

# Celebrating Amazing Moments with God

Lesson 11

Becoming a Generous Church

February 19, 2012

Have you ever met someone who surprised you? As you drove away you may have turned to your mate or a friend and remarked, “You know, he’s really not at all like what I thought he was. I was really surprised.”

Perhaps there are some things you need to revise about how you have thought about God, too. If you had a list of things you believe about God—what would it say? How would revising any erroneous things you have believed about God change your relationship with Him?

Many people, including many Christians, are convinced that God is a rigid perfectionist and an iron clad legalist. They can hardly imagine God being full of mercy, grace and kindness let alone God wanting to see His children living fun-filled lives that are full of joy.

But this is the truth about our heavenly Father, our God, the God who created heaven and earth and all that is in it. We discover the life of joy God desires us to experience in the ancient feasts of Israel. And we see where that joy ultimately leads us. But before we get to the festivals that that brought joy to the ancient Israelites let’s focus on what the Bible tells us God is really like.

This is important because in the end God is who He is. He isn’t who we think He is, who we want Him to be, or who we think He should be. He is who He is.

**The Bible gives us a good insight into who God really is—**

- God is holy (Is. 6.3; Rev. 4.8)
- God is righteous (Ps 89.14; 97.2)
- God is good (Mk. 10.18)
- God is love (2 Cor. 13.11)
- God is benevolent (Ps. 145.9, 15f.)
- God is merciful (Eph. 2.4; 1Pt. 1.3)
- God is full of grace (Eph. 1.6; 2.7)
- God is truth (1 Jn. 5.20; cf. Jer. 10.10; Rom. 3.4)

**Second, Jesus tells us, “If you really know me, you will know my Father as well (Jn. 14.7)—**

One of the strange realities of life is that many people are absolutely convinced that Jesus, the Son is much more loving, kind and gentle than our Heavenly Father. But Jesus tells us this isn’t the case. If we really know who Jesus is—we’ll also know who the Father is and what He’s like. We have Jesus’ word for this.

## Third, we see what God is like by what he says and emphasizes in Scripture.

- God has a tender heart for the poor (Dt. 24.14; Ps. 140.12; Prov. 17.5; 19.17; 21.13; 22.9; 22.22-23; 28.27; 29.7; 31.9).
- God has a tender heart for the widow and orphan, too (Dt. 10.18; Ps. 146.9; Prov. 15.25).
- God comforts His people (Mt. 23.37-38; 2 Cor. 1.3-4).

**Fourth, we see what God is like by what He does in Scripture.** While it is surprising to many people, just as Jesus went to celebrate the wedding in Cana, God likes to celebrate with His people. We see this in the great festivals God gave Israel to celebrate.

- **Passover** celebrated Israel's deliverance from the land of bondage
- **Shavuot** (pronounced sha-voo-it), celebrated the giving of the Law to Israel
- **Sukkoth** (pronounced su-kuth), commemorated Israel's time wandering or tenting (tabernacling) in the wilderness
- **Purim** (pronounced poor-um, either is correct), celebrates Israel's deliverance from wicked Haman through God's providential hand.
- **Chanukah** (pronounced han-na-kah), celebrates Israel's deliverance from wicked Haman through God's providential hand.
- **Israel was designed to be a joyful nation**, a nation that was constantly celebrating how God had powerfully moved in the lives of His chosen people.
- It's amazing to think that God gave Israel religious festivals that lasted up to a week. Imagine what it would be like to celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas for a week with your family and friends. Think of all the fun, joy and memories this would bring your family.

## Understanding the BIG picture—

- God told His people in Deuteronomy 12.7, “**Rejoice** in everything you have put your hand to, because the Lord your God has blessed you.”
- “Celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days after you have gathered the produce of your threshing floor and your winepress. ***Be joyful at your Feast***—you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, and the Levites, the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns. For seven days celebrate the Feast to your Lord your God at the place the Lord will choose. For the Lord your God will bless you in your harvest and in all the work of your hands, and ***your joy will be complete...***” (Dt. 16.13-17).

# GOING GENEROUS!

a Sermon Series by Dr. Jay Dennis & Connect Group Study by Pastor Terryl Delaney

- God delivered his people out of the bondage of Egypt and set them free.
- They were an enslaved people, a people of poverty. “But the Lord had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people (of Israel), and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians (Ex. 12.33-37).
- It has been quipped that God paid His people 400 years of back wages on the night of Passover. Jacob and his family had come to Egypt as a wealthy people. They were stripped of their wealth and made slaves. Now, God restored their wealth.
- Once in the wilderness, God invited His people to contribute toward the building of a dwelling place for Him, the tabernacle. He only asked those who were willing to give...
- “Moses said to the whole Israelite community, ‘This is what the Lord has commanded: From what you have, take an offering for the Lord. Everyone who is willing is to bring to the Lord and hair; ram’s skins, dyed red and hides of sea cows, acacia wood; olive oil for the light; spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense; and onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breast-piece.”
- God could have kept all the money. But He didn’t.
- God wants His people to give out of a heart of love and devotion.
- The offering for building the tabernacle was astonishing. We read in Exodus 36.4-6, “So all the skilled craftsmen who were doing all the work on the sanctuary left their work and told Moses, ‘The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work that the Lord commanded to be done.’ Then Moses gave the order and sent this word throughout the camp, ‘No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary. And so the people were restrained from bringing more, because what they had was more than enough to do all the work.”
- **The question:** What moved the people of Israel to be willing to give so much?
- **The answer:** We find the answer in association with the Shekinah cloud of glory, a fiery cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. It had joined them almost immediately when they left Egypt (Ex. 13.20-22).
- The shekinah cloud of glory was with the Israelites 24-7. It was a visible representation that God’s power and presence was with them. Shekinah, in biblical Hebrew, means to  *dwell, inhabit or settle*.

# GOING GENEROUS!

a Sermon Series by Dr. Jay Dennis & Connect Group Study by Pastor Terry Delaney

- It is easy to let this thought slip by us all too quickly with little or no thought. So let's stop and focus on it: **GOD'S PRESENCE IS HERE, IN THIS PLACE, RIGHT NOW IN THIS PRESENT MOMENT. GOD IS HERE, LITERALLY, WITH ME THIS VERY MOMENT. I'M NOT ALONE. GOD IS HERE. WOW!**
- Talk about excitement and joy. God created a sense of His power and presence in the religious festivals of Israel and seeing the cloud of shekinah glory over the tabernacle (and later, over the temple).
- David wrote in Psalms 22.3 that God indwells the praise of His people.
- Naturally, God is omnipresent. But there are times when God reveals (unveils) more of Himself to his people than at other times.
- The celebration of the religious festivals relived the outpouring of God's love, power and provision for his people resulting in a virtual eruption of praise. The visible testimony of God's presence seen in the ever-present shekinah glory did the same.
- The result was joy. As David writes in Psalms 16.11, "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore."
- When God's people have this kind of relationship with God, giving, even extravagant giving, is never an issue.
- How does this great truth affect us today? The presence and glory of God no longer indwells a manmade tabernacle (tent), the Holy Spirit now indwells every born again believer. We have the presence and power of God actually living within us through the person of God the Holy Spirit.
- The question is—do we feel His power and joy? Is He moving us to extravagant generosity? If not, why not? We can grieve the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4.30) and we can quench what He wants to do in and through us (1 Thess. 5.19). May this never be the case.
- May God always reign in our hearts so we can be the joyful people He created us to be.