

The Feast of Stephen

Celebration & Sacrifice in a New Year

Introduction

- This is a time of year where many of us have already enjoyed multiple gatherings and meals together with friends and family (feasts!). In many ways this is a vestige of Christian tradition since the church has long celebrated certain feasts during this time of the year for the purpose of glorifying God and reflecting upon His goodness.
- Interestingly, the feast that immediately followed Christmas on Dec. 26th was the Feast of Stephen. This is worth reflecting upon as we enter a new year because the incarnation of the Lord Jesus allows God's people to celebrate even while facing their own mortality.

Main Point: As we begin the new year reflecting upon the martyrdom of Stephen, we are reminded that times of both _____ and _____ lie ahead for us.

Feasting

Biblical Observations:

1. According to the OT, feasting often includes both _____ and _____ with others for the purpose of celebration.

Gen. 21:8—*And the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.*

1 Kings 3:15—*And Solomon awoke, and behold, it was a dream. Then he came to Jerusalem and stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and offered up burnt offerings and peace offerings, and made a feast for all his servants.*

Judg. 14:10—*His father went down to the woman, and Samson prepared a feast there, for so the young men used to do.*

2. God commanded Israel to celebrate certain feasts in remembrance of His _____.

Lev. 2-3, 5—²*“Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, These are the appointed feasts of the Lord that you shall proclaim as holy convocations; they are my appointed feasts.”*³*“Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work. It is a Sabbath to the Lord in all your dwelling places...”*³*In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight, is the Lord's Passover.*

3. The Prophets anticipated a time in the future when God's people would feast forever in God's _____.

Isa. 25:6-8—⁶*On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.*⁷*And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations.*⁸*He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken.*

4. The early church observed times of feasting together.

Acts 2:46-47—⁴⁶*And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,*⁴⁷*praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

Jude 1:12—*These are hidden reefs at your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, shepherds feeding themselves...*

“...the love-feast, [was] the most intimate service of worship the early church practiced. The love-feast was a communal meal that included observance of the Lord's Supper...” — Thomas Constable, *Jude*

5. The early church observed the command of the Lord to His people to eat a _____ of remembrance together.

1 Cor. 11:23-26—²³*For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread,*²⁴*and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”*²⁵*In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”*²⁶*For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

Key Point: Feasting is celebration in the _____ that looks back on what God has done in the past or forward to what He will do in the future!

Stephen

Biblical Observations:

1. Stephen bore witness to the Lord Jesus through his _____.

Acts 6:3,5—³*Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty...*⁵*And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit...*

2. Stephen bore witness to the Lord Jesus in his _____ of the truth.

Acts 6:9-10—⁹Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen...rose up and disputed with Stephen. ¹⁰But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.

Acts 7:51-52—⁵¹“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. ⁵²Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered,

3. Stephen bore witness to the Lord Jesus through in his _____.

Acts 7:56, 59-60—⁵⁶And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”...⁵⁹And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”⁶⁰And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Key Point: Stephen serves as an _____ to believers of what it means to live as witnesses of the Lord Jesus.

Celebration, Sacrifice, & the Incarnation

Biblical Observations:

1. In His incarnation, the Lord Jesus affirmed the _____ of feasting and celebration.

John 2:1-3, 9-10—¹On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ²Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. ³When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.”...⁹When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom ¹⁰and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine ‘til now.”

2. In His incarnation, the Lord Jesus experienced the realities of living as a servant of God in a _____ world.

Mark 3:3-38—³⁶And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. ³⁷And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. ³⁸But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion...

Matt. 26: 37-39—³⁷And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸Then he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.”³⁹And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”

3. In His incarnation, He made possible the _____ of all things through His death and resurrection.

Gal. 3:3—Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”

1 Cor. 15:48-49—⁴⁸As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

Rev. 21:3-4—³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

Key Point: The reality that our Savior has _____ to the right had of God allows us to live lives of celebration and sacrifice throughout all the days of our lives.

Questions for a New Year

- What times of celebration lie ahead in 2023? How do they look back, how do they look forward?
- What times of sacrifice lie ahead in 2023? What opportunities to bear witness in word and deed are before me?

“Grant, O Lord, that in all our sufferings here upon earth, for the testimony of thy truth, we may steadfastly look up to heaven, and by faith behold the glory that shall be revealed; and, being filled with the Holy Ghost, may learn to love and bless our persecutors, by the example of thy first Martyr Saint Stephen, who prayed for his murderers to thee, O blessed Jesus, who standest at the right hand of God to succour all those that suffer for thee, our only Mediator and Advocate. Amen.”

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