

**[1]**  
**First Fruits**  
**Deuteronomy 26:1-11**  
**January 7, 2018, Jeff Germon**

Happy New Year! God is so good! 2017 zipped by so fast. Today, very appropriately, is one of our Remember and Celebrate Sundays. About every quarter or so we take a look at one of the Jewish festivals from the Old Testament and then remember what we have seen God do in that quarter and acknowledge that it was all from him. The first Sunday of the New Year is a great time to do that. We should, of course, always remember that all good things come from God, but it's easy for us to forget.

Every year on our anniversary Ruth and I look back on the year and thank God for what he has taught us and how he has blessed us. It's one way that we purposefully keep ourselves grounded in Christ and remind ourselves that he is God and we are not and that everything good comes from him.

**[2]**

This morning we are going to take a look at the Jewish Festival of First Fruits (*Bikkurim*). We don't hear much about this festival, but it was a very important event in the life of the Israelites. It was a festival in which the Temple was necessary, so it hasn't actually been celebrated by the Jews since 70 AD, when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans.

It was, however, a very important festival that has rich significance for us as followers of Jesus, as we will see in a few minutes. The Festival of First Fruits was supposed to be a time when the Israelites would acknowledge that God was their provider. It was a way of giving thanks to him, and acknowledging that any success they had came from God.

Before we take a closer look at the festival let's do a quick recap of where we have traveled in our series thus far.

**[3]**

On September 10th, we started our sermon series at the beginning of the Bible, in Genesis, where we saw that God created the universe and everything in it, including humankind. He put the first man and woman (Adam and Eve) in the Garden of Eden where they had everything they needed for life. It was literally paradise. They had only one rule. There was one tree God forbade them to eat from called **The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil**. Other than that they were free — until they believed the lie of Satan that they could find satisfaction and reach their full potential without God.

They ate of the fruit and things spiraled out of control. The *shalom* they had with each other and with God was lost. Since that time, because God created humankind for relationship with himself and each other, he has been all about restoring the peace that was broken in the garden. His heart for us is that all our relationships would have peace.

He called Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 12 to become a nation through whom he could bless every nation on earth. His plan was to use them to gather for himself a people who would be fully committed to his rescue mission to restore his peace to the earth. Along with his promise that they would become a great nation he also promised they would have land in which to settle.

When Sarah was 90 years old and Abraham was 100, they had their first son, Isaac. Isaac had Jacob. Jacob fathered twelve sons who became the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. They all ended up in captivity as slaves in Egypt. Their descendants were there for over 400 years and were brutally oppressed by the Egyptians.

They cried out to God asking that he rescue them. God raised up Moses and through a bunch of miracles, he used Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. They ended up wandering in the wilderness for forty years because of their disobedience to God. During that time, while camped out at the foot of Mount Sinai, God gave them the law, the first five books of the Old Testament, to teach them how to love him and each other once they settled in the land across the Jordan River.

In that law God also gave them some festivals that they were to celebrate at certain times of the year to remember God, his promises, and his faithfulness. Today we are going to look at one of those festivals called the Festival of First Fruits, or *Bikkurim* in Hebrew. We'll come back to that in a bit.

After Moses died, Joshua took over the leadership and led the Israelites across the Jordan River where they settled in the land God had promised them.

Israel then looked at the other nations around them and noticed that they had kings to lead them, and they did not. So, they begged God for a king. God did as they asked, but warned them that the kings would not treat them well and that they would suffer under them. Saul was the first king. He started off well, but after some victory he began to believe in his own power and his pride initiated a quick downward spiral.

After we looked at the rise and fall of Saul, we got into the Christmas season, so we fast-forwarded to the New Testament and saw how all of the Old Testament points forward to Jesus.

Last week, Ryan wonderfully brought us back to our Old Testament narrative where he looked at the first chapter of King David's life, his call and his battle with the giant Goliath. Next week we will continue on with King David.

#### **[4]**

Before we move on to the Festival let's remind ourselves of the three threads we see weaving their way through the Biblical Narrative, through all history, and even through our lives.

1. **God is up to something.** He is God and we are not. He is restoring the shalom that was lost at the garden at the beginning of time. He is purposefully moving history to a final conclusion. We are in HisStory. We can choose to be a part of what he is doing or not. The choice is ours.
2. **Satan is up to something.** He is actively working to destroy peace on earth. He wants to do whatever he can to destroy relationships and cause as much strife and disunity in the world as possible so the *shalom* of God is broken.
3. **We, as fallen human beings, without the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, most naturally move away from God.**

We see these three threads in every Biblical story and we see them very clearly in our own lives.

**[5]**

Today let's rewind to the giving of the festivals and specifically the Festival of Firstfruits. If you were to research the Old Testament festivals using Google, many of you would end up being very confused, especially with this one. It's confusing for a number of reasons, the main one being that the Hebrew word *Bikkurim* is literally translated 'first fruits.' And that word is also used in the Harvest Festival, which is a different festival that we will look at in a few weeks.

I am going to try to simplify this as much as possible. Before we read an example of the First Fruits Festival in the Old Testament let me just give some overarching principles that come out of this festival. These are keys, not only to understanding the festival, but they are keys to understanding how we grow in maturity and in our faith in Jesus.

**[6]**

### **1. We are utterly dependent on God.**

We like to think we aren't. And we work as hard as we can to make sure we don't need God. We would never say that, and most of us would probably say it's not true, but I think, we often live as if we don't need God.

The First Fruits festival was meant to remind the Israelites that everything belongs to God. Without God they would not have a harvest. They were totally dependent on God whether they knew it or not.

**[7]**

### **2. Gratitude should be a way of life, a constant recognition that everything good comes from God.**

An attitude of gratitude will crowd out arrogance, pride, selfishness, anger, resentment, and self-pity.

**[8]**

### **3. Trust in God is at the core of the life of faith.**

The First Fruits festival was a spiritual discipline that trained the Jews that they can trust God, not only with their finances, but also with their time, their relationships, their talents, and all of their affections.

The Festival of First Fruits is all about giving the very best of every part of your life to God, as opposed to giving him your leftovers.

Leviticus 23 gives a description of the seven major festivals that the Jews celebrated. We don't have time to read it this morning, but it would be a good idea for you to read all of Leviticus 23 to get the big picture of the seven Old Testament feasts that God required of the Israelites.

Here is a list of them:

**[9]**

#### **1. Passover (*Pesach*)**

This feast was to remember how God miraculously delivered them out of captivity in Egypt. The angel of death, who would kill all the first born of everyone in Egypt, passed over every home that had its doorposts painted with the blood of a sacrificed lamb (Exodus 12). Those who didn't believe God refused to do this and their firstborn sons, including firstborn male livestock, were killed by the angel of death. The Egyptians, of course did not believe God. The Israelites took him seriously and were saved. The Passover feast is a time to remember the salvation of Israel. This feast takes place on the first full moon in spring.

**[10]**

**Jesus died on the cross at the exact time of the Passover Feast in Jerusalem. He was the Passover lamb who gave his life for the sins of the world.**

Today, after the sermon, as followers of Jesus, we will symbolically take communion (which was a part of the Passover meal that Jesus celebrated with his disciples on the night he was betrayed) to remember Jesus' death and the fact that we are passed over by death because Jesus spilled his blood for us on the cross.

**[11]**

## **2. Unleavened Bread (*Chag HaMotzah*)**

This feast begins on the night after Passover. It was to remember that God provided for them when they were delivered from Egypt. When they were rescued from Egypt, God told them to make bread without yeast to take with them on their journey because they wouldn't have time to wait for the bread to rise. They were to eat their meal in haste.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread was a week long feast where no yeast or leaven could be eaten, or even found in their houses. In the Bible yeast often symbolized sin. So, unleavened bread was to be eaten during this week long festival which symbolized a holy walk with God.

**[12]**

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, which means "House of Bread." He was called the bread of life. He lived a sinless life. And as we learned when we watched the Passover video by Jews for Jesus a few weeks ago, the *matzah* (unleavened bread) is striped and pierced. Jesus was striped from being whipped and was pierced by a spear, and then died in our place so we could have life.

Jesus was put in the tomb at the exact time of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This was no coincidence. Crucifixion normally took three days. Jesus died in just six hours, exactly at the time so he could fulfill this festival.

**[13]**

## **John 10:17–18 (NLT)**

***17 "The Father loves me because I sacrifice my life so I may take it back again. 18 No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded."***

**[14]**

## **3. First Fruits (*Reshith Katzir - Bikkurim*)**

Today we are going to focus on the Festival of First Fruits. It was to be held on the Sunday following the Feast of Unleavened Bread and was to acknowledge that God is their provider.

**[15]**

Jesus rose from the dead, ***"the first born from among the dead"*** exactly on the day of this festival. We'll take a closer look at this in a few minutes.

[16]

#### 4. Harvest (*Shavuot*)

The Harvest Feast is also called the Feast of Weeks, or the Feast of Pentecost, due to the fact that it was to take place seven Sabbaths after the Feast of First Fruits; 49 days, plus one. It was a celebration of the harvest and an anniversary of the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. In a few weeks we are going to look closer at this, so I don't want to give too much away. But, it is important to note that the Holy Spirit was given at this celebration at Pentecost in Acts 2.

[17]

Remember, Jesus rose from the dead after three days and then spent forty days teaching his disciples. Then he told them to go to Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit who showed up exactly on the day of this festival. And on that day there was a great harvest of souls. 3,000 people were added to their number that day. The harvest continued and is still continuing now all over the world.

The other three feasts will be fulfilled at the second coming of Jesus.

[18]

#### 5. Trumpets (*Rosh Hashanah*)

#### 6. Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*)

#### 7. Tabernacles (represented the presence of God) (*Sukkoth*)

We won't discuss these three festivals right now. But let me just say that Jesus will return again one day, the Bible says, **with the sound of a trumpet**. There will be a **day of atoning** where everyone will be judged, and those who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb will be **in the presence of God forever**.

You cannot tell me after looking at this that God is not sovereign. He is moving all history towards a final conclusion. He continues to work today - all around us. He is still gathering a people for himself who will be fully committed to his mission. We, at CRBC, need to take this seriously and get in the game. He will not force us to join him. That is our choice, but we would be very foolish to live as though life just happens by chance or fate and go on attempting to build our own safe haven when he has called us to something much greater.

Let's back up a bit now and deal more closely with the Festival of First Fruits. It is described in more detail in Deuteronomy 26. God is telling his people how they are to honour him once they cross the Jordan and get settled in the land he promised them.

[19]

#### Deuteronomy 26:1–11 (NLT)

***<sup>1</sup> “When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you as a special possession and you have conquered it and settled there, <sup>2</sup> put some of the first produce from each crop you harvest into a basket and bring it to the designated place of worship—the place the Lord your God chooses for his name to be honored.***

[20]

***<sup>3</sup> Go to the priest in charge at that time and say to him, ‘With this gift I acknowledge to the Lord your God that I have entered the land he swore to our ancestors he would give us.’ <sup>4</sup> The priest will then take the basket from your hand and set it before the altar of the Lord your God.***

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***<sup>5</sup> “You must then say in the presence of the Lord your God, ‘My ancestor Jacob was a wandering Aramean who went to live as a foreigner in Egypt. His family arrived few in number, but in Egypt they became a large and mighty nation.***

***[22]***

***<sup>6</sup> When the Egyptians oppressed and humiliated us by making us their slaves, <sup>7</sup> we cried out to the Lord, the God of our ancestors. He heard our cries and saw our hardship, toil, and oppression. <sup>8</sup> So the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand and powerful arm, with overwhelming terror, and with miraculous signs and wonders.***

***[23]***

***<sup>9</sup> He brought us to this place and gave us this land flowing with milk and honey! <sup>10</sup>And now, O Lord, I have brought you the first portion of the harvest you have given me from the ground.’ Then place the produce before the Lord your God, and bow to the ground in worship before him.***

***[24]***

***<sup>11</sup> Afterward you may go and celebrate because of all the good things the Lord your God has given to you and your household. Remember to include the Levites and the foreigners living among you in the celebration.***

***[25]***

The Jewish farmers, upon bringing their first fruits (*bikkurim*), were to recount their ancestors’ journey to and from Egypt. The land of Israel to the west of the Jordan River was the culmination of that journey. The purpose of retelling the journey of their ancestors was to reflect on how God led them. It was a story of the ebb and flow of their faith in God.

Our back stories are an important part of our journey as well. My mother was here for Christmas and I had the privilege of asking her some questions about her story. It was a very rich experience for me listening to my heritage. I have a long history of preachers in my family. My father was a lay preacher and evangelist. My mother’s father was a lay preacher. And I learned that my great grandfather was a pastor/evangelist.

***[26]***

I quizzed my mother about him. That whetted my appetite to learn more so I emailed my uncle and asked him what he knew about my great grandfather, Peder Overlid. He told me about a couple books about early Saskatchewan pastors where he is mentioned. He was born in Norway in 1873 and immigrated to the United States in 1897. He was married in 1900, and he and my great grandma, Karen, had nine kids.

He worked as a farmer and a carpenter to make ends meet, but his real love was preaching the Word. He traveled as an evangelist until the Lutheran denomination that he was a part of recognized his giftings and in 1920 ordained him as a pastor. He pastored five churches at the same time, one of them being in the same town where Ruthie and I have a house that we rent out.

He had an old Model T Ford that he wore out in 1928, so the churches got together and bought him a new 1928 Chevrolet. In the winter, he had to use a team of horses pulling a cutter sleigh to get around. He was paid \$300/year by the denomination and then given support by the churches for the remainder of his income.

That was my great grandfather. His was a story of trusting in God each step of the way. I can't imagine pastoring back then in those conditions. Now, when I am going through discouraging times I can look back at that heritage and remember that the same God, the God of my father, grandfather, great grandfather and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is still in charge.

A very important part of walking with Jesus is looking back and remembering God's faithfulness and cultivating an attitude of gratitude. That practice really will, in time, vanquish arrogance, pride, selfishness, anger, resentment, and self-pity.

That is why God instituted the Feast of First Fruits as a spiritual discipline, to help them acknowledge his faithfulness and thank him for it.

### **[27]**

Back to the Festival of First Fruits: In Israel, the most basic sense of faith stemmed from a dependence on God in regards to agriculture. Jewish society in that time was dependant almost entirely on agriculture. In reality, because only God controls the weather, they were dependent on God's blessing. The Festival of First Fruits was meant to cultivate a right heart attitude towards God and his loving providence towards his people.

There are some principles here that are key and very much apply to how we should live our lives. We have already alluded to them earlier.

### **[28]**

- 1. They were to bring the first and very best of their crops to present to God. Why? In recognition that they were utterly dependant on God.**

Why was this important? Because if they waited until the end of the season they would very likely end up giving him their left-overs, at best, and maybe even nothing.

How many of us are not tempted to do the same thing?

We worship the same God as the Israelites. We do not live under the law of the Old Testament anymore, but the same principles of trusting God still apply.

Let me ask you a question.

### **[29]**

When you give your tithes and offerings to the Lord, do you wait to see if you have any left over at the end of the month or year and then give? Or, do you give in faith, a tithe of your income, trusting that the same God who provided for the Israelites will provide for you? I can guarantee that if I wait to decide what to give until month's end, there will be nothing left. I can always justify a want as a need until it's all gone.

I'm an expert at that, which is why Ruth and I, for as long as we have been married, have set aside at least a tithe of our income to give to the mission of Jesus. We filled out an automatic withdrawal form and every week our offering gets withdrawn from our account.

This principle does not just relate to our finances. It relates also to our time and our energy and our talents. It's easy to wrongly believe that our money is our money, our time is our time, our energy is our energy, and our talents are our talents. We have worked hard for them all and so we get to decide how they are spent.



The last part is true. We do get to decide. But, they are not ours. They are God's. We are simply managers of what he has given us. We give back to him a portion of what he has entrusted to us in recognition that **we are utterly dependent on God.**

**[30]**

**The First Fruits festival was a reminder to the Israelites that everything belongs to God.** Without God they would not have a harvest. They were totally dependent on God whether they knew it or not. We are no different.

**[31]**

**2. Trust in God is at the core of the life of faith.**

The First Fruits festival was a spiritual discipline to train God's people that they could trust God, not only with their finances, but also with their time, their relationships, their talents, and all of their affections.

The Festival of First Fruits is all about giving the very best of every part of your life to God, as opposed to giving him your leftovers. It's about celebrating God and his provision and providence.

**[32]**

***"...go and celebrate because of all the good things the Lord your God has given to you and your household."***

We are going to celebrate the Lord's Supper right now. In the Lord's Supper, we look back and remember Christ's sacrifice that bought us life. Remember these things as we prepare our hearts:

**[33]**

**1. Jesus died on the cross at the exact time of the Passover Feast in Jerusalem. He was the Passover lamb who gave his life for the sins of the world.**

As followers of Jesus, we symbolically take communion (which was a part of the Passover meal Jesus celebrated with his disciples on the night he was betrayed) to remember Jesus' death and the fact that we are passed over by death because Jesus spilled his blood for us on the cross.

**[34]**

**2. Jesus was put in the tomb at the exact time of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.** This was no coincidence. Crucifixion normally took three days. Jesus died in six hours, exactly at the time so he could fulfill this festival. In John 10:17-18 Jesus said, no one could take his life from him. ***"I lay it down and I take it up again."***

**[35]**

**3. Jesus rose from the dead, *"the first born from among the dead,"* exactly on the day of the Festival of First Fruits.**

**[36]**

**1 Corinthians 15:19–23 (ESV)**

***19 If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. 20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.***





***Living in HisStory: Revealing the True Wonder of Who God Is***  
***First Fruits***  
***Deuteronomy 26:1-11***  
***Week of January 7, 2018***

**Objective of this study:** To see how Jesus is the fulfilment of the Old Testament festivals, and to acknowledge God's faithfulness and thank him for it.

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us]

**Worship (5 – 10 minutes)**

1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **Psalm 89:1-8** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you. **Did anything “jump out at you”?**

**Welcome (5 minutes)**

What are some things you are thankful for? How has God been faithful to you in the last year?

[It's really important when doing this study that we each think about ourselves specifically and ways we need to grow, not how Christians in general need to grow. Do the hard work of letting the Holy Spirit speak to *your* heart.]

**Word/Work (60-90 minutes)**

1. Read Deuteronomy 26:1-11.
  1. Identify the different aspects of this feast and their purpose and meaning (find at least three).
  2. Review from the sermon the “keys and principles to understanding the festival and how they are keys to understanding how we grow in maturity and faith in Jesus.”
  3. Read 1 Corinthians 15:19-23; Romans 8:23; James 1:18. What do they say about Jesus? What do they say about us?
  4. How did Jesus fulfill the Festival of First Fruits?
  5. What does it mean to you that the feasts point so amazingly to Jesus?
  6. How does all of this affect your heart and life now, in regards to how you spend your life (Time, treasure, talents etc)?
  7. If you have extra time, you could read Leviticus 23 for a overview of all the festivals.

**Prayer**

1. Spend some time in prayer. Start by worshipping God for who he is and what he has done. Focus on being grateful
2. Here are some things you can pray about for the church:

- A. Praise God that he met all our needs financially last year.
- B. That, as a church, we would actively and purposefully engage in the mission of Jesus in Campbell River.
- C. Our church board and staff as they lead us to live out the mission of Jesus
- D. River Kids ministry as they reach out to kids in our community.
- E. **Our missionary of the month:** Aaron and Julie Gole at Camp Homewood
- F. **Our missionary of the week:** Mark and Catherine Buhler
- G. **Local CR church:** Quadra Island Bible Church