

Sermon: The Life of the Party

Text: John 7

Discussion Questions:

Talk about the major holidays/family gatherings in our modern American culture.

- How did each of these holidays get their start?
- What is unique about each one that you love?
- Do you think of these holidays as a “pilgrimage”—a journey back to “home”?
- What place does God have in these holidays?
- What place does family have in these holidays?

The Old Testament outlined three major “feasts” or festivals that were to be a part of the Jewish annual calendar. These are described in **Exodus 23:14-17**:

“Three times a year you are to celebrate a festival to me. Celebrate the Festival of Unleavened Bread; for seven days eat bread made without yeast, as I commanded you. Do this at the appointed time in the month of Aviv, for in that month you came out of Egypt. No one is to appear before me empty-handed. Celebrate the Festival of Harvest with the firstfruits of the crops you sow in your field. Celebrate the Festival of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in your crops from the field. Three times a year all the men are to appear before the Sovereign Lord.”

1. **Passover** (aka: **Feast of Unleavened Bread** and **Firstfruits**)—This was the first feast in the Jewish calendar year as God directed (Exodus 12:1-2). Passover was actually two feasts—Passover, followed by the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread—its specific purpose was to remember God's redemption of Israel from slavery in Egypt.
2. **Feast of Weeks** (also called **Pentecost** or **Harvest Feast**)—This was to be a celebratory feast 50 days (“penta” = 50) after Passover celebrating the first fruits of the wheat harvest in the spring of the year (Leviticus 23:15-21; Deuteronomy 16:9-12).
3. **Feast of Tabernacles** (also called **Feast of Booths** and **Feast of Ingathering**)—This feast, in the fall of the year, commemorated two events—the pilgrimage from Egypt to the Promised Land in Canaan and the fruitfulness of the Promised Land (Leviticus 23:33-43; Deuteronomy 16:13-15). Celebrants lived in rough booths during the week to remember the sparse living conditions in the 40-year journey through the wilderness.

All ceremonially clean and able-bodied males were required to journey to Jerusalem each year for all three feasts. Spaced from early spring through the fall, the three feasts were a continual reminder to Jews of God's redemption from slavery into a life of abundance.

- Discuss what you see as the most important aspect of each feast, and why it is you think God required this particular celebration.

Examination:

- Read **John 7:1-13**
 - Do you think Jesus was avoiding the region of Judea—and more specifically the city of Jerusalem—because He was afraid of the Jewish rulers (v. 1)?

- Thinking about having Jesus as your brother can raise a lot of very interesting questions when you really stop to ponder it. We know that Jesus never sinned. We also know that by the time Jesus was 12, He had a keen awareness that God was His true Father. We can't know for sure—but how do you think these things impacted family dynamics? How do you think Mary handled this?
 - What did Jesus' brothers think was His motivation (v. 4)? Does it surprise you that they didn't believe in Him (v. 5)?
 - Do you think Jesus' brothers secretly wished for His death (vv. 6-8)—or were they clueless as to the murderous intent of the Jewish leaders?
 - Jesus, it seems, was planning to go to the festival (v. 10). Why do you think He told his brothers He wasn't going—and then went anyway?
 - Think about this interesting dynamic at the festival (vv. 10-13). Everyone seems to have been looking for Him. There was widespread whispering, with “sides” being taken. Some thought Him a good man—others thought Him a liar. What side would you have been on and why?
- Read **John 7:14-24**.
 - Why do you think Jesus waited until halfway through the festival to “go public”?
 - What are some words to describe the way Jesus taught (v. 15)?
 - How does choosing to do God's will validate the truth of His words (v. 17)?
 - How does verse 18 (Jesus' true motive) connect with verse 4 (the motive Jesus' brothers ascribed to Him)?
 - Jesus is clearly referring back to the miracle in John 5 (vv. 19-24)—healing the lame man on the Sabbath. Why do you think Jesus brings this up?
 - Read **John 7:25-44**.
 - What does Jesus claim about Himself in verses 25-29? How does this connect with John's purpose in writing this Gospel (Jn 20:30-31), that we would believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God?
 - What do you think it means that they tried to seize Him, but didn't lay a hand on Him? What do you think that looked like?
 - What caused many in the crowd to believe in Him (vv. 30-31)?
 - This had now escalated into a significant conflict (32). Where was Jesus going—that they would be able to find Him?
 - What offer does Jesus make to anyone who believes in Him (vv. 37-39)?
 - Read **John 7:45-53**.
 - Why don't the temple guards arrest Jesus (vv. 45-49)?
 - How do the Pharisees view the crowds & the “common people” (v. 49)?
 - Hmm...what do you make of Nicodemus—going on the record in support of Jesus (vv. 50-52)? How much courage did this take? Do you think Nicodemus was “born again” by this point?

Application:

The world is still divided over Jesus. Perhaps now more than ever. What side to you stand on? Why? Are you willing to stand up for Jesus, even when those around you hate Him?