

Feast of Tabernacles

By Paris Reidhead*

Will you turn, please, to our text of the morning, John 7:37-39. We have read the background Scripture from Leviticus and Nehemiah, and the first portion of John 7. We also read these words that comprise our Text, but hear them again:

“In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)”

Next Lord’s Day Morning, at 10 o’clock, begins the 78th Annual, Bible and Missionary Convention. It is advertised as America’s oldest Missionary Convention. I can readily feel that any Congregation might well say, The 78th! Well! All my life there have been Missionary Conventions at the Gospel Tabernacle Church. This is just one from many, just another. But I submit to you that in the past four years it is not true that we have had just four missionary conventions. To the contrary, there have been four feasts that have been prepared for us for the Lord as He has drawn together men from different countries and different parts of this country and Canada who have gathered here at this time, anointed of the Spirit of God to speak to the heart of what they had reason to believe would be a prepared, waiting congregation.

This is a feast. It is strange, a coincidence, that 78 years ago Dr. Simpson¹ felt that the proper time for this first Convention, and all the subsequent ones here in this place, was the first week of October. There is, I say, a coincidence in that it almost corresponds with the Feast of Tabernacles which was from the 15th to the 21st day of the month of Tishri, the 7th month of the Jewish Calendar. It was the Feast of Harvest, the Feast when all had been gathered. The olives had been brought in, the wheat had been brought in, and all of the fruit of the orchard had been gathered and stored. The wine had been made, and was in its wine skins. All was in readiness for that period when they should from the fruit of the earth. And so, God ordained that after the Harvest there should be a period when all of Israel would gather together.

There were seven feasts in Israel, and this was the last in the Jewish calendar. The year begins the first Feast, at least of their year of Feasts, with the Passover, that time that spoke of Redemption by the stretched out arm of God when He brought a people out of Egypt unto Himself a people to whom He spoke from Sinai saying, “I have borne you on eagle’s wings” (Exo. 19:4b). “I have brought you that I might make you a chosen generation, a kingdom of priests,” and later that He should have a people that would know Him, and believe Him, and be witnesses unto Him (Exo. 19:6).

The second was the Feast of Unleavened Bread, speaking to us at least of Communion with God as we would come to the Table of the Lord and see there the unleavened Bread and the Cup, reminding us that this Feast of Unleavened Bread in the Old Testament was that which spoke to Israel of Communion with the Lord.

The third was the Feast of First Fruits, when they would pluck the grain that was just beginning to head, and bring it before the Lord, speaking of Resurrection, that all of our life flows out of resurrection – the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. If you are in Christ today, it is not simply that He extended your time and existence from that time that you met Him throughout Eternity. This could be endless life. But it never could be Eternal Life. And the Feast of First Fruits spoke of the fact that it was that which had been buried and brought forth a new life that gave life to people. So it would speak to us of the Lord Jesus, that all we have we have in Him.

The Feast of Pentecost you well understand meant not the grain as it was offered before the Lord at the Feast of First Fruits, but now the grain has been ground and it has been molded into the shape of a loaf, and would speak to us of that sovereign work of the Spirit of God there at Pentecost when these. Individual believers were constituted visibly before the Nations as His Church, His Body.

¹ Albert Benjamin Simpson (1843-1919) founder of The Christian and Missionary Alliance

The Feast of Trumpets speaks of the calling out of a people, which was what God did when He led His people forth, and that which He has been doing.

And now we come to the 7th, the last of the Feasts, The Feast of Tabernacles. I have explained that this had to do with a Harvest Festival, after the ingathering of all the harvest when everything was laid by, and the people could rest, knowing that God had blessed during that past growing season. He ordained. He sovereignly ordained – ordered. This was not just a pleasant suggestion from someone that might say something that could be of profit, or, Shall we do something for our vacation this year? That was not the approach. This was ordered of God, that His people should take one week in which they did no servile labor, in which they broke the entire pattern of the past, in which they exposed themselves to the Law of God and opened their hearts to the truth of God. They did it in those early days through the time of Joshua, for Nehemiah wrote that it had not been done from the time of Joshua, the Son of Nun, till it was revived by Ezra, until they did it faithfully in those first years, and God met them with blessing.

It did not only involve cessation from work, but God wanted to break the pattern of their life. Their homes had obligations, and responsibilities. And so He said to His people, I want you to make booths out of palm branches, out of the branch of the myrtle, and of the pine tree, and branches from big trees, great trees. I want you to fashion a booth, and live there to remind yourself of your past, and to teach yourself concerning the future. And so there would be days of great business, as food would be prepared for this time of tenure. They were to avoid cooking as much as possible, and that their houses could be prepared before the beginning of the Feast of Tabernacles. Can you see them going out and bringing in the branches and erecting the little lean-to, the little shelter, and thatching the roof with branches in order that there might be just a little temporary shelter while they gave themselves up for these seven wonderful days to what God would say to them. We understand, of course, the purpose for it. It was threefold. By bringing them away from their normal homes, the homes of stone and brick, that they had made, and having them to sleep and to reside in these little thatched booths-booths made of branches, He was reminding them that they had been a people in bondage. He was taking them back in their memory that generations that have not been present when they crossed the Red Sea might hear again from their fathers the story of their bondage, and of their slavery.

I wonder sometimes if this is not necessary. We soon forget the pit from which we have been dug. We soon forget the shackles that bound us. I am afraid that there is one way by which the Church of Jesus Christ has grievously injured those still in the chains of sin, by a “holier than thou” attitude that causes them to wrap themselves up as though they were somehow better than these that are in sin. As I look out upon you today and see you, a company of Redeemed people, I would dare to venture and draw the bold hazard and say that there is not among us a crime against society or God that has not been committed by those who name the Name of Christ, if not in fact at least in heart. Someone said, “The best people are in the Church.” This I seriously challenge. May I just change it and say, “Perhaps the worst people are in the Church,” those that have had the uncovering work of the Holy Ghost done to their hearts, those that have the sophistication of their own casual contentment with themselves stripped away, those that have seen themselves as God sees them. If you talk to people outside the Church, and outside of Christ, you will soon gather in conversing with them that the best people in all the world are the unsaved. And if you want to find the epitome of social propriety and justice, go to our prisons. For I have yet to find, but in one case, a guilty man in prison according to their own lights and testimony. I do remember one man who said, “I deserve to be here and far worse.” But other than that, the ones that have spoken to me from behind the bars are all there because of what they call the “Miscarriage of Justice,” a bought jury, or a crooked judge, or lawyer, or someone else. But apparently the finest people are in our prisons, the next finest class are in the world outside in the bar and in the place of sinful amusement and crime, and listening to them you would say (and they would maintain it probably) the worst are in the Church. Well in this we will have to agree, that we are those that have seen ourselves as totally helpless and utterly undone, and have been pressed by the Spirit of God to the place that we realize that the works of righteousness which we could perform would in no wise add one iota of merit to the Lord in our case. And so we were closed in with Christ, crowded to Christ. This was what God intended the Feast of Tabernacles to do, to remind His people that they were bond slaves, and were content with their slavery, that they ground and worked for a cruel task master. He wanted them to remember that it was by Blood that He had spared them, and by power that He had delivered them.

I think that we should associate this with our own forth coming Convention. I believe that we should remember that when God began the testimony of which we are the heirs, some 79 years ago now... Dr. Simpson left the Thirteenth Street Avenue Presbyterian Church, down between 7th and 8th Avenue, and he walked out, saying that God had called him to establish a work. In a little upstairs room on 23rd Street, seven people met with him, only one of which at that time or afterward came from the church that he had served as Pastor. They were a small people, a little people, that had nothing more than a burden, or a desire, or a hunger, or a yearning, or a longing to please God. I think it behooves us to remember that we have been dug from a pit of filth and iniquity, and uncleanness. It behooves us to remember that every one of us, dead in trespasses and sins, were by our own testimony in coming to Christ utterly helpless, as well as totally condemned. It behooves us to remember that, and to realize that it is all of Grace, all of the free unmerited favor and love of God. This was what the Feast of Tabernacles was to do. Secondly, it was to teach the people that they were called for a special purpose, that they were not called to live inside of their houses as the end of their being. All the nations around them could make their house the final object of their living. They could make the accumulation of goods the end of their being, but when God called His people out again, away from their homes into their little shelter of branches, He was literally saying to them, Remember that I called you to Myself to be a witness unto Me. I believe that there is a parallel we need to understand.

I cannot imagine anyone being drawn of God to The Gospel Tabernacle Church in New York City simply to find a comfortable berth where he could sit in the same manner in which he would conduct himself in some lovely church in the suburbs. I just do not see how the Spirit of God could join to us those who did not have a sense of responsibility, a sense of burden, a sense of destiny, and a sense of the call of God. I believe that God here 79 years ago established a Testimony. It was then the suburbs. And you recall that some of the wisecracks that criticized the judgment of Dr. Simpson said, "Why have you gone to the suburbs? You are foolish. Don't you know that New York City will never grow out to 44th Street, (for the center of urban life was down on 14th Street)." And they were way out near the corn fields. But he had vision. I do not believe his vision was only for himself. I believe his vision was for us, in this hour, in this day, in the moment of the responsibility that we face. It was utterly unthinkable, as much as 25 years ago, that the capital of the world should somehow become New York City. But this is the case. And imagine a man so led of God that 79 years ago he chose the very Street at the other end of which has become in a sense capital of the world in the United Nations. I do not believe that it means that we have become subservient to the principle of the United Nations, but I believe that it does manifest something of our destiny in serving in a generation that is in need of Christian Testimony and guidance as ours is.

I would submit to you, therefore, that as the Feast of Tabernacles reminded them of the pit from which they had been dug, it also reminded them of the destiny and ministry to which they had been called.

Furthermore, the Feast of Tabernacles and their gathering there reminded them of the preparation that must be made. You recall that just as the Red Sea spoke of deliverance from the penalty of sin, spoke of deliverance from Hell, and from judgment because of past sins, so the Jordan River spoke to them of death to self, and preparation for service. Oh there was a great deal of fighting going on in the wilderness, as they wandered 40 years in unbelief. But do you know with whom they fought? Each other. Oh yes, they were fighting well enough. But they were fighting with one another. They were as cannibals, tearing at each other's flesh, seeking to destroy one another; and this always characterizes those that have not gone through the Jordan River. While a person is wandering in the Wilderness, he will criticize Moses. He will criticize Aaron. He will criticize his brethren. He will criticize all and every one, and everything. This characterized Israel in the Wilderness. And God wanted HIS people to remember that they had wandered in their failure and that as long as they were in such booths and tents there was no ministry for God. It was not until this people came to the place of sheer weariness, if you please, so that they were willing to lay down in death that God was able to use them. And so the booths speak of the fact that as long as you have avoided the Cross on death to self you are useless to God. And I think that one of the testimonies that has characterized this Convention for the last 78 years (77 years) has been the preaching of identification with Christ. It will be sounded again this year. It will be announced by Dr. Bandy. It will be proclaimed by our Brother Tozer². The only thing that I fear is that some who have heard

² Aiden Wilson Tozer (1897-1963) Pastor and Author. Christian and Missionary Alliance

this testimony for years, and decades, and decades may yet go on avoiding the Cross, and after the Convention is over still continue to murmur and complain, and gossip and fight, and rob God of Glory and hinder the work of the Spirit of God, and fail to hear what the Lord has said. And then it will be necessary for the Church to wander another twelve months while someone else just drops by in the sands. Oh, may God give to us a voice to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches. I have sought to bring to you in these past four years men that I have felt whose testimonies coincided with ours. It was the genius of Dr. Simpson, for all those many years, to bring in men from other fellowships. If you will read of the early Conventions, you will find that he brought in men—Baptist men, Presbyterian men. He brought in the Reformed Episcopal men. He brought in men from every different group. Wherever he found a man that shared in our testimony, Dr. Simpson brought into this convention week. This we have sought to do. We have endeavored to bring to you men from other persuasions in order that you might sense that the Truth you believe is in no sense yours. We do not believe in Alliance Truth. We believe perhaps in an Alliance Testimony, but not in Alliance Truth. It is God's Truth. It is Eternal Truth. We have no corner on it, and it has been an encouragement to my heart to be able to bring to you men that have had a testimony similar to ours, emphasizing this truth that Jordan does stand for the Cross, and that if a grain of wheat would bring forth, it must fall into the ground and die. And this was the testimony of the Feast of Tabernacles.

And then you will remember that it also testified that there was a Land to be conquered. There was a battle to be fought and to be won. After being weary of fighting with each other, they finally came to the place that they were prepared to be the vehicle in the hands of the Spirit of God for the Battle He would win. I believe that in this day, there are tremendous battles that must be won. I do not believe in any sense that our Nation is to come to that place where we are to lay down in despair and say that conquest by communism is inevitable, that the destruction of our Nation and its heritage is utterly unavoidable. This I cannot believe. But I believe that it is a strong possibility, and that the only means by which it can be avoided is for men and women such as yourselves this morning to commit yourselves in absolute irrevocable abandonment to Jesus Christ, not to the Church and its program as the ultimate end, but simply as a means; Not to the activities as the ultimate end, but simply as a means. I believe, dear heart, today that the Spirit of God is calling us in this crucial hour of our history to an abandonment to Jesus Christ, the like of which we have never known.

Oh I am grateful that there were those in other days that responded to the challenge that was presented over this desk by Dr. Simpson and those he brought to them through the Convention weeks through the passing of the years, but in many cases it was a challenge to invade lands. This we will hear. There are still many lands to be invaded. It was a challenge to give. It was a challenge to go. And that remains unchanged and unaltered. But, in a sense, in a sense, we are hearing in this hour a new note of challenge. It is a challenge to BE in the day in which we live. For there are forces that are determined to destroy everything for which we stand. The only possible means of survival will be a return to Religious vitality, and strength. This is going to come, not by any casual attention, not by any casual participation, not by any sense of, "Well it has all happened before, and it is going to happen again." I believe that this is fatal. I believe that this lackadaisical spirit, this "It can't happen here, and so everything is going to continue as it has since the time of the fathers" is going to be that spirit which will mean our destruction, if destruction does come. It is going to be on your part that God is going to say during the days of this Convention something new to you, something you have not heard in the past, and challenges are going to be presented to you regardless of how old you are, the implication of which are going to change your life for years to come, yea until Jesus comes, or until He carries you to Himself.

And, therefore, I say to you that if you are to avoid sinning against the Spirit of God it is for you to view the Convention as a feast of Tabernacles in which you shall diligently seek to put aside all other responsibilities and you shall diligently to live as it were in a booth, in order that you can be present at every proper time to hear what the Spirit of God is going to say unto the Church. His anointed messenger, coming to us, we believe in the fullness of the blessing of the Gospel is Dr. A. W. Tozer whom we have felt should minister both at noon, at 12:10 until 12:50, and in the evening. Now I am asking everyone in the headquarters to go to their superior and request permission to be here for that Service that you can hear what the Spirit of God says. I have talked with your superiors. I have talked with those for whom you work for the most part. I have requested this. And I am saying to you today that those of you that are nearest who comprise that corps of people that are here, I am urging upon you in the presence of this company that you deal with this as something entirely new and different, and that you

prepare to be here if possible every day at 12:10. It may be necessary for a skeleton staff to be kept on, but God is speaking and God will be heard. And we should view this as not something optional, but something mandatory. I shall not be speaking, but there will be these anointed servants of God whom HE has brought to whom we should give ear, not that they are going to be before us as someone that we come for the name's sake, or the personality's sake, but we view them as the oracle of God, and the messenger of God to our hearts.

I urge you to come, every service to which you can possibly come. In the afternoon if it is possible. If you have days of vacation left, take them now. And if there is the possibility of your being in, or even should some of you be able to stay in town, reasonable accommodations can be found in which we shall be happy to help you. The thing I am saying: Last week the Staff, every member of the Staff to my knowledge with but three exceptions was invited to attend. And the three were but an oversight. And there were some who couldn't, some who didn't. But we heard God speak through His servant during that Retreat, and there was a melting and a breaking, and a preparing of our hearts. Last Lord's Day, through the ministry of Dr. Brown, we heard Him speak. Now I submit to you that God is speaking. He has spoken in other years. Never have I heard in the past, in 25 years of ministry such a continuing of testimony as I heard last year, October 2-9, when from that first service by Mr. Matthews until the closing message, it was one message of God for those that had ears to hear. Now I submit to you, dear heart, that God in Grace has spared us until this hour. I believe that if you cannot come, God's Word is equally true. And if you are utterly unable to be here, and will open your heart to the Lord, you will hear Him speak. What is the message that our Lord Jesus gave to those of His day, and what is the message to which we would hear Him call us today. Our Lord Jesus, seeing the Chief Priest bring the pitcher of water there in His hour, and pour it out upon the steps in the Court of the Women, and see it run down the steps, our Lord saw that this was something that had been developed through the years as associated with the Feast of Tabernacles. For it had to do with harvest, and the harvest He seeks is the Fruit of the Spirit: Love, joy peace, for this is foundational to all of His ministry. We must BE if we are to DO. And, consequently, I believe that that message which you can hear from Him this morning if you must leave in the hours to come, and you will hear in the hours of the Convention, will be this, that message that He echoed there that day when He said, "If any man thirst, let him come to ME and drink, and out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living Water" (Joh. 7:37-38). It is this for which Communism has arisen, to destroy a type of Christianity that has the form without the power. It is this that Communism finds irresistible the manifestation of the presence of Christ through the Holy Ghost, transforming the life, and the character, and the conduct. And it is this to which the Spirit of God is calling you, to that place of death to self, the Jordan River, to the experience of the fullness of the Holy Ghost, and to walk in the fullness of the Spirit, in order that your life might manifest the glory of Christ, and radiate the beauty of Christ, and that you might be to HIM a vehicle, an instrument, a tool, totally abandoned to HIS sovereign purpose.

Israel failed God. They said the Feast of Tabernacles does not interest us. And continuous with their refusal to hear God when He spoke at the appointed times was captivity and bondage.

I plead with you to deal with these days that come before us now as a Church, and as a people, and as a testimony as it is in the Word, not restricted to this Convention or time, but I speak particularly to those who have such great responsibilities because of such great light. I plead with you to realize that unless we lay hold of that which is ours in Christ, and give ourselves to Him that He may give Himself to us, the time for the continuation year after year of just adding one convention to another may soon come to a solemn and a tragic close. "For when the salt loses its savor, it is good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men" (Mat. 5:13). How long will God be patient with a people that have had such testimony as have we. I plead with you, therefore, to make this the week of weeks, and erect a booth in your spirit, and open your heart, and to hear and to heed what the Spirit will say to the Church.

Shall we bow in prayer. We thank Thee, our Father, for a great heritage. But if we would look into the past and warm ourselves by the ashes of fire of yesteryear, we would sin against Thee and against our generation. And so, Lord, everything of the past is but to encourage us that if we will but break before Thee, and bend before Thee, and confess our sin before Thee, and seek Thee with whole hearts, Thou wilt meet us. And every answer of prayer in the past is but an encouragement to trust Thee for the need of the present. Our hearts cry out to Thee today. We plead the precious Blood of Christ upon us today. Oh Thou Spirit of the Living God, come upon this people. Give them a heart to seek Thee. As they gather for prayer meeting throughout the week, may there be a strange wonderful sense of Thy presence. Our Father, as we come into the first service on the Lord's Day

next may we know that Thou art here, Thine anointing Presence, Thy speaking Voice, Thy challenging Word. Oh come upon us, come upon us. We pray, Lord, for those whose hearts may be cold toward Thee, that Thou wilt find them out, and that there may be a drawing, not to a man, not to men, not even to a ministry, but to the One who said, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink" (Joh. 7:37). It is the Lord Jesus we seek to exalt. It is Him that we would uphold. It is Him that we would present, proclaim. And we pray, our Father, that because we have sought Thee in the week past, and in this week, and in the weeks to come, that Thou canst come and rain righteousness upon us, and so seal the Word to our hearts, and us to Thy Service. For Jesus' Sake. Amen.

* Reference such as: Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City on Sunday Morning, September 24, 1961 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.

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