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Feasting Like Pilgrims
Deuteronomy 16:1-17
Series: Loving God in Every Way

Introduction: Take your Bible and turn with me to Deuteronomy 16, Deuteronomy chapter 16. In just a few moments we are going to gather together around the Lord's Table as we remember our Lord's sacrifice and rejoice in Him. This is one of the glorious routines of the Christian life and of the life of the Church – the Lord's Table.

Routines and rhythms are very helpful and wonderful things which are like memory aids. It is in the routine of the normal day that you are reminded to wash your body, brush your teeth, make yourself presentable to others, eat, and take care of the others in your home. You have well-established routines and rhythms that keep you on track. And I know that because I know that if you get interrupted in your routine, then you are prone to forget something. So, if your alarm didn't go off at the right time and you overslept, you probably forgot to put deodorant on or brush your teeth or pack your lunch for work, or something crucial because your routine got messed up. Routines and rhythms are essential to life. God has made us to be rhythmic and routine oriented people.

And he has also prescribed rhythmic systems and practices for his people so that they might not forget some crucial things. So, we are called to rhythmically gather on the first day of the week so that we might exhort one another to love and good works. We are called to the rhythm of teaching and learning within the church family as we grow together in the grace of Christ. We are called to the rhythm of the reading of Scriptures in our gatherings. The pattern of singing to one another psalms and hymns and spiritual songs is prescribed for us. We are given the rhythm of the preaching of the Word in season and out of season for the ongoing building of the Church. We are given the command to pattern our lives after Christ and take up our cross daily and follow Jesus. We are called to the ongoing proclamation of the Gospel to the lost so that others might be saved by His grace. We are given the pattern of baptism as people come to faith in Christ. And we are given the Lord's Table as a regular gathering of the church around the core truth which unifies us – the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. These rhythms and patterns are given to remind us.

And God gave the Old Testament people of God, the nation of Israel, patterns that they also were to follow. Specifically, in our text in chapter 16 they are 3 feasts prescribed for them in which they are to gather in the presence of God. What we find in our text is not a detailed list of all the particular laws which are to govern these feasts, but rather, we have a pastoral application of the rhythm those feasts created. In other words, Moses reminds them of some of the things they are to do and observe at each feast, but he is much more interested in directing

their hearts to love God more and more through these feasts. And that is the point of the rhythm established by God in the first place. It was never just about going through the motions of the rhythm. But the feasts established by the Lord were for the purpose of helping His people love Him as they should.

We're going to start this morning at the end of the text – so look down at verses 16-17. This is the summary statement of our section. *Read 16:16-17.*

This rhythm of 3 corporate feasts for God's people was for the purpose of returning, remembering, and rejoicing. He says that all the males must appear not because the females don't matter, but because the men are to lead their families back to the Lord. And the men should always be able to make the trek from wherever they are in the Promised Land to God's appointed place. The women might not always be able to do that because of pregnancy or infant children. But we know from verses 11 and 14 that all who could come for the feasts should come.

And they should come for the purpose of returning to the Lord, remembering what the Lord has done, and rejoicing before Him. That is the pastoral application of this rhythm to the people of God. They are to follow this pattern as a way to help them return, remember, and rejoice. And in this they will love God more and more.

The three feasts that are given here are not the only feasts they were to observe during the year. In Leviticus 23 we learn of 7 total feasts. But these 3 feasts are the ones in which they are specifically commanded to come before the Lord in the place where he will choose to place His name. And when you look at how they work out on the calendar you get an even better sense of God's good design here. They are geared to match up to the rhythm of their agrarian society in the Promised Land. The first feast, the Passover, would be the first month of their calendar year and it would be the beginning of their barley harvest. Then, after Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread, which was the week following Passover, they were to return home and finish their barley harvest and their wheat harvest. Then, 50 days later they were to return to the place where God would choose to place his name. And they would bring their offerings from their harvest and gather in God's presence and rejoice. And then, at the beginning of month seven, they would gather again, and they would bring the offering of their processed grains and their winepress which would have just been finished up. So, the rhythm set by the Lord here is gather in month one and again 50 days later, and then again in month 7. So, essentially, he is calling them to meet at the beginning of the calendar year and at the mid-point of the year. And he is also calling them to meet at key points in their harvest and farming cycles. And all of this is so that they will return to Him, remember His work, and rejoice before Him. Now that you have the overview, let me take you quickly through the details of each feast and show you the specific ways in which each feast calls for them to return, remember and rejoice.

I. Passover (1-8)

- a. The first feast is the Passover feast prescribed in verses 1-8. *Read 1-8.*
- b. *Return to His Presence – vs. 2, 5-7*

- i. In each of these three feasts I want to point out to you the call to return, to remember, and to rejoice. The Passover was a call to return to His presence in verses 2 and 5-7. They couldn't just hold this feast anywhere because this feast wasn't just about any old thing, or in commemoration of any god. To fulfill the intentions of the Passover feast throughout the generations of the Israelites, they were to return to the presence of the Lord.
 - ii. Remember who is saying this and to whom he is saying it. Moses is speaking to the generation that has known almost nothing but wandering in the wilderness. They have been pilgrims without a homeland. But now, they are about to enter into God's Promised Land, and they are going to spread out into their tribal allotments and likely never be gathered as one whole people again. So, God sets this rhythm of calling this one people back together to appear before their one God.
- c. *Remember His Redemption*
- i. And this call to return was for the dual purpose of remembering and rejoicing. And for the Passover specifically, they were called to return so that they might remember His redeeming them from Egypt. Every part of their celebration at this feast of Passover was to point them back to their experience in Egypt. It was the same time of the year that God brought them out of Egypt. They were to sacrifice the Passover lamb at twilight because that was when their forefathers had the first Passover meal and spread the blood of the lamb on the lintel and doorposts so that the angel of death would pass over their home. They were to eat no leavened bread because this all happened with such great haste. They were thrown out of the land by Pharaoh after this tenth plague ravaged the land of Egypt. They had no time for bread to rise and they lived on unleavened bread. They were not to leave any meat from the Passover lamb until the next morning to remind them of the haste of which they left Egypt.
 - ii. All of these patterns and rhythms of celebration at the Passover feast were to remind them of the great work of God to redeem them from Egyptian slavery. So, 100 years after Moses, the people were to gather in Jerusalem and sacrifice the Passover lamb and feast together with unleavened bread for a whole week. And it should all point them to their glorious past when God liberated them from another nation's control and made them his own people. It was supposed to remind them that the only reason they were in the Promised Land at all was because of God's great goodness and grace.
- d. *Rejoice Soberly*
- i. And this was to cause them to rejoice soberly in the presence of God. We see that in verse 8. They are to celebrate this feast for 6 days and then on the 7th day, they are to have a solemn assembly to the Lord their God. They are not to work on that day, but rather they are to be before God rejoicing solemnly in his presence. The eating of unleavened bread the whole week

is to remind them of the great blessing of God to put them in a land they can call their own where they enjoy the bounty of the field and the safety of towns and villages given to them by God. And this should result in some serious joy. Their remembering of what they were rescued from should give them great joy. And this great joy should be filled with sober and serious thoughtfulness. It should be a joy which is sourced in an honest contemplation of how great God is to redeem us from slavery and make us his own people. It was to be a sober joyfulness in God's presence.

II. Feast of Weeks (9-12)

a. Then in verses 9-12 we come to the feast of weeks. *Read 16:9-12.*

b. *Return to His Presence*

i. Notice again in verse 11 that the feast is to be celebrated in the presence of God. So, the first thing about this feast is that they once again are to return to God's presence. This feast is 7 weeks after the Passover feast. We learn from other texts that it is the day after the 7th Sabbath, which means that it will be on a Sunday morning sometime in late May or early June. And it will be after the wheat harvest is complete throughout the land. And it is to be celebrated with everyone who can make it from every household. But most importantly, it is to be celebrated in the presence of God – at the place where he will choose to make his name dwell there. So, they must once again pilgrimage to God's place for this feast so as to remember and rejoice.

c. *Remember His Provision*

- i. The first part of that dual purpose of returning and feasting is to remember His provision. That is what this feast is all about. It is at the end of the grain harvest and it is all about taking to the Lord a freewill offering from the harvest which reflects a deep understanding that this harvest is from God. He is the great Provider. Every kernel of grain in their possession is because God has kept his word and blessed his people.
- ii. But notice that God does not just expect his people to remember that on their own. No, he knows they are made from dust. He remembers their frame, and therefore he gives them this rhythm of the feast of weeks. It is to be a yearly pattern in which, if they do what God has said, they can't help but remember that all they have has been given them by a gracious and merciful God.
- iii. This feast has also been connected with the incident of the giving of the Law at Mount Horeb. It is thought that it was about 50 days after the Passover that the people camped near Mount Horeb and God called for them to assemble there and spoke to them and covenanted with them to be their God and they his people. And he spoke to them His ten words, or the Ten Commandments, and called them to the abundance of life that was available to them if they would walk by faith according to His Word.

iv. So, at this feast of weeks they are not just remembering the bounty of God's provision for them, but they are also remembering the gift of God's Word to them. And as Moses has already told them back in Deuteronomy 8:3 – man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. So, this feast is a celebration of God's provision of physical food, but more than that it is a celebration of God's provision of spiritual food through His Word.

d. *Rejoice Cheerfully*

i. And this should cause them to rejoice cheerfully before the Lord. As they remember that He is the great provider of all, they can't help but abundantly rejoice in His goodness. When they see the overwhelming abundance of God's blessing, they are to respond in verse 10 with a tribute of a freewill offering from their hand. This is what they are to bring to the feast – a freewill offering from their own harvest. It is probably connected to the tithe offering we talked about in chapter 15. But here it is described as a freewill offering. Those are terms describing an open hand and a soft-heart before the Lord. Remembering God's provision should produce a rejoicing marked by great cheerfulness before the Lord.

III. **Feast of Booths (13-15)**

a. And then the last feast in this yearly rhythm is the feast of booths in verses 13-15.
Read 16:13-15.

b. *Return to His Presence*

i. Did you notice that for the 5th time in this section they are called to have a feast in the place that the Lord will choose? In other words, here is another leg in the rhythm of yearly worship before God. They were to be all together as God's people in God's place to remember God's blessing. And the call in verse 14 is for all to come from every household. All who are able are to gather in God's presence to feast before Him.

ii. And this feast, we find out from other texts, is the feast where they create booths, or small tabernacles, to live in for this week long celebration. And it is at the end of the farming year before they head into the winter months, after they have finished processing their grain on the threshing floor and have finished harvesting the grapes from their vineyards and treading them in the winepress. Then they are to come and gather before the Lord.

c. *Remember His Blessing*

i. And in this returning, they are to be remembering God's great blessing to them. At the end of the farming year they are to gather all together one last time to remember that everything they have received in the past year – everything that will sustain them through the coming months – all of it is from the Lord's gracious hand. And as they look back on the past year of blessing, according to verse 15, they are also by faith believing that the coming year will be filled with God's blessing as well.

ii. And by living in tents for a week they are also remembering in a very tangible way their history as sojourners and pilgrims. They are once again reminded of God's great blessing to rescue them from slavery in Egypt and to lead them to the Promised Land. The only reason they have a harvest to rejoice in is because of God's powerful work to bring them into this land that flows with milk and honey.

d. *Rejoice Abundantly*

i. And so, this should cause them to rejoice abundantly at the end of verse 15. They are to be altogether joyful. The abundance of God's blessing in the past year is to be reflected in the abundance of their joy-filled worship. They are to bring before the Lord a portion of that blessing and they are to offer it before Him with abundant joy.

Conclusion & Application:

So, maybe you are delighted to learn of these OT feasts, but you are wondering, what does this have to do with us? Well, I'm glad you asked. In these feasts we see a picture of our Savior and we see a pattern for our own worship of the Lord.

We see a picture of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ in each of these three feasts. You are probably already ahead of me here, but just think through this with me for a second. All three of these feasts foreshadow a unique aspect of the character, nature, and work of Jesus Christ our Lord.

- Passover – Jesus is seen in the Passover celebration in that He is the sinless Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world. The Passover lamb had to be without blemish or spot, and in the killing of the lamb the blood was to be used to cover their house and protect them from judgment. And the flesh was to be entirely eaten by the family as an expression of their faith that this lamb had died in their place as it were. Instead of the firstborn in the household dying, the lamb had died, and God's judgment was assuaged, and the death angel passed over. Not only that, but the unleavened bread associated with Passover is a picture of the affliction of Egypt and of the slavery they left in Egypt. And in this Christ is pictured in that His body was unleavened and it was struck with great affliction so that we might be freed from our slavery and made unleavened before the Lord. And so here, you have the perfect setup for the Lord's Table. This last supper that Jesus had with his disciples was at the Jewish feast of Passover. They had sacrificed a lamb and had offered its blood at the Temple. And then they gathered around the table and ate the unleavened bread – this bread of affliction – and ate the meat of the lamb – and Jesus take the bread and the cup and says to them that they are to remember him in the days to come when they eat this bread and drink this cup. The bread is a symbol of his body – sinless, pure, and undefiled – which was broken for them at the Cross of Calvary. And the cup was a symbol of his blood which was to be shed for the remission of their sins. This Passover is a beautiful picture some 1500 years before Christ which was to be observed every year by his people to help them return to the Lord, remember His redemption, and rejoice soberly before Him.

- The festival of Weeks – or better known as Pentecost – also points to the glory of Jesus Christ and the goodness of God. You’ll remember that it was at this feast in Jerusalem, some 50 days after the death of Jesus, and 48 days after the resurrection of Jesus, and some 10 days after the ascension of Jesus – that the disciples were gathered together in one place in Acts 2. And similar to the Jews’ experience at Mt. Horeb, there was this supernatural intervention as the house was filled with a mighty sound from Heaven like a rushing wind and tongues of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them and they were filled with the Spirit of God and they began to speak in languages which they did not know as the Spirit gave them utterance. Instead of God speaking with a great and thunderous voice, He sent His Spirit upon His disciples and they spoke for Him as His witnesses on that day. And what did they say? Did they rehearse the Old Covenant Law of Moses? Did they rehearse the 10 commandments? No – they spoke of God’s great plan of salvation through this Jesus of Nazareth who had proven himself to be the Messiah. They were given a powerful Spirit to proclaim an authoritative word about the Word of God who had taken on flesh and had given his life for sinners. So, at this feast where the Jewish people remembered God’s rescuing them from slavery and his provision for them in the grain harvest and His life-giving Word given to them at Mount Horeb – God sends His Spirit and through the apostles He preaches Christ as the life-giving Word upon whom they must believe!
- And then, this feast of tabernacles is a picture of Christ in that He too came to earth and tabernacled among us. It is a picture of His incarnation into human flesh. He pilgrimaged from the glories of Heaven into humanity so that we might know God through Him. And in tabernacling among us He earned the right to be our glorious Savior through whom we will have life and have it abundantly. Remember that the Jews of the Old Testament were to bring an abundant gift to the Lord at the feast of booths to celebrate his abundant supply. Well, beloved, in Christ Jesus, we have been completely supplied. So much so that we can say with Paul “My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”

The great lesson of these three feasts for us then is to see afresh the glory of our Savior. He is our Passover Lamb and our bread of affliction. He is the Word of God by which we can have true and eternal life. He is the fullness of God’s blessing to us in that he tabernacled among us and has stored up for us eternal riches in bountiful supply. Therefore, we should worship Him! And this worship of our great God should follow the pattern prescribed in this text in Deuteronomy 16. Not the rhythm of time or the rhythm of practice, but the rhythm of principle. The pattern of returning to the Lord and remembering the Lord’s work and rejoicing before the Lord should be true of our worship. Every time we gather together, we are gathering before the Lord – in his very presence. We are coming together with one unifying truth – the worthiness of God our Savior. And we are coming together to remember His great work to supply all things for us, and especially His work to redeem us and make us His own people. Therefore, the message of the Cross of Christ parks itself front and center in our gatherings because we must be regularly reminded of the high price that was paid to save us from sin and to give us abundant life.

And this gathering to return and remember, must always be marked by great rejoicing. Beloved, there is no biblical allowance for joyless worship of God. It is to be sober-minded and serious. It is to be abundant and cheerful. And it is to be costly in that we should never come before the Lord empty-handed in worship. We should give as we are able to the Lord, and in New Testament terms that includes much more than our money. That includes the great gift of our lives to the Lord – week after week after week after week. Having returned to the Lord and having remembered His great character and work we are to cheerfully rejoice in His great goodness to us! Let's pray.