

Eating Before The Lord

David C. Grabbe

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Throughout last year, Richard gave a series of sermons that was highly significant in its ramifications. The series was called, “Jesus in the Feasts,” and the upshot of his sermons was that, from Passover through the Eighth Day, each observance is—first and foremost—a powerful pointer to Jesus Christ. Even as the whole sacrificial system pointed to the Messiah, so also the annual feasts picture Him in some way. While each feast may contain other themes and lessons, the opening of Leviticus 23 is clear that they are all feasts to Him.

As many of you know, the Worldwide Church of God was really into prophecy. Prophecy is exciting, and it hooks people’s attention. We are curious about the future and how things will unfold. And as long as this is kept in balance, there is nothing wrong with that. However, when the prophetic view is how we first look at the annual feast days, the thoughts of future events tend to overshadow the real object, which is Jesus Christ Himself.

Certainly, future events in God’s plan are important, especially when He has devoted so much of His book to telling us in advance what will happen. But the future is not more important than our present walk with God. It is not more important than understanding His will for us now, which will help us to be on the right side of the future as it arrives. So, if we want to understand what each feast pictures, we must look for Christ in them first.

Today we will look at part of our role before God that is especially important this week. Please turn with me to the New Testament’s most prophetic book:

Revelation 1:4-6 John, to the seven churches which are in Asia:
Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is
to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and
from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead,

and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

This is the apostle John's opening salutation for the book, and it includes some of Christ's credentials. But for our purposes today, verse 6 is what we are after. It says that Jesus has made us kings and priests to His God and Father. A better rendering is "a kingdom of priests" rather than "kings and priests," which we will get to in a moment.

It is a very significant statement. There is an echo of this in Revelation 5:10, which Richard began his sermon with on the 1st Day. That's the one that says that Christ has "made us kings and priests [or, "a kingdom of priests"] to our God; and we shall reign on the earth." There is a similar mention in Revelation 20:6, which says that those in the first resurrection "shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years."

But we came to this mention because it shows that this applies to us right now. The other places tend to give the impression that the priesthood is a future role. Yet verse 6 here states that He has made us priests. That is who we are right now.

Most translations and commentators suggest that "kingdom of" is a better rendering here than "kings and." I'm not a Greek scholar, but what I have found is that "kingdom of priests" has more support from the rest of Scripture than to say that we are kings now because we were washed in His blood. Our kingship is still future, but our priesthood is something we must attend to now as we prepare to reign, which Richard spoke about.

In Exodus 19:6, God said that the children of Israel were to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. That was His intent for them. Israel failed miserably in that responsibility, though they will have another chance after their future restoration.

But Peter picks up on this terminology and applies it to the church:

I Peter 2:5 "you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

I Peter 2:9 "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;"

In verse 9, Peter uses the term "royal priesthood" instead of "kingdom of priests," but the terms are essentially the same. It is a priesthood that serves a King. And, as in Revelation 1:6, this is all present tense. It does not say we will become a royal priesthood, but that we are one now. This is a critical part of our spiritual identity.

In terms of spiritual identity, God calls New Covenant believers various things, such as firstfruits, children of God, and heirs. We can take great encouragement from how God identifies us because the various identities indicate how much we are worth to Him.

But the identification of the church as God's priesthood carries a slightly different implication. It reminds us of our responsibilities, whereas many of the other identifiers remind us of benefits. This is not to take away from those other identifiers at all, because we need them, and we need to believe them. But the priesthood aspect is perhaps not as popular because it is a role that reminds us of what is required of us while other identifiers tend to emphasize what we have received or will receive.

These verses describe the grouping we are part of as "holy. It says "a holy priesthood" in verse 5 and "a holy nation" in verse 9. However, we must remember that holiness is a process. We were made holy when we were set apart by God. But that holiness is just the starting point. From that setting-apart that God did, Scripture tells us we must pursue holiness, as well as perfect it. Holiness is an integral part of this role, this identity.

Now, our priesthood is distinct from the Levitical priesthood. One of the biggest differences is that our High Priest is perfect and eternal. In addition, our service is not in making animal sacrifices, but sacrifices that are spiritual

in nature and purpose. Our sacrifices and offerings involve a great deal of self-sacrifice, so we become living sacrifices. Relatedly, our service is not in a physical tabernacle or temple, but primarily within the spiritual temple—helping it to be built up so God is glorified.

What is interesting, though, is that there are very few direct New Testament instructions regarding how to be a priest. These verses in I Peter are the main ones. We could also add Hebrews 13:5-6, which mentions the sacrifice of praise, as well as doing good and sharing as other sacrifices. And Romans 12:1 says that we are to present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God—another mention of holiness. But what this means is that even though we are separate from the Levitical priesthood, we must go back to their instructions to understand the role of a godly priesthood in general.

Hebrews 8:5 says that the Levitical priests served “the copy and shadow of the heavenly things.” Their service was a type of the heavenly reality, which means we must look at the principles and intent within the instructions in Leviticus to understand how we are to serve, because we are part of the “heavenly things” now. Those instructions are the only pattern we have for how to fulfill our role. And we must understand them with Christ as our High Priest, and with discerning how they apply under the New Covenant.

Peter mentions spiritual sacrifices and praising God, and we will look at another application that will set the table for the rest of the sermon. Please turn to Hebrews 13:

Hebrews 13:10-13 We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.

The author of Hebrews did not identify himself, so for the sake of convenience for today, we’re just going to call him “Paul.”

Paul really says a mouthful here. But to understand what he is getting at, we must remember what came before this, which is basically the whole book. As a refresher, Hebrews was written to a group of believers who were approaching the end of an age. However, the pressure of their times was causing them not to care as much about their calling. Instead, they were spiritually drifting, and starting to fall back to the religious and cultural norms around them that they had come out of before. Those ideas were overshadowing Jesus Christ, just like the prophetic timeline has for us.

So, Paul wrote to point out that Christ was vastly superior to all the lesser things the Hebrews were looking at for guidance and support, and which were causing them to drift. Much of what Paul addresses is the Levitical priesthood, the temple service, and the sacrifices. But remember, those things are the shadow. They point to the reality, which is Christ.

In addition, the Judaism that Christ encountered as a man, and which had Him put to death, was a corruption of the law He gave to and through Moses. Various traditions had arisen over the centuries that skewed God's intent. On top of that, the high priesthood had become a political office that was for sale. The whole system was leavened.

In these verses, then, Paul distances Christ and His work from the established system and ideas that were still tugging at the hearts of the Hebrews. The established system, especially with its corruption, could not give them the strength and wisdom and other things they needed as the pressure kept increasing.

Hebrews was written to show Christ's superiority over all other factors, and this passage near the end is a call to action to metaphorically leave Jerusalem and the temple and to go outside the camp—outside the established system—to where our Lord was crucified. Paul is saying that Christ wasn't in that system. Now, we understand that, in its original and pure form, it came from Him, and also that it will be instituted again in the Millennium. But those who truly believe in Christ have something far better.

Believers in the first century—at least those in Judea—had to come out of Judaism. Believers in Gentile areas, such as Corinth, Ephesus, and Galatia,

had to come out of pagan systems and cultures that never had God in them. And today, we must come out of the world. That could mean coming out of Catholicism or Protestantism. It could mean secularism, agnosticism, and even atheism. It could mean progressivism or Republicanism. It certainly means to stop loving the world, this present, anti-God system that continuously pressures us to conform. Paul says that to go forth to Christ, we must go outside the camp.

Hebrews 13:10 is key for our purposes today as we consider the priesthood of the Most High God. It says, “We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat.” Within the tabernacle and later temple, the altar symbolized God’s table. The things that were put on the altar pictured God eating and being satisfied, assuming everything was done according to His instructions and His holiness was upheld.

However, the priests who served in the tabernacle were also allowed to eat some things from the altar. Not everything was for them—some things were completely consumed by fire on the altar, meaning they belonged only to God. But the priests had a right to eat certain portions of the sacrifices.

In verse 10, Paul leans on that but then contrasts it with what we, as the New Covenant priesthood, have the opportunity to eat. We have a different altar—a different table; one that is invitation-only.

Even as the physical altar was God’s table that also provided food for the Levitical priesthood, our better altar points to Christ as the means by which we are spiritually fed. But this privilege also comes with a significant responsibility, which is to make use of the food that is available to us that is not available to the uncalled.

What makes the difference is God’s Spirit. Others may read God’s Word and glean some things, but God’s Spirit, working with our minds, imparts spiritual understanding that allows the spiritual priesthood to grasp things that others simply will not see or accept.

What is more, God’s Spirit allows the understanding to then have an application, meaning our lives are changed by what we read because we start making different choices. That’s wisdom. Choosing God’s way of life over

the common system—whether Judaism or Protestantism or whatever—then reinforces our place outside the camp, meaning that we’re not going to fit with those who are part of the dominant system, but that’s just fine because we’ve gone forth to where Christ is. That is far more important than what’s inside the camp.

Part of our responsibility is shown in the previous verse:

Hebrews 13:9 Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.

This is the beginning of the context of spiritual eating as a royal priesthood, and Paul warns of being carried about by various and strange doctrines. In other words, we must be very careful about what we eat spiritually, just as we are careful with what we eat physically. Our spiritual diet is even more important than our physical diet because what we take into our minds affects our worldview and then our decisions. We could have the perfect physical diet for ourselves and yet be moving away from Christ if we are not careful with what our minds digest.

Verse 9 mentions “doctrines.” That translation is correct, except that it has the tendency to make us think of something officially stated, such as a church’s statement of beliefs or a paper written by a committee of scholars. And those are true applications, but the Greek word here can be used broadly in the sense of “teaching.” Today we are surrounded by teachings because of our digital connections with the rest of humanity.

When we put verses 9-10 together, we can see that Paul links spiritual teaching and spiritual eating. So, the admonition is not to allow ourselves to be carried away by just any teaching, especially when we have a table of spiritual food that few others have the right to eat at. If we focus on that table, we will be much less vulnerable to false teachings.

Verse 9 goes on to say that it is good for our hearts to be established by grace rather than with foods. Within the context, the foods refer to the offerings under the Old Covenant. The priests could eat from most of the offerings,

and everybody could eat from the peace offering, provided they were ceremonially clean.

But, as Paul's contrast continues, there was nothing spiritually profitable that came from that food. It did not enhance their standing with God, and it did not make them more like Him. The sacrifices served a purpose under the covenant with Israel, but the biblical record is clear that those foods, by themselves, could not provide any spiritual benefit. Spiritual strength comes from spiritual things, not from physical foods.

Instead, he says, it is good for the heart to be established by grace. Because of the religious culture around us, "grace" is often thought of as just a synonym for "forgiveness," but that is not correct. More fully, "grace" refers to anything that God gives. It can include forgiveness, but grace is not limited to that.

Plugging that back in, Paul is saying that it is good for the heart to be established, meaning strengthened, by what God has given. And it is in this context that Paul mentions an altar that is separate from the Old Covenant system. That spiritual altar is an aspect of God's grace—His favor toward us—that the rest of Israel cannot access yet.

Protestant commentaries commonly say that this altar is the cross of Christ, and thus, we feed on His sacrifice. That has an element of truth, but it also tends to limit one's view just to the crucifixion, which is one of Protestantism's bad habits. This altar includes much more.

This is where we come full circle. Even though the physical sacrifices cannot provide spiritual strength, and even though we are part of a royal priesthood that is separate from the Levitical priesthood, we must examine the shadows to learn more about the reality. We must go back to those instructions and look at them through a spiritual lens to find applications for us.

To this point, we have been considering the spiritual priesthood and what that priesthood eats, and now we will take a side trip regarding eating because eating is a significant part this Feast.

Deuteronomy 12:5-7 “But you shall seek the place where the LORD your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go. There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. And there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which the LORD your God has blessed you.

God told Israel there would be a central place of worship where God would place His name, and that is where the pilgrimage feasts would be kept. He did not want Israel to do these things on their own because He knew their worship would devolve into something outside of His intent. He goes on in verse 8 to forbid every man doing what is right in his own eyes. So, He gave instructions that all their sacrifices and offerings had to be brought to the central location, and the Feast is included in that.

Verse 7 contains a critical phrase. The Israelites were not just to eat the sacrifices and offerings at the central location, but they were to eat “before the LORD [their] God.” That phrase means more than just that the LORD was at the central location. It means that He was the focus and the reason for what they were doing—the rejoicing and so forth.

If you look down to verse 18, it contains the same basic wording. It says that the tithes and offerings cannot be eaten within one’s gates (that’s in verse 17), but had to be eaten before the LORD. And the rejoicing also had to be “before the LORD,” again meaning that it was done with respect to Him. The rejoicing was because of Him—because of His work and His blessing. The rejoicing was not an end unto itself.

Several years ago, a woman who normally attends with another church of God group visited our Feast site. This wasn’t a one-day visit, but rather she heard a number of messages and fellowshiped as well. After getting a pretty

good taste of a CGG Feast, she said something that really struck me, and which also raised a serious question. She said, “Its different here.” She said, “This is going to sound funny, but you guys talk about God.”

I don’t bring this up to cheerlead or grandstand. That was one person’s experience, and the plural of “anecdote” is not “data.” I am quite certain that someone, at some time, came to a CGG Feast and had a lackluster experience, and another group’s Feast was more to his or her liking. As the car commercials would say, “Your mileage may vary.”

But that observation raises the question of why we—meaning the greater church; the whole spiritual priesthood—why we keep this Feast. I believe that woman’s experience should make us evaluate why we gather and rejoice in various ways if God isn’t the focus.

Without that critical element of actually having God at the forefront, the Feast is just a party, dressed up in a religious costume and paid for by second tithe. Obviously, that is not God’s intent. Yet we know from Amos and Isaiah that that is indeed what happened in Israel and Judah. The people brought their sacrifices and offerings and they rejoiced, but God wasn’t in their thoughts. They may have been near the Temple, but they were not truly eating and rejoicing “before the LORD [their] God.”

The same wording is used for the second tithe, just a couple chapters ahead:

Deuteronomy 14:22-23 “You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always.

Deuteronomy 14:26 And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household.

Verses 22 and 26 specify that the second tithe is for use “before the LORD,” meaning it is in reference to Him. The pilgrimage feasts were about going to where God had placed His name to worship Him. The rejoicing comes from this because it was and is an unparalleled blessing to have the Creator God as one’s God. Yet notice that verse 23 also states that part of eating before the LORD is to grow in our fear—our respect—of God. That can only happen if we tie our Feast experiences to His activity in our lives.

Please start turning to Leviticus 7. Sometimes God’s words in Leviticus are difficult for us to really tune into because we don’t have any experience with the offerings. Their literal application was under the previous covenant, and it is easy to classify these chapters as irrelevant to us.

However, we must remember that these Scriptures are God-breathed, and that His Word endures forever. There is a divine quality to these instructions. Leviticus is part of the “Holy Scriptures” that Paul tells Timothy can make him (and us) wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Paul goes on to say that these instructions are part of what makes us complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work (II Timothy 3:15-16). There is tremendous value in these parts of God’s Word. We just need to understand them through the lens of Christ’s ministry, which now includes His role as High Priest.

The sacrificial law is valuable because it contains principles and patterns from the mind of God. Remember, these things reflect the heavenly reality, so when we identify what the symbols teach us, we also catch glimpses into the mind of our Creator and Savior. That’s why these things can make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ.

Leviticus 7 is the tail-end of the instructions for all the sacrifices and offerings. We will just read the summary in verses 35-36:

Leviticus 7:35-36 This is the consecrated portion for Aaron and his sons, from the offerings made by fire to the Lord, on the day when Moses presented them to minister to the Lord as priests. The Lord

commanded this to be given to them by the children of Israel, on the day that He anointed them, by a statute forever throughout their generations.

Leviticus 7 is the capstone of the main instructions for the burnt, grain, peace, sin, and trespass offerings. Throughout these first seven chapters, God specifies which portion He claims as His own and which portion the priests could have. So, this is the section of Scripture that Hebrews 13:10 alludes to. The Levitical priests had a right to eat from the altar—from God’s table—within certain bounds.

We will move on to chapters 8 and 9, which are about the consecration of Aaron and his sons. They went through this ritual to be officially set apart by God and installed into office so they could serve in the tabernacle, similar to how we are baptized to enter God’s priesthood. And since we are looking at our role as the royal priesthood today, there is rich material in these chapters for us to consider.

But these chapters are especially relevant this week because God uses patterns. Based on those patterns, there are significant similarities between the Feast of Tabernacles and the consecration of the priests, which we will see.

We will start with the time structure, which is found in verse 33:

Leviticus 8:33-35 [Moses speaking] And you shall not go outside the door of the tabernacle of meeting for seven days, until the days of your consecration are ended. For seven days he shall consecrate you. As he has done this day, so the LORD has commanded to do, to make atonement for you. Therefore you shall stay at the door of the tabernacle of meeting day and night for seven days, and keep the charge of the LORD, so that you may not die; for so I have been commanded.”

The first similarity between this Feast and the consecration of the priests is the length of time. The priests had to stay within the tabernacle of meeting

for seven days. The Feast is also seven days long (Leviticus 23:34-36). In the Bible, seven days is the common length of time for sanctification or purification, and that's what we see here.

After the seven days of the Feast, the Eighth Day is a holy day designated as a sacred assembly. For the priests, after seven days in the tabernacle, the next day—their eighth day—they came out of the tabernacle, and the whole congregation assembled to witness the conclusion of the consecration (Leviticus 9:5). It was not called a sacred assembly, but there was an assembly, and it served a similar purpose in terms of closing off the previous seven days. It was a very special day. Please flip over to chapter 9:

Leviticus 9:22-24 Then Aaron lifted his hand toward the people, blessed them, and came down from offering the sin offering, the burnt offering, and peace offerings. And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of meeting, and came out and blessed the people. Then the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people, and fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. When all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.

This eighth day was the result of the previous seven days of consecration, and on it, the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people. Fire came out and consumed what was on the altar. The congregation witnessed God accepting and symbolically eating the meal that had been laid out for Him. For the sake of our hearts and nervous systems, it is probably a merciful thing that fire does not come out each time we make an offering.

Nevertheless, this was a very significant eighth day. Seven days, immediately followed by a special eighth day, matches the pattern of staying in temporary dwellings for seven days and having a sacred assembly on the Eighth Day.

As an aside, the tabernacle is described in two different ways. They look similar in English, but in Hebrew, they are quite different. The first way is simply “the tabernacle,” and the Hebrew word is *mishkan* (Strong's #4908). It indicates a tent or a dwelling place. The tabernacle was the dwelling place of God amid His people.

The tabernacle is also referred to as “the tabernacle (or tent) of meeting.” I will just spell the Hebrew words, and you can pronounce them in your head, so you don’t think I am swearing: *ohel mo’ed*. Now, “the tent of meeting” may sound like the congregation getting together to meet in a tent, but that would be impossible. Even if only the men of Israel assembled, that would still be hundreds of thousands of people, and not even the biggest circus tent in history could hold that many.

Instead, “the tent of meeting” or “tent of appointment” has a different focus. It refers to the place where God meets with mankind. This term is typically used in the context of the duties of the priesthood, because God met with mankind through the office of the priest. Thus, when “tabernacle of meeting” is used, it points to the relationship between God and man through the priests.

Now, getting back to the similarities. We saw that the time structure was the same: seven days, followed by a significant eighth day. Another similarity is the location. The priests had to stay in the tabernacle of meeting for seven days. That generally describes the Feast as well. You know the verses, so we won’t turn to them, but God says,

Leviticus 23:42-43 You shall dwell in booths [temporary dwellings, like the Tabernacle] for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, 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.’

While God required the priests to remain in the tabernacle for seven days, the Feast is not as stringent. It only requires dwelling or residing in temporary dwellings, not remaining in them, day and night. Even so, the temporary dwellings are the base of operations to remind us that God made Israel dwell in booths during their journey.

Another similarity is the basic commanded activity. For the Feast, Leviticus 23 says, “For seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD .” Numbers 29 gives further definition to the offerings for the Feast, and just

to summarize, the number of offerings during the Feast was tremendous. Likewise, during the consecration of the priesthood, for seven days, they offered an offering, made by fire, to the LORD.

A final similarity is the eating. As we saw, God commands that we eat before Him at the Feast. Likewise, the priests that were being consecrated did this literally—they ate in the Tabernacle. In terms of proximity, eating in the Tabernacle is as close to “before the LORD” as they could get without being in the Most Holy Place.

To add a little more to this connection, prior to Leviticus 8, the only mentions of this Feast are in Exodus 23:16 and Exodus 34:22, but they are what we could call “minor” mentions, and they use its other name—the Feast of Ingathering. That’s really all those mentions are—just that name. The main and detailed instructions for the Feast of Tabernacles—including that name—do not come until Leviticus 23, some 15 chapters after the consecration of the priesthood.

What I draw from that is that not only do the Feast and the consecration follow the same pattern, but the Feast itself seems to be patterned after the consecration of the priesthood. Remember that the priests were representatives of the whole nation, and God’s intention was for the whole nation to be a kingdom of priests. And each year, when the nation kept the Feast to be reminded of the wilderness journey, they also rehearsed, in type, the sanctification of the priests. So, in addition to the primary theme of the wilderness journey and God’s providence, the Feast also appears to be a memorial of sanctification.

Taking this one step further, even though we, the spiritual priesthood, have already been sanctified through God’s actions, this pattern suggests that the Feast of Tabernacles is part of our ongoing sanctification as priests as well. However, our ongoing sanctification is something we have a part to play in by what we choose to do this week. As an obvious counterexample, spending the evening in one of Nashville’s famous honky-tonk bars could result in several things, but sanctification probably isn’t one of them.

We’re going to go back to the eating aspect of the priesthood, and of this Feast, and of the altar that we have a right to eat from. (If you’re not already

back in Leviticus 8, please turn there.) There are many details in this chapter, so I will just summarize some of what the priests went through and what they ate during their seven days of consecration. We will skip the parts about the washing, the anointing with oil, and the holy garments, but we understand that all those things have spiritual parallels.

The sacrificing begins in verse 14 and goes through the end of the chapter (Leviticus 8:14-36). There was a bull for a sin offering in verse 14 to cleanse the priests, followed by one ram for a burnt offering in verse 18 to symbolize their complete dedication to God.

Next was a second ram (verse 22), called the ram of consecration. This one is interesting because it only shows up here in the ordination of the priests. This offering was a type of the peace offering, which we understand pictures a meal between God, mankind, and the priest, except here the priests weren't fully priests yet. Even so, it represents fellowship with God, and a relationship on good terms because of God's grace. It also implies being filled and satisfied because of what God provides and does.

But this ram of consecration was not a typical peace offering because its blood wasn't just sprinkled around the altar. It was a meal, but its blood had a special purpose. Notice what happens with the blood from the second ram for the priests:

Leviticus 8:22-24 And he brought the second ram, the ram of consecration. Then Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram, and Moses killed it. Also he took some of its blood and put it on the tip of Aaron's right ear, on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot. Then he brought Aaron's sons. And Moses put some of the blood on the tips of their right ears, on the thumbs of their right hands, and on the big toes of their right feet. And Moses sprinkled the blood all around on the altar.

For us, God does the consecrating, and it is spiritual in nature rather than involving the blood of an animal. Even so, this ritual shows three areas or applications for us to be aware of. Remember also that, as with holiness, there is an initial consecration by God, but there is also a lifelong process of consecration, which we usually call sanctification. So, the three areas in this

ritual point to areas where God has consecrated, but they are also areas to pay attention to in our service as priests on an ongoing basis.

First, God consecrates the ear. The ear is how the priest hears the Word of God, which is a foundational duty. A priest must be tuned into God. God has consecrated our hearing by drawing us from the world and giving us His Spirit, which provides spiritual discernment to recognize what is of God and what is not.

In John 10:27, Jesus says, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” The metaphors are different, but the implication is the same. Our ears have been tuned to our Shepherd and High Priest so we can follow Him. That is available to us while those around us are tuned into the world instead. Their ears have not been consecrated with the blood of the ram, which points to Christ.

Yet with this privilege comes a great responsibility, and these days, a great deal of work. The siren song of the world is becoming more insistent, reaching us through our phones and watches and earbuds, competing for and even drowning out the voice of our High Priest. So, there is an evaluation point here for us regarding how much we actively seek the voice of our High Priest versus passively taking in the many voices from the world. We have been given a priceless gift, but it is up to us to consistently use it.

After God consecrates the hearing, second, He consecrates the thumb. The thumb is the extremity, and it represents the whole hand. In turn, the hand represents one’s ability to work, to serve, or to perform priestly duties. The right hand, especially, symbolizes strength, ability, and skill. The picture that emerges is that, with consecration, our abilities and aptitudes are set apart for divine work and service.

Again, the people of this world have not been set apart to serve God the way we have. It is a privilege. Through God’s Spirit, we can serve and sacrifice, confident that God will fill in the gaps and provide what is needed. Richard made this point in his Bible study last year on the feeding of the 5,000. God provides with abundance that we cannot comprehend or anticipate. What He is looking for, though, is our willingness to reach out, to lend a hand, and to be conduits of His outworking. God does the things we are unable to do, but

He is looking for effort from us. We must give God something to bless, and trust that He will give the increase. He has gifted each of us to serve, and our inclusion in God's royal priesthood means we have a responsibility to then use what He has made available.

You might notice that these areas of the body and our lives follow a progression. First, God tunes the ear so we can hear Him. This opens the way for the consecration of our service, which then leads to the third area, which is the big toe. The toe stands for the whole foot. The foot, in turn, represents walking or standing, or both. Both apply metaphorically in our priestly service.

What is interesting is how critical the big toe is to the functioning of the foot. Without the big toe, both walking and even standing are extremely difficult because the big toe gives stability. Try walking sometime without letting your big toes touch the ground. (Not right now please.) It can be done, but with great difficulty. Running is all but impossible. When the big toe is missing or injured, it throws off the whole structure and the ability to move.

Getting back to the symbolism, if we are listening to God's voice, and we are serving, this leads to standing and walking with balance and stability. We can have a steady, even walk with God and each other. We can follow Him and walk in His ways.

Yet without a properly functioning foot, and especially a big toe, people tend to flail about because they are unbalanced. Their movements are unpredictable because they lack a dependable base. They may injure other people with an out-of-control walk because their equilibrium is off.

In this regard, think about what metaphorical crutches we may be using because we don't feel like we can put our full weight on our consecrated feet. God's ideal is for us to stand upright and to walk evenly because of what He has done. Yet we may be spiritually leaning on other things—other people or other elements of life under the sun—because we are not yet making full use of God's consecration. Physically, we may need support as we age. But spiritually, our feet—our base—should be getting steadier and more dependable.

Because of what God has done, we can stand with Him, or before Him, with a sure foundation, and then use this spiritual stability to serve Him and each other. Such stability and steadiness and reliability are available, but like with many things, there is a process of growth to learn how to stand and walk as He intends.

Drop down to verse 31:

Leviticus 8:31-33 And Moses said to Aaron and his sons, “Boil the flesh at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and eat it there with the bread that is in the basket of consecration offerings, as I commanded, saying, ‘Aaron and his sons shall eat it.’ What remains of the flesh and of the bread you shall burn with fire. And you shall not go outside the door of the tabernacle of meeting for seven days, until the days of your consecration are ended. For seven days he shall consecrate you.

We skipped over much of what happened with the ram of consecration, but just to summarize, portions of it were offered to God, and in verse 31, the priests were commanded to eat it as well. Remember, the ram of consecration was a type of peace offering. Aaron and his sons are thus shown in fellowship with God, and unless they were really insular, they were in fellowship with each other. It would be rather silly for them to all be eating at the same place and yet eating separately. God’s intent was for them to eat together because they were consecrated together, and that applies to our fellowship, too.

Verse 31 says that another part of their peace offering meal was unleavened bread, mentioned in verses 2 and 26. Unleavened bread is a well-known symbol of Christ. We rehearse that each year in the spring. In John 6, Jesus identifies Himself as the bread of life, the living bread, and so forth. He says that unless we eat of Him, we have no life in us. He is the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. And here we find that unleavened bread is a component of priestly consecration.

But Christ’s involvement is not limited to the unleavened bread. The ram of consecration, which became the peace offering they shared with God and each other, also points directly to Christ. Hebrews 10:19-20 says we have

“boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh.” The new and living way was consecrated by His flesh. That’s what we eat of.

Aaron and his sons probably had no idea what they were acting out. The blood that was put on their ears, thumbs, and toes, and the flesh and the unleavened bread they ate for consecration, all pointed forward to the Messiah. This is all part of the altar, the table, that we have been given the privilege to eat from that the sons of Aaron do not.

In fact, the wording back there in Hebrews 13:10 tends to hide what we have been given. It can legitimately be interpreted that we have a claim on Christ’s life and sacrifice, and I hasten to add, not because of anything we have done, but because of our inclusion in His priesthood. We have a claim on the peace offering and the fellowship it represents. We have a claim on the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. These things are ours by right. And yet, like Esau selling his whole birthright for a physical meal, we too can give up this claim in favor of something that seems more desirable in the present, but which will not last.

The picture is undeniable that continually eating of Christ is foundational to our ongoing consecration as God’s priesthood, as well as accepting His blood for consecration, in addition to accepting it for forgiveness.

There is one more detail we will touch on here. At the end of verse 33, and going into verse 34, it says, “For seven days he shall consecrate you. As he has done this day, so the LORD has commanded to do, to make atonement for you.”

Various scholars, such as Keil and Delitzsch, say that these verses indicate that the procedure we have looked at, including the blood on the extremities and the eating, did not just happen the first day. This same ritual was performed each day for seven days. There were other aspects that we did not cover, such as a sin offering and a burnt offering, being anointed with oil, and so forth. But the blood was applied each day, and they had their peace offering with God and each other each day for seven days.

It is also significant that the word for “consecrate” in verse 33 carries the meaning of “to fill,” and specifically, to fill the hand. Each day, the priests ate the flesh of the ram of filling, and they ate unleavened bread from the basket of filling. It basically says, “For seven days, he shall fill your hand.” This consecration consists of being filled with what God has provided—which we are doing now at the Feast. But being filled by God is not an end unto itself. The priesthood is filled by God for the purpose of then serving Him and His people.

Another thing the peace offering pictures is a person being strengthened. Even as food strengthens physically, the real strength comes from the relationship being on good terms—that peace. The strength that comes from being filled by the meal and the fellowship enables the man to fulfill his responsibilities.

If the consecration of the priests sets the pattern for this Feast—as it appears to—it suggests that the focus of this week is not the future, but the present. We are a kingdom of priests—a royal priesthood—right now. The ritual we have looked at teaches us how we are equipped and enabled to serve, not just this week—which is the easy part—but also when we return to our regular lives, because our priesthood obligation continues then. It is at the core of our identity. We are filled by what God provides through the life, death, and High Priesthood of Christ, and our ears, hands, and feet are set apart by His blood to serve.

But let’s get back to eating once again. It is difficult to overstate the importance of eating spiritual food to this priesthood role that God has graciously placed us into. Eating is a major part of this Feast, and as the royal priesthood, we have the right to eat from God’s table. Eating symbolizes taking in and meditating on Christ’s life and words, and then using them to fuel and direct our lives. Jesus said that His words are spirit and they are life (John 6:63). Peter picked up on that and told Him, “You have the words of eternal life.”

The words of the Father and the Son have a quality to them that other words do not. No other book can change your life for the better than the one in front of you. It doesn’t matter how many 5-star reviews another book has or the

credentials of the author. It simply lacks the inherent capability that the Word of God has. And because our ears have been consecrated, we can pick up on things the world cannot grasp, and then make use of them.

But it's that "mak[ing] use of them" that demonstrates our loyalty to our High Priest. The Scriptures frequently refer to both hearing and doing. Having knowledge and even understanding will not profit much if they do not affect what we do with our consecrated hands and feet. The words of life will be of no effect if they stop at our ears.

Just reading the words is not enough. That's a great and necessary start, but we must allow the words to change how we think and how we live. We must find the application—the wisdom; the principles—so our lives become conformed to the life of our High Priest.

Throughout the Scriptures, God has a lot to say to and about the Levitical priests, and not all of it is positive. Please turn with me to Malachi 1 as we continue to think about our spiritual table and our priestly service:

Malachi 1:6-7 "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honor? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence? Says the LORD of hosts to you priests who despise My name. Yet you say, 'In what way have we despised Your name?' "You offer defiled food on My altar, but say, 'In what way have we defiled You?' By saying, 'The table of the LORD is contemptible.'

Malachi 1:12-13 "But you profane it, in that you say, 'The table of the LORD is defiled; and its fruit, its food, is contemptible.' You also say, 'Oh, what a weariness!' And you sneer at it," says the LORD of hosts. "And you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick; thus you bring an offering! Should I accept this from your hand?" says the LORD.

This was given centuries after the consecration in Leviticus 8. It was even after Judah had been chastened through captivity and then returned to the Land of Promise. The priesthood at this time was in a state of decay, and God's controversy has to do with the priests' approach to the offerings. They

were not giving the best they had, but instead they were doing what they thought they could get away with. As it says, they considered God's table, His altar, to be contemptible.

There are things here for us to watch out for because our priesthood is of greater importance and a higher caliber than the Leviticus priesthood. These warnings may not apply in their letter since we do not literally cut up animals and hoist them onto an altar. But where human nature still reigns in us, this same approach may be found.

The attitude that God takes them to task for is considering His service to be a weariness or drudgery. Service was a burden and they were tired of it. Maybe the priests did not say this out loud, but their attitudes and actions spoke for them, like with the Laodiceans. The picture is of servants who do not regard it a privilege or a blessing to serve the Creator God. Their preferences and priorities were geared elsewhere, and service to God and His people was a burden that was keeping them from having the life they wanted.

Our priesthood responsibility is covered by Christ's words about denying ourselves, taking up our cross daily, and following Him (Matthew 10:38-39; Luke 9:23-24). We have been called to whatever service He sets before us. There will always be an aspect of self-denial in serving, and the role of a priest exemplifies that.

The Levitical priests were born into their role. We have a choice as to whether we enter this priesthood. But once we accept His blood, we also accept everything that goes with it, including priesthood responsibilities that may feel wearisome and a burden if our focus is under the sun.

The priests here also said in some way—perhaps with their conduct, or maybe just in their minds—that God's table was contemptible. There are two ways we can apply this. One is a despising of what we put onto God's table, meaning our spiritual sacrifices and offerings. This can happen when we disconnect what we do from the One to whom we owe our lives. When our focus and priorities drift from God to material concerns, then our spiritual sacrifices are not done with the same care, and we begin to give God less than He is due. We begin to devalue His portion of our lives in favor of what we want from life.

A second way we can call God's table contemptible is less obvious in this chapter, but it fits into our overall theme today. After God eats from His table, He shares with His priests, and they eat from His table. In this scenario, calling God's table contemptible means despising or even rejecting the food—the spiritual food—that He offers to us from this table that hardly anybody has a right to eat from.

In practical application, this looks like neglecting Bible study, or just going through the motions without consciously taking in and applying the words of life that our consecrated ears have been gifted to be able to receive.

This is especially challenging today, when there is an all-out assault on our attention from the time we wake up until we go to sleep. Today, the word of God must compete with best-sellers and podcasts and feeds and more channels and information sources than can be counted. But none of those things will yield the abundant life that only comes from the Good Shepherd. He tells us not to strive for the food that perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which He will give us.

So, it's worth contemplating how often God's word loses this competition in the arena of our lives. Without prioritizing God's table and His life-giving food, we simply won't have the spiritual strength and energy to steadily walk the narrow and difficult way that leads to life.

This matter of rejecting what God has graciously offered is so serious that Paul addresses it with one of the strongest warnings in the whole Book—and he does so with the language of tasting, of eating. He says in Hebrews 6,

Hebrews 6:4-6 For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance . . .

To taste these things—to be fed by them—and then to choose something else is to call God's table contemptible. Without being fueled by God from His table, the predictable result is falling away, for which there is no repentance.

I mentioned near the beginning that there are very few direct New Testament instructions regarding our priesthood. Even so, after what we have seen today, I believe we can find allusions to priestly things.

For example, near the beginning of Christ's Sermon on the Mount, He declares, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." That fits with what we have looked at today. As His royal priesthood, He is more than willing to fill us. The Levitical priests had their hands filled from God's table, and they ate, but our High Priest will fill our lives, so we are satisfied and strengthened through our communion with Him. To have that is to be blessed indeed.

But the question for us is what we truly hunger for. What our hearts truly desire is what we will pursue—either the food that perishes, or the food that endures and leads to everlasting life, which only comes from our High Priest and His table.