

Rejoice In God'S Feast

Suggestions for Approaching the Feast

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 29-Sep-12; Sermon #1124

You can begin turning to Deuteronomy the 28th chapter where we will begin this message. I believe that all of us know that we are commanded to rejoice in the keeping of God's feast. But I wonder how many of us know that God plainly states that *He* can rejoice. Now this is not going to be a sermon about Him rejoicing, but we are going to get to that pretty quickly. And I think that you will find that what I am about to show you about rejoicing will be helpful to your understanding about rejoicing in keeping God's feast.

Deuteronomy 28:63 And it shall be, that just as the Lord rejoiced over you to do you good and to multiply you, so the Lord will rejoice over you to destroy you and to bring you to nothing. And you shall be plucked from off the land which you go to possess.

I want you to notice first the context in which the word "rejoice" appears. First of all, Deuteronomy 28 is the blessing and cursing chapter and God can rejoice in either blessing or cursing. Now, are we becoming like Him? Can you rejoice in the time that you are being judged or going through a difficulty? God can rejoice in blessing and cursing. Let us look at this word in a slightly different context.

Deuteronomy 30:9 And the Lord your God will make you abound in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your land, for good. For the Lord will again rejoice over you for good, as He rejoiced over your fathers.

I believe that comparing these texts reveals something helpful in regard to the way that God defines rejoicing. Now, do we not we have the tendency to define or even to limit the term rejoicing to what we might call "fun times"? Times when we are really happy, we are really up, we are enjoying what is going on, everybody is laughing? That is a rejoicing period of time. Everybody has a smile on their faces. I am pretty sure that God can rejoice, from what He just said there, when people do not have a smile on their face, and yet He is rejoicing.

We can see, I think pretty clearly, that God does not limit His rejoicing just to those

Rejoice in God's Feast by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

times. We can say that He does when He shows us clearly in Deuteronomy 28 that He rejoices in painful judgments that He from time to time has to deal out, the judgments that He brings upon the guilty.

So Deuteronomy 28:63 is definitely not one of those times where we might say “this is going to hurt me more than it does you” when we do this. He uses rejoicing at any time that He has the knowing satisfaction that He is doing the right thing. Rejoicing is not limited only to those occasions in which there is an elevated feeling of happy exuberance.

I am going to rehearse a little bit here mostly with Evelyn. She will remember these things, but I want to share them with you because this makes Evelyn's and my 52nd Feast of Tabernacles. Nashville will be the 21st different site that we have kept it at, but we have never kept it outside of the United States. We have requested a transfer only 3 times and each time we did it in order to spend some time with our very widely-scattered family. We have never transferred to another area or country just to see something, or some famous site, or to experience the attitudes and lifestyles of a particular strain of people. This has not been because we were totally disinterested in those things. It was because the Feast itself and the responsibility we had at the Feast was what captured our mind and attention.

Besides that, I reason, how many different feast sites did God ever establish in Israel? In over a thousand years of time He established a grand total of two. The first was in Shiloh which He destroyed because of Israel's disobedience. The second was in Jerusalem. Now I am not saying that what the Worldwide Church of God did was evil, but I think that God is showing that attending a wide variety of festivals sites is not necessary to produce spiritual growth.

We were baptized in September, 1959 and the first holy day service that we attended was the Feast of Trumpets and then of course following that was the Day of Atonement. And that was the first time that we ever fasted for an entire day. That particular day is really seared into my mind, but it was not only the fast that made that day so significant to me (and it is still significant to me because it helped to point me in the right direction). It was because I met so many visitors to services that day, from New York City, from Philadelphia and other points east of Pittsburgh, and even people from Canada as well. On that Day of Atonement those people were already on their way to the Feast of Tabernacles in Big Sandy, Texas.

Do you realize that in 1959 the city of Pittsburgh was the only city in the United States between Chicago, Illinois and London, England in which there was a congregation of the

Rejoice in God's Feast by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Radio Church of God at that time? Those people in New York City, in Philadelphia, in Baltimore, if they were going to come to a Feast, had to come to Pittsburgh in order to keep it, and indeed, when we had feasts days then up until about 1962 or so, they were still coming to Pittsburgh and I met people then on those holy days from North Carolina, would you believe it?

There were people coming to Pittsburgh from Canada. We had four men in the Pittsburgh congregation from Canada. They started in Toronto, Canada and they were in Pittsburgh for services every Sabbath. You know how far it is from Toronto, Canada to Pittsburgh? They all did not live in Toronto. What they did is, they met at a holy day in Pittsburgh and they found out that they were from northern New York and northern Pennsylvania and they put together a relay. One man would start from Toronto, he would carry on about a 100 miles, the next guy would then pick up the relay, on to Erie, Pennsylvania and on down to Pittsburgh. Those men stayed the entire weekend! They came there for the Sabbath, they stayed the next day for choir practice, and they stayed for Spokesmen Club, and then they repeated it and went back to Canada, and the next week they repeated it again.

Keeping the Sabbath was something that you had to have a vision of and you had to have a treasure regarding it in order to keep it the way those people did. When Evelyn and I came into the Pittsburgh church, with our 4 kids at the time, we raised the attendance to one hundred. That was a major congregation in those days.

But, at any rate, that first year—1959—we did not attend the Feast of Tabernacles because we had no money whatever to keep the Feast. We did not even know about the second tithe until just before the Feast of Trumpets. And even if we had known, I do not know if we still would have made it because like most young people, we were dead broke. We were in hock up to here. But God did come first in our life and even though we were in hock up to here, we began paying tithes and then we were in hock even higher.

That Feast of 1959 we kept the holy day Sabbaths and the weekly Sabbath with our children at home, making do the best we knew how. There was no broadcast whatever, no live streaming, there was no Internet, there was no downloading of any kind of sermon material during the entire week. There was nothing on the telephone, there was *nothing*. I can remember we felt to some degree abandoned. I worked during the week, took the holy days off, took the Sabbath off, but otherwise we kept it by ourselves. But we made good and well sure that in 1960 we went to the Feast of Tabernacles. We went to, of course Big Sandy, Texas and somewhere between 5 and 6 thousand people were there. Wow, six thousand people! That was not the only Feast site by that time.

There was also one in Squaw Valley, California.

Now it was a real interesting experience partly because Gladewater, Texas had a population of less than 8,000. Big Sandy and Hawkins, which were the next cities—towns? villages?—I mean, this was a one-traffic-light affair, both of them. They were the biggest towns around there and boy, they were pretty small. I believe that at that time neither Big Sandy nor Hawkins had even one motel. There were only two motels, I believe, at the time. Can you imagine brethren? Both of them were in Gladewater. Two motels for 5 to 6 thousand people attending the Feast of Tabernacles in Big Sandy on the Ambassador College campus.

We were not able to get a room in either of those motels, but I was able to make arrangements through Ambassador College to stay in a private home in Gladewater with a family by the name of Warren. I can remember them fairly well, even to this day. There were ten people in that home. It was Evelyn and my children, and there was another family there by the name of Johnson, and believe it or not, they were from Johnson City, Tennessee. I mentioned that the family name was Warren. I tell you with ten people in that home all sharing the same bathroom, we felt like we were in a rabbit warren there somewhere.

About 25 years later Evelyn and I kept the Feast in Johnson City, Tennessee and Mrs. Johnson was still in the church and we met her there. Mr. Johnson had died during that period of time. Evelyn and I were there because I was one of the traveling speakers that headquarters had sent out to give a sermon.

Back to Gladewater, because this was a kind of interesting experience. This was the year 1961 that this took place. By that time Gladewater had one fairly large motel that was called the Colonial Motel, a two story affair, and Evelyn and I were able to get two rooms in that motel. Now these two rooms were abutting one another, but they were not side by side, they were back to back, and there was a big porch that went all the way around the second floor and so we put four of our children in that room, and Evelyn and I and Alison, who was our youngest at that time, had the other one. So we arranged for an elderly couple to peek in on our kids once in a while, and quiet them down or whatever. We also made arrangements with our children, a series of signals: knock-knock-knock—that is the way. One knock was this, two knocks was this, three knocks was that. Otherwise our oldest daughter Virginia was in charge over there. Actually we made out pretty well.

I want, as I go along here, for you to compare keeping today's feast with the way it was then.

There were no real restaurants in Gladewater or Hawkins or Big Sandy. I do not mean that there were no restaurants at all but they were not anything that you would consider to be a restaurant today. The nearest restaurants were in Longview, Texas and Tyler, Texas. Each one was roughly 20 miles from Gladewater. Now, what did you do when you wanted to go out to eat? Well you had to go at least 20 miles. But what about lunch time? That was little bit more of a problem because you could not go to an air conditioned restaurant there. There was nothing to go to. So we ate on campus where most of the people were staying.

They were staying in the Piney Woods area. They were staying in tents. They were staying, some of them in the Booth City area as well. But any cooking that they did, was done on charcoal grills or bottled gas camp stoves. In addition to that, sanitation facilities were very skimpy and greatly overcrowded. The church had erected a couple of permanent buildings in which there were places to relieve yourself and even to take some showers. Every day at services we would get an announcement: "Well, I'm sorry to tell you this, but the drains are clogged up again. Please be patient with us." This resulted in people taking showers at one o'clock, two o'clock, 3 o'clock, 4 o'clock at night and then crawling back in bed in order to be ready for services.

Speaking of services, we had *two services every day*. Friday was particularly interesting, and this was because one of those two services was in the evening and fighting sleep during that service was very hard for this man and I did not always succeed. You can see it in the notes that I was taking, as my pen went right down the paper. Also it was on one of these Friday evening that one of our daughters was standing in between the two rows and she vomited on the lady in front of her.

I mentioned eating lunch at the college dining room. The food was reasonable but it took you an awful long time to get there. From the time you left services and walked to the student center, the dining hall. . . . Well, by the time you got out of services with 5,000 people, there was already a line that seemed like it was half a mile or three quarters a mile long. They could only feed so many people at a time, and so there was an awful lot of time standing in the sun, with Alison singing songs all the while we were going along there.

There were *no* activities. I kid you not. No softball tournaments, there was no dances, no volleyball—there was nothing! We were at services all the time, and by the time services were over for the day you were too tired to do anything else. Try concentrating as hard as you can for roughly six hours. It is wearying.

There was, and I am pretty sure still is, a small lake in Hawkins and once in a while

Rejoice in God's Feast by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

people would dash out there and take a swim for a little while at some time or other I know I did it once myself. And I believe that there is a lake on campus, but after a while they started warning you about the snakes, so I never went swimming there.

Well at any rate, of all of these feasts that we had kept, there was only one that I could recall that I would consider was really a downer and that was in 1974. This was one of the times that Evelyn and I asked to transfer. At that time I was pastoring the Norwalk AM and PM congregations in Orange County in California and we wanted to travel across the country during the Feast time because it was the only time that we could afford to go. We went to Florida to visit with her parents. And so we kept the Feast that year in St. Petersburg, Florida and believe it or not, there were now over 12,000 people keeping the feast at that site and I think eventually St. Petersburg reached somewhere around 17,000 people attending the Feast of Tabernacles.

But I was not rejoicing at that Feast. On the long drive back to California after visiting with her dad and mom, I had quite a bit of time to analyze why that Feast to me was such a downer, and it was because I had put very little into making the Feast a good time. Now we had kept the Feast 13 previous times but this was the first time that I can look back on, that I was just there. I was there, but that was it. I was just there. And I know that I had not personally learned the lesson that the Feast is not a vacation. In some ways it has many trappings of a vacation in that we have more money than usual and we travel away from our home base. We are often in a resort area and we are not occupied in our day to day job.

Well, when we got to St. Petersburg Feast site I had no idea of any person or family that we would see there because we had made no arrangements to meet up with anybody. Besides that I had no responsibility in any aspect, whether spiritual or physical, in the operations of the Feast. That was a first for me. Even the very first Feast that we kept at Big Sandy I had a job to do. And would you know, it was at 3 am. We had a deacon in the congregation and he said: "Hey, would you like to work?" and I said: "Sure" and he said: "At 3 am?" I could not back out then, but actually it turned out to be very enjoyable. At 3 in the morning you would be surprised in a little burg like Big Sandy how many people were coming and going out of that Feast site at 3 am. Maybe they were going somewhere to get showers. I do not know.

But I was learning during that Feast that I had given nothing, zilch, nada to making that a good Feast of Tabernacles. So, as I thought this through, I realized that what dominated my thinking was visiting with my in-laws, with whom I got along very well, and we had a good time with them. I was to some degree interested in the city of St. Petersburg itself. I had been to Florida many times because of visiting her parents down

Rejoice in God's Feast by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

there, but I had never been to St. Petersburg. And not only that, I also loved traveling because I loved to drive, and still to this day, I love to drive.

The only trouble was that all of this was not a good mix for me with the Feast of Tabernacles and the kind of attitude and approach I needed to have. And spiritually for me, as Ted was saying in the sermonette, it was very distracting, the combination of all of these factors that would normally have caused me to rejoice. I think God was teaching me something.

Leviticus 23:34 Speak to the children of Israel, saying: In the fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be a Feast of Tabernacles for seven days.

Leviticus 23:37 These are the feasts of the LOORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire to the LOORD, a burnt offering, and a grain offering, a sacrifice and drink offerings, and everything on its day.

Notice the positive commands about how the feasts are to be kept.

Leviticus 23:37 you shall proclaim to be holy convocations. . .

And here is what everybody is supposed to do:

Leviticus 23:37 . . .to offer an offering made by fire. . .

That is for everybody, it is not just for the priests, everybody is to make an offering by fire. You decide what that offering is going to be but we are commanded to have this approach towards the Feast of Tabernacles. Drop down to verse 40:

Leviticus 23:40 And you shall take for yourself on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the LOORD your God for seven days.

Drop down to verse 43:

Rejoice in God's Feast by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Leviticus 23:43 that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

Why? You are children of Israel and God is making us dwell in booths to this day because booths means something spiritual—spiritually important.

Now we are going to encompass in this, Pentecost:

Deuteronomy 16:13-16 You shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles seven days, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress. And you shalt rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, and your male servant and your female servant and the Levite, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, who are within your gates. Seven days shall you keep a sacred feast to the Lord your God in the place which the LORD chooses, because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so you surely rejoice. Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses, at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed.

I would think by this time you should have gotten the point that God is very serious about the Feast of Tabernacles. However, the appearance—indeed, the seeming emphasis on rejoicing—might mislead one in thinking that the Feast is to be one big blast. But remember, when God uses rejoice, He rejoices when He is giving people pain. You can be sure it is a fair judgment when He does that. But it rejoices Him, gives Him a sense of satisfaction to bring pain on somebody that will bring change to their life. We will get more to that a little bit later.

Now, as if to draw attention to rejoicing, Leviticus 23:40 is the first time in the entire Bible that the word rejoice appears in the Scriptures. This particular word means "to brighten up." I want you to notice that. In Scripture, this Hebrew word usually appears as a spontaneous but unsustained feeling of jubilation to a subject. In other words, it tends to suggest a happy, momentary focused reaction.

In the Bible the subject almost always involves God. That is where rejoicing appears. It involves God or something about His way. Overall, God wants us to brighten up

Rejoice in God's Feast by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

because of anticipation of His reasons for commanding His feast, or we have missed His point in calling the Feast in the first place. God does not do anything unreasonably or carelessly; there is always a point, a purpose, in everything that He does. He wants us to rejoice, but we are seeing that the rejoicing is connected with what He wants us to get out of the Feast.

We are going to go now to the book of Amos, chapter 5. God is speaking:

Amos 5:21 I hate, I despise your feast days, and I do not savor your sacred assemblies.

Please understand. They were not keeping Baal's feast days, they were keeping God's feast days but they were doing it in such a way, in such an attitude, in such an approach that God is disclaiming any responsibility for what they are doing. And so it became *their* feast days. They were not keeping it the way He wanted it to be kept. We are going to learn something here in just a bit.

Amos 5:21-22 I hate, I despise your feast days, I do not savor your sacred assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings, . . .

Notice He said: "though you offered *Me*." The Creator God was somewhat on their mind.

Amos 5:22-24 . . . and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments. But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream.

Let us first begin by considering the historical context. Israel at the time of the Amos' ministry was a prosperous nation. Thus on the one hand there is a material prosperity, and on the other hand, declining spiritual and moral practices going on. God placed Amos into that mix of prosperity and spiritual and moral weakness to warn them of the judgments about to fall.

It is very easy for us humans to think that prosperity equals all is well between us and God. Not so, it can be deceiving. I think that Ted's description in the sermonette was accurate about Lot being a man who was well-off. Having a wife and having a family, he was living "the good life." Now God was about to destroy the entire city. He was at least

giving him the opportunity to get out of there.

So God placed Amos into this mix of prosperity and spiritual and moral weakness to warn them of the judgments about to fall. Those judgments did not really fall for about 40 years. I mean the really serious ones. Now how much rejoicing can one do in that circumstance?

I just happened to think of something. This movie that we are going to show, which is drawn from Isaiah 9:10, took place right after Amos' ministry. Probably around 725 we will just guess, maybe it was a little earlier, say 730, or whatever.

So God placed Amos into this mix of prosperity and spiritual and moral weakness to warn them of the judgments about to fall. Now how much rejoicing can one do in that circumstance? That could not have been a happy Feast to those listening to those sermons. Amos was like a thorn in their side. But yet, into that mix, is where God—and when God—chose to send Amos.

To compound the problem, Amos was a Jew and these people that he was speaking to were overwhelmingly all Israelites, and you know that there was a family antagonism there. "Why should we take correction from a Jew? They're every bit as bad as we are!" That did not matter; Amos was *God's* messenger and that made all the difference in the world.

Same chapter, God is listing some of these indictments here:

Amos 5:10-12 They hate the one who rebukes in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks uprightly. Therefore because you tread down the poor and take grain taxes from him, though you have built houses of hewn stone, yet you shall not dwell in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink from them. For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: afflicting the just and taking bribes; diverting the poor from justice in the gate.

God had things already spelled out as to what they were doing. Now the important point I want to make with you right here and now is that the Feast of Tabernacles does not happen in a vacuum. It is preceded by the conduct, the behavior, the attitudes, the functioning of the people who kept the Feast, *before they got there*. In other words, we cannot separate our conduct throughout our life prior to the Feast of Tabernacles to the way things go *at* the Feast of Tabernacles. We do not want that disconnect to come to

us because God oversees what is going on in our lives *all the time*.

It is very interesting. He probably made this Feast of Tabernacles one of *His* happier times when He was telling these people that these judgments were just about ready to fall on them. Again, why would He do it? Because the satisfaction that He would receive from knowing that what He was doing was the right thing and it would probably lead to these people's eventual repentance. And that gave Him some sort of joy. But please understand, we do not keep the Feast of Tabernacles in a vacuum. It is connected with everything that went before as well.

So it is highly likely that we are going to bring with us to the Feast basically the same kind of attitudes, the same kind of conduct that we have had leading up to it. That is probably what happened to me in St. Petersburg that year. I went there in a bad attitude. I was going to have a good time. 'John the righteous' was going to have a good Feast, but I did not. So now you are getting the sermon that I prepared all the way back then in 1974 on the way home from St. Petersburg.

On the other hand, I have no doubt that when the Israelites kept the feast that we are reading of here in the book of the Amos that they enjoyed it. As it progressed, God was not pleased, and I really do not think that many people keeping that Feast got the point. There is a point for you and I and that is: it is a witness that one can have the blessings of good things in life and yet those blessings can be a means of obliterating God and His purpose from the Feast. Take a hint from Ted's sermonette. That is something that we have to keep under control.

I am going to show you later, if I get that far, that rejoicing is a choice. We can *choose* to rejoice. We can set the attitude. We have power over it. That is why God rejoices even in punishing people. It is from the satisfaction that He gets out of correcting people in that kind of a situation.

Part of the answer to this solution is to truly seek God's Kingdom even at the Feast, and the mind will be helped to be changed in the right direction. But sometimes this is not easy.

One of this world's evangelists said this. "It takes five percent effort to win a person to Christ but a 95 percent effort to keep him in Christ and growing to maturity in the church." I can see why he would say something like that. He has dealt with it a lot in the world. He realizes that people are all too easily turned aside to what they accepted with rejoicing just a little while before. The mind can change that quickly and so the point here is that one must discipline himself to prioritize, and that is what Ted was getting at.

Rejoice in God's Feast by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

How many people have failed to grow, or even completely lost their way because they allowed their time to be buried under an avalanche of activities?

What led me to this is I read a book one time called: *How to Live on 24 Hours a Day*. It was written by a man named Arnold Bennett. Well, a young woman came to him after hearing a lecture by him and she told Mr. Bennett that she was going to concentrate. "On what?" Mr. Bennett asked. "On lots of things." she replied. That is the point. When we concentrate on a lot of things we are in reality concentrating on nothing.

Numbers 29 opens the door to something that has to do with the keeping of the Feast.

Numbers 29:12-13 On the fifteenth day of the seventh month you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work, and you shall keep a feast to the Lord seven days. You shall present a burnt offering, an offering made by fire as a sweet aroma made to the Lord: thirteen young bulls, two rams, fourteen lambs in their first year. They shall be without blemish.

Now that is just to get us started because this chapter shows that God required of the Israelitish people 189 sacrifices to be given by the nation during the Feast of Tabernacles. He required more sacrifices for the Feast of Tabernacles than all other feasts *combined*. Sacrifices are symbolic of something given up at a cost to the self, but given for the benefit of another. To make it very obvious, the Father gave the Son and the Son, Jesus, gave His life for the benefit of all. A Christian is to be a living sacrifice giving himself in service to God and fellow man rather than always serving human nature. Jesus said, "Greater love has no one that to lay down his life for his friends." Sacrifice is the very essence of love.

There is more love symbolically shown there in Numbers 29 required by God than all of the other feasts combined. There is something very important about the Feast of Tabernacles. Sacrifice is the essence, the heart, the core, the very being, that part of love which gives it energy in the right kind of affection and service. Love is an action; the Bible makes that very clear. Love is something that we do. It is something that we give. It is an expression of affection, an expression of caring for. It is an expression of sympathy for, it is an expression of kindness, and it is an expression of thoughtfulness.

God does not blow smoke. There is something about the Feast of Tabernacles that is very important when He shows that more sacrifices are to be given at the Feast of Tabernacles than all others combined. If you are following me you are beginning to see why I had a lousy Feast of Tabernacles in 1974. I gave nothing, except a ride for my

Rejoice in God's Feast by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

family to St. Petersburg and Ft. Lauderdale. But I ate good meals, had an occasional beer, a glass of wine, and even met some people from Pittsburgh that I knew from before. They were down there keeping it. But really, I left empty spiritually because I gave nothing.

Deuteronomy 12:10-12 But when you cross over the Jordan, and dwell in the land which the Lord your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that you dwell in safety, then there will be the place [Notice, the place, one place, **the** place.], where the Lord your God chooses to make His name to abide. There you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, and all your choice offerings which you vow to the Lord. And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levite that is within your gates, since he has no portion or inheritance with you.

Deuteronomy 12:17-18 You may not eat within your gates the tithe of your grain or of your new wine or of your oil, or the firstborn of your herd or of your flocks, of any of your offerings which you vow, or your freewill offerings, or the heave offering of your hand. But you must eat them before the Lord your God in the place which the Lord your God chooses, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, and the Levite who is within your gates; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God in all to which you put your hands.

This context includes the keeping of God's feast. Eventually that place became Jerusalem that was going to be set aside for the keeping of God's feast, as well as the weekly Sabbath service. I want to use this primarily for the feast. Now I want you to notice, especially from these verses right here as well as the ones that we previously talked about, how sacrificing and rejoicing are linked. Both are required—sacrificing and rejoicing. The days of sacrificing are not over. They have simply been changed to spiritual sacrifices. God is love and sacrifice is the essence of His outgoing concern that produces all the really good things in life!

Deuteronomy 16:11-17 You shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your son and your daughter, and your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your gates, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are among you, at the place where the Lord your God chooses to

Rejoice in God's Feast by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

make His name abide. And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes. You shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles seven days, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress. And you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant and the Levite, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are within your gates. Seven days you shall keep a sacred feast to the Lord your God in the place which the Lord chooses, because the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you surely rejoice. Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God in the place which He chooses: in the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; they shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed. Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given you.

Three times in that series of verses He commands us to rejoice. You shall rejoice, you shall surely rejoice. Two of those three times rejoicing is commanded within the context of the family, servants, the ministry, strangers, orphans, and widows. Rejoicing and sacrifice is clearly associated as being within the company of like-minded people.

We come to the Feast out of the world almost overburdened with troubles great and small. We might face trials here, and they may be nothing compared to what the world is facing virtually every day. It is entirely possible that the troubles others within the company you are in right here are greater than the troubles that you have. In fact, it is possible that you have already faced a trial on the trip here. In registering, or perhaps with your room assignment, or with the meal, or perhaps an incipient sickness of someone within your family, has already affected you emotionally and is threatening to make the Feast a real downer.

I am starting on something here so that you will understand and I will tell you in advance, the Feast of Tabernacles is ***not supposed to be problem-free***. We kind of laugh about it, we chuckle when something happens just before the Feast and we say: "Well, you know it's just the feast." We expect it to occur. That is good, you are learning. Because God does not expect the feast to be trouble free. It is possible that you are facing and enduring events that may be nothing more than mere irritants compared to events that others are facing up to, either people that are here or people out in the world.

Rejoice in God's Feast by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

We are commanded to rejoice in a circumstance—this is my 53rd feast now; I say this with experience—we are commanded to rejoice in a circumstance that seems ready-made to produce problems. We have come here to present ourselves to God on an occasion that pictures, in the future, a world of integrity, harmony, and abundance because God's great fall harvest is being worked out. There is a figurative lesson that is somewhat varied and it does not show up unless it is really dug for. It is something that has to do with the harvest of Pentecost and Tabernacles, in what they represent.

Notice that God says that we are not to come before Him empty. “You shall not come before Me empty.” What was it that the Israelites were likely to bring with them whenever they kept the feast? You see this is associated with both Pentecost and Tabernacles. If they kept the Feast of Pentecost what would they bring with them? They did not have banks they ran to. It is very likely that they brought a portion of their harvest. Probably winter wheat would be my guess. And so, whenever they kept the Feast of Tabernacles, what were they very likely to bring? Well, it was the beginning of the fall harvest of grain and most likely it was wheat. I am just guessing there. But it would be a grain, I think in most cases.

There is something I am going to read for you now in Psalm 126.

Psalm 126:5-6 Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.

It is the sheaves that I am interested in. This is one of the psalms of assent focused on between the Feast of Trumpets and the Feast of Tabernacles. A sheaf is a bundle of cut stalks of grain. So what were the Israelites likely to bring to a feast at those times of the year? It was very likely some of their harvest and that would have been grains and that is why the psalmist said that these people would be carrying their sheaves. At Tabernacles, the fall harvest of grains, they were to bring with them the profits of what they had just harvested. Bringing in sheaves symbolizes prosperity given by God and then brought to the feast to share with Him and others congregating together.

In principle, is this not what we do? We come here with the profits of this year's work and we share them with God in an offering and we also share them with one another, taking one another out to dinner and so forth. Now notice it says “shall doubtless come again with rejoicing.” The word appears right in this context. And in this context the rejoicing results from sharing one's prosperity with others. This is something that God very definitely wants us to do.

I mentioned earlier that this symbol has a spiritual tie. What does it take for a farmer to give an offering of his prosperity? First of all, he must not be lazy. He must do the physical work and receive the blessings of God. That is what it says in verse 5: "Those who sow in tears." So he must not be lazy. He must do the physical work and receive on top of these the blessings of God, like rain in due season, in order to ensure that there is a good crop and a profit. Now work and the blessings are not limited to the physical alone. Life is not one dimensional. Just like I said, you cannot separate the way we have lived during the year from the Feast of Tabernacles and we cannot separate the physical and the spiritual either because life is not one dimensional.

Are there not spiritual works and do they not produce spiritual fruits? The answer is "absolutely." What am I driving at here? When we go to the Feast of Tabernacles, we are to bring with us the spiritual fruits that we have reaped during the year. We find it very easy to say, "Well, I can reach in my wallet and get out the fruits of my work here—the greenbacks." But God wants us to understand that everybody should be able to bring with them spiritual fruit, which they in turn are to do what? They are to share them with the people who are here. This is how you rejoice.

We share our profits with those who are here. Does it not say in Ephesians 2:10 that God has ordained that we are to do good works in Christ Jesus? If we do those good works we are going to reap a spiritual profit that we can bring with us. Now it is not that we are earning it. God is giving it. And so we find in Galatians 5:

Galatians 5:13-14 For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; but only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word even this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

If we are reaping a spiritual crop of fruits we are going to be able to do that, especially when we are brought together at the Feast of Tabernacles.

Galatians 5:15-16 But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another! I say then, walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

Galatians 5:18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

And we will not go through that, but in verse 22:

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is [Here is the crop:] love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

Now drop down to chapter 6, because if we are bearing this kind of fruit, it tells us then in verse 2 of chapter 6 because he continues with the thought of how the fruit of the spirit is to be applied.

Galatians 6:2-4 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.

We are commanded to deliberately bring the fruit of God's Holy Spirit—fruit that we have produced during the year—to the feast and to share those fruits with others, and it does not take any money to do that. It takes, though, a mind that is focused on serving and pleasing others, of being kind, of being compassionate, of being thoughtful, of being generous, of being an uplifting person. The reason that feast in St. Petersburg was such a noticeable downer to me was because I was just there to please myself. It was an approach problem. I was not mean to others, I was just all wrapped up in myself. I wanted to make sure that I enjoyed it, that I had fun.

Now, we know that the time during which this spiritual harvest will take place is called the Millennium, but what is it going to take to produce the Millennium? Because Christ is going to be ruling, the Spirit of God will be more available than at any time during man's history. Those things are certainly true, but I think we need to take our thinking a step further. We tend to think of the Millennium as a time of peace and prosperity, but it is more than that. It is a time also of monumental problems. I want you to turn with me to Ezekiel 36 just to show what God is going to have to do on His part in order to produce that, and whom He is going to work through.

Ezekiel 36:24-25 And I will take you from among the nations, and gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and all your idols.

Is God going to do this in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye? No, He is not.

Ezekiel 36:26 I will give you a new heart and a put new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

I just mentioned in the previous verse that you read there in Psalm 126:6, how that the person not only has to give of himself to produce a crop, he also has to receive the blessings from God to enable these things to actually be produced. This is what God is saying that He is going to do on behalf of those who are coming out of the tribulation. They are going to have to give of themselves in order to produce a crop, even as we have to do it now.

Ezekiel 36:25-27 Then I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you will keep my judgments and do them.

But I hope brethren, that as we are going through this, you are thinking of what God has already done for you to make it possible for you to bear a crop of the fruit of His Spirit. He has had to do all of these things for us and He expects a crop and He expects that crop to be used in our relationships with each other. If we do not, what good has it done? We can go all the way back and say His Son died in vain if we do not make use of it. Verse 28:

Ezekiel 36:28-31 And then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be my people, and I will be your God. I will deliver you from all your uncleanness. I will call for the grain and multiply it and bring no famine upon you and I will multiply the fruit of your trees and the increase of your fields so that you need never again to bear the reproach of famine amongst the nations. And then you will remember your evil ways, and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and your abominations.

There is a tremendous lesson there if we will just apply what we just read to ourselves, because we are going through this process right now in which God is giving of Himself.

Rejoice in God's Feast by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

God is giving of His love; God is doing what is necessary on His part to make sure that we can produce the fruit. And He does not expect that we will eat all this fruit ourselves. We will never be in the image of God if we do not start using that fruit that God is producing in us with each other. That is what He is doing it for. So He wants us to carry the ball onwards.

Now, let us keep on going because it gets even more interesting. Remember, this is taking place as the Millennium begins.

Ezekiel 36:32 “Not for your sake do I do this,” says the Lord God; “let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel.

God is really stooping down to take care of us and to provide for us and help us so that we can be like Him and live life like Him and He wants to see fruit coming from that. But we have to give of ourselves and He has created the Feast of Tabernacles so we have the opportunity to do it in the best environment possible. The best environment we will ever be in during the year to work on ourselves, to practice using this fruit of the Spirit of God that He made possible, that He produced in us. Now we can spend on it ourselves, like I did in St. Petersburg. Or will we give of ourselves what He is producing in us?

Ezekiel 36:33-34 Thus says the Lord God: “On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will also enable you to dwell in the cities, and the ruins shall be rebuilt. The desolate land shall be tilled, instead of lying desolate in the sight of all those who pass by.

What is God saying so clearly? “When I start working with you, I want you to do your responsibility too! Otherwise what I am doing for you is in vain.” And He does nothing in vain.

Ezekiel 36:34-38 The desolate land shall be tilled, instead of lying desolate in the sight of those who pass by. So they will say, ‘This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden, and the wasted, desolate, and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.’ “Then the nations which are left all around you shall know that I, the Lord, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted what was desolate. I, the Lord, have spoken it, and will do it.” “Thus says the Lord God: “I will also let the house of Israel inquire of me to do this for them: I will increase their men like a flock. Like the flock offered as holy

Rejoice in God's Feast by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

sacrifices, like the flock at Jerusalem on its feasts days, so shall the ruined cities be filled with flocks of men. Then they shall know that I am the Lord.”

If we draw this to its focal point, it means that when we begin acting like God then we will know that He is the Lord. We learn by experience, we learn by doing, it is a hands-on affair. Now I am not saying that everything in the Millennium is going to be peaches and cream, because God shows in Zechariah 14 that He is going to plague the Egyptians if they do not do what He says. Maybe they are especially hardheaded, I do not know, but apparently they are not going to do too well for a while till they start learning.

Let us just summarize here. We can expect to have problems within the time-frame of the Feast of Tabernacles. There are going to be problems in the Millennium. We are experiencing a tiny Millennium here, seven days long, and He wants us to use the tools that He has given to us to enable us to bring forth a spiritual crop of good fruit and then we share them with one another.

Now a question: do we understand that problems do not have to be attacked in a bad attitude? Do bitterness, resentment, wrath, self-pity, and depression really help? Brethren, God has given us a better Spirit than that. And God is on His throne and He is there to help. He wants to do that. He commands us to rejoice and the very fact that He commands us to rejoice shows that the attitude is subject to our will. Everything He commands is subject to our will. *We can do it*, so the very fact that He commands rejoicing, just like He commands keeping the Sabbath and holy days, is proof that it is not something that automatically occurs just because one is here. So just like the Millennium, it must be produced.

We are here to worship God, and true worship is imitating God to the degree that we are able. We have to begin acting like God while we are here. We are here to learn and to become filled with the essential attributes of God, which is outgoing concern, giving, serving, sharing, sacrificing.

Do not shrink from it. Be like God. Before He created us, He knew that He would spend His time serving us and then dying for us. At this feast, make it your resolution to be actively proving that you love God. Give of yourselves in time. Pray, especially about Satan; the weather, the sermons, and the choir. Offer yourself in service, sing with all your heart, make as little work as possible for others, follow directions, be clean, do not litter, do not lose things. That last one was useless. **Give** a great feast!