**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes from 3-10-2024
Jesus & Rosh Hashanah**

We’ve been looking at Jesus and the Jewish calendar for the last few weeks here at Chestnut Grove. One celebration that we should all easily identify with is New Year’s. New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day are a big deal in America and throughout much of the world. I remember many fun new year’s celebrations over the years. I recall playing cards and board games with family and friends. Eating a special meal or two. Enjoying some football. Making New Year’s resolutions. Watching the ball drop on TV. In fact, on a personal note, I even had my first date with Kara 20 years ago on New Year’s Eve.

And I would guess that you have some fun memories for new year’s celebrations as well. Laughter. Play. Song. A meal. tradition.

For the people of Israel, Rosh Hashanah is considered their new year’s celebration. In some ways, there are some real similarities between Rosh Hashanah and our Gregorian Calendar New Year’s.

For Rosh Hashanah, there is celebration and games and laughter. There are also foods that are typically shared as well. There is a type of bread called challah bread, which is made that is in the shape of the circle, representing the fullness of the yearly cycle and the calling to live for God throughout the year.

There are also apples and honey that are normally eaten, representing the hope for a sweet new year.

In the Bible, the first reference to this special day is found in Leviticus 23:23-25. Hear these words of Scripture, “**23The Lord said to Moses, 24“Say to the Israelites: ‘On the first day of the seventh month you are to have a day of sabbath rest, a sacred assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts. 25Do no regular work, but present a food offering to the Lord.’”**

You may have noticed that this is the 7th month. In the Jewish calendar there are actually 12 months in the calendar. This can be a bit confusing. In a sense there are a couple new years within the Jewish calendar year.

And even though Rosh Hashanah would appear to only be the midway point of the year in the first day of the 7th month, it became the main new year’s celebration for the Jews each year, like the civil new year.

There are several things to note about this special day. This was to be a day of rest, where no work is done. During the day there would be joy and celebration and play.

But then, the atmosphere shifts to a more solemn tone. This was because this day was also to include a sacred assembly as well. It reminds me a bit of Ash Wednesday. This more serious and contemplative worship would begin with trumpet blasts. For this reason, this also became known as the Feast of Trumpets.

The trumpet blast was a very meaningful symbol for the Jewish people. It symbolized being vigilant against sin and fully committed in loyalty to God. It was sometimes a battle cry. And so, the people were assembled together to begin the year with God as the center.

Rosh Hashanah would be the first day of what became known as the ten days of awe. Ten days after Rosh Hashanah was Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Next week we will be highlighting the Day of Atonement and its relevance for Christians today, but for today we just need to remember that Rosh Hashanah began the 10 days of awe, which would culminate on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

These days would be days of reflection and repentance. It was a time to get hosed off, spiritually speaking. It was a time to seek forgiveness and to offer forgiveness. It was a time to get one’s heart and mind right with God.

It was also a time to rededicate oneself to God. There was the belief that during the 10 days of awe, God would search the hearts and minds of His people to determine if they are prepared for new assignments and being spiritually promoted, so to speak.

In thinking about New Years for our common Gregorian Calendar, which we typically use today, one thing that we often hear about and sometimes participate in are new year’s resolutions.

These resolutions are similar the Rosh Hashanah calling to change and grow, but also different. They differ in that most new year’s resolutions focus on the outward actions. Exercise and diet – things like that. But with Rosh Hashanah, the calling to change and transformation is more inward. The focus is more in the heart and mind and on inner transformation.

What are Christians to make of Rosh Hashanah?

Again, as we have stated with other Jewish special days, we as Christian are not required to celebrate Rosh Hashanah. We live in the new covenant that Jesus began. Simply put, observing special days is not required for believers.

But that being said, understanding and valuing Rosh Hashanah does have value for believers today. And I would like to give several reasons.

First, reflecting on Rosh Hashanah should help Christians remember that play and laughter and celebration are important. And they are important to do from time to time. God enjoys it when His people take time to do these things and to do them together.

This should remind us that fellowship opportunities that are offered at church are actually spiritually important. Play and laughter and games are not meant to be a contrast to spiritual activities. These are to be spiritual activities. We are created for fellowship. Fellowship with God and with others.

Game nights are great opportunities. Church dinners are invitations to rich fellowship. Church bonfires are meant to be spiritually impactful.

Second, Rosh Hashanah should remind us that God calls His people to more than just outward transformation. This holy day can serve as a reminder that God invites us to reflect on our inward walk with God and where growth and transformation should take place.

All of us are a work in progress. Christ loves us just as we are. But Christ calls us to maturity. I love how King David writes in Psalm 139 verse 23-24, **“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”**

Maybe the Lord is calling you to forgive someone. Maybe He is calling for you to ask for forgiveness from someone. Perhaps God is calling you to do something new or to stop doing something you have been doing.

Rosh Hashanah reminds us that a sweet new year can only happen when we chose to yield to the Holy Spirit. There are many things that we cannot control in life. But we can control choosing to live each year for God. And a year lived in surrender to God is a sweet year indeed.

Third, while the 10 Days of awe between Rosh Hashanah are not explicitly prescribed in the Bible, I believe that there is a truth in God watching our lives and determining when He would release new assignments for us. Again, I think of King David. He was faithful as a shepherd boy, caring for his father’s flock. He did what he was called to do with diligence and faithfulness. His heart was in the right place.

And then, suddenly, Samuel the prophet arrives and it is David who is anointed to be the next king of Israel. God saw his heart and was determined that He wanted him to be raised to serve in a much more prominent way.

We need to remember that our God has many names. And each of these names describe some of God’s attributes. One of those names is El Roi. This means “The God who sees me.”

In Genesis 16, we read the story of a woman named Hagar. She was in great distress and God came to her. And she called God, “El Roi.” This name expressed that God was fully aware of her situation. He understood her. And God met her right there to lead her forward on your journey.

We are here today to worship El Roi. He sees us. He knows us. He understands all the circumstances of our lives far better than we do ourselves. **And He loves us right where we are.**

God knows what we are doing when no one is watching. Nothing is a surprise to Him. And if we are choosing faithfulness to Him in the secret place, He sees this and will reward us. This is the basic gist of Matthew chapter 6 as well. Do not try to impress others. Rather, seek faithfulness to God in private.

This does not mean that Christians are to seek the limelight for ourselves. It just means that we are to be faithful and intentional and disciplined and quick to repent when we sin. We are to actively pursue a close walk with Jesus Christ. And we can trust that the Lord does notice this and He will expand our opportunities to be His vessels. I believe that the 10 Days of Awe can serve as a reminder of this.

And fourth and finally, Rosh Hashanah should remind us of the 2nd coming of Jesus Christ and our call to be spiritually alert and awake until He returns.

Finally, in looking at the New Testament, we remember that when Christ returns, there will be a mighty trumpet blast.

1 Thessalonians 4:16 states, “**16For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.”**

When Christ returns, He will usher in the eternal new year. He will bring about a new age. He will make all things new. And for those of us that follow Him, that will be a day of celebration and joy like no other.

All wrongs will be righted. All the faithful will celebrate. And we will be with the Lord forever.

But until that day comes, may the blast of the trumpet or the ram’s horn, may it remind us that we are to be spiritually vigilant. May we live as spiritual soldiers is God’s army. May we not give the enemy a foothold. And may every year be a sweet one as we seek to walk with Jesus Christ in humble obedience each day.

If you would like to observe the next Rosh Hashanah, it begins this year at sundown on October 2nd and concludes at sundown on October 3rd. But whether or not we chose to observe Rosh Hashanah, we can learn from this celebration that we are to be people of celebration, people who seek inward transformation far more than outward transformation, people who seek to be spiritually promoted by God in order to be used in all the ways that God desires to use us, and finally, that we should vigilantly await the victorious return of Jesus Christ to earth.

Let’s pray…

Resources:

[www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)

<https://www.c4israel.org/_teachings/feasts-of-the-fall/?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAiArfauBhApEiwAeoB7qP05ujhOXJj29LKxJJ4zGa2pETlnfKYbXScyAZMuXZd216vVmf4TzBoCLO8QAvD_BwE>

<https://veenaazmanov.com/round-challah/>

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/reasons-to-praise-god-as-el-roi.html#:~:text=El%20Roi%20means%20%E2%80%9CThe%20God,that%20God%20does%20see%20us>.