Sabbath Sermon: The Resurrection To Come
Andrew J. Manuse, Pastor — 4/27/2024
First Fruits Ministries, an affiliate of Corner Fringe Ministries



Torah Portion: Here are the Torah Portion Readings for this week: Chol Hamo'ed Pesach (Intermediate Day of Passover): Exodus 33:12-34:26; Ezekiel 37:1-14, Song of Solomon 1-8: https://tinyurl.com/4fjz7be8

Shabbat Shalom, brothers and sisters. Please turn to your neighbors with a hug or a handshake and say good morning with the love of our LORD Yeshua. ——[pause, title screen]——You know, Jen and I like natural foods and making meals from scratch using our own ingredients as often as possible—time permitting, of course. You may know that we have hens for fresh eggs, and I've been buying raw milk for various reasons I won't get into now. I want to tell you that I truly think the little bit of raw milk I've drank is already starting to heal me of some of my lactose intolerance—and it was bad! It seems to be clearing up. Also, Jen has been eating fresh milled bread from Mighty Mill within the past few months, which is made from stone-milled wheat berries, and it seems to have some healing effect on her gluten intolerance. Now don't hear me wrong—all the Mighty Mill bread is out of the house this week—we've been working through the matzah every day, but I have to confess a little something to you, and I think it's something we ought to discuss today, specifically on this High Sabbath during the Week of Unleavened Bread. Two of the folks who were visiting here along with Pastor Kraig from Corner Fringe in February mill their own bread and they have been sharing photos and recipes on Facebook in the weeks since we've seen them. Jen and me, in our appetite for natural foods, actually bought our own stone mill a little more than a year ago, and we have the wheat berries to mill in it, but we haven't used it yet. Well let me tell you this. It was Jen's birthday on Wednesday, and I'll tell you what I was going to do. I was going to break out that mill and set it up, stone grind some of the wheat berries we have in the pantry and make some stone-ground pizza dough for some home-made pizzas, just like I saw our sister make on Facebook. My mouth was watering as I thought about it during the workday. When I went downstairs to get started, I thought to myself, "now where is the yeast...."



Yup, that's when it hit me, and it hit me hard. I said to myself, "This is the Feast of Unleavened Bread and you were getting excited about making pizza … Are you kidding me!" I told a few brothers in the faith about my indiscretion and one sent me this meme last night—yes, all in good fun—but look at this guy's face. This was exactly how I felt. This guy was me, and man was I low. I couldn't even read Psalm 43:5, "Why are you cast down, O my soul? Why are you disquieted within me?" I knew the answer to that question. I had just absentmindedly desired leavened bread during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This photo really is a great image of how I felt. Can any of you identify with this? When I went so far as to accidentally consume some yeast at one point in the past, this was the face. How is it that it didn't even occur to me until I was ready to go, or until after it was too late, even? It didn't even register that I was indulging in the forbidden fruit, so to speak. I wasn't just distraught, I was devastated. At least there was no yeast in the house on Wednesday. I punted quickly and went out to buy some steaks for the grill, which were a quite welcome addition to the table, but the whole drive to

and from the butcher shop, I was beating myself up. How could I allow the enemy to take me so off course? How could I not remember the LORD at this moment that I had spent so much time preparing my heart for? What was wrong with me? Would I be cut off? The enemy did not waste any time planting all these thoughts in my head. First the temptations, then the absentmindedness, and then the condemnation, and I can tell you he did not let up. I turned to prayer, asking for forgiveness, and I confessed my sin to three brothers. Besides sending the meme, my brother also noted, “Passover is war, [but] accidental consumption of yeast is not intentional [sin], and God knows your heart.” He then added this important piece, and this is why I'm telling the story. He said, “In moments like this, you’re reminded that you need the mercy of the LORD and all of your efforts will fall short without the grace of God. God gives us these moments to humble us. Embrace that blessing.” I couldn’t agree more, and thanks be to God for such wisdom. If only I had thought of that. Another brother said more directly, “Don’t overthink it. By dwelling on it, you’re slapping forgiveness in the face.” Yes, that's another approach away from the indiscretion, and perhaps I needed to hear that, too. When we don’t embrace the blessing of humility and the grace of God, it is also sinful. Both positions helped bring me to the right place right in the middle, fully dependent on the LORD for His grace, ready to walk forward in His will once more. Then came the advice of the third brother, who sent me Charles Spurgeon’s sermon, called “The Fainting Warrior: Our Lifelong Fight With Sin” from January 23, 1859 (https://youtu.be/7iM0UFNofcE). This contemplation really helped me take the whole ordeal to the next level, and honestly, I wish I could just read the whole thing to you right now. It's a perfect sermon for today, so if you haven't listened yet, check out the link I'm going to put in the description below. What I had contemplated wasn’t a small thing, because leaven represents sin, and sin can kill us forever. It is good when we suffer from the realization of sin in our lives so we can turn to Messiah Yeshua for the grace He offers us for salvation so that we can walk anew in the freedom of forgiveness toward His righteousness, which is what our redeemed spirits truly desire. Does your spirit desire this? It ought to.

As I had three friends give me wise counsel in the midst of my experiences this week to help direct me back on track, I have three verses from the wise counsel of God that I want to share with you today to tie this story together with where we’re going next in today’s message. First, in Psalm 139:23-24, the psalmist wrote “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” This ought to be our prayer daily—moment-by-moment even. Yes, we are forgiven for our sins, but we have to confess our sins to be forgiven of them, and to confess them we have to know that we’ve committed them. As we covered a few weeks ago in Leviticus 5, God even provides us with the opportunity to atone for unknowing sin, and we ought to pray humbly for such forgiveness also. But to pray for forgiveness from our known shortcomings that cause us righteous anxiety, yes, this is something we ought to be doing daily. If there is any wicked way in me, I want to know about it—I want it revealed—and I want to confess it so I can be forgiven. This is a good prayer. Sin ought to be something we hate; it ought to be something that troubles us when we think about it. Yeshua died on the cross to save us from it, and while we owe Him nothing but gratitude and praise for this, it ought to disturb us that He had to suffer on our behalf. It’s not something we ought to take lightly or consider flippantly, but it ought to cause us sorrow and remorse, and it is a good thing when it does. It means we are on the right track.

Secondly, I want to go back to that Psalm I referenced above, because it relates to the main theme I’m trying to explain. Though Psalm 43 begins as David’s prayer for vindication against an ungodly enemy and unjust men, we can think of his external battles as a metaphor for the internal battles we fight when

our spiritual enemy confronts us with the sins he has tempted us to commit. Consider the psalm from where it picks up at the end of verse 2 to verse 5. We read: “Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?” Isn’t that the question that I was asking myself this past week? I mourned much longer than I should have. Truly, I beat myself up, and that held me back from accomplishing all of the things God wanted from me this past week. I’m sure we’ve all been there. But afterward I prayed as David prayed, and I implore you to join in with me: “Oh, send out Your light and Your truth! Let them lead me; let them bring me to Your holy hill and to Your tabernacle.” Isn’t this the prayer of a preacher who wants to bring God glory in the Word that goes forth from His pulpit? Isn’t this what we all desire from the LORD; to be led by His Word into a deeper and more fulfilling relationship with Him; a relationship we can share with one another also? This is why humility and contrition are so important, for when we humble ourselves the LORD exalts us in Him. David writes, “Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy; and on the harp I will praise You, O God, my God.” Yes, when we confess and repent, when we suffer from the presence of sin in our lives and turn away from it toward the truth and light that Yeshua offers us by His grace, which He gave us through His sacrifice on the cross, then we can stand before Him and praise Him for what He has done for us. Our flesh doesn’t want to let go of its hold on our spirit; our sin nature doesn’t want to let the forgiveness of Messiah Yeshua liberate us, the enemy wants to deceive us into thinking that because we can never measure up to Yeshua, we can’t ever be with Him. But Yeshua is the God of our strength! He has delivered us from the deceitful and unjust enemy. He has paid the penalty for our shortcomings and invited us to walk with Him. This is why, like David, we have to double-down in prayer and say, “Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God.” We must walk on, not in sin, but in the light of Yeshua, casting off those things that attempt to draw us away, one-by-one, day-by-day, knowing that we have God as our hope, our redemption and our very life, and for this reason we ought to offer Him nothing but thanksgiving and praise.

In Spurgeon’s sermon, he began with a famous verse from the Apostle Paul, and the following excerpt comes from the third passage I want to reference. In quoting Paul, Spurgeon said, “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” He posed it as the lead question that he would answer throughout his whole sermon. Is this not the question that we find ourselves asking following a thoughtless indiscretion or unintentional sin? Hopefully we even ask this question when we slip up and lose our self-control, falling into unrighteousness. Paul was a man raised out of the depths of a depravity I hope none of us ever know; he was saved to the heights of grace that only the exceptionally damned can experience. He was a well-educated, Torah-keeping pharisee who made it his purpose to arrest, prosecute and even murder Christians because he believed they were blaspheming God. His murderous heart was leading him on the road to eternal death, but then Paul met God Himself on the way to Damascus and came to understand that in his zeal he was persecuting the One who truly saves, and he repented. Paul experienced a radical conversion of faith, He was healed, He received the Holy Spirit, He was baptized, and then He immediately began risking his own life to preach the truth of God’s grace through Messiah Yeshua. But even in this New Covenant state of salvation, in the new life that Paul was experiencing in Yeshua, Paul faced the trauma of sin. He wrote in Romans 7:21-25, “I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.” You see, Paul not only knew the law of God, but He desired to keep it, and he strove to keep it, but Yeshua revealed to him that he had not kept it and could not keep it even now. And yet, the Holy Spirit of God that dwelt within him helped him to keep it

more and more, just as Yeshua had promised in John 14:15-18. But even Paul, the one who was radically saved by Yeshua, fell short. The enemy warred against him and used his weak fleshly state to lure him into sin, just as the enemy does with you and me. This truth is what lead the Apostle John to write, “if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). It’s true. We all fall short, even after we’ve been saved. At the same time, this truth is not an excuse to sin—it is a warning against it, and a warning we ought to heed. John said a bit later, “by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.” (1 John 2:3). The love of God is perfected in us when our heart seeks to obey God and walk in righteousness, and this we ought to do. But we all fall short, and so thank God we have an Advocate with the Father, Messiah Yeshua the righteous (1 John 2:1), and “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). These truths, which are universally presented throughout the Scriptures by almost every prophet, are what lead Paul to conclude, “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” The answer is simple and it is glorious, and Paul offers it with humble gratitude we also ought to emulate. He said, “I thank God—through Messiah Yeshua our LORD!” We all ought to thank God! Thank you Yeshua for what you have accomplished on our behalf for we are dead in our sins without You! In You, Yeshua, we can walk in the newness of life!

The Feast of Unleavened Bread is a great time to recognize the impossibility of getting all of the leaven out of our homes, and in like manner, how impossible it is to get every scintilla of sin out of our flesh, as much as we might desire to do so. We can’t possibly do everything necessary to walk with God forever, even after coming to know Him and His ways, but we still ought to try with everything we've got, depending fully on Yeshua to help us fill in the gaps, lest we fall short. When the rich young ruler in Matthew 19 asked Yeshua, “What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life,” he was met with the right answer in reply, “If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.” Yeshua meant the commandments of Torah, of course, which He proceeded to list, in part, to point to the whole. Make no mistake: this we ought to do—it ought to be our heart’s greatest desire to obey the Word of the LORD, and there is no question that this is a requirement to make it into Heaven. Yeshua said so. But even when we flawlessly keep the commandments, or at least desire to keep them perfectly in our hearts, because that is the best we can hope for, there will be some area of our heart that holds on to sin and disqualifies us. We cannot get there on our own. Somehow the rich man knew his perceived obedience was not enough, because he said, “All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?” Perhaps he was nobly asking the LORD to search his heart and find any wicked way in him so he could walk in the everlasting way? This is a question we ought to ask. This is the hope we ought to have.. But when we ask this question, we also ought to be prepared to take action on the answer we receive, because obedience to the living God is life to us. The LORD responded by asking the rich man to sell everything and follow Him, perhaps not a literal request or at least not necessarily something that each of us has to legalistically do. The problem here is that Yeshua’s command revealed this rich man’s true heart condition. He went away sorrowful, holding up his earthly possessions as an idol that he put before the LORD. Perhaps he didn’t keep all of the commandments after all? He was standing before the Creator of Heaven and Earth and everything in them; the one who gives abundantly to all who love Him. How could He not trust that God would give Him a hundredfold of everything Yeshua asked him to give up in this life plus the eternal life he sought? It is because his flesh nature blinded him to the Truth of God’s Kingdom: When we build a relationship of faith and trust in Yeshua, all things we could possibly imagine and more will be available to us in the eternal life He gives us that starts right now, but we have to build that relationship and act on the faith and trust we say we have. When we trust in our flesh alone,

as this rich young man did, there is no way we can make it to Heaven. We deny Yeshua when we put other things in this life before Him. This is the meaning of Yeshua's answer to the question, "Who then can be saved?" It's straightforward: "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." We can't do it in the flesh, but if the Spirit of God dwells within us, we can do it with Yeshua. He added, "everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for my Name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold and inherit eternal life." Again, He is not saying that each of us must literally do this. However, should any of these people or things come before the LORD, it is imperative that we put Yeshua first and forsake whatever is necessary in this life to walk after Him.

Perhaps the LORD worked on the rich young man's heart and eventually won him over, maybe He didn't. The choice was ultimately up to the man, and it is also up to you and me. Yeshua says to each of us right now, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me." This is a Feast, after all. Do we not want to dine with the LORD? We need Yeshua—the resurrected Messiah—we need to know Him intimately and trust in the free gift He gave us that we're now celebrating. What an honor to sit at His table! Messianic congregations sometimes underemphasize this truth because the modern church has been so dismissive of the law, and there is a moral imperative to correct that error. And we ought to correct it, because Scripture is clear that the Saints endure by keeping the commandments of God and the faith in Yeshua, a testimony of two that establishes our entry into the Kingdom of God (Revelation 14:12). At the same time, particularly on a day like today, we ought to focus on our own deficiency in making it into the Kingdom without the grace of God, something we embrace by faithfully trusting Messiah's finished work on the cross and His resurrection from the grave. When I personally can't do something as simple as disregarding yeast for a week without stumbling, how can I possibly hope to make it into Heaven on my own merit? What other thoughts, words or actions, or lack thereof, are keeping me away from the Kingdom of God? I deeply regret every shortfall, I rebuke every temptation, I confess every sin, I turn to walk back toward the LORD at every chance I get, but without the grace of our LORD it all falls short. This is why Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8-10, "By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Messiah Yeshua for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." It's important that we turn toward the commandments—it's imperative that we walk in them—it's required for salvation, but it's also true that this is only half of the equation. Without the grace of God through Messiah Yeshua, without our love for Him and His perfect righteousness and our trust in His lovingkindness and mercy, we can't enter the Kingdom. But with God, all things are possible. When we choose to follow Yeshua; when our spirit strives to please Him by doing His will, and when we trust everything He's done and promised to do, we can look forward to a resurrection similar to His at the End, which will lead us to the very place He is preparing for us even now. He desires that we join Him there, to dine with Him.

And so, as we celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread through Monday evening, we ought to remember that Yeshua is the unleavened bread and the unblemished lamb who offered up Himself for us, and this is why He has commanded us to partake in the unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine to memorialize what He has done for us. We have to accept His free gift, and we symbolize that acceptance by partaking in the unleavened bread and fruit of the vine this week. In 1 Corinthians 11:1, 23-25, we read Paul's teaching on the matter. He wrote, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Messiah. … For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night

in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the LORD's death until He comes.'" We learn in Matthew 26, Luke 22, and Mark 14 that Yeshua had offered this memorial commandment to His disciples during a Passover Seder, and so we know the context for this commandment from the LORD.

It was not a new commandment. In Leviticus 23, we can see the LORD command Israel to "eat unleavened bread" on each of the seven days of the feast, and also to make an offering by fire to the LORD on each of the seven days. It's hard to say that we ought to simply eat unleavened bread as food with no spiritual purpose when Paul notes in 1 Corinthians 11, "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the LORD's body" (1 Corinthians 11:28-29) and then he also wrote, "If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home" (1 Corinthians 11:34a). The act of eating unleavened bread is simply a physical action that we take, but it's not about the matzah—it's about what the matzah represents.

When combined with the idea of the offering by fire to the LORD, we can see the memorial of communion during the Feast of Unleavened Bread really take shape, especially when paired with the idea that Yeshua said to eat the unleavened bread and drink the fruit of the vine during the Feast in memory of Him. Review Psalm 141:2, Revelation 5:8 and Revelation 8:3-4, where we can see the WORD of God offer the interpretation that our offerings by fire metaphorically implies our prayer and worship. The LORD is commanding us to pray with gratitude and worship Him on each day of the feast? Don't we do that every day anyway? We ought to double-down during this week, and we ought to add the memorial Yeshua commanded to go along with it. And so, when we eat unleavened bread and drink the fruit of the vine to symbolize the blood of the unblemished lamb each day of the feast, we are internalizing the understanding that it was Yeshua's sinless sacrifice that has made us worthy of eternal life. It's not something we can accomplish on our own, but it is something we have to accept in the way that God has articulated in His Word. It's something we have to take into ourselves. When we come together during this feast, we ought to offer up our prayers and praise to Yeshua and memorialize His sacrifice, for in His sacrifice alone we ought to put our hope. This is a salvational faith.

When we were discussing the Torah reading for the Intermediate Day of Passover at dinner last night, my wife Jen noticed something interesting about Exodus 34:26 that I want to share with you that expands the understanding I've been discussing, and that particular observation led me to also examine the broader context of the verses that you see on the screen. When understood metaphorically and prophetically, these verses point to what Yeshua accomplished, to how the LORD desires that we honor Him with an annual memorial of these accomplishments, and to how we ought not remember His sacrifice. We're going to get into all three lessons here. First off, the LORD reminded Israel of the golden calf incident, noting in verse 17, "You shall make no molded gods for yourselves." I think this verse has prophetic significance for keeping the feast, particularly in the modern day, but more on that in a moment. Right after this verse, in verse 18 the LORD said, "The Feast of Unleavened Bread you shall keep. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, in the appointed time of the month of Aviv." And so you see here, the LORD has repeated the commandment to eat unleavened

bread again, establishing it as something very important to Him, and He is quite clear here that it ought to be done only in the month of Aviv, which is also called Nisan, during the appointed time of the Feast. A little later in the text, the LORD added another element. Notice in verse 25 where He said, “You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leaven, nor shall the sacrifice of the Feast of Passover be left until morning.” This verse is a direct tie to the death of Yeshua on the cross. The lamb had to be unblemished when sacrificed for Passover, but additionally, the lamb was sacrificed with unleavened bread, rather than leavened bread. Yeshua, when sacrificed as “the Lamb of God” and the “Bread of Life” on the cross had to be without sin, and He had indeed lived a flawless life. It’s a direct correlation that points to the memorial celebration He asked us to keep. The last section of this verse is important also. When the LORD said, “nor shall the sacrifice … be left until morning,” this points to Yeshua’s body being lain in the tomb by Joseph of Arimathea before sundown. In the account of John 19, the Jews insisted that the bodies not remain on the cross past sundown when the Sabbath would begin. In Luke’s account in chapter 23, Joseph of Arimathea laid Yeshua in his tomb “as the Sabbath drew near.” This correlates with a law in Deuteronomy 21:23 that states that the body of one condemned to hang on a tree must not remain overnight, and Yeshua’s prompt burial wasn’t just to avoid defiling the Sabbath, but also to honor the Torah. We all know that death could not hold Him, and the resurrection of the LORD came next. Likewise, we read in Exodus 34:26, “The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring to the house of the LORD your God.” We know from John 20:17 that the risen Messiah said to Mary, “Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God’” (John 20:17). It was later that same evening, on the “first day of the week,” when Yeshua appeared before the disciples and said “shalom” to them (John 20:19). According to Leviticus 23:9-11, the priest was commanded to wave the sheaf of the first grain of the harvest before the LORD so it would be accepted on our behalf … “on the day after the Sabbath.” Thus we can see that the LORD Yeshua presented Himself before the throne of Heaven as our first fruits offering, to atone for our sins, and then He returned to show Himself alive to His disciples as a witness for us. Before we move on to talk more about the resurrection, I want to remind you of the first verse we read in Exodus 34:17 regarding the LORD’s prohibition against molded gods. After the LORD explained how the first of the firstfruits ought to be brought to the house of the LORD, we read, “You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.” This clause is seemingly out of place, but when Jen reminded me that the act of boiling a goat in its mother’s milk is a pagan fertility ritual, it struck us that there is a single message being communicated here. The LORD is instructing us how to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread and how not to keep it, especially in light of Yeshua’s resurrection from the dead. First, we ought to memorialize the LORD’s death by eating unleavened bread on each of the seven days of the feast. We ought to offer up prayers, thanksgiving and praise to the LORD along with this memorial. When combined with Yeshua’s commandment to drink the fruit of the vine with the unleavened bread, and the First Fruits commandment to combine a grain offering, an offering made by fire, and a drink offering of wine, it’s clear that the memorial also ought to remind us of the blood Yeshua shed for us to establish His new covenant. However, our memorial ought not include any molten images meant to represent God, meaning that we should not look to or memorialize the crucifix as part of our celebrations. Likewise, we ought not participate in any pagan fertility rituals along with our memorial of the LORD’s death and resurrection. It seems like the LORD could see how later generations would combine His memorial with Ishtar’s celebration surrounding the spring equinox. Ishtar, or Easter as many Christians call the holiday today, is the remnant of a fertility celebration, and both eggs and bunnies were a part of it even back in ancient days.

As the LORD explained through the prophet Ezekiel, the teachers of God's Word ought to "teach … the difference between the holy and the unholy, and teach … discern[ment] between the unclean and the clean. In controversy they shall stand as judges, and judge … according to [God's] judgments. They shall keep My laws and My statutes in all My appointed meetings, and they shall hallow My Sabbaths" (Ezekiel 44:23-24). The prophesy seems quite significantly relevant to our topic, particularly when earlier in the book, Ezekiel wrote, "Her priests have violated My law and profaned My holy things; they have not distinguished between the holy and unholy, nor have they made known the difference between the unclean and the clean; and they have hidden their eyes from My Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them" (Ezekiel 22:26). In both verses, God's teachers were mixing His holy commandments with the profane actions of the pagan peoples around Israel, particularly during the Holy Convocations and Sabbaths of the LORD. They were even ignoring the LORD's Sabbaths and making their own. But the LORD has told us which days to worship. The Feast of Unleavened Bread, in particular, has three Sabbaths; namely, the first and last day as well as the intermediate Sabbath that we are celebrating today. The LORD does not want us to mix pagan elements or celebrations with the commandments that He has laid out for us to memorialize what He has done for us. He wants us to hope in what He has promised, and not in our own way. He wants us to keep His feast with sincerity and truth, with the intention of drawing in near to Him as He draws in near to us. These feasts are all about building our relationship with Him, after all.

Perhaps you might think I'm taking this interpretation too far? First of all, consider how I began today's message. If any of us eat leaven during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, or even contemplate eating leaven in our hearts, as I did, it is a sin against the perfect manner in which the LORD has asked us to keep the feast. When we become aware of this sin, we ought to confess it and ask for the LORD's forgiveness, determining to bend our hearts toward Him and His desires, and then He will freely forgive us and won't even remember what we did against Him. What if, on the contrary, we willfully eat leaven during the feast and do not think anything of it? What if we bow before a crucifix, a molten god, if you will, or participate in an Easter Egg hunt and eat chocolate bunnies, even during a different season than God's appointed time, and say we're remembering Yeshua's death and resurrection? All I can say to you is that I personally do not want to find myself in that position, not now and not ever again, so help me God. It's not only Ezekiel who speaks to this issue. The LORD is quite specific throughout His Scripture that we ought to separate the holy from the profane. Another notable example is Leviticus 11, where the LORD explained which meats we can eat and which we can't. There in verses 46-47 we read, "This is the law of the animals and the birds and every living creature that moves in the waters, and of every creature that creeps on the earth, to distinguish between the unclean and the clean, and between the animal that may be eaten and the animal that may not be eaten.'" The LORD explains that eating an unclean animal is an abomination; it's sheqets (שֶׁקֶץ), detestable, from shaqats (שָׁקַץ), meaning to detest, make detestable; in other words, something that is idolatrous. If we put eating unclean meats before the instruction of the LORD, we are holding the food up as something more valuable than our love of the LORD. What did Yeshua say about the rich young ruler who put his fortune before His desire for the LORD? With man, it is impossible to enter Heaven, but with God, all things are possible. If you aren't yet eating clean, pray for the LORD to give you His heart and a desire to please Him. The Apostle Paul also speaks directly to this issue, and not just regarding mixing the holy with the profane, but specifically mixing the holy with the profane during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The whole context which the first letter to the Corinthians is written is leading up to the Passover, which Paul instructs us to "keep" with "the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." We ought not keep the feast with malice or

wickedness, and certainly he means malice or wickedness toward one another, but he also means we ought not show any malice or wickedness toward God. To love God is to keep His commandments, and loving God is the first and greatest commandment. Loving one another is the second. To be sincere then, we ought to truly desire to meet with the LORD this week and do what He has asked of us, and to keep the feast with truth simply means to keep it according to the Word of God, which we've been exploring.

Further on in his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul discusses the prevalence of idolatry in the pagan culture and instructs the Gentile Corinthians to avoid it when they come together to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread. He emphasized the point that the idols themselves are powerless when compared with our Creator God, who redeemed us by His blood, but then he asked: should we provoke the LORD to jealousy? He is a jealous God. He wants to be first. That's what He told the rich man who wandered off not willing to give up his riches. Whoever puts God first will be given the abundance of God's kingdom. What about those who don't put God first? Do we want to find out? Here's Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 10:18-22, "Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?" It's important to recognize then that Yeshua has instructed us how to celebrate His Passover memorial and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. He has also instructed us how not to celebrate it. In no uncertain terms, Paul notes that we cannot worship God at the same time that we are worshipping demons. We can't drink from a communion cup before a crucifix, and we ought not eat chocolate bunnies or deviled eggs with our unleavened bread. The LORD has warned us.

But with His warning, the LORD has also given us a picture of the glory that is to come when we draw in near to Him during this time and remember the grace that He offers all of us who desire to do things His way, even when we fall short. Continuing with the Passover theme, Paul detailed the beautiful fulfillment of the feast in the death and resurrection of Yeshua as well as the future prophetic hope of the feast in the resurrection of God's faithful on the Last Day. Yeshua did not die and rise again just to forgive our sins, but also to make a way for us so we can also die and rise again into eternal life like He did. Consider our congregation's theme verse, 1 Corinthians 15:20-23, which reads: "But now Messiah is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Yeshua all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Yeshua the firstfruits, afterward those who are Yeshua's at His coming." You see, this is the grace that God offers to us; for those of us who trust in Yeshua and keep God's commandments because of the love we have for the one who saved us, we will live, even though we must die. Yeshua is the resurrection and the life. He is our first fruits. He rose from the dead on the day after the Sabbath during the week of Passover. This year, those days are set apart by quite a few days, but in the year of the crucifixion, there were three days separating Yeshua's death and resurrection as prophesied. Everything had to line up perfectly, and according to the Biblical records, it did. Now that Yeshua rose from the dead as our first fruits, our life ought to be dedicated to following Him so that when He arrives we can be a part of the later harvest. We have to put Him first so we too can be resurrected from death to life. It is what He is calling us to do.

In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul explained the coming resurrection with a little more detail. We read, “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Yeshua died and rose again, even so, through Yeshua, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a Word from the LORD, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the LORD, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the LORD himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Messiah will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the LORD in the air, and so we will always be with the LORD. Therefore encourage one another with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). I do find these words encouraging, especially when compared with all of the other promises of the resurrection in Scripture. With Godly sorrow, we approach the LORD and get closer to Him. We do not grieve as others who have no hope.

Later in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul wrote: “Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:51-53). This is the promise we have in Messiah Yeshua, when we live in Him and walk along His narrow path the way He walked. When we do the things He did, relying on His grace to cover our shortcomings, desiring to overcome our fleshly existence, we truly will be transformed to be perfect like He is perfect, at the appointed time. In Hebrews 6, the author calls “the resurrection of the dead” an “elementary doctrine of Messiah” and “a foundation” of the faith. Almost every New Testament writer spoke about it, and Yeshua Himself foretold it as the reward for building a relationship with Him in this life. But an important principle of Scripture ought to come into play as we prepare to close out today’s message in celebration of our risen savior and anticipation of our own resurrection in Him, and that is this: All New Testament doctrinal realities have to be backed up by prophesy in the Torah or the prophets.

And while I can spend another hour analyzing all of the different Scriptures on the resurrection, I want to revisit the amazing prophesy in Ezekiel 37 that ought to leave no doubt of the doctrine’s validity. We’re going to read starting with verse 1, where Ezekiel writes: “The hand of the Lord came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones. Then He caused me to pass by them all around, and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and indeed they were very dry. And He said to me, ‘Son of man, can these bones live?’ So I answered, “O Lord God, You know….” And doesn’t God know, after all, which souls waiting in Sheol will rise again and live forever in His Kingdom? I dare not judge which bones will live, for God alone can judge the disposition of His people. All I can say for sure is that those souls who love God and keep His commandments will be there by His grace, and that’s what and why we are celebrating today.

The passage continues, “Again He said to me, ‘Prophesy to these bones, and say to them, ‘O dry bones, hear the Word of the Lord! Thus says the Lord God to these bones: ‘Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I am the Lord.’ So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to bone. Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but there was no breath in them.” I love this! Prophesy to the bones: “hear the

WORD of the LORD!" Paul explained, "For the LORD himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command." Yes, the very Word of the LORD, the Word of Yeshua, will raise up bones from the grave. He is the resurrection and the life, and whoever believes in Him will not die, but live. It is this day that we ought to live for and nothing should be more important to us than hearing our beloved's voice, when He calls us up from our slumber.

The passage continues, "Also He said to me, 'Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord God: 'Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.' So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army. Then He said to me, 'Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel.' … " (Ezekiel 37:1-11a). Is there anything impossible with God? The children of Israel, those native born and those grafted in, will be raised up by the name of Yeshua. But we will also live when we are born again of the Holy Spirit, and without this experience there can be no resurrection. Dead bones won't live without the Spirit dwelling within.

The Holy Spirit of Yeshua will unite all of us, the remnant whom the LORD calls, together in His Kingdom, as the Prophet Joel explains, "It shall come to pass afterward that I will pour My Spirit on all flesh;" … and it shall come to pass that whomever calls upon the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the remnant whom the LORD calls (Joel 2:28a, 32)." Whoever calls out Yeshua, Yeshua, and truly desires to be with Him will meet the LORD in the air and be with Him forever. His grace is sufficient for us, and today we are rehearsing this wonderful time to come, for He is risen, and He desires to rise us up to be with Him. He has gone to prepare a place for us.

In the meantime, the LORD calls out to us in this time and pleads with our hearts. He desires our humility and our repentance, so He can exalt us. He wants a long-term relationship with us—eternity! To arrive, He expects us to endure through failures and insufficiencies, through indiscretions and errors, returning to Him each and every time, calling out to Him to help cover us with His grace, to help redirect our hearts to join together with His way, His truth and His life, for no one gets to the Father except through Him. He died on the cross to enable this, as the prophet Joel also foretold. In Joel 2:12-14, we read, "'Now, therefore,' says the Lord, 'Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.' So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm. Who knows if He will turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him—a grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord your God?" He has left this blessing behind Him, the grain offering and the drink offering for the LORD, for it is for His glory that He seeks to save us by His body and blood. He asked us to memorialize this blessing with prayer and gratitude. He desires our company and has given us everything we need to come into His presence forever. Let us be ready for Him by seeking His mercy and grace with humble, contrite and obedient hearts that celebrate with Him according to His will. For when we draw near to Him, He draws near to us. Shabbat shalom.