

Lord of the Sabbath

Program #16

Celebrating the Resurrection

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Hello, again. This is Brother Kenny. On today's program I am going to discuss a very controversial subject. Should we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, and, if so, when?

In previous programs, I have noted that I can find NO Biblical command for celebrating the resurrection of Jesus. I can not find any recorded Bible observance by the direct disciples of Jesus of the day that He rose from the dead.

What IS commanded is a day for remembering His DEATH as our Passover Lamb. And, Paul claimed that Jesus Himself instructed him to eat the bread and drink the cup to "proclaim His death" until He comes again. I do that as part of observing the LORD'S Feast of Unleavened Bread which Jesus always kept holy. And, Paul had the Christians at Corinth observe that spring feast long after Jesus had ascended back into heaven.

It may seem like heresy to claim to be a disciple of Jesus, and be a part of His church, and not celebrate Easter: or even His resurrection! In fact, I also DO NOT celebrate His birth on December 25 of each year which is called Christmas.

I don't mind answering why, but I believe the better question is for those who do celebrate a resurrection Sunday or a Christmas birthday of the Lord of the Sabbath. Why do you do that when neither His birth nor His resurrection is a day of commanded worship or celebration? Not only is it NOT commanded anywhere in the Bible, there is not one verse in the entire New Testament where any apostle or disciple of Jesus ever taught or held either of these as holy day celebrations!

So, from where do celebrations of Easter and Christmas come if not from the word of God? The brief answer is that these holidays were created by the Church of Rome hundreds of years AFTER the resurrection of Jesus. It was done by decrees of the "converted" Roman Emperor to standardize Christianity in the Empire. However well intended, these holidays are NOT the holy days OF the LORD. They are days ABOUT the LORD declared holy by early Church leaders. They are the teachings of men codified as doctrine without the involvement of one single apostle sent to preach the gospel! They are factually and historically the traditions of men.

The Apostle Peter, in 2Pet. 2:1, which was supposedly written about 66 AD, already warned about false teachers who would secretly introduce heresies even denying the sovereign Lord [of the Sabbath] and how He bought them salvation at great personal price:

But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.

By the third century, the way of Jesus and the teachings of His apostles were clearly changed. Not only was the Sabbath day of the Lord changed, so were the very holy day Feasts of the LORD which Jesus faithfully kept all His life! Few would deny that changes to God's commands and the way Jesus worshipped were made. But, many would claim the leaders of the Church had the authority from God to make these changes. I don't buy that. Do you?

One of the interesting aspects of both these man-made religious celebrations is the Scriptural uncertainty of exactly on what day Jesus was born and on what day He rose from the dead. It is preposterous to claim that Jesus was actually born on what we now call December 25. That IS a false teaching. The more scholarly minded Christians will readily admit it was a day chosen for a celebration. It was NOT the birthday of Jesus.

Similarly, although Scripture makes it clear about the day, and even the hour, when Jesus DIED, there is no Scripture to tell us the day or the exact hour when He rose from the dead. There was not one eye witness to His resurrection identified in Scripture. We only have accounts of various people coming to Jesus' tomb and finding it empty. The tomb was found empty late on the weekly Sabbath by Mary Magdalene according to Matthew 28: 1 (KJV). That tomb was still empty the next morning when others confirmed her report. The angel told Mary He is not here; He is risen, but the angel did not provide the day or the hour when the resurrection actually occurred. No one knows for sure when the resurrection occurred.

So, doing annual memorials on certain days of the year when the original days of the events are not verifiable from Scripture, strikes me as odd. I suspect that if God wanted us to remember these admittedly glorious events on certain days each year, He would have told us exactly when they occurred. Doesn't that make sense to you too?

Now the fact that I do not celebrate a specific day dedicated to the birth or resurrection of Jesus in no way minimizes my belief that both occurred. They are marvelous and essential to our beliefs and our worship of God in spirit and in truth.

It is my belief that Scripture suggests that Jesus was born during the Feast of Tabernacles in the fall of the year, not in the winter. During that week-long Feast, I rejoice in the glory of His birth.

It is also my belief that Scripture makes it clear that it was some time during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (called the Passover feast) that Jesus rose from the dead. So, it is during this seven-day Feast of the Lord when I remember the resurrection of Jesus and how important that event is to my God and to me. It is this type of remembrance that I wish to cover today.

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is clearly related to the Feast of Unleavened Bread. For Jesus is not only our Passover Lamb, He is the first of the firstfruits of the harvest of human souls to life eternal. We see this in 1Cor. 15: 20-23:

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.

What does it mean to have Christ be our firstfruits? Well, this further links His resurrection to the harvest festivals called the Feasts of the LORD given to Israel to be observed in all their generations.

We can see from Scripture that there is an order in the resurrections from the dead of various men. The first human resurrected from the dead in a glorified body was Jesus. The next resurrection of the dead to glory will be those who are Christ's when He comes again to earth as King of kings for His millennial reign over the Kingdom of God on the earth. It is called the first resurrection and the one we desire as Christians. There is also a resurrection to judgment of those not in Christ at the end of His 1,000 year reign. This separate amazing event is included in the Feast of Tabernacles in the fall of the year.

While there is no holy day celebration given in Scripture for the resurrection of Jesus, some see a link to the firstfruits in the Feasts of the Lord. Ponder Ex. 23: 14-19:

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 seven days, as I commanded you, at the times appointed in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt; none shall appear before Me empty); and the Feast of the 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 a year all your males shall appear before the LORD God. You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread; nor shall the fat of My sacrifice remain until morning. The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God.

Here we see how when Israel came into the Promised Land, sowed seed and harvested crops, they were to make appearances before the Lord at the Temple [the house of the LORD] bringing the firstfruits of the various crops that they harvested for food.

The first crop that grew in the land of Israel was the barley. It would be available for the spring Feast of Unleavened Bread. The firstfruits harvested for the next Feast of harvest was the wheat. This second Feast of the LORD is in the summer and is also called the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost. The third Feast of the LORD is in the fall at the end of the growing season. It is called the Feast of Ingathering of dates, grapes, olives, apples and other fruitlike delicacies.

Here is a possible link to the resurrection of Jesus as the first of the resurrected firstfruits. We see it called the sheaf of the wave offering and it is described in Lev. 23: 9-11:

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.

And, note further in Lev. 23: 14:

You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain until the same day that you have brought an offering to your God; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

Here we see that until this barley corn sheaf wave offering is made before God at the Temple, Israel was not to eat any new grain in its dwellings. There is a disagreement about just what day this offering was to be made. It certainly appears to be the day after the weekly Sabbath which occurs during the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread. Others feel it is talking about the high-day Sabbath of Abib 15 which begins the feast with the wave offering on Abib 16. This disagreement goes back all the way to the days of Christ where one position was held by the Sadducees and the other by the Pharisees. These were sects of the Jews which held a few different doctrines.

I won't give you my opinion on this issue today. It would more than fill the program and take away from my main topic of whether or not to celebrate a resurrection day and when.

What is important to note now is that whenever this day of the barley sheaf wave offering is, it is also the START of a count of the commanded "counting of the omer." This is the commanded daily grain offering for seven complete weeks. The next day, the fiftieth day, which is Pentecost, is an annual holy day of the LORD during the Feast of Weeks. Two loaves of leavened bread made from wheat are also made then as a wave offering.

So there may be a link to Jesus as the firstfruits of God's redemptive power. The Feasts of the LORD ARE ALL shadows of Jesus who was to come. It is an amazing revelation! If, as discussed previously, Jesus was resurrected late on the weekly Sabbath, this was the time when the priests would supposedly supervise the selection, cutting and reaping of the firstfruits of the barley crop with a sickle. Jesus, as our firstfruits, would then also be reaped from his earthly tomb at precisely the same hour. Then, the grain would be harvested, made into fine flour and roasted so that the next morning the new barley grain could be waved, or elevated, before the LORD by the priest.

Some assume that the priest waves this sheaf of cut stalks of barley before the LORD. Actually, what is commanded to be waved is an omer (a dry measure) of roasted grain made into flour and probably offered before God in a bowl. This would be done on

Sunday morning IF the Sabbath mentioned is the weekly Sabbath during the feast.

So, some teach that Jesus was therefore the wave offering and had to ascend to the Father for His acceptance as the sacrificial Lamb of God before the firstfruits of the harvest of human souls could begin. This is their (morning after the weekly Sabbath) link to the resurrection of Jesus. They further say that only after He ascended to the Father in heaven, and was accepted by the Father, and then returned to the earth, that He could be touched by disciples such as the doubting Apostle Thomas.

And, this supposed Sunday morning wave offering is on the same morning that the resurrected Jesus showed Himself first to Mary Magdalene. To support this view, you might look at John 20: 17:

Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'"

Others, including myself, think Jesus may have simply been warning Mary that He would soon be ascending to His Father in heaven (actually His ascension is clearly shown to have happened 40 days later) and she should not cling to Him as if He was alive again in His physical body to be with her as He was before His death. He knew His days on earth were numbered and His purpose for coming had been finished completely.

This teaching that the resurrected Jesus is the Wave Offering during the Feast of Unleavened Bread does not hold water very well. If we look back at Lev. 23: 11 in the NKJV, we see that this offering is "on our behalf." Other translations make it more clear that this offering is for YOU, the people of God. In the KJV we see "to be accepted for YOU." In the NIV we see "to be accepted on YOUR behalf." And in the NRSV we find "that YOU may find acceptance."

As you can see, the offering is NOT about the PRIEST being accepted. And, did Jesus, as our High Priest, need to be waved and offered before God to be accepted as the firstfruits? Can you believe that the Father would resurrect anyone to eternal life in the Kingdom of God if they were not already acceptable to Him? What seems apparent is that you and me too can be accepted as firstfruits along with Christ when our time for resurrection comes. We are the first fruits of the wave offering needing acceptance by God before being used by Him as witnesses and servants.

The wave offering of barley also does not fit with the celebration of the resurrection on the first day of the week (the day after the weekly Sabbath). It seems a day late. Also, the wave offering of the barley grain was never an observance by the people of God. It was done only by the priests at the Temple. Since we have no Temple or Levitical priesthood today, the barley wave offering has pretty much gone the way of the animal sacrifices. So, I see no reason to celebrate that event.

So, while there seems to be a connection to the firstfruits with the Feasts of the LORD,

there is no scripturally valid connection to a celebration of the barley wave offering to the resurrection.

The importance of the resurrection of Jesus lies not so much in a day to be celebrated, but as a blessed hope of our own resurrection to eternal life at the reappearing of our great God, and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Some disciples were convinced that Jesus would return very soon to begin His reign as King over all the Earth with His throne in Jerusalem. He would then free Israel from the Roman Empire. Yet, the apostles and disciples who knew Jesus, and even saw Him ascend to heaven from the Mt. of Olives, began to die off and Jesus had still NOT returned.

Of particular note is the teaching of the Sadducees who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. Paul put them into a very uncomfortable corner in 1Cor. 15: 12-19:

Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But, if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up---if in fact the dead do not rise. For, if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

This really was meant to give the contemporaries of Jesus a blessed hope that though they could not follow Jesus up to heaven at His time, they could after their own resurrection. This is the reason the term “fallen asleep” is used in Scripture for those who have died in Christ. It means they will awake and live again as if they were not dead but only sleeping.

There is a powerful connection between the death of Jesus as our Savior and His resurrection from the dead as our LORD. Basically, by faith we MUST believe both of them happened. It was necessary for Jesus to die as our perfect, innocent and spotless Passover Lamb to pay the death penalty for our sin. However was it necessary for Jesus to be resurrected for us to be saved from the death penalty, or for us to be resurrected?

If not, why was His resurrection important? Jesus, at His last supper with His apostles prayed to His Father for Himself. John recorded what Jesus said in John 17: 1-5:

Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I have glorified You on the

earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

These words of Jesus are so powerful and majestic, they take my breath away! Then, on that same night, Jesus prayed for His Apostles whom He sent into the world with their own work to finish. Then lastly, Jesus prayed for all who would believe in Him. That is, He prayed for YOU and ME that one day His believers would also be with Him where He was going and where He still is to this very day---in heaven with our Father.

I admit that John is my favorite writer of the New Testament. He was the Apostle whom Jesus loved. He was the one who Jesus asked to care for His mother Mary after His crucifixion. He was also the last living Apostle. He was the one to whom Jesus gave the revelation, or the apocalypse, of the ultimate unfolding of the history of man. I too love John! If you believe in Jesus as the Savior of the world, sent by God to redeem the dead in Christ from the earth, I urge you with every ounce of my being to read John 17 right after this program. You will be blessed and challenged.

Also, if you ever get a chance to visit the Greek island of Patmos, where John received the revelation from the resurrected Jesus of the end of the present age and the start of the eternal Kingdom of God, I believe it will touch you deeply and forever. I shall never forget my visit to this special place in God's marvelous creation and how it fits with His plan of salvation.

In these words of Jesus we see the bottom line concerning the importance of His resurrection. It was to glorify the Father and His power to not only give life to man, but to also give eternal life in a new glorified body to all the firstfruits whom the Father gives to Jesus, the Christ. The Word of God had emptied Himself of His prior glory before the creation of the world. The Word of God was sent by the Father to become "God in the flesh," a man like us whom we call our Savior and the Lamb of God. It was necessary for Jesus, to return to heaven, alive and glorified, to once again be with the Father and take the authority over all humanity as to whether they would also gain eternal life.

The recorded truth about the resurrection of Jesus was also helpful for us to have hope in our own future resurrection. With this blessed hope, we do not fear death, even when we see no sign of Christ's imminent return. Our grief is not so difficult to bear when we see our loved ones and brethren in Christ die their first death. We know that when He returns, as He promised He would, that we too will rise to meet Him in the air and be forever with Him for all eternity.

It seems that Peter saw the message clearly. In 1Peter 1: 1-9:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of

God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Well, I could go on for another hour or two, but I see my time is short. Let me try to summarize my answers to the questions I set forth at the start of this program. Are we commanded to have a certain annual day to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus? My answer is plainly NO; NOT according to scripture. Is it good to celebrate and study this wonderful event in the life of Jesus. Yes, indeed.

But, how and when should this be done? Scripture does not give us a clear answer. I can tell you what I have concluded and hope that you will consider it. If your study yields a better suggestion please contact me. Perhaps you can even join me on a future Program to discuss your beliefs and practice concerning the resurrection of Jesus?

What seems comfortable and Scriptural to me is to acknowledge and ponder the resurrection of Jesus during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This can be done on either of the two high-holy Sabbath days at the beginning and end of the Feast or at Bible studies during its seven days. I usually play the song He's Alive! by Dolly Parton during this feast. It moves my heart to great joy and awe in anticipation of one-day seeing my living Lord face to face.

I like to also concentrate on what Jesus said and did during the forty days He was still on the earth in His glorified body before His ascension to the Father in heaven. This can be done on one or more of the next six Sabbaths as the count to Pentecost ensues.

Until next Sabbath, may the face of our LORD shine upon you that you may be saved and resurrected to eternal life in your proper time. In order to keep the Feasts of the LORD at the commanded appointed times, you need God's calendar: not the one on your wall! We'll take a look at this issue in the next Program.