

Jesus and Jubilee

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[0 : 00] Now, if you have your Bibles, you will find it helpful to have them open at Leviticus 25, page 128 of the Church Bible. As we think about Jesus and Jubilee, but first, what comes to your mind when you hear the word Jubilee? I imagine for some of us, it might be nothing. You may never have heard the word before. For others, you hear the word Jubilation, Jubilee, maybe you think of joy, party, celebration. In the UK, the word Jubilee has become associated with the royal family. So, there was the Platinum Jubilee a few years ago of Queen Elizabeth II. So, a Jubilee in the royal family marks significant anniversaries in life and service. For some of us with older and longer memories, you might think of the Jubilee campaign back in the year 2000. Some of us maybe remember that. There were people from at least 40 countries sort of came together, academics, church leaders, seeking the end of third world debt.

And so, there was this huge worldwide campaign and petition. Now, when we come to Jubilee in the Bible, which one of these ideas is helpful for us? Well, I think this last one, this last one, of ending debt of bringing freedom is the most important because Jubilee is a freedom word in the Bible. Every 50 years, according to God's design in Israel, a horn, a trumpet would sound. It would be a time of release from debts. If you'd sold yourself into slavery, a return, a release from slavery, a restoration to family land would happen. So, it's a huge moment in society. Here's another question as we get going. What came to Jesus' mind when He spoke about Jubilee? So, we heard that a section of that sermon in Luke chapter 4, where Jesus deliberately proclaims the year of the Lord's favor, the year of Jubilee. He says, now it's here, and I have come to bring it in.

So, Jesus understands that Jubilee was a revelation, a demonstration of God's heart of grace. Jesus. It's a vision for restoration and renewal, and Jesus says, my ministry is about that.

[2 : 59] Jesus' ministry fulfills in a wonderful way all that Jubilee promised, that God would bring freedom through His Son, that in the life, the death, the resurrection of Jesus, God provides release, redemption, restoration, rest, that goes far beyond economics, but gets right to the heart of our need.

It becomes a spiritual thing. So, we're going to keep that in view as we look at a few things about the Jubilee as we find it in Leviticus 25. We'll think about the pattern, which is interesting, the purpose, which is vital. We'll think about how it was practiced, and then we'll finish by thinking about Jesus as the person who brings Jubilee, and not just once every 50 years, but by God's grace, we can know at this day, we can know every day the freedom that Jesus came to bring. But let's begin with a pattern for Jubilee. So, verse 8 and 9 of our reading, count seven Sabbath years, then sound the trumpet on the day of atonement. It's interesting, I think, to see how the people of Israel were invited to mark time. You know, we have calendars, and we have diaries. How did they mark time? And how was that significant for Jubilee? Well, there was this pattern, wasn't there, of the Sabbaths? There was this seven times seven pattern, so 49 years where, just like creation, where God said six days to work, one day to rest. In Israel, there was seven days to work the land, one year for the land and the people to rest. And they were to do that seven times. And then on year 50, that was the Jubilee. And it was also a Sabbath rest for the land. So, the Jubilee, whenever we think about this Jubilee, we have to connect it with Sabbath, a time of rest and restoration, of recognizing God as creator and provider.

And to understand, too, that Sabbath becomes identified with God releasing people from slavery. And that's absolutely then tied up as well with the day of atonement. So, last week, if you were here in church, we thought about this wonderful ceremony. Every year, God gave His people the day of atonement.

This was one day where the high priest would go into God's very presence, would offer sacrifice to cover the sins of the people, to remove sin, to enable the holy God to live in relationship with His people. And God deliberately connects the Jubilee with atonement, because Jubilee is about redemption. It was saying to the people that God is the one who cancels our moral debt, our spiritual debt, our spiritual debt by His grace. And there was then the invitation within society to cancel economic debt. God has restored me into fellowship, so I should restore people to the land. So, it's about Sabbath. It's about redemption. It helps us to learn important truths about God. The people of Israel were left in no doubt during the Jubilee year. God is creator. God is provider. [6 : 24] God is the one they are invited to rest in and to trust in that He will provide. Psalm 24, the earth is the Lord's and all that it contains. Jubilee reminds us God is the great Redeemer. That with Jesus that is the promise of forgiveness. With God that is this promise of life in God's land under God's blessing. A really rich salvation idea. And so today, even as we begin, God is giving us an invitation. Sabbath is an invitation. Rest is always a gift.

But resting in God's presence is a real gift. It becomes a weekly time to reset, to focus on worshiping, trusting God. And that's freedom for us.

To have a Sabbath as a high point in our calendar is a gift to us as much as it was for Israel. And recognize too that God is inviting us to know true freedom, as Jesus talked about.

That in Jesus we can be released from the guilt of sin. And we can be released to enjoy life with Him. The invitation comes through faith in the Lord Jesus.

So the pattern for Jubilee is significant, but so too is the purpose. Verse 10, Consecrate the 50th year and proclaim liberty, freedom, throughout the land to all its inhabitants.

[8 : 16] It shall be a Jubilee for you. Now, boys and girls, you will know this. Every device, I have a device, every gadget comes with either a reset button or a way for our phone or our technology to be reset. You know when it gets that glitch or it just doesn't work, we all know what buttons we have to hold down and press to restart.

We want to get back to a previous condition when it was working properly. Well, the year of Jubilee was like that. It was God's way to fix what was broken. But what was broken wasn't a device. We didn't have devices back then. What was broken was society. This was God's way to fix it when people had got themselves into debt and become poor. This was God's fix when they had lost their home and lost their sense of place. So if you think about that, for most of the nation of Israel, the year of Jubilee would become this once-in-a-lifetime moment. If things have gone bad, Jubilee is my hope that things can get better again.

So we've got to believe that for a poor person in Israel, they would live anticipating, counting in their calendar, when is it the year of Jubilee? Because when it's Jubilee, I don't have to be a slave anymore. When it's Jubilee, I don't have to live with this building deck.

When it's Jubilee, I can get back to my family land, the land that God gave me. So again, it's so important. It doesn't get much bigger if you're an Old Testament Israelite than this.

[10 : 11] It's a great social reset. God has provided a fix. When people would, because of their sinful hearts, be tempted towards greed that would force people from the lands and take advantage of them, there's a reset. This is God's reset to bridge the gap between rich and poor.

This is God's way to care for the very smallest unit in society. So Israelite society, you had your 12 tribes, and those tribes were divided into clans, and those clans were divided into the smallest unit, the family unit. And the Jubilee was caring for the family. So it's a social reset, but it's also an economic reset, because God is so wise and so merciful that He's established this year to prevent a poverty cycle, to prevent poverty passing, a legacy of debt passing down through the generations. Because every 50 years, a person would be freed from their debt and returned to their land, a place where they could provide for themselves. But it's also a wonderful personal reset as well.

And this is something that some of us will understand, and some of us, depending where we come from, might not get it. But if you are from a rural place, if you are from a country place, if you are from the land, then you will know very well how close the connection is between a person and the land.

I studied Scottish history, and I studied the Highland Clearances, and I listened to the poetry of people who had been ripped from their land and sent on their boats to Canada and America. And that sense of grief, that land that they loved that was very much tied up with their personal identity, they saw it going over the horizon.

[12:06] God gives Jubilee so that people can be back in their place. They can be God's people in God's place, knowing His blessing. And it's a wonderful picture of God's plan of salvation.

And in the storyline of the Bible, the idea of Jubilee helps us to understand the coming and the mission of the Lord Jesus. Because it brings a salvation promise of a debt that is canceled, of a freedom that's enjoyed in God's presence, of living gladly under God's rule. Think about Jesus' mission. Jesus' mission, and He understood it, it centers on the cross. And what happens there on the cross is that Jesus has come to secure freedom from sin and guilt. Paul in Colossians 2 uses this wonderful image that when Rome was executing criminals, they would pin up the record of debt above the criminal's head. And we're invited to imagine that when Jesus dies on the cross, He is dying for my record of debt. So we can look at the cross, and if our faith is in Jesus, we can say, my sin, my debt has been paid in full. That's Jesus' mission, freedom. And Jesus' message, I am the way to experience and to enjoy life with God now, and life in a restored creation, and fellowship with God in the future. Jesus brings us into the kingdom now, but we look forward to when He returns and establishes the new creation, and we live with Him in a perfect world forever. So the purpose of Jubilee speaks to the purpose of Jesus. Now let's move there, thirdly, to think about the practice of Jubilee. And just let me return for a moment to the Jubilee 2000 campaign, this idea of debt forgiveness to be extended to whole nations, that some of the world's poorest could have their massive debt burden removed. It was a moral campaign, if you remember. It began in the universities with the academics, but it was very much driven by churches and church leaders. And then you had guys like Bono from U2 who became the sort of public figurehead. You might remember there were human chains that were formed in different cities in Europe. So when the G8 summit met in Birmingham, 50,000 people formed this human chain, bringing this message to break the chains of debt slavery.

And the result of this campaign, 20 million people signed a global sort of petition online. And the result was, and I think it continues to be the case, that there is now much more international awareness of the problem of third world debt. There was certainly a challenge to the corruption that was happening in some of these countries, greater accountability. And some 70 billion pounds of debt was written off. 35 countries did have a huge measure of their debt release.

[15:22] Now, when we turn to the practice of Jubilee in Leviticus 25, how did it work out? What would the impact be of the Jubilee? I want to think about two things. Firstly, to think about the land, because the land is a huge focus. So in verses 11 and 12, if you have your Bible, it says that the 50th year should be a Jubilee for you. Do not sow and do not reap, for it is a Jubilee and is to be holy for you. So think about the fields. The fields were to have a rest. This was a holy year. So the land was to be rested, and the people were to trust that God would provide not just one year of harvest, but three years of harvest. So there's a clear lesson in the Jubilee that the people should trust God.

And then in verses 13 to 17, there are instructions about the family lands. There's this recognition, poverty might force the sale of your family land, but God's law forbade that it be permanent. In fact, it says in verse 16 that what you're buying and selling is actually the number of crops, the number of harvests until the next Jubilee. And in verse 17, they were told very clearly, do not take advantage of each other, but fear your God. That's the lesson. They are to live fearing their God. This is to be a spiritual form of economics. Verse 23, recognizing that all the land is God's land, that the land was a gift of God's grace, and so they are to care for one another when it came to family land. We didn't read verses 27 to 31, but that's a really interesting little section. Because there's a distinction made between city houses and farm houses. City houses, it could be permanently transferred. So there was this one year where if you had enough money, you could redeem and buy back your house in your city, but otherwise it would pass permanently to the person who bought it. But that wasn't the case for your house on your family land.

That could be redeemed at any time and had to be given back at the Jubilee. And so you might ask, why does God care about country more than city? No, the whole idea is the land is God's gift.

The land is the source of family income, so that house and that land must be protected because God cares for the people. As city dwellers, I think sometimes we struggle with themes of the land in the Old Testament, but we have to remember as well that the land was a big part of God's promise. God had acted to save His people from slavery, but also to give them this wonderful new home, the promised land, the land of Canaan. It was a place where they would work and they would rest and they would worship under the rule of God, knowing God was with them. It was a big deal. When

Jesus came, slightly different language, but John 14, Jesus invited His followers to understand that He was preparing a home for His people.

[18 : 45] Jesus said, my Father's house has many rooms and I am going to prepare a place for you. Jesus would go to die, to rise, to return to heaven, to prepare the way so that all who trust in Him would go to be with Him, to live in that home, in that land.

When we trust Jesus who said, I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me. So, the Jubilee focused on the land, but it also focuses a lot on the idea of redemption and release. There's lots of details that we could look at, but we'll look at verses 47 to 55 as a case study. So, here is a situation where an Israelite has hit hard times. Things have become difficult, and so he has been forced to sell himself to become a slave or a servant. What remains true? Verse 48, if they sell themselves to the foreigner, they retain the right of redemption.

There is always the prospect of freedom if they can gather enough money. Secondly, one of their relatives may redeem them. An uncle or cousin or any blood relative in their clan may redeem them. So, we maybe are familiar with this idea of kinsmen redeemers. A near relative who is willing to bear the debt, who is willing to pay the price, who is willing to secure redemption.

Famous Old Testament story of Ruth, the book of Ruth, Boaz is her kinsman redeemer, Naomi's kinsman redeemer. And we understand that redemption comes at a price. Verse 50, they and their buyer are to count the time from the time from the year they sold themselves, and the price is based on that.

[21 : 01] And also, at the end of the chapter, to understand that God releases his people at Jubilee. Verse 51, even if someone is not redeemed in any of these ways, they and their children are to be released in the year of Jubilee. Why? For the Israelites belong to me, and I am the Lord your God.

So, you get this wonderful idea that the God of grace, who rescued his people from slavery at the Exodus every 50 years, is going to do it again. This reset button of the Jubilee is an expression of God's saving grace time and time and time again. Two things for us to think about briefly in this regard. One, that the message of Jubilee is a message of hope, that God brings good news for those who are poor, for those who are oppressed, saying there is a day coming of reversal, of restoration.

It's the kind of themes picked up by Martin Luther King. The civil rights movement in America often drew on those biblical themes. There is a day coming. And we have this wonderful message about God, that God sees and God cares, that God gives hope for those whose lives are broken. God cares for those who are small and weak.

We have a God who in Jesus can make everything new, including us. But I think as Christians, we also, as well as recognizing the hope that Jubilee brings, we also need to see that just as it was for Israel, Jubilee brings a present responsibility.

So, there was a law in the Jubilee legislation about how someone who was following God had to live. They had to not take advantage. They had to make sure that the poor were cared for.

[23 : 17] And as God's people, we have an ongoing responsibility to care about justice, about mercy, about people's dignity, to acknowledge people's worth.

You know, as an individual or as a church, we will likely not change the world. But that doesn't mean that we don't have responsibility, and we can help, and we can change in our neighborhood. And by God's grace, we should.

Well, let's move finally to the person that Jubilee points to, having looked briefly at some of the details. Let's see how Jesus pulls it together and makes it all about him. Picture the scene in the Nazareth synagogue on that day. As Jesus walks in, a relatively unknown teacher coming back to his hometown as he's hometown as he deliberately picks up the scroll of Isaiah, as he deliberately looks for that section that speaks of the year of the Lord's favor, and he announces in that sermon, I am your Jubilee. I am your way to freedom. I can restore you to life with God.

How can Jesus bring such a hope-filled, joy-filled message? How does Jesus fulfill those Jubilee themes?

Well, Jesus declares that he is the one who brings true rest. Matthew chapter 11, verse 28, Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. There is rest from Jesus, the Son of God, as he declares God's grace. He says to us, we don't need to earn our salvation.

[25 : 30] We don't need to work so hard that God will somehow accept our efforts. Rather, we rest and trust. In the work of Jesus for us. Jesus has come to keep the law for us. Jesus has come to die as if he were a lawbreaker, taking our place and our punishment, though he had done no wrong. Jesus has risen again to give new life with God to all those who trust him. All the work is done. We are invited to rest and to trust in this wonderful gift. Jesus brings true rest. Jesus comes to bring true restoration.

Many of us are physically far from home today. This is not where we grew up. For some of us, we are in another continent. Another level, many of us have that longing for home in that sense of, where is the place where I find security? Where is the place where I know I belong? Where is the place where I experience true love? Maybe we live with that longing unfulfilled in this world, but with Jesus, He brings us access to a wonderful family, the family of God. He is the true elder brother who brings us to God the Father. And He says to us that while our sin separates us from God, He has come to deal with sin to bring us home. Jesus restores us to fellowship with God. That one relationship, that one family we were made for, that one love that will last forever is ours in Jesus.

And Jesus has come to bring true redemption, true relief. Remember His words at the beginning, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Do we know what it is to feel a sense of guilt?

To feel a slave to habits and patterns? Well, there is wonderful news from Jesus. He is the one who has come to break the chains of debt in a decisive way. He has come as our kinsman redeemer. He has become one of us in order to identify with us, to represent us, to take our debt for us, to pay the price in full, with His bloodshed on the cross, so we can live with total freedom. And so Jesus comes to fulfill for you and for me the purpose, the plan of jubilee. We don't need to wait for a trumpet to sound.

[28 : 34] We don't need to mark time in our calendar waiting for jubilee. We can have that today. It can be experienced every day. That sense of renewal and restoration and rest. It comes as a gift from Jesus.

taking our debt of sin, restoring us to life with God, resting now with the promise of eternal rest. When Jesus comes in that final reset, when He comes as judge, when He comes to establish the new creation, when His people will experience the joy of never-ending jubilee. Let's pray and give thanks.

Father God, we thank You for what the jubilee represented for the Old Testament believer, a chance to be set free, a chance to be restored to their land and into community.

And we thank You for what that anticipates Jesus fulfills. And we thank You that He came to forgive our debt of sin. We thank You that He came to restore us to life with God. And that with Jesus, we have the promise of a land and a home, heaven and the new creation, life with God, knowing Jesus, our Lord and Savior, and living under His rule gladly. And so we pray that we would experience some of the joy of jubilee even today as we rest and as we trust in Jesus our Savior. Amen.

[30 : 25] Amen. Now let's close singing the hymn together, Cornerstone, and we can stand together to sing.

Amen.