

The Mission of Jubilee

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- [0 : 0 0] In our morning worship we've been looking at the mission of God. We've been looking at what the Bible is about, really, and we've been trying to explain that the Bible is just a random kind of mixture of stories that are brought together.
- Rather, there's a purpose in what God is unfolding in the Bible, and it all leads up to Jesus Christ and the salvation of Jesus, and then kind of after Jesus everything is looking back to him.
- So I do apologize profusely to you if you're here today for the baptism, and you're thinking, well, what is he on about? And we're coming into this, and we haven't had the earlier sermons, and we don't know what he's on about.
- It will only be 20 minutes of your life that you'll never get back. And you can last that long just for the privilege of watching the baptisms, and I'm glad that you can be here today.
- And I hope that there will be some link and some fusion between what I'm saying from God's word and also relevant to the baptisms. But we've come to a reading, a really great, really unusual reading in the Old Testament in the book of Leviticus, which we don't often read from, to be honest.
- [1 : 1 1] And then I'm going to read a short passage from the New Testament from the beginning of the life of Jesus. Okay, so in Leviticus, I think that's on your order of service today, the scripture reading from Leviticus chapter 25 and from verse 8.
- And this is entitled, The Year of Jubilee. Okay? You shall count seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the time of the seven weeks of years shall give you 49 years.
- Then you shall sound the loud trumpet on the tenth day of the seventh month, on the day of atonement, you shall sound the trumpet throughout the land. And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the year to all its inhabitants.
- It shall be a jubilee for you when each of you shall return to its property and each of you shall return to its clan. That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you.
- In it you shall neither sow nor reap what grows of itself nor gather the grapes from the undressed vines. For it is a jubilee. It shall be holy to you.
- [2 : 1 4] You may eat the produce of your field. In this year of jubilee, each of you shall return to its property. And if you make a sale to your neighbour or buy from your neighbour, you shall not wrong one another.
- You shall pay your neighbour according to the number of years after the jubilee. And he shall sell to you according to the number of years for crops. If the years are many, you shall increase the price, and if the years are few, you shall reduce the price.
- For it is the number of crops that he is selling to you. You shall not wrong one another, but you shall fear your God, for I am the Lord your God. For you shall do my statutes and keep my rules and perform them, and then you will dwell in the land securely.
- The land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and dwell in it securely. And if you say, what shall we eat in the seventh year if we may not sow or gather in our crop?

And I will command my blessing on you in the sixth year so that it will produce a crop sufficient for three years. And when you sow in the eighth year, you will be eating some of the old crop, and you shall eat of it until the ninth year when the crop arrives.

[3 : 24] This is God giving directions to the people of Israel that he was in a kind of theocracy. He was giving them legislation and guidance about how they should govern our society.

And in Jesus, in Luke's Gospel, chapter 4, at the beginning of his ministry, we are told in verses 16, he came to Nazareth where he had been brought up, and as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day and he stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him.

He unrolled the scroll and found a place where it was written. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor, he has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind to set liberty to those who had oppressed to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

He rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendants and sat down in the eyes of all the synagogue were upon him and he began to say, today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

So there are the two passages and we are going to speak for a little while today about the year of Jubilee, which is a celebratory year. I am old enough to remember the Queen's Jubilee year, which was 25 years on the throne.

[4 : 49] That just kind of, Jubilee is coming to an English language meaning just a celebration. And today is very much a celebration, a celebration of new life and of God's covenant and grace and of the community of the church and of baptism.

And I believe also that this, one of the verses from Leviticus chapter 25 which speaks about liberty and Jubilee is the verse that is inscribed on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia, which some of our American brothers and sisters here will know about.

And so we have this concept of freedom and liberty and justice and Jubilee and celebration coming from this passage. A few weeks ago we looked at Abraham who was entered into this new covenant with God and there was going to be a new start, a completely new start for him and the family and the generations after him.

And then last week we looked at Moses and how God kind of revealed that within that there would be a new society, a new community built up together. In embryo at least and the Old Testament, everything's in shadow.

Everything's just kind of pointing forward to what Jesus is about and what Jesus is doing in our community and our lives as Christians and in the church.

[6 : 09] So everything in embryo and shadows in the Old Testament and it's fulfilled and expanded and explained a little bit more in the New Testament.

So the Old Testament helps us to understand and this great concept of Jubilee is one that maybe we don't know very much about and yet it's a tremendously significant and important part as it's unpacked, as it's unfolded, as to what it means to be Christians in today's society and Christians as a church and Christians in the world in which we live.

So very briefly we're going to look at that today. The Year of Jubilee is explained in verses 8 to 10 of this chapter in Leviticus. Trumpet was blown, okay?

Trumpet in the Bible was always connected with music and celebration and introducing times of festival and rejoicing. And so the legislation was unfolded with this great trumpet sound and it was very radical legislation.

Very radical command that God was giving to this community, to this people, that we can see shadows of that are reflected in our Christian lives. And very much we can see echoes of what God was wanting to do and what God was doing through this in the world in which we live.

[7 : 32] So if you're here today and you maybe don't normally go to church or you're not a Christian and you might not even believe in God, then I hope you'll see that even in what God is saying here, there's echoes of it in our lives.

And all of these echoes just point towards our Creator God and what He's done for us in Jesus Christ as He wants to bring us back to Himself. So we had this great trumpet sounded on the 50th year, okay?

On the 50th year. So what happened was the years went in cycles just like the weeks. So there was six years, just like six days, and then one year of rest in this community.

So on that year of rest, there wasn't to be work and there wasn't to be land plowed and crops taken up. So it was a year of rest environmentally and also socially for the people and spiritually.

But then seven times seven is 49. Well, this was good at my maths. And then so the 50th year was this year of Jubilee. So there would be seven times seven.

[8 : 38] Each 77th year was a year of rest. Then the 49th year, you're still with me? You got the maths? It was a year of rest. And then the 50th year was a double whammy.

It was a completely magnificent year which trumped all the other years of rest. And it was called the Jubilee year. And it was consecrated especially for the whole nation to be a separate year.

And there was a few things in it that were very important. There was rest. So it was to be a year of rest. I could do a hands up here.

How many are looking forward already to work tomorrow? Okay. Well, this was a whole year where you didn't need to go to work. How fantastic was it. In fact, it was the second of a year of not going to work.

It was a year of rest. And of course the work was a lot more agrarian in many ways and it was land based. And so the land needed rest. And so there wasn't any land to be plowed either.

[9 : 38] It was to be a time of celebration, of meditation, of rest for the land and for the people. It was absolutely radical. And I felt very guilty after last Sunday night's sermon which has to spoke about the commute of life being a bit of a drag and a bit dull and all the trials and the difficulties.

It's very easy to forget that there's the other side of that in grace and in the Gospel and as we believe in our Christian lives. So I hope this is a bit of a redress for that.

So there was rest but there was also release. So Israelites who had fallen into poor times would often sell their land in order to pay the bills and sometimes would actually have to sell themselves into slavery.

And this 50th year was the end of that. Anyone who'd sold their land was able to get their land back and anyone who was sold into slavery were able to get their freedom. So there was this in-bill recognition in this community from God that there was the dignity and the equality and the justice of every person was important.

And everyone ultimately was equal and if they'd fallen in hard times then that was to be redeemable and they were to be given the opportunity of being restored. They were to recognise that the land was God's ultimately.

[11 : 01] It was to stop this huge accumulation of land by prospectors, those who would come and buy up everyone's land and become rich and powerful.

And it was to remind them as he says, verse 23, the land was not sold in perpetuity for the land is mine said God, you are strangers and sojourners with me. It was to remind them that ultimately the land even that they were given was God's gift to them.

And it was a reminder of the importance of family. Talks about kinship and of people and of family coming back together may have been split up through slavery or through poverty and they're to be brought back together because family was important.

Inheritance land was important. Land's not really that important to us but in a city environment it's slightly different.

But in the Old Testament land was the means of production. Land was where people were able to make their wealth, maybe not wealth but make survive because they could earn enough to eat and to get the things that they needed in life.

[12:12] And that was hugely important, the dignity of that. And I also spoke of their need to rely on God. They wonder how in earth are we going to live and they say that in verse 27.

How are we going to live for this time if we can't produce crops and sell them and then eat from them and everything else. And God says, look, I'll command a blessing for you so that on that sixth year you will have more than enough to do you for the years where the crops aren't producing.

And so it was to remind them of the miracle of salvation that God was going to care for them even though it seemed ridiculous and also that they were going to have to follow God's ways, God's laws and God's equal division of the land.

Now that might have been brilliant news for the poor, fantastic news for those who had become enslaved. But it might not have been quite so good news for the accumulators, for the great capitalists of the day who wanted to get more and more land and become more and more powerful.

And God was reacting against that particular danger within the society. And of course, most importantly, it was a year of celebration, of jubilee, of recalibration, of healing, of rest, of enjoyment, of life and of God.

[13:37] And it was to remind them of the purpose of life, to get off the treadmill for a little while and to enjoy simply being alive and enjoy being human, enjoy being made in God's image and enjoy the community of His people.

Now, was I ever enacted in the Old Testament? Did it ever happen? God commanded it here in Leviticus? Probably not. There's no real indication that it was something that was celebrated.

I think partly because it was too hard, too difficult. The Old Testament people of God were hugely self-absorbed and sinful and selfish and it's doubtful whether they ever trusted God enough to enact this great jubilee command.

They needed greater revelation, they needed to know and understand and appreciate the cost of their salvation that only Jesus was able to reveal to them.

So can we reimagine for a moment jubilee principles through Jesus Christ and in the New Testament and for our, you know, what on earth has this got to do with our Christian lives?

[14:50] What's it to do with a baptism? What's it to do with worship? And we just think of one or two of the things that this Old Testament principle reminds us of because Jesus himself, when we read in Luke chapter 4 at the beginning of his ministry, he quoted from Isaiah 61 which was itself the language of jubilee.

It was jubilee language that Jesus was using. He speaks about the year of the Lord's favour and the year of jubilee was the year of the Lord's favour.

And so he was using this jubilee language when he was speaking about what he had come to do spiritually and physically in our lives.

And that same idea of rest and of the Sabbath rest which is spoken of here in Leviticus 25 is linked to what Jesus did in salvation in Hebrews chapter 4 where we have that picture of the rest day paralleling our spiritual rest when we put our trust in Jesus Christ.

So quickly, broadly and then specifically, broadly if we take this Old Testament teaching of jubilee, how does it apply to what Jesus has done?

[16 : 04] Well broadly it reminds us that God in Jesus Christ did something really, really great. He's done something really great. This jubilee year was a great idea.

It was a great thought. It was a great structure. It was a great legislation because it freed people and it released people and it rested people and it gave equality and dignity and justice to the society that was the Old Testament people of God.

And so it was a great thing even if it was never properly enacted. And what Jesus has done in coming as God, as a baby, growing up perfect and then being nailed across as we were singing in our place to die for our sins is something really great.

It's something absolutely radical and unique which has transformed our lives as Christians and the lives of the Macraes and the Olivers who will come forward shortly for baptism which is why they want to bring their children up in that covenant that God has made.

And that transforming covenant which doesn't just affect them but affects their children and affects the church and affects the community in which we live.

[17 : 25] Grace and the grace of God and the free offer of salvation is a celebratory reality and it touches us at the very core of our longings.

The very core of things that make us human and everyone here today is human and so what God has done in Christ touches us the longings we have to celebrate, the longings we have to rest, the longings we have to be restored, to be healthy, to know justice, to know all of these big concepts as well as the little things that are reflected in the kind of choices we make in life and by the decisions we make and by the longings we have.

We see that broadly Jesus Christ comes to give us these things both spiritually and ultimately physically in our lives also and also here.

So broadly it's something great Jesus has done but also specifically what is it that's so great? What's so great about what Jesus has done?

Two things, first is that we can celebrate as human beings and as Christians. You know some of you may have not visited a free church before and some of you may have the impression that a free church is a very doer and presbyterian and Calvinistic and miserable place.

[18 : 51] Well if we've given you that impression I'm very sorry because it shouldn't be and being a Christian isn't to be doer and miserable and rotten and judgmental and a killjoy.

It's never been and it should never have been. We should be as a people celebratory and we should be able to firstly celebrate despite the tears that we go through in life.

I'm not suggesting that we don't go through tears and life isn't difficult. We all recognise that but we underplay this great celebratory attitude and aspect of our lives.

We tend towards legalism and to the grind of life and to the misery and the battles and the struggles and the difficulties of being a Christian. Let's celebrate today and remember that we have a rest in Christ.

We don't need to earn our favour with God. We don't need to try and please Him. We don't need to try and make ourselves better than other people so that God will accept us and get into heaven. Jesus says, Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden, I will give you rest.

[19 : 53] I have done it for you. I have paid the price for your sins. I love you. I just want you to trust in me. I want you to believe in me and follow me because of my love and because I have accomplished salvation.

When He died on the cross He said it's finished. He's paid the price. Simply trust and obey. This is that we are living in spiritually symbolic the year of the Lord's favour.

This is the jubilee time when Christ's work has finished and we can rest in Him. It means that we can rest physically and not feel guilty. We shouldn't be workaholics as Christians.

I have to work really hard. I have to work all the time because that's what pleases God. No, God doesn't say that. God says you can work six days if you want and that's good but you can rest.

Rest is important and I gave my people a year of rest every seven and a double year of rest every fifty. Rest is good. So when you have a cold drink, when you get a hug from someone, when someone smiles at you, when you enjoy a meal together or go on holiday, you have got off the commuter, the scot-rail commute that we spoke about last week and you're just relaxing and enjoy that rest.

[21 : 08] Enjoy these ordinary things which God gives us to enjoy because they are absolutely right and good and proper as we give Him the glory and His day, the Lord's day.

It's not a day for rules and regulations, it's a day of rest. He's given it to us, for us, a day to break the cycle, a day not to be working seven days a week.

So work seven days a week and then another seven and keep on working and we've worked so much, we've got lots of money to spend on our celebrations and our parties and our holidays and we die.

You know, what's the point? What's the point of working so hard that we kill ourselves because He says rest and refocus and recognize who I am. So there's rest and there's also restoration.

This jubilee year was a great year of restoration and that is absolutely the case for us as Christians and what Jesus offers to us, he reminds us that I think often also we speak simply about what God has done, has been saving our soul as if it's some kind of separate thing to our body and to our life.

[22 : 18] But He saved us body, life and soul. He saved us wholeheartedly and He redeems this stuff of life for us, the everyday ordinary stuff because He made it and He made it for us to enjoy in thanksgiving to Him for the gift.

You know what it's like if we enjoy things that someone's given us, we're grateful to them for what they've given us and that is the right attitude but sin comes in and makes us very ungrateful to God and we're not thankful to Him for our life, we think it's our own and we think that we earn it and we think that we are in possession of it.

But in Christ He restores everything. He highlights here the importance of family and covenant and baptism speaks importance of family to us.

Jubilee speaks of the importance of work, of our jobs, of dignity, of having equality and relationships and speaks about the injustice of poverty and the importance of looking out for one another both in the church and outside of the church in the society.

So your life and what you do and when you leave church today and where you go to work tomorrow, it's not like just church matters, it's not just that the Christian hour that you spend here matters, your whole life matters to God and it's all to be redeemed, your studies, your relationships, your pleasure, your joy, your rest, your work, all of these things He says, look, do them for my glory and do them because I've redeemed them and given them significance and there's a future aspect to all that He is doing with our lives.

[24 : 01] He's forgiven our sins and He wants us to relate to Him in every aspect of our lives because He is our Lord and our God. So our life is restored but also our life is restored not just individually but He's placed us in a church.

Therefore these same principles of new society and new community are important in the church. These jubilee principles, the way we treat one another, the dignity with which we treat one another, the provision for one another at a very basic level, even the provision of meals for one another, the sharing of our wealth with one another, the forgiving, the restoring, the celebratory elements of life are what we're to share together.

So in a day like this we share this great celebration of baptism together and we share huge and beautiful cakes together and we just share life and that's good and important and it's part of what God has done in our lives but there's a cost to that as well, isn't it?

Sometimes we've thought in the church that salvation is about me and Jesus. Just about Jesus is done for me and my salvation and as long as I'm a Christian then it doesn't really matter how I act in the church or in the world or anywhere else, it's just, or in the family as a dad or a mum, doesn't really matter.

Just me and Jesus. Not so bad theology, bad understanding of the Bible, God's mission is not just to redeem us to Himself individually but to put that whole new society into place in the church so that we care for and love and are equal with and are united together as a people so there is a cost to that.

[25 : 54] And he's also, with this I finish, he's also placed as in a society. Therefore we take these great principles of rest and equality and celebration and life and we see them in the echoes of the world in which we live.

They may be broken echoes, if you can talk about a broken echo, they may be just shadows but we recognise that there's true humanity in every society that we need to both celebrate and point towards the Creator who made these things.

It's the stuff of life. Get involved in people's lives. Get involved in the ordinariness of their lives because these are the things that God has done for us. These are the gifts that He gives us and we point that out to people and introduce them to your church, to your church society, to your church people, to this new society with a new ethic and a new morality and a new community that should be, isn't always, but should be and we seek to forgive and love one another, should be loving and committed and involved and generous and celebratory.

And also I do think we have a responsibility to expose the brokenness of this world and the society that we live in that is estranged from God.

People again say, well Jesus didn't get involved in politics or the society in which we live. I disagree with that. I think Jesus did. I think He was crucified because He got involved in politics because He was seen as being a rival king to Caesar.

[27 : 48] He did celebrate and He did challenge. And therefore I don't think it's free or fair of us to simply imbibe the politics or the philosophy or even the economics of the day in which we live, whether it be capitalist or socialist or all the different bits in between without thought and without Christian molding and challenging and thinking to guide us because this Jubilee year speaks about how terrible social injustices and inequality, that that is not a good thing, that the increasing divide between the rich and poor is not what God wants for society and the overproduction in the world and the greed that comes from it and the destruction of an environment and intensive farming and corporate greed and unacceptable unemployment and unwillingness to work all of these things as Christians, we should have opinions about that are molded on the justice and on the Jubilee and on the teaching and on the morality and on the salvation of the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives.

That is hugely significant, a different ethic both individually and in the world in which we live. And then let's remember that we celebrate despite the tears and also we celebrate beyond the tears.

That we look forward to this great reality of eternal life with Jesus as Christians who put our trust in Him that He has come and the Old Testament points forward to this mission of God that He has come to explode the DNA that is in every single one of us as human beings that need for dignity and work and land and family and celebration and purpose and rest and worship and the presence of God.

All of that is in us and He has come to redeem that as we put our trust in Him in a future physical heavens and earth where there will be no darkness and no tears and no night.

And this life as Christians is to point towards that. And that's why we believe that baptism isn't just a religious ceremony, a ritual that we go through.

[30 : 24] We believe it to be something that speaks of this great covenant that God has entered into with individuals by faith but also into their families and the covenant and the sign of the covenant is baptism which reminds us that we are bringing our children both in family and in church family into this great place of privilege and great place where they are opened up to the salvation of Jesus Christ and to the work of Christ and to trust and hope and forgiveness.

They still will need to make that commitment to Him themselves but nonetheless what a great privilege they have to know that sign of the covenant through baptism in their lives.

The opposite is continued estrangement from Him and missing out on all that He offers spiritually and forgiveness and hope and future physically in restoration ultimately with Him and in that life and just an ongoing restless separation where only the echoes and only the shadows can be known.

And so Jesus we believe is our Redeemer and is our Saviour who is the most important person in our universe. Let's bow our heads and pray. Father God we ask and pray that you would bless us with the great truth of Jubilee that you would redeem our lives that we would not feel guilty sometimes we do feel guilty at celebrating and having a good time but help us rather to celebrate to the glory of God and celebrate life and family and individuals and families and churches and societies as we recognise even in the brokenness of this world the shadows and echoes of what you want for us.

May we see most importantly the saving work of Jesus to bring back what has been lost to redeem what is distant and to save what is separate and may we see the importance of that most significantly in saving us from the sin and judgment of death we pray and ask these things in Jesus' name.

[32 : 53] Amen.