

Calendars and Christ

Exodus 23:14-19

Introduction

Monuments and Holidays: Love **monuments** (e.g., walking DC). Why it matters what we memorialize. What we memorialize we value (literally lift up). 9/11 #neverforget (we're prone to forget). What we memorialize matters (hence Civil War monuments). **We use monuments and memorials to tether our lives to the past provision of God** (in Bible). We not only use monuments, we use **holidays** (lit. holy days). Holidays help us remember and direct our hearts toward what we value.

- US Federal Holidays (10): **New Year's Day** (1/1), **MLK** (3rd Mon Jan), **Washington's Birthday** (3rd Mon Feb), **Memorial Day** (Last Mon May), **Juneteenth** (6/19), **Independence Day** (7/4), **Labor Day** (1st Mon Sep), **Columbus Day** (2nd Mon Oct), **Veterans' Day** (11/11), **Thanksgiving** (4th Thurs Nov), **Christmas** (12/25).

Lord of My Calendar: These holidays intrude on your calendar (e.g., trash collection, day off, mail, bank, etc.) *forcing* you to contemplate their meaning and inserting themselves into your life.

- God calls his people to annual festivals as well, we see some of these annual observances in this week's passage. ¹⁴ "Three times in the year you shall keep a feast to me..." ¹⁷ Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the Lord GOD.
 - He is building a nation, teaching them his character, and leading them from slavery through the wilderness to the promised land.

How does God disciple our hearts? Head (thinking), hands (doing), hearts (loving). It's impossible to love what you don't know, but knowing isn't the end. God calls us to "love" him.¹ We are ultimately and usually led less by what we know and more by what we love (we are desire-ers more than think-ers).² **God uses rhythm, liturgy, calendars, and schedules not only guide us on his path but to shape us in his ways.**

- "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt 6:21).
- (1) What we invest in (time and money) **reveal** what you value.
 - Checkbook and calendar. It is quite easy to tell what someone values by how they spend their money and their time (e.g., amazingly odd to skip gathered worship on Christmas for something else, even something good; you're just telling on yourself; I value human family more than faith family)
- (2) What we invest in (time and money) **elevates** (or creates) value.
 - When you spend a lot of time on something and you start to *care* about it more and more (e.g., slow DIY; fireplace).
 - If you **know (head)** that Jesus is important, and you want to **love (heart)** him more, then you need to show up in your actions, **do (hands)**, daily, weekly, annually, etc.

¹ Matt 22:37 (Great Commandment)

² James K. A. Smith

Concentric Circles: We have so reduced discipleship to personal, internal, positive feelings toward Jesus that someone can say they are a “Christian” or “love Jesus” and it doesn’t have any bearing on their day-to-day life, daily schedule, or finances. We need to flip the script (e.g., job, home, church). Are you a slave to your money or is your money a resource for the KoG? Are you a slave to your calendar or is your calendar a tool for the KoG?

- God calls them to **move their bodies** not just their **hearts** (e.g., holy convocation; feast = pilgrimage, etymologically related to hajj). They brought **sacrifices** not just *positive vibes (e.g., “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” [Rom 12:1]). *Why gathering with the church matters

A Note on Rest and Holidays: God is the rightful ruler of your day, your week, your year, and your life. He calls us to weekly rest (Sabbath) and annual remembrance (festivals).

- But this is always “rest with a purpose.” Today’s passage will teach that these annual festivals are “to the Lord” for the purpose of remembrance and worship. **Rest without worship is just a nap. Holidays without worship are just vacation.** This isn’t to say anything against naps or vacation (both are good).
- God doesn’t just want you to take a break, he wants you to dedicate a portion of your time for worship.
 - Worship is rest.

God gave his people annual feasts to disciple their hearts as his worshippers. As God’s new covenant people we need to structure our calendars in a way that disciples our hearts in the path of Jesus.

¹⁴ “Three times in the year you shall keep a feast to me. ¹⁵ You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. As I commanded you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. None shall appear before me empty-handed. ¹⁶ You shall keep the Feast of Harvest, of the firstfruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field. You shall keep the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor. ¹⁷ Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the Lord GOD. ¹⁸ “You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with anything leavened, or let the fat of my feast remain until the morning. ¹⁹ “The best of the firstfruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God. “You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.

1. The Content of the Feasts

#1 – Unleavened Bread (Passover): ¹⁵ You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. As I commanded you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. None shall appear before me empty-handed.

- This is basically discussing the Passover (Passover being the one-day event and the Feast of Unleavened bread occurring the following 7 days). *Go back and check out mine and pastor James’ sermons on chs. 11-13.

- Here the emphasis is on the “unleavened bread” (e.g., not enough time to let the bread rise; make haste).

The Passover event is so significant that it becomes the basis of their calendar. It is now, for them the new year (the Jewish “New Year,” Rosh Hashanah actually occurs on the first day of the seventh month; that’s a web of historical intrigue).

- They are being remade into a nation and the foundation of their identity is this deliverance event.
 - The **first event of their new calendar** is this Passover meal. Here the term Abib refers to a season (“ears of barley”). Occurs in the spring (when the ears are still on the barley).
 - **Every year** when you harvest your “bread” you’ll remember when you left so quickly you didn’t even have time for your bread to rise (crackers instead of loaves).
- The pattern of their life is created anew based on the salvation of God.

(a) None Excluded: None shall appear before me empty-handed.

- This applies to everyone. **Everyone is called to worship.**
 - All these festivals occur when planting or harvesting is done, when no one has an excuse to skip. *The excuses we give to skip worship are bizarre (if you wouldn’t miss work you shouldn’t miss church; does your social media or television consumption prove that you had time for God all along?).

(b) None Polluted: ^{18a} “You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with anything leavened,

- Sin and sacrifice need to be separate (leaven = sin; sacrifice = atonement). **Everyone is called to pure worship.**

(c) None Withheld: ^{18a} or let the fat of my feast remain until the morning.

- You can’t hold back some of the sacrifice for other use (e.g., cooking, eating, etc.). **Everyone is called to complete sacrifice.**

#2 – Harvest (Pentecost): ¹⁶ You shall keep the Feast of Harvest, of the firstfruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field.

- aka “Feast of Weeks”, Feast of Pentecost³, *Shavuot* because it occurs **7 weeks** or **50** days after the feast of unleavened bread (late spring, early summer).
- This is the first harvest (grain harvest). Later in the Torah, we learn that it is a celebration involving loaves of bread (contra unleavened Passover), animal sacrifices, and freewill offerings (sin offerings, peace offerings)

First and Best: ^{19a} “The best of the firstfruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God.

- Because God is the one who has provided everything we give him our first and best as a reminder that it all belongs to him.

³ Exod 34:22, Lev 23:16

- John answered, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven (aka “from God”), (Jn 3:27).
- Everything comes from God “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen” (Rom. 11:36).
- We take all that we’ve been given from God, and we walk around with pride. How can we think, “If God gave it to me, it’s mine.” #entitled
- Leviticus adds a reminder to leave the edges of the field for the poor. Gifts are meant to be shared. God’s generous provision for his people compels them to generously provide for others.
 - “For indeed, grace is the key to it all. It is not our lavish good deeds that procure salvation, but God’s lavish love and mercy. That is why the poor are as acceptable before God as the rich. It is the generosity of God, the freeness of his salvation, that should permeate our lives” (Keller).
 - If everything we have is from God, then we are called to use whatever influence, power, or status we have to generously serve others. In fact, a lack of generosity (not just money but time, reputation, etc.) is a sign that you refuse to acknowledge that everything you have is a gracious gift of God.

#3 – Ingathering (Booths): You shall keep the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor.

- AKA Feast of Ingathering, Tabernacles, Booths, *Sukkot* (ever notice the tents in our more heavily populated Jewish areas in the fall?).
- It marks the end of the [agricultural] year (second grain crops, tree and vine crops, olives, grapes, etc.). September or October.⁴
- The final harvest is received.
 - Later descriptions explain how participants will construct **temporary tabernacles**, tiny field huts, from branches to symbolize God’s provision for his people in the wilderness.⁵ Forty years you sustained them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell (Neh 9:21).
- Even in the wilderness he met them, dwelt with them, and sustained them and he promised to bring them to the promised land.

Ingathering: It’s a feast characterized by joy and gratitude because of God’s provision. It’s the moment when all the waiting, anticipation, and uncertainty is turned to relief (e.g., plant, water, and wait; growing grass or vegetables; much out of your control; almost feels like magic).

Enigma: ^{19b} “You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.”⁶ *One commentary basically said the meaning has been too obscured so I’m not going to try (Enns). Yet this seeming proverbial statement occurs 3 times in the Pentateuch.

⁴ Five days after *Yom Kippur*

⁵ Lev 23, Deut 16

⁶<https://www.haaretz.com/archaeology/2018-08-16/ty-article-magazine/.premium/can-jews-eat-cheeseburgers-after-al/0000017f-f8d9-d318-aff-fbfb1a640000?v=1699729356310>

- 3 times in the Pentateuch.
 - Is it related to Pagan practices? Maybe but no historical evidence.
 - Is it mistranslated? A nursing kid (at its mother's milk).
 - Through many iterations and later in the development of Rabbinic Judaism it eventually came to be the basis for many modern kosher rules not mixing *any* dairy or *any* meat (e.g., why certain Jews can't eat a cheeseburger).
- I think the Rabbinic development is not consistent with the original meaning of the Hebrew (nursing kid) or the context of the Torah. **I certainly wouldn't take one of the most obscure passages of Scripture and build an ironclad set of dietary rules around it.**
 - If you pressed me on the meaning, I would think it probably has something to do with the incongruity of killing an animal dependant on it's mother's milk in that milk (against using the instrument of life for the purpose of death). The Feast of Ingathering is a time of joy, life, and celebration of God's provision. #honorlife

2. The Fulfillment of the Feasts

In Christ: We learn that all of the laws, commands, patterns, and feasts of the Old Covenant find their fulfillment in Christ. He does not come to abolish the law but to complete it.

- The point of these feasts is not how I can keep them to demonstrate my personal righteousness but to see how I am dependent on Christ to provide for my every need.

#1 – Unleavened Bread (Passover) – Death: It is no accident that the Last Supper, which becomes the model for our weekly Lord's Supper occurred at a Passover meal.

- We all know that the Passover Lamb ("fluffy and muffy" as Keller calls them) cannot truly protect us from the just judgment of God. We need a perfect permanent sacrifice.

So we get to the story of Jesus and the Last Supper in Luke 22. They are celebrating the Passover (Lk 22:7). They have the unleavened bread (symbolizing his broken body) and the crushed fruit of the vine (symbolizing his spilled blood). But where's the lamb? There is no lamb mentioned. **Because Jesus is the perfect spotless lamb of God.**

- The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn 1:29).
- Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed (1 Cor 5:7).

Jesus is the perfect, permanent sacrificial lamb whose blood pays our debt and covers us from the judgment we all deserve.

- For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:21).

Jesus, our Passover lamb, **gives us life and changes how we live.**

- How would you live if you knew the only reason you were alive is that Jesus, the perfect spotless lamb, took your place?
 - You would live an unleavened life: ^{6b} Do you not know that a little leaven (sin) leavens the whole lump? ⁷ Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been

sacrificed. ⁸ Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (1 Cor 5:6-8).

#2 – Harvest (Pentecost) – Resurrection: The firstfruits are that in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep (1 Cor 15:20). And on the first Pentecost we see God bringing many to salvation, the first harvest of believers to receive his Spirit.

- And all of this anticipates a great and final harvest

#3 – Ingathering (Booths): A final ingathering is still awaited. God dwelled with his people in tabernacles and temples made of human hands, but in the last days he took on flesh and “tabernacled” with us. We await his second coming when he will live with us perfectly and permanently, there will be no more separation.

- In John, Jesus actually tells everyone on the last day of this feast that he is the fulfillment of this celebration (Jn 7:27-38).
- ⁷ Thus says the LORD of hosts: Behold, I will save my people from the east country and from the west country, ⁸ and I will bring them to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness” (Zech 8:7-8).
- ³⁰ Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ³¹ And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other (Matthew 24:30-31).

Three Festivals, Three Phases: In many ways, I think we see the story of Christ reflected in the story of these festivals. His past sacrifice (passover), his present provision (pentecost), and his future harvest (booths).

3. The Lessons of the Feasts

Total Provision Demands Total Worship:

- No one is excluded, nothing is held back.
- First and best.
- A life of natural generosity because of what Christ has done.
- Natural response of joy and gratitude because of the gifts of God.
- A life of worship has to go beyond a general admiration or a personal appreciation of Christ to a life of sacrificial worship.
 - “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom 12:1).

- Does your worship of God extend to your body? To your money? To your calendar? To your entertainment habits? To your food choices? To your speech? Is it your whole life or simply a type of religious fandom?
- Are you cheating God, holding back, giving him only the leftovers of your time, money, and relational energy?
 - If I have anything left, I give it to you God. What if you treated your spouse like that?
- True worship is a holistic commitment, a surrender of your entire life, transforming it into a living expression of devotion, radiating through every dimension of your being.

Total Worship Demands Deliberate Remembrance: To cultivate a life of complete devotion, it requires us to deliberately commemorate and celebrate the character and salvation of God.

- We've talked about daily (prayer, scripture, worship, evangelism, discipleship) and weekly (worship gathering, small group, etc.) patterns (invitations, not obligations).
- But also consider seasons!
 - Church rhythms (fasting, mission, community, etc.)
- And holidays (Easter, Pentecost, Advent).
- We need to reorient our lives around the salvation of God (rhythms of work, rest, and worship).
 - What is your life oriented around?
 - Is your life tethered to the secular calendar (school, summer, etc.) or Christ? Are you being disciplined by your circumstantial nation or your chosen faith?
- We need to cultivate intentional practices to counteracting the competing narratives of our culture.
 - We have the same need as the Israelites, rhythms of work, worship, and rest, not to guide us to salvation but to tether us to our Savior.
- But the same need still exists
 - Not to guide us to salvation but to tether us to our salvation (walk in love)

Practical Application: Various Christians have developed seasons and practices to do just that. One of them is Advent which commemorates and anticipates the "arrival" of Jesus, at his birth and his second coming. It occurs the four weeks leading up to Christmas day.

- "Christmas is the only Christian holy day that is also a major secular holiday—arguably our culture's biggest. The result is two different celebrations, each observed by millions of people at the very same time. This brings some discomfort on both sides. Many Christians can't help but notice that more and more of the public festivities surrounding Christmas studiously avoid any references to its Christian origins... The holiday is promoted as [simply] a time for family and gifts... On the other hand, non-religious people can't help but find that the older meaning of Christmas keeps intruding uninvited" in the music and stories of the holiday (Keller). It's amazing how ubiquitous Jesus is at Christmas yet how most of us miss him. Despite swimming in gospel reminders, many are drowning in their own sin. Despite Christ being in the name of the holiday, the prevalence of nativities, or Linus' reminder of the real meaning of the season in Charlie Brown's Christmas special, we still seem to confuse the point. We've done a pretty good

job of burying Jesus so deep in the festivities that he's hardly noticeable at all. Amid the trimmings, traditions, decorations, and stories, **how did we end up in the spot of celebrating Christmas but missing Christ?**

- Well, for one, we've done what we do best — sin. And we've sinned in the way that we sin best — **we make everything all about us**. We take the good thing (the gift of Jesus) and we turn it around to us (“give me all the gifts”). “Sin pulls us away from God's kingdom and produces in us an obsessive allegiance to our little kingdom of one... Perhaps in ways we're not conscious of, we have shrunk life down to the size of our own glory” (Paul Tripp).
- Christmas, for many, is simply a break from work where they can indulge their materialistic impulses to buy the gadgets and gear they want but don't need. The season of giving too often serves as an excuse to justify our selfishness rather than exalt our savior.
- **How could you use Advent as a season and Christmas as a day of celebration to focus explicitly and intentionally on Christ?**
- **What patterns of gathering for worship should you prioritize to disciple your heart in longing for Christ?**