

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SERMON: *Rosh Hashanah*

SERIES: *Stand Alone*

SCRIPTURES: *Leviticus 23*

SPEAKER: *Shaun Kipe*

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**Credit to Dallas Willard; Rachel Held Evans*

Well good morning, it so great to worship with you. Want to say welcome to all of you gathered on-line, at home, tuning in to the live stream.

It's a New Year. 2020 is now behind us. And after the year we had, there are many people glad about that and looking forward to new and exciting things in 2021. This is why people make New Year's resolutions? This year is gonna be different. This year I will be different.

Calvin & Hobbes Comic

The sad thing about resolutions is that most people have given up on their resolutions by the end of February. Whether we want to change or not, most of us have trouble actually following through and making any real change.

All that said the intention behind resolutions is actually a good one. The concept of taking time to reflect on life...what your life entails, who you are becoming, might be one of the most important things you can do as you begin the New Year.

Did you know God's people celebrated New Years with a time of reflection? And so this morning, I just want connect the celebration of New Years for God's people in Scripture with our own New Year.

We want to look at three aspects of the Jewish New Year and what they can teach us as we head into 2021.

Rosh Hashanah (TITLE SLIDE) is the Jewish New Year. It literally means “head of the year” or “beginning of the year.”

The Jewish New Year is described in your Bible in **Leviticus 23**. So if you have a Bible go ahead and turn there, we’re headed to verse 23. The Jewish New Years celebration begins with...

I. The Festival of Trumpets

²³ The LORD said to Moses, ²⁴ “Say to the Israelites: ‘On the first day of the seventh month you are to have a day of Sabbath rest, a sacred assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts. ²⁵ Do no regular work, but present a food offering to the LORD.’”

Little side note, some of you who pick up on details, may have noticed that this passage refers to the Jewish New Year as “the first day of the 7th month.” We don’t have time to go into all of this this morning, but if you are interested in the formation of calendars and all of that kind of stuff...a few simple google searches about Rosh Hashanah and Jewish New Year and its relationship with the Gregorian Calendar that will give you plenty of fascinating reading to do in your free time!

Jewish New Year’s begins with the festival of Trumpets and the blowing of one of these (**PIC OF SHOFAR**). Since you’re all sitting at home, with hand held digital devices at your fingertips...quick trivia question, who can tell me what this is called? Go ahead, shout it...even if you’re wrong, it doesn’t matter, and I can’t hear you anyway.

A. Shofar

And it is blasted to begin the festival of trumpets.

Many of you know I'm a big soccer fan and several years ago back in 2010 the World Cup was played in South Africa. It was the first time ever that the World Cup was held in Africa! One of the cultural trends that came about during that World Cup was the blowing of a horn...the viral craze related to one of these...do you know what this is? **Vuvuzela.**

Fans from around the globe, fell in love with these South African horns called "vuvuzela." The sound itself was unique and electric, even obnoxious and became the iconic audible symbol of the 2010 World Cup. When soccer matches were played you couldn't hear anything but the sound of the vuvuzela.

Check out this quick video clip:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bKCIFXqhLzo>

Sounds like a swarm of bees, doesn't it?

The blast of the shofar at New Years, is that kind of audible symbol in Judaism...unique, iconic, electric.

Tradition has it that the Shofar was sounded when the 10 commandments, God's Holy Law, were given to Moses at Mount Sinai. The Shofar that is supposedly what brought down the walls of Jericho and thus, it is the Shofar that announces start of the Jewish New Year at Rosh Hoshanah.

Why begin New Years with the blast from a horn?

It is intended as **a wake-up call!** Think of it a little bit like a modern day alarm clock. You know on these cold winter nights, when you fall into a deep sleep, snuggling down into your cozy, warm blankets and you become oblivious to the world around

you and the night passes? You need a wake-up call. We even say that someone sleeping soundly is “dead to the world.”

We’ve gone on several long trips with our kids, in the car. And for kids long car rides are difficult, keeping them entertained. And so eventually what do you tell your kids? If you go to sleep, the time will pass much faster. Now, that’s actually a lie all you parents out there. Time does not move any faster when you are sleeping. But what we mean is that you don’t realize time is passing? You need a wake-up call to get you up and moving.

Have you ever noticed this before? Life has a way of putting us to sleep. We create habits, patterns, rhythms...some good, some bad. But soon we fall into this trance of just following the pattern or rhythm of life that we’ve created.

Life becomes an involuntary machine. We become oblivious or apathetic towards the life we are living and ultimately the person we are becoming day after day, moment by moment.

We use the phrase in our world “just going through the motions.”

And the scary thing would be to wake up to life...5 yrs, 10 yrs. 20 yrs from now and look back and say *“For 20 years, I was going through motions/dead to the world, life was happening, but I was almost oblivious. I never thought about the patterns I was creating or the person I was becoming. I missed out on the life God wanted me to have. The person God wanted me to become.”*

The blast of the shofar, the festival of trumpets is sounded at New Years as a wake-up call, to awaken God’s people from their lethargy towards life and faith...to break from the trance or rhythms we create.

One Rabbi describes it this way...

“Listening to the primitive wail of the ancient musical instrument, not only reminds worshippers of Judaism’s beginnings in a long-ago, in a far-away desert. But also touches the deepest and most basic places in the human soul – those places where each human being searches for and finds primordial beginnings and the mysteries of existence.” (Rabbi Dosik).

What are you doing with your life and who are you becoming?

Perhaps as you begin 2021...you need the wakeup call of the Shofar.

What habits of life are you creating for yourself and your family? (diet, exercise, spiritually, leisure, work, volunteering)

Who are you becoming? What kind of person are you becoming? Based on the habits and patterns that you are living? Are you growing into a person that is gentle? Patient? Joyful? Content? At peace? Slow to anger and abounding in love?

In what areas are intentionally working on living your life like Jesus? With your finances, tongue, prayer life, Bible reading, worship habits etc.

“We each become a certain kind of person in the depths of our being, gaining a specific type of character. And that is the outcome of a process of spiritual formation...” (Willard 19-20)

The Feast of Trumpets begins Rosh Hashanah the Jewish New Year with a wake-up call.

A second primary aspect of Rosh Hashanah is

II. Repentance

The blast of the Shofar, begins a 10 day period of repentance that culminates in Yom Kippur or the Day of Atonement and we are going to talk about that in just a moment.

But during this 10 day period God's people are to take an "inventory of the soul"...confess and repent.

And I know **repentance** is kind of an old fashioned church word that many of us don't really like to practice much anymore.

Part of the reason is that in our world, we don't like think that we are sinners. In fact in today's world many people don't even like to talk about sin.

But repentance is part of the process of change in our lives. Repentance, at it's core is a sincere apology...remorse...sorry for what we've done and a desire to be a different kind of person.

You may have noticed, recently when we have shared communion we pray a corporate prayer together. Do you remember some of the words we say?

"Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent...have mercy on us and forgive us;

Dallas Willard says this about repentance...

"To prosecutors and judges in our court system as well as to people in ordinary situations of life, it still matters greatly whether wrongdoers show signs of

remorse or seem to be truly sorry for what they have done. Why is that? It is because genuine remorse tells us something very deep about the individual...There is little hope for genuine change in one who is without remorse, without the anguish of regret.” (Willard 60)

Change in our lives, our character begins when we take time to be intentional about repentance.

Otherwise, we just stop noticing, or paying attention to our sin. We stop calling it out. We justify our own sin...“we had good reason to do what we did. The end result justifies the means we used, even if they were wrong.” We have excuses. Anything to avoid the wrong in our lives.

Check out this cute little guy. This video went viral recently, a young man who also had trouble admitting his wrong...

VIDEO from 0:00 – 1:08

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aFYsJYPye94>

We just get used to living with our sin. We fall asleep.

“One of the greatest obstacles to effective spiritual formation in Christ today is simple failure to understand and acknowledge the reality of the human situation...” (Willard 45)

But sin is real. Sin fouls things up and it will ruin your life. Even if oh so subtly.

Sin is the cause of war, abandonment, loneliness, slavery, racism, sex-trafficking... sin is also behind lies, even little white lies, and deceit and half-truths. Sin is behind grudges, judgementalism, greed, jealousy. Cold, hard words. Hypocrisy. Yelling at your kids.

What do you with all of this? Where does change begin? Part of the answer is repentance. If you never face up to it. You'll never change.

The prophet Isiah wrote...

Isaiah 6:5 - ⁵ “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips...

Paul wrote...

1 Timothy 1:15 - ¹⁵ Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.

John Ortberg puts these scriptures into modern language for us...he says, repentance is when we say...

I am a mess. I am powerless over my own ego. Left to myself I will waste my one and only life in stupid ways. I will damage and neglect relationships. I will make idols of my success and reputation.

I will dishonor my sexuality. I will use words, which I'm supposed to use to worship God to deceive people. I will use people for my own advancement. I will serve myself instead of serving others. Greed will rule my wallet. Resentment will fill my heart. Pride will govern my choices. Left to myself I will spend a pathetic existence trying to polish my outer image...so that no can see what an egocentric sinner I really am. And if successful in this, I will go to my grave a respectable fraud.

I'm a mess and I need God.

(John Ortberg)

Repentance is acknowledging the mess we have made of life and understanding we need a healing, a starting over.

A. Your Knotted String

So this is kind of neat. I was reading that some Rabbis like to use the symbolism of a string or a rope when it comes to repentance. They say that at birth, we are each tied (connected) to God with a string (**IMAGE**). Every time we sin, the string breaks (**IMAGE**). But when we repent, God sends the angel Gabriel to tie knots (**IMAGE**) in the string and to reconnect us to God.

1 John 1:9 - ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Because we fail and lose our way on the journey through life, our strings are full of knots. Now this is kind of cool, what happens to the length of a rope when you cut it and tie knots in it?

CUTTING ROPE symbolism on stage.

The rabbis like to say, “If you think about it, a string with many knots is shorter than one without.” (**IMAGE OF STRINGS AGAIN**)

So the person with many sins, but a repentant heart is closer to God.

I’m reminded that my life isn’t intended to be one of perfection. It is often permeated with failure and sin, but then followed by humble repentance. I like to think I have a string full of knots and keeps pulling me closer and closer to God.

Psalm 51:17 - ¹⁷ My sacrifice, O God, is^[b] a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.

Repentance is not intended as humiliation or punishment, repentance is one of those acts that helps reconnect our lives with God.

If you never take time to repent...to actually pause life and reflect on life, you'll likely get stuck in the lethargy of sin. A broken string, but no knots...Separated from, apart from...life with God.

If you want peace with God, contentment in life. Start with repentance.

And I'll just offer a little suggestion here, when it comes to practicing repentance. During Rosh Hashanah the Jews perform a ritual called...

B. Tashlikh

A tradition dating back to the middle ages but based on various Old Testament references to God washing away sins.

Isaiah 1:16 & 18 - "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes...Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.

Tashlikh literally means "**casting**". And so they take bread or sometimes pebbles to a river and as they confess their sins, they tear off a piece of bread and throw into the river...to be washed away as God washes away our sins.

Our sins, failures are cast into the ocean of God's grace and allows us to get a fresh start on life. Maybe one way you could practice repentance, choose a day and time and find a stream, river, creek...a day that's warm enough that you can be outside for a while. Grab a loaf of bread...and cast your sins into the ocean of God's grace.

And if you do this, be as specific as possible, in naming the sin in your life...calling it out.

Not just, “I have a sharp tongue.” But thinking back on specific moments where that sharp tongue showed up, “I didn’t speak to my co-worker in a way that was gentle and patient. I yelled at my son for not brushing his teeth quickly enough.”

At Rosh Hashanah the Jews believe that the world, communities and even our individual lives get a fresh start through repentance. Maybe we need repentance as we begin 2021.

Finally...this time of repentance during the Jewish New Year culminates in...the Day of Atonement.

III. Yom Kippur

Look back at Leviticus 23:26 -

²⁶ The LORD said to Moses, ²⁷ “The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. Hold a sacred assembly and deny yourselves,^[d] and present a food offering to the LORD. ²⁸ Do not do any work on that day, because it is the Day of Atonement, when atonement is made for you before the LORD your God.

Offering sacrifices to make things right with God. Now during Rosh Hashanah the Jews traditionally read from **Genesis 22**. Why?

In this story Abraham is asked by God to sacrifice his son Isaac.

It’s a kind of hard story to swallow. God asking a man to sacrifice his own son.

As you read the story, you get an uncomfortable feeling. You can picture Abraham inviting his son to go for a walk in the mountains. A young Isaac excited because he probably loves these mountain walks. But sickening because, in his ignorance, you know that Isaac doesn't realize this walk is not going to be like all of the others.

When they reach the mountain the servants are told to stay, while Abraham and Isaac go and worship. The drama of the story is building. They walk up the mountain. Details about who carries the wood and the knife are vivid in our imaginations. You can practically picture the young Isaac working hard to hold the pile of wood and keep up with his father. You can hear his words as he innocently asks "Where is the sacrifice of atonement for today?"

And while this is a hard story to swallow, you have to remember that in Abraham's day, this was a much more common practice. Child sacrifice much more common. People believed that in order to appease the god's, and make things right with the gods...they had to sacrifice their own children.

And so Abraham get's ready and ties up his son and lays him on the altar, and in the ancient world everyone knows how this tragic story ends.

What's fascinating about the story in Genesis 22, is that something shocking happens. It doesn't end like all the other stories end...Yahweh, Abraham's God, intervenes. God stops Abraham. He doesn't offer his son on the altar. God steps in. And instead God provides a substitute lamb in Isaac's place.

Genesis 22:12-14 - ¹² "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him..."¹³ Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram^[a] caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."

In other words, in this story God provides atonement. Ancient god's never provide atonement. They ask and take even your children. Abrahams God is different. It turns out that rather than condemnation and sacrifice...our God provides grace...forgiveness...atonement. On Yom Kippur the Jews celebrate a great God who provides.

And for those of us who follow Jesus, we can actually take this one step further...because we believe that Jesus becomes the final piece of atonement.

Hebrews 10 - ¹¹ Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. ¹⁴ For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

God in Jesus, made atonement once for all. Rather than the sacrifice of animals or children or others God sends himself as the spotless, perfect sacrifice as atonement...healing.

“a human being is regarded by God as something immensely worth saving. Sin does not make it worthless, but only lost.” (Willard 46).

This is why the story of Jesus...His life, his death, his resurrection, what he said and taught is called the Gospel...Good News.

Jesus is never surprised by our sin. He is never turned off. He is never shocked. Our confession doesn't lead to condemnation from God, instead it leads to our healing.

There is a place where your sin, shame, guilt, regret can get taken away, where change happens, where transformation happens, where new life is offered to anyone who wants it...it's a place called Calvary.

Folks, I don't know what this New Year will bring...but I do know...I'm hanging on to Calvary all year. I'm hanging on to Jesus. I'm hanging on to his life, his teaching, his sacrifice, his healing, his salvation.

If you are willing to hear the wake-up call of the shofar, to take your sin to God in repentance, and humbly come to the foot of the cross...I believe you too can find, change, healing, salvation for your life. That's a 2021 worth being excited about.

