

[DEUTERONOMY 14:22-29](#)

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Rally Day

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THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS A PARTY!

When we were in Ecuador last month, we worked extremely HARD during the DAY! I haven't worked THAT hard in YEARS! But EVERY night, we PARTIED. That's one thing about Ecuador: EVERYTHING there is INTENSE! The MUSIC just BLARES everywhere you go, even on city BUSES! They drive FAST and FURIOUS! I rode across the ENTIRE city of Guayaquil (it took about a half-hour) STANDING UP against the cab, in BACK of pick-up truck, with the WIND blowing through my hair, and the driver WEAVING between cars, LANE to LANE. It was WILD and CRAZY – and I LOVED every MINUTE of it! When you walk around the BARRIO, you are constantly inundated with the smell of burning TRASH. They BURN trash on every corner, it seems, because there's NOWHERE to PUT it. We got SO close to the DIRT -- and the HEAT, because there was nothing to SHELTER us from these things, like there is HERE, where we don't have to DEAL with the HEAT because we have AIR-CONDITIONING, and we don't have to DEAL with the DIRT, unless we CHOOSE to. And when they PARTY there, they PARTY – with the SAME kind of intensity! There's dancing and singing and all the rest! It was just INCREDIBLE to SEE – and FUN!

Well, Tony Campolo, who preached at OUR church several years ago, has written a BOOK entitled, *The Kingdom of GOD Is a PARTY*. And I found it INTERESTING that he said THIS about our Scripture Lesson for today: *AS I was reading Deuteronomy 14:22-29, the passage about TITHING, it hit me HARD. I REALIZED that I had gotten it all WRONG. I had always THOUGHT that what the Lord told Moses to TELL us was to set aside 10% of ALL our earnings to give to the work of God (or the ministries of the CHURCH). BUT, as I read and re-read the passage, it was CLEAR that the TITHE was NOT for that at ALL. IT was for PARTYING! ONCE a year, according to...Deuteronomy 14, ALL the people of God were to bring 1/10 of ALL their earnings to the TEMPLE in Jerusalem. IMAGINE! 1/10 of Israel's Gross National Product. And it was NOT used for MISSION work. It was NOT used for CHARITY. It was NOT even used to put an ADDITION onto the TEMPLE. It was USED for a gigantic PARTY! ...No WONDER little David could sing, "I was GLAD when they said unto me, let us GO to the HOUSE of the LORD." What kid WOULDN'T be thrilled to go to a gigantic PARTY? Not even the most SPOILED brat would have said, "I don't want to go! CHURCH is such a BORE!"... The celebration on Mt. ZION was anything BUT a BORE... lots of FOOD and plenty to DRINK...DANCING, SINGING and EXUBERANT celebration!*

And EVERYBODY was INVITED to the party, from WIDOWS who hadn't had a FUN night OUT for a YEAR, to poor KIDS who couldn't come up with TICKET money to WHATEVER was the ANCIENT equivalent of Disney World. Prostitutes and tax collectors were invited... And EVERYBODY forgot about their TITLES and CREDENTIALS at this WONDERFUL party. The RICH danced with the POOR. Management did a BOTTOMS-UP with LABOR.... IT was CRAZY." And friends, IT was JUST like ECUADOR, with all these RICH Americans and all these dirt-poor Ecuadorians FEASTING, drinking and dancing TOGETHER, and having a BALL in the process! And it was SO BEAUTIFUL to see!

Well friends, those PARTIES in ISRAEL, as WELL as those parties we had in ECUADOR, were ALL about ONE thing: the KINGDOM of GOD! You see; for the

HEBREWS, God PLANNED for them to be a FORTASTE of what God has in mind for ALL of us when the Kingdom of God becomes a REALITY. And for US, in Ecuador: I don't HOW many TIMES Diane and I said to each other: THIS is what the Kingdom of GOD is going to LOOK like! There weren't RICH and POOR, Black and White, Ecuadorians and North Americans. There were JUST a bunch of PARTY-GOERS, ALL having FUN together!

And friends, it's TRUE: **OUR God is a PARTY God!** OUR God LOVES a good PARTY! And if you don't BELIEVE me, just look at what JESUS says about the Kingdom of God. And HOW do we know God BEST? We know God BEST by looking at JESUS, right? Well, JESUS compares the Kingdom of God to a WEDDING feast, to a WEDDING reception. And I don't know if you've been to a WEDDING reception lately, ESPECIALLY a JEWISH wedding reception, but let me tell you: a JEWISH wedding reception is a LOT like an ITALIAN wedding reception, or ANY MEDITERRANEAN wedding reception! It's the ULTIMATE blow-out! YOU don't know what a good party IS until you've been to a WEDDING reception like THAT. The PARENTS mortgage their HOMES in order to buy ENOUGH food, drink and music to keep EVERYBODY partying LONG into the night. And JESUS said that THAT is what the Kingdom of God is LIKE. It's like THAT kind of PARTY!

And SO, as Tony Campolo SAYS: *Whenever Christians PARTY, THEY provide a FORETASTE of what is to COME. WHENEVER they celebrate with LAUGHTER and SONG, they EVANGELIZE! They send out the MESSAGE that the Kingdom of GOD is at HAND – and the Kingdom of GOD is a wonderful PARTY. And it was THIS vision of what was to come, says Tony Campolo, that made it POSSIBLE for Jesus to endure the AGONY of Calvary (the AGONY of the CROSS). And I suspect that that's ALSO what makes it possible for those extremely poor ECUADORIANS to endure the agony of THEIR poverty as well. And SO, IF that vision can help THEM, it can also help US to endure the PAIN that WE have to endure in OUR lives, whatever it IS. Yes, the KINGDOM of God is a PARTY that we can look FORWARD to and get EXCITED about!*

BUT, we can get a FORETASTE of that kingdom right here and right now. Yes, my friends, WE need to PARTY! WE need to CELEBRATE! And THAT'S what THIS day is all ABOUT! I found out that the Ecuadorians REALLY know how to PARTY. But, I'm NOT so SURE about US, New England YANKEES, especially when there is NO alcohol flowing. BUT, I'd like to THINK that we can DO it. SO, I would ask us to give it a TRY! LET'S spend this day CELEBRATING -- celebrating the Kingdom of God, celebrating this GLORIOUS day, celebrating our Lord JESUS and the FAITH that He offers us, celebrating this INCREDIBLE church family INTO which God BROUGHT each and every ONE of us, celebrating ALL these terrific CHILDREN, and MOST of all, celebrating the absolutely AMAZING GRACE of our God. Yes, LET'S give ourselves a FORETASTE of WHAT is to COME! Let's CELEBRATE! Let's have a PARTY, because GOD is GOOD, and God's LOVE is UNCONDITIONAL and EVERLASTING, and God's GRACE is just AMAZING! THANKS be to God! Amen.

Let's stand and SING *AMAZING GRACE! How SWEET the SOUND!*