

# Feast and Remember

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[ 0 : 00 ] So we are studying this passage. We're looking actually the whole book of Deuteronomy, which is basically, it's basically three sermons.

Moses hears from God and he preaches to his people just before they're about to enter the promised land. Moses doesn't actually get into the promised land. He dies before he gets there. So he wants to download to this younger generation here, you know, the heart of God as it relates to lots of different things.

So tonight we're in the middle of Moses' second sermon. So Moses preaches three sermons. We're in the middle of the second sermon, Deuteronomy 16.

And here Moses says, when you get to the new land, you need to have these regular religious feasts. So our passage, it's a description of three annual feasts that God's people should start doing once they get to the promised land.

Now, before we get into the details, the first question we want to ask is, it's like, why? Like, what does God want to accomplish by having his people go to these big feasts?

[ 1 : 11 ] Because, I mean, logistically, this is a big, these things are a big drama to pull off. Because you're actually asking, once you get there and people will settle in the various places in the whole country, you're actually asking people, no matter where they live, to turn up to this one place.

You're asking the whole country to come to this one spot for this big thing they're going to do. Pack up and leave the village and make this huge trip to the temple.

And it's compulsory. You have to go. Verse 16 says, all the males have to go. Remember, this is a patriarchal society. The hope was, everyone went, the whole family went.

But if they couldn't, at least one guy from every family had to go. Jesus actually makes the trip when he's 12 years old in Luke 2. So big drama to pull this off. And really costly, obviously.

Financially costly. Physically costly. There's this great line in verse 16. I love the directness of it. It says, don't turn up empty-handed. I love that. So the feasts, they were costly.

[ 2 : 14 ] They were logistically a drama. But they were also a really good time. You would eat a lot. You would give a lot.

You would celebrate a lot. I don't know if you missed it. You might have missed this line in the passage where he says, Moses says, I want no food. I want no food left by the morning.

So you just had to eat and eat and eat and celebrate, celebrate, celebrate. Give, give, give, give, give. Fantastic. So back to the question. What's the point? Like, like, why bother?

Well, one of the big reasons was to remember. They were supposed to remember that they were a blessed people. Hence this huge celebration.

You're a blessed people. And they're supposed to remember to be a blessing to others. That's going to become more clear as we look closer at the text.

[ 3 : 11 ] So let's go through these festivals quickly. We've got three festivals. We'll talk about them quite quickly. And then we'll ask the question, 5,000 years later, like, what does it, what does it mean for us as Christians in 2020?

So first festival, the Feast of Passover. That's verses one to eight. Actually, what Moses does here, he talks about Passover. Then he talks about unleavened bread.

Moses actually kind of mushes, he sort of mushes together two feasts right here, which happened one after the other, Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. They happened one after the other. Passover, as many of you will know, celebrated God's people being saved from Egypt.

So the Jews were enslaved there and there's all these kind of like curses hit the Egyptians, all these curses hit the Egyptians because they're trying to, you know, Moses is trying to convince him, like, let my people go.

The final curse was death. Death visited Egypt, but it passed over households, the households of God's people if they put the blood of the lamb on their doorpost. Death passed over, but touched the households of all the Egyptians.

[ 4 : 17 ] As a result, Pharaoh relinquished and set the Hebrew people free from slavery. The unleavened bread piece, that's kind of a reminder they had to leave Egypt in a hurry. So when they're making food for the big trip, no fluffy, big white loaves of bread, just kind of like unyeasted flatbread.

So during these festivals, they remember all this. They'd have a huge party, lots of food, lots of grilled meat. A special animal was killed to symbolise how they were rescued by a sacrifice of a lamb.

And no fluffy bread for a long time, just the flat unleavened bread. So that's Passover in 30 seconds. The next festival is called the Festival of Weeks. That's verses 9 to 12.

You might not have heard of this one. But we sort of know it more, in later years, it was called Pentecost. So 50 days over Passover, 50 days over Passover.

So sort of coming into spring, you see it there in verse 10, begin to count seven weeks from the time the sickle first is put into the standing grain. This is the harvest festival. Again, compulsory.

[ 5 : 24 ] So if the previous feast celebrated says, remember salvation, this feast says, remember God's provision. We don't get tons of details on it here in Deuteronomy, but it is mentioned in three other books of the first five books of the Bible.

So, but anyway, huge big party, and you give to God from what God has provided to you from this, you know, from spring, from the spring harvest.

For the people of God, it was a reminder that what they were eating, it wasn't because they're just really great people and they're, you know, amazing farmers.

It was a reminder that, you know, the Lord provided the sun, the Lord provided the dirt, the Lord provided the seeds. You know, you guys, you didn't make the seeds no matter what sort of, you know, Monsanto says.

Like you don't invent these. The God provided you these seeds. It reminds them they're completely dependent on the Lord. You can think of it like this. All of the most important knobs and levers and buttons are on God's side of the wall.

[ 6 : 35 ] So we give God credit for his provision in our lives. So once a year, the Hebrew people, no matter where they lived, would leave their villages and head to this central place for the spring festival, known as the festival of weeks or Pentecost.

Okay. The third festival, the feast of booths, also known as the feast of tents, of tents. So verses 13 to 15. So for this festival, for seven days, God's people would leave their nice homes and they would live in tents to remind them that God provided for them in the desert during the Exodus.

So when they are escaped from Egypt and they're traveling to the promised land, they had to live in tents and God provided for them. This is a festival to say, you know, it's a very physical thing.

It's a very wholehearted thing. It's like, give up your comfortable homes for a week and live in tents. It's like saying, give up self-reliance and remember how God provided you, provided for you in the desert.

It's reminding them that they must trust in the Lord for all of their stuff, even though they're in this really comfortable situation. I was chatting to my daughter Sadie a couple of days ago and I said, what's one word you would use to describe God?

[ 7 : 56 ] And straight away, it just popped out of her mouth. She said, loyal. I thought, oh, that's gold, right? That is absolute gold. God has been so loyal to his people.

And festivals like this, they remind them of the loyalty of God. So this festival happened, it happened at the, sort of like in what we'd call autumn or the fall, right?

Sort of towards the end of the harvest. Again, everyone comes, it's a joyful, it's a family gathering sort of thing and it's a reminder of God's provision.

So those are the feasts. So the question is now, like we're like, you know, thousands of years later, what do we, so what?

What does it matter to us? Is it of just historical importance? Like it's just kind of interesting historical things that old believers used to do. You know, we're Christians, we're on the other side of Christ's coming.

[ 8 : 52 ] We don't do any of this stuff anymore. So what does it mean for us? Let's have a think about that. Well, first we look at it in terms of fulfillment, don't we? And we could spend a lot of time looking at this.

We'll just do this very quickly though. Christ was crucified during what feast? Passover. And the gospels are very clear about that.

This happened during Passover. During the Passover feast, Christ was crucified. This is not a coincidence, of course. Christ is, the New Testament calls Christ the Passover lamb.

He was killed. He was the blood. He was the sacrifice. So death passes over us. Then a month and a bit later, during the Feast of Weeks, during Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came down on the church.

Lots of people came to faith. This was like a harvest, the first fruits of the church. Probably not a coincidence either. You know, it's just, it's wonderful to see how the Bible is this cohesive story all pointing us to Jesus.

[ 9 : 59 ] So we could spend a lot of time on that. We're not going to, but we look at it in terms of fulfillment. That's one of the ways it matters to us, a very important way it matters to us. But even if we look at the passage just through the eyes of the original hearers, looking at the passage on its own terms, it's immensely helpful to us.

So that's what I'd like to do for a couple of minutes. So Moses' picture of life with God, dwelling with God, was what?

It was a banquet. That's the picture he used to say, here's what life with God is like. It's feasting with God and with others and it's giving ourselves to others as well.

That's why the festivals were the meal base. That's why they were communal. And that's why they always incorporated those on the margins. Did you see that? Did you pick that up?

In a couple of the feasts, it says, make sure you include the widow, the fatherless and the sojourner, the refugee. Those on the outside always include these in the feasts.

[ 11 : 19 ] So Moses' picture of life with God was enjoy His blessings and be a blessing to others. And that's what the feasts would do.

They were this, they were constantly putting this truth before God's people. So why the regularity of these feasts? Because we have a tendency to, and I'll say this harshly, we have a tendency to amputate the blessings of God from the blesser.

To take the blessings and sort of push out the God who gives the blessings. Here's what I mean. You know, we can enjoy God and His blessings, but sometimes we want to just push God off to the side.

But hang on to the blessings, the community and the love and the justice. We want to hang on to that stuff. And what these festivals do is they bring together God and His blessings.

They bring together those things. Let me say it another way. So, stay with me here, stay with me here. Listen to this, listen to this. we often get caught up in questions like, why do bad things happen to me?

[ 12 : 39 ] Why is there suffering in the world? And we want answers. And people lose their faith over such questions. Why do bad things happen to me?

Why is there suffering in the world? But this passage says, and it's, I think it's genius, it says, we also need a good answer to the question, why are there good things in our lives?

And here's the great irony, you know, if we don't have a proper answer to that question, we can lose our faith as well. Because you start to think all the good things in your life are just because you're really great.

See, Moses suspected this would happen. They would become people who are self-reliant, completely self-reliant and ignore the giver of all the good things in their life.

Moses suspected this would happen, which is why he said, do these honking great festivals and come from all over the country. Everyone, come along.

[ 13 : 44 ] Remember, there is, you are only here because God saved you and He's still providing for you. Let's think about this for us, Christians. We enjoy lots of benefits, don't we?

And you can rattle off hundreds of them. Here's a couple. We have a morality to shape our lives. We have community. No matter where we go in the world, we have community.

We have a call to be outward-looking and seek justice. Isn't that wonderful? We have a sense that ultimately everything's going to be okay. That's brilliant stuff, isn't it?

That's just tremendous. These are the blessings of our life. But it can happen that we get forgetful. We get a bit comfy in these blessings and we sit back and just sort of enjoy these blessings and God slowly gets sort of shunted off to the side.

We can forget that we were all destined for eternity without God. But the Lord called us by name and He saved us and He provided for us and He is loyal to us.

[ 15 : 02 ] We can forget the big story behind all these blessings we enjoy. So what's the foil to the spiritual forgetfulness? Well, there's probably lots of ways to address this.

I will recommend one. I'll recommend one way. And it's this. Folks, don't waste this pandemic.

Don't waste the pandemic. Normally, we have very little margin in our life. You know, we like our time and we don't like our time being invaded.

But some of us right now have a lot more space. At this moment, we have a lot more space in our life. Folks, like what Robin Logan said, use that space.

See, normally what we try and do is we fit worship into our schedule. Now, you don't have much on. Do it the other way around. Fit everything else around these spiritual practices in your life.

[ 16 : 02 ] And I know some of you are doing that. You're using the space for these wonderful practices where you remind yourself of the great story of salvation. Lock those things in so when this corona thing is finished, they're still there.

And I know what you're saying. You're sort of like, oh, it's just a bit of a hassle, isn't it? It's a bit of a hassle. I know, I know, I know. But remember, you know, these festivals in Deuteronomy, they weren't just intellectual affairs.

They were very physical things. You know, you make a long trip, you had to prepare it. It was costly. You had to bring all these things. So prepare. Prepare in your house.

Like in our place, we have a comfy chair and beside that comfy chair, we have a basket. And in that basket, there are Bibles and prayer books and devotionals. And they are just there all the time waiting to be used.

Folks, carve out space in your life to remind yourself of God's great story whilst you have these margins in your life. I think I'll close here.

[ 17 : 09 ] We are forgetful people. And what happens is we can hang on to the blessings, but forget the giver of those blessings.

So don't waste this pandemic. Create some space in your life to dwell on the goodness of God, on the beauty of Jesus, the ever presentness of the Holy Spirit in your life, that you were lost and now are saved.

Folks, dwell with God and get these truths into your bones. Amen.