

Three Feasts - One Focus

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[0 : 0 0] But if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, the book of Exodus, chapter 23.

Exodus, chapter 23. And if we read again at verse 14. Exodus 23, verse 14.

For the Lord said to his people, Three times in the year you shall keep a feast to me. You shall keep the feast of unleavened bread, as I commanded you.

You shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. None shall appear before me empty-handed.

You shall keep the feast of harvest, of the firstfruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field. And you shall keep the feast of ingathering. At the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor, three times in the year shall all your males appear before the Lord God.

[1 : 1 6] And so on. As you know, when it comes to harvest Thanksgiving, we don't celebrate harvest Thanksgiving like our American neighbors.

Because as you know, harvest Thanksgiving, it's a big thing in America. In fact, it's a public holiday where families, they get together and they gather together for a big meal of turkey and all the trimmings.

But you know, what's interesting is that harvest Thanksgiving, it was introduced in America by the English Puritans. Because after the English Reformation in the 16th century, the Church of England introduced days of fasting where there was repentance, but also days of Thanksgiving, with harvest Thanksgiving being one of these days.

And when some of the English Puritans in the 17th century, when they emigrated to the United States, it was after a good harvest that they sought to follow in their English custom and give thanks to the Lord.

And so in 1621, the first harvest Thanksgiving meal was held in America. And since then, harvest Thanksgiving has been celebrated each year in America on the fourth Thursday in November.

[2 : 3 7] However, sadly, however, the nation which initiated Thanksgiving or even introduced harvest Thanksgiving no longer acknowledges or appreciates or attributes or ascribes their Thanksgiving to the Lord.

Which always brings me back, as it does every year, it brings me back to what Reverend William MacLeod here in Barvis often says. I'm sure you've heard him saying it before.

He says, when the cupboards were empty, the churches were full. But now that the cupboards are full, the churches are empty. And you know, it should always make us question ourselves as a congregation and community because if our cupboards and cabinets and fridges and freezers are full, then our thanksgiving to the Lord should be full.

But far too often, the reality is our cupboards are full but our thanksgiving is empty. Which is why the Lord reminded His people here in Exodus chapter 23, He reminded them about the importance of thanksgiving.

The importance of thanksgiving. And the Lord reminded His people by initiating and introducing not one but three feasts of thanksgiving.

[4 : 03] Three feasts of thanksgiving. And I want us to see that there are three feasts with one focus. Three feasts with one focus. And the first feast that we see, it's in verse 15, the first feast is the feast of unleavened bread.

The feast of unleavened bread. We read there in verse 14, three times in the year you shall keep a feast to me. You shall keep the feast of unleavened bread. As I commanded you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib.

For in it you came out of Egypt. None shall appear before me empty-handed. Now we were saying earlier to the children that it's important to have manners, especially when it comes to saying thank you or please.

And you know, in many ways that's what the Lord was teaching the children of Israel here in the book of Exodus. Because the Israelites, they were being taught to acknowledge and attribute and appreciate and to ascribe all their thanksgiving to the Lord.

Because the Lord said there in verse 14, He said, three times in the year you shall keep a feast to me. Three times in the year you shall keep a feast. You shall give thanks.

[5 : 21] So the Lord, He initiated and introduced not one, but three feasts of thanksgiving. And these three feasts, they all followed the agricultural year.

The feast of unleavened bread there in verse 15, it was held in the spring, in the time of the barley harvest. Then the feast of harvest mentioned in verse 16, it was held in the early summer.

That was the harvest of wheat. And then the feast of ingathering was held in the autumn. That was the ingathering of the produce from the orchards and the vineyards, whether it was grapes or olives or apples or whatever it was, it was the feast of ingathering.

But as we said, there were three feasts with one focus. Three feasts with one focus. And the focus, the focus of course was the Lord. The Lord's people were to, they were to acknowledge and appreciate and to attribute and to ascribe all their thanksgiving to the Lord.

Three times in the year you shall keep a feast to me. You shall keep the feast of unleavened bread as I commanded you. You shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt.

[6 : 40] The first feast there in verse 15 is the feast of unleavened bread, which was actually a feast that the Israelites had already eaten and they'd already enjoyed. And they had eaten and enjoyed it on the night of the Exodus from Egypt.

Because you'll remember in our study of the book of Exodus, you'll remember that Exodus chapter 12, it's a crucial chapter. It's a crucial chapter not only in the story of the Exodus, but also in the story of salvation.

Because Exodus chapter 12, it records for us the final plague and the first Passover. The final plague and the first Passover. The final plague, you'll remember it was that knockout punch.

It was the knockout punch where the Lord struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, the firstborn sons. We're told in Exodus 12, there was not a house in Egypt where someone was not dead.

But the thing is, the Israelites, they avoided, they avoided the final plague and the knockout punch by preparing the first Passover. And they prepared for the first Passover, you'll remember by removing the leaven and readying the lamb.

[7 : 51] They prepared for the first Passover by removing the leaven and readying the lamb. They removed the leaven, that was a symbol of consecration and commitment to the Lord.

And readying the lamb was a symbol of complete cleansing. Because on the night of the Passover, you'll remember how the Passover lamb, it was slaughtered, slaughtered on the front step of every house of the Israelites.

The lamb was slaughtered there on the front step and then they used a hyssop branch like a paintbrush where they took the shed blood of the slaughtered lamb and they smeared it along the lintel and down the doorposts of the house so that the door of their house was completely covered in the blood of a Passover lamb.

It was a complete covering for complete cleansing. And the Lord commanded the Israelites on the night of the Passover, He said to them, stay at home, shelter under the blood and save lives.

Because when the Lord would bring His final plague and His knockout punch upon Egypt, the Lord said, when I see the blood, I will pass over. When I see the blood, I will pass over.

[9 : 04] But the Passover was only the first night of the feast. It was only the first night of the feast. Because as we read there in verse 15, the feast of unleavened bread was to last for seven days.

And that feast was to last for seven days and every year throughout the generations, the Israelites were to commemorate the Passover, which was the first day of the feast, and then celebrate the feast for those seven days, the feast of unleavened bread.

And throughout that feast, they were to acknowledge and appreciate and attribute and ascribe all their thanksgiving to the Lord for their salvation from slavery.

But you know what I find remarkable? This is what I love about the Bible. The feast of unleavened bread, it began with the institution of the Passover.

And the feast of unleavened bread, it ended with the institution of the Lord's Supper. Because as we said, these three feasts, they all have one focus.

[10 : 14] And the focus is directing us, as it should, as the Bible does, to the Lord. Therefore, it's no accident, it's no accident that it was during the Passover and the feast of unleavened bread that Jesus brought an end to the Old Testament and instituted the Lord's Supper.

Because as you know, Jesus is our Passover Lamb. Jesus is the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world. It was A.W. Pink who made that beautiful connection between the Passover Lamb and the cross of Jesus, where he said, the door of the house which had blood on the lintel and on the doorposts and on the step.

He said, it pictures Christ on the cross, blood above, blood above where thorns pierced His brow, blood on the sides where His nail-pierced hands were pierced to the cross and then blood below for His nail-pierced feet.

And my friend, Jesus is our Passover Lamb. And the Feast of Unleavened Bread, it focused upon Him. Because like the Israelites, we are to acknowledge and appreciate and attribute and ascribe all our thanksgiving to the Lord, to Jesus.

And so it's no accident that it was during the meal, the Passover meal, and during the Feast of Unleavened Bread that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper.

[11 : 46] Because the Lord's Supper focuses our feast upon Jesus. And by using the simple symbols, symbols of bread and wine, they explain and they emphasize to us the broken body and the shed blood of Jesus on the cross.

And you know, we often refer to the Lord's Supper as communion. And rightly so, because the Lord's Supper is all about communion and fellowship. But in other traditions, they refer to the Lord's Supper as the Eucharist.

Maybe you've heard that somewhere. The Eucharist. The word Eucharist means thanksgiving. Eucharist means thanksgiving. So they refer to the Lord's Supper as the Eucharist because the Lord's Supper, it's not only about communion and fellowship, it's also about thanksgiving.

And so the Lord's Supper is a thanksgiving meal whereby we acknowledge and attribute and appreciate and ascribe all our thanksgiving to the Lord.

And you know, that's why Jesus commands us in the Gospel. He says to us very simply, do this in remembrance of me. Do this in remembrance of me.

[13 : 02] As I mentioned earlier when doing the intimations, at the beginning of December we'll be celebrating the Lord's Supper. We'll be participating in and partaking of this thanksgiving meal.

A thanksgiving meal which has been provided by the Lord for His people. And you know, my friend, maybe as someone who has not professed their faith yet, maybe over the next couple of weeks, maybe you need to give consideration to Jesus' invitation to come and the command He issues.

The command is very simple. Do this in remembrance of me. Do this in remembrance of me. Failure to obey is to be disobedient.

That's why Jesus says, do this in remembrance of me. So the first feast, Feast of Unleavened Bread. Three feasts, one focus. So the first feast, Feast of Unleavened Bread, the second feast, we see there in verse 16, the Feast of Harvest.

The Feast of Harvest says at the beginning of verse 16, You shall keep the Feast of Harvest of the first fruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field.

[14 : 23] You shall keep the Feast of Harvest of the first fruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field. And as we said, these three feasts, they followed the agricultural year.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread was held in the spring, the time of barley harvest. The Feast of Harvest was held in the early summer, which was the wheat harvest. And the Feast of Ingathering was held in the autumn, when there was the harvest of the orchards and the vineyards, where it was all gathered in.

There are three feasts with one focus. But you know what I find fascinating when studying these three feasts with one focus, is that as the years passed, so as you go through the narrative of the Bible, you'll notice that as the years passed from one generation to the next, the names of these feasts often changed.

But the purpose of the feasts didn't. Because as we said, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, it began with the Passover. But the Feast of First Fruits was a one-day feast held during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

And the Feast of First Fruits was the day on which all the worshippers of Israel, they brought the first fruits of the barley harvest and offered it to the Lord as an act of worship, an act of thanksgiving.

[15 : 47] That's why we're told at the end of verse 15, we're told that none shall appear before me empty-handed. They were to come with the first cut of the barley harvest.

They were to come and bring the first fruits of the barley harvest and offer it to the Lord at the tabernacle or at the temple. They were to offer it to the Lord in an act of thanksgiving.

But you know, this is what amazed me. The Feast of Unleavened Bread, it would begin with the Passover meal. And as it was in the experience of Jesus, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, it began on a Friday.

The Passover meal was held on a Friday. The Jews counted sundown to sundown, so it was the start of a Friday. Which, as you know, was the day that Jesus, the Passover lamb, he was slain for our sins.

It was Good Friday. Then on Saturday, during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, it was the Sabbath, because the Saturday was the Jewish Sabbath. It was the seventh day of the week.

[16:50] That was the day that the Jews gathered together to worship the Lord at the tabernacle or at the temple. But you know, what's fascinating is that the Feast of Firstfruits took place on the day after the Sabbath, which was Sunday, the first day of the week.

And so you had Passover beginning the feast on the Friday. You had the Feast of Unleavened Bread on the Saturday. It was a week-long feast. But then on the Sunday, you had the Feast of Firstfruits, the first day of the week.

And of course, the first day of the week was the day that Jesus rose from the dead. It was the day of resurrection. It's the Lord's day. Which means that Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week during the feast of Firstfruits.

Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week during the Feast of Firstfruits. Why do I tell you all this? Because Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, and this is what I love about the Bible. Paul says 1 Corinthians 15, and I always wondered why he said it. He said, Christ is our firstfruits who has been raised from the dead. Christ is our firstfruits who has been raised from the dead. He is the one who has been given to us as a great gift. He is the one for whom we must worship and praise and give thanks for. He is the feast upon which we must focus, and our focus must be upon Jesus, because Christ is the firstfruits who was raised from the dead.

But there's more here, because this second feast, the Feast of Harvest, mentioned there at the beginning of verse 16. As we said, it took place in early summer when the wheat fields had been harvested. More precisely, the Feast of Harvest took place seven weeks, seven weeks after the Feast of Unleavened Bread had ended. So the Feast of Harvest began seven weeks after the Feast of Unleavened Bread had ended. And it was because of this seven-week period, this seven-week time frame, that the Feast of Harvest was later called the Feast of Weeks. The Feast of Weeks. But as time passed down throughout the generations, as you go through the Bible, you see it changing. People began to speak in Greek rather than Aramaic. And therefore, the Feast of Weeks, it became more commonly known as the Feast of Pentecost. The Feast of Pentecost. The Greek word Pentecostos means 50th. Pentecostos. So that's where you get a pentagon. Five sides. Pentecostos. 50th. And if you do the maths, our maths teacher will correct me if I'm wrong, but you know, the Feast of Weeks, it began seven weeks after the end of the

[19:57] Feast of Unleavened Bread. So there's a seven-week gap. Seven times seven, 49. 49 days. Therefore, the following day was the 50th day, which marked the start of the Feast of Weeks or the Feast of Pentecost.

And as we said, throughout these three feasts, they all have one focus. They're all driving us towards one person. And the focus is Jesus. And that was certainly true of the Feast of Pentecost.

Because as you know, in the book of Acts, in the New Testament, it was on the Pentecost day. It was on the 50th day. The 50th day after the death and resurrection of Jesus, our Passover Lamb, we're told that the Holy Spirit came upon the church in power. And Jesus promised his church, he promised his church, the church that still remains to this day, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit will come upon you and you will be my witnesses, he said. My witnesses in Jerusalem and in Judea and in Samaria to the uttermost part of the earth. And so we are witnesses for Jesus.

Our focus is to be upon Jesus. We are to witness to the power and the work of Jesus Christ. And so you see, my friend, the Feast of Harvest or the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost, whatever name you want to call it. It points us forward and focuses our attention all upon Jesus. Therefore, we must acknowledge and appreciate and attribute and ascribe all our thanksgiving to the Lord.

Everything must be directed back to him, to the giver of every good and perfect gift. Three feasts, one focus. Three feasts, one focus. The first feast is the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

[22 : 01] Second feast, the Feast of Harvest. The third feast, the Feast of Ingathering. The Feast of Ingathering. We'll read the section again. So verse 14, the Lord says, Three times in the year you shall keep a feast to me. You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

As I commanded you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib. For in it you came out of Egypt. None shall appear before me empty-handed. You shall keep the Feast of Harvest of the first fruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field. And then lastly, you shall keep the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor. Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the Lord God.

As you can see there from verses 14 and 17, the three feasts with one focus, they are bookended by the same phrase. You see in verse 14 and verse 17, the phrase three times in the year. Three times in the year. Therefore, these three feasts were to be commemorated and celebrated on three separate occasions throughout the year. And as we read there in verse 17, it was during these three feasts that all the men, all the men in the community would appear before the Lord, either at the tabernacle or later at the temple in Jerusalem. All the men were to appear before the Lord for these sacred and special feasts, where all the men of the city and the towns and the villages throughout the nation of Israel, they would all come together. They would all travel together to celebrate these feasts at the temple or at the tabernacle. You know, I was thinking, you know, it would be like all the men in Scotland going and gathering in Edinburgh. It's quite a lot of people when you think about it. That's what would happen.

All the men from each village, from each community, from each town, each city, they would all come together. And the thing is, they had all been working the fields, and then they're all coming together to give thanks to the Lord for the produce of the fields.

It would be a large gathering where they would all come together and praise the Lord in worship. And in doing so, what were they doing? They were acknowledging and appreciating and attributing and ascribing all their thanksgiving to the Lord. It was all back to the giver. And you know, that's what it should be with us too. Our praise is to be full of thanksgiving to the Lord.

[24 : 50] Do you know how different our prayer life would be if we were more focused upon thanksgiving than our requests? And yes, we need to ask and give prayers and petitions, but we also need to thank the Lord. We need to have an attitude of gratitude towards the Lord.

We need to have an attitude of gratitude. In fact, the Hebrew word for praise, you see it throughout the Bible. You see it throughout the book of Psalms, the word praise. The Hebrew word for praise is derived from another Hebrew word, thanksgiving. They relate to one another. They belong to one another. Therefore, our praise should always include thanksgiving. Our prayers should always include thanksgiving, which only emphasizes to us to praise the Lord in thanksgiving. We need to give thanks to the Lord because He is the giver of every good and perfect gift. And that's what we've been singing about this morning. In Psalm 105, the psalmist exhorted and encouraged us. He said, give thanks to God, call on His name, to men His deeds make known. Sing ye to Him, sing psalms, proclaim His wondrous works, each one. In Psalm 106, the psalmist said, give praise and thanks unto the Lord. Why? For bountiful is He, His tender mercy doth endure unto eternity. And then the next Psalm we'll be singing is Psalm 107. The psalmist begins, praise God. Why? For He is good, for still His mercy's lasting be. Let God's redeemed say so, whom He from the enemy's hand did free. My friend, we're to praise the Lord in thanksgiving. We're to have an attitude of gratitude towards the giver of every good and perfect gift. We're to acknowledge and appreciate and attribute and ascribe all our thanksgiving to the Lord, to Him and to Him alone. Because it's the Lord who provides all the blessings and all the benefits of life. We know that for ourselves. He gives to us all the F's of life. Fun, that's from the Lord. Food, from the Lord.

Family, from the Lord. Friendships, from the Lord. Falling in love, from the Lord. Fitness, our health, from the Lord. Finance, from the Lord. The Lord provides all these blessings, all these benefits.

But the Bible tells us we're not to seek security and satisfaction in all the F's of life. We're not to seek security and satisfaction in fun, food, family, friendships, falling in love and fitness and finance.

We're not to seek satisfaction and security in them. No, instead, we're to lift our eyes beyond this world. We're to look at life and love life and live life with that eternal perspective, where we acknowledge and appreciate and attribute and ascribe all our thanksgiving and praise to the Lord. Because He is worthy of all our praise and all our thanksgiving. He is worthy of all our praise and all our thanksgiving. But as we conclude this morning, I want us to see that this final feast, the feast of ingathering. It was also given other names. We saw that with the feast of unleavened bread.

[28 : 24] We see that with the feast of harvest. It was called the feast of weeks or the feast of Pentecost. But the feast of ingathering, the last feast that's mentioned, it was also given other names, such as the feast of tabernacles, the feast of booths, the feast of succot, which means tent.

It was a feast that commemorated and celebrated the Lord's protection and the Lord's provision for the Israelites throughout their wilderness journey. But particularly the feast of tabernacles or booths or succot or the feast of ingathering, particularly it commemorated and celebrated the Lord's provision of water in the wilderness.

The Lord's provision of water in the wilderness. Because without water, nothing grows. You need water. And like the other feasts, this feast had one focus. Because our Bible reminds us that the provision of water in the wilderness, where did it come from? It came from a rock. And that rock, says Paul, that rock was Christ, providing for his people water in the wilderness. The rock was Christ.

And that's why when you go to John's gospel, John chapter 7, John is recounting the story of what happened during the feast of tabernacles, the feast of booths, the feast of ingathering. And John tells us that right at the end of that feast, John 7, it says, on the last day of the feast, the great day, who stands up but Jesus. Jesus stands up and he cries out. What does he cry out as the rock of salvation?

If anyone thirsts. If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. You're thirsty, he says, come to me. If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. That rock was Christ. He is the one who has provided for his people. And he's provided for you. He's provided for me. Therefore, we're to ascribe all praise, honor, and glory to him and to him alone.

[30 : 41] My friend, there are three feasts with one focus. I love how the Old Testament presents to us Jesus. Three feasts with one focus. The focus is the Lord Jesus Christ.

They're calling us to come to this Jesus with an attitude of gratitude, to come to him, humbly acknowledging the gifts he has given to us. The temporal gifts. There are many.

But you know, the greatest gift is Jesus himself, given freely, freely to whosoever, freely to you, and you're asked to come and receive. Ask and you shall receive. Seek and you shall find. Knock and it shall be opened to you. My friend, we're to have an attitude of gratitude. We're to acknowledge, appreciate, attribute, and ascribe all our praise and all our thanksgiving to Jesus.

Three feasts, one focus. May our focus be Jesus and Jesus alone. Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to thee for thy word. We give thanks to thee for giving it to thy people and that we're able to read it in our own language.

We're able to have it explained to us and seek to understand that it points us to one person, to thy son, to the Lord Jesus. And help us then, we pray, to come with praise and thanksgiving in our heart. To come, Lord, knowing that we have received so much and that thy word says to us so clearly that to whom much is given, much will be required of us. Help us then, we pray, to be thankful, to give thanks for all that the Lord has done, but to give thanks especially for Jesus, the greatest gift, the freest gift, freely offered to whosoever. And Lord, we pray that we would all claim and cling to this gift, the gift of Jesus, the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. Bless us then, we pray.

[33 : 12] Watch over us, we ask, and help us this Lord's day to ascribe praise and thanks to the Lord, for bountiful is he. Do us good, then we pray. Go before us for Jesus' sake. Amen.

We're going to bring our service to a conclusion this morning. We're going to sing in Psalm 107. Psalm 107. We sang in Psalm 105, 106, and then Psalm 107. Psalm 107 is a psalm which praises the Lord and gives thanks to the Lord for his salvation. And in Psalm 107, you have different testimonies. And every testimony, every person who is saved, they all ascribe praise to the Lord, because that is the greatest gift to receive salvation. And this is what the psalmist says, he says, praise God, for he is good. For still his mercy's lasting be. Let God's redeemed say so, whom he from the enemies handed free and gathered them out of the lands from north, south, east, and west.

They strayed in deserts pathless way, no city found to rest. And then there's this verse in verse 8, where it's repeated throughout the psalm. Oh, that men to the Lord would give praise for his goodness then, and for his works of wonder done unto the sons of men. So we'll sing Psalm 107 from the beginning down to the verse marked 8. And we'll stand to sing, if you're able, to God's praise.

Praise God, for he is good. For still his mercy's lasting be. Let God's redeemed say so, whom he from them the east and the east and the free. And gathered them atop the lands from north, south, east, and west.

They strayed in deserts pathless way, no city found to rest. For thirst and hunger in them fates, their soul when strays them pressed. They cry unto the Lord and he, and frees from their distress.

[36 : 21] them also in a way to walk, that right is he did guide. That they might to a city go, where in they might abide. Who that men to the Lord would give praise for his goodness then, and for his works of wonder done unto the sons of men.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.