**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes 3-31-2024 (Easter Sunday)
The Feast of First Fruits**

Over the last couple of months here at Chestnut Grove Church, we have been taking a closer look at Jesus in light of the Jewish calendar. It is really fascinating to explore those special days in the Jewish year through the lens of Jesus Christ. He is the ultimate fulfillment of each of these special days.

And many times, He chose to say or do certain things on particular days in order to reveal Himself more clearly to the Jews and to the world. Easter Sunday is not an exception.

During what we call holy week there were actually 3 special days all clumped in together. The first was Passover. This was the day that Israel would eat of the Passover meal in remembrance of God’s judgment passing over them just before Israel was set free from slavery in Egypt.

The second of this cluster was the Festival of Unleavened Bread. This would begin the day after Passover and would be a one-week celebration, celebrating the victory of God over all the gods and idols of Egypt. And was to be no leaven eaten during this week, as leaven was a symbol of sin. This Festival would be a reminder that because of God’s grace shown to them, God’s people needed to get sin out of their lives.

But during the 3rd day of these events, there was a special feast that took place called the Feast of First Fruits. It was during this day that the Jewish people were to offer the first fruits of their barley harvest to the Lord as an offering to Him.

Barley would ripen earlier than the other grain offerings and thus it would be the first fruit that the people of Israel were to present to God in Jerusalem.

The priests would wave the sheaf as an offering before the Lord on the Day after the Sabbath during the festival of unleavened bread.

It was to be a continual reminder that it was God who brought Israel into the Promised Land. It was one way that Israel was to remember God’s grace in their lives and that if it wasn’t for His help, they would have never entered the Promised Land.

And wouldn’t you know, the Feast of First Fruits would be the same day as the most important day in history. Jesus was crucified on a Friday. The next day was a Sabbath. And the following day would be the feast of first fruits. This was the day that Jesus rose from the dead! In Paul’s first letter to the Christians in Corinth, we read these words in 1 Cor. 15:1-23.

**1 Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. 2By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.**

**3For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance[**[**a**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%2015&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28722a)**]: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5and that he appeared to Cephas,[**[**b**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%2015&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28724b)**] and then to the Twelve. 6After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. 7Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.**

**9For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. 11Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.**

**12But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 15More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. 16For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.**

**20But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. 22For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23But each in turn: Christ, the first fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.**

In this powerful excerpt from Paul’s letter, he first makes it very clear that Jesus’ resurrection is historical fact. There were many witnesses. There were many people that saw Jesus alive, that ate with Him, that could testify that Jesus was very much alive three days after His death.

Paul mentions Cephas, who is Peter. And he mentions Jesus appearing to the apostles as a group and he mentioned appearing to his brother James. He mentions a group of 500 people at one time, many of whom were still living and could coaberate the truth. And finally, Paul mentioned that he himself has seen the risen Lord.

Certainly, there were others that Paul could have mentioned. There were the women, who were actually the first witnesses of the resurrection. He could have mentioned the two followers that were on the road to Emmaus. He could have mentioned Thomas being present a week later to see Jesus. But what Paul did write was more than sufficient to prove the truth that Jesus was indeed risen.

But then Paul mentions something very interesting in the closing verses of this passage. Let’s hear them again.

**20But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. 22For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.**

Twice Paul mentions Jesus as the first fruits. What does this mean? Well just as the first fruit of the harvest anticipated the full harvest to come, so likewise the resurrection of Jesus Christ anticipated the future resurrection of those that put their faith in Jesus as Messiah.

This means that just as historical as Jesus’ resurrection was, so will the resurrection of all who put their trust in Jesus be. Jesus Himself was the fulfillment of the feast of first fruits.

And just as there would be more barley to harvest after the feast of first fruit ended, so it is certainly that all who follow Jesus would eventually be given transformed glorified bodies, very much like Jesus’ own body.

But that is not all. Not only does Jesus’ resurrection serve as the fulfillment of the Feast of First Fruits, but God has also given His Holy Spirit to believers as a first fruit of what is to come. Paul writes to the Christians about this in Romans 8:22-29.

**22We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. 24For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? 25But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.**

**26In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. 27And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.**

**28And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. 29For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many** **brothers and sisters.**

Did you catch it? Paul is telling these Christians that “we ourselves have the firstfruits of the Spirit.” This meant that even though their bodies may be feeling less then optimal, even though sickness and pain and physical death were present realities for them, the giving of the Holy Spirit to believers offered them confident hope that eventually their bodies would be transformed to be like Jesus’ glorious resurrected body.

So friends as we reflect on this Feast of first fruits in light of Jesus, what are we as Christians to make of it?

Again, as I have stated repeatedly throughout this series, Christians are not obligated or required to observe this feast in order to truly be believers. It is faith in Jesus alone that saves anyone – Jew and non-Jew alike.

But understanding and reflecting on the feast of firstfruits can serve to strengthen our faith. How? I suggest 3 main reasons.

First, the feast of first fruits should remind us to be thankful for all that God has done for us and to express our thanksgiving by giving back to God.

This is the original meaning of this feast. Just as Israel was called to express their gratitude for God leading them out of bondage and leading them into the Promised Land and enabling them to bring forth a crop, we must recognize that anything good in our life flows from the hand of God. And we are to be intentional in practicing gratitude and in showing our appreciation through heartfelt worship and giving back to God through joyful offerings.

Second, with Jesus fulfilling the feast of first fruits through His own resurrection, we are to have confidence that everyone who follows after Jesus, including us, will eventually be part of the full harvest. All Christians will eventually have transformed glorified bodies very similar to Jesus’ own glorified body.

We do still live in a very broken and fallen world. There is much pain and suffering. There is grief and loss all around us and often within us. But Jesus being the firstfruits of the resurrection reminds us that these things are temporary. Soon the pain and sufferings of this age will be over and all will be well for us and for all who have put their trust in the savior of the world.

And third and finally, this feast of first fruits reminds us that God has given us His Holy Spirit to help us in the meantime. The Holy Spirit is the One who helps to wait patiently until our hope is realized. The Holy Spirit is constantly working for our benefit. He is interceding for us. He is working circumstances out in ways that are for our good. He gives us peace that passes understanding when we must need it. He reminds us of who Jesus is and all Jesus did. And He reminds us of who we now are as God’s children.

So, on this Easter Sunday, this Resurrection Sunday, may we remember that Jesus fulfilled this important feast. He is the first of the resurrection. And because He lives, we should have confidence that our future is so bright, we might need to wait shades, metaphorically speaking of course. But truly, because Jesus is the first fruits of the resurrection, we can know with certainty that the best is yet to be for us and for all God’s people. Thanks be to God!

Let’s pray…

Resources:

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

<https://firmisrael.org/learn/jesus-resurrection-and-the-jewish-holiday-first-fruits/>