

What Harvest? Rediscovering the Power of First Fruits Giving

10-9-11

What has your spiritual harvest been like in your life? Have you prayed to God about your family, your job, your calling in the Lord? Have you sown seeds of faith toward these things? Have you exercised your faith and done the work of tilling, tending, weeding, watering and watching against pests that a good garden requires? If we're honest, many Christians simply don't follow through when it comes to doing what it takes to sow and reap a harvest for themselves, let alone for the Lord. As a result, our lives often feel like we're treading water instead of sowing and reaping a rich harvest blessed by God. Can we understand God's ways better in order to help ensure we obtain a good harvest?

A Biblical key to bountiful harvests is the principle of "firstfruits." The Bible refers to "Christ the firstfruits" (*1 Cor 15:23*) and also calls us "firstfruits of the Spirit" (*Romans 8:23*), as well as "firstfruits of His creatures" (*James 1:18*). What is the meaning of firstfruits and how is it relevant to our faith today?

God commanded the people to come to Jerusalem three times a year to celebrate the festivals of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles (Sukkot). In addition to their spiritual significance, these festivals were also agricultural festivals. Passover celebrates the upcoming barley harvest in Israel. Pentecost anticipates the next wheat harvest, while Tabernacles represents the completed fruit harvest. The day after Passover and the day of Pentecost the people were to bring firstfruits offerings – the first grain of the upcoming harvests – to the priest.

Firstfruit offerings differ from tithes in that a tithe is a tenth of what has already been harvested , while firstfruits represent a token of a harvest that has yet to fully ripen . It takes more faith to offer firstfruits than to tithe, because a tithe is something already in hand, while the harvest represented by firstfruits is still in the future. The future harvest can still be destroyed by drought, pestilence or an enemy.

Ezekiel 44:30 says: "The best of all firstfruits of any kind, and every sacrifice of any kind from all your sacrifices, shall be the priest's; also you shall give to the priest the first of your ground meal, to cause a blessing to rest on your house." Notice that firstfruits can cause a blessing to rest on your house ! When you are faithful in offering firstfruits, God will bring a blessing to remain on you and your family. "House" refers here not just to where you live, but to you and your descendants. Firstfruits offerings have the power to bring lasting change to you and your future generations!

Firstfruits consecrate the entire future harvest to the Lord. *Romans 11:16* says: "if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches." By consecrating something to the Lord, it becomes His and the whole of what was consecrated becomes His also, spiritually speaking. By offering firstfruits in the house of God, the entire harvest becomes holy unto God. When we recognize the entire harvest as coming from Him, you can be certain He will care about that harvest! That's why Ezekiel says "firstfruits can cause a blessing to rest on your house." This may sound like manipulating God, but the Bible shows that it is simply the way God works. Everything depends on our attitude! The Lord looks on our hearts (*1 Samuel 16:7*).

Abel's offering was preferred by God over Cain's because Abel brought the first and best of his flock —a stud animal capable of multiplying Abel's flock—whereas Cain brought from his harvest, which he had already gathered. Abel's offering required more faith. Abraham did not withhold his "only son" and God turned His previous prophecy (*Gen 12:1-3*) about Abraham's descendants into a promise: "By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD , because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son" (*Gen 22:16*). Firstfruits unleash the power to turn prophecies into promises!

Israelites were to offer their firstborn sons to God, as well as the firstfruits of their livestock and produce. (*Exodus 13:2*, etc.) This was in exchange for God's having slain the firstborn of Egypt in order to set the Israelites free. But out of His mercy, the Lord also allowed Israel to redeem their sons by paying five silver coins to the Levites. (*Numbers 18:16*). This principle of redemption lies behind Jesus' sacrifice on the cross (*1 Peter 1:18*). That is why Paul called Christ the "firstfruits." By His sacrifice, we too become holy, just as the first portion makes the whole lump holy. Further, by pouring out His Spirit upon us, we become the firstfruits of the Spirit that will one day be poured out on all flesh (*Joel 2:28*). Because His Spirit is holy and is in us, God looks upon us as holy, the firstfruits of His Great Harvest yet to come!

Pray and ask the Lord to show you a firstfruit offering you can give to bring forth a great Kingdom harvest in your life!