

## Jesus and the Year of Jubilee

Portions adapted from "Jubilee" by Vic Folkert @SermonCentral.Com

Proclaim LIBERTY Throughout all the Land unto all the Inhabitants Thereof. Lev. XXV.



The Liberty Bell is often connected with our national freedom from British rule, because it was rung to announce the first public reading of the Declaration of Independence in 1776. However, the bell was originally cast in 1751, in recognition of the 50th anniversary of William Penn's Charter of Privileges for settlers in the colony of Pennsylvania. Penn was a devout Christian of the Quaker tradition and his reading of the Bible guided him to revolutionary ideas about true liberty and justice for all people in a God guided and blessed land.

Did you know that our nation was founded – at least as William Penn envisioned it – not only on the ideas of political and religious freedom, but also on the Biblical concept of God's "Jubilee" being for all people. The quotation circling the top of the Liberty Bell is from today's text in Leviticus (25:10) which describes the Year of Jubilee as God had mandated it to be celebrated by the people of Israel. ***Proclaim LIBERTY throughout all the Land unto all the Inhabitants***

Before they ever entered the Promised land, God had laid out a plan, to which the people of Israel had agreed, to celebrate every seventh day as a **Sabbath day**, every seventh year as a **Sabbath year** and every 50<sup>th</sup> year as the **Year of Jubilee**.

This pattern of Sabbaths was intended to remind the Israelites that the land they were entering would always belong to God – not them – and the bounty which the land provided would always be a result not just of their labor, but more importantly of God's blessings on them as His people. Resting every seventh day and letting the land rest every seventh year would force the people - and prove to them - that they could rely upon God's abundant provision for their every need, as long as they continued to honor Him as their God. God promised that He would give a triple harvest every 6<sup>th</sup> year to see everyone through the Sabbath years until the next harvest of the 8<sup>th</sup> year (Leviticus 25:21).

Then there came the **Year of Jubilee**, an even more radical lesson in their dependence upon God's blessing. Following the Day of Atonement on the 49<sup>th</sup> year – which was already a Sabbath year, the Temple trumpets and shofar horns would again sound across the land, calling the people to yet another Sabbath year, but this one including the forgiveness of all debts, the release of all slaves and the restoration of all lands back to their original owners; everyone got to return home and start over. **What was God's purpose behind this radical readjustment of the national economy?**

To understand the Year of Jubilee, we need to understand God's vision for how all of His people could live an abundant life for all of their years in His Promised Land. The Promised Land was not just a place, it was an idea – an economic strategy – for how people could thrive, living in freedom and peace for generations to come.

When the Israelites first took possession of the land of Canaan, each family received an equal inheritance of property. Since land ownership was the key to economic prosperity, income inequality would be minimal. There would be no "1%" of the super-rich among God's people.

Yet over time, inequality would inevitably set in. A husband might die, leaving a widow with children. By God's law, his brother should marry the widow and take care of the family—but what if there was no brother, or the brother refused to provide for the family in need? The widow would have to sell the land and her adult children must then become servants of a neighbor in order to earn a living.

Without land, thus having no hope of improving their situation, these servants would probably marry other servants, forming entire families in servitude; almost like slaves. In 2-3 generations, there would be a permanent underclass in Israel. While at the same time, the rich would become richer, with slaves to do their work for them.

But every 50<sup>th</sup> year, with the declaration of "Jubilee," all debts were cancelled, all indentured servants were freed and land was to be returned to the families who originally owned it. This would be a major disruption of both the social order and the entire economic system; providing an escape from generational poverty and a reminder that God's vision of liberty and justice for all was truly intended for ALL PEOPLE at all times.

Thus, the Year of Jubilee was **God's big 'Reset' button** – it was a mandated rebooting of the entire system intended to provide hope and restore balance and abundance for all people living in God's land of promise; It was truly revolutionary! And if they had followed these Sabbath year principles, it would have transformed Promised Land economics from the dog-eat-dog version which we still use, into a 50 year program of recycling, where everyone wins.

Now here is an incredible truth – although God had given Israel this 50 year reset, this unique opportunity to celebrate worth, to express justice, to honor life - **not once was it ever recorded that Israel celebrated either a Sabbath year, or Jubilee year.** They had agreed to it, they referred to it – but not once in their history did they ever actually take a Sabbath year rest for the land, or practice a Jubilee year of restoration. The result was predictable, as can be seen throughout the world today; the poor became poorer, and the rich became richer. That is the way of the world; it was not God's vision for His people in the Land of Promise. And they paid the price for their disobedience.

According to 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles and the prophets Jeremiah and Daniel, Judah's 70 year exile in the land of Babylon was partially in repayment to the Promised Land for nearly 500 years of neglected Sabbaths (2 Chron 36:21, Jeremiah 25:11-12, Daniel 9:2).

By the time we get to the New Testament hundreds of years later, they had still not celebrated a single Jubilee year, but by then they believed that when the Messiah came, He would bring back Jubilee, He would show them how to do it.

**Don't you wish we could have a year of jubilee?**

Had Israel followed God's Jubilee plan, there still would have been some debt, but not much. There would have been some wealth, but not the disparity we see today, with **"just 8 men owning half the wealth in the entire world."** [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wealth\\_inequality\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wealth_inequality_in_the_United_States)

According to 2020 Federal data, the top 1% of Americans hold over 30% of all household wealth in the U.S., while the bottom 50% of the population holds less than 2% of all wealth.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/tommybeer/2020/10/08/top-1-of-us-households-hold-15-times-more-wealth-than-bottom-50-combined/?sh=1bcf81cc5179>

**The total personal debt load in America equals 14.35 trillion or an average of \$145,000 per household**, with \$6,271 of that being in credit card debt and another \$17,533 being in car loans. <https://www.fool.com/the-ascent/research/average-american-household-debt/>

**When you add on the national debt of nearly \$28.1 trillion or \$85,049.00 for every person living in the U.S., it is not an exaggeration to say that we are swimming in oceans of debt!** <https://www.justfacts.com/nationaldebt.asp>

Wouldn't it be nice to reinstate the Year of Jubilee once in a lifetime and give each generation a chance to start over? But if Israel never accomplished this even when beginning on a perfectly equal footing, I don't see how the United States or the world for that matter will be able to do so until Jesus Christ, King of kings and Lord of lords returns to resume His rightful reign over the Earth.

**But we don't have to wait until the end of time to enjoy personally God's Jubilee, which is as much about spiritual enslavement as it is about economic equity.**

Right at the start of His ministry, after John's baptism and His wilderness trials, Jesus came back home to Nazareth where He had grown up and early one Sabbath He made His way to the Synagogue as He was accustomed to and motioned that He had something to say.

*When the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'*

*He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'* (Luke 4:17-21)

What was Jesus doing? His sermon had three points:

1. Jesus was proclaiming that He was their long awaited Messiah ... *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.*
2. That His mission would be one of deliverance.... *God has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free.*
3. And He wasn't here to bring about just one year, but rather a brand new age of liberty and freedom for all ... *the year of the Lord's favor.*

Then as you know, Jesus did just what He said, He preached "good news" to the poor, He healed the sick and lame, restored sight to the blind and set the spiritually captive – which includes EVERYONE WHO ASKS – FREE!

Thus, the Year of Jubilee is still relevant to us because we've all made bad choices, we've incurred a huge debt of sin, been sold into slavery to the devil and we've lost our spiritual inheritance! But thank God our High Priest, Jesus Christ, has gone into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled His own blood in atonement for all the world's sins!

In a Peanuts cartoon, Lucy approached Charlie Brown with a paper and pen and said, "*Here, sign this. It absolves me from all blame.*" Then she went to Schroeder with the same paper and said, "*Here, sign this. It absolves me from all blame.*" Finally she went to Linus: "*Here, sign this. It absolves me from all blame.*" As she walked away, Linus said, "*Gee, that must be a nice document to have.*"

But we can have such! God says to us...

[I am the Lord], I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins. Isaiah 43:25

Through the person and work of Jesus Christ, our entire debt load of sin has been cancelled; we can be absolved of all blame. All prisoners of death can be set free, and our inheritance of salvation and Heaven restored to us ... if we are willing to admit our need and accept God's Jubilee as He would freely and lovingly give such to us.

In a dream, Martin Luther found himself being attacked by Satan. The devil unrolled a long scroll containing a list of Luther's sins, and held it before him. On reaching the end of the scroll Luther asked the devil, "Is that all?" "No," came the reply, and a second scroll was thrust in front of him. Then, after a second came a third. But now the devil had no more. "You've forgotten something," Luther exclaimed triumphantly. "Quickly write on each of them, 'Paid in Full with the blood of Jesus Christ, God's son!'" [K. Koch, *Occult Bondage and Deliverance*, p. 10.]

Many people today are in "bondage." Whether it is alcohol, drugs, sex, gambling, or eating addictions, fear of the future or of failure, or bitterness and anger. Many people are so bound by their sin, that there's no freedom in their lives. They live lives of "quiet desperation," even within the church. But this is exactly why Jesus came.

**Jesus came to offer you Jubilee from guilt and sin, to bring you out of captivity to death. Deliverance begins with a decision to let Jesus lead you out of the prison you're in.** But there is also that other aspect of Jubilee that each Christian should face: God intended not only spiritual freedom but also economic freedom for all people.

One of the reasons that God's people were taken out of the land of promise, into captivity, was the inequality between rich and poor and the misuse of power and wealth by the rich.

Do you think God judges nations today by how they deal with poverty and wealth?

Do you think the growing disparity between wealthy and poor people in America is a problem?

Are you concerned about people in America who seem unable to escape poverty, because they lack opportunity, skills or hope?

Maybe we are concerned; yet what can we do about it?  
How should the principles of Jubilee be applied in today's world?

We will certainly discuss this when Something More resumes in three weeks – that will give you some time to come up with the perfect solution. We will probably not all agree on the political and economic implications. In fact, the discussion might become heated! **Yet Jubilee gives us insight into the heart of God. We must listen for what God is telling us and how that informs our economic as well as political views.**

For those who are politically on the “conservative” side, Jubilee says that justice goes beyond “equal protection under the law.” God’s justice provides for **OPPORTUNITY** for everyone to achieve success, which should be reflected in our laws, policies and budgets. Conservative values must be compassionate and tempered by the value of human life over property and personal rights.

For those on the “liberal” side, Jubilee emphasizes that governmental assistance should be structured to encourage **PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY**. The rich should not be allowed to take advantage of the poor, but neither should the poor be allowed to abuse the system. Governmental policies and assistance should not shield people from the consequences of irresponsible or immoral behavior.

God’s word challenges all our political biases and that is a good thing! Jubilee calls for each of us to examine our own political views, aligning them with God’s priorities and values.

### **As a Church we can and should be a community of Jubilee!**

God’s vision for His people in the Promised Land, was that they would live in a community of equality, justice, mercy and freedom. They would not be like the other nations. That vision is now focused in the church of Jesus Christ. Although we can advocate for godly principles in our nation and society, **the primary focus of God’s vision is for us, His people to be doing the work of Jubilee in our daily lives with our neighbors.**

It is remarkable to see how much of Jesus’ ministry was focused on poor and needy people and how often Jesus talked about money. But to really see the impact of the gospel, we must look at the early church: The Book of Acts records that immediately following Pentecost and perhaps for as many as 14 years after that, until renewed persecution sent the Jerusalem Church out into the world....

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul... there was not a needy person among them Acts 4:32-34

“Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in

common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them" Acts 4:32-34

Would such radical sharing of resources be the answer to world poverty today?

No, as Leviticus shows us following God in a fallen world is not easy! Yet the early church was pointing to something beyond themselves: that God's kingdom is a kingdom of righteousness, justice and thriving people (Isaiah 65:20-23, Isaiah 61:7).

Along with the good news of God's offered Jubilee from sin, the church can also give the world a vision and a taste of God's coming kingdom. It does so by sharing resources, and by giving acceptance and love—for rich and poor, powerful and weak, strong and needy.

In the days just before Israel was led into exile and the land given its neglected Sabbath rests, the people were still going through all their religious motions yet wondering why God was not blessing them? So, God challenged them saying...

*Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?*

*Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?*

*Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rearguard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.* (Isaiah 58:6-9)

As He did then, God still seeks to give all people a day of Jubilee today. That is the life, we – as God's family – have been charged to share with the world; to share with others in need, to seek mercy and justice and to live joyfully as a community in which all people are loved and supported.

We are not there yet, but we are seeking it, tasting it, and asking God to bring it. As we pray in the Lord's Prayer, "*Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven.*"

Let's pray about this now.