

Lord of the Sabbath

Program #36

Rejoice Before the Lord

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This is Brother Kenny wishing you another delightful and peaceful Sabbath day. Today I will begin to discuss what is typically the favorite Feast of the LORD. Besides keeping the weekly Sabbath day, also called an appointed feast before the LORD our God, this is what the LORD commands His people to do each year in Lev. 23: 33-36:

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, saying: The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days to the LORD. On the first day there shall be a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it. For seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. It is a sacred assembly, and you shall do no customary work on it.”

Notice that this Feast of the LORD is seven days long. However, there is an eighth day added on to the end of the Feast. It is not a part of the Feast of Tabernacles. It is separate and brings the best news that a follower of the Lord of the Sabbath has for His disciples. Holy convocations are commanded by God on the first day of the Feast AND on this wonderful Eighth Day.

However, what makes this Feast special and the favorite of most Feast and Sabbath day keepers is more than its length. It is the rest of the command found in Lev. 23: 39-40:

Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of the LORD for seven days; on the first day there shall be a Sabbath-rest, and on the eighth day a Sabbath-rest. And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days.

Did you catch the key word in the command that makes this the favorite appointed time of the year for the people of God? It is a time to “REJOICE before the LORD” for seven days! It is a command that His people be joyful at this time every year! How gracious is our God to us? He commands His people to take a week each year and rejoice together before Him! It is truly a holy week, a seasonal holiday of great joy.

You might say the LORD insists that His people take a one-week vacation each year! I suspect that few Human Resources Managers of organizations realize that it is the LORD, and not the owner of their business or a labor union, who is behind the idea of having at least one week of vacation each year for all who labor six days most weeks of the year.

But, there is a key difference in this analogy. It is NOT an owner paid vacation! Our LORD commands that His people use their own money to pay for their holiday and their week of rejoicing before Him. He commands them to take time off from vocational work at no pay. We find this detailed in Deut. 14: 22-23:

You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always.

Now, we realize that God commanded His chosen people Israel to tithe. The purpose of this tithe, or first tenth, was for the tribe of Levi who was NOT given an inheritance of land in the Promised Land as the other tribes were given. They were His priests and their work was to serve God and serve the other eleven tribes of Israel.

Here we see a second tithe that seems to have a different purpose. We are to eat this tithe, not give it away to the Levites who have no land or herds and flocks to produce food and drink! Let's look closer at this tithe and what it is for as we continue in Deut. 14: 24-26:

But, if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe, or if the place where the LORD your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, when the LORD your God has blessed you, then you shall exchange it for money, take the money in your hand, and go to the place which the LORD your God chooses. And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires: you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household.

Here we see some additional instruction concerning how to REJOICE before the LORD. We see that you should take from your accumulated tithe of grain, wine and olive oil, herds and flocks to eat before the LORD in the place He chooses to place His name. Thus, we can see that each family head or land-owner is to save a tithe of his produce and use it so he and his household can rejoice before the LORD at this feast.

This is considered by many to have been a second tithe for the people of Israel, a second tenth of their "increase" from the land as blessed by God during the year. Now, if you were to save a tenth of your annual income, the production from your labor (if you are not a farmer or tender of the land given to Israel) and take it to a place where God chooses to put His name and spend it in a week on "whatever your heart desires," I suspect you would have quite a joyful time on this vacation. Do you get it? God blesses you with the fruit of His commanded labor and wants you to rejoice before Him! God's love for us, His people, called sheep in His pasture, is amazing. His provision for our care and happiness is awesome, gracious and loving.

This is not some banquet or festival thrown by a land-owner, a priest or a king to which people are invited as guests. It is NOT optional. It is a command of God. Each family or household of Israel who had land was to put aside a tithe of his increase from the land that will allow them to enjoy “whatever their heart desires” in the place God chooses to place His name. They are clearly commanded to keep this Feast of the LORD for seven full days. This is a mandatory holiday vacation for God’s family and household!

Now, let us be clear, if your commanded labor in the land given to you by God results in new crops and flocks worth say \$50,000, you would have the equivalent of \$5,000 to spend on this weekly vacation for your family or household. Since a normal week would in this case produce an equivalent of \$1,000 to live on, this specific week your budget would be five times larger. If this sounds like a special week, a time to rejoice in God’s provision and blessing with your family, you have discovered a God who loves you and rewards you for your work, obedience and trust in Him each year.

Yet, few Christians that I know have EVER had a week like this. I can speak for myself here. Before turning to the Lord of the Sabbath, I never experienced such a vacation or such joy. Oh, I took a vacation most years. They were mostly to visit my, or my wife’s, mother and father, and our brothers and sisters. As our families gradually spread out across America, travel away from our own home was necessary. They were pretty much like every other week except that I did not work and instead spent time with our family.

What I did not do was rejoice before the LORD with them! What I did not do was spend several times my weekly budget to do the things my heart desired but simply could not afford to otherwise do. But, praise God, since 1990, I have learned how wonderful God’s ways and commandments are for those who obey Him.

The best weeks in my entire life have come about because I have obeyed God’s command to rejoice with my family before Him in places where He has placed His name. I have worshipped Him there, not just the first of the seven days, but each of those days. I have the warmest memories of time spent with my family in some of the most beautiful places on this planet which I would probably have never visited had I not kept the LORD’S Feast of Tabernacles.

Many of my Christian friends are surprised to learn that I no longer keep a holiday on December 25 which the mainline Churches of the world call “Christmas.” They think I miss out on a wonderful time with my family and my God. I must confess, it is they that miss out the poured out blessings and goodness of the Lord of the Sabbath. They enjoy one family day together; I enjoy seven. They spend money on gifts, some of which last a few weeks. I spend ten percent of my income in a week together creating memories which last a lifetime. So, please don’t feel sorry for Brother Kenny and what he misses by not keeping “Christmas.” Man’s ways are indeed foolishness to God as scripture says.

And, during God’s holy days and Feasts, He has taught me His way of life. I have tasted that way; and it is indeed very GOOD my friend. To have your eyes opened to the great

love and grace of God by His written and living Word and in keeping His Sabbaths makes decorating a tree and exchanging gifts, sometimes by mail not even being together in person to exchange them, seem rather limited and relatively uninspiring.

You aware that Jesus WAS NOT born on December 25, aren't you? While we do not know the exact day from Scripture, it is likely to have been during this very Feast of Tabernacles! So, I believe it is very appropriate to recognize the birth of our Savior and rejoice in it during the Feast of Tabernacles just like the angels and shepherds did almost 2,000 years ago. As December rolls around, I will be discussing this holiday and the birth of our Savior and Lord and how we might best remember it with great joy.

We also see from the context of the command that this place that God chooses may be too far away from the land that you own, harvest and store your tithe, to carry it to the place God chooses. So, God allows you to exchange your tithe of produce, herds and flocks locally for money. You can take the money to the place where God places His name for the feast and buy whatever your heart desires to enable you to eat and rejoice before Him.

From the context of God's commands to Israel, it is clear that He intends to establish a specific place where His name would dwell and the people of God would come there to rejoice before Him in a holy convocation for seven days. It seems from scripture that this place would be in the promised land called Israel which He would give to His people as an inheritance forever. More specifically, it would be Jerusalem, the city of God, where He eventually placed His name and dwelt among them.

And, brethren, if you believe the Word of God, if you are adjudged worthy to enter into the Kingdom of God on earth, you will indeed go to keep this Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. Don't believe me. Check out the prophecy of Zechariah for when all Israel, both the divided houses of Judah and Israel, will be restored to the land that God gave to their fathers. The King of kings will return to be there. It will be a time when His laws are written in their hearts, not just on tablets of stone. It will be the Day of the LORD!

And, my friends, if you don't keep the Feast of Tabernacles now to worship God as He commands, I assure you on the word of the Almighty that you will in that future day. No matter what nation you are part of then, you will keep the Feast of Tabernacles or suffer the punishment and wrath of God. It is plainly foretold in Zech. 14: 16-19:

And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, on them will be no rain.

Whatever family of the earth you are in, you will either worship the King during the Feast of Tabernacles or your nation will receive no rain; a plague sent by the LORD upon you.

One meaning of a holy convocation that I had not previously covered is that it is a time of “rehearsal.” Check out the meaning of the Hebrew word “miqra” which is Strong’s #4744 translated in English as “convocation.” You will see it can mean a public assembly before God for a “rehearsal.” And, that dear friends, is exactly what I believe we should be doing during the Feast of Tabernacles this year. We should be rehearsing it and its meaning for the day we will keep it in the Kingdom of God in Jerusalem with our King. Amen!

So, it is easy to see how this would become one of the three annual “pilgrim” Feasts of the LORD. Israelites living throughout Israel, and even those scattered in other nations of the world, were commanded to appear before the LORD in Jerusalem to worship before the LORD. We see this commanded in Ex. 23: 14-17:

Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year: You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt; none shall appear before Me empty handed); and the Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits of your labors which you have sown in the field; and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you have gathered in the fruit of your labors from the field. Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the LORD God.

For the first two pilgrim Feasts of the LORD, Unleavened Bread and The Harvest of the First Fruits, it seems that only the male heads of the household were required to come to the place where God places his name. However, for the Feast of Tabernacles, in Deuteronomy 22: 26, there is a clear reference to its celebration with one’s household.

By “household,” was meant more than your blood family members. One’s household included any servants or strangers living with you over which you were the head, including any Levite among you. It would include even orphans and widows living within your gates or towns. We can see this in Deut. 16: 13-15:

You shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles seven days, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress. And you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant and the Levite, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, who are within your gates.

So, when it came time for the Feast of Tabernacles, an extensive plan and a festive celebration away from home was envisioned for all whom you normally lived and worked with throughout the previous year. Now can you see why saving such an above-normal tithe (or money equivalent) is needed to follow God’s command?

Clearly, the idea of rejoicing and feasting “as your heart desires” suggests a time when the most exquisite of food and drink would be consumed. Wine is specifically

mentioned. You can't help but conclude that during this feast, the very best vintage would be saved or be bought for this purpose.

Even "strong" wine or similar drink that could lead toward intoxication was encouraged! Its link to rejoicing or merriment cannot be ignored. In today's vernacular we might save that bottle of "top shelf" long-aged scotch whiskey to bring to the feast and be enjoyed responsively.

This truly is a special week of eating and drinking each year. The choicest cuts of your favorite meat would most probably be brought, or bought, for consumption during the feast. However, is it possible that "whatever your heart desires" includes more than just food and drink? Let's say that, while feasting in Jerusalem, one desired a special bath or a massage. Would that be something appropriate to do at the feast of Tabernacles? Could you avail yourself of the more expensive and fragrant perfumes or lotions of the day which you would not do the other fifty one weeks of the year?

What if there are various modes of transportation or types of lodging available? Would it be appropriate to avail yourself of the very best available camel or oxen caravan or a seat in first-class on a modern jet plane? Could you rent the most exquisitely located or most comfortable type of temporary lodging for your week's stay in Jerusalem or wherever God places His name? Does a five-star hotel in Daytona Beach or Disneyworld that you could normally not afford sound pretty good and enjoyable for your family?

Indeed, some Feast goers have transformed the heart's desires of Moses' time into the heart's desires of today. So, if your available tithe will allow you to stay at a five-star hotel rather than your accustomed two-star hotel, isn't that a suitable way to rejoice before the LORD? Is renting a luxurious Cadillac, or a top line mini-van, or camper, for transportation more desirable and more joyful before the LORD than renting a Chevrolet or driving your own old and tattered vehicle to the Feast of the LORD?

Is playing a few rounds of golf during the feast at the most expensive private club in the place where God has placed His name, even though you normally play at a not so fancy public golf course at home, something you should do during this Feast? I surely think this is God's will for you His people. Rejoice with your household before the LORD!

Is what the LORD intended regarding rejoicing limited to just food and drink? Some feastgoers think so. They believe that the temporary tabernacles or booths (called sukkot) made from the limbs of trees as specified in the Leviticus command is all that is permitted by the LORD. Or, perhaps there should be a modest accommodation, such as the tents probably used by Israel in the wilderness as they wandered for forty years?

How should an Israelite today keep this Feast of the LORD? How should a Christian, as one grafted into the family and nation of God, celebrate this Feast of the LORD in Christ? I certainly do not pretend to know all the answers or speak for God, in general, or for any person's specific case. However, I do believe there are several elements of this Feast which convey for us its important examples, lessons and spiritual fulfillments in

Christ that make it a time of worship and great rejoicing of our entire household before the LORD.

The first lesson to start with is, “Why did the LORD tell Israel to keep His Feast of Tabernacles?” We find the answer in Lev. 23: 42-43:

You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

We must understand that the Feasts of the LORD were memorials of how God had intervened in the history of the people of Israel whom He chose as His nation and a peculiar people out of all the families of the earth. But, we have other commands concerning this Feast of Tabernacles that reveal an even broader and prophetic purpose in its celebration. What the Sabbaths and Feasts of the LORD represent to those who know and follow the Lord of the Sabbath, but are not of Israel, are truly inspiring.

What does a tabernacle mean to a disciple of Jesus? Can you answer that question clearly as taught in Scripture? Do you know what tabernacle you dwell in today as you celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles? Do you know what tabernacle you will dwell in during the Feast of Tabernacles in the Kingdom of God ruled by the King, our Lord Jesus?

Indeed there is much to learn about the Feasts of the LORD. They reveal great lessons of His plan of salvation for mankind. I feel pretty certain that few religious leaders of our day have a clue about this commanded Feast today, or in the coming Kingdom of God.

In closing today, I would like to share a song with you that touches my heart. It was written by a dear sister in Christ. Her name is Denise. Let her sing it for us today. I am sorry to say that this is a recording from a VHS Video Camera and is therefore not up to normal broadcast quality. None the less, I think you will enjoy its words as she sung it at a Feast of Tabernacles in South Dakota in 2002.

Do you know the great Creator?
Have you heard of His great plan?
Do you know He plans to change us
From simple mortal man?
To a spirit-born family rising up into the air,
Brethren gone before will join us.
I can't wait till we're all there!

Do you know the great Creator?
Have you heard of His great plan?
Do you know He plans a Kingdom
Spreading all across the land?
To a hurt and torn people
Needing peace and tender care.

Brethren, we'll be there to guide them.
I can't wait till we're all there!

Do you know the great Creator?
Have you heard of His great plan?
Do you know He plans a new world
Coming down from Heaven.
All the former things to pass on
No more dying no more tears.
God Himself will be there with us.
I can't wait till we're all there!

And He who sat upon the throne
Says "Behold I make all things new!"
Write this for these words are trustworthy and true,
I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.
It is done!
He who hungers I will be His God,
He will be my son.

Do you know the great Creator?
Have you heard of His great love?
Did you know He sends these promises,
From heaven up above.
To a temple fitly builded,
One another's burdens bear.
Brethren, faith and hope will bind us,
I can't wait till we're all there!

Brethren, faith and hope must bind us,
I can't wait till we're all there!