

1 Corinthians 5:7-8

Let Us Keep Celebrating the Festival

So can I ask how you're going to celebrate today? What's your Easter celebration going to look like this year. Well obviously we're already starting here this morning in worship. You're here or joining us at home to sing your loud alleluias of thanks for the good news of Easter. Christ is risen, he is risen, indeed! But what else? How else will you make the most of this glorious day. Maybe you have a traditional Easter meal. Ham and cheesy potatoes was ours growing up. Maybe you've got a few activities planned. Easter egg or easter basket hunts for the kids? Maybe a gathering with a some family and friends? Or maybe you'll just have a quiet morning and afternoon at home, and that's good too.

But I would venture a guess that IF you're getting together with family or friends, and particularly if you're hosting that gathering, your preparations to celebrate involved some cleaning. Maybe even some thorough cleaning. You know, the kind where you actually move the couch to vacuum. The kind where you get behind the counter top appliances. A real, thorough cleaning. Did any of you spend your day yesterday doing that? And even if not THIS weekend, I think we can all relate to that idea of cleaning in preparation to celebrate.

You know, because we're familiar with that idea, we have an immediate connection with the ancient Israelites but it might not be one you're even all that aware of. You might be familiar with some of the preparations that went into celebrating the Passover. The year old lamb without defect. The bitter herbs. The unleavened bread. All of it eaten in a ceremony of remembrance as the story of the exodus was retold. Maybe you're familiar with that. But the part that connects you to the Israelites of old might not be quite so familiar. You see, the Passover celebration happen within a longer celebration God commanded called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. That Feast lasted for 7 days, one of which was the actual Passover celebration. And the reason you have a connection with the Israelites of old is because in preparation for this feast, God told his people they needed to clean. A thorough cleaning, in fact.

So they swept and they wiped down their surfaces and their dishes and their cooking areas AND... they threw away their bread. What? You don't do that when you're getting ready to celebrate Easter? You don't throw your

bread away? Well, that's where our cleaning preparations diverge from theirs. You see, God's command for them to clean wasn't to impress the company they'd have over. It was get rid of all the yeast in the house. Just as the name of feast indicated, it was the Feast of Unleavened. And to celebrate, every speck of yeast was to be removed. **For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you must be sure to remove all yeast from your houses, for whoever eats anything leavened from the first day until the seventh day will be cut off from Israel.** So like I said, sweep the floors. Wipe the counter tops. Throw out your bread.

Strange to our ears, but with a point. You see, it was a picture. Yeast is everywhere. You might not realize it but wild yeast is as prevalent as the germs and bacteria all around us. Have you ever noticed that white film on the skin of grapes? That's actually wild yeast. Yeast is everywhere and it permeates everything. Scripture specifically picks up on it's ability for a tiny amount to permeate a whole batch of dough as a picture for how sin works in our hearts. Even a small sin allowed to grow in our hearts can wreak eternal havoc as it leads our hearts away from God.

So you can see what God was saying to his people right? Get rid of what I've commanded you to get rid of.

So what does this have to do with Easter. Well the spiritual implications of this OT festival, the Feast of Unleavened Bread with the Passover in its midst, along with its fulfillment in Christ on Good Friday and Easter Sunday is exactly what the apostle Paul had in mind as he considered the implications of Easter dawn for those who know that amazing news: Christ is risen! He is risen indeed.

Listen to Paul's urgent reminder **Purge out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, just as you are unleavened. For our Passover lamb has been sacrificed, namely, Christ! So let us keep celebrating the festival, not with old yeast, not with the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.**

What happened 2000 years ago...what those women saw, the angels and the message of risen Lord...what those disciples saw...the empty tomb and implied promises it brought...what happened on the first Easter morning is cause for continual celebration by God's people. Not just today, but everyday, Paul urges God's people, **let us keep celebrating the festival.** Let us keep celebrating what Christ has done. Let us keep celebrating with joy in our hearts the victory Easter brings.

So how do we do that? Paul explains that too. What's critical is not a matter of the right external celebration. It's that our hearts celebrate Christ as the Passover Lamb.

Look at what the message of Easter we heard the angels proclaim (He is not here, he has risen just as he said) means for you. Paul, writing to a problem-plagued, sin-challenged congregation in Corinth told them **You ARE unleavened**. To problem-plagued, sin-challenged Christians 2000 years later, God continues to remind you, **you ARE unleavened**. Because of Christ. Because of your Passover lamb, God can actually and truthfully look at you and call you perfect. He can call you free from sin. Unleavened. Untainted by the permeating nature of sin. He can do that because your Passover lamb shed his blood in your place. He paid the price for your sin. And when he rose on Easter dawn, he proclaimed to a world of sinners, your sins are forgiven. You have a new life in me. He has purged us from the yeast of sin by freeing us from the guilt our sins bring. And in him, we are now unleavened in God's sight. Christ is risen, he is risen indeed!

But that's not all. **Purge out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, just as you are unleavened**. Let us keep celebrating the festival! Easter means we don't stop at knowing the problems of our past and the sins of our future are purged from God's record. Easter also proclaims freedom from sin's power over us. Christ's resurrection means that you have been raised new with him. That new faith now has the power and the desire to purge the old yeast of sin and live as we have been made.

So each day we watch for the yeast of "malice and wickedness" that every day tries to grow anew in our hearts. We guard our hearts against the malice that looks at our fellow man and schemes evil against him. We guard our hearts against the wickedness that calls us to ignore God's holy will and follow our own path. It's part of celebrating the festival! Not painful guilt or with sinful pride. But with joy in the freedom our risen Lord has given.

Each day we celebrate the festival as we seek not only the comfort of the Passover Lamb's forgiveness but also its power to live with a sincere heart that finds strength in his saving truth. Each day we celebrate the festival as we delight that in his death and resurrection Jesus has declared us to be a new, unleavened batch of dough and has given us the power to live who we are in him!

Today, and every day, live as his new batch of unleavened bread. Today, and every day, clear out every remnant of that old yeast of malice and

wickedness that clings to our hearts. Today, and every day, throw that old yeast of “malice and wickedness” at the foot of his cross. Today, and every day, find at the empty tomb of your Passover Lamb the power that is yours to live in “sincerity and truth.”

That’s why, and that’s also how, we sing today and every day, **At the Lamb’s high feast.** That’s why, and that’s also how, we **praise our victorious King.** Such is our joy as this Easter day, and every day, we keep celebrating the festival!

Hams and hunts are fine ways to relax on an Easter day. But our celebration is a continual one of triumph and joy. The victory of Christ over sin is ours. The yeast has been purged and the power to take up that task has been given. **Easter triumph, Easter joy! This alone can sin destroy; From sin’s power, Lord, set us free, Newborn souls in you to be. Alleluia!** Amen.