

The Year of Jubilee

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[0 : 0 0] Now we're going to turn to God's Word. We're going to turn to a book that we don't often read from, the book of Leviticus. The words will come up on the screen if you've got a Bible you might like to turn to us. Leviticus chapter 25.

Now Leviticus is in many ways quite a scary book for lots of people. It is where God gives the detailed regulations about sacrifice and about how the people should live before him.

But I thought chapter 25 is particularly appropriate to think about today because it is about the year of Jubilee. The idea of Jubilee, as so many other things, is something that comes from the Bible.

And the year of Jubilee was every 50th year that the people particularly celebrated and remembered God's goodness to them. So we're going to spend a little while this morning thinking about the year of Jubilee and thinking about some of the lessons perhaps we can learn as a church as we go into our Jubilee year this year.

So we're going to read not the whole chapter, we're going to read a few verses from Leviticus 25 and then see what God has to say to us. So start at verse 8, Leviticus 25 and verse 8.

[1 : 0 4] And God says, In this year of Jubilee, everyone is to return to his own property.

If you sell land to one of your countrymen or buy any from him, do not take advantage of each other. You are to buy from your countrymen on the basis of the number of years since the Jubilee.

And he is to sell to you on the basis of the number of years left for harvesting crops. When the years are many, you are to increase the price. And when the years are few, you are to decrease the price.

Because what he is really selling you is the number of crops. Do not take advantage of each other. But fear your God.

I am the Lord your God. And then we're moving down a bit in the chapter to verse 35. Verse 35. And God again says, If one of your countrymen becomes poor and is unable to support himself among you, help him as you would an alien or a temporary resident, so that he can continue to live among you.

[3 : 0 2] Do not take interest of any kind from him, but fear your God, so that your countrymen may continue to live among you. You must not lend him money at interest or selling food at a profit.

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God. And God, I'm sure, will bless his word as we consider it together.

If you move back 50 years from 2017, it's not very difficult to work out you get back to 1967. I can only remember clearly two things that happened in 1967.

And one of them was that it was probably the best year ever for Scottish football. In May, we went down to Wembley, and the Wembley Wizards hammered the world champions English.

Say they hammered, we won 3-2, but it felt like we hammered them. And we then obviously became world champions because we beat the previous champions. So great, great for Scottish Scotland. And then the event I really remember well from the football is the following month, the month of June, Celtic became the first British team to win the European Cup.

[4 : 11] They went out to Lisbon, the Lisbon Lions, and they won the European Cup. I have quite a strong memory of that. As a result of that, I had my first sporting hero, who was this guy here, who was called Bobby Lennox.

A kind of speedy winger for Celtic. I'm not sure why I chose him, but he quickly became my sporting hero in 1967. So that's the first memory, nothing to do with church.

Second memory very much is to do with church. It is of moving up into this church here. Up until 1967, the church, the people of the church, we worshipped down in a hall in Lauriston Place.

And you can maybe just make out, we're looking towards to across here, and our hall is where the flats were on the far right of that picture. We were up a stairs, it wasn't a ground floor, but it was a stancho hall that we used to meet in there.

But very much a hall rather than a church. And I can remember some of the excitement, certainly among us youngsters, at the thought of coming to a real church. And a real church building, and quite grand it was too.

[5 : 12] These are the decorative pipe organs. They're actually still there. If you can go up above that screen there, if you can see through, these pipes are still there. There's no organ, obviously, now attached to them. You can see if you go up in one of the storage areas up in the gallery today.

Very good if you're getting a bit bored at one of the services. You could try and count the number of pipes that were in the organ. But it was an exciting time for the church. It was a real step of faith for those who were in leadership at the time to move from a relatively small hall upstairs into this big church and to think that we could use it and that we could continue to worship God here.

And we've been here now for just about 50 years. The anniversary is actually in July. And they've been good years on the whole. There have been difficult times.

We've gone through times when the church has struggled in many different ways. But as I said at the start, God has been faithful to us. And as we look back, we do so with thanksgiving. I'm sure a lot of us who have been here for a long time will get a bit nostalgic over the course of the year.

Please forgive us for that. And we will also be trying to look forward and to look at what God is continuing to do among us. There's also, of course, as church members will know, a year of a new start for the church.

[6 : 30] John Gemmo, our pastor, for the last seven and a bit years, has now moved on to further Christian service. And certainly for the first half of the year, we won't have a pastor leading us, but we will have Graham Shanks, our assistant pastor, and Peter and the interns who will be still very active.

But we're very much depending on God and looking forward to what God has to do for us over the year. But I thought it would be good this morning to look at this year of jubilee that the Israelites were instructed by God to celebrate and to think, what does it say to us as we enter our 50th year?

What lessons can we learn from God's instruction to Israel that will be of help to us as we look back and as we look forward this year? Year of Jubilee, the name probably came from the trumpet that was sounded at the beginning.

The Jubal was the name of the trumpet. It was probably the year of the trumpet. And of course, over time, jubilee has become something particularly associated with marriage, but also with other things as well.

It's not entirely clear how often the year of jubilee actually was celebrated by the Israelites. You don't read about it a lot in the Bible. So whether they actually did as God had instructed them over the years, we're not sure.

[7 : 50] But what God gave them was something which was very important. For most people, once in their lifetime, they had this special year.

Once in their lifetime, they had this year which was set apart for God and was to be holy before him. And it was a time when they were supposed to recognise the goodness of God to them, recognise their dependence on God, and also to recognise that they were the people of God.

That they weren't just like any other nation round about and that they would have a real care and a real concern for each other and particularly for those who were disadvantaged.

We'll think about some of these things as we go along this morning. But it was a special year. Three points, three very simple points. They all begin with F, so hopefully relatively straightforward to remember.

The first thing was, it was a year of faith. We read about that at the beginning of our reading. This was to be a year when the people depended on God to provide for them.

[9 : 02] Now the Jubilee year wasn't unique in that sense. Because God had said that every seventh year was to be special in that they depended on God.

As every week had a Sabbath day, a day of rest, so every seventh year was to be a Sabbath year, a year of rest. A year of rest particularly for the land, that the land could renew itself and be able to produce a bigger crop in subsequent years.

And a year of rest in that sense for the people too, they wouldn't be sowing the crop and so on. It was a year of rest every seventh year, but every 50th year you had an even more special year of rest.

And the seventh year and the 50th years were years of faith. You can imagine the people getting to the end of the sixth year in the seven-year cycle and saying we've had a good crop this year just as God promised we would, but is it really going to be enough to see us through the next two years until we have our next harvest?

Is there enough in our barns to see us through? And they then had to trust God and say, yes, we believe in God. We know that God is faithful. We're not going to plant our crops next year.

[10 : 15] We don't need to because God has promised we'll have the Sabbath year and God will provide. The 50th year might have been doubly so.

Now it's not entirely clear, at least to me, exactly how the 50th year works. So it might have been you had the 49 years and then you had the 50th year. So in fact, we had two years when there was no planting.

Some people think the 50th year, the Jubilee year of each cycle was actually treated as the first year of the next cycle. So it was a Sabbath year, also a Jubilee year. It was year one and then year 50 would also fall on a Sabbath year.

Don't know the answer to that, but quite possible that the people of Israel were being asked to trust God for two years in this case. One year for the normal Sabbath year and another year for their Jubilee year.

And what a temptation there may have been to say, let's just hedge our bets a bit. Let's just plant a bit of crop. Let's just make sure for ourselves that we'll be okay. And God says, no, this is a year when you have to depend on me.

[11 : 21] You have to have faith. I will provide. I will give you what you need. And I'm sure God, if the people did indeed celebrate the Jubilee year, God certainly would have been faithful to his promises.

And for us too, we're entering a year where we need to have faith. We need to depend on God. As I said, we enter it without a pastor. We have six months at least and possibly longer when it's going to be all hands on deck and we're going to have to cover for the enormous amount that John has done over recent years.

But we can't go into it thinking we will need to make all these plans and we will do it. We need to go in saying we are dependent entirely on God and he is the one who will see us through this Jubilee year.

He is the one who will be with us and will help us and will guide us and will ensure that the church continues to enjoy growth and spiritual blessing over the coming months.

I put in a picture for this point the words Jehovah Jireh God provides. Many of you will know that recognize that these words are associated with Abraham from the Old Testament.

[12 : 41] Abraham who had one son Isaac in his very, very old age and God asked him to go and to take Isaac and to offer him as a sacrifice to God.

And as Abraham is going out the mountain with Isaac and Isaac said well, father there is no ram how are we going to make the sacrifice? Abraham just says to him the Lord will provide.

And of course at the end of the day the Lord does provide the ram Isaac is spared and Abraham names that place Jehovah Jireh God provides. Let's go into this year of Jubilee and see it as being a year when our faith in God can be strong when we can really depend on him and know that whatever lies before us whatever may face us in the year ahead if we have our trust in God our confidence in him rather than in ourselves then we can know that he will provide.

It is to be for us a year of faith. Second thing I suggest is it is a year of fellowship. Let's look for a moment at the picture on the right the lower right the reset button.

The year of Jubilee was very much a year when you pressed the reset button in Israel. Now we didn't read all the detail of it we read a little bit about how the land was restored to its original owner and so on but the way it worked was on the 50th year everything was restored to what it should have been in the beginning.

[14 : 13] And so you had a situation that would straightforward when we read about where you sell land to someone you can't sell it forever you're only selling at least on a certain number of harvests and on the 50th year you go back to the land and you take possession of it.

Later in the chapter God envisages the situation which undoubtedly arose where some of the people of Israel got into financial difficulties where they were struggling to make ends meet.

And in that circumstance the first thing you might do would be sell off your land so you could get some money from that and God says yes you can do that but if you do that it's restored to its original owner on the 50th year.

If someone got really really desperate then they might say well I've not got anything to give I've got no possessions left all I've got is myself. And they might offer themselves to whoever they owed money to and said I will work for you to pay off my debt.

And again God said yes you can do that it's not like the slavery that we were familiar to within America a couple hundred years ago and so on it's people voluntarily offering to work for others God said yes you can do that but on the 50th year you're released from it.

[15 : 27] The 50th year is when everyone goes back to their people and the reset button is pressed. If you own land you get it back if you've even given up your liberty you get that back as well.

It's a time to press the reset button. And why was that? Fundamentally it was because God was saying to the people of Israel everything you have and everything you are belongs to me.

It's not really yours. I've provided it. I've been there to give it to you. I've blessed you with so many things and I want it to be a reminder these things belong to me and even if you both have a bit of wealth over the years you bought land off people you're not to just go ahead and to keep that land you need to give it back you need to restore it to its original owner because the land and the people belong to me.

One of the effects of that was that all the tribes of Israel and all the clans within the tribes they would get their ancestral land back and they could resettle again in the 50th year.

Now this wasn't just letting people off with their debts for nothing. This was God saying there is an accountability for what you do. If through unwise decisions or through things that happen to you you get into some kind of financial difficulty there are consequences in that but along with the accountability comes grace and you will be you will suffer your consequence of what you've done for a while but then at the end of the day you will get back what belongs to you.

[17 : 14] And for the people of God the reason why I've called this a year of fellowship it was a reminder of what they had in common through God.

That they were the people of God they were all the people of God who he'd called to himself and who were accountable to him and they were to live together in the land and not one become very wealthy another become very poor they were to care for each other they were to enjoy fellowship and focus on what they had in common.

However this year we will enjoy really good fellowship. We'll have people coming back probably particularly the first weekend in September when we have our big celebration who were here perhaps 50 years ago or 20 years ago or whatever people who have been in the church in the past and we'll be able to share with them something of what God was doing in their time here something of what God is doing now among us we will enjoy fellowship together and we will recognise that as those who know and love the Lord Jesus we are the people of God and God is good to us and we really care for each other.

The year of fellowship and a year too when we should have care for those who aren't as well off as we may be.

Those who don't enjoy all the blessings that we do. It's very easy for Christian church practically evangelical churches to lose sight of the fact that there is so much poverty and suffering around us.

[18 : 53] God wouldn't let his people in the Old Testament do that. So let's this year have a concern too for those who have little in our land in our city.

We do it every week through the basics bank and other opportunities in the church to work a very well working among those who are in many ways disadvantaged. Opportunities to give to those overseas who are suffering in terrible ways.

Let's remember that people of God are one in the Lord Jesus. us. We need to have a real care and concern for everyone.

Because ultimately what we're about as a church is not glorifying ourselves, is not getting rich ourselves in any kind of way. What we're about as a church is bringing glory to God and we do that as together in fellowship.

We worship him and we serve him and we think the thoughts of God and we have that concern that God has and the Lord Jesus had for those who are in difficult circumstances.

[19 : 59] Let it be a year of fellowship, a year of caring for us. Finally, the third F, it's a year of freedom.

That was right at the beginning of our reading that God talked about to consecrate the 50th year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants.

The year of Jubilee as such, the word isn't used in the rest of the Bible. But there is a fairly clear reference to it in the book of Isaiah in chapter 61 which was taken up by the Lord Jesus when he preached in the synagogue at Capernaum.

They didn't call it the year of Jubilee, they called it the year of the Lord's favour. Here are the words that the Lord Jesus quoted in the synagogue. The spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind to set the oppressed free to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

[21 : 15] To proclaim the year of the Lord's favour or the year of Jubilee. And the Lord Jesus saw in his coming to the earth the first time also in his coming when he comes again that he was the one who truly brought about the year of Jubilee and who brought freedom to those who were in captivity of whatever kind.

So the Jubilee while it emphasises that we belong to God while it emphasises that we are accountable to God and that we're accountable to each other in the way that we treat one another.

It also emphasises that we are of real value of real worth to God. That is what the Lord is bringing out. He talks about those who have nothing, those who are poor, those who are prisoners, those who are blind, and in those days to be blind, almost inevitably meant you are a beggar.

Those who were in many ways the very dregs or considered the very dregs of society. And the Lord Jesus says, these people are important to God.

These are the people who I've come for and to whom I proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, the year of Jubilee. The year of Jubilee is something which gives hope to all of us if we are going through difficult times or if we feel we are of little worth in this world.

[22 : 51] It is the year when God can say to us, you really, really matter to me. I sent my son into the world to give you freedom, to give you riches more than you could ever imagine, to set you free from the oppression, from the bondage that comes from the sin that is in this world.

The year of Jubilee is a year of hope. It's a year of hope that God will truly bless into the future. As I said, it's a year of hope, particularly as we look forward to the return of the Lord Jesus to take his people to be with him.

And why do we know that there is hope for us? We know there is hope because God's son came and he died on a cross, he took the punishment that was due to us for all the wrong we've done.

So that if we trust in him, we can have forgiveness, we can be released from the debt, not the physical debt that's talked about in the year of Jubilee in the Old Testament, the spiritual debt, the fact that we have failed God and that we deserve to face the consequences of that.

Our God is a God of grace and a God of mercy and he wants us to free us from that and to give us hope for the future. So if you come to 2017 and perhaps look back on 2016, it's been difficult and there have been hard times, come with hope and come with faith, knowing that there is true freedom in the Lord Jesus and true forgiveness and the new start, the reset button if you like, the opportunity as we trust in him to move forward with him and to have confidence in him for the future.

[24 : 41] I'm sure this will be a great year. In many ways I'm quite excited about the year that is to come. Let's make it a year where we recognise that God is among us, that God is holy, that God is awesome, but also that God cares for us and that God wants to truly bless us.

Let's come in faith, not knowing what the future holds, but knowing the one who holds the future and with our trust fully in him. I pray for all of us, this may be a year when we grow closer to the Lord Jesus, perhaps come to know him for the first time or come to know him better, and when we are able to go on with confidence that the Lord is with us, and as we trust him, he will bless us.

Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for your word to us this morning. We thank you for this year of jubilee that you graciously instituted for your people.

We thank you it was a year of faith for them, a year of fellowship as they celebrate what they had in you, and a year of freedom too, as those who were in bondage, in debt, were fully released.

Thank you for our year of jubilee. We pray it may be a real year of blessing, that we pray it may be a year of faith, when we trust in the Lord Jesus, and look to him for all our help.

[26 : 12] That it may be a year of fellowship, when we have a real concern for each other, and we can enjoy together what we have in the Lord Jesus. And it may be a year of freedom, when the things that perhaps burden us and threaten to overpower us at present, that as we trust them to your hands, that we may be able to leave them with you and enjoy the freedom that can only come through the Lord Jesus.

We thank you for our time together, we commit ourselves to you, we pray for your presence with us for the rest of the day, as we continue to celebrate the new year, and we give you our thanks in Jesus' name. Amen.