**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes from 3-24-2024
Jesus and Tabernacles – Palm Sunday 2024**

People have long been interested in the concept of home. Home is to be a place of peace, rest, fellowship, joy, play, work. Our hearts are drawn to home.

Elvis Presley sang, *Home Is Where Your Heart Is.*

Madeleine L’Engle stated, “Maybe that’s the best part of going away for a vacation–coming home again.”

An unknown author once stated, “A house is made of walls and beams; a home is built with love and dreams.”

And of course, L. Frank Baum wrote and Dorthy Gale of Kansas famously stated, “There is no place like home.”

These words can remind us of one of the most important themes in Scripture – God’s desire to dwell with His people. The Lord walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden in wonderful fellowship. God would lead Israel to a Promised Land, which was to be their home. And God would dwell with them in a special way as they journeyed to Canaan and would make a way for His presence to remain with them. And in the final book of Scripture, the Book of Revelation, the Lord Jesus comes to dwell again on earth with His people. The dwelling of God again with faithful people all over the world.

Again, our Lord loves to be in fellowship with the creatures that He created in His image. He loves to talk with them and to listen to them. He desires to be their resting place and their home.

Today, as we begin our Holy Week journey together, we turn to one of the most important festivals in the Jewish calendar. This festival is all about the concept of dwelling or abiding. In other words – it was all about being at home with God. It is called Sukkot or the Festival of Tabernacles. It is also known as the Festival of Booths.

God commanded the people of Israel to observe this special celebration to remember the time when Israel lived in the wilderness. If you are familiar with the Exodus events from Scripture, the Israelites were rescued by God from slavery in Egypt. And then they ended up wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. It does not need to be this long. It could have taken a few weeks. It was because of their disobedience that the Lord did not allow them to enter for 40 years.

But during these 40 years, God dwelt with Israel in a special way. There was a tabernacle that God instructed to be built. And in the midst of the people, God’s presence went with them day and night for 40 years. Pretty amazing!

To remember this and to strengthen future generations with the knowledge of these events, the people of Israel were to travel to Jerusalem and to live in temporary shelters or booths for a week each year. It was to be a time of remembrance and celebration.

Here these words from Leviticus 23:33-36, 39-43: **33The Lord said to Moses, 34“Say to the Israelites: ‘On the fifteenth day of the seventh month the Lord’s Festival of Tabernacles begins, and it lasts for seven days. 35The first day is a sacred assembly; do no regular work. 36For seven days present food offerings to the Lord, and on the eighth day hold a sacred assembly and present a food offering to the Lord. It is the closing special assembly; do no regular work.**

**39“‘So beginning with the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the festival to the Lord for seven days; the first day is a day of sabbath rest, and the eighth day also is a day of sabbath rest. 40On the first day you are to take branches from luxuriant trees—from palms, willows and other leafy trees—and rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days. 41Celebrate this as a festival to the Lord for seven days each year. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come; celebrate it in the seventh month. 42Live in temporary shelters for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in such shelters 43so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in temporary shelters when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.’”**

Friends, it is fitting that we are speaking about the Festival of Tabernacles on Palm Sunday. Why? Well because, palm branches were a big part of this festival. They were one of the primary construction materials for building these temporary booths or shelters for the Israelites to live in for a week. Tying the branches together would serve as a covering, protecting them from severe weather.

Now as the words from the LORD to Moses explain, this festival was created by God ‘**so that (Israel’s) descendants will know that I (The LORD) had the Israelites live in temporary shelters when I brought them out of Egypt.’**

The festival would include worship and celebration. Offerings would be given to God. The first and the last days of the festival would be days of rest. This would be a reminder that the LORD brought them out of slavery and God would provide for the nourishment to sustenance of His people.

Perhaps you remember that during the 40 years in the wilderness, food and water were miraculously provided for the Israelites. God caused springs of water to come forth in barren places. And God brought supernatural bread to feed the Jewish people. And God would provide extra on the day before the Sabbath so that the Israelites did not need to work in gathering on the Sabbath day.

This Festival of Tabernacles was to remind the Jewish people of all of these things.

Fast forwarding to Jesus, our Lord would most certainly have celebrated the Festival of Tabernacles many times over the years. In fact, we have a very significant moment in Jesus’ ministry that took place during this very festival.

I invite you to turn with me to chapter 7 of John’s Gospel. We will be hearing from verses 2-3, verses 14-15, and finally, verses 37-44: **2But when the Jewish Festival of Tabernacles was near, 3Jesus’ brothers said to him, “Leave Galilee and go to Judea, so that your disciples there may see the works you do.**

**14Not until halfway through the festival did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach. 15The Jews there were amazed and asked, “How did this man get such learning without having been taught?”**

**37On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. 38Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” 39By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.**

**40On hearing his words, some of the people said, “Surely this man is the Prophet.” 41Others said, “He is the Messiah.” Still others asked, “How can the Messiah come from Galilee? 42Does not Scripture say that the Messiah will come from David’s descendants and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?” 43Thus the people were divided because of Jesus. 44Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him.**

There is a whole lot happening in here. We see at the beginning of this passage that Jesus’ brothers told him that he should go to Judea with his disciples. At this point in Jesus’ ministry, His own half-brothers did not believe in Him. That would have been hard for Jesus to have people that He knew and loved, and yet did not recognize Him for who He was.

Eventually, after Jesus’ resurrection, His family did believe. I’m sure that Jesus’ post-resurrection appearance to James turned James’ world upside down. James would become the leader of the church in Jerusalem. And both James and Jude would be inspired by the Holy Spirit to write books that would come to be recognized as Scripture. No doubt, all of his brothers and sisters would come to believe in Him.

But back to the Feast of Tabernacles here. The brothers tell Jesus that He should go to Judea to celebrate the feast. But it was not until halfway through the feast that Jesus arrives. And Jesus begins to teach the people in Jerusalem during this festival.

The crowds would have been huge. What major festivals, such as Tabernacles, would take place, and the population of Jerusalem skyrocketed. Estimates range from 1 to 12 million, as the people far and wide would flock to the city.

And many Jews present were just amazed at His teaching and the many miracles that Jesus had performed. And people were putting their trust in Him. But not everyone. Others were becoming increasingly hostile to Jesus. Many were refusing to believe their own eyes and their own ears. There was this growing division between the Jewish people and those that responded well to the Messiah and those that responded poorly to the Messiah.

 But then we come to this very fascinating scene. Let us hear verses 38-39 again: **37On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. 38Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.”**

You may remember from our reading in Leviticus that there was a closing special assembly on the final day of the festival. Think of a finale during a fire works display. Well, something similar would be the final day of this great festival.

On the great day of the feast, the priest went around the altar seven times carrying myrtle twigs and fruit, in memory of the seven-fold circuit of Jericho before the walls fell. The priest poured water into a bowl and poured it out onto the ground. This was in remembrance of the water from the rock. They read the passage from Exodus and Ezekiel 47, about the river from the threshold of the temple, the river of living water running to the Dead Sea. People believed that when the Messiah came, he would provide water just as Moses had done.

And it was at this point that Jesus calls out with a loud voice, ***"Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water'"* (7:37-38).**

This is so amazing. Jesus was turning people's thoughts from physical water quenching physical thirst to humanity’s spiritual thirst for God and eternal spiritual satisfaction. And only He could quench this thirst.

Jesus uses this very specific moment during the Festival of Tabernacles to make it loud and clear that just as Israel needed the LORD to provide physical water and physical food from them, everyone needed to come to Jesus in order to be made spiritually full, spiritually satisfied.

Mind you, Jesus had already miraculously multiplied a small amount of bread and fish in order to feed well over 5,000 people. That scene would have been reminiscent of the LORD providing food in the wilderness.

But more than physical food and water, the soul needs spiritual food and drink. Bodies get hungry again, even after big meals. But Jesus quenches the spiritual hunger eternally.

And not only this. Jesus is saying that those who believe in Him, those who come to come in faith, they will have rivers of living water flow from within them.

John identifies this is a reference to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the One who connects the dots of Scripture. The Holy Spirit is the One who teaches people about Jesus and reminds them of what Jesus has taught.

Jesus is saying that the invitation is there for anyone who comes to Him. I think about Isaiah 55, which states in verse 1, **“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.”**

So coming again to today, Palm Sunday, we see people lining the streets of Jerusalem and shouting praises to Jesus. But many of those that were praising Jesus were shouting praises because that wanted Jesus to do what they wanted Him to do. And they wanted to overthrow the Romans. But that is not what Jesus came to do. He came to overthrow a far more terrifying enemy than Rome ever was. He came to defeat Sin and Satan.

But for those that had spiritual eyes to see and spiritual ears to hear, Jesus would not only quench their spiritual thirst and hunger, but also give them His Spirit so that others would see Christ’s work in their life and be drawn to Christ as well. He says “Rivers of living water will flow from within them.”

Friends, as we process all of this today, what are we to take away from the Festival of Tabernacles in light of Jesus Christ?

As a review, Christians we are not required to observe this special week. Nor should we pressure others to have to do so. None of these special days are required to be observed by Christians.

But at the same time, all of these Jewish special days should be a blessing for Christians to understand and glean from. And this definitely includes Tabernacles.

Here are 3 big takeaways for Christians and Tabernacles.

**First, this festival should help us remember God’s gracious presence with Israel and His provisions for them through their wilderness journey**. As Christians, Israel’s story and history becomes part of our history. We celebrate the successes and grieve the failures that took place. And we remember God’s presence with Israel through their wilderness journey. We remember God’s provisions for them every step along the way. And we remember that the LORD promises to see us as His people today and every day, until the end of the age.

I am reminded of Paul’s powerful words to the Philippians. He told them, “My God will meet of your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.” It was true for the Israelites in the wilderness and true for Christians in the 1st century and it is equally true for us today.

**Second, we are to remember that God came to us as Jesus Christ to tabernacle among us.** In fact, in John chapter 1 and verse 14, we read that Jesus “became flesh and dwelt” – literally, the original word is tabernacled. Jesus, the Word of God, the Son of God, God in the flesh, tabernacled among us.

This means that the festival of Tabernacles should remind Christians that God literally came and tabernacled or dwelt or made His home amongst humanity.

Tabernacles should remind us that Jesus came to dwell amongst humanity in order to make a way for humanity to dwell with Him forever. He made his home on earth so that we could make our home with Him forever. And truly, there is no place like being home with Jesus.

**And third and finally, as we journey through the wilderness of this age, we are invited to Christ’s sustaining life to be our spiritual nourishment**. We are to drink of His life by seeking to know Him better every day and to be strengthened in our spirit by our relationship with Him. He is our life. He alone satisfies.

We are to look to Him to be our ultimate source of satisfaction and joy and pleasure. And as we do this, the Holy Spirit will have His way in and through us. And His Spirit will touch many, many people around us as we carry the presence of Christ in us as we go.

So let us come to Jesus each day for spiritual nourishment. We do this through prayer and worship and time in His Word or other spiritual disciplines. He is waiting for us to come and drink of His life.

Finally, so you are aware, the next Festival of Tabernacles is October 16-23rd. I suspect you will be unlikely to build a temporary shelter to live in for a week, but it is an invitation to remember all of these things. To remember God’s dwelling with Israel, to remember Jesus tabernacling with humanity with His incarnation, to remember His invitation to come to Him and drink, and to remember that when we do, His Spirit will not only bless us but also flow through us to bless others in Jesus’ Name. Pretty amazing!

Let’s pray…

Resources:

New Testament Cultural Settings: Lesson 8: Jerusalem and Early Christianity

<https://www.housebeautiful.com/lifestyle/fun-at-home/g15064764/home-quotes/>

<https://harvestcommunity.net/the-word-became-flesh-and-tabernacled-among-us/>

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