The Divine Paradox: Joy Through Sacrifice!

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Well, this was a time of great joy for the children of Israel. The Lord had provided the early and latter rains, the harvest was gathered, and the fruit of the vine, the winepress was tread. It had been a long and difficult year, filled with hard work under the sun. But the long-awaited Feast of Tabernacles was here, and it was indeed the most joyous celebration of the entire year. It was the highlight of the year, known simply as the Feast. It did not need any adjective.

Please turn to Leviticus 23. Yes, we have been here a few times. We are going to examine the divine paradox of the Feast: rejoicing and sacrificing for seven days, tying into Ronny's message. So here in Leviticus 23, we will start in verse 40. We will pick up near the end here.

> **Leviticus 23:40** . . . and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days. You shall keep it as a feast to the Lord for seven days in the year. It shall be a statute forever in your generations.

So we are commanded to have a feast to the Lord, with seven days of rejoicing.

Over to Deuteronomy 14, where we will pick up the instruction on second tithe. And yes, David was here too, but clearly God wanted some reinforcement here. We must be a forgetful people. We will just pick up one scripture.

> **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.

Over to Deuteronomy 16, now verses 14 and 15.

> **Deuteronomy 16:14-15** 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 where 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 shall surely rejoice.

This is a command that is repeated three times at the Feast: you shall rejoice, and then a fourth time, you shall surely rejoice. Are we supposed to be rejoicing? Now God clarifies in Deuteronomy 16:14 that this command requires us to not do this alone. Ronny hit on this: we are to be together all seven days with the entire community, rejoicing and eating before God.

Now, as Martin pointed out, rejoicing is a fruit of God's Spirit. It is not some temporary emotion of happiness that is based off of external circumstances. Rejoicing requires a deliberate choice centered on God's faithfulness rather than self-centered merriment.

In verse 17 now, let us read that one.

> **Deuteronomy 16:17** Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God, which He has given you.

During these commanded seven days of rejoicing, we are also commanded to be giving, according to the different blessings God has given to each of us. And here, we see the link between rejoicing and sacrificing. We can tie in Hebrews 13:16, where it reads: "Do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." The Feast is one giant potluck where everyone brought the fruit of their labor to share with others as they rejoiced and ate together before God.

Let us go to the first psalm in the last book of Psalms. I see some puzzled looks. For everyone other than Richard, that is Psalm 107. (I am sure others

knew that as well.) Here, the psalmist outlines many blessings from God that we should be thankful for and rejoice over. First on the list, Psalm 107, verse 1:

> **Psalm 107:1** Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.

And this is a song that we sing. In verses 13 and 14:

> **Psalm 107:13-14** (paraphrased) When Israel cried out in trouble, He saved them out of distress. He brought them out of darkness and death, and freed them from slavery.

We see here a reference to when we repent from our sin, He actually frees us from the bondage of sin. Verses 37 and 38, we see a reference to the abundance of the harvest. They yield a fruitful harvest.

> **Psalm 107:38** He blesses them, and they multiply greatly.

Now reading verses 21 and 22.

> **Psalm 107:21-22** Oh, that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! Let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare His works with rejoicing.

In the conclusion, in verses 42 and 43, we see it is the righteous who see it and rejoice. What is it they see that makes them rejoice? The psalmist tells us they actually understand the lovingkindness of the Lord. And we can tie that perfectly to Hebrews 13, verse 15.

> **Hebrews 13:15** Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.

So we rejoice, that is, we offer our sacrifice of praise and thanks continually for the unmerited sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who opened the door for our relationship with God.

Back to Leviticus 23 now. Let us see the other side of this paradox. In the very command to keep the Feast of Tabernacles, we see two separate Hebrew words that demonstrate the linkage between rejoicing and sacrificing at the Feast. In Leviticus 23:39, Leviticus 23:41, and in Numbers 29:12, we see two Hebrew words back to back, repeated three times, verbatim. It reads, you shall keep, first word; a feast, second word; of the Lord for seven days. We see this repeated three times.

And when we look underneath at these words, you shall keep is *Strong's* #2287, *chagag*, meaning to march in a sacred procession, to observe a festival. Get this one: to be giddy, to celebrate, to dance. We can clearly see rejoicing in this Hebrew word. Now the second word, a feast, is *Strong's* #2282, *chag*, meaning a festival, a solemn feast, sacrifice. So here, *chagag*, keep a festival of rejoicing, and *chag*, a solemn feast of sacrifice. We see this phrase again, by the way, in Zechariah 14, for in the Millennium, God's people will be attending the Feast of Tabernacles so that they too can learn how to rejoice and sacrifice.

> **Leviticus 23:36** For seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to the Lord.

We saw earlier, we were commanded seven days of rejoicing, seven days of sacrifices. But there is more, as we know. In Numbers 29, God actually specifies the required sacrifices. We are actually to offer more sacrifices at the Feast than all the other feasts combined. These sacrifices were never about slaughtering an animal. They were about the voluntary and uncomplaining giving of a life in total devotion to God, which is a living sacrifice. The goal of the offerings is to produce unity with God, to be acceptable, to be a sweet-smelling aroma to the Lord.

The Feast paradox of rejoicing and sacrifice is that it is actually a spiritual truth: true, lasting joy is found only through complete surrender and self-sacrificial love. Simply put, there is no rejoicing without sacrifice. Jesus

Christ's sacrifice creates and enables all rejoicing. We respond to God's sacrifice with our sacrifice of humble repentance. We joined a covenant of sacrifice with God. And then we do what Ronny was talking about: we obey His law, and we work to overcome our stupid, stubborn, carnal nature.

God's plan to create us in His image through sacrifice predates creation. We see this in II Timothy 1:9. It reads, ". . . His own purpose and grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began." Also, I Peter 1:18-20 adds, our redemption through "the precious blood of Christ. . . was foreordained before the foundation of the world." Jesus Christ's sacrifice is how we are redeemed, and following His example of daily living sacrifices is how we are transformed to become like God. God beings sacrifice by their very nature, brethren.

So we are commanded to offer more daily living sacrifices during these seven days than any other time of the year. This ties perfectly into David's message yesterday. (I wish he did not take all my scriptures. I am just kidding. It was very good.) Our focus here is not just on the future. Our focus is on being a present royal priesthood, as we learn how to serve alongside our High Priest. We read in I Peter 2:5, we are "a holy priesthood, offer[ing] up spiritual sacrifices. . . to God through Jesus Christ." And in Romans 12:1, ". . . by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."

Here at the Feast, we are to have more daily living burnt offerings and complete devotion and service to God than any other time of year. How are we spending our time here at the Feast? This must come first, right? Our burnt offerings must come first. This is the first great commandment, as Ronny mentioned: to love God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind. God must always be the focus at the Feast of Tabernacles.

But to be acceptable, those burnt offerings had to have, right on top of them, a meal or grain offering. And here at the Feast, we are also to have more daily living grain offerings aligned to that second great commandment: to love others through self-sacrifice and service. Remember, these offerings were literally consumed, burned up, providing a sweet aroma to the Lord.

Please turn with me to I Chronicles 21 (nobody took this one), verses 8 to 18. I am just going to summarize here. David acknowledges his sin of numbering the people for his own purpose. Grab on to that: for his own purpose. After 70,000 men fall to the plague, David comes before God begging for His mercy and asking God to punish him. He was the one that sinned, not the people. The angel of the Lord relays to David, go erect an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Ornan.

Now, we see here the first condition of an acceptable sacrifice, which always starts with the right underlying humility—an attitude of humility, repentance, and recognition for God's unmerited mercy—as we too, just like David, often seek our own will. We seek our own achievements, we look for our own solutions through our own self-reliance and selfish ambition. And we do it all the time, brethren. We could tie this to Psalm 51. (Mark was here earlier, just a few days ago.) The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart is what He wants from each of us, first and foremost.

So David goes and asks Ornan now to sell him the threshing floor, so that he can build an altar to the Lord. Ornan responds, "Hey, I'll give it to you. Take the oxen, the wheat for the burnt offering, the grain offerings. I'll even give you all the wood. I'll give you the yokes of the oxen, you can use that to fuel the fire." And now we are going to pick up verses 24 through 26.

> **I Chronicles 21:24-25** Then King David said to Ornan, "No, but I will surely buy it for the full price, for I will not take what is yours for the Lord, nor offer burnt offerings with that which costs me nothing. So David gave Ornan six hundred shekels of gold by weight for the place.

We see another important attribute of an acceptable sacrifice: acceptable sacrifice has always come at a cost to the giver. In the parallel account in II Samuel 24, we see David pays just 50 shekels of silver for the threshing floor, oxen, and wood, but here he is paying 600 shekels of gold for the entire hillside surrounding that threshing floor. This is Mount Moriah, a large enough area, by the way, for the future temple that Solomon would build. You could jot down II Chronicles 3:1. That makes that very clear. This was

also, by the way, the same place where Abraham offered Isaac. You see that in Genesis 22:2.

Now, in verse 26,

> **I Chronicles 21:26** And David built there an altar to the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called on the Lord; and He answered him from heaven by fire on the altar of burnt offering.

So God displays His mercy and His grace with a consuming fire from heaven, demonstrating His acceptance of David's humble repentance and His offerings. You know, Ronny mentioned the sacrifices of Abel and Cain, and there is a really good chance, by the way, the way that God showed that Abel's sacrifice was acceptable is He sent fire down from heaven to completely consume it.

Our Feast is set apart, brethren, as the highlight of the year, requiring more sacrificial love, more living sacrifices than all the other feasts combined. Are we bringing acceptable burnt and grain offerings with that right underlying attitude of humility, repentance, recognition for God's unmerited mercy? We know Jesus personified the intent of these sacrifices as a living sacrifice and devotion to God, and ultimately His life was consumed as an acceptable sacrifice.

The greatest sacrifice of all is the sacrifice of self. This is what God wants from each of us. Jesus says in John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." Sacrifice is the very essence of godly love. Sacrifice is what godly beings do. That is what we are here to learn.

Our discipleship requires a life of complete surrender to God's will. We do not make the journey to the Kingdom for free—it literally costs us our life. Paul admonishes in Ephesians 5:1, "Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma."

Are we bringing God an abundance of our daily burnt offerings and complete devotion and service through prayer and praise? Are we loving God with all our heart? Or are we holding something back that we think we know best about? To be an acceptable whole burnt offering, we must be ready and willing to sacrifice everything of value to serve Him. Jesus tells us no one can serve two masters. He tells us in Luke 14:26 that our loyalty to Christ must surpass all earthly ties, even to family and to self.

Now, we are probably not guilty of taking a census to prepare for war, at least I hope not. But where have we pursued our will? Our solutions? Where have we had self-reliance over God? Have we prayed and actually wanted God's will to be done in all aspects of our life? Think about that. Have we prayed and actually wanted God's will to be done in all aspects of our life, thereby sacrificing what we really want, as we put everything into His hands in complete faith and trust? Tying into brother Clyde's message, do we question what good could possibly come from our suffering, or the suffering and perhaps even death of someone we love dearly? As Richard reminded, God knows what we really need to become just like Him.

How about our daily grain offerings? Are we offering more daily love here at the Feast than any other time of year? As we read in Deuteronomy 16:17, giving as we are able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God, which He has given to you? Are we giving of our time and resources? Or are we using them for ourselves and our selfish pursuits? Are we forbearing mistakes, forgiving and forgetting any wrong, sacrificing our ego to not complain?

There is always a lot we can complain about at the Feast. We did not get the room we wanted. The hotel is a bit worn. The non-Sabbath lunches here are not very filling—more like a fast, they do not exist. But at least the elevators are working now. Brethren, I have stayed at some absolutely stunning hotels as I travel for work, and I am here to tell you, this is probably not one of them. And yet, there is no place I would rather be than right here with you all.

We should be thankful for the blessing of God's Feast site, for the place God chose to put His name. We should be thankful and rejoice for the opportunity to be here together with Him and each other. We must remember there will

always be a trade-off, a sacrifice we must make for being together in a place where the majority of our family can afford it. The Feast is not a time to be on our own. We are commanded, as Ronny mentioned, for seven days to be rejoicing, eating, sharing, and sacrificing together with God and our family.

Turn with me to Philippians 2. Now, here is a fun fact while you turn; you may not have known this. The New Testament word for rejoice actually shares a root with the Greek word for grace, *charis*. We rejoice in response to our great God's unmerited gift of sacrifice, for His unmerited grace.

> **Philippians 2:17-18** Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me [Paul says].

Over to Philippians 4 (that is just across the page for me), verse 4:

> **Philippians 4:4** Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!

In this repeated command to rejoice in the Lord, our rejoicing always centers on the Lord and continues regardless of external conditions. And over just a page or so now to Colossians 1, verse 24, we will read:

> **Colossians 1:24** I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church.

Our sacrifices to our brethren can be downright difficult, because we are surrounded by so many imperfect people, just like us, but different. Our imperfections are different. We all have different blessings, but we all have different imperfections too. And that is why it is so important to be here together. Each of us, warts and all, is a gift to each of us as we learn together—we learn together how to be like God, giving unmerited, undeserved sacrifices to each other.

We must remember an acceptable offering always starts with the right underlying humble attitude, an attitude that takes the focus off the self and puts it on serving God and others. We see the warning in Isaiah, Amos, Malachi, where God outright rejected their sacrifices and offerings. They were unacceptable because of their underlying attitude of pride and their lack of mercy and love for each other. In Malachi 1:7, God actually condemns their polluted bread, their grain offerings. And likewise in Psalm 50, God calls His people and scolds them for improper grain offerings as they assumed His role as judge and spoke negatively about others.

There is a very simple test regarding the sacrifice of acceptable speech: Are the words I am speaking bringing glory to God? Are they spoken in humility and sacrificial love to build up the Body of Christ? What fruit did my words produce? Did they edify, encourage, and build up, or did they tear down?

Far too often, Satan infects members in the Body of Christ to develop a pride-enabled autoimmunity. They see someone make a mistake and just cannot hold their tongue, and thereby the Body of Christ actually attacks itself. They are convinced somehow that they are doing God a favor, that it is their role to correct others or openly speak negatively about someone else's problems. And these words are often spoken hastily in retaliation for being hurt. But these words are polluted bread. They are unacceptable offerings at God's table, and the polluted bread of negative speech literally pollutes the mind of someone else *about* someone else. And we need to be very careful about our words at the Feast of Tabernacles. We are here to bring glory to God and to build up the Body of Christ.

Turn with me to Zephaniah 3 as we start to wind down here, with the view of the future Millennium that we symbolically celebrate here at the Feast. Here in Zephaniah 3, we are the daughter of Zion, the church, the future firstfruits, who have just been glorified and are side by side with our Lord and Savior, King of kings, Jesus Christ. We are rejoicing, we are singing, because the Lord has taken away our sins. He has imputed His righteousness on us, and now we are newly glorified into His image. Imagine how joyous that time will be! Picking up here beginning in verse 14.

> **Zephaniah 3:14** Sing, oh daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away your judgments, He has cast out your enemy. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall see disaster no more.

Skipping to verse 17 now:

> **Zephaniah 3:17** The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.

At this joyous occasion, we are not rejoicing alone, we are not singing alone. Get that: the Lord our God, the mighty God who saves, will be right there with us, and He will be rejoicing over us with singing. God Himself will be rejoicing and singing with His Family. And as Clyde referenced in Hebrews 12:2, Jesus gave His life, enduring the painful sacrifice and shame, for the joy set before Him. This is that joy. This scripture is pointing to that joy that He is looking forward to, to be right there with all of us, singing. And this is also the joy set before us, so that we too can endure the sufferings of self-sacrifice.

During this time, we will be helping God restore the people of Israel and teaching everyone about the way of God, the way of sacrifice and giving, as we help prepare them for the coming great throne judgment. But we are here now, and as David reminded us, we are here as priests, and we must be offering our spiritual sacrifices. Here at the Feast, we are commanded to *chagag*—keep a festival of rejoicing seven days, and *chag*—a solemn feast of sacrifice for seven days.

God has provided us seven days in this optimal feast environment to rejoice, as we give thanks and praise to God for His unmerited mercy and lovingkindness, by which He is recreating Himself in us through sacrifice. And during these seven days, it is an optimal environment to sacrifice, to give more sacrificial love, more living burnt and grain offerings than any other time of year. Sacrifice enables rejoicing. This is our time to practice

becoming like God, holding nothing back, literally consumed through our acceptable offerings.

As we follow His example, given unmerited gifts of sacrifice and service, we walk in His Spirit, in the Spirit given to us through Jesus Christ's sacrifice, and thereby we are transformed from self-focused to God-focused and others-focused, as we produce an abundant spiritual harvest here at the Feast of Tabernacles. Thereby our sacrifices actually produce joy. Think about that. *Our sacrifices to each other actually produce joy*. We enable rejoicing through our daily sacrifices to each other. Through our daily living sacrifices, we gradually exchange our self-concern for God-concern and others' concerns. And with each daily sacrifice, we gradually put to death our carnal nature as we become more like God, and we look forward to our future joy as part of this family.

As we read in Isaiah:

> **Isaiah 62:5** And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.
>
> **Isaiah 65:18-19** Be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, and her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people.