**Answer 25 of the 1st 2nd 3rd RUTC:**

**Those Who Became the First Fruits of Christ (Exodus 23:14-17) 7/2/2023**

In verse 14 in the passage, the Lord told the Israelites to celebrate the three festivals every year. We must hold onto the spiritual meaning and covenant within these festivals and have a time of worship in thanksgiving and happiness to God who gave us that covenant.

**The three festivals are as we know, the Festival of Unleavened Bread (Passover), the Festival of Harvest (Pentecost), and the Festival of Ingathering (Tabernacles).**

**First, the Festival of Unleavened Bread (Passover) is giving thanks to the freedom from 400 years of slavery that the Israelites gained when they applied the blood of the lamb and the firstborns of all the Egyptians were killed.**

Christ is the one who died and shed his blood just like the lamb of Passover. When we believed that He died for us and held onto the covenant of the blood that he shed, our life’s three curses came to an end (curse of original sin, curse of Satan, curse of eternity). Whoever holds onto this blood covenant of Christ, they can come out from any problem, failure, pain, destiny, and curse (salvation). Problems may come even after you receive salvation. You must hold onto the covenant that Christ finished it all (John 19:30) and break down the forces of darkness that plants unbelief in your heart. You will experience all those things turning into evidence for those saved by God. This is why we celebrate the Passion Week and Easter. It is a time of restoring faith and thanksgiving for salvation and blessings.

**Second, the Festival of Ingathering (Tabernacles) is a time of giving thanks for the year’s harvest, but spiritually, it is a covenant of the eternal heavenly background and future that has been given to us.** Just like a farmer stores his harvest that he gathers all year long, God will lead us who are saved into eternal heaven. We must not lose hold of eternal life, eternal background, eternal glory, and eternal reward. This is why we give Thanksgiving worship. It is conviction and thanksgiving for the eternal heavenly background and the future that we have.

**Third, what is the meaning of the Feast of Harvest that we are celebrating this week? What covenant must we hold onto as we give thanks and enjoy happiness?** We must at least hold onto the three covenants within it and enjoy the greatest thanksgiving and joy this week.

**1. First, the Feast of Harvest is a time of giving thanks for the first fruits of the year that God gave.**

**1) It is important because we are closing off the first half of the year in thanksgiving, and we are preparing for the latter half of the year.** There are so many things to be grateful for when we think of the grace and answers that God gave to us even in these difficult times. Look back and see. Even the hurtful times were something to be grateful for, and even the problems and the pain that came to us were in the end something to be grateful for. The fact that God gave us the strength to endure all of that is also His grace (1 Corinthians 10:13). Are you still facing hardships? Wait upon and give thanks for God’s great and unsearchable works that He will carry out, and the good that he will create from it.

**2) In other words, this Festival is a time in which we can experience how God takes responsibility of the lives of those He has saved and turns their lives into blessings.** It says that it is a Festival that will be celebrated in all respective lands, and in all respective environments, generation after generation (Leviticus 23:14). Do you know what believer has strength and is happy? Do you know what church has strength and is happy? They are individuals that experience this blessing within all kinds of hardships and problems, and a church where those individuals gather. That is why God allows suffering and various hardships and problems (James 1:3-4)

**2. There are important spiritual significance (covenant) and spiritual blessings that we must hold onto during the Festival of Harvest.** When we hold onto the spiritual meaning and the covenant within this celebration, all problems, suffering, and pain will turn into the answer and blessings of 25.

**1) God named us, who are in Christ, the first fruit of Christ.**

**① Originally, the Festival of Harvest is a time of joy and thanksgiving for the first fruits that we harvest (16).** The farmer plants the seeds and works all summer long to grow fruit. How precious is that joy?

**② God said that we are the first fruit of Christ gained through His suffering and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20).** Christ went through desperate time of suffering and resurrected to make us His fruit (The firstfruits). He made us children of God and His fruits. That is why we are so precious before God (Isaiah 43:4). No matter how lacking we are, God saved us with such hope, and He continues to fulfill His salvation (Philippians 1:6).

**③ All believers of Old and New Testaments are within this (Revelation 14:4).** In the end times, the world will face great hardships, and Satan will bring attacks and tribulations. However, this is the reason we will have no choice but to have victory. The believers will be guided by the little lamb; they are the first ripe fruits that have received redemption from sin, curses, and the world (Colossians 1:14). Do you have scars, problems, and hardships? Hold onto the covenant that you are the first fruit of Christ and have victory.

**2) God named those who receive salvation through our evangelism and missions the continuing first fruits.**

**① We are continuously bearing more first fruits that bring God joy. That is evangelism and missions.** Paul rejoiced for the ones who received the gospel through him because they were the first fruits (converts) given to Christ (Romans 16:5, 1Corinthians 16:15). This is why there is happiness when you are within evangelism and missions.

**② Only when we individuals and our church is within evangelism and missions will unprecedented works that transcend time and space and the blessing of the throne come upon us.** As Jesus sent his disciples who were weak and full of failures, the Lord was with them and gave them evidence (Mark 16:21-22).

**3) God promised us the power of the Holy Spirit so that these precious first fruits may bear through our lives.** There was great significance for the Holy Spirit to come upon the believers of Mark’s Upper Room during this Festival of Harvest.

**① The 5 works that were fulfilled in Acts 2 are blessings that we can experience and enjoy in this age.** It is the power of the Holy Spirit like fire and wind that came upon individuals (Acts 2:9-11). When they held onto the Word and prayed, the Holy Spirit allowed them to experience the Word of God being fulfilled (Acts 2:14-21). Through these people, the 3000 disciples arose and began the historical work of saving Israel (Acts 2:41). There was evidence in the fields they lived in, and they experience the number of believers growing every day (Acts 2:42-47).

**② In everything you do, try to connect everything to evangelism and missions that bear the first fruits of Christ and try to do them by the power of the Holy Spirit in prayer.** Even the things you do for least of the individuals are not small. Jesus said, whatever you do for them is what you did for me (Matthew 25:40). Small devotions are not small. If anyone gives even a cup of cold water for the little ones, they will not lose their reward (Matthew 10:42). Even at work, it makes a difference when you seek God to be with you and seek the power of the Holy Spirit (Genesis 41:39). True devotion is when you do things by the power of the Holy Spirit, boast of Christ, and do not trust yourself (Philippians 3:3).

**Conclusion** – The moment you received salvation through Christ, you became his precious first fruit. God awaits for more first fruits to continue to bear through us (God’s kingdom). Do not do anything with your diligence, standards, or power. Only look upon and rely on the power of the Holy Spirit. Even the smallest of things we do, God will bless. May your life be the lives of the first fruits that reveals His glory.