**The Community in Canaan**

Exodus 34:18-26

**Good Morning Beloved,**

* In college, we had “power hour” outreaches.
  + We would go to the university center and prayerfully strike up conversations about spiritual matters.
    - Most often the focus would be on the individual.
      * “If you were to die tonight do you know that you would go to heaven?
      * “How do you find peace, comfort, or purpose in life?”
        + These are great questions to ask, but almost always there focused solely on individuals.[[1]](#footnote-1)
    - Our measurement of success was simple… would the person trust in Jesus Christ for salvation by grace alone by faith alone?
      * If they did… mission accomplished.
    - My grandfather, a pastor for 60 years, asked me… “Jere Scott, when you share with others… what place does the church have?”[[2]](#footnote-2)
  + John Leonard – “God communicates his grace to us through the preaching of the Word, the sacraments, and prayer – all things that are functions of the church.”
* There was also another group that worked incredibly hard to love others well… it was the party team.
  + We would ask… what’s on your plan for Christmas?
    - Julia Child - "A party without cake is just a meeting."[[3]](#footnote-3)
  + We would ask… does it really matter if we have a square dance?
    - Beastie Boys - “You gotta fight. For your right. To parrrrrty.”
  + We would ask… do you really need the sound system for all these things?
    - 50 Cent - “We gon’ party like it’s your birthday.”
* In a fascinating reflection, more people came to the grace of God by faith in Christ through parties.
  + There was something about a celebration that was supremely alluring… and supernaturally attractive.
    - Individuals were embrace, accepted, and energized in community as grace extended to more and more people.
* In Exodus 34, we find that one of the distinctive characteristics of God’s people in the land of Canaan will be they do more than party… they will FEAST in Community.

**The Reading of God’s Word** – Exodus 34:18-26 (P. 74 in the Pew Bible)

*18 “You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month Abib, for in the month Abib you came out from Egypt. 19 All that open the womb are mine, all your male livestock, the firstborn of cow and sheep. 20 The firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. All the firstborn of your sons you shall redeem. And none shall appear before me empty-handed.*

*21 “Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest. In plowing time and in harvest you shall rest. 22 You shall observe the Feast of Weeks, the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the year's end. 23 Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the Lord God, the God of Israel. 24 For I will cast out nations before you and enlarge your borders; no one shall covet your land, when you go up to appear before the Lord your God three times in the year.*

*25 “You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with anything leavened, or let the sacrifice of the Feast of the Passover remain until the morning. 26 The best of the firstfruits of your ground you shall bring to the house of the Lord your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk.”*

**The Preaching of God’s Word**

1. **The Feast of Unleavened Bread (vs. 18-20, 25-26)**
   1. These are the three main times of FEASTING in the Old Testament.
      1. It was more than a party…. But not less.
         1. Joyful voices paired with festive music as children joined hands with grandparents in dancing while food abounded.
      2. Yet it is more than a party… it is a sacramental celebration.
         1. Believers refreshed one another with stories… jokes… and tangible acts of kindness.
         2. Because what made a FEAST better than a PARTY was reflection of God’s provision and revelry in God’s protection.
      3. Here are three times for God’s people to be reminded that the steadfast love of the Lord endures forever (Ps. 136:1).
   2. The first FEAST in the calendar year was the Feast of Unleavened Bread.
      1. This springtime festival (March – April) was paired with the Feast of Passover.
         1. POINT: Once a year, FEAST because God rescued you out of Egypt.
            1. Remember the night the angel of death passed thought Egypt.
            2. Remember that you were spared by the blood of a lamb (Ex. 12).
            3. Remember how quickly you flee with unleavened bread.
            4. Remember how all you possess has been redeemed by the LORD.
      2. Don’t forget your deliverance from Egypt in the land of Canaan.
2. **The Feast of Weeks (vs. 21-22a)**
   1. The Feast of Weeks celebrated the first-fruits of the harvest.
      1. God’s promise to bring you into a land flowing with milk and honey are true (Ex. 3:17).
         1. It was called the “Feast of Weeks” because it occurred seven weeks after Passover (May – June).
            1. 7 weeks is 49 days… therefore the next day was the 50th day… which was called Pentecost.
         2. POINT: Once a year, FEAST because God provided for your needs in the barley and wheat harvest
3. **The Feast of Ingathering (vs. 22b-24)**
   1. At the end of the year, there was one last great festival celebration.[[4]](#footnote-4)
      1. Ingathering, also called the Feast of Booths or the Feast of Tabernacles, celebrated the agricultural work being done.
         1. POINT: Once a year, FEAST because God sustained them all the way from the wilderness on to the land flowing with mild and honey.[[5]](#footnote-5)
   2. These are the Covenant Communities distinguishing celebrations (in addition to the Sabbath).
      1. How did they celebrate?
         1. Refrain from working.
            1. Illustration: Ebenezer Scrooge reviews the accounts and tabulates the expenses at the Christmas party.
         2. Assemble together
            1. Reconnect with those who are looking to the Lord by faith.
         3. Bring good food
            1. Meat, grain, and wine!
         4. In a radical distinction from the way the world views a party*,* rejoice in the Great Host, the LORD God Almighty.
            1. *Ex. 34:23 Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the Lord God, the God of Israel. 24 For I will cast out nations before you and enlarge your borders; no one shall covet your land, when you go up to appear before the Lord your God three times in the year.*
   3. This is the joy of life…. To be in fellowship with the LORD.
      1. When David conquered Jerusalem and established his son Solomon to build the temple, the prophet Isaiah tell us what the name of Jerusalem will be…
         1. It is *the city of our festivals* (Isaiah 33:20).
            1. When the throne was established…. When the Temple was constructed… the only fitting terminology for the place where “God’s people were in God’s place under God’s rule and blessing”[[6]](#footnote-6) was FEASTING!

Solomon decicated the Temple on the Feast of Tabernacles as all the Abrahamic Covenant promises were to be realized (1 Kings 8:62ff).

* + 1. These three Feasts show in tangible ways that God is…
       1. *merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin* (Ex. 34:6-7a).
    2. But by the end of the Old Testament, these three feast will also reveal that God is….
       1. *who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.* (Ex. 34:7b).
  1. Throughout the prophets’ writings, the Feasts were tangible reminders that the people had broken covenant and pursued Satanic deceptions of true joy.
     1. Lam. 1:4 - *The roads to Zion mourn, for none come to the festival; all her gates are desolate; her priests groan; her virgins have been afflicted, and she herself suffers bitterly.*
        1. This reality directly violates the clear direction in Deuteronomy 16:16, which says…
           1. *16 “Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God at the place that he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Booths. They shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed.*
     2. *Ezekiel 20:16 - “because they rejected my rules and did not walk in my statutes, and profaned my Sabbaths; for their heart went after their idols.”*
        1. Those who reject thecall to community in Canaan then hear from the LORD…
           1. Amos 5:21 - *I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.*
  2. So the Old Testament concludes… with the people redeemed out of Egypt being cast into exile.
     1. As the memories of great celebrations from the past remaining only as memories like a faded photograph of yesteryear.
        1. How are we to have community in Canaan now?
           1. A silence answers back with a defeating hush.

1. Conclusion
   1. Until a young rabbi stood up on the last and greatest day of the Feast of Tabernacles and cried out…
      1. *“If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”[[7]](#footnote-7)*
         1. The irony was that the ONE who spoken was seen as a disturbance, even though he was the LORD GOD in their midst as the Master of the Banquet.
   2. With perfect candidness, this same wise teacher at the Feast of Unleavened Bread celebrated the Passover with His Disciples.
      1. But rather basing their fellowship on the lamb’s blood that adorned the doorposts in Egypt, Jesus Christ declared….
         1. *“I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. 16 For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” 17 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, “Take this, and divide it among yourselves. 18 For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” 19 And he 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. Do this in remembrance of me.” 20 And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. (Luke 22:15-20)*
      2. Here we see that the greatest Jewish feast always pointed to the death of Jesus Christ on the cross so that a NEW COVENANT would be established in His Blood (Eph. 1:7) for the forgiveness of sins through the TRUE PASSOVER LAMB (1 Cor. 5:7).
         1. For the Son of Man came declaring that the Kingdom of Heaven was like a Wedding Feast as the invitations to FILL the Master’s House are issued in city and throughout the country-side (Matt. 22:1ff).
            1. For those who do not feast with the King in His House will be feasted upon in the final judgment.[[8]](#footnote-8)

So that you would not be cast out of the Great Feast, Jesus Christ endured the CROSS for you.

* 1. Yet the CROSS is not the end, for at the Feast of WEEKS (which is known as Pentecost) the Holy Spirit was poured out upon all nations so that they would repent of their sins and believe upon Jesus Christ and be saved (Acts 2:1ff).
     1. THE CHURCH of JESUS CHRIST is the community that is established as elect exiles (1 Peter 1:1).
        1. We are the Body of Christ who reminds one another that we belong to God (Ex. 34:23).
        2. We are the Bride of Christ who abandons all other false suitors.
        3. We are the Heralds of Christ who plead with pled with all people like the Prophet Isaiah, saying…
           1. *“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. (Is. 55:1ff)*
  2. Beloved*,* the reason we gather each Sunday as a community still sojourning in the wilderness is because there is a perpetual feast in the Heavenly Zion because of Jesus Christ is the first fruits of resurrection life as Isaiah wrote,
     1. *On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples  
            a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine,  
            of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.****7****And he will swallow up on this mountain  
            the covering that is cast over all peoples,  
            the veil that is spread over all nations.****8****He will swallow up death forever;  
        and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces,  
            and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth,  
            for the Lord has spoken.*
  3. Oh Beloved, the three feasts look forward to the day when the LORD Jesus Christ will resurrect all HIS people and usher you into His presence with great joy.
     1. In hope of his great FEAST, we walk to the New Jerusalem singing…
        1. *Praise the Lord! for he is glorious*

*Never shall his promise fail*

*God hath made his saints victorious*

*Sin and death shall not prevail*

**Prayer**

*To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.* (Rev. 1:5-6).

**Benediction – Jude 24-25**

*Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.*

1. John Leonard helpfully noted this in chapter 5 “Party Evangelism” in *Get Real: Sharing your everyday faith every day*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Westminster Confession of Faith XXV.ii states it even more directly “The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel… consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Similarly, Ina Garten said, “I try to greet my friends with a drink in my hand, a warm smile on my face, and great music in the background, because that’s what gets a dinner party off to a fun start.” [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. By the time of Christ, the Feast of Purim (Esther 9) and the Feast of Rededication, also called Hanukkah, (John 10:22) will be a added to the Jewish calendar as well as a community fast (Yom Kippur). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. King and Stager note in Life in Biblical Israel that “The feast of Booths (*sukkot*) or Tabernacles derives its name from the Israelite practice of dwelling temporarily in booths (*sukkot*) to protect the olive orchards during the harvest (September)” (p. 354). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Vaughn Roberts uses this phrase as a summary statement of the kingdom of God in *God’s Big Picture: tracing the storyline of the Bible.* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. John 7:39 – “Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Revelation 19 vividly states, “17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, “Come, gather for the great supper of God, 18 to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great.” 19 And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. 20 And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. 21 And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.” [↑](#footnote-ref-8)