant? Well, just take our mind back. This is, if you like, this is a precursor for every person that brought a basket of something, it's a precursor of what they expect the rest of their harvest to be like.

So it's the first fruits of their particular harvest, not the grain harvest, but whatever they're doing as a local farmer or providing for their family, it could be a little patch of ground, what we might call an allotment, I don't know, but it's a small but significant offering.

It's a precursor. So not just the grain, but produce of the ground was prominent in first fruits. And then, so what you'd say is arguably the ground gave forth the fruit of holy men during that time when people were seen walking the streets who had particularly been entombed.

[34:49] You remember Jesus at the time of the resurrection, we read that people who had previously died, saints, holy men, had been entombed, were seen walking the streets.

The ground gave forth the fruit as a precursor to the harvest that is yet to come. Now you can understand why I'm kind of shaky about this, because it sounds like I'm making it up.

But I believe that's true. And I quickly went raking through various scholars to see if anybody agreed with me. And in fairness, some do and some don't.

But aside from the sacrifice for the whole harvest, there was a precursor of harvests that had come from the ground that may well have represented these folks that were seen walking about having been dead, they were now raised to life.

And that being a precursor for what will happen to all of us at some point, which of course is taken from Daniel 12 verse 2, that every single person will be at some point resurrected.

[36:01] So what's the application for us? Well first, I hope, thanksgiving, because it is for God to have put, albeit mysterious, albeit quite quite well concealed to the uninitiated.

It's there for us to find that God before Jesus was raised, hundreds of years before Jesus was raised, put this feast in place.

And he put it there so that when he was raised from the dead, we would understand. This feast seems to me to predict the event in which not only Jesus was raised, but also that others were also

raised at that time.

And so it was a further fulfillment of the prophetic aspects of this feast. I hope as well as anything else, because if ever there's a doctrine that troubles people, it's the doctrine of the resurrection. Can we believe it really happened? And I think what we've just experienced is the scripture telling us that God not only predicted it would happen, but put it in the life of the Jews in a way that they would understand.

[37:17] I'm sure some of them scratch their head when they're waving the sheaf and saying, well, what's this really about? But we've got a burnt offering at the same time, and we know what the burnt offering's about, so this must be linked to that in some way.

And you can almost hear their cogs going around as they work it all out. But when Jesus came, he said that he was going to be the firstborn from the dead, that he was going to be our firstfruits. And the New Testament confirms that that's what he was. So if anything, it should lift our faith to hold fast our belief to the resurrection. Father, thank you so much for this word.

And I have to say, I have found this challenging to prepare. But I am continually amazed at your grace and your goodness to us, that you leave us without excuse. That whichever way we come at this, we finish up with the same story.

Jesus died for our sins and was raised from the dead by the goodness and grace of the Father. He was able to lay down his life and able to take it up again.

[38:23] And that he would do that for us speaks of a depth of love that I can't even begin to describe. But thank you, Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.