

Sharing Our Lives at the Feast

by Mark Schindler

Forerunner, September 15, 2021



One of the great blessings that God gives us every year is the command to keep His holy days. As with all of His laws, they do much more for us than they do for Him. As a loving Father, He provides for our every need, and the holy days are a need that we do not fully realize that we have.

The holy days give us a chance to spend extra time together. With other members of God's church, we sing hymns, pray, and hear His Word expounded in a setting suitable for drawing us closer to each other and to God. Just as importantly, it gives us time to spend fellowshiping and encouraging each other while sharing "war stories."

One of the best times for this, of course, is the Feast of Tabernacles. We have a whole week to spend together in one place. Each year my family seems to meet certain people that make the Feast even more special than it already is, and from them, we receive some particular point of encouragement or inspiration. Two such instances demonstrate for us the liberty from fear that can be produced by absolute love and trust in our great Creator God.

Heart Problems

At a recent Feast of Tabernacles, we were fortunate to spend time with a couple that we had met at previous Feasts. This time, we had the opportunity to get to know them. We talked quite a bit about our families, friends, hometowns, common goals, what we had been studying and learning, successes and failures, and all the things God's people share when they get together at His feasts.

One day, we started talking about how wonderful it is that God has given us this opportunity to be part of His great plan. We agreed that, even though it is tremendous, sometimes it just seems so hard to step out in love and faith and put absolute trust in Him. We began sharing stories of how God had intervened in our lives, and they told us the story of their child who, as a baby, came down with a life-threatening, congenital heart problem.

They stayed up for nights on end. Constantly imploring God to intervene and heal their child, they spent weeks watching the baby struggle to live. The wife was beside herself. She believed that God would heal, but He had not done so, and their baby was slipping away.

Finally, she asked her husband what he thought they might be doing wrong. Why was God not intervening? After all, they trusted His Word. They knew His Word says, "I am the LORD who heals you" (Exodus 15:26). She believed this with all her heart. Her husband simply told her, "You've got to let the child go!"

It was as simple and as hard as that! Healing could not take place until she truly believed that God is a loving God and that fear could have no part in her worship of Him! She had to believe—absolutely—that "all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). She had to trust, even if their child died, just as Abraham had faith with Isaac, "that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead" (Hebrews 11:19).

What an inspiring testimonial of fearless faith in our loving God and all that He is! Once the parents' minds were set, once they extinguished their fear and believed the Almighty Creator God and loved Him enough to trust Him, God healed the child, who lives to this day! Though it may have ended another way, they were

convicted. They would accept God on His terms because they put aside fear and loved Him!

To hear God glorified like this should give us an encouraging boost! This should make us eager to continue on to the life of liberty set before us.

Barrels of Air

Several years ago at the Feast of Tabernacles in St. Petersburg, Florida, we heard another uplifting story of Christian courage. Each year that we attended the Feast there, one of the highlights was special music. For some reason, that site had one of the finest choirs and amazing soloists. Perhaps the best soloist—and certainly the most inspiring—was a man named Barry Yoder.

When he performed his baritone solo for special music, it was comparable to the world's finest opera performances. His booming voice could probably fill the 10,000-seat arena without a microphone! He seemed to have barrels of air for lungs.

But, there was a catch. When Barry came on stage, ushers carried him up the stairs in his wheelchair. When he fellowshipped among the congregation, he sat in a chair that unfolded into a bed if necessary. An oxygen tank was strapped to it, and tubes ran from the tank into his nostrils because he was always short of breath!

My family had the privilege of sharing a meal with Barry and his wife, two wonderful people. I vividly remember Barry—who could not finish even a sentence without becoming short of breath—explaining to my children how he could not make it through a stanza in the hymnal without gasping for air. But when it came time for him to glorify "the Boss" (as Barry liked to call our Father), he put aside his fear of failure and embarrassment. He went right up on stage to use the powerful voice God had given him. His only desire was to return to God the glory that was rightfully His.

Barry would never take any credit for his performance. He just said, "It's not me who does the singing up there. It's the Boss that does it. Every day I have is a day given to me to do a job that the Boss has given me. Do you know that I died twice from heart failure last June? The doctors gave me up for dead, but God brought me back. I'm not sure why, but I know there's something that He still has for me to do."

I knew that one of the reasons God brought him back was so that he could declare the love of God before our kids that day. They could see a man who did not fear the possibility that he might fall down and make a fool of himself before all those people. He would do this because he absolutely loved and trusted his Father in heaven.

Truth Applied Glorifies God

These two stories illustrate an extremely important aspect of why we should keep God's holy days: the encouragement we can give one another to continue in the Way. In a 1988 sermon John Ritenbaugh said, "Truth, liberty, and freedom go hand in hand, but truth will produce liberty only as it is applied." Barry Yoder and the couple with the ailing baby applied God's Word to their lives. They lived it, and it became part of their very way of thinking! Their love for God and His Word delivered them from fear, and by this love of God working in their lives, they won another measure of freedom from the bondage of Satan's world and his way of thinking. Beyond that, it was produced, to some degree, in those with whom they had shared their experiences.

Slowly but surely, we must all learn the lesson Paul speaks of in I Corinthians 6:19-20:

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

These people have learned this lesson and glorified God by going through their trials while trusting Him and putting fear aside. Afterward, they have encouraged

others with their experiences. What better forum does God give us to do this than at the Feast of Tabernacles?

Togetherness at the Feast

In I Corinthians 12:12, Paul writes about how the church has many members but is one body. We all have different responsibilities, as well as different circumstances and events to shape us in our individual lives. It all comes down to "the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it" (verses 25b-26).

He writes later:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. (II Corinthians 1:3-5)

In verse 14, he concludes, "We are your boast as you also are ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus."

Are we rejoicing together as a body, lifting each other up, and working together? The Feast of Tabernacles gives us the opportunity to do this more than any other time of the year. *But it takes love.*

It also takes dropping the defense mechanisms that human nature sets up to protect the self from getting too close to others. In another 1988 sermon, John Ritenbaugh remarked:

The more two people love one another, the less they fear what the other will do. Maybe we don't really love God the way that we profess that we do. Fear comes from over-concern about the self. Fear is bondage produced by self-centeredness. Fear is the opposite of love, and fear makes a person rooted where he can't do anything at all!

Are we stagnating because we are misusing the time God commands us to come together before Him? At the Feast, we are not only to assemble for services, but we are also *to dwell together* for a week—like a family. Are we really sharing our lives so we can benefit and grow from each other's experiences? Or are we avoiding our brethren because we fear the embarrassment or rejection of really getting to know one another?

"Perfect love casts out fear" (I John 4:18), and if we really love one another as we say we do, then we will use this time to share our trials and triumphs—and grow

together! This indeed is one of our stated goals: "Till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).