

Jubilee

Leviticus 25, 27

Imagine, if you will, that you have the opportunity to tell someone about the life and work of Jesus Christ. Maybe it will be a friend. Someone you work with. Or someone in your own family. Or someone you just met. They want to know about Jesus. Where in the Bible would you turn to tell them?

Maybe John 3:16. Maybe Ephesians 2. Or Romans. I doubt any of you would turn to Leviticus 25? Would any of you proclaim Jesus to an unbeliever today by explaining the year of Jubilee? Probably not.

But Jesus did! When he had the chance to explain his own work in the local synagogues of his hometown of Galilee, at the very outset of his ministry, he made reference to the year of Jubilee. Turn with me to Luke 4, the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry, immediately after the temptation in the wilderness.

Luke 4:14 Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region. 15 And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. 16 So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. 17 And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: 18 "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; 19 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD." 20 Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all

who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. 21 And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Actually, you will notice, he quotes Isaiah 61:2, "To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD." But Isaiah is referring to Leviticus 25! Jesus would "preach good tidings to the poor." He had come to "heal the brokenhearted, [to] proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound."

In short, Jesus came to inaugurate the Year of Jubilee!

We will come back to that at the end of the sermon, but I mention it now to tell you where we are going. This whole book of Leviticus points us to Jesus Christ, and that will be our focus this afternoon. And with that in mind, go back to Leviticus 25. This chapter is divided up by its own structure into three sections, first the sabbath rest of the land, then the provisions for redemption of property, and finally the redemption of slaves. We'll look first at,

I. JUBILEE AND THE SABBATH REST.

I want you to see clearly that the structure of our whole lives is to be based upon the sabbath principle. And sabbath means rest. From creation, of course, that sabbath principle structures the use of our time on the very same principle as God has structured his time. A cycle of six days labor and one day rest. That is what we call a creation ordinance, part of the moral law of God written upon the hearts of his people from creation, before the fall. Adam and Eve, in the garden, were sabbatarians. One day every seven, they would rest from their normal labor and delight themselves in the Lord.

That provision was codified and placed in the written expression of God's law during the age of Moses, and remains as a perpetual obligation of great delight for God's people today. But

there were other elements of this sabbath principle in the Old Covenant, including a sabbatical year every seven years, and this great sabbatical jubilee year every seven groups of seven years.

The seven year sabbath is explained in,
v.1-5

The obvious question is, then, “What shall we eat?” Look at,
v.20-22

I hope you remember that same principle is in effect with the weekly sabbath. Particularly with regard to the provisions of manna in the desert!

Ex. 16:22 “And so it was, on the sixth day, that they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one. And all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. 23 Then he said to them, “This is what the LORD has said: ‘Tomorrow is a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. Bake what you will bake today, and boil what you will boil; and lay up for yourselves all that remains, to be kept until morning.’” 24 So they laid it up till morning, as Moses commanded; and it did not stink, nor were there any worms in it. 25 Then Moses said, “Eat that today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. 26 “Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is the Sabbath, there will be none.”

You should clearly see the spiritual principles at work here. God is teaching his people that he will provide for them, all that they need. They must trust him. And obey him. Yet in their obedience, in our obedience I would add, there is great blessing! Since the fall, that sabbath rest is the occasion to escape, even temporarily, from the awful effects of the curse. There is rest from toilsome labor!

Another great blessing is clear right here in Leviticus 25.
v.18-19

The land will be more fruitful if it is given a sabbath rest. There are good explanations of this principle of resting the land which are often applied by wise farmers and workers of the land today. Land itself needs a rest! And those who let their land rest WILL receive more abundance from their land. But there is a much higher principle at work here than merely agricultural theory. The sabbath year was a year to remember what God reminded his people in,

v.2

Note the phrase, “the land which I give you.” The sabbath is a reminder of God’s mercy and abundantly sufficient provisions for the needs of all his people. That’s true of the weekly sabbath. The seven year sabbath. And the 50 year sabbath, that year of Jubilee.

All a reminder of the Lord’s faithfulness to his own covenant promises. And he makes mention of those promises throughout this chapter, first in,

v.17

That is always the context for the giving of God’s law. “I am the Lord your God.” Similarly,

v.38

And then, v.55

I cannot under-estimate the importance of those words. “I am the Lord your God.” “I have redeemed you.” “I have saved you.” “And here are my blessings to you.”

I don't believe you could find a greater expression of those blessings anywhere in the Old Testament than this year of Jubilee. So let's look more closely at what all of this means.

Please look with me at,

v.8-9

It is announced by that great trumpet call, beginning on the day of atonement we studied in chapter 16. And then we learn what Jubilee really means.

v.10

Jubilee means to proclaim liberty. To proclaim freedom. The idea is that Jubilee is a restoration. Remembering God's mercy, the people of Israel would be restored to the original standing they had had fifty years previously. It is the concept of redemption. Property was returned to original owners. Debtors were released from their debts.

This redemption or restoration is expressed in,

v.13-17

Much can be said about social justice in all of that, for the price of buying your land back was measured by how far away the year of Jubilee was. After all, in that year, the land would automatically revert to the original owner. Land could never be sold off permanently. In effect, a man could only rent out his land or his own labor for a maximum of 49 years. The rent is payable in one lump sum in advance, as if there were a sale, but in the jubilee year the land reverts back to its original owner and the slave is given his freedom.

Thus, if a man went bankrupt the year after the jubilee, he would be enslaved for up to 48 years unless a relative was able to redeem him. But if it happened later in the cycle, he would have

a shorter time to wait for release. Thus about once in any man's lifetime the slate was wiped clean. Everyone had the chance to make a fresh start.

Let's look more specifically at that in regard to land.

II. JUBILEE AND PROPERTY.

We start with a great principle,

v.23

That is one of those abiding truths that still applies to us today but is illustrated in the ceremonial regulations of the Old Covenant. We don't have a year of jubilee any more. I wouldn't recommend applying these principles of land ownership and redemption to our civil government. But I do want you, as God's people, to understand this universal truth. "The land is Mine," says the Lord.

It is all his. Your house, your car. Your clothes and your furniture. Your checkbook and your retirement account. Everything belongs to him. That was made clear in the Old Covenant by the provisions for the land to revert back to the original owner. Because the land belonged to God, it couldn't be permanently sold by one man to another man.

Men, after all, are "strangers and sojourners" on this earth! The people of Israel were to understand that, and become an example for us, as we read in,

Heb. 11:13 "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. 15 And truly if they had called

to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.”

So it was, in OT Israel, land that was sold could always be redeemed.

v.24-28

There are some exceptions and specific cases illustrated in verses 29-34, and the whole matter of promising and paying vows is found in chapter 27, with reference to the Jubilee year, but the idea that is prominent above everything else is the principle of redemption. How blessed is the man who was able to redeem his own land, or had a relative to do so. Look back at that expression in verse 25, translated “redeeming relative.” It is sometimes translated “kinsman-redeemer.”

Blessed for any man, is the coming of his kinsman-redeemer! Blessed is the redeemer who comes in the name of the Lord. And you should realize that this is the language of worship Jesus received on his own triumphal entry into Jerusalem five days before his crucifixion. Quoting from Psalm 118, the people lining the streets cried out, “Hosanna to the Son of David! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’ Hosanna in the highest!”

Blessed is the redeemer! The kinsman redeemer, who was prophesied in,

Is. 59:20 “The Redeemer will come to Zion, And to those who turn from transgression in Jacob,” Says the LORD.

Also, Job 19:25 “For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth.”

Have I lost you? That redeemer is he who is being described in Leviticus 25. It is Jesus who came to redeem!

v.25

And then we find the issue of,

III. JUBILEE AND SLAVERY.

Actually, the idea is just about the same as with the land, except that instead of redeeming land, a man could redeem himself! And instead of land being returned at the year of Jubilee, a man who had sold himself into slavery in order to pay his debts would be released and freed.

Now slavery isn’t quite the best word for us to use today, because it creates images of slave ships coming over to this country from Africa, with brutal oppression of slaves on American plantations. In Leviticus, however, it was something more like imprisonment, and it gave a man who was unable to pay off his debts a way to work them off directly.

Ideally, one of his relatives would pay off the debt for him. But if not, he always had hope. The year of Jubilee.

There are really two reasons or explanations for all this. First, on a human level, it was simply a matter of compassion.

v.35-38

We could certainly make personal, moral applications of that to our lives today. But this a far more important meaning for this provision. It was a guarantee that an Israelite would never again be enslaved as they were in Egypt. For the people of Israel are the people of God. They are not slaves, they are set free.

v.39-43

And again, in,
v.54-55

So it is that God declares to his people, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” Thus, God who redeemed his people would preserve their freedom. And that concept is surely carried over in principle to the New Covenant.

John 8:31 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. 32 “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” 33 They answered Him, “We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can you say, ‘You will be made free?’” 34 Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. 35 “And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. 36 “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.”

That brings me back to where I started.

IV. JUBILEE AND JESUS.

Under this heading, and in an attempt to tie together everything about the year of Jubilee, I’ll mention three things, Jubilee then, Jubilee now, and Jubilee in the future.

I’ve already begun to make reference to some of that, so let me summarize, beginning with Jubilee then. In the Old Covenant. For the people of Israel, the year of jubilee announced the fullness of their redemption, every 50 years. Land is restored to original owners, those to whom God had promised the land in the first place. Slaves were set free. Everyone got a fresh start.

It was as Isaiah prophesied,

Is. 61:1 “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound; 2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn, 3 To console those who mourn in Zion, To give them beauty for ashes, The oil of joy for mourning, The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; That they may be called trees of righteousness, The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.” 4 And they shall rebuild the old ruins, They shall raise up the former desolations, And they shall repair the ruined cities, The desolations of many generations. 5 Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, And the sons of the foreigner Shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers. 6 But you shall be named the priests of the LORD, They shall call you the servants of our God. You shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, And in their glory you shall boast. 7 Instead of your shame you shall have double honor, And instead of confusion they shall rejoice in their portion. Therefore in their land they shall possess double; Everlasting joy shall be theirs. 8 “For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery for burnt offering; I will direct their work in truth, And will make with them an everlasting covenant. 9 Their descendants shall be known among the Gentiles, And their offspring among the people. All who see them shall acknowledge them, That they are the posterity whom the LORD has blessed.” 10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. 11 For as the earth brings forth its bud, As the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, So the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.”

For the nation of Israel, that was a great hope! The nation of Israel would be known among the Gentiles. They would inhabit the lands of the Gentiles. Verse 6: “You shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, And in their glory you shall boast.”

Israel would shine forth in righteousness. And the people of the Old Covenant were saved in that great hope! It is the great hope of a redeemer. The great hope of their Messiah. They people of Israel were saved by faith in that one who would come. We, of course, know his name as Jesus.

Jubilee points us to Jesus, the kinsman-redeemer who would himself, announce this great year of freedom.

Don't think that Leviticus 25 is simply a description of some idealized social order. The year of Jubilee had many, many applications for society and for moral living, but that's not the point. The point is not merely social justice and economic equality. Certainly it is evident that the freedom of Jubilee cannot be attained by a merely external or outward form of religion. And, in fact, there is little record that the year of Jubilee was ever practiced faithfully. By the time of the exile into Babylon and Assyria, Jubilee was virtually obsolete.

But that doesn't change what God had written. And what he had written in all of the Old Covenant was a prelude to the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the second person of the trinity. So for a few moments, consider Jubilee now. And by that, I mean Jubilee in this present age, from the first coming of Jesus until the end of this age, when he will return in glory.

Please go back with me to,

Luke 4:17 And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it

was written: 18 “The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; 19 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.” 20 Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. 21 And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

Can it be any clearer? The year of Jubilee, the real year of Jubilee is not announced with the Old Testament blast of the trumpet. But with the blast of Jesus' own preaching. Preaching the gospel. And the preaching of the gospel is to the brokenhearted! “Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth.”

The preaching of the gospel is for those who are in bondage, slaves to the dominion of their sin. “Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.”

The preaching of the gospel is for the blind.

John 9:39 And Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind.”

He is the light of the world, the light that shines in the darkness.

And so, dear people, this is the acceptable year of the Lord.

This is the year of Jubilee now! This whole age, from the first coming of Jesus until the second. For the gospel is being proclaimed, and the promised covenant blessings of God are being poured out upon his covenant people.

The hymn writer Charles Wesley has great insight when he writes, “Blow ye the trumpet blow! The gladly solemn sound let all the nations know, to earth’s remotest bound; The year of Jubilee is come; return ye ransomed sinners home, return, ye ransomed sinners, home.”

“Jesus, our great high priest, has full atonement made; ye weary spirits rest; ye mournful souls be glad.” “Ye slaves of sin and hell, your liberty receive; and safe in Jesus dwell, and blest in Jesus live.” “The year of Jubilee is come!”

So I preach to you!

2 Cor. 6:2 “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. And “if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.”

And yet, there is still more! Jubilee to come!

For the fullness of restoration is still to come, isn’t it? The fullness of freedom from bondage. The fullness of freedom from sin. That great day is predicted in,

Acts 3:19 “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, 20 “and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, 21 “whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.”

The times of restoration speak of the glorious appearing of Jesus at his second coming, when all things shall be made new. That final day of Jubilee will be on the day described in,

Rev. 21:1 “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. 2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. 4 “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” 5 Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” And He said to me, “Write, for these words are true and faithful.”

I will make two final applications. First, I, in Jesus’ name, will preach this day of Jubilee now. This day of salvation. Repent, and trust in Jesus, that you might receive the forgiveness of sins. And that is the message that we as a church must proclaim.

And secondly, you who know and love Christ, look forward to this great and coming day of Jubilee. I’ll end with Peter’s great exhortation at the end of 2 Peter,

2 Peter 3:14 “[Further], beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless;...17 You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; 18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.”