
Christian Holidays: The Last Great Day of the Feast

by: Ronald L. Dart

What in the world is God doing? I suspect that there would be some people who would answer that question and say: "Well not very much. The world looks to me like God wound it up, started it spinning and then walked away from it." If you were to ask: "How is the gospel doing in the world?" The same people might say: "Well not very well." After all most of the world is not Christian and never has been. And all of those dead people who never heard of Jesus in their life time, where are they?"

Now I realize that I am making some people uncomfortable over these questions, but they are honest questions and they deserve an honest answer.

In one of the apostle Paul's letters, he wrote this to Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:3-4: "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; {4} Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." So, we know that it is God's will for all men to be saved. Well, there may be a few who would reject this is the end, I am not a universalist, but not half the world, surely. Most of the people who have lived on this planet have never gotten a chance to reject it in the first place.

Paradox of a Parable

Now let me show you a paradox. There was a day when Jesus was speaking to a crowd of people and He gave them a parable. It was the parable of the sower and the seed (Matthew 13:3-9), and how a man went out into his field sowing seed and it fell in different places and produced different results. And when Jesus and His disciples got by themselves, the disciples came to Him and said: "Why do you speak to them in parables?" Now the traditional explanation of this is that Jesus' parables are illustrations, they are literary devices that He used to make His meaning clear. In fact, I think that if you went through Christian literature of various denominations and Sunday School literature you would find here and there, comments that would say this, that these are illustrations or literary devices, little stories, homilies that Jesus used to explain things so people would understand what He is driving at.

Now if that is the case, why did Jesus' disciples ask this question? Why did they come up to Him and say: "Lord, why do you speak to these people in parables?" It should have been apparent why He did it. The answer is that a parable is much more like an allegory than an illustration. An allegory is a representation of a spiritual or moral or other abstract meaning through the actions of fictional characters that serve as symbols. It is in the nature of an allegory that the reader or the listener has to find the meaning for himself. And that means that people are apt to find different meanings in an allegory. You may hear it and decide one thing from it and I may hear it and get something quite different from it. Hence the disciple's question: "Lord, why in the course of teaching these people are you using allegories?" Jesus' answer is nothing short of astonishing. He said, "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given" (Matthew 13:11.)

So here is our paradox, on the one hand it is God's will that all men should be saved, and on the other hand Jesus spoke in allegories so that some would understand the gospel and others would not. In fact, to this day people understand Jesus differently and by anyone's definition of salvation, a lot of people who claim to be Christians aren't.

Look at the doctrinal statements of all the different churches. Look at their approach to these things, and you will see very clearly how differently people can look at the statements and the teachings of Jesus and how far and wide they can define them. Most of the people in the world couldn't care less.

Is God Trying to Save the World?

You would think that God isn't really trying very hard to save the world and I fear that you might be right. For if God is God, if He is all powerful, all knowing, and nothing can be withheld from God, then wouldn't you think that He would be trying hard to save the world right now and that He would do it? So maybe our answer is that God is not trying to save the whole world right now! That seems logical. Maybe saving the world is a little further on in God's plan but as you know, that still leaves a very large question mark. All of the people who have died in the past who never knew and never got a chance.

God's Holidays Pictures God's Plan of Salvation

Years ago, I learned that the holidays in the Bible actually picture the plan that God is working out here on this planet. It is strange to say this, but most people don't really think about it. They look at the holidays of the Bible as purely Jewish holidays. They see them as commemorations of events in Jewish history, just like the fourth of July commemorates American independence, and it has nothing to do with anything else.

As we have been seeing in this series of Born to Win radio programs, that isn't quite the case when it comes to the holidays of the Bible. They are called the appointed times of Jehovah. They aren't merely Jewish, they belong to and identify God and they picture elements of the plan of God.

Now virtually the entire Christian world dismisses all of these holidays as Jewish. They think that they picture things out of Jewish history and that they have no relevance to the Christian faith or so they think. But they are wrong.

Every single one of these Biblical holidays also picture the plan of God and are entirely relevant to the Christian faith. In this series of Born to Win radio programs we have been walking through these seven Biblical holidays in the year and have found Christ and His work in every single one of them.

What Happens to those Who Have Never Heard of Jesus?

The questions that I am asking you right now arises from the last of these Biblical holidays and from the question of the Christian faith, what happens to all the rest of the millions of people who never heard of Jesus, not in their life?

What about the Gentiles? What about the nations who to all intents and purposes down through history have been cut off from God, and shut out of the promises of God?

Feast of Tabernacles

In the seventh chapter of John there is an interesting section about the Feast of Tabernacles. John introduces it by saying in Verse 1: "After these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him." Around Jerusalem and Judea, it was a very dangerous place for Jesus, so He stayed in Galilee in the north. "Now the Jews' feast of tabernacles was at hand. {3} His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart from here, and go into Judaea, that your disciples also may see the works that you are doing. {4} For there is no man that does anything in secret, and he himself seeks to be known openly. If you are going to do these things, show yourself to the world." For in fact, His brothers (Matthew 13:55) didn't believe in Him either. They were kind to Him, I guess, but they didn't really believe. So, Jesus said to them: "My time is not yet come: but your time is always ready. {7} The world cannot hate you; but me it hates, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil." Nobody is going to like you if you tell them what they are doing is wrong. Verse 8: "Go on up to this feast," Jesus told his brothers, "I am not going up yet to this feast: for my time is not yet fully come." And in fact, if He had gone up there with His brothers and had been part of a group going into Jerusalem from Galilee, He would have been spotted right away. But by going up there alone later, He could go incognito as it were.

You know looking back from our time it is hard to imagine how Jesus could walk into the city of Jerusalem and not be recognized. But the truth is they didn't have television, His name wasn't plastered in everybody's home every night of the week on the news broadcasts. Most of the people there had never seen Him and those who had seen Him had not seen Him long enough that He would really register strongly on their minds.

So when "He had said these words unto them, he stayed in Galilee. {10} But when his brethren were gone up, then went he also up unto the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret." Just as an ordinary humble carpenter. {11} "Then the Jews looked for him at the feast, and said, Where is

he? {12} And there was much murmuring among the people concerning him: for some said, He is a good man: others said, No he's not; he deceives the people. {13} And nobody would speak openly of him for fear of the Jews." By that they meant the Jewish leaders. {14} "Now about the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught. {15} And the Jews marveled, saying, How knows this man letters, having never learned?" I guess it is obvious that Jesus had no degree, He had not studied in any of the famous Jewish schools, and yet when He spoke, they knew that this man knew. He knew letters and the letters in particular that He knew were those of what you and I call the Old Testament, the Holy Scriptures.

Jesus answered them saying: "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. {17} If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. {18} He that speaks of himself seeks his own glory: but he that seeks his glory that sent him, that is a true man, and no unrighteousness is in him. {19} Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keep the law? Why are you going about to kill me? {20} The people answered and said, you are crazy: who's going about to kill you?" The Jewish leaders knew, and Jesus knew.

"Jesus answered and said unto them, I have done one work, and you all marvel." What does He mean by that? He means that He read their minds that they were going about to kill Him. Frankly, it probably didn't take much discernment to spot it. Jesus said: {22} "Moses gave you circumcision; (not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers;) and you on the Sabbath day circumcise a man. {23} If a man on the Sabbath day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken; why are you angry at me, because I have made a man completely well on the Sabbath day? {24} Judge not according to the appearance but judge righteous judgment." He is basically making the argument in an ongoing battle with these people in how the Sabbath Day was to be observed. Note, not whether it was to be observed, but how it was to be observed. They said it was a sin to heal a man who was sick on the Sabbath Day, on the other hand, they would circumcise an eight-day old child on the Sabbath Day so that the law would not be broken. And then they criticized Jesus for healing sick people on the Sabbath Day. What a difference.

Verse 25: "Then said some of them of Jerusalem, Is not this he, whom they seek to kill?" {26} "But, look, he is speaking boldly, and they are saying nothing to him. Do the rulers know indeed that this is the very Christ?" {27} "We know where this man comes from: but when Christ comes, no man knows where he comes from. {28} Then cried Jesus in the temple as he taught, saying, You both know me, and you know where I am from: and I am not come of myself, but he that sent me is true, the problem is that you don't know him. {29} But I know him: for I am from him, and he sent me. {30} Then they tried to arrest him: but no one would lay hands on him, because his hour was not yet come. {31} And many of the people believed on him, and said, When Christ comes, will he do more miracles than these which this man has done? {32} The Pharisees heard that the people murmured such things concerning him; and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take him. {33} Then said Jesus unto them, Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto him that sent me. {34} You will look for me and will not find me: and where I am, there you cannot come. {35} Then said the Jews among themselves, Where will he go, that we shall not find him? Will he go to the dispersed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles?"

Now where did this come from? What is generally not realized is that there are numerous places throughout the gospels where Jesus makes it very clear that the truth of God, the promises, the covenants, all of the great gifts of God were given to the Jews, and they were supposed to share them with the world, and they had not done so. There are many references about the Gentiles and that the gospel must be taken to the Gentiles, and people had heard this and now they are wondering when is He going to do that? Verse 36: "What manner of saying is this that he said, You shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, there you cannot come?"

Last Great Day of the Feast

In Verse 37 John records this: "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come to me, and drink. {38} He that believeth on me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. {39} (But this spoke he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Spirit was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.) Now let's consider what is going on here. This is the Last Great Day of the Feast. It is a unique day, one of the great days of the Hebrew calendar, but oddly enough it is one that you rarely hear anything about. The Jews are aware of it, but Christians, by and large, many have never heard of it beyond this particular saying and it never registers on them that Jesus Christ on this occasion is engaging in some very important symbolism. Jesus chooses to issue a call on this day not just to some but to all men to come to Him.

God's Festivals are Commanded

The first mention of this day is found in Leviticus 23. This is the chapter in which all of the Christian holidays, as I call them, are laid out. The world looks at them, Christianity looks at them as Jewish holidays. But when you study them and find Christ in every one of them, there is a very good reason to call them Christian.

In Leviticus 23:33 "The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, {34} Speak to the children of Israel, saying, The fifteenth day of the seventh month shall be the feast of tabernacles for seven days to the LORD. {35} The first day shall be an holy convocation", that means you go to church. "You shall do no servile work in that day", that means you take that day off from work. {36} "Seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD: on the eighth day shall be an holy convocation to you", and you shall go to church. "You shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD: it is a solemn assembly; and you shall do no servile work therein." So we have two days, the first day and the eighth day, you take the day off from work and you go to church and you celebrate on these days.

Let's notice in verse 37 that "These are the feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations." This verse indicates that these are God's festivals and are not just Jewish holidays. They are the appointed times of Jehovah.

Verse 39: "In the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep a feast to the LORD seven days: on the first day shall be a Sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a Sabbath." You take these two days off. Now there is some question of whether this eighth day is a separate festival or is it just merely the last day of the Feast of

Tabernacles. We will leave that aside for the time being and consider the special significance of the day for Christian people.

The Water Festival

The Last Day of this Feast on the Temple Mount was characterized by the pouring of water. One source says that the Temple Mount was a wash of water on this day, it was a great water festival.

Let's go back to John 7:37, And hence, here stands Jesus on the Temple Mount on the day of the water festival, "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come to me, and drink. {38} He that believes on me, as the scripture says, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. {39} (But this spoke he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Spirit was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)"

The greatest meaning of this day is found in the words 'any man', not just some, not just some in the western world, not just some in North America, any man. For to this day, you see, the gospel has not been extended to 'any man.' So, Jesus somehow on this Last Great Day of the Feast, stands and cries aloud in the Temple that there is connected with this day a time when 'any man' will be able to come to God for salvation.

You know there is a parallel between the Feast of Tabernacles and human history. The pattern in the Bible appears to be that man has six thousand years of human rule to do his best and oddly the chronology of the Bible seems to work with that even though, without going back and looking at archeology, the times involved are probably greater than what we find in the Bible. This doesn't mean that the Bible is wrong, it simply means that we don't have all of the data. The pattern in the Bible seems to be that man has six thousand years to get done whatever he is going to do. The seventh thousand years, what everybody calls the millennium, is the time of the Kingdom of God. But if you have been following this carefully, you may wonder what about that eighth day? That is outside of the seven-thousand-year plan. Yes, it is, isn't it?

What Happens at the End?

What comes at the end of the plan of God?

Now you don't have to be a scholar to figure out where to turn in the Bible if you want to take a look at the end of the plan. Do you? Logically you go toward the end of the book of Revelation, so let's do it.

Revelation 20:1 John is standing, and he says: "I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. {2} And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, {3} And cast him into the abyss, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season." Now I don't figure looking at the world that I live in that that has happened yet. The Devil seems to be very much alive, but when we come to this period of time, when the Devil is

bound for a thousand years, this is what people talk about when they are talking about the millennium. It is the seventh thousand-year period. It is symbolic, it connects to the Feast of Tabernacles.

And so he says: "Cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up for a thousand years" {4} "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." You won't find the word 'millennium' in the Bible, but this is where the idea of the millennium comes from. It is odd that in Christian conversation it is talked about in terms of the millennium rather than the Kingdom of God, which in fact, it is the time of the Kingdom of God, the reign of Christ upon the earth.

John continues in verse 5: "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection."

Now if you look at the Feast of Tabernacles being seven days as being symbolic of the seven thousand years of human history, in which we are all camping out down here on this planet, we are strangers, pilgrims, we are like Abraham wandering to and fro in the earth, that during this seven thousand years, we are kind of at loose ends. The seventh thousand-year period, what we call the millennium, is the time of God's rule, instead of man's rule. That's the way that some people look at this.

John goes on to say: {6} "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with him a thousand years."

Two Resurrections

Do you realize what we just read there? When he said the first resurrection, he implies that it is not the only one. In fact, it would seem here, that we have at least two resurrections, the first and the second are a thousand years apart. Now I realize all of this stuff can be interpreted one way or another, but it seems to be the simplest and straight forward way of understanding the vision that John is seeing here.

After the Millennium

Now he goes on to say: {7} "When the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, {8} And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea." Mind you that this is at the end of the thousand years of peace, of Christ's reign, but now the Devil is allowed to be loose again. And this is what happens.

Verse 9: "They went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. {10} And

the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet were cast, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever." The old Devil has a very unpleasant future ahead of him it seems.

White Throne Judgment

"And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. {12} And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life."

Now wait a minute, where are we anyway? First of all, all those who are in Christ, the first fruits, the Saints were resurrected in the first resurrection. The Kingdom of God was established on the earth and Christ with the Saints ruled on the earth for a thousand years. Now we are at the end, after the thousand-year period, when as it says in verse 5, the rest of the dead did not live until the thousand years were finished.

Now we see this great white throne and the dead, the small and great stand. What is it when the dead stand up? It is a resurrection, right? They stand before God and the books are opened then another book is opened which is the book of life, {12} "and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works."

Now think about that for a minute. The book of life is the book with the names of all of the Saints of God of all of those people who were in Christ in this life. I hope that your name is written in the book of life and I trust that mine is. Now think about this, since everyone whose name was written in the book of life were raised in the first resurrection, why open the book of life again in this second resurrection? It can't possibly be to see who has been written in it because they have already been resurrected. I don't know if you have thought about this but the only possible reason for opening the book of life at this point is so that new names could be entered in the book of life.

Verse 13: "The sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. {14} And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. {15} And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." Now I don't know what all of the details are of God's plan or how He is going to work out every aspect of it, but you know it is pretty plain, when you make your way through the things that I have been through in the last twenty Born to Win broadcasts, to help us understand what it is that God is all about.

Sooner or later, God is going to come back and revisit a lot of people in this world who never knew and never understood. They are going to come up out of their graves and they are going to be judged.

Now you could think that they are all standing before a bar of justice being judged for what they have done in the past, but the judgment of a prize fight goes on while the fight is being waged. These people will be alive, back on the earth, and judged by the way they are living their lives.

You know it may be that your old uncle Bob, who never had time for religion, will in the second resurrection find time for God. This will be a time of reunion when we will be able to see family, friends and loved ones who were not called by God in this life and who were not resurrected in the first resurrection. It will be a great reunion and we will be able to teach them and encourage them to follow God's way of life and to make it into God's family.

The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit RLDEA.com where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.

Discussion Questions

1. What are your thoughts about Mr. Dart's opening questions?
2. What are your thoughts about Mr. Dart's point that there is a paradox, God wants all to be saved, yet Jesus spoke in parables so that not everyone would understand?
3. What are some major differences between Christian churches because of the fact that we interpret scripture differently sometimes?
4. Do you believe that God's Holy Days picture His plan for salvation? Why or why not?
5. How would you answer the question: "What happens to those who have never heard of Jesus?"
6. What are your thoughts on the point that Jesus was not arguing with the Jews of His day on whether the Sabbath was to be observed, but rather how the Sabbath was to be observed?
7. Did you know about the water festival?
8. Have you ever studied about the Eighth Day and its significance to humanity?
9. What are your thoughts about two resurrections?
10. What are your thoughts about the point that the book of life is opened again in the second resurrections, so that new names can be added to it?