The Feasts of the Lord

Welcome

Pray – open our eyes to the wondrous things in your Word.

I wonder if you are like me?

When we find out the news – however you get it – newspaper, television, radio, podcasts, web sites – what we get is an unending stream of death, destruction, horror, bitterness, selfishness, greed, the list goes on.

When I look at the world I see a society that is crumbling.

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Poverty – people clinging to overcrowded boats.

Gap between rich and poor widening. 8 men own half of the world’s wealth.

Greed is driving up prices for everything from houses to food.

Social norms – truths that have existed for thousands of years – are now challenged –

marriage,

gender (107),

sexuality are unrecognisable to a previous generation.

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Death and destruction – some the result of nature but many the result of man

Wars Ukraine to Myanmar. 32 – now 33 Gabon

Earthquakes

* Turkiye earthquake Feb 2023 59,259 killed, 345,000 homes

Fires

* 23 major wildfires so far this year.
* 100s killed
* Hawaii 2,200 homes destroyed.

Floods

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Even technology fills me with dread.

* Rise of influencers with
  + Hedonism
  + Pursuit of wealth, power, beauty
* Fake news – can’t believe my own eyes any more
* AI – changing our world as I speak
  + Potential for good and for evil

And yet, no matter how bad the news is

God is ultimately in control.

God has a plan

* Laid out since the beginning of the world
* It begins in the first chapter of Genesis and culminates in the final chapter of Revelation

This morning I want us to look at God’s plan – roadmap for redemption.

Carefully and wonderfully spelled out for us in the Feasts that God appointed for the children of Israel to celebrate.

We find them in Leviticus 23 where God offers a glimpse into the future and clearly shows the coming of the Messiah.

Let me quote:

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Amidst the whirlwind of the modern world, where chaos often seems to hold sway, a constant truth remains: God's unwavering control extends beyond what meets the eye. Leviticus 23 sheds light on this through the Feasts of the Lord. These sacred observances not only hold historical and cultural significance but also serve as a roadmap pointing towards a greater redemptive plan for humanity. It's in these Feasts that we find foreshadowing of the coming Messiah, Jesus, and His future return. In exploring the Feasts of the Lord, we catch a glimpse of how God's enduring guidance is intricately woven into the fabric of time, revealing His ultimate purpose for all.

Who wrote this overview? A great theologian or preacher?

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ChatGPT when I asked it to write an introduction to my talk this morning.

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Leviticus 23

* seldom read
* regarded by most as an historical curiosity
* God’s plan for redemption revealed
* These feasts are prophetic glimpses into the future
* some fulfilled in the first coming of Jesus
* the rest yest to be fulfilled in His second coming.

A look into this chapter can provide us with the antidote to the misery that the news brings us

God is and always has been in control.

His plan is not deterred by what we see happening around us.

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Levitcus 23:1-2 sets the scene for us.

1The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2“Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, These are the appointed feasts of the LORD that you shall proclaim as holy convocations; they are my appointed feasts.”

Convocation – a gathering together of people.

Some background:

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Jewish calendar – lunar months

Easter is our example of a holiday that follows a lunar calendar hence it falls on a different date each year.

Originally the new year began on the 1st day of the month of Nisan

During the exile in Babylon, this changed to match the Babylonian calendar and now the year begins 6 months later on the 1st day of Tishri.

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God began preparing for the Feasts in Genesis 1:14

14And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for *seasons* [or appointed times or feasts], and for days and years, 15and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth.” And it was so.

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8 Feasts

Shabbat or the Sabbath is unusual as it occurred each week.

Look at the next 7

* Passover or Pesach vs 3
* Feast of unleavened bread or Chahg Hah-MAT-zote vs 6
* Feast of Firstfruits or Yom Hah-Bih-KUR-ihm vs 9-14
* Feast of weeks or Pentecost vs 15-21
* Feast of trumpets or Rosh-Hah-SHAH-nah vs 23-25
* Dat of Atonement or Yom Kippur vs 26-32
* Feast of Booths or Sukkote vs 33-43

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First 4 feasts in Spring and celebrate both the calling out of the children of Israel from bondage in Egypt and the harvest.

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Passover

* Most recognised by non-Jews
* See the coming promise of the Messiah.
* Passover we see the sacrificial lamb brought into the home four days before the sacrifice
  + Jesus rides into Jerusalem four days before His crucifixion
* The lamb was to be without blemish and sinless
  + Jesus was sinless
* The sacrifice of the paschal lambs began at 9am
  + The crucifixion began at 9am
* The lamb was not have any bones broken
  + Jesus did not have his legs broken
* The lamb was to be consumed that day and was to be left
  + Jesus was taken down from the cross that day contrary to custom

The similarities were not lost on the New Testament writers.

* 1 Corinthians 5:7   
  For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.
* 1 Peter 1:18-20   
  knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.
* Hebrews 4:15  
  tells us Jesus was without sin.
* Just as God set His people free from slavery to the Egyptian, Jesus sets us free from slavery to sin.  
  Romans 8:2  
  For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.
* John 1:29  
  The next day he, John the Baptist, saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

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Feast of Unleavened Bread – vs 6

* Immediately follows Passover
* Jesus lay buried during the first days of the Feast of unleavened bread.
* Eat unleavened bread (bread without yeast) for 7 days
* Yeast symbol of sin
* Unleavened bread points to the Messiah’s sinless life.
* The Matzah
  + Unleavened – without sin
  + Striped  
    Isaiah 53:5  
    and with his wounds or stripes we are healed
  + Pierced  
    Zechariah 12:10  
    And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him
  + Broken  
    Luke 22:19  
    And Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you.
  + The bread of affliction  
    Isaiah 53:4  
    Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

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Feast of Firstfruits

* Occurs on the first day of the week after the first Sabath of Passover
* Jesus rose on the day of the Feast of Firstfruits
* Celebration of the harvest to come – just as Jesus is the first to rise
* 1 Corinthians 15:20  
  But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

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Feast of Weeks

* Occurs 50 days after Passover
* Greek for 50th is Pentecost
* Celebration of the full harvest and the giving of the law on Mt Sinai
* In Acts 2 we see the giving of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost and the beginning of the harvest promised at the resurrection of Jesus.
* In Exodus 32:25-28, Moses comes down to find the people & golden calf
* In anger he orders the Levites to kill their brothers, companions and neighbours – a total of 3,000 men are killed.
* In Acts 2:40-41, Peter receives the Holy Spirit and preaches with 3,000 saved.

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And here ends the prophesies fulfilled in the Messiah Jesus, 2000 years ago and foretold in the first four feasts 1,500 years before that.

Today, our Jewish brothers and sisters continue to celebrate these feasts, failing to see that their promised Messiah has already come.

But the next three feasts herald events that are yet to come to pass.

They occur in the Autumn months and begin with Rosh Hashanah – the Feast of Trumpets.

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Rosh Hashanah heralds in the Jewish New Year.

Begins 10 days of awe. Time of reflection and repentance during which the Jewish people seek to improve themselves and win favour with God.

Name written in the book of life.

Rosh Hashanah involves the blowing of the shofar – rams horn – blown up to 101 times during the day.

We are in the time of the gentiles

This will end and all of Israel will be saved according to Romans 11:25-26

Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. 26And in this way all Israel will be saved.

What heralds the end of the time of the gentiles and the restoration of Israel?

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

And in 1 Corinthians 15:52

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.

Just as the shofar herald in the new year, one day, Christ shall come again with the sound of the trumpet to herald in a new age for all of Israel.

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At the end of the 10 days of awe we find Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

This is a day of fasting and intense prayer as each person is believed to be judged by God and their name written in one of three books, one for people who are judged to be evil and sealed for death, one for people who are judged righteous and are sealed for life, and one for those who hang in the balance and have another year to show that they are righteous.

The day of Atonement is the final day to get right with God for the coming year.

In the time of the Temple, this was the day that the High Priest entered into the Holy of Holies to intercede with God on behalf of the nation of Israel.

This feast prophetically points to the day of the Second Coming of Jesus when He will return to earth. That will be the Day of Atonement for the Jewish remnant when they "look upon Him whom they have pierced," repent of their sins, and receive Him as their Messiah (Zechariah 12:10 and Romans 11:1-6, 25-36).

All of Israel will finally repent and acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah.

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And finally the last Feast – the Feast of Booths or Sukkote in vs 33-43.

Here we see the Messiah dwelling here on earth amongst his people.

Peter understood this on the Mt of Transfiguration .

* Jesus had said that not all of the disciples would not die until they had seen Him coming in His kingdom.
* Peter and James and John see Jesus with Moses and Elijah
* Peter says, Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.  
  The word for tents means tabernacle or booth and Peter recognised that he had seen the kingdom where Jesus would dwell amongst His people.

As we read in Micah 4:1-7 the entire world will be at peace as Jesus reigns and everyone will worship Him. Where the world will celebrate the Feast of Booths and those who don’t will be punished with draughts and plagues.

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So the feasts as outlined in Leviticus 23 lay out God’s plan for redemption and restoration.

Four of the feasts prophesised events that have come to pass in the first coming of the Messiah.

The final three point to a time yet to come when Jesus returns again and dwells amongst us.

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In this world of sin and suffering, as we hear and see the news that assault our values and all that we hold dear

* We can have hope in that God has a plan
* From the very beginning
* He has made it known to us through the prophets and through the Feasts
* He has warned us that as the time for the final three prophesies draws near we will see chaos unfold.  
  Matthew 24:6-7  
  And you will hear of wars and rumours of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places.
* We have hope because, no matter how cold the world becomes, how self-centred, how destructive, how sinful – God is in control.

A word to the fathers here today, we have, I believe, a responsibility to ensure that our children, and our children’s children know that God is in control.

I see in my role as a teacher of young people, many who are suffering from anxiousness and depression. Who see the world as uninviting, as unwelcoming, a world full of hopelessness, where the aim is to get whatever pleasure you can in what little time you have because all else is meaningless and out of their control.

I believe fathers have a role teaching their children that the God who foreshadowed the coming of the Messiah in the Feasts will have the ultimate victory. That there is hope, there is love and beauty and there is meaning.

And I believe fathers have a role telling their children that God has a future planned that is wonderful. Where peace will be the norm. Where Jesus the Messiah will dwell amongst us. Where hope and love and life will be eternal.

As it says in 1 Peter 1:3-12

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.