

The Early Spring Feasts of Israel

Blazing Shadows of Leviticus

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Bible Text: Leviticus 23:4-14; 1 Corinthians 5-15
Preached on: Sunday, July 10, 2016

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Turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Leviticus. If you're wondering how much longer in Leviticus, well, we're into Leviticus 23 and Leviticus is 27 chapters long and I think probably by the end of summer we'll be wrapping up the book of Leviticus. We're going to be a couple weeks here in Leviticus 23 because my suspicion is that most of you once you get past the Passover and maybe the Day of Atonement, it gets a little bit fuzzy on the rest of the feasts of Israel. I know I am a little bit fuzzy on the feasts of Israel, or I was before getting deeper in this study and it brings forth some tremendous gems.

In this chapter, we find the Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Firstfruits, the Feast of Weeks which later on is referred to as the Feast of Pentecost, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and then finally the Feast of Booths, b-o-o-t-h-s, just to be clear, Booths. We're going to break those down into three segments. This week we're going to look at the early spring feasts because there are three that fit together and all happen on the same week and in a couple weeks we are going to come back again and we're going to look at the late spring feasts, the Feast of Pentecost, and the Feast of Weeks, and then finally we'll look at the three that came together at the end, Trumpets, and Booths, and the Day of Atonement. But let's open with a word of prayer.

Father God, we give thanks for your word. Lord, we know that we have your Apostle Paul write that all Scripture is God breathed and that it is all useful, Lord, so help us not to despise any part of it. Lord, even as we come to these very old-fashioned sort of portions that talk about the feasts in Israel and that seem so distant to us, Lord, I pray that you might first give our attention to this word. Father, I pray that your Spirit might work upon the hearts and minds, Father, that we might be impacted and transformed by the reading and the proclamation of your word. Lord, that this promise that you have made that he who has begun a work in you will carry it on until the day of Christ Jesus, Lord, that that might be fulfilled, Lord, in part through the hearing of and meditating upon your word this Sunday morning. So, Father, I commend this congregation to you into the hearing of your word in Jesus' name. Amen.

Leviticus 23. We'll get to the passage in a moment but first I want to invite you to change your perspective for a moment. It's hard when we read about these various feasts to really

wrap our mind around it because they seem so foreign to our own experience but if you could go back not very far, maybe 200 years ago, to this place right here in Walsh when your ancestors were cutting down trees to make fields and busting up sod for the first time, you would discover that your ancestors 200 years ago had more in common with the Israelites in Leviticus than they do with you. Does that seem strange? Think about this for a moment. They didn't have any sort of penicillin or hospitals, not really any sort of doctors, certainly no tests that could be done, and the surgeries that were done were done without anesthesia. They lived without electricity and without modern communication devices and they were utterly dependent on the harvest coming forth. A drought year like the year we're having right now would cause them great concern because they didn't just import a ship of grain from Russia to make bread with or go down to the grocery store and buy themselves a jug of milk, everything was dependent on what they could grow and so it is with the people of Leviticus. They realized that they are utterly dependent on God. For 40 years they wandered in the wilderness where there is no place to grow a crop and so they were dependent on God sending down manna from above and when they go into the Promise Land, they have land to grow things on but you are very much dependent. We can't even begin to fathom on the crop coming forth and when that crop comes forth, that the relief of saying, "Yes, we will eat for this next year." So they realized they were dependent on God, and your ancestors 200 years ago, perhaps the reason churches were fuller in those days is because they could not get away from the sense that they were very much dependent on God. And though you may have cell phones in your pockets and have driven here in automobiles and have bank accounts and saving accounts and investment accounts, they were utterly dependent upon God for everything.

So it is with Israel that God weaves worship into the very warp and woof of their life. As they lived through their seasons of harvest, all of these feasts connected in some way with the fact that God is sustaining them, that God is keeping them alive, that God is utterly essential to the continuation of the life either in the wilderness or in the Promised Land. Some of these feasts or festivals are about feasting and some of them are about fasting. Some of them command certain foods that must be eaten. Take a lamb, sacrifice a lamb and roast a lamb in such a way. And some of the commandments, they are not to be eaten, "Rid your house of all leaven for the Feast of Unleavened Bread." And over the next few weeks we will get into these things. But all of this is intended to lead Israel and I believe to lead us as we study this, back to God and to his gracious provision.

So let's look here at these first three feasts that are listed after the Sabbath day. Verse 4 of Leviticus 23,

4 "These are the appointed feasts of the LORD, the holy convocations, which you shall proclaim at the time appointed for them. 5 In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight, is the LORD's Passover.

Pause there for a moment. This is not January 14th. Israel's first month is a month called Nissan and it corresponds...they had a lunar calendar and so Nissan corresponds with

somewhere in the middle of March through about the middle of April. Have you ever wondered why is Christmas always the same but Easter seems to shift all over the place? It's because Easter, our celebration of Easter, is tied still to that lunar calendar that Israel follows and so our celebration of Easter almost always corresponds with the Jewish celebration of Passover.

So we've got this first instruction, it's very short, on the Passover. There are a lot of instructions on the Passover. I'll talk about those in a moment.

5 In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight, is the LORD's Passover. 6 And on the fifteenth day of the same month [the next day] is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. 7 On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work. 8 But you shall present a food offering to the LORD for seven days. On the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work." 9 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 10 "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land that I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest, 11 and he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, so that you may be accepted. On the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. 12 And on the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb a year old without blemish as a burnt offering to the LORD. 13 And the grain offering with it shall be two tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, [by the way, that's double the normal grain offerings,] a food offering to the LORD with a pleasing aroma, and the drink offering with it shall be of wine, a fourth of a hin. 14 And you shall eat neither bread nor grain parched or fresh until this same day, until you have brought the offering of your God: it is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

Let's take just a moment to deal with this text because some of the text, it's hard to hear and try to picture in your mind what you're seeing, but for the Israelite, this was every single year. When we get to the end of chapter 23, what we'll hear is God say three times a year every male in Israel is to present themselves at the place that God has appointed for his tabernacle and later his temple. We hear these words "feasts, feasts, feasts," and you go, "You know, seven days of unleavened bread doesn't quite sound like the kind of feast that we think of." But the language, you have the word "feast," comes from a word that sounds an awful lot like the word "hajj," which is a word that the Muslims use for a pilgrimage. Their languages are similar. It seems that God has said these are kinds of pilgrimages when Israel is to present themselves again altogether in the worship of God.

Two of these early spring feasts are based on Israel's history if we are standing in the book of Leviticus. They're looking back at something that happened in the book of Exodus and one of those feasts is looking forward to something that hasn't yet happened. It says when you come into the land, that's the Feast of Firstfruits because you can't wave a jar of manna, well, I guess you could, but God provided that in a different sort of way.

But when you come into the land, when you come into the land, it takes the land to grow something in, this is when the first thing that comes forth and it's going to be barley because barley is the first thing that matures right around this time of the year. Go out and harvest it. The part there at the end that says, "and you shall not eat meat or bread nor grain parched or fresh until this same day, until you have brought the offering of your God," you say, "Well, what are they supposed to eat?" I mean, after all, the Feast of Unleavened Bread started the day before. How do you make unleavened bread if you're not allowed to eat the barley? You're not to eat any of the new harvest. You're eating last year's food, last year's grains. That's what you're going to make your bread with until the day of firstfruits when you bring in the sheaf. This is the firstfruit, this is the evidence that God is going to sustain us. God has brought forth something from the ground and we present this to him and it's very visual. They are waving this sheaf of barley around and saying, "Look, God has brought this forth and as God has brought forth one, so will he bring forth many." And after that they are able to eat. That's the Feast of Firstfruits.

But before that, we have the Feast of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and those two things are linked together. The Passover has to do with the sacrifice of a lamb and there are very specific instructions for how that lamb is to be killed and how it is to be cooked and how it is to be eaten, and there is a reason for that. We'll get there in a moment.

But what's this whole thing about unleavened bread? Do you know what leaven is? It's a cooking science thing. How many of you have ever cooked with leaven? Leaven is not quite exactly the same as yeast. How convenient it would have been back in the Old Testament days or for that matter 200 years ago, if you could have gone down to the grocery store and bought a little packet of yeast and warmed up some water and sprinkled the yeast in and stirred it around with your fork, waited for a few minutes and just kneaded that in your bread? But many of you here have probably cooked with leaven before although now it's not a necessity, it's something people do as a pastime. Have you ever cooked sourdough with sourdough starter? So sourdough starter is leaven. Here's how leaven was made. How are you going to leaven or make your bread rise? Well, it's very simple: you need some flour, you need some water. You mix those two things together. You set it out and there is a little bit of a process to it. Most people will tell you it takes about two weeks to really get it going and you kind of have to hold it the right way and hope that you're kind of good at it, and what it's actually doing is it's capturing wild yeast that just floats through the air. And you stir it around and eventually you get this thing started and then every time you make bread, you put in your starter and you knead it all up. You let it rise. You take a little bit out and put it back in and you bake your bread, and every week when you make your bread for your family, you get a little leaven and you knead it in. It's an interesting thing, if you knead some leaven into your bread and you think two minutes afterwards, "Whoa, I didn't want leavened bread," you're in trouble because you can't get it out. It's a serious kind of thing that this leaven works its way through.

Now listen, the Israelites ate leavened bread almost all the time so leaven is not absolutely synonymous, it's not exactly the same as sin though the Israelites dealt with it

on the week of Unleavened Bread as a picture of sin. For the most part, leaven was just how you got common bread. You know, I think most people like ?? bread rather than flatbread. You get those little air pockets in it so that it is a little nicer to eat when you spread your butter, the butter has something to melt into, but the process of leavening bread is actually a process of fermentation. You cook the leaven in and what the leaven is doing is it is actually eating up sugars and giving off gas which is causing it to rise. It's a process of fermentation and it works its way in.

So it became a prime illustration for the believers in the Old Testament and it carries on into the New Testament to look and see leaven as a good illustration for the effect of sin; that sin has a way of working its way into a life and if it is not set aside, it will work its way in and begin corruption everywhere. It's not that you can have sin over in this corner of your life and it isn't anywhere else. If you are cherishing up a little bit of sin here, it's starting to work its way through and so God said to Israel, "In order for this to be clear to you, one week a year you will cleanse all leaven out of your house." We have thrown all of it out. There is nobody left in Israel that has a little bit of starter.

And it's interesting, that means that Israel ate unleavened bread probably for about three weeks of every year because they had the Feast of Unleavened Bread but since you weren't allowed to have leaven in your house throughout that entire time, it is going to take about two weeks to get your starter started again. And can you see how a people who is working through this practice is given cause to reflect on the meaning of something? It's very tactile. I mean, you are sitting there eating unleavened bread and your kids are going, "Mom, why are we eating unleavened bread? Dad, why do we eat unleavened bread?" It's an opportunity there to talk about how it is that we have swept out the sin of our life. We do not desire to have any sort of sin or corruption in our life and leaven has a process of fermentation, corruption and we don't want that. "So, kids, we have put it aside and we're fasting in a way, we're not depriving ourselves of food but we are depriving ourselves of leaven in order that we might reflect on these things."

Now, I want you to see something. I want you to see that the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, these things are intricately linked and one precedes the other and all these must precede the other because at the beginning, it's the reason, the Passover is the reason that the children of Israel were eating unleavened bread. Most of you know this story but let's touch on it again. For 400 years Israel has lived as slaves in Egypt and they have been crying out and God has sent Moses to say to Pharaoh, "Let my people go." At the same time, he has hardened Pharaoh's heart so he will not let them go. We see that is a different sermon and we will get into that some other time. But God is sending plague after plague, nine plagues have come: blood in the water, frogs everywhere, gnats and flies, dead livestock, boils on the people, hail on crops, locusts in the field, darkness in the sky and still Pharaoh says, "You will not go." Nothing has changed. In fact, things seem to be getting worse for Israel, not better.

But this is the night of the Passover. This is the night when Moses has given to Israel God's instructions. He says, "You are to take a lamb," they took it four days earlier. "This lamb that you have had in your home, you're to take this lamb and you are to sacrifice the

lamb and you are to pour out the blood into a bowl and you are to take a brush and you are to brush that blood onto the door posts and the lintel of your home, and then you are to take this lamb and you are to roast it in fire. Not boil it or eat it raw. Roast it in the fire. Don't break any of its bones. And you are to sit down and you are to eat." Kids, this is the one time when your mom and dad aren't saying, "Slow down. Don't eat with your mouth open." In fact, the opposite is true. Here are the instructions from Exodus 12:11. The Lord speaks through Moses and says, "In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD's Passover."

So there is a whole family and it is the strangest meal they have ever had because they have roasted this lamb and it is there and everybody in Israel is having roast lamb, except for slaves that probably wasn't a common occurrence. Everybody is eating it as fast as they can. Not only that, dad is sitting there with his staff in his hand. They had their coats on, their belts tied, their shoes on their feet and nobody is saying, "Kids, slow down. Eat. Eat fast. Fast. Fast." Why? Because this is the night of Passover. On this night God's destroying angel will pass through Egypt and he will slay the firstborn, the firstborn child, the firstborn animal, save in the houses that are marked with blood; in the house where some substitute has been sacrificed and the blood has been placed on the doorpost and lintel, he will pass over. So it is they are eating in haste with all their traveling clothes on and I'm sure they're saying, "I wonder what this is all about?"

Then the cries start to go up through Egypt, a cry from every home that is not marked with blood, that has not had a substitute sacrificed on their behalf. A cry goes up and before the sun comes up, in the middle of the night, Moses and Aaron are summoned out of their room, "Pharaoh wants to see you." They go through the darkened streets of Egypt hearing the cries coming from the homes of every family that has lost somebody and finally come face-to-face with Pharaoh for the very last time. For the very last time Moses will look at Pharaoh, will listen to Pharaoh and Pharaoh says to him, "Out! Go out from among my people, both you and the people of Israel! Go serve the Lord as you have said. Take your flocks and your herds as you have said and be gone!"

So it is that Israel who has just eaten their Passover lamb, who has put the blood on their door posts and lintel, who already are dressed in their traveling clothes are summoned out of their houses and before the sun comes up are heading out of Egypt on their way. They have been redeemed from slavery. They have been bought back. They had been made the nation, the people of God, and all of that is based on God's gracious act and all of that has been signified through the sacrifice of a Passover lamb.

The lamb, the Passover lamb, is the cause that leads to this effect of unleavened bread because who has time to leaven bread when you are running out of Egypt, walking out of Egypt because they didn't have to run? They've got their bowls packed on their backs, their leavened bread needs to mix it in, you've got to sit there and wait for a couple of hours while it rises and punch it down and divide it into loaves and let it rise again. Nobody has time for that so instead they're mixing up a little bit of flour and a little bit of salt and a little bit of water and making it quickly and people are eating it. Never get

these two reversed. It would have been absolutely ridiculous, the people would have said, "I don't know what this is all about," if they had been commanded to eat unleavened bread but no Passover had happened. "Why are we eating unleavened bread?" But it made sense to the people, "We are eating unleavened bread because we are traveling on the road and nobody has time to work in the leaven."

Now, of course, the festival of Firstfruits didn't happen at that time. In fact, the second year in the book of Numbers, we read that in the first year of the month on the second year after the Exodus on the 14th day, the people observed the Passover and they observed the week of unleavened bread but we hear nothing about the ??? because of course you couldn't celebrate the festival of Firstfruits because you had no firstfruits to celebrate with. But this is where systematic Bible reading pays off because we come to the third time that the Passover is mentioned: the first time in Exodus; the second time in Numbers in the second year; the third time we hear it in reference to Passover is in the book of Joshua 5. Joshua 5, we read that Israel goes into the Promise Land. It has been 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. Finally they are brought into the Promised Land. Their males all undergo circumcision and then before they even come to the city of Jericho, before they have entered into any sort of battles to take the land, we read this in chapter 5, verse 10, "While the people of Israel were encamped at Gilgal, they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening on the plains of Jericho. And the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. And the manna ceased the day after they ate of the produce of the land. And there was no longer manna for the people of Israel, but they ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year." This is the providential care of God.

There are two seasons of harvest in the Middle East: there is the early harvest, that's the field harvest when the barley comes out first and then the wheat comes up after; and then later on in the fall time is the fruit harvest when the grapes and the olives are harvested. And God brings his people into the Promised Land on the first month of their year, the month of Nissan, in order that they might celebrate the Passover, but for this time something different happens. Rather than simply having the Passover lamb followed by the week of Unleavened Bread, God has brought them into a land that they did not sow but which has come forth in harvest. They arrive in the Promised Land at the beginning of barley harvest and so this entire tribe of a million people has food to eat that they cut from fields and for this entire year as they are doing battle with the Canaanites, they are eating the crops that the Canaanites planted. This is God's providential care for them.

And as you read this passage, you say it never actually says that they celebrated the Feast of Firstfruits and you're right, it doesn't, but here's what it does say: it says that right before this that they obeyed the Lord and circumcised all their males so that they could eat the Passover feast, and then they had the Passover feast, and then it says that they had unleavened bread, and then it says that they ate of the food of the land and that the manna stopped and I think that in that place, what we expect to see is that they brought forth a sheaf of the first barley cut down and held it before the Lord and said, "Here, here is the provision of the Lord and much more will come."

We could wrap up at this point, okay? We could wrap up at this point because I think you see here the three sacrifices and what they meant for Israel. The Passover meant God has acted and has redeemed us. The Feast of Unleavened Bread speaks of my responsibility because God has redeemed me, because God has saved us, he has thrust us out of Egypt to be an entirely new nation, we act differently and we're going to sweep out the leaven and we're going to live in a different sort of way. We're going to live as the people of God and part of that is intentionally setting aside leaven for this week. Then finally, so I'm looking backwards, God's redemptive action; I'm looking present, here is how I'm living right now, directed toward holiness; and I'm looking to the future, God is going to provide for us and continue to provide for us. I think at that point we have rightly exegeted the first few verses of Leviticus 23 except that Jesus comes along on the road to Emmaus and starts to speak to his disciples that are there and open their minds to see the things that were written of him beginning with the law and the prophets and they say, "Didn't our hearts burn within us." And when Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees, he says, "Moses wrote of me," so I think there is just a little bit more here.

It's interesting to me that the Apostle Paul I think has Leviticus 23 on his mind as he writes to the Corinthians because all three of these feasts show up in the book of 1 Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 5, we find a shocking situation that has happened in the church. There is a man involved in an incestuous relationship and the church has thus far been fine with it and Paul writes to rebuke them and he says, "Turn this man over to Satan. Put this man out of the church. You have wrongly understood it if you believe that a person can live in this way and simply embrace it as if all things are fine. Turn this man over to Satan that he might learn to repent." Then he goes on to diagnose how this turn of events came upon the church and he brings up Passover and Unleavened Bread. Here it is, 1 Corinthians 5:6, he says,

6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

You know that's true. It doesn't take a lot of leaven, you work a little bit of leaven into the loaf and leave it alone and it leavens the whole thing. "Don't you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?"

7 Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. 8 Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Here's what Paul has to say to the church as he talks about leaven: realize how pervasive sin is. If we have known sin in our midst and nobody deals with the known sin, eventually what happens is people look and say that's okay and it begins to work its way in. Sin is pervasive. Sin corrupts, even secret sin. If you have a secret sin that you keep that you know about and you don't tell anybody else about, you kind of put it in a little corner of your heart and say to God, "That's mine. Just leave that alone," it's not going to stay there. Sin is pervasive. Sin corrupts. It starts working its way in.

So what do we do? Some people would say, "Well, let go and let God." That's not what Scripture says. Scripture says to cut it out. Jesus says if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. I don't think that he meant that you should literally tear out your eye or cut off your hand. If he did, there should be a lot more half blind and lame people around here in the province. If I gouge out both of my eyes, he doesn't deal with the fact that sin, the sin of the eye, is affecting me because my mind is still able but I hear Jesus say it and it's as if Jesus wants me to deal radically with sin. Paul wants us to deal radically with sin. He wants you to cut it out, throw it away, sweep it away. This is our responsibility. God commands his church, "Cleanse out your old leaven." So impure thoughts present themselves before you, throw them away and cry to God and say, "I have some impure thoughts."

You know, wild yeast is a really good illustration of this because you have all had this experience, you're in prayer, you're in your Bible meeting and all of a sudden a thought comes into your mind. Where did it come from? You didn't decide to put it in there. It's like wild yeast floating along and it settles down and you've got a couple of choices on that, you can go, "Well, I didn't decide about that but here it is so we're just going to dwell on this thought for a little while," or you can say, "God, I don't want this thought in my mind." Throw it out. Throw it out. Confess those things. I desire purity. Old grudges against people pop up so confess those things and give them up. Don't dwell on the old grudge. Discontent makes you wonder whether God is really good, whether he really cares about you because somebody else's life seems to be going so well and you just seem to have trouble all the time and you're tempted to say, "God, I don't know if you're good." That's covetousness working its way. Get rid of that.

Now if we stop right here, do you know what we've got? If we stop right here, we've got ?? We have the religions of every world system right at this point. Every world system says to you, "Go and deal with your sin. Go get rid of the problems. Go get rid of whatever it is that in particular God says you shouldn't do. You're responsible so go and be responsible and deal with these things." If we stopped right here, that's what we've got and Christianity, praise God, doesn't stop right here. This is what it says in that passage, "Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump," that's what we've said so far, but then it says this, "as you really are unleavened." So how did that happen? How is it that Paul can say, Sam, sitting in the front row, is already unleavened, so cleanse out the leaven? How did that happen? How does a 13-year-old boy born into sin become unleavened? Well, it says in the next line, "For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed." Already Jesus Christ has been sacrificed. Already Jesus Christ has done what is necessary to cleanse us and to make us holy and so since he has already done this work, since he has already accomplished the work that needs to be done, since we are already justified in him, what should I do? I should live to my reality. I should live with my focus and my desire fixed on being just like Jesus. "Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed."

So go back to Israel for a moment. Why is Israel eating unleavened bread in the wilderness? Because the Passover has happened. The cause was the Passover, the effect was unleavened bread. The cause was God's gracious redeeming action of Israel, bringing them out of Egypt. God did that. All the unleavened bread in the world that they had eaten couldn't effect an escape from Egypt but God has done it. God has graciously redeemed them and the effect is that they are eating unleavened bread. God has acted. He redeems. We respond with faith and then with obedience. So I deal with my sin but not in hopes that God might respond to my action. It's not some great divine beauty contest of the soul, that the person who is most righteous and the person that is most just, the person that deals most with their sin and God looks and says, "Well, you know, they've got enough. I think that maybe that person is good enough and I'll do the rest." No, no, no. God has acted. God has already done the work of redemption. Christ our Passover lamb is sacrificed and since he has been sacrificed, I have been made unleavened. My sin has been dealt with and so now I am living in that reality. Does that mean that I will never be tempted? No. What do I do when I find this leaven starting to work its way, when I find that I have fallen into some sinful pattern of behavior? I say, "Oh well, Jesus saved me so I guess this is okay." No, I cleanse it out. I say, "I don't want this. I want holiness. I'm going to follow after Jesus Christ. I want to be like him. Because of Christ's sacrifice, I cast away impure thoughts. Because of Christ's forgiveness, I refuse to live in anger or bear a grudge. Because of Christ's gift of grace, I am content with what God has given to me."

That leaves only one other spring festival in Israel left, the Feast of Firstfruits. So think again for a moment about the sequence of events in Israel. Think about the sequence of events when they first came into the land and they found the barley harvest already begun, or the barley in the field ready to be harvested. So what you get is Passover in the evening, and on the next morning begins the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and they have already cleansed out all the leaven from their houses, and on the day after that, they would bring forth the sheaf of the firstfruits that it might be waved. As God has given this sheaf of firstfruits, so they believe God is going to greatly multiply the same. God is using physical acts to depict spiritual realities.

We've gone over this before but for just a moment again, thousands of times Israel has gone through this. Thousands of times the Passover lamb is brought and slain and they remember a substitute was slain so that the destroying angel passed over us and we were redeemed from our captivity and went out into the wilderness. And thousands of times they have eaten unleavened bread and they are reminded that we have been redeemed out of slavery, brought as a people of God and we live to an entirely new reality, sweep out the leaven. And thousands of times people have cut down the barley in their field and before they ate any of it, they brought a sheaf in and waved it before the Lord saying, "Lord, you have done this once and we believe that you will greatly multiply this over and over again that we will be sustained by it." Those are the acts that they have seen done thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands of times, 1,500 times at least, the Passover has come that they could have done this, that they could have witnessed this.

Finally we get to this day when on the Passover, the Lord Jesus Christ is brought and he is crucified. Christ our Passover lamb is crucified. We know this, that he was crucified on Friday because the next day was Passover and the Jews came and said, "We don't want him hanging on the cross over the Passover. Take him down." So they took him down and they buried him and the next day is Passover, and the day after Passover is the day when the Jews would have brought in their sheaf, their firstfruits, to wave it before the Lord, believing, "If I have one sheaf like this God will greatly multiply the same." And on that day as the Jews bring in that sheaf of barley, that is Sunday morning.

1 Corinthians 15, Paul, perhaps the greatest Old Testament scholar of his day says, "How am I going to describe to the people what the meaning of resurrection is?" 1 Corinthians 15:20. Paul, he knows the Old Testament better than anybody in this room, has this thought in his mind. Here is the picture that Israel has seen 1,500 times over, that has been done so often that even the people in Corinth will have some understanding of it. How do I describe the pain of resurrection? 1 Corinthians 15:20,

20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

Here is the equation that God gave to Israel, it's basic mathematics: you have one, bring that in and wave it before me in the faith that if you have been given one sheaf, I will greatly multiply the same. Then he sends Paul to say, "You know this equation so apply it here. Jesus Christ has risen from the dead and if you have one who has been raised like this, I will greatly multiply the seed." Praise be to God. Here is our faith, the faith that Jesus Christ has been crucified and that I have been redeemed, that that is God's work not mine, that he has done it. So what is the result? That I live each day in the reality of this. I do not want to live in sin. I want to live to holiness. God has done this. Let me live. That's my reality and I look forward to the day when I will be raised. That changes everything in how I live, the fact that I will be raised. Christ is the firstfruits and God is going to multiply that on the earth.

Father, grant that this might be fruitful food for thought. Lord, you know the situations of the lives that are here before you today. Lord, you know the one that needs to hear that message that Christ is the sacrifice and a substitute that can set the prisoner free. Father, you know the one who is sitting here today in this church that has some sin in their heart that they think they can hold but, Lord, Father I pray that for that one they might hear this message and know that they must thrust it out, that they must cut it off, that they must sweep it away. Lord, we must live toward holiness. That's what you have called us, to be holy. Father, for the one who is here perhaps trembling a little bit at their own frailty, at their own humanity, at the fact that this fragile body is beginning to waste away, Lord, that they might be reminded that Jesus Christ was raised not as some worn out, tired form of being, but Lord, raised in a resurrection body with strength, with vigor. Lord, we call him the firstfruits of those from among the dead. We give you thanks in Jesus.