

Encouragement in Keeping the Feast
Feast of Tabernacles
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Good morning, brethren. Special greetings to those behind the camera out in Elkhart, Indiana, those in Sooke, British Columbia, anybody on the phone, anybody streaming live on the website. I certainly want to welcome you to the feast here and joining us here this morning.

I'd like to start this morning, if you would turn with me please to Hebrews 10. We're going to read verses 25 through 27 to start. I'm going to read this from the New Living Translation. I've got about a 70/30 split of New King James and New Living. I'll try to call them out to avoid confusion as we go along, but we'll start with Hebrews 10:25 from the New Living.

Hebrews 10:25. *And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.*

26) Dear friends, if we deliberately continue sinning after we have received knowledge of the truth, there is no longer any sacrifice that will cover these sins.

27) There is only the terrible expectation of God's judgment and the raging fire that will consume his enemies. (NLT)

Now for those that may have heard me speak in the past, my approach when I'm asked to speak is pretty simple. I like to share what's on my mind. I like to share things that I'm studying. I'm not up here to sell you anything or try to twist your arm. I'm just sharing as a brother what's been on my mind. And leading up to the feast this year and on and off for some time now, what we read here in Hebrews 10, specifically in verse 25, speaks to a subject that's been heavy on my mind.

Now, in the context of the time that we're here for, the Feast of Tabernacles, this principle has been especially resonating for me. Looking around at the conditions of the greater Church of God, we see this neglect that's spoken of here in Hebrews 10:25; we see it as extensive. Now, I want to preface this by saying that there are extenuating circumstances. I think we all understand and appreciate that. Acute financial hardships, health concerns, we completely understand those things, but in all likelihood we're all aware of individuals or families who have made the conscious choice to—for a lack of a better way to put it—go off grid. Or just go their own ways, often keeping the feast in utter isolation, not keeping it in its entirety, or not keeping it at all anymore, for which there are countless justifications and we're not going to get into any of those. But for me and, again, in my experience recently I've had several of these situations come up that I've been made aware of as I've been thinking about these specific cases and seeing what's happening, I've been finding my attitude getting kind of sour and my frustration level growing.

I'm thinking of all of God's commands and everything that is required to be a Christian, why would one not choose to keep the feast? This is purely physical, talking completely physical here. This time, this celebration, this feast is the good part. Right? This is the reward. This is part of the benefits of walking the Christian walk, living this way of life.

And I know some who will put fastidious effort and diligence into de-leavening; every nook and cranny, every crack and crevice completely swept clean. Or they will absolutely make sure I'm not going to eat or drink anything on Atonement and they're very fastidious about that. Those are good things, but, again from a physical perspective, that's the hard stuff. Right? Then when it comes to keeping the feast, it's pretty laissez-faire. They don't give it a lot of thought. And I ask myself, "Why? Why? Or why would you choose isolation during this time of fellowship especially if you spend the bulk of the rest of the year in your time in isolation?" Again, I understand there are extenuating circumstances. There are those that by force are isolated, but then there are those that are isolated by choice, they make that conscious decision.

The more that I'm thinking about this I remember the day I was kind of boiling this over in my mind. I'm getting all fired up and I'm getting all worked up. I finally came to the conclusion, "Rick has asked me to speak at the feast this year. Here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to tell everyone why they need to be keeping the feast, why they need to be here, why they need to be fellowshiping, why they're wrong if they're not, and how Hebrews 10 verses 26 through 27 is a comin' your way if you don't get your act together—a real fire and brimstone kind of sermon." And you're all laughing at me! Why?

But then I read verse 24 of Hebrews 10. Let's read it. I'm going to read it from the New Living Translation once again.

Hebrews 10:24. *Let us think of ways to motivate one another ... (NLT)*

Motivate one another to what?

10b) ... to acts of love and good works. (NLT)

Now The Contemporary English Version of the Bible translates verse 24 this way.

Hebrews 10:24. *We should keep on encouraging each other ... (CEB)*

Keep on encouraging each other:

24b) ... to be thoughtful and to do helpful things. (CEB)

Then if we dovetail this with verse 25, again from the New Living, we'll just keep reading.

25) *And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but ... (NLT)*

I'm going to shift the focus.

25b) *... but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return [Jesus Christ's return] is drawing near. (NLT)*

Now every year, Rick sends out a letter to those that have been asked to speak or song lead at the feast and the letter contains some guidelines, some principles, the basics of how things are going to run and I'd like to quote just one sentence from that letter in putting all these thoughts together that are rolling around in my mind. Rick says this in the letter, quoting, "We should aspire to have positive, encouraging, and uplifting messages that leave the brethren inspired and well-educated in God's word."

Now, I'm sure many of you have had experiences in the past at feasts where maybe messages haven't been that way. I'm not advocating smooth words, not advocating a lack of strong meat, but again the instruction. What did we read here in Hebrews 10 verse 25? We are to encourage and we are to encourage especially now as in no other time in history, so much more though than we did last year. Why? Because His return is one year closer than it was last year and we know—we just celebrated the Feast of Trumpets—that the days leading up to the return of Christ are going to be some rough times, seriously rough times. So we need this encouragement. We need to be instruments of, as it says in verse 24 of Hebrews 10, "thoughtful and helpful things."

Now the word translated as "encouragement" in the Greek here can and does mean *to instruct, to teach or admonish*, but Thayer's Greek Lexicon also describes this word as meaning *to console, to encourage and strengthen by consolation and to comfort*. That's a little bit different twist on that word. So, with all of this in mind and, perhaps needless to say at this point, I changed my approach. I tried to change my attitude, change my approach to what I'm sharing with you here today.

We're going to go into more of the specifics as we go along here, but I'd like to start with this to all of you here in Kellogg, those in Elkhart, Indiana, to all of God's people wherever you are gathered, wherever you are assembled together keeping this Feast of Tabernacles, I'd like to say thank you. Thank you for being here. Thank you for the sacrifices you have made. And we've all had to make them—we'll talk more about that here shortly—to be here. Thank you for supporting the efforts of others that have worked diligently, tirelessly to ensure that the feast as we're keeping it can be kept. Your efforts, all of your efforts, are in and of themselves encouraging and positive examples that not only serve to witness to the rest of the world, but witness to one another. And, again, we're going to explore all of this in more detail as we go.

Now, disclaimer time: Lest you be concerned about my approach, things like inducing pride, vanity, self-congratulatory, "Yea! We're number one. Go Team." We're all aware of what it says in 2 Timothy 3:16. *Scripture is given for correction and instruction in righteousness.*

Scripture also contains encouragement as well and I'd like to touch on just one example of scripture recording an act of encouragement. We're going to find this, turn with me please to Acts 11 where we'll read verses 19 through 24 from the New King James Version. And the example we have here that we're going to explore is that of Barnabas whose name, as we're told in chapter 4 verse 36, means *son of encouragement*. I think it's interesting to note that wasn't actually his given name but it was a name that was given to him by the apostles. In other words, they saw this individual, they saw his actions, and they gave him this name that reflected his character and we're going to see Barnabas living up to his name in this example.

Acts 11:19. *Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. (NKJV)*

So, stopping here, what do we see? What's the backdrop? As a result of what transpired after Stephen's martyrdom, we see that the early church was starting to become scattered under some duress. These were trying times. And they were "trying" not necessarily of their own doing. The scattering that was going on here was a matter of survival, not preference.

The New American Standard Updated Version translates it this way, "*those who were scattered because of the persecution,*" and the NIV says, "*by the persecution.*" So, this sets the stage here.

20) But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus.

21) And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.

22) Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. (NKJV)

So what do we see? The early church has an opportunity here. Right? There were a great number of believers, as it says, and it's an interesting mix. We've got these new converts, those that have just come into the faith, just hearing the gospel, and, then, we've got those that are on the run. So, we have these two groups coming together and either way you view it, they are probably not the most mature, most solidified, most experienced, most stable group. So, it's an interesting mix of people.

There are a couple of paths that could have been taken here by the church. One would have been to identify faults, weaknesses, shortcomings, call those out and then subsequently beat all those people over the head with the Bible, I guess "scrolls" in context of the times. Or there is a different path. Let's take a look at what Barnabas did in verse 23.

23) When he came and had seen the grace of God, ... (NKJV)

Now that's paramount; Barnabas recognized the source—the grace of God.

23b) ... he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. (NKJV)

We don't see Barnabas coming in guns blazin'. We don't see condemnation, browbeating, reproof or correction. We see gladness. We see encouragement. We see encouragement to do what? What does it say? "To continue with the Lord." We see, and this is the Tom Beohm paraphrase, "Hey, guys! This is wonderful! This gives me great joy! Keep it up! Continue!" Was Barnabas' take here considered wrong or prideful or vanity-inducing? What does verse 24 say? I think this is really interesting in context.

24) For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.... (NKJV)

Those are pretty positive words there! And the ultimate result, as you finish verse 24, was:

24) ... And a great many people were added to the Lord. (NKJV)

So we see the fruit produced from this approach was positive. Question: Would this have been the same result if Barnabas had had a less positive response to the situation? We don't know. It's something worth thinking about.

First disclaimer: Biblical precedent for taking an encouraging and supporting approach.

Now for my second caveat here or disclaimer, turn with me to Philippians 2 where we'll read verses 12 and 13 from the New King James Version.

Philippians 2:12. *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; (NKJV)*

Now we most often put the focus of this verse on the working out your own salvation with fear and trembling aspect, but notice what Paul says before that. He says, "As you have always obeyed ... much more in my absence" which seems to indicate that the efforts of those in the church in Philippi were genuine. It wasn't "Oh, well Paul's here. Let's put on our Sabbath smile. And then, when he goes away, we'll just do our own thing." And this is key because Paul regards it as such. He's calling them out and saying, "You're doing this and that's good." Notice he starts the entire thought in verse 12 with "My beloved," which that word in the Greek is rooted in a word we all know, "agapao." So we have a tender, loving, encouraging admonition here, but here's the caveat in verse 13.

*13) for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.
(NKJV)*

Christ puts it more succinctly. Turn with me to John 15 and we'll just read verse 5 here, again from the New King James. Christ tells us:

John 15:5. *"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. (NKJV)*

Nothing! God the Father and Jesus the Christ are the very genesis of our existence and it is only by their power, will, and aid that any of this is possible. To not acknowledge this would be a disservice and would be ignorant on my part and I certainly don't want to diminish in any way, shape, or form the extreme importance of our source of understanding and our source of empowerment.

Rather what am I shooting here for? Calling out the current result of our collective efforts. Now, collective efforts, what does that reference? God and Christ working with our contributions in where we stand today. A Biblical example of this concept in action is maybe the children of Israel coming out of Egypt. They had everything provided for them. Right? The dramatic deliverance out of Egypt, the protection of the pillar and the cloud, the way of escape through the Red Sea, they had the manna. They had clothing and shoes that didn't wear out—all these things that they had no way in and of themselves of being able to provide. We can look back on the historical record and there is absolutely no doubt of the source of these amazing miracles.

But they still had to walk. Didn't they? God didn't literally pick them up, kick them under their feet and get them out. They had to strap their shoes on. They had to collect the plunder from the Egyptians. They had to load up their animals. They had to grab their walking staffs. They had to sacrifice that lamb and put the blood on the doorposts and the lintel. They had to put one foot in front of the other as they went through the wilderness. Again, God provided the manna, but they still had to collect it. They still had to prepare it. They still had to eat it. God could have provided manna to an extreme. If they didn't consume it, they would have died; they would have starved to death. And, while their efforts in comparison to God's mighty works pale, they still played a part. That's the point here.

Maybe a little closer to home for those of us who are parents. How about when our toddlers begin to walk? Do we stand in judgment and say, "Humph! Do you call that walking? I don't think so." Do we point out all of the things that are wrong with their form and stride and balance? "Hey, you need to engage your core and your gluts. You're just doing this all wrong. You have the wrong shoes for this event?" No! No! We celebrate the progress as it is being made. "Yeah! Come to Papa! Come to Daddy! Yes!" We cheer them on and encourage them to continue trying. And this is paramount, especially as it becomes more challenging, through the fatigue, through the failure, through perhaps the tougher challenges or obstacles that they face.

This really speaks back to where we started in Hebrews 10:25. As we mature spiritually, coupled with the more difficult trials, the trying times that we're living in, being edified, being encouraged, acknowledging on occasion that some progress is being made—if done in the right spirit and tempered, as we're going to do today, with why these efforts are valuable and what they ultimately mean, why they're important—can benefit our hearts and benefit our minds and give us that boost to continue on to take those next steps as we go through this Christian walk.

So, my “mission statement” for this morning can best be summed up in Ephesians 4:29.

Ephesians 4:29. *Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. (NLT)*

The foundation is laid; let's dive into some details. Again, hearkening back to where we started, Hebrews 10, for those of us here in Kellogg or Elkhart, wherever you happen to be behind the camera, on the phone, wherever you're assembled, what can we learn from the experiences leading up to and being at the feast, being assembled together before our God? How will it help us to be effective kings and priest in God's coming kingdom, specifically the time we're here foreshadowing—the time of the Millennium?

As a backdrop and I think we've only been here a couple of times. I was thinking we might be here more, but let's review the commands once again for the keeping of the Feast of Tabernacles. So, let's first turn over to Leviticus 23 where we'll read verses 39 through 43, from the New King James Version. These are very familiar passages to just set the tone here.

Leviticus 23:39. *Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of the Lord for seven days; on the first day there shall be a Sabbath-rest, and on the eighth day a Sabbath-rest.*

40) And you shall take for yourselves 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 Lord your God for seven days.

41) 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. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month.

42) You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths,

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." (NKJV)

So, what are we going to pull out of these verses?

There is a sacrifice of a time commitment in the keeping of the feast and even though there are sacrifices and there is investment of resources, it is temporary. It requires

effort. It requires some participation. And it's supposed to be a joyous occasion. Hold onto those; we'll dig into all the details here shortly. Deuteronomy 14, please, we'll read verses 22 through 26 here, again from the New King James.

Deuteronomy 14:22. *"You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year.*

23) 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.

24) But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe, or if the place where the Lord your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, when the Lord your God has blessed you,

25) then you shall exchange it for money, take the money in your hand, and go to the place which the Lord your God chooses.

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.
(NKJV)

So, what principles can we pull out of this? Again, we see this resource/sacrifice concept and commitment and rejoicing.

1. The first principle, the first area we can take encouragement in, learn from, and carry forward is this: Keeping the feast requires sacrifice.

We have sacrifice in a couple of key areas that I'm going to touch on. The first is time. We're commanded to keep the feast to the Lord for seven days plus the eighth day, plus the flanking travel times on both sides to get to and from the place where the Lord your God chooses to place His name.

Now, for me personally, my life's experience has been taking this sacrifice concept for granted. Since I was five-years-old, going to the feast has been a given. We looked forward to it and it was enjoyable, but there was never a question of whether we would or not.

However, I had an experience when I was a teenager that changed my perspective and it was the first year after I graduated from high school. I was out living on my own. I won't go into the details, but it wasn't a time in my life where I was particularly wise or successful. I learned a whole lot in fulltime attendance at the "School of Hard Knocks," however. But that year when the feast came around, I not only didn't have enough money to go anywhere for the feast, but I didn't have the time to take off of work to be able to afford anything but to take time off for the holy days and still be able to eat—like literally eat. That experience gave me a very real view of what it takes—the sacrifice involved to attend the feast—and even more important, what was missed when one was unable to take advantage of the opportunity, which we'll get into more here shortly.

Subsequently the following year, I put some more effort into ensuring I could get to the feast, understanding better what that sacrifice means and what I missed out on.

Now outside of my own experience, we all know of, we all have our own personal experiences of sacrifices being made to attend the feast. Many risk jobs to attend. For our children, schools often frown on the idea and have been adversarial toward families taking the time off. We've had prayer request for both of these leading up to the feast this year. And for those who have put these things on the line to be here this year, you are to be commended for doing so. Thank you for taking that step out on faith and putting your jobs, your educations, putting these things on the line for obedience sake.

Now the other major sacrifice involved in keeping the feast is financial. And I mentioned my firsthand experience with that. And, as time goes on and as the cost of living increases and we are becoming more scattered and fellowship with like-minded brethren becomes harder, this financial sacrifice involved is becoming more real for more of us. Large families, tight budgets, loss of work and income, whether you're self-employed or maybe you don't get a lot of paid time off. So, there is a tremendous sacrifice financially involved in just taking that time. These are very real scenarios, real scenarios that many of us in this room have had to face this year.

And it's not just for the seven days that we're here. Right? It's a yearlong sacrifice. Perhaps that tithe that we're commanded to set aside, we could have looked at that and weighed it in the balance. It could have been something that on the onset could have been a greater priority. But for everyone here, for everyone that has been faithful to God in keeping His commands to set aside those funds necessary, to take those steps out on faith, thank you.

So how does this concept of sacrificing our resources apply to the Millennium? How does this tie in? How will we apply what we're learning going through this and going through these experiences? First of all, and this is going to be a theme going forward here and I'll try to tread delicately with what I'm about to say. While Satan will be bound, Christ will rule the world and we as spirit-beings will work alongside Him in that effort, for human beings—especially those who will have lived through the tribulation into the Millennium—the time of the Millennium will not necessarily be the functional equivalent of mainstream Christianity's view of heaven. Okay, what does that mean?

Before I go any further with that thought, I'm not saying the Millennium is going to be a negative experience. In contrast to today and especially in contrast to the times leading up to Christ's return, it's going to be better—just day and night better. Again, Satan will no longer be influencing the minds of humanity and Jesus Himself will be personally overseeing the activities of this world and ruling in His love. We've read scriptures this feast that speak of peace and prosperity breaking out and abundance, physical abundance and spiritual abundance during this time.

Why am I saying this then? Let's notice a passage that we traditionally associate with our interactions with humanity during the time of the Millennium. Turn with me please to

Isaiah 30. We're going to read verses 19 through 21 from the New International Version.

Isaiah 30:19. *O people of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. He will be gracious if you ask for help. He will surely respond to the sound of your cries. (NLT)*

I think it's interesting to note here these two Hebrew words for "weep" and "cries" in verse 19 are two different words. The word translated "weep" means *to lament or bewail*. The word "cries" means *to call out or proclaim*.

So I read this and I get a picture in my mind of when my kids really want something and their moaning and groaning and flopping around like fish on a shore. "Oh, if I only had Oh, if I only could get" They're not asking. They're just kind of flopping around. My response is okay, deep breath, "Why don't you ask calmly and nicely because I'm more than happy to help you out." While my kids may have that desire, that intensity, it moves from a lament to a call out, a request.

I'm pointing this out because in the time of the Millennium, there is still going to be need. Life will not be handed to human beings on a silver platter. God is saying here in verse 19, "Look, you will have needs, but you will need to ask. And if you ask, we are happy to help you out." So reading on here in verse 20:

*20) Though the Lord gave you adversity for food and suffering for drink, he will still be with you to teach you. You will see your teacher with your own eyes.
21) Your own ears will hear him. Right behind you a voice will say, "This is the way you should go," whether to the right or to the left. (NLT)*

Now we reference our role in the Millennium often in the context of verse 21, but the implication is that choices are still going to have to be made. And if there are choices to make, there is the less ideal option that can be taken. Even in the idyllic world without Satan's influence, human beings will still have learning opportunities. I know for many, especially those of us who have grown up in the church—I'm a generation two; my wife is a generation four—this perspective is kind of revolutionary in thinking. In the past we had this picture, especially as kids growing up, that the Millennium was going to be this crystal and perfect utopia. No pain. No tears. No trouble. No discomfort. Satan is put away. Nothing uncomfortable will ever happen ever again.

Now that time is coming; that time is coming when those things will be true and we're going to be foreshadowing that here in just a few days. The Millennium, maybe not quite that time yet; better than before, better than now—absolutely! But—to put it in the vernacular—heaven on earth? Not quite yet, but we're getting there.

To expand on this concept then, one of the lessons we're learning today—and we can all relate to this—is just because we're doing the right thing (We're walking in faith and obedience and doing what we're supposed to be doing as we know it.) that doesn't

mean that we're 100 percent free from experiencing pain or having opportunities to exercise faith through trauma. Does it? Now, in the context of the feast, here's a vivid personal example. A couple of years ago my oldest daughter Juliana came head to head with another kid at the park. Nasty black eye, mild concussion, pretty shaken up over the experience. Now I could look at that and say, "It's an innocent little girl and she's keeping God's feast. Why would a loving God do that? Why would He allow that to happen?" Again, for those that have put jobs on the line, doing the right thing doesn't always mean the situation is going to work out the way you would hope or desire or expect. To be frank, perhaps your reward—if you want to think of it that way—might be the unemployment line.

So, what does this have to do with the Millennium? What's the point here? What we are learning, the experiences, the opportunities we have to build faith, being faithful and making these sacrifices we've been talking about will help us be able to say those words we read in Isaiah 30, "This is the way you should go," because I've been there, I've done that, I got the T-shirt. Right? "This is the way to go" to those in the Millennium who have to make decisions about keeping God's laws and the sacrifices they may have to make in their context to do so.

Obedience will still be an option. God's not going to force people to obey. For instance, we know what it says in Zechariah 14 verses 16 through 19. We won't turn there, but we know. What does it say? If the feast isn't kept; nations don't come up to Jerusalem. What happens? No rain. You mean people are going to make that choice? I personally feel that God is not in the business of making empty threats, which by extension, then, says there is a pretty decent chance that scenario will play out at some point. It could be residual human nature from those who have lived through the tribulation into the millennial period or perhaps, innocently enough, but a perceived insurmountable obstacle keeping the feast from being attended.

We will have the opportunity, brethren—you and I, God willing—to share our experiences that we're going through now, our sacrifices and say, "When was it? 2015? That was the year my boss told me not to come back if I go to the feast. But do you know what? I chose that path and God provided," however that story ends for you and for me. So again, thank you for your sacrifice of time, your sacrifice of finances and be encouraged to know there is a big picture purpose being served in doing so.

2. The second principle, the second thing we can pull out of this, that we can be encouraged by, that we can learn from in keeping the feast is the fact that: This is all temporary.

We can look at this temporary condition in a few lights, a few different angles, but leading up to the feast (as it seems to be the case every year and with each year growing in increased intensity), the trials, the distractions, the devices of Satan that he uses in hopes of derailing us are just really ramping up. The prayer requests that were coming up the few weeks before the feast this year seemed to be chocked full of trial after trial after trial. It was interesting looking at what was going on in a lot of your lives

through those requests. It wasn't just one thing, but it would be something and then something else would spawn off of that and then spawn off of that. So, you had this compound trial thing going and very intense. Coincidence? I don't think so.

But we can take hope and comfort in the fact that these things are temporary and none of it happens—none of it happens—outside of the purview of God and God's passing on it. Turn with me to 2 Corinthians 4, please where we'll read verses 16 through 18 from the New Living Translation.

2 Corinthians 4:16. *That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. (NLT)*

Brethren, in spite of what you may be enduring, hardships in your life physically, emotionally, spiritually, you have not given up. You are here. You're here right now. You're here today in faith, in obedience, in the power of the spirit—again key—keeping God's feast. And in this light, thank you. Thank you for doing so.

17) For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! (NLT)

Again, this now—temporary. But it's an investment. It has value. It's an investment in the future.

18) So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever. (NLT)

This dovetails very neatly into keeping the feast itself. We're here for seven days and what are we doing? We're fixing our gaze on things that cannot be seen. We're foreshadowing a time in which our suffering, our troubles will be no more. We've talked a bit about this millennial perspective. In the traditional sense, this is millennial for us. We will no longer experience pain or suffering because we will have our inheritance at this point. But for now in this time—bittersweet. Right? Sweet for the moments we're here together sharing during this time and bitter knowing that we're going to be re-entering the dark of this world and have yet another year of this darkness to endure before we have, God willing, this chance to come together once again.

Now going back to the thought we discussed in the context of Isaiah 30, for those alive in the Millennium who will be helping, teaching, and encouraging, for them there will be effort. There will be some work involved and we will be encouraging, again, human beings to make those choices ("This is the way, walk in it.") to play a part to do what needs to be done to work and to contribute.

And that's not a concept that, frankly, human beings buy into very easily. We're all very well aware of the "welfare" mentality that plagues our nation and it puts tremendous strain on resources that are there to help folks who fall on hard times. God Himself in

His law has provisions to take care of those who are under duress, but it's not designed to carry the load of a population looking to take advantage to the system. Under the authority of Jesus Christ, there are not going to be any free rides. We've already referred to it here at the feast, but Micah 4:4 tells us that everyone will live in peace and prosperity—again, there will be that aspect—enjoying their own grapevines and fig trees.

That word “enjoying” in the Hebrew is used throughout the Old Testament. It's translated as “dwelt.” So, it's used extensively to reference people or nations dwelt here, dwelt there, dwelt in this part of the land, that part of the land, etc. But “to dwell” means more than just to sit back and relax. Right? It means to work. You dwell in your house. What do you do? You work on it. You sustain it. You build it. You maintain it. We'll get more into this here shortly.

So, how does what we are doing today, in our understanding of this temporary condition that we exist in, help us with our future roles? The Millennium itself is not the end-state of God's plan. It's pivotal. It's vital, but the end is not yet. We will have opportunity to share what will be during the context of that millennial timeframe, if you want of think of it this way, the gospel. The good news of what? The coming of the Father, the day in which Jesus will turn all things over to Him. And that, again in context, their present troubles, the work involved in being a human being will come to an end. Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 15 please where we'll read verses 21 through 24 from the New King James Version. And as we read through this, perhaps picture in your mind saying some of these words to a human being alive during the time of the Millennium, again words of encouragement.

1 Corinthians 15:21. *For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead.*

22) For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all [A-L-L, all] shall be made alive. (NKJV)

Again, think of sharing this in the context of the time of the Millennium and say, “Yes, these are temporary troubles that you're going through. You're going through this learning process. You, too, will be made alive.”

23) But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. (NKJV)

Which will, God willing, be you and I. Christ started this process. I can witness; I can attest to it. I'm here before you doing so.

24) Then comes the end, when He [Christ] delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. (NKJV)

Through our working today, through our learning, our prevailing through the power of, again, God's spirit working within us and with what we have been given in terms of the

understanding of God's plan and how observing these holy days models that plan, we will be able to encourage those alive in the time of the Millennium that, yes, this is temporary too. An end is coming for you too—one that will surpass your temporary struggles of being alive in the flesh and the growing pains in doing so.

3. The third principle we can explore here is one we've alluded to already which is that keeping the feast means more than just showing up, but requires active participation.

Let's go back to Leviticus 23 and this time we'll read just verses 40 and 41. We're going to put this in the frame of active participation at the feast.

Leviticus 23:40. And you shall take for yourselves 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 Lord your God for seven days.

41) You shall keep it as a feast to the Lord for seven days in the year.... (NKJV)

Now this isn't something we do today—the actual literal building of succoths. It's the principle that I want to look at here. It wasn't just a "show up and it's all there for you" event. Rather the feast required and still requires not just preparation ahead of time but participation during. Those of us in Kellogg, those behind the camera, listening on the phone, you've actually taken this principle to heart, believe it or not. Because, by being here right now, you have made the choice to participate. Consider how many have made over the past couple, three decades perhaps, the conscious decision to no longer participate.

Growing up back in the day, my family's assigned feast site was Tucson, Arizona. Many of you have probably been there in the past—thousands, thousands of people in attendance. Look around today, a few hundred is considered significant. Now again, tempering this with "many are called, few are chosen," tempering this with it's only under inspiration, it's only what we've been granted (God's spirit within us), you still made a choice though. Thousands over time have been offered the same choice and have decided not to do this today. So for your efforts, your contribution, your participation, thank you. Thank you for this.

And, yes, participation is not limited to the more visible actions that are done. While they serve a purpose.... And I'll take a bit of liberty here as a speaker as I'm about to throw myself under the bus, but I personally like to think of participation and contribution in this way. Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 12 please, where we'll read verses 20 through 22 from the New Living Translation. We all know these passages. There are no surprises here, but let's just explore them in this context.

1 Corinthians 12:20. Yes, there are many parts, but only one body.

21) The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you."

22) In fact, some parts of the body ... (NLT)

Notice this.

22b) ... that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary.
(NLT)

Brethren, we are one body and we all need one another. Being involved and participating makes this unity, makes this oneness possible.

Now verse 22 kind of drives home my thought here. Those parts that seem weakest, notice the word “seem.” In the New King James, this phrase is translated *which we think to be*. And I ask the question: Is it actually about being weak or least important or more about our perspective and bias? That’s something to think about.

But those are the most necessary. Again, I’m taking some liberty here, but me being up here right now preaching a sermon? Frankly, not the most important part of the feast. I hope I can share something valuable. I hope this is helpful. I hope it’s encouraging. I hope it’s edifying, but it’s each and every one of you that make this collectively possible, that make up the body of Christ today. It’s the kind word. It’s the smile, the helpful hand or perhaps it’s what you aren’t able to do that provides opportunity for other members of the body to step up, to serve, to learn to grow through that experience. And where does it start? It starts by showing up. It starts by being here. So, again thank you for your participation, your contribution. You are vital to the body of Christ.

Now the Bible makes it very clear, both directly and in principle, that participation, doing our part, is not an optional exercise. 2 Thessalonians 3:10 tells us:

2 Thessalonians 3:10b. ... *If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.* (NKJV)

It’s pretty straightforward. We’ve already referenced Zechariah 14 verses 16 through 19, which we won’t turn to. Again, we know it. If nations don’t come up for the feast, they will get no rain. This underscores the notion we’ve been discussing about the Millennium. It’s not going to be completely free of some pressure, some discomforts. God in His wisdom, I’m sure, recorded this as a testimony, again, of what will probably transpire at some point. Hopefully, one done. Right? Try it once, didn’t like it. Again, there will be learning opportunities for those alive and under our guidance and under Christ’s direct rulership. More direct to the point, keeping the feast is not nor will it be in the future optional.

The final principle we can take away from keeping the feast that I’d like to share is one that I know for me is easily lost or misapplied.

4. We are to rejoice.

As I know it’s has been mentioned here in Kellogg in past years, it’s worth calling out again and considering. We have a truly god-inspired celebration going on here. We

have such a diverse mix of age, race, backgrounds, and I think this is the most important one, even perspectives—interpretations of what scripture says—or our experiences.

We have a lot of differences, but we're here and, at least at this point, we haven't resorted to throwing rocks at each other. It's the idea that we don't necessarily see eye-to-eye, but we can walk hand-in-hand (Can't we?) as we enjoy and spend this time with one another in fellowship and in worship. This is very, very powerful to the community at large that we're spending this feast in. I know comments have been made in the past by the staff of this facility that we're a very harmonious group and what they see amazes them and how unique that is amongst the groups—you can imagine ski bums and so forth coming through here—how harmonious we are compared to other folks that come and go. (And I can say that about ski bums because I'm one of them.)

Brethren, you can broadcast a thousand sermons. You can distribute a mountain of literature. You can attempt to cajole and pressure through words or you can be a light. Matthew chapter 5, please, where we'll read verses 14 through 16 from the New King James Version. I know for some of the children that are here this was the theme of a summer camp in the Pacific Northwest this past year. Matthew 5 beginning in verse 14, what does Christ tell us?

Matthew 5:14. "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill [notice] cannot be hidden. (NKJV)

If we are allowing the spirit to work in us—not that we're doing this out of contrivance or forced compliance, but rather simply allowing God to work in and through us—like that city on a hill, brethren, you can't be hidden. You will stand out. You will be noticed. It is going to happen!

15) Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. (NKJV)

Now, verse 15 is a really interesting one to me. If God's spirit is the light inside of us, He's not going to allow us to be put under a basket. He's not going to give us light and not use it to give light to all, to one another, to the community at large in which we're celebrating the feast. What is He going to do? What does it say? He's going to put us on a lampstand where He's going to set us out there for everyone to see and everyone to benefit from. And that's really the crux of this.

16) Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (NKJV)

Not hear your words, your rhetoric, and see something completely different. Right? The hypocrisy of modern Christianity. Letting our light shine means men—not just brothers and sisters, but men—in general will see good works, all of which point back to God the Father.

Here in Kellogg, my hope—in Elkhart, wherever you are gathered, wherever you have this opportunity to rejoice—is the light is shining. And praise be to God the Father, praise be to Jesus Christ for providing that light; and thanks to each of you for being willing vessels of that light and rejoicing in what we've been provided for.

How does this apply to the Millennium?

We live in a world today that's struggling in a bit of a paradox. Humanity is profoundly unhappy and dissatisfied. And the more unhappy, the more dissatisfied we become we look to our things, our technology, our pharmacopeia, any other means to find contentment, to find rejoicing, to find joy and happiness, which in turn drives this unhappiness. It drives this dissatisfaction even deeper because we're missing what really matters. We're missing the source. We're missing the reasons to have joy and rejoice in life.

As Christians keeping the command to keep God's feast, we're learning and we'll be able, in turn, to help those living in the Millennium find joy and contentment, maybe some of the simpler things in life. I'll read Ecclesiastes 2 verses 24 through 26 from the New Living Translation, which lists some conclusions that Solomon came to in his grand experiment.

Ecclesiastes 2:24. *So I decided there is nothing better than to enjoy food and drink and to find satisfaction in work. (NLT)*

It's interesting that the Feast of Tabernacles is a harvest festival. God says, "After you have gathered in your increase, this is the time to celebrate." So, finding that satisfaction in that work, and what else was part of the command? Whatever your heart desires, food and drink. So there is an interesting tie in there, the simple things to enjoy. Solomon continues:

24b) ... Then I realized that these pleasures are from the hand of God. (NLT)

Again, acknowledging the source.

25) For who can eat or enjoy anything apart from him?

26) God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy to those who please him.... (NLT)

So imagine saying to a human being alive in the Millennium, "All that stuff, the old age stuff, back in the day, those gizmos, the drugs, the raunchy entertainment—you don't need it! You just don't need it. Hey, enjoy some good food. Enjoy good drink. Find contentment in your contribution." We talked about the vine and the fig tree. Right? What you have done, how you've participated in this new world that exists. And know that it all comes from God. Not from the hand of some multinational corporation looking to make a buck, but it's coming from our Abba, our Father.

Now, I mentioned previously that this is an area that I personally can struggle with. Leading up to the feast this year it seems especially over years in the past I struggled. I struggled coming to the feast this year in finding a place for rejoicing. The pulls of work projects—I just got body slammed at the office. Right up to the very end, I had several setbacks. A lot of things just ate up my literal and mental time coming into the feast this year. Projects around the house—admittedly, I bit off more than I could chew. These took a lot longer than I expected. And for those that live on the wet side of the Cascade Mountains, it's a race against time. Once the feast comes and goes we move into our soggy season, and so getting stuff done outside has to get done. And, then, there is the preparation for the feast itself. The week or two before the feast, I was spent, done, drained, devoid of joy.

And I look out at all of you. Look at your enthusiasm! I look at your zeal, your demonstrated desire to obey and be here. And, for me personally, that means a lot! Being here together, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves—that thing that really got me all riled up in the first place—choosing through inspiration to participate helps bring joy to those who may find the strength to rejoice under the weight of the world, if you will. It's kind of hard to come by. So, for me, that's just me personally, thank you for being here and rejoicing.

Now I also mentioned previously this idea of misapplication when it comes to rejoicing at the feast. What I mean by that can be articulated in something that happened a number of years ago. There was a Facebook post that was put out there from an individual keeping the feast. And it was a picture of their expansive liquor cabinet fully stockpiled. To which another individual on Facebook who is not in the church made the comment to some effect of "Wow! How do I sign up for that?" That may seem funny on the surface, but, brethren, is that an accurate reflection of Jesus Christ? If He was here keeping the feast, is that something He would do?

I mentioned this thought in a study that I shared with the group out in Worden, Illinois before the feast. I'll just reiterate what I said then. We have a chance to live life—speaking in the context of the feast—live life like we will live as spirit-beings. This is something worth giving some serious thought to leading up to the feast. Do we treat it as a foreshadowing of God's kingdom on earth? Or a frat party? Are we diligent to make the effort to live clean? Or just let ourselves get carried away with food, drink, and social activities? I'm not saying we should not eat, drink, and rejoice, but more questioning our mindfulness of the chance we have to taste the reward now, which we stand to inherit, to help carry us through the hard times. Unlike any time in our past history, brethren, in the context especially of these smaller venues, we have the chance to truly spiritually rejoice and be positive influences to one another in this regard. In a crowd this small, you can't hide. You can't get lost—really! We have been, and hopefully, will continue to take advantage of the opportunities we have here to edify, to build up in fellowship and build up in rejoicing.

Alright, let's wrap it up here. Hebrews 3 please, we'll read verses 12 and 13 from the New King James Version. We are in principle kind of coming back full circle.

Hebrews 3:12. *Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; 13) but [notice] exhort one another daily, ... (NKJV)*

Take advantage of that opportunity.

13b) ... while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. (NKJV)

That word “exhort” in verse 13 is the same Greek word we found in Hebrews 12:25. Again, it means *instruct, teach, admonish*; yes, absolutely, but also *console, encourage, strengthen through consolation, comfort*.

Brethren, we all face so much over the course of a given year. And as time progresses, the risk of evil creeping in, of being hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, as we’ve read, that risk grows dramatically. We need; we desperately need to be encouraged and need to encourage one another as absolutely often as we possibly can.

And the Feast of Tabernacles, this commanded assembly of God’s people, it’s a perfect opportunity to do so! And in that vein, I commend each of you, again, only by and through God’s strength, by His inspiration, by His grace, but commend nonetheless for taking the steps to be here and the sacrifices involved in doing so—sacrifices we’ve all had to make in our own ways. And doing so knowing it’s a short term event with a lot of investments for a short term event and that this pictures just one step in God’s plan, but regardless choosing to be present, choosing to be involved, choosing to participate and with your brothers and sisters in Christ rejoicing and celebrating as members together of the family of God. And through it all, not just having fun and not just having a good time, but we’re gleaning practical tactical lessons in faith, hope, trust, vision, the power of community. All these things that we’ll be able to, in turn, take and carry those forward into our roles in the Millennium as kings and priests.

So, brethren, thank you for not forsaking one another. Brethren, thank you for your encouragement.