

# FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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**SERMON:** *There is a Problem*

**SERIES:** *Jubilee*

**SCRIPTURES:** *Leviticus 25; Isaiah 61; Luke 4*

**SPEAKER:** *Shaun Kipe*

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*\*Credit to John Howard Yoder – Jubilee Economy; Tony Campolo; Shane Claiborne*

Well good morning, it so great to worship with you. Want to say welcome to all of you here in this room and to those of you gathered on-line, at home, tuning in to the live stream.

Let's start, with something you never want to hear in church, but if you have a Bible you can open it to the book of Leviticus. Yep, you heard me correctly, next two Sunday's we want to talk about an important concept, that is found smack-dab in the center of the exciting book of Leviticus. For now, just mark **Leviticus 25**, we'll come back to that in a few minutes.

Sometimes people will ask me where my ideas for sermons and series come from. Mostly, I like to read and as I find myself challenged by various things I read and start thinking that, *"I need to flesh this information out in my own life. I need to think about how this really applies."* And the best way to do that is writing sermons.

Recently I've been doing some reading that really challenges the way I think about **global economics** and the **worlds resources** and how it is that some people have so much, while other's have so little. And it seems to me there is a problem with the worlds system.

## **I. There is a problem**

Most economists agree that there are enough resources in our world to meet everyone's needs. There is enough food that no one should starve and enough water, clothing, natural resources etc.

But it turns out that **20% of the world's population controls 80% of the world's resources**. Which means that **80% of the world's population is then left sharing the remaining 20%** of the world's resources. And I realize sometimes statistics are easy to gloss over, just numbers.

So I want to do a little visual illustration this morning. And want to a little bit of time to do this, because I want to help set the scene for this mini-two-week sermon series and to help you visualize this problem. I have asked 10 volunteers to join me on the stage.

- I want the 2 of you to stand over here.
- I want the 8 of you to stand over here.

These 10 folks represent the world's population. What a good-looking world we live in. And I brought with me today some of the world's most important resources (10 bottles of water; Toilet paper; Bread; Pillow; Toothbrush; Toys; blankets; money; etc.)

Now, I want you to look at what you see on the stage...in an incredibly simplistic way, this represents the current state of our world. First of all, does anybody else have any problem with what you see on the stage?

I want you to look at this for a moment and just allow me to ask the questions that I have personally been wrestling with. And I understand that how we answer the questions I'm about to ask are extremely complicated and impacted by all kinds of factors. But for me the complicated nature of this has simply become an excuse to remain ignorant rather than taking action to do something about it.

Have you considered that when we use more resources than we need to, other's are left without?

Are you aware of how the costs/prices we pay for goods and resources, effects the conditions of workers around the globe?

Have you ever considered the working conditions of the people who make the clothes that we purchase?

Have you considered how the coffee you drink every morning gets to you?

How does the energy I use in my home and we use in our community/nation, impact our physical environment?

Is it ok for me to take 20 minute showers when some people don't have clean drinking water?

Is the world's system of economics and distribution of resources so complicated we can't fix this? Is this "just the way it is?"

Do you think that God cares about this?

Should Christians challenge the systems of the world when they lead to this? How do we do anything about this as individuals and as a church? How can our "small efforts" make any difference in a world that is so big?

**How would you go about fixing what you see on the stage?**

**\*You all can be seated.\***

It's funny, I was thinking that if the children were still up here, I think they would look at this with their innocent little eyes and hearts and they would probably say, *"This isn't that complicated, the answer is very easy...the 2 should just share what they have with the 8?"* Is it because of things like this that Jesus said, "Unless you become like little children you cannot enter the Kingdom?"

John the Baptist said it very plainly one time... he said, **"the one with two tunics should share with the one who doesn't have"**

Jesus was pretty plain about this also, he said “don’t store up treasure on earth...” He even told a parable about a rich man who began to acquire huge amounts of wealth and he said, “I have nowhere to store my wealth.” So tore down his barns and built bigger ones to store his surplus. All the while, the world around him starved.

That’s where this sermon series comes from. I need your help. I don’t want let myself off the hook. I want to be obedient in following Jesus, even if it makes me uncomfortable. I want to know my/our responsibility in a world like this. I’ll really be interested to see where our conversation goes in the sermon lab the next two weeks.

But there is a problem, even if we aren’t aware of it. Even if we have sheltered ourselves from it. Even if we disagree on what the solution to the problem is.

What does all of this have to do with the book of **Leviticus**?

Just as context, Leviticus is the third book in your Bible and it is basically comprised of the Jewish Law system. God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt in the book of Exodus. And in Leviticus, he gives them laws that will set them apart from other nations, in the way they live their lives...compared to the world and the empires and the world systems around them. God said, *“you are going to live differently. You’re going to treat workers differently, you’re going to treat women differently, you’re going to treat the land differently, you’re going to treat foreigners differently, cause you’re a different kind of people.”* And right in the center of the book of Leviticus, describing the distinctive nature of God’s community, is one of the key passages about economics for God’s people.

A fascinating, challenging, perplexing and yet exhilarating concept called...**Jubilee (Sermon Series Graphic)**.

You may have heard this word before. Around July 4<sup>th</sup> Waynesboro has a “Jubilee” celebration down town. Most people don’t realize this is a Bible word. God’s idea and really neat one.

So for the next two weeks we want to learn a little bit about Jubilee...what it was, why it matters and how it still applies in our lives today.

Let’s start with...

## **II. What exactly is Jubilee?**

**Leviticus 25:8-10 - <sup>8</sup> “Count off seven sabbath years—seven times seven years—so that the seven sabbath years amount to a period of forty-nine years. <sup>9</sup> Then...<sup>10</sup>Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you;**

So Jubilee year was to happen every 50<sup>th</sup> year for God’s people and was a proclamation of liberty. A time of freedom...and we hear that word and we think, “*Oh yes, that’s great, liberty, freedom...good American values. I like this Jubilee thing.*”

This verse (Leviticus 25:10) in fact is inscribed on the **Liberty Bell in Philadelphia (PIC)**.

BUT, BUT this is how we can so easily misinterpret or take things out of context...take a Bible verse and use it to support our cultural lifestyles. Because Leviticus 25:10 is in the context of the Hebrew Jubilee...and we do not apply liberty in the way it is described here in Leviticus. This is not the kind of liberty we are used to thinking about. You would not run for governor or state office using God’s economic Jubilee plan.

Ready...let me highlight the

## A. Four key aspects of Jubilee:

**...proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants.**

Not completely fleshed out here, but this liberty throughout the land, kind of meant two things specifically for the Jews. This meant that all slaves in Israel were to go free. **1. Free all the slaves.** And **2. cancel all monetary debts.**

**...do not sow and do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the untended vines. <sup>12</sup> For it is a jubilee...eat only what is taken directly from the fields.**

Means do not farm your land during the Jubilee year. **3. Allow your land to rest** and experience relief.

And then finally,

**<sup>13</sup> “In this Year of Jubilee everyone is to return to their own property.**

The idea here is **4. give back all land,** that had been bought or sold during this 50 year period, **to the original owner.**

So there are these four primary aspects of Jubilee:

- Free slaves, cancel debts, rest the land, and return property.

I told you a fascinating, challenging, perplexing concept.

Why? Well, Jubilee is a realization that the world's economy is messed up because humans are sinful and greedy and selfish. And will lead to all kinds of inequality and separation. The rich will get richer, while the poor get poorer. Humans will enslave and indebt other humans. And so in Jubilee God creates a way to systemically

interrupt human greed. It was a way to level the playing field. To re-distribute resources and make sure everyone gets a fair shot.

Now, some of you may know this...but most

**B. Scholars don't believe the Jubilee was ever practiced** by the Jews, at least not fully. Did you know that? Moses commanded it and it's in their sacred Law, but they never fully put it into practice.

In fact, there's a somewhat humorous passage in the book of Jeremiah, hundreds of years later, about this...

**Jeremiah 34:8-11 - <sup>8</sup> The word came to Jeremiah from the LORD after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people in Jerusalem to proclaim freedom for the slaves.**

Kind of like, in a moment of inspiration the Jews say, *"Hey we know this Jubilee law about freeing slaves is in here and we aren't being faithful to this law. Let's actually do it."*

**<sup>9</sup> Everyone was to free their Hebrew slaves, both male and female... <sup>10</sup> So all the officials and people who entered into this covenant agreed that they would free their male and female slaves and no longer hold them in bondage. They agreed, and set them free.**

Wow, that's just great isn't it? Finally following the Jubilee. A change of heart. Radical commitment and transformation to God's law. But then look at the very next verse. Verse 11.

**<sup>11</sup> But afterward they changed their minds and took back the slaves they had freed and enslaved them again.**

They began to wonder, *“If we free the slaves, that’s our labor force. They sustain these comfortable life-styles we want to have. This really complicates our lives and our economy. Do we really want to do that?”*

It turns out they were much like many of us today. They probably looked at Jubilee economics and thought, *“That’ll never work. Not in the real world. Too many flaws. Too much grace and generosity. Too many people will cheat the system. We’ll lose our comfort and our way of life. Maybe we can find a way to explain away the call of the Jubilee.”*

By the way, can I just tell you, it doesn’t matter what system you have in place, people are sinful and greedy and selfish and will always find ways to cheat the system. This is why we don’t put our hope in systems...economic or political. Systems have their place, and we can and should have good conversations about the various kinds of systems this world offers and the advantages and disadvantages of those systems, but systems will come and go. And systems can’t solve the problem of human sinfulness. We point people to Jesus. Jesus changes hearts. He turns greedy and selfish hearts into generous and selfless hearts...and when that happens, then the system isn’t nearly as important anymore.

I remember reading a story recently about Mother Theresa. Someone had gone to spend some time working with her. And during their daily prayer time, began to notice that Mother Theresa had deformed feet (**PIC OF MOTHER THERESA’S DEFORMED FEET**). Of course this isn’t the kind of thing you just walk up and ask Mother Theresa about, like, *“Why are feet so funny looking.”* But the other sisters said, *“You’ve probably noticed that Mother’s feet are deformed and your probably wondering why.”* *“Well, yeah, but didn’t want to bring it up.”* *“It’s because we receive shoe donations, she always sorts through them first and takes out the worst pair of shoes for herself so that nobody else has to wear the worst pair. And over the years it has cause her feet become deformed.”*

Jesus had given Mother Theresa a Jubilee kind of heart. Just because it was never practiced doesn't mean it was not God's intention or vision for humanity.

So,

### **III. How do we go about putting Jubilee into practice in our world today?**

I'm gonna get us started today and then we'll pick up next week with this same question.

And as we go about thinking about the practical application of Jubilee, I do want to acknowledge that one of the challenges with reading and understanding Old Testament passages is that we live in a vastly different world.

There is **cultural separation**. We can't just flatly or literally apply Jubilee today. Many of the concepts tied up in Jubilee economics are culturally specific. Land for them is different than land in our world today. Slavery/servitude...different back then than it is today. So we want to consider this cultural separation as think about applying Jubilee.

And then second, and perhaps more importantly, is the **progressive nature of revelation**. Jesus says on many occasions, *"You have heard it said in the OT law, but I'm here to show you something different."* That means there is much of the OT law that we no longer practice literally. For example. We do not sacrifice animals for the forgiveness of our sins even though the OT law commands it, because Jesus became the final sacrifice. And so we can't just flatly apply Jubilee in our lives.

And so some would argue, *"Jubilee was practiced back then or should have been, but we no longer have to pay attention to it today."* Maybe we could just throw the whole

thing out. The only problem is, the prophet Isaiah said that Jubilee economics would be one of the identity markers of the Messiah and his new Kingdom...

**Isaiah 61 - The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>2</sup> to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor...**

Many scholars agree that this reference in Scripture to “the year of the Lord’s favor” is a call to Jubilee! And then in **Luke 4** Jesus comes along and watch...

**<sup>16</sup>...on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue... He stood up to read, <sup>17</sup> and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:**

**<sup>18</sup> “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, <sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”<sup>[a]</sup>**

**<sup>20</sup> Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and...<sup>21</sup> He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.**

It seems that the heart of Jubilee is at the center of the Kingdom of God that Jesus was ushering in.

So while we may not apply Jubilee economics flatly, in Jubilee economics there are aspects of God’s character, values and principles about God’s people and His Kingdom, that transcend time and culture.

That’s really what we want to wrestle with. **How do we take these four basic concepts of Jubilee and live them out in today’s world?**

And so to finish our time this morning let's look at one of these concepts. We'll get to the others next week. Let's look at...

### **A. The return to each individual of their own property...**

**13 “In this Year of Jubilee everyone is to return to their own property.**

Keep in mind, when Israel conquered the Promised Land it was divided among the twelve tribes (**PIC OF PROMISED LAND DIVIDED INTO PARTS**). Each tribe was given it's own plot of land. The idea behind Jubilee is that every 50 years, land that had been bought or sold during this period is returned to it's original ancestral owner. This was to ensure that land did not concentrate into the hands of a few, but was spread fairly and evenly among the twelve tribes. It was kind of a way to ensure “the redistribution of wealth”.

Now that seems like a pretty radical idea, but the principle behind that idea was intended as a reminder to the Hebrews, that the land (or really anything you claim to own) is not actually yours, **it belongs to God** and He is simply loaning it to you.

Look at down at verse 23...God clarifies this concept...

**23 “The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers.**

Now pause here for just a moment. This concept is extremely challenging to the way many of us think about ownership and possession. When you think about your stuff, your world...do you see it as yours or God's?

My property. My house. My resources. My bedroom. My cell phone. My office. My seat in the auditorium. My parking spot.

A couple of weeks ago, on a Saturday morning, right around the time I was working on writing this sermon about seeing everything as belonging to God. I went up to the Cumberland Valley rail trail to go for a run. It was that weekend we got like 4 inches of rain. So it was raining, by the time I was done, I was soaked. It was also cold that day, low forties. I ran a long run. I was exhausted when I finished. I was walking past the pavilion to my car. And I noticed the wind had blown one of the trash cans over and the trash was blowing out across the open field. And I thought *“man, that’s a shame, polluting this beautiful nature area.”* And then I thought, *man I’m glad I don’t own this place, cause if I owned this place I’d have to chase down all that trash and clean it up.* I thought *I wonder who does own this property.*

And then all of a sudden my sermon comes back to me...I hear God’s little voice in my head saying... *“Actually Shaun, I own this park, I own this parking lot and this pavilion and nature trail and even that nice warm car you want to go sit in. It all belongs to me.”* Honestly this is no joke. And I realized that if I believe what I’m about to preach on May 15<sup>th</sup> about ownership and possessions related to Jubilee...that this nature trail really belongs to God...I need to wrestle with what would God expect of me when I see trash on his nature trail. And so begrudgingly I walked around...and it only took me 10 mins...but I walked around and picked up that trash as a way to teach myself that this land belongs to God.

Jubilee would say to you and me, “God’s nature trail. God’s house, God’s bedroom, God’s car he’s loaning it to you.”

God even warned His people of this mentality “faulty ownership” when they were entering the Promised land...he said, *“when you settle in the Promised Land and you start to accumulate resources and wealth and property...”*

**Deuteronomy 8 - <sup>17</sup> You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” <sup>18</sup> But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth,**

You will be tempted to think the land is yours, the wealth is yours, the resources are yours because you earned it or secured it or conquered it. God says, *“just remember the reason you have it is because I gave it to you.”*

You don’t get to say at the 50 year Jubilee, *“Well, I was a really good entrepreneur and made some really wise business decisions and bought that land. So it’s now my land to keep.”* Deep down, however it is you acquired that land or those resources, it still belongs to God and He decides how His land is distributed and shared.”

Psalmist writes... **“The earth is the Lords and everything in it...”**

And I believe that really that’s the heart behind this Jubilee principle “of returning property”. **It’s really not yours, it’s God’s.**

And we find this Jubilee concept in the New Testament church community... one of the signs of the new community and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit was a totally new and radical view of ownership and possession.

**Acts 4 - No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had...<sup>34</sup> that there were no needy persons among them.**

I heard this fascinating story about Brother Juniper (**PICTURE OF BR. JUN.**), lived back in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century...he caught hold of this Jubilee vision of ownership and possessions. So much so that he used to give everything he had away to others in need, including his clothes. The shirt right off of his back, to the poor and the beggars, until he wasn’t wearing any. Legend has it, he ended up naked a lot of times. And he was scolded by his superiors for giving his clothes away like this. On

one occasion, they even ordered him, that he may not do this anymore. “You may not give your tunic away anymore.” And out of that meeting, on the streets, he came across a beggar. Who said, “*Brother Juniper I know that you are such a generous man, I’m need in of clothing.*” Brother Juniper said, “*Friend you have caught me at a bad time. I’ve been ordered not to give my clothes away...but if you tried to steal them from me, I sure wouldn’t stop you.*” (Claiborne EMU Seminar)

Now, listen carefully, I’m not saying there is no such thing as ownership or private property. Ownership, in fact, can be a good thing. Ownership is when I feel a sense of responsibility for property and resources and possessions.

We’re going to look more at this next week. When God creates the first human beings and places them in the garden, they are given a sense of ownership of the earth. To rule over it, and to use their power to help the world and creation flourish. We should feel that sense of ownership and responsibility for our world and our resources and our property.

So, yes...ownership in a sense. BUT...it is ownership with an open hand...the idea behind this Jubilee concept is...it’s yours as long as you remember it’s not really yours, it ALL belongs to God.

And folks this is really important for us to grasp hold of. If we can’t release our possessions they begin to hold us. We become owned by the very things we claim to own. And in a world which is so driven by money and wealth and material items, I just wonder if so many of us (church people) are owned by our possessions. Without realizing it. We have been consumed by the very things we are consuming. And we’re missing out on living God’s Kingdom life.