# Christ In The Feast Of Tabernacles Dr Jason Hubbard Dr Darrell Johnson

Christ in the Feast of Tabernacles - Dr Jason Hubbard / Dr Darrell Johnson

In Leviticus 23:34-43, God instructed the people to build temporary shelters (sukkah) and to live or tabernacle in them for 7 days to remind them that God tabernacled among them in the desert. The Feast was held in the fall where worshippers would live in little ‘huts’ or ‘tents’ to recall the days when their ancestors lived in tents as they made their way through the Sinai desert. The feast was and still is a time to remember.

They remembered how God-the Living God himself-graciously choose to come and live with them in a tent called the Tabernacle . The feast was and still is a time to Renew Hope. The Living God himself, would one day tabernacle among the people of God, not only just among them but also dwell in them by his Spirit!

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt (tabernacled) among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

“In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (Eph. 2:22).

Water Ceremony

At the time of Christ, the Feast of Tabernacles was extremely rich with symbolism, and theology. There were two major components: a water ceremony, and a light ceremony. The water ceremony recalled the fact that God provided water from the rock, flowing as they journeyed through the desert. During this ceremony the Jews would remember that God had promised them a greater miracle-the miracle of God pouring out his Spirit upon his people, filling and flooding them with the water of life (Isaiah 44:3-4). During the Feast, the Priests were divided into three groups; one group making the sacrifices, the second group would depart through the Eastern Gate to the Matzah Valley where they would cut willows, the third group led by the High Priest would go out to the Water Gate, to the Pool of Siloam to draw a golden vase of living water while his assistant held a silver vase full of wine. At the same time, both the second and third groups would return to the Temple. The priests with the willows would march in unison, swinging them to produce the sound of a rushing wind. A primary text and song proclaimed during this ceremony at the time of Christ was Isaiah 44:3-4,

“For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. They shall spring up among the grass like willows by flowing streams.”

As both groups reached their gates, the shofar would blow and all would be quiet. One man with a flute would then stand and begin to play. He was called the "Pierced One" and would lead the procession in with a call for the wind and water to enter the Temple. The priest with sacrifices would lay them on the altar. The people would sing Mayim which means water (Isaiah 12:3), then the vases were poured into the bowls on the corners of the altar. At that point, the priests with the willows would begin laying them against the altar to form a sukkah (God's covering). Each day, excitement would build until the 7th day.

When the hush fell over the crowd, they could hear the water being poured out. In John 7:37-38, Jesus (The Pierced One) spoke the words,

"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me streams of living water will flow from his innermost being."

Light Ceremony

Next was the light ceremony. Jesus claimed, “I am the light of the world; follow me and you will not walk in darkness but will have the light of Life” (John 8:12). Jesus could have made that claim anywhere, to anyone, at any time but he choose to make it in a particular context during the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:2). On the first night of the Feast, when the sun had set to the sound of joyful singing, they would light four 20ft high candelabras, looming over the city so that all of Jerusalem was aglow with light! During this ceremony they would recall how God had guided them through the desert with a pillar of fire by night and cloud of glory by day. God could guide because God is Light. For seven nights people celebrated God as Light and then on the eighth night the candles were extinguished and they looked forward again to next year when light would light up the city of Jerusalem again. It was on the eight night when Jesus, walking through the court of women proclaims, “I am the Light. I am the Light of the World.” His statement is brilliant in every sense of the word! It’s as if Jesus is saying, “I am the light that pierces the darkness every night, illuminating the whole world.” As William Barclay writes of Jesus, ‘I am the light that never goes out. ’ Staggering! And not just light ‘of the world,’ but light ‘for the world.’ As it says in Isaiah 9:2,

“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”

As the apostle Paul declares, “God who said, let light shine out of darkness’ has shone in our hearts to give us the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ’ (2 Cor. 4:6). Jesus is God with a face. Jesus Christ, the Morningstar, shines out during the darkest and the coldest time of the night. He is the brilliant one. He is the dazzling one. He is the chandelier of heaven! He is clothed in garments of light. His face shines brighter than the sun. His eyes are like flames of fire, with burning desire to do the will of the Father!

Jesus calls us to follow him and be the “light of the world” (Matt. 5:14-16). He calls us to reflect the light of his life to those around us! Those who love the light come into the Light so that all will be exposed. Nothing is hidden from God. Light reveals and exposes all things. There is no such thing as a “private moment.” The true acid test of whether we are being the light of the world, walking in the light as children of light is whether we love one another. I John 2:10,

“Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble.”

Let’s ask the Father to “Light up the Nations” with his glorious Son. Come Lord Jesus and ‘tabernacle’ in our midst through united, day and night prayer, praise and worship!

I AM

After the Exodus out of Egypt, God commanded Moses to raise funds from the Israelites saying, ‘Let them construct a sanctuary for Me that I might dwell among them’ (Exo 25:8). The tabernacle was to be a place where the Living God would dwell among the redeemed people of God.

“I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God. 46 And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them. I am the LORD their God” (Exo. 29:45-46).

As Israel travelled through the wilderness there was this glorious presence of God dwelling near them in this tent-tabernacle. Therefore the central focus of this Feast of Tabernacles was the presence of the Living God. The feast celebrates God’s gracious decision to dwell among His people and manifest his Glory to them!

As we mentioned earlier, each of these Jewish feasts had a particular liturgy that accompanied them at the time of Christ. Here are a few more texts that were read, sung, and reflected upon during the Feast of Tabernacles. Notice some of the key words …

“O Israel, trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield. 10 O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield. 11 You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield” (Psalm 115:9-11).

Notice the pronouns, He, 3x He, He, He …

Psalm 46, 50, and 81 were also sung during the feast. Note Psalm 46:10,

“Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!”

Notice the recurring pronoun, I 3x I, I, I …

And portions of Isa 40 – 55

“Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he” (Isa 41:4).

““You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me” (Isa 43:10).

“even to your old age I am he, and to grey hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save” (Isa 46:4).

Did you see the recurring combination of the pronouns ‘I’ and ‘He’ in the phrase ‘I am He’?

The Hebrew word for I is Ani . The Hebrew word for He is hu. Ani-hu literally means I-He. When the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek, the translators rendered Ani-hu by the Greek words ego eimi. Most translators will render it ‘I am He.’

On the Sabbath of the Feast of Tabernacles the Levitical priests sang the ‘Song of Moses’ recorded in Deuteronomy 32. The high point of that song is verse 39 where we hear God speak,

“See now that I, I am He, and there is no God besides me; It is I who put to death and give life”

The Hebrew is Ani ani hu, I, I am He. The Greek is ego ego eimi, I, I am He, the divine pronouns. According to German scholar Ethelbert Stauffer, by the first century those pronouns Ani hu, or I am He, had become the “all-inclusive summary of God’s self-revelatory declarations in the Feast of Tabernacles”

At one point during the Feast, a choir of priests would sing at the altar, “God is in his temple.” Then a priest singing God’s word would respond, “Be still and know that I am God” Then the choir of priests would chant again and again and again,

“Ani, Ani, hu - Ani, Ani, hu”

“Ego, Ego, eimi – Ego, Ego, eimi”

“I, I am He – I, I am He”

Thus at the Feast of Tabernacles along with the images of water and light, the words, “I, I am, I am He” were reverberating in the minds and hearts of the Jewish worshippers as they anticipated the ‘Real” presence of the Creator. They were expecting that at any moment now the “Living God” would show up!

John tells us that after Jesus made the claim “I am the Light of the World” (John 8:12), the religious authorities engaged him in a religious debate. Jesus says to them,

“I told you that you would die in your sins; for you will die in your sins unless you believe that ‘I am He’ (John 8:24).

Did you hear him? I- He, ego eimi. The authorities heard him loud and clear. Jesus had just uttered the sacred name during the Feast, and he uttered it in reference to himself!

More debate ensues, and then Jesus responds,

“When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He” (John 8:28).

Ani hu, ego eimi, the very words by which Yahweh the Almighty, Yahweh the one and only chooses to be known to Israel. Jesus the man from Galilee, dares to say, “Unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.” When you have lifted me up from the cross, then you will realize that I AM HE!

Next they accuse him of having a demon (John 8:48, 52), and Jesus responds towards the end of the debate,

“Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day, he saw it and was glad” (John 8:56)

They laugh at him, saying he is only 50yrs old, and then Jesus drives home his tabernacle claim,

“Before Abraham was born, I AM” (John 8:58).

He doesn’t say, ‘before Abraham was, I was” but ‘before Abraham was I AM.”

Immediately they pick up stones to stone him … right in the middle of the Feast of Tabernacles the Living God dwelling among his people, Jesus of Nazareth says – “I AM HE.”

The full revelation of the I AM would happen when Son of Man will be lifted up at the cross! It was here where the full manifestation, disclosure and glory of God, Yahweh, I AM would be put on display before all the world! May we BEHOLD THE MAN, BEHOLD THE LAMB, BEHOLD THE GLORY and be transformed from glory to glory!

“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18).

In light of Jesus’ Tabernacle claim, let’s consider 3 implications:

We now understand why he can make the other claims he makes, “I am the way, the truth, the life,” I am the Bread of Life,” I am the Good Shepherd,” “I am the Vine, you are the branches, apart from me you can do nothing”

We can now appreciate why the rest of the New Testament puts him at center stage, at the center of everything! Given who he thinks he is, he has every right to walk into our lives, interrupt our plans and command us, ‘Come to Me, Follow Me, Loose your Life for Me.’ Given who he says He is, we are crazy, ‘not to obey, not to come to him, not to follow him, not lose our lives for him!’

We understand why the gospel, this good news is the greatest news anyone can every hear! The cross stands at the heart of the gospel. Jesus lifted up, Jesus arms stretched out, Jesus hands nailed to the cross, Jesus blood dripping to the ground!

In light of Jesus tabernacle claim, those arms are the very arms of God, those hands are the hands of God, those bleeding wounds are the very wounds of God. It is God who suffers there! It is the Creator who suffers there! It is the I AM who becomes sin there. It is the great I AM who takes upon HIMSELF the just punishment for the sins of the world. It is the I AM who cries out ‘IT IS FINISHED.’ God is satisfied! God is satisfied with the sacrifice of this Man, because this Man is GOD! Hallelujah!

Our Response? Rejoice Always!

The Feast of Tabernacles is the only Levitical feast on which God outright commands us to rejoice. (Leviticus 23:40, Deuteronomy 16:14-15).

I believe the ultimate aim and purpose of our lives is to Glorify God and Enjoy him forever! The best way to Glorify God is by enjoying him forever! As John Piper writes, God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. We were created for Glory, to know His glory with our minds, and treasure his glory with hearts! God created us to know and enjoy His Glory, and in this way, display it’s supreme value and worth! The Glory of God is the Supreme JOY of His People. He longs to fascinate us with all that he is, to exhilarate us with his dynamic personality, and move our hearts with his outrageous love! And the acid test to whether we are experiencing the Glory of God is JOY! Joy is unique in it’s capacity to witness to what we treasure. God’s aim is that we reflect and display the worth of His Glory to all those around us!

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. 11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:9-11).

Jesus says he loves and enjoys us with the same measure of love and enjoyment that the Father has in him! As we enjoy God enjoying us, by daily abiding in his love, we will experience his joy in us! As we obey his commandments, loving God and loving others, an explosion of joy erupts in our hearts! This joy is our strength.

“The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing” (Zeph. 3:17).

As we live in light of eternity, we count it all joy whenever we face various trials, and take great joy whenever we are persecuted, and falsely accused knowing that our reward is great in heaven. Jesus asked the Father in John 17 that we would experience the fullness of His joy in our hearts. He longs to give us his ‘oils of joy’ instead of mourning (Isa. 61:2). He desires to bring forth streams of joy and gladness into the place of wilderness, and struggle in our lives (Isa. 35:1-2, 11),

“For there is a river that makes Glad the city of God, the holy habitation of God” (Ps. 46:4).

As David prophesied of the Lord Jesus in Psalm 16:11 (ESV),

“You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

As Isaiah 56:6-7 (ESV) says,

“these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer…for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations”

It’s God’s desire that we be a house of prayer for all nations, a people of prayer and he promises that He will make us Joyful in his house of prayer!

AMEN and AMEN

Dr Jason Hubbard and Dr Darrell Johnson