

August 25th – Celebrate Good Health – Feast of Tabernacles – Principle of Provision

Introduction – Are you familiar with the term “survival of the fittest?” It is a maxim of the theory of evolution which postulates that only the strongest, smartest, or savviest will perpetuate their species. Innate in our very being is the desire to perpetuate our own lives and those of our families. From the beginning of humankind every effort both moral and immoral has been made to survive the challenges of our environment and our enemies. In the days of old, tribes and people groups developed the habit of calling on a supreme being or god to protect and provide for them. This instinct flowed from the basics of God’s contract with His creation that if we would worship Him and acknowledge Him as the giver of all things, He would provide and protect us. This principle was isolated in the chosen people of Israel and is now being perfected through Christianity.

But something has changed in the last few generations. The rejection of God, and the little gods we invent as substitutes for Him, have led to the axiom of “Survival of the Unfittest”. This is a concern that science and technology is prolonging and propagating those in nature who otherwise would be culled by the stronger herds simply because they use socialistic techniques to take from those who have to pretend to give to those who have not, all the while perpetuating themselves. This guarantees their survival and the need to perpetuate the poor masses, so they have the excuse to redistribute what others have accumulated.

Oh, how far we have drifted from the reality of God’s provision as perpetuated in the third Major Feast of the Israelites; the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles. This yearly feast which lasted 7 days in September/October was designed to remind God’s chosen that He was the provider of all things. Moses described it this way: *"So beginning with the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the festival to the LORD for seven days; the first day is a day of sabbath rest, and the eighth day also is a day of sabbath rest. On the first day you are to take branches from luxuriant trees—from palms, willows and other leafy trees—and rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. Celebrate this as a festival to the LORD for seven days each year. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come; celebrate it in the seventh month. Live in temporary shelters for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in such shelters so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in temporary shelters when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the LORD your God."* (Lev 23:39-43)

This celebration was one of great joy for the children of Israel. When Jesus participated in this feast personally, he used the occasions to talk about Him being the “Living Water” and Light of the World. He would also say himself; *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. (Joh 15:5-6)* Perpetuation is defined as “the continuation or preservation of a situation, idea, etc.” We are fit to survive when we perpetuate this idea of the feast in which God is the provider of all things who commands we be good stewards of them.

That is why I believe the reality found in Christ which was shadowed by the Feast of the Tabernacles is our weekly celebration of the giving of tithes and offerings. How does God intend to preserve, prepare, and perpetuate His people? He preserves us through the guiding principles of stewardship. He prepares us to endure the ever-changing geo-political landscape through sacrifice. He perpetuates the power of provision that would guide us through corruption, conquest, and captivity through submission. It all starts with the understanding that what we have all belongs to God and He has tasked us to be good managers of that.

The Feast of Booths, which in Jesus' day was celebrated on the courts just off of the Temple steps was meant to put people in humble structures for a week which had unblocked sight of the night sky surrounded by luxurious fruits and leafy vegetation as a visceral sign of God's incredible provision in this world and in the world to come. Christ extrapolated this theme in His claims of Light and Water and Vine as a shadow of fulfilled promise in Heaven.

It wasn't until 1955 when "In God We Trust" was printed on all U.S. paper currency. The tradition goes back to the 1860's when newly minted coins carried that imprint. It has long been the belief in our country that God is our great provider and protector. President Thomas Jefferson wrote, "The God who gave us life gave us liberty at the same time" and asked 'Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are of God?'" Jefferson was no bible purist or fundamentalist, but even he recognized the role God plays in the perpetuation of this great nation.

Paul described this perpetuation as God indescribable gift:

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: "They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever." Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift! (2nd Corinthians 9:6-15)

Paul had been instructing his friends in their generosity by recognizing how they had given to help others because God had generously blessed them. The only motivation one would have to be generous is to believe that God will provide what we need on all occasions. The principle of stewardship is cheerful giving because we believe God will bless us abundantly so that we have everything we need while we abound in every good work. When we trust this

truth, God will “enlarge the harvest” of the right in which we participate. We will be “enriched” to be generous so God gets the credit, and there will be an effervescent expression of thanks to God. Who is at the heart of all this enlargement, enrichment, and effervescence? It is God that we trust so that we not only survive but we thrive as He perpetuates us.

Now anytime a preacher/pastor starts talking about giving, most people grab their purses and wallets and grip them tight. But let me assure you, I will never ask you to give stewardly, sacrificially, and submissively unless I lead the way. I believe in the provision of God, and He perpetuates His blessings in my life every day. I consider myself to be rich beyond anything I could ever need, and it is a privilege for me to bring my tithes and offerings into the storehouse of God. I know God is blessing my life beyond measure. I know He has enlarged the harvest of righteousness in my life, and enriched me in every way, and I am effervescent in my thanksgiving to God! You will never take about that indescribable gift from me.

But what might be robbing you of this indescribable gift? When we gather on the first day of the week to bring our offerings to God, we are following a 2000-year-old tradition which has proven to be effective in every nation and in every situation. The fact that America has put its trust in God fundamentally has allowed us as a people to give billions of dollars to other countries to help them. It has allowed the church to give billions of dollars in mission and ministry dollars to help those in need. This is all part of God’s indescribable gift, but sadly many in today’s culture, even Christian are missing out on this celebration, just as many Jews have given up on the Feast of the Tabernacle.

So what can I say to you today to encourage you to perpetuate the reality of the Feast of Booths through your celebration of the tithe and offering? I could use Malachi for the hard sell; "Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?' "In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. (Mal 3:8-10) Or I could use the soft sell; But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving. I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. (2nd Corinthians 8:7-9) Whatever method works for you, go with that to motivate you to participate in the provision of God. Otherwise you will get caught in the trap of survival of the unfittest which doesn’t actually work or perpetuate God’s will in your life.

Rab and Mae Fraley were perfect examples to us all of celebrating the tithe and offering. They didn’t have much but were always the first to give, give more than they could afford, and they first gave of themselves...May we all follow their incredible example of celebration.