TODAY'S ORDER OF WORSHIP

Welcome by: Daniel Balch / Opening Prayer by: Robert Ward
Morning Assembly Song Leader: Bobby Rader

#47 Holy, Holy, Holy
#134 The Lord's My Shepherd

Scripture Reading by:
#313 The Old Rugged Cross

Communion Devotional by: Zach Arthur
Lord's Supper and Contribution

#144 O Worship the King
Sermon "The Return of the King"
Mark 11:1-11

#909 There's a Fountain Free
#587 Sing and Be Happy
Closing Prayer by: Craig Girard

Our Small Groups will meet tonight.
Robert Ward's group will meet at the building at 5:00 p.m.

Other Opportunities For Spiritual Growth

Sunday: 9:00am — Bible Study Classes, 10:00am — Worship, 5:00pm — Worship
Wednesday: 6:30pm — Bible Study Classes

March 24, 2024

"Stand Firm in…Liberty"

Galatians 5:1

Celebrating Religious Holidays?

Our Easter Egg Hunt for children occurring immediately after the worship assembly caused me to think about celebrating religious holidays more generally. Today is Palm Sunday, the day where many religious groups commemorate the Triumphal Entry; indeed, our sermon will be on that theme, too. This begins what is known as "Holy Week" leading up to Easter. Easter is the oldest of all religious holidays celebrated by Christians. The earliest Christians did not practice an annual observance of the resurrection; rather, they met on the first day of the week because of the association with it—as one scholar has put it "every Sunday was a little Easter." But by the mid-2nd century, an annual observance was widespread.

With Easter celebrated on Sunday, the rest of the week followed over the years. The first to fall into place was Good Friday, naturally, due to the crucifixion. Then Holy Saturday, the Great Sabbath or Easter Eve, with its associated vigil. Wednesday was then added, as the day on which Judas plotted to betray Jesus. And then Maundy Thursday, commemorating Jesus washing the disciples' feet and the Last Supper. By the late 4th century, the name "Holy Week" and all the days were practiced. All of this is to say, this was an evolutionary process; these days were obviously not celebrated in the NT or by the earliest Christians.

That raises the question we want to examine: can we celebrate religious holidays? In churches of Christ, we are motivated by the restoration principle: we believe the NT is normative for our faith and practice as Christians—that is, it sets the standard for what we believe and what we do. That is why we look to the earliest Christians for guidance in our efforts to follow Jesus: how did they interpret Scripture? Given the fact that they did not celebrate Easter (or other religious holidays), should we? A lot of us probably grew up hearing teaching against it for this very reason.

Perhaps the place to start is to ask if there are passages that speak to observing man-made holidays. We might be surprised to find the answer to that is yes—and if we want to be shaped by Scripture, we need to examine them. They give us insight on how God feels about days set aside to honor him

Purim
In the book of **Esther**, she is chosen by Ahasuerus, King of Persia, as queen. She conceals her Jewish origins from him on the instructions of her cousin, Mordecai. Meanwhile the prime minister, Haman, is incensed that Mordecai refused to bow before him in the street. So he urges the king that Jews ought not to be tolerated, because they observed customs that were so different. Ahasuerus gave him permission to handle it, and he planned genocide: on a certain day, all Jews are to be killed and their goods plundered.

Hearing about all of this, Mordecai urged Esther to go speak to the king. She hesitated, because visiting the king without an invitation could mean death. But she found favor and invited him to a banquet. There, the entire plot is revealed with the result that Haman is hanged on the gallows he built for Mordecai, and the Jewish people are allowed to defend themselves

Family News & Notes

WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH YOUR CHURCH FAMILY

Our Sick

Gayle Coleman will be having a procedure on April.

Oscar Cantu had surgery last week and is at home.

Continued Prayers
(Need cards, phone calls & visits)

Steve Ward, Caitlin Smith, Virginia Cole, Ken Coleman, Joe Edd Stifflemire, Donna Wilson, Jo Ella McKewen, Kelly McCain, Wayne Noonkester, Rickey Lucas, Jennifer Stelly

Shut Ins
(Need cards, phone calls & visits)

Jim Smith, Winona Angelle, Catherine Parker, Peggy McIntosh, Lois Watts, Willo Dean Ellis

Our Missionaries

Aaron & Marisa Bailey in Montepuez, Mozambique , Rod Kyle in the South Pacific

Upcoming Activities

Elders, Minister meeting Monday, March 25th at 5:30 p.m..

We will have a Houston Food Bank truck on Tuesday, April 2nd at 8:00 a.m.

Easter Egg Hunt for the youth immediately after service today. Food will be provided. If you are interested in this a signup sheet is on the bulletin board. See River Lucy or Brooks McKelroy for more information.

Elders	Deacons	Minister
Ken Coleman	Zach Arthur	Bryant Perkins
Bobby Rader	Daniel Balch	
Don Taylor	Danny Balch	
Robert Ward	Walden David	
	Gus Tristan	

"Stand Firm in…Liberty"

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Here is why this is important: the Jews created a new holiday, Purim, to commemorate all this: *And Mordecai recorded these things and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, obliging them to keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same, year by year, as the days on which the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and gifts to the poor…Therefore they called these days Purim, after the term Pur.* **(Esther 9:20-23, 26)**

God had commanded Israel to keep a number of feast days under the law. But here we have a new day created by the people themselves, without any sort of commandment or prophetic word—and, importantly, with no condemnation from the inspired author. There is evidently no thought that creating a special day to remember what God had done for his people was unlawful.

Now, someone could push back on this in a couple of different ways. You could argue that the fact that it is included in Scripture shows tacit approval. Conversely, you could argue that just because it is not condemned does not mean that it is approved. To answer both of those arguments, let us consider a festival outside of Scripture.

Hannukah

We will talk a bit. about Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the Seleucid ruler of Judah a couple of centuries before Jesus, in our sermon this morning. For now, suffice it to say that he oppressed the Jews, and they rebelled under the leadership of the Maccabees. Ultimately, the Maccabees retook Jerusalem and cleansed the Temple. Listen to what the historian Josephus says about it: *Now Judas celebrated the festival of the restoration of the sacrifices of the temple for eight days…they were so very glad at the revival of their customs, when, after a long time of intermission, they unexpectedly had regained the freedom of their worship, that they made it a law for their posterity, that they should keep a festival, on account of the restoration of their temple worship, for eight days.* (Antiquities 12.7)

It's worth noting that no mention is made in the earliest sources of the "miracle" of oil for 8 days. But what is most interesting for our purposes is that this was being practiced in Jesus day. And look at what **John 10:22-23** says: *At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon.* The most natural reading is that Jesus was at the Temple for the festival. Not only is there no record of him denouncing the celebration as unlawful, but he was at the Temple at the time when its rededication was being celebrated!

Putting these two examples together, we have cases of man-made religious holidays—days set aside to honor God for something he had done for his people. Not only are they not condemned, but Purim is at least given tacit approval. And Jesus himself seems to celebrate Hannukah (and Purim too)!

There is a lot more we could say here if we had more space. But, taking Paul's principles in **Romans 14** into account (go read it, it's all about not binding opinions, specifically mentioning honoring certain days), if someone wants to celebrate the Resurrection annually—or commemorate the birth of Jesus, for that matter—we should let them do that. On the other hand, if that bothers someone's conscience, we should be sensitive to it. We must resist the urge to make hard and fast rules here. But it appears there is no commandment that is violated by having special religious holidays; to the contrary, Scripture seems to specifically allow it. We should neither bind them as obligatory as a church, nor judge those who do celebrate them. *And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.* **(Col 3:17)**

Bryant Perkins