

# **Truth for Today**

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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## **The Seven Feasts of the LORD: The Feast of Firstfruits and the New Meal Offering**

I suppose that many would say, "Without Christmas, there would be no Easter". Personally, I would put it round the other way, "Without Easter, there would be no Christmas". If we think carefully about it, both statements are true, but in different respects. Either way, what do we mean?

At Christmas, we remember that there was a time in the history of the world when Jesus was born into the world. That is a statement of fact, recorded in Holy Scripture. Luke 2:6-7 relates, "While Joseph and Mary were at Bethlehem, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes." Then in Luke 2:21, it is written, "his Name was called JESUS". Then, at Easter, we remember that there was a specific time when Jesus actually died. Again, that fact is recorded in Holy Scripture. John 19:30 records, "Jesus said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost". Then John 19:33 states, "then the soldiers came to Jesus and saw that he was dead".

Circumstantially, and chronologically, if Jesus had not been born into the world, and lived in the world, it would not have been possible for Him to die. Very true! Conversely, if it had not been in the will of God that He should die for our sins, He would never have been born into the world in the first place. So, both statements are true, but in different respects.

Today, we are to think particularly of the fact that having died and been buried on what we commonly call Good Friday, His resurrection out from among the dead took place on what has since become known as Easter Sunday. Now, long before these major events happened, they were foretold in the Old Testament, in Leviticus 23, in what are called there The Feasts of the LORD. There are seven in all. The seven feasts fall into two groups. At the time they were written, the statements about both groups were prophetic. They all related to the future. Now, at this late stage in the history of the world, the first four feasts, The Passover, The Feast of Unleavened Bread, The Feast of Firstfruits and The New Meal Offering, have all had their fulfilment, in Christianity. The second group, comprising The Feast of Trumpets, The Day of Atonement and The Feast of Tabernacles, remain prophetic, yet to be fulfilled in the nation of Israel. I must leave the second group to others whose talks will follow this one.

The Passover (Leviticus 23:4) teaches us about the death of the Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary. There can be no doubt about that. 1 Corinthians 5:7 tells us, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us". The Feast of Unleavened Bread, which follows (Leviticus 23:5-8), highlights the practical response in the lives of Christian believers who are in the benefit of the death of Christ, by faith in Him. The Feast of Firstfruits, outlined in Leviticus 23:9-14, foretells the personal resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The New Meal Offering (Leviticus 23:15-22) looked forward to the descent of the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost, to inaugurate and form the Christian church, as given in Acts 2.

All blessing that God shall ever bestow, and all justice that He shall ever administer, is and shall be based ultimately on the death and personal resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. On what has become known as Good Friday, we commemorate the time when Jesus our Lord died at Calvary. On what has become known as Easter Sunday, or Easter Day, we remember the time when Jesus our Lord broke the bands of death and rose again from among the dead. These facts, and their significance, are crucial to the truth of Christianity.

As a result of The Passover, the people of Israel were delivered from slavery in Egypt, about fifteen hundred years before the birth of the Lord Jesus at Bethlehem. God took them, miraculously, eastward through the Red Sea, and into the Wilderness of Sinai. There they had to learn hard lessons before the nation could go into Canaan, or Palestine as we know it.

God helped them to understand what He wanted them to learn by giving them this series of seven feasts, spread over their sacred annual calendar. They could not possibly learn fully what the feasts represented without the teaching of the New Testament so readily available to us. Nevertheless, God gave them to understand that if they carried out the instructions He gave them, that this was pleasing to Him. They did know this. It was for their spiritual blessing to obey God in carrying out these celebrations. Nowadays, we Christians can see and understand what God was building up to in a way the people of Israel could not possibly comprehend.

A previous talk concentrated on the first two feasts in the series, The Passover and The Feast of Unleavened Bread. Today, we move on to the next two, The Feasts of Firstfruits, and The New Meal Offering.

### **The Feasts of Firstfruits**

The first four of the Seven Feasts of the LORD are closely related. The first and third feasts refer to the Lord Jesus personally. The second and fourth relate to the effect and result for us Christians of the first and third. Happily, this relationship is summarised for us in two well known New Testament verses, Romans 6:10-11. "For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." The first double statement refers to what is true of the Lord Jesus personally. The second double statement refers to what is true for us as a result of what is true of and for Him. This lines up very nicely with the first four of the seven feasts. Let us think about them.

"In that he died, he died unto sin once." That is, He did not die a natural death. "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures", as stated in 1 Corinthians 15:3. He will never need to do that again. As we read in Hebrews 9:26, "once in the end of the age hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself". Again, in Hebrews 9:28, "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many". The Apostle Peter adds his own confirmation of this in 1 Peter 3:18, "Christ also has once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, and quickened by the Spirit". He will never need to suffer and die again because He accomplished the work God gave Him to do fully, perfectly, to the glory of God the first time. The work of the Cross will never need to be repeated.

Romans 6:10 goes on to say, "in that he lives, he lives unto God". That is, having dealt with sin when He died, He rose from the dead. He had fully completed the work of the Cross. Paul says in Romans 4:25, "he was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification". His personal resurrection out from among the dead confirms that God has been fully satisfied by the offering that Christ made when He died upon the cross.

In raising Jesus our Lord from the dead, God demonstrated the fact that the sacrifice of Christ upon the Cross fully answered to God for every sin that has ever been committed. There is sufficient value to God in the sacrifice that Christ made, potentially to clear every sinner of every sin that has ever been committed.

Putting our trust once and for all in the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, the value to God of the work of Christ is applied to each of us as individuals. As we read in Romans 3:22, "The righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ is unto all men [that is, potentially available] and upon [that is actually effective] upon all them that believe". In Christ, all is settled and complete, in virtue of His death and resurrection.

Building on that foundation, the Scripture goes on to say, "Likewise, reckon ye also yourselves dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through our Lord Jesus Christ". That is, having put our trust in the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, we are made aware of two major consequences. The truth of the Cross has been applied for our eternal benefit. We are acceptable to God because of the value to Him of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary.

In response to that, we accept that in God's eyes, our old life lived without God, indeed against God, made it necessary for the Lord Jesus to die the death of the Cross on our behalf. He did for us what we could never have done for ourselves. He, the willing Substitute, accepted in Himself the condemnation we as individuals deserved because we have sinned against God. Knowing that, we accept a firm commitment. We must dissociate ourselves completely once and for all from that old life of sin that made it necessary for the Lord Jesus to die as a willing substitute, on our behalf. The truth of that is depicted in the Feast of Unleavened Bread, previously considered.

But that is not the end of the story, not by any means. Christ did not remain in the grave. On the third day, he rose from among the dead (see 1 Corinthians 15:3). This is depicted in the Feast of Firstfruits. We read in 1 Corinthians 15:20, "now is Christ risen, and become the firstfruits", and again, in 1 Corinthians 15:23, "Christ the firstfruits". What does it mean? Simply this! In any harvest, the quality and character of the final, full harvest is indicated in the quality and character of the firstfruits.

It is a beginning, a first sample, a token of the final thing. There is going to be a mighty harvest for God as a result of the work of Christ upon the Cross. The beginning of that harvest of souls was the personal resurrection of the Lord Jesus. So, quite rightly, His personal resurrection, upon which the final harvest is based, is called the Firstfruits. Notice, it is not just an event or a stage in the harvest. It is personal. He, Himself, is the Firstfruits, the Pledge, the Guarantee that there will indeed be a mighty harvest. We take our character from Him, because we are associated with Him, as the One Who is risen from among the dead.

When did that main harvest first come to light? Acts 2 tells us. When the Holy Spirit came down from heaven on The Day of Pentecost to inaugurate the Christian church! (Acts 2:1-4) When will the main harvest be gathered in? When

Jesus comes again, in fulfilment of His wonderful promise, recorded in John 14:3. "I will come again and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also". Again, in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 we are told, "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

### **The New Meal Offering**

Meantime, a wonderful thing has transpired here upon earth. The old life we lived has been brought to an end before God in the death of Christ upon the Cross. We are linked with Christ in the death that He died, and thus released from the penalty of our sins. But not only so! A new life has been made possible, indeed brought into being. In virtue of His personal resurrection, God has linked us with Him as the One Who is alive from among the dead. This was spelled out in picture form in Leviticus 23:15-22 in the New Meal Offering. It foretold what has been finally revealed as the church of the living God, beginning on the day of Pentecost, fifty days to the day after Christ Himself rose from the dead. The word 'Pentecost', of course, means fifty. Christ rose from the dead on the third day, on the first day of the week. Then, on the fiftieth day from the day of His resurrection, again on the first day of the week, the Holy Spirit came down from heaven and formed the church. Three thousand souls believed the gospel of their salvation when Peter and the other disciples preached the gospel on that Day of Pentecost. As individuals, each of those three thousand people repented of their sins and trusted Christ as their personal Saviour. So began the mighty harvest.

Notice the terms that are used. As to Christ Himself, His resurrection is called the Feast of Firstfruits (1 Corinthians 15:20). As to the formation of the Christian church, it is called The Feast of Pentecost, or Feast of Weeks, as to when it happened, fifty days from the day when Christ rose from the dead. As to the character of those harvested, it is called the New Meal Offering. The perfect life on earth of the Lord Jesus was signified in The Meal Offering. The life of the believer takes its character from Christ as risen from the dead. We feed spiritually on Him by reading the Scriptures and meditating upon Him in the power of the Holy Spirit. As a result, we are enabled to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, as stated in 2 Peter 3:18. This new life lived on earth, giving such pleasure to God in heaven, is called the New Meal Offering.

The personal life of Christ, lived here on earth, was a unique life which was perfect before God, giving Him constant delight. That wonderful life was traced out in Leviticus 2:1-16 as The Meal Offering. Now Christ is in heaven. But, because of His personal death and resurrection there are lives lived on earth, now, at the present time, under the constant scrutiny of the eye of God, lives that give pleasure to God. They are of the same character as the life that Christ lived personally on earth when He was here. Of course, there is, and must be, this essential difference. He was absolutely perfect, in every way. We are not, and never shall be, perfect until we are in heaven with Christ above, fully conformed to Him, never more to be parted from Him. But, wonder of wonders, we can, each in our measure, live a life empowered by the Holy Spirit dwelling with us. A life which gives pleasure to the heart of God, living out moral qualities and virtues seen to perfection in Christ's perfect personal life upon earth! The life that Christ lived perfectly when He was here on earth can continue to be seen in the lives lived by those who are linked for ever with Him because they believe that He died for them and rose again.

You will notice the word of caution implicit in what I have said about our lives compared with His. He was absolutely perfect. Not a flaw, nor a trace of imperfection in anything he ever said, did, or thought. That can never be said about us, either as individuals or in aggregate. That is why, in relation to our lives, grouped together under this term, The New Meal Offering, there is an instruction that the offering had to be baked with leaven, ever and always a symbol of the presence of the evil which results in sin. As long as we are here in this world, there is that in us which is capable of expressing itself in sin. Nevertheless, by the grace of God, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, there is also that in us now, the new nature implanted by God, which can express itself in thoughts, words and deeds well-pleasing to God. These thoughts, words and deeds express that life which is of Christ; a reflection of that which so pleased God in Christ when He lived here upon earth. We are enabled, in effect, to live out a continuation, here and now, of the kind of life that Christ lived, here in the world.

In closing, let us again take account of those most significant verses that pull these things together so well, Romans 6:10-11: "For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

May the Lord help us to believe them, understand them, and live in the light of what they teach us. Amen.

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