

Celebrate the Feasts

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 0 0] be seated. You may like to turn again to page 151 in the Bibles to Deuteronomy chapter 16. We're continuing our sermon series on this Old Testament book of the Bible, Deuteronomy, and I'll pray for us before we hear God's Word preached. Speak to us now, Lord God, we pray from your Word, write its truths in our hearts that we may receive it in faith, that we may believe it and obey it, that we may celebrate your goodness and grace to us all our lives for Jesus' sake. Amen. In 1994, I ate Christmas dinner in a barn. It wasn't quite sort of a reenactment of the manger of Bethlehem. It was a converted 14th century barn in the Cotswolds in England near where I lived, and I was there for lunch with friends. It was a beautiful barn. It was pretty small. It was a bit cold. But at the end of this long wooden dining table was a sort of side cabinet thing where you kept crockery and cutlery and so on. It still had the original docket for when you bought it. It was bought in 1712. And the lounge room of this barn had an antler, you know, a deer head with antlers on the walls. It had a little gallery around the top where you could have had musicians if we had, which we didn't, an open log fireplace. It even had its own little chapel at the end of this converted barn. We had champagne and wine. We had turkey and roasted chestnuts and Christmas pudding. It was a right royal feast. Additionally so, because of the eight of us there, one person, apart from the friends that I was with, one person was a godmother for one of Princess Margaret's children, I believe. And even better than that, somebody else who was there was related to or descended from or something like that, Haile Selassie, the former king or emperor, whatever, of Ethiopia or Abyssinia if it might have been called that then, I'm not sure.

And somehow there was me as well, the colonial boy. And a right royal feast to celebrate Christmas. Feasts, when they're done properly, are extravagant affairs. And for us, I guess, the thing is Christmas still, with too much food around that lasts for days and days afterwards, of course, in leftovers. But feasts in the Old Testament also were extravagant affairs. And as we think about the feasts in Deuteronomy and the feasts of ancient Israel, there's an element in which we've got to think in some sort of extravagant terms. They ate lots. There were lots of animals sacrificed and eaten by the people as they would celebrate the feast. And it would go on for some time. Most of these feasts are one-week events. Some of you may have seen the film, I think it was a 1980s film, a sort of arthouse film called *Babette's Feast*, which I saw many years ago. And it's set in Scandinavia, sort of dour, bleak, Protestant Scandinavia. And this woman somehow has inherited a lot of money, and she's going to put on a feast for the village. And of course, it's bleak and cold, but in come the best truffles and chocolates and everything. I can't remember all the details of the food. But there's this huge feast, and it transforms these people into sort of joyful celebratory people, as indeed, of course, Christians should. And it's a sort of evokes the images of the feasts of the Bible from the Old Testament, but also how we as Christians should celebrate the goodness of God to us. There are three feasts here in Deuteronomy 16, the three main feasts of the Old Testament. Later on, there's a couple of others that are added, the Feast of Purim from the time of Esther, and later on again, beyond the Old Testament, but before Jesus' day, the Feast of Hanukkah, which arises out of some events in the early part of the second century BC. But these three feasts are the key ones, the Feast of Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles. The first paragraph of Deuteronomy 16, verses 1 to 8, deals with the Feast of Passover, probably the best known of these three to us today. There's no specific date, it's just the month of Aviv. It's the 14th day of the month, if you read Exodus and Leviticus and so on, where these laws are there already from 40 years before. It's tied with, like all three of these feasts, to harvest. All these feasts have got a sort of agricultural or agrarian feel about them. So it's the Feast of Unleavened Bread, a seven-day feast that marks the beginning, I think, of the barley harvest and celebrates God's goodness in the provision of food to eat. But also, the Feast of

Passover, from the time of its institution 40 years before this instruction in Deuteronomy, has very clearly a note not just of God's provision in nature for food to eat, but also of God's redemption. And so in particular, the Feast of Passover commemorates the liberation of Israel from Egypt earlier in the time of Moses, from slavery in Egypt. So in verse 1 of chapter 16, in the month of Aviv, the Lord your God brought you out of Egypt by night. In verse 3, you shall eat unleavened bread with it, the bread of affliction, because you came out of the land of Egypt in great haste, so that all the days of your life you may remember the day of your departure from the land of Egypt. And then in verse 6, you shall offer the Passover sacrifice in the evening at sunset, the time of day when you departed from Egypt. So very clearly, this Feast of Passover is anchored in remembering the redemption of Israel from Egypt. You will always remember it.

[6 : 21] Every year you will celebrate this festival so that you remember it, so that you never forget what God has done in bringing the people of Israel out from slavery in Egypt. And the events leading up to it originally, of course, we read in more detail in the book of Exodus. But you may recall that under Moses' leadership, there was a sequence of plagues against Pharaoh and the Egyptians, culminating in the 10th plague, the killing of the firstborn. And we might think it's slightly abhorrent that God would bring the killing of the firstborn of Pharaoh's own children and the firstborn of every other Egyptian child. But that's precisely what Pharaoh had tried to do at the beginning of the book of Exodus, putting to death the firstborn, indeed all the males, born to the Israelites or to the Hebrews.

So in effect, the success, if you like, of that 10th plague shows that God is the powerful one, not Pharaoh, who put himself up, in effect, to be God. And for Israel, living in Egypt, the way by which they were saved from that plague against the firstborn was to put some blood on the lintel of their doorposts and so on. And thereby, God would pass over them as his angels came to smite the firstborn of all the Egyptians. Traditionally, this Passover sacrifice would involve a lamb, although an ox is allowed here in Deuteronomy 16 as well. They would eat unleavened bread because it would commemorate the haste with which they left Egypt and bread would take with leaven, of course, would be nicer bread and would take but would take longer to cook for the leaven to work through it and then to bake it. No time for all that. The unleavened bread marked as bread of affliction in verse three is to commemorate not only the affliction, but the haste with which Israel had to depart from Egypt. And they were to kill the sacrifice for the Passover. Verse six at the end says in the evening at sunset at dusk, because it was at night that the Egyptians left Egypt. And so quite possibly, this original or this Passover festival is an all night feast. It starts at dusk when the animal is killed, then you've got to cook it, and then you eat it. And you celebrate with so much food and sacrifice and so on, all the people gathered around. So that's in a nutshell, some of the things about the Passover festival. The second one that's mentioned in the next paragraph is the festival of weeks, probably the least known of the three of these feasts to us.

There are also instructions for this earlier in Exodus and in numbers as well. And it comes seven weeks from the day after the Sabbath day at the end of the feast of unleavened bread. So seven weeks is 49 days or 50 days if you count it inclusively. For in our calendar, Passover would be March, April, and in our calendar. And in our calendar, this feast or festival is May, June. They're tied to a lunar month.

[9 : 19] So it varies whether where it occurs year by year. It's also agrarian in nature. It's the end of the grain harvest. So it acknowledges God's provision of a grain or wheat for harvest and food. So in verse nine, at the beginning of the instructions, count the seven weeks from the time the sickle is first put to the standing grain. But also this festival is not simply an agricultural festival. It's tied also to acts of God in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. So in verse two, remember that you were slaves or a slave in Egypt and diligently observe these statutes. So again, there's a combination of the agricultural with the redemption in the celebration of this feast. And that same pattern occurs in the third feast, the festival of booths in verses 13 to 17. In our diary, this occurs in September, October each year. In the Jewish calendar, it's a few days after the Day of Atonement, which is not mentioned in

Deuteronomy, but is at length in Leviticus 16. And probably this was the major feast up to the time of Jesus' day, at least. Whereas maybe these days, and certainly in our thinking, the Passover might take priority.

Probably the Feast of Tabernacles was the primary feast. Again, it's got an agricultural basis. It's the end of the harvest of summer fruit. So olives and dates and figs and grapes and so on. It marks the end of that harvest. So again, it's got this Thanksgiving sense of gratitude to God for the fruit of the land that he is providing for them. But again, it's got a redemption theme through it. So the booths or the tabernacles, depending on the name of the and the used in the translation, booths and tabernacles would be little tents made out of leaves and branches of trees and so on, in which Israel would have lived during the 40 year period from Egypt to the promised land, not living in houses, but living in tents, mobile on their way to the promised land. So the booths or the tabernacles commemorates that wilderness 40 year period of Israel's existence. Now, when was the last time that you celebrated these feasts?

My guess is that probably none of us or almost none of us would have ever celebrated the Feast of Weeks. Maybe one or two of us have celebrated in some way a feast of tabernacles. I remember some years ago going to a synagogue in Elstonwick or St Kilda or somewhere for their Feast of Tabernacles ceremony, just to get a feel for what it was like. And quite possibly a number of us have had a sort of Christianized version of a Passover festival, often in the week before Easter in Holy Week.

But how often, if ever, have we celebrated these feasts according to these laws? Indeed, not even the Jews celebrate them now according to these laws. They don't sacrifice animals as under these instructions. There's been no temples since 70 AD, so nowhere to be a pilgrim to go to to celebrate quite like these laws. Although, of course, there's a slight offshoot of the Jews, the Samaritans, who were despised by Jews, of course, in Jesus' day. And they still exist. There's about 700 of them. You might have seen in the paper this week. It's their Passover festival. And on the last Israel trip, some of us have been to the place where they sacrifice, the Samaritans sacrifice to this day, their Passover animals for a six-week Passover festival.

[13:03] But my guess is that none of us really celebrate these feasts. And the question becomes, well, why? Why not? This is part of our Bible. Why is it that we no longer celebrate these feasts in these ways? What's changed for us? Or are we actually being disobedient to Scripture?

Well, when we deal with Old Testament laws, there's a way of dealing where we've got to work out what are the principles in these laws and see how does the New Testament change or modify or uphold those principles and then reapply them to our circumstances today? You see, sometimes people say, well, because this is Old Testament sacrifice stuff, Jesus has done away with that so we could in effect ignore that. I think that throws the baby out with the bathwater.

There's much that we can learn and gain from these laws, even though, as Christians, we're not under obligation to celebrate them in these ways. So what are the themes in these laws that seem to be dominant and most significant? The first thing to note, I think, is the emphasis on God. All these feasts are conducted in the presence of God at the place that God chooses to make his name dwell. There's a sense in which, and the language follows this, verse 1, celebrate to the Lord. Same in verses 10 and 15.

Verse 2, sacrifice to the Lord. You're in the presence or rejoicing before the Lord in verse 11. Verse 8 talks about an assembly before the Lord. So everything that's done here is before the Lord.

And that ties in with it being a pilgrimage feast or festival. All the people are to go to the place that God chooses to make his name dwell there for each of these three festivals. And in Deuteronomy 12, there's more instruction about that place. It came later, 400 years later, to be Jerusalem.

[15:02] And probably in the interim period before Jerusalem's temple was built, it's the place where the Ark of the Covenant in the tabernacle is kept at various places like Gilgal, Shiloh and so on before Jerusalem.

So there's firstly a theme of being in the presence of God as the people of God. What you're doing is done in his presence to him and so on. It's worth making a brief comment that all of these are pilgrimages.

So people would leave their lands, especially the men, verse 15, 16 rather, three times a year, all your males shall appear before the Lord your God at the place he will choose at these three festivals.

They'll not appear before the Lord empty handed. Being at this place is an instruction for the men, but the women aren't excluded so much as they have the option to go.

They don't have to go, but they can go. The men have to go. So it's a pilgrimage feast. The Hebrew word for that is Haag, which is very similar to the related Semitic word in Arabic, Hajj, which we hear

of, of course, for the pilgrimage to Mecca that Muslims are to make once in their lifetime at least. [16:21] So the first theme is the presence of God. They're gathering before the presence of God for these feasts and festivals. The second theme is the theme of remembering. Each of these festivals is tied to a commemoration of some act of God for the deliverance, redemption, salvation of Israel from Egypt.

So each of them recalls some aspect of that, the Passover being the actual night of liberation and coming out from Egypt. The festival of tabernacles or booths commemorates the 40 years of being in the wilderness and God's provision in the wilderness and the tents in which they lived and so on. The festival of weeks, verse 12, says, remember that you were a slave in Egypt. So all of these come back to remembering that time in Egypt and deliverance from Egypt and through the wilderness towards the promised land 40 years after leaving Egypt.

So the theme of remembering is a key aspect of these feasts. Thirdly, and related more to the agricultural nature, there's certainly a theme of blessing or gratitude.

Each of them is tied to some harvest in some way. Each of them acknowledges God's provision in giving the crops that provide them with food to eat. Each of them has a sequence of offerings that people would make.

[17:48] They're not to come empty handed. The end of verse 16 said the instructions in Leviticus and Exodus give more detail about all the offerings that are to be made during these feasts, freewill offerings and so on.

All of which are an acknowledgement with gratitude of the blessing that God has given the people of Israel through the harvests, the barley, the wheat, the summer fruits that are harvested.

All of them presuppose the blessing comes from God. And in that sense, there is a sort of undercurrent here that is anti-idolatry and anti-Canaanite gods.

Something that's overt, if you remember back a couple of weeks to chapter 13, with the instruction not to follow the false teachers who lead you after another god. And overtly in chapter 12 as well, which we looked at back in January or February.

That is, the Canaanite gods were fertility gods. You would go to a Canaanite god and offer some sacrifice in order for invoking or provoking the god to give you crops or rain or animals or children.

[18:57] All the aspects of fertility. But here the undercurrent is that it is God who provides. It is God who's the god of fertility, the god of Israel, Yahweh, Jehovah. And so there's this acknowledgement of God's blessing and an expression of gratitude in giving back.

So you don't come empty handed. But verse 17 says, All shall give as they are able according to the blessing of the Lord your God that he's given you. Exactly the same thing, in fact, we saw last week in the generosity that is to be extended to the poor as well.

God has blessed you. And out of that blessing, you are to give back to him in the sacrifices and free will offerings and so on that are part of these festivals, as well as indeed of all the other acts of worship that the Old Testament prescribes.

Indeed, well could an Old Testament Israelite have sung the doxology, praise God from whom all blessings flow, is in one sense a summary of part of the theme of these feasts as well.

And the fact that they're not to be empty handed in coming is that it undercuts their pride and self-sufficiency. It's not their wealth that has gained them their crops and possessions.

[20:10] It is God's provision. Now related to that, but maybe distinctively as a theme, is the theme of rejoicing. There's more occasion of the word joy or rejoicing in Deuteronomy than any other book in the Old Testament other than Psalms and Proverbs.

To be with God is to rejoice, to be redeemed people, blessed people, abundantly provided for people by the great goodness and grace of Almighty God.

This theme of rejoicing is worth highlighting because it is so distinct. We may take it for granted and skip over it as we read. But any other worship of any other God, whether ancient or modern, lacks a fundamental theme of rejoicing as part of its worship.

You see, when you would go to a Canaanite God to worship, you were trying to appease the God's anger or trying to provoke them into giving you something. And so it is in much of the culture and feel of the worship of the worship of other gods in our own day and age.

Distinctive in Christian worship as in Old Testament worship. We come before an Almighty God not to try and wheedle out of him something, but we come with a fundamental joy because of what he by his grace has already given to his people.

[21 : 38] You see, it's unique in the theology of the Christian faith that God is a gracious God and loves to give when we don't deserve it and even though we don't deserve it.

So our approach to him as the people of God is always to be marked by rejoicing and joy as a fundamental characteristic of our approach to God.

And that's unique and distinct from Canaanite worship or any other modern worship of any other God for that matter at all. So in verse 11, with the festival of weeks, rejoice before the Lord your God.

In verse 14, with the feast of tabernacles, rejoice during your festival. The end of verse 15, with the feast of tabernacles, you shall surely celebrate.

Let your hair down, rejoice and be joyful in the presence of God in a celebration of the feast of booths. There's no explicit mention of joy in the feast of Passover here.

[22 : 41] But if you read through the Old Testament, you recognize that on the times when we do hear an account of the Passover festival being celebrated, joy is a mark of it. No, not least when we read of it in the time of Hezekiah in the book of two chronicles, where they're so joyful in celebrating the Passover that they decide to do it for another week.

Let's extend the season and go for another week. We're so happy and joyful in celebrating the Passover, remembering God's deliverance from us. Joy is to be a mark of the worship of God's people of God.

And the fifth theme that I think is important in these feasts is a theme of unity. It is not the individual Israelite who makes his way along the tracks down the Jordan River and up the hills to Jerusalem to offer his sacrifice of Passover.

They come together as a community from all over Israel. They belong together as a community in their pilgrimage festival and feast. And it reminds us that, in a sense, our relationship with God, yes, it is personal.

It is unique between me and God. But it's not private. I think sometimes we Anglicans in particular have somehow confused private and personal. That's probably a flow on from the Victorian age of the 19th century, I suspect.

[23 : 58] And it's unhealthy. Our Christian faith is personal to us, but public. We belong together. We pray together. We sing together.

We hear God's word together. We have fellowship together. We rejoice together as the people of God. It's a corporate act that we gather to do. And for us, even on a Sunday, it's not so much coming and just sitting in my little cubicle or pew and me relating to God directly and then just not having any relationship with anyone else.

We belong together. It's a corporate event. Christian worship, the worship of the living God, whether Old Testament or New Testament, is always a corporate event. Personal, yes, but not private. Always public.

And in particular, the unity here and picks up a theme that we saw last week as well in the passage about giving to the poor in chapter 15. The unity here is to be overtly or explicitly extended to those in need.

So notice, for example, in verse 11. Rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, the Levites resident in your towns, as well as the strangers, the orphans, the widows who are among you.

[25 : 11] All of those people, especially the last part of the list, may well be poor. So, yes, it's the men have to go. But the children, the wives are all part of this, as well as the slaves who own no land, could make no sacrifice because they had no animals to offer.

They are to be incorporated in this. The Levites, the same. The Levites were the priests. They didn't own land. They didn't have animals to or crops to offer. But they were to be explicitly included in the celebration of the feast, as well as them, the strangers.

Literally, that is not just somebody you don't know, but somebody from another country who's come and decided, basically, I want to be an Israelite and worship their God. They're not a full Israelite.

They can't own land like Israelites did.

They can't, therefore, offer animals and crops. But they are to be included in as well. And then the orphans, people who've lost their parents. Therefore, they may be poor.

They may not have land. And the same, too, for the widows. Men would own the land. Somebody who's been widowed may actually be in a vulnerable position, depending on what children they've

got and how good the children are, basically.

[26 : 23] All of those categories were vulnerable to being landless and poor. They are to be included. So the unity is not just whoever is there. It's a sort of deliberate unity of inclusivity of people, especially those in need, to gather together.

Well, those five themes are principles that the New Testament upholds in its ideas of worship, even outside of these three feasts.

That is, worship is in the presence of Almighty God. It is remembering what God has done to spur us up to keep on loving and doing good works.

It's to be marked by gratitude for God's blessings. It's to be marked by joy. And to be marked by unity of the people of God. Now, what about these specific feasts, though?

Where do these end up in the sort of scan of the Bible, given that we no longer practice these three core feasts? The feast of Passover, we probably most readily know where it ends up, in a sense.

[27 : 31] In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus' last supper with his disciples in that upper room the night before he died was clearly a Passover meal. And Jesus' words then, in particular the words of institution with bread and wine, indicate that that Passover meal finds its fulfillment in Jesus' impending death and in our remembrance of that death in the celebration of the Lord's Supper with bread and wine.

In John's Gospel, the emphasis is slightly different in that it focuses more on the death of Jesus as the Passover sacrifice itself. So that instead of celebrating or sacrificing rather a lamb to remember liberation from Egypt, the death of Jesus is the sacrifice for the sins of the world to liberate not from an oppressive power like Egypt or even Rome, but rather to liberate us from the slavery to sins.

The bog of sin, as we saw in the children's talk earlier in the service. So the Passover meal finds its culmination and fulfillment in the death of Jesus and in a new meal that celebrates that in the Lord's Supper.

It's not quite, I think, a direct link from Passover to Lord's Supper so much as Passover into the death of Jesus and from the death of Jesus, our commemoration in the Lord's Supper, which we do regularly in our church services.

We find the same sort of fulfillment expressed in 1 Corinthians where Paul says Jesus is the Paschal Lamb sacrificed for us. So the Passover festival finds its fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ and in his death for our sins.

[29 : 14] Secondly, the festival of weeks. Seven weeks.

Jesus, which already here has some commemoration of slavery in Egypt, had the particular focus of commemorating God's giving of his law at Mount Sinai in the wilderness period.

Part of the reason for that is that seven weeks after leaving Egypt, roughly, Israel was at Sinai. And so the timing sort of coincides. And so at Mount Sinai, God gave the law, the Ten Commandments written on tablets of stone and the rest of the law to Moses to pass on to Israel recorded for us in Deuteronomy, amongst other books in the early part of the Old Testament.

In fact, in Jesus' day, as they would celebrate the festival of weeks, Exodus 19, the passage where Israel arrives at Mount Sinai, was one of their lectionary readings for that day.

It's no coincidence then that it's at the day of Pentecost that the Spirit of God is poured out.

Because the Old Testament looked forward to a new covenant when the law of God would be written not on tablets of stone, like the Ten Commandments were, but on the hearts of God's people by God's Spirit.

[30 : 53] And so in fulfillment, in a sense of giving the law on tablets of stone, comes the pouring out of God's Spirit on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2.

So we find then a fulfillment with the giving of God's Holy Spirit from that Feast of Weeks way back here in Deuteronomy 16. The Feast of Tabernacles gets one main mention in the New Testament in John's Gospel chapter 7.

If you read Matthew, Mark and Luke, the only time Jesus goes to Jerusalem is to die other than as a child. But John gives us a fuller picture of Jesus' latter years.

And on several occasions, Jesus goes to Jerusalem as an obedient Jew to make his pilgrimage for the key feasts. Three times, in fact, he goes for Passover in John 2, John 6, and then to die in John 11 at the end.

And he goes also in John 7 for the festival of tabernacles or booze in Jerusalem. In Jesus' day, because it's commemorating the 40-year wilderness period and God's provision in that time, part of

that provision was God giving water out of a rock, which you can read about in Exodus and Numbers.

[32 : 08] And so it was a ceremony for that. It was a water-pouring ceremony to remember the giving of water from a rock. And the other thing about the 40-year wilderness was God leading them through the desert for 40 years by a pillar of fire by night and cloud by day.

And as part of that recollection, remembrance, commemoration of the leading by fire, there were candles lit all over the courtyard of the temple to give light to remember the direction of God. In John 7, Jesus says two very profound things that show us where the Feast of Booths finds its culmination or fulfillment.

Jesus said, If anyone is thirsty, come to me. So a ceremony that had flowing or pouring water as part of its ceremony to commemorate the water from the rock, Jesus said, Come to me.

In fact, later on in Paul, again writing to the Corinthians, says that Jesus is that rock in the wilderness. So the fulfillment is found in Jesus Christ.

[33 : 18] There's a whole lot of other ways in which we could explore that more, but that's sufficient for now. The other thing that Jesus says when he goes to the Feast of Tabernacles is the day after the feast in John's Gospel.

The candles would be all extinguished. Everything would be over. And Jesus there in the courtyard precincts of the temple said, I am the light of the world.

Again, directing people's attention to himself. When he said, come to me if you're thirsty, he talked about giving out the Spirit, as he was the giver of the Spirit, to those who followed him.

What we find then is all three feasts point to Jesus in the end. He is the Passover lamb sacrificed for our sins to release us from slavery to sin.

He is the one who gives the Spirit of God, his own Spirit, to write the law on our hearts so that we may believe and follow the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[34 : 23] He is the one who's the light of the world, who gives us direction for life forever. He's the one who gives the life-giving Holy Spirit to his followers and to his people.

All these themes come together in Jesus. And indeed, the themes that I've drawn out find their greater fulfillment as well in Jesus.

The people of God gathering to worship in the presence of God, we are in the presence of God far beyond, in a far more privileged and intimate way than any Old Testament believer did, because we have access to the throne of grace by means of the death of Jesus.

So our being in the presence of God now, here in this building, not because it's a building, but here together, because we're gathered together, is an intimate presence with God because of Jesus.

We are to remember not just the events of the Exodus, although they're worth remembering too, but the greater act of redemption and salvation that comes through the death of Jesus, which we remember by God's word and by the celebration of the Lord's Supper from time to time.

[35 : 29] As we gather together, we think maybe not agriculturally of the blessings of God to us in crops and so on, maybe not as much as we ought, but we know that we've been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms already.

We still come together in God's presence as blessed people, having received from him by his grace, not in order to provoke him to give us what we want. We come together with joy and rejoicing, because the salvation that is won for us is secure in Christ.

It is a greater salvation than ancient Israel had. If they were commanded to rejoice, how much more ought we? Indeed, as Paul says, rejoice in the Lord always when he wrote to the Philippians and as we'll sing shortly.

And finally, we come together as the people of God. The New Testament is no less corporate than the old. And our Western way of thinking is damagingly individualistic.

We belong together as the people of God. Jesus' death brings us not only into God's presence, but brings us into an eternal unity with God's people, an essential belonging together.

[36 : 41] All those things find their culmination in Jesus Christ. And if celebrating these feasts was to be a right royal feast, a great celebration of rejoicing and letting your hair down, how much more ought our gatherings be?

Not three times a year, not even at the special occasions, but week by week as we gather together as redeemed and blessed people. Joy should be a constant feature and mark as we gather together in unity in the presence of God to remember the blessings of God through Jesus' death.

Amen.