



Selah: Stop, Look, Listen- November 22, 2022

The Lord be with you.

I'm really excited that this is Thanksgiving week and we're going to be with our kids and grandkids and we're going to be eating and we're going to be celebrating and then it's going to be Advent and Christmas and it can't come too soon for me as this has been kind of a crazy year with one train wreck after another and so it's really going to be good to have some days to celebrate. And in all of this I am reminded of a story that is told by Leo Buscaglia who was one of the most popular speakers on public broadcasting stations a few years ago. As he told of the day that his father came home from work and announced that his business partner had embezzled money and had left the Buscaglia family broke. And that evening, Mama, Mama as Leo liked to call her, Mama, she goes out and she sells her most expensive piece of jewelry and she uses that money to buy the ingredients for a big Italian feast. And when Mama's family scolds her for such foolish extravagance, Mama says, she says, the time for joy is now when we really need it, not next week. And Leo Buscaglia says that Mama's big feast that night that it just lifted their spirits and helped carry them through some difficult days ahead.

Well you count me in with Mama. I mean we really do need a feast. This is the time for joy. And did you know, did you know that God is all in for his people feasting and celebrating? In fact, God commands, I mean God didn't suggest, God commanded that Israel throw seven feasts a year. That's four feasts in the spring, three feasts in the fall as Israel's worship centered on a feast. A family vacation to the city of Jerusalem where some of those feasts lasted as long as eight days. But in case you're wondering how a family managed to pay for all of that, well, they paid for it with a tithe. That's right. A 10% offering that was holy to God. By the way, we ministers don't usually talk about this tithe when we talk about stewardship, but God commanded three tithes. Let me listen for you. First is a tithe of 10% to go to the Levites. That's in Leviticus chapter 18 verse 26. Second there was a tithe of 10% to go to the care of the poor, the widows and orphans. That's in Deuteronomy chapter 14 verses 28 and 29. And then there is this tithe, a tithe of 10% to be set aside for families to go to Jerusalem for the feast. And this tithe is seen in Deuteronomy chapter 14 verse 22 where it says, set apart a tithe of all the yield of your seed that is brought in yearly from the field and the presence of the Lord your God in the place that he would choose as a dwelling for his name. You shall eat the tithe of your grain, your wine and your oil, as well as the firstlings of your herd and flock, so that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always.

Notice that God says that it is in this feasting and celebrating that they will learn to fear to reverence God always. But let's just suppose that a family lives, well, lives way up north in Galilee where it's



water from rock

going to be too far to carry 10% of their harvest to Jerusalem. And so God provides for that in the next verses. Verses 25 and following, God says that you may then turn your 10% tithe into money and with that money secure in hand, go into the place that your Lord your God will choose, spend the money for whatever you wish. Let me read that again. Spend the money for whatever you wish, oxen, sheep, wine, strong drink, and you shall eat there in the presence of the Lord your God, you and your household rejoicing together.

And so this was a tithe set apart as holy to God, as belonging to God for people to use whatever they wish to have a good time in the presence of the Lord their God, they and their household rejoicing together. Later on in the same chapter, God commands that the feast was to be shared with the poor, the widows and orphans. Just what many of you are going to be doing this Thanksgiving and throughout the holidays as we open up doors and we celebrate with others the goodness and greatness of God.

We see David doing something like this in Second Samuel chapter six, when in a very religious act, David brings up the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. And David leads the people it says with singing and dancing and a feast for everyone it says it included a cake of bread, a portion of meat, a cake of raisins. I mean, that was typical Old Testament worship as they would come together with others who love God, and they would sing and dance and they would tell stories about God's goodness, and they would eat together.

That was the completion that was the crowning point of worship. And so I'm not surprised when the psalmist said, I was glad when they said to me, let us go up to the house of the Lord. You know, I can't help but wonder if we might have held on to more of our youth in the church if they knew something of the joy and celebration of God and life. Solomon the wise has a has a good word for us in Ecclesiastes chapter five, verse 18, a good word for us as we head into Thanksgiving and then into Advent. Solomon says, "This is what I have seen to be good. It is fitting to eat and drink, and to find enjoyment and all the toil with which one toils under the sun." Mama Buscaglia was right. This is the time for joy. This is the time for joy, as we really need it. And I wish you a joyous celebration of God's goodness. And yes, I'll be with you on Thanksgiving Day with some thoughts about that very special day.

I am Tim Smith, a fellow traveler. Thank you for listening. Until next time.