

You Are His – His Care Confirms It! NUMBERS 28:26-31

(Reading: Leviticus 23:9-22)

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ...

By now we are realising how carefully the Lord regulates the worship and service of His people in the Old Testament.

He lays down exactly what His people need to be the light to Him among the nations.

There's no part of their lives that should be untouched by Him.

What we have seen thus far in Numbers 28 is clear about this, (as the handout chart shows us).

The verses 1 till 8 began with the daily offerings.

Twice each day, dawn and dusk, there were public offerings.

Then the verses 9 and 10 prescribed a Sabbath offering.

Once a week, on the seventh day, there was a public midday offering.

But it doesn't end there.

The verses 11 till 15 lay down monthly offerings.

This meant every four weeks there was an extra special offering.

And you knew it was extra special because you offered up a lot more.

Then there are the annual feasts.

The first of these was the Passover Festival.

That especially remembered their being saved from Egypt.

The effect of the Lord on their lives becomes even clearer, however, with the second most important festival in the Hebrew calendar year.

For some seven weeks after the Sabbath following the Passover there is the Feast of Weeks.

That's why one of the names for this festival is 'Feast of Weeks.'

Because it comes exactly seven weeks later.

Seven times seven days afterwards.

Seven – the one uniquely symbolic number in Scripture.

Seven – the number which expresses "completeness" or "perfection".

And it's on the day after this that there is this one day festival.

The day that commemorates fifty days since the sickle was first put to the barley harvest.

The Jubilee day!

That's why this day is also known as Pentecost.

For Pentecost is the Greek word for 'fifty' which was used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures.

This day is also called ‘The Feast of Harvest’ and ‘The Day of First-fruits.’
It was a day which was to be treated as a Sabbath day – a sacred assembly.
This was because the loaves made from the new grain were offered on the altar.
Leviticus 23 verse 17 instructed the people, “From wherever you live, bring two loaves made of ten-tenths of an ephah of fine flour, baked with yeast, as a wave offering of first-fruits to the LORD.”

So, though it was a one day festival, it was especially set aside.

Every year it was to be faithfully remembered by Israel.

Right throughout the Old Testament and in the New we find references to it.

This was to be an abiding ordinance.

For while their various crops and fruit might ripen at different times, the Lord set down that at the time of the wheat harvest, seven weeks after the Passover’s Sabbath, His people were to specially thank Him.

It’s quite a different reason for solemnly worshipping the Lord their God.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread had celebrated His great saving act of the destroying angel passing over His people.

The people who had sprinkled the blood of the lamb on their door posts.

That was special revelation.

That was an act where God moved in an extra-ordinary way.

And what could be more special than Jesus Christ Himself coming to live among us?

That is the height of all special revelation.

His death and resurrection is the ultimate supernatural act.

In fact, all special revelation either directly points towards Him, speaks about when He was here, or looks back to Him.

But now they’re commemorating general revelation.

For this is the care God gives them every day and in every way.

A care that the pagans also experience.

Though, unlike the pagans, Israel knows who cares for them.

So while, as Matthew 5:45 says, the sun rises on the evil and the good and the rain falls on the righteous and the unrighteous, because they are of the righteous they know who sends that rain.

That’s indeed what the first aspect to this text says.

GOD’S PEOPLE THANK HIM FOR FOOD.

Congregation, we need to imagine the testimony this was in the world then.

We have seen that already in the way God’s people were to celebrate the New Moon.

That was quite different than those around them.

The whole style of worship is a total contrast to the other religions.
Because the Lord’s way had them looking a completely different way.

And so each day, morning and evening; and each Sabbath, at mid-day; and once a month; they would have solemn times of worship.

There were priests set apart to lead it.

And the people reverently looked on.

How different could you get from the world!

And the Feast of Weeks does it again.

Because harvest time for the pagans was party time!

If you thought their New Moon festivities were wild, you'd be definitely blown away by what they did on this day – or in this week!

So the last thing on pagan minds at this time was what they had done wrong. They were too busy having a good time.

There was gluttony and much immorality. In fact, more than likely they wouldn't have remembered much of this time anyway because of their drunkenness!

But the Israelites were remembering alright.

They were thanking the Lord for another year of His care for them.

That was shown by what we read in Leviticus 23.

Because the offering of new grain referred to in verse 26 of the text is the Lord receiving the first of the new harvest before anyone else.

Leviticus 23 verse 14 declares, "You must not eat any bread, or roasted or new grain, until the very day you bring this offering to your God.

"This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live."

Imagine that!

Right when they harvested the first-fruits, which was around the time of Passover, and which would have been barley because it ripened several weeks before wheat, they had to bring the amount equivalent to an omer of fine flour as an offering to the Lord.

So the harvest began with the Lord, and then, with the Feast of Weeks, it ended with the Lord.

For after seven weeks of harvesting, they have come to the end of the crop.

Seven weeks, forty-nine days – over a month and a half.

After all that work, they had to lay it again before the Lord.

Your meal shouldn't only begin with grace – that blessing we ask on the food.

It has to also end with thanksgiving!

And so it is that the people are gathered before the Lord on Pentecost.

The people are giving thanks to whom thanks is due.

Congregation, there is a certain spirit in all this.

Israel has to have a good attitude here.

They cannot be like Israel was in the time of Jeremiah the prophet.

In Jeremiah 5:24 he says of disobedient Israel that they don't "fear the LORD our God, who gives autumn and spring rains," and "who assures them of the regular weeks of harvest."

You see, true thanksgiving isn't just words.

It's a response.

And it's the same response regardless of what God has given you.

A good example of this is the first Thanksgiving Day held by the puritan pilgrims in North America.

You might know the story.

It had been a hard time for those settlers.

But in amongst all their difficulties – the loss of loved ones, the lack of food supplies – they still believed they were blessed.

And so on Harvest Day they chose to celebrate God's goodness by sharing a meal with the Native Americans who had helped them to survive.

That attitude made one Christian writer say that so much of the spirit of the original celebration had been lost today.

People are complaining that their Thanksgiving Day has been "spoiled" by bad weather, disappointing food, or a bad cold.

But it's we who are spoiled, she said, spoiled by the very blessings that should make every day a day of thanksgiving, whatever our circumstances.

That's why this Feast of Weeks was to be an annual event, regardless of how well the harvest did – or didn't do!

The Lord's people need to see that all things are sent by God.

It's all for our good – even if we don't think it's so good!

Are you going to judge God?

Would you tell Him what to do?

Now, in Deuteronomy 16 verse 10 the Lord said that the freewill offering ought to be in proportion to how much the harvest produced.

So it was never to be unfair.

God never asks for what we cannot give.

But always the standard requirements for the public worship were to be kept.

This was to be the time the Old Testament Church showed their gratitude for the Lord's care physically.

But also this was to be the time that **GOD'S PEOPLE DEDICATE ALL TO HIM.**

Our second aspect.

Congregation, this might not seem to be any different from the first aspect.

Surely thanksgiving, which is the expression of gratitude to God, means you live your whole life a certain way.

A way which is focused on using what we have to the glory of God.

Exactly!

So it's indeed tied up with the first point.

Yet unless we draw out that it's not only about a response to God but also a direction with Him, we will miss the vital part this feast was in Israel's life.

This is where the word "first-fruits" particularly comes in.

Because the first thought is to be for the Lord.

And if the first thought is always for the Lord it certainly gives us His direction for our lives.

After all, who was it who thought of them?

No wonder that in Deuteronomy 16 verse 12 this feast is connected to their deliverance from Egypt.

Because it's their being saved by the Lord that puts them in this special place.

And certainly the burnt offerings and the sin offering on this day pointed again to how He had called them apart.

Now, if their focus is on the Lord, it will also be on their neighbour.

That's clear from the two tables of the law.

For the first four commandments are vertical – they are how we show who God is to us.

And the second six commandments are horizontal - they show how who God is to us reflects in the way we treat others.

The Lord Jesus summed up the Ten Commandments in Matthew 22 this way.

In the verses 37 till 39 He said it was this: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

"This is the first and greatest commandment.

"And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'"

So Old Testament Israel, while loving the Lord their God, also care for their neighbour.

That's why our reading of Leviticus 23 ended with verse 22 commanding them to leave the very edges of the field and the gleanings for the poor.

This way the crumbs of the meal could feed those in need.

You see, when Israel met in this special public worship, they weren't only giving a portion of what they had to the Lord, they were dedicating all they had to Him!

I mean, don't we do the same each Sunday?

You don't honestly think that what you put in the offering bag is the total sum of your commitment, do you?

Of course not!

It's the portion – the tithe – you set aside especially for God's Kingdom work through the Church of Christ.

But it also represents a whole life set apart from Him!

The apostle Paul spoke about this in Galatians chapter 6.

Using the harvest analogy he says there in verse 8, “the one who sows to please the Spirit will reap eternal life.”

And so he goes on in verse 9, “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, **especially to those who belong to the family of believers.**”

The early New Testament Church was well known for this love they had for one another.

To be part of the church meant you were part of the most loving family on earth.

And is it any surprise since God Himself is our Father?

Can you see it, congregation?

God is creating a new society.

In amongst the darkness of this world His light shines – through all our little lights!

It’s because we join those lights together in the Church that we become **the Light**, the Body of Christ Himself!

Someone once wrote a poem expressing this sentiment.

She said, “O Heavenly Father: We thank Thee for food and remember the hungry.

“We thank Thee for health and remember the sick.

“We thank Thee for friends and remember the friendless.

“We thank Thee for freedom and remember the enslaved.

“May these remembrances stir us to service, that Thy gifts to us may be used for others.”

As we dedicate our all to the Lord our worship is acceptable to Him.

Hold any part back and we’re no different to Ananias and Sapphira.

So let’s not hold anything back.

We know from Romans 1 verse 21 that nothing turns us into bitter, selfish, dissatisfied people more quickly than an ungrateful heart.

Instead, let’s be completely taken up in thanking God for all He’s done. That will restore contentment.

That will bring out the joy of our salvation.

And then we will have the same Spirit ancient Israel had when they faithfully celebrated this feast.

For then it was the most joyful time for them.

The bounty of the harvest had been taken in.

So let’s also rejoice.

The greatest harvest of all time is coming in.

The first-fruits have already been seen.

1st Corinthians 15 gladly declares that.

For verse 20 there says that “Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.”

As the apostle Paul goes on to explain, “For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.

“As in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

“But each in his own turn: Christ the first-fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.(vv21-23)”

This is the true message of Easter.

Because this is what remember every Sunday, for Sunday is the first day of the week.

As those who belong to Christ you dedicate your all to Him.

You show you’re His fruit.

Dear believer, when you do that you are offering up your sacrifice every day. Because it’s a spiritual sacrifice.

And then you’re the aroma pleasing to the Lord!

Amen.

PRAYER:

Let’s pray...

O Gracious God,
We give You but what is Your own,

All that we have is Yours alone,

Amen.

Whatever the gift may be;

A trust, O Lord, from Thee.