

“Party Time Is Holy Time”

August 23, 2020

Old School: Party Time series – LIVESTREAM

Leviticus probably isn't our first choice when it comes to a riveting part of Scripture. We assume it's heavy on rules and regulations or only about what people can't do, and certainly there are many directives for the Israelites. But it's all aimed at a specific purpose. God, who is holy, calls God's people to be holy. God saved them and formed them into a holy nation, and God offers a plan for how they can be holy.

And if you read through Leviticus, you'll find a lot about the role of priests and issues around purity, including moral code relating to how we care for the poor and seek justice. That didn't start with the prophets, but was a part of God's call to the Israelites from the beginning.

But Leviticus also includes a lot about rituals. There were specific ways for the people to offer thanksgiving to God and to express sorrow for their sin – special offerings that they were called to bring to God personally. And there were specifics about feast days – times of celebration – to retell and remember the story of God's salvation in their lives.

The Hebrew word for feast or festival means “divine appointment.” They were called to celebrate because God said so, and there was a rhythm to it that went along with the seasons. For any of us who have farmed or gardened, we get it. This was a time ordered and invited by God – holy time that was literally set apart for them to gather together for worship and celebration.

It was like a really big family reunion where they could remember who they were, where they came from, and maybe even who they could be in God. The same is true for us; celebrations keep us grounded in what's important. For the Israelites, their relationship with God who saved them was paramount.

When they came together, it was time to remember who they were together and who God was – how God had saved them and called them to be holy together. It was time to remember God's faithfulness and care as they depended on God for the harvest. They claimed their history with God and could trust in God to continue to lead them into the future.

Leviticus talks a lot about holiness – being set apart for a purpose. The people are called to be holy. There are holy things (and unholy things). There are holy places like the Temple. And there are holy times – specific times set apart for remembering and rejoicing. And it's a reminder that God rules over time, too. Time is sacred, and time set aside to celebrate is holy, sacred, meaningful, and important. Celebrations keep us

going because they offer important perspective on the whole of our lives. They connect us to God and to each other.

I want to share a picture with you that was taken almost two years ago. **SHOW SLIDE** – Mom and Dad’s 50th anniversary party

My parents celebrated their 50th anniversary. We had an open house in my hometown where they had lived forever, and it was glorious! When my sisters and I talked about it, we weren’t sure if it was something they’d want to do, but they agreed, and so we put it together. It wasn’t extravagant, but a time of refreshments and time together.

You can see my dad’s expression as he talks to a family member, and the whole day was fantastic! It was incredible to see our family, their longtime friends and classmates, our Mason church family, and country neighbors show up to celebrate with us, and it really was holy time. It was time to give thanks and appreciate their life together – and to recognize the support and love from others that was a part of their marriage. When I think back on that day, especially now after my dad passed away this past February, I’m so grateful for that holy time. We still talk about it.

All time is holy time, but celebrations help us to remember that. Life with God isn’t designed to be devoid of happiness and celebration. It’s clear that celebration is God’s call. Party time is holy time! Work is important, and rest is important – and in that call to rest is a call to enjoy life. This isn’t about being repressed and prohibited, but about being free to rest, celebrate, and live in the joy of the Lord, which is our strength.

One commentator writes, “A sabbath or a festival was like a kiss between lovers. It gathered into a special moment what is always true.” Celebrations offer structure to our lives and remind us to remember God’s goodness in all times of our lives. Even for the Israelites, the festivals recounted both good times like the Exodus – being set free from slavery in Egypt - and difficult times like wandering in the wilderness. God’s presence and care was the constant. So beyond keeping us grounded in what’s important and keeping us going, celebrations point us to the Source of our eternal joy – more than happiness, but a deeper sense of joy because of God’s presence and care for us.

I asked the Facebook world why celebrations are important. And here are some highlights that affirm that sense of holy time. Celebrations are times...

to find joy in someone’s life or in our own life and share that joy with others through fellowship, prayers, and acts of kindness...

for community building...

for eating - breaking monotony, recognizing extraordinary times...

for rejoicing in and recognizing those blessings and milestones which are gifts from God in life...

for honoring what's good and positive...

often founded in tradition that cement family and community relationships...

for happiness, joy, renewal, hope...

sometimes quiet, even tinged with deep sadness and experienced alone, but celebration is in the ability to look back at an incredibly devastating event and realizing that you have survived. There is still so much more to work through, but you can celebrate a slight glimmer of hope in the future quietly and alone...

joyous or somber where people share stories, pictures, memories, laughter or tears, rituals, food, music, fun, dancing activities and can involve sharing gifts.

Celebrations are important for bringing people together and sharing memories and blessings of the past and hope for the future...

to remember a birthday or anniversary when the person(s) being celebrated is there physically, but I also celebrate folks who are no longer physically here on days like birthdays by finding some way to do something positive or helpful for someone else as I honor that loved one's memory. It is a tangible way to celebrate the impact that beloved person had on my life...

to notice with joy the achievements of myself or others...

for family time and the joy that provides. It's important because it builds lasting memories...

for getting together with family and friends to honor and acknowledge important times in their lives. They are usually joyful times. I also like to celebrate the lives of loved ones we've lost to death. It reminds us of all the good things they've brought into our lives and keep our memories fresh...

A time to be happy, a time to honor someone or their accomplishments, a way to make someone truly feel special and cared for.

For lifting up a person or situation that makes us pleased, proud, happy...

For getting out of the routine and sharing food or fellowship with other people to make them feel special and enjoying time together...

For appreciation...

For marking an official end to a period of trial. Like the party for Prodigal Son. Or the party for the last chemo treatment. Sometimes it marks the beginning of a new adventure, as a Bon Voyage party or a Wedding Shower or a housewarming. A celebration is the bookmark that we put in our book of life to mark and remember where we've been, what we've done, those we did it with and what was accomplished or overcome.

Certainly, this year has changed the way we think about celebrations – or at least how we celebrate. The purpose is the same, and perhaps it's even more important. I asked for pictures from celebrations during the past few months, and here are a few:

SHOW SLIDES – PPT of celebrations

Baby Ellie – born in June

A 2020 graduation party

A birthday party at the pool

A 2020 graduation social distanced and a send-off for the military

A long-distance birthday celebration

A 61st birthday for Tom

A Zoom wedding complete with confetti

A 16th birthday card shower

A 20th wedding anniversary celebrated in our parking lot

A drive-by for friends

Party time really is holy time. May we embrace the holiness of celebration and allow God to bless us and others through it remembering God's presence and care always.

Thanks be to God! Amen.

PRAYERS of the PEOPLE and THE LORD'S PRAYER