

# FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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**SERMON:** *Jubilee Economics*

**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.

We are taking two weeks to talk about this ancient Hebrew practice called Jubilee (**SERIES GRAPHIC**). It's found in your Bible in the book of Leviticus. So again, you can go ahead and open to Leviticus 25. Just had some really good and thoughtful conversation with folks over the last week about Jubilee. What it means...what it maybe doesn't mean? So thanks for getting involved in the conversation, it's how we grow and learn together.

We read this last week, but let me just refresh our minds about what Jubilee is. Remember there are four key components to Jubilee. I'll highlight them again as we read our main Scripture.

**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;**

Jubilee was to happen every 50<sup>th</sup> year as a time of extravagant “liberty.” Specifically for the Jews, it meant **freeing slaves** and **canceling debts**. That’s two of the key components. Continue reading...

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

Component three of Jubilee was **allowing the land to rest**. Don’t plant or harvest crops in the Jubilee year. And then finally,

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

We talked about this idea last week...but the idea here is **give back all land**, that had been bought or sold during this 50 year period, **to the original owner**.

And we said that at least part of what is going on here, in this fourth key component of Jubilee is a “re-thinking of ownership and possessions.” For the Jews the idea behind this command was a reminder that **everything** you own/have **belongs to God**.

The first step in acquiring the Jubilee mindset is coming to understand in a radical way, that...our money, our house, our resources, our property, our retirement savings...my running shoes, my closet, my pantry...all of this really belongs to God. And until I begin to see my possessions in that way...I will not have the Kingdom of Jesus “Jubilee” mindset.

This morning we want to take a look at the three other key components of Jubilee and begin to wrestle with how they apply in our lives today, ok?

Keep in mind...we don't apply Jubilee "flatly" or literally because we live in a different culture today. But there are **principles and values found in Jubilee, that are valid and applicable in our lives today**. In fact, Jesus claimed that these principles and values of Jubilee would be one of the primary distinctives of his Kingdom!

**Luke 4 - <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>[4]</sup>

What we discover is that the principles of Jubilee are fulfilled in Jesus and his way of life. And so we need to wrestle with how this ancient practice, applies in our lives...even if it makes us uncomfortable.

So here we go let's take a look at this idea of

### **I. Allowing the land to rest...**

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

What we find then in this Jubilee stipulation is

### **A. The ecological aspect of our faith.**

Don't ravage the physical earth, instead you should care for the earth. Did you know that the earth, the land, physical creation, plants and animals matter to God?

It's interesting sometimes when we go to Scripture, I think we immediately go looking for spiritual truth. And there is definitely plenty of that and even some of that here in

this Jubilee concept. But at a very basic level, this component of Jubilee is related simple biology, farming, care of the earth and God's creation.

Qualifier I am not a farmer or biologist, but to the best of my understanding, the idea of letting the land rest for a year — particularly in the era before synthetic fertilizers and mechanized agriculture — was crucial to ensuring that the land remained healthy and productive year after year.

Many farmers put this Jubilee principle into practice using a similar idea called **“crop rotation”**. This is when farmers plant different crops, sequentially, in the same plot of land. For example, say a farmer has planted a field with corn one year. When the corn harvest is finished, the next year he might plant beans. Because corn consumes a lot of nitrogen and beans return nitrogen to the soil.

Crop rotation improves soil health, optimizes the nutrients in the soil. Crop rotation even combats pest and weed pressure.

In an era before this kind of biological understanding of the earth and other ways of fertilizing the soil...you would just allow the land rest. To “catch it's breath”. There is an ecological or environmental concern to our faith.

And this should not come as a surprise to us because there are references all throughout Scripture related to God's concern for the health and vitality of His physical creation.

From the very beginning...

**[Genesis 2:15](#) - The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.**

One of the very first and primary responsibilities of humanity in the Bible is to care for God's creation!

The Prophet Isaiah writes - **“the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.”**

The physical creation speaks of God’s grandeur. It worships Him.

Paul writes that **“since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature are clearly seen being understood from what has been made.”** (He’s saying the physical creation gives evidence to God’s existence and character!) Paul goes on to say later on...

**“creation itself groans, like a woman in childbirth, awaiting it’s own redemption...”** Did you know that? I’ve found so often, some poor theology in Christians about the physical earth and where it’s headed. Some people seem to think that the earth is gonna be incinerated at the end of time and we’ll all go live in Heaven. We don’t have time to delve into that conversation today, but that is simply not what the Bible teaches. The Bible actually teaches that the earth is gonna be redeemed, renewed itself into eternity.

Jesus made references to creation care, all throughout his own teaching...that **“God clothes the flowers in the field and feeds the birds of the air...”**

The great evangelist Billy Graham has a great statement about this, he once said...

**Why should we be concerned about the environment? It isn’t just because of the dangers we face from pollution, climate change, or other environmental problems—although these are serious. For Christians, the issue is much deeper: We know that God created the world, and it belongs to Him, not us. Because of this, we are only stewards or trustees of God’s creation, and we aren’t to abuse or neglect it. The Bible says, “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it” ([Psalm 24:1](#)).**

*When we fail to see the world as God’s creation, we will end up abusing it. Selfishness and greed take over, and we end up not caring about the environment or the problems we’re creating for future generations.*

Author Tony Campolo says this about this Jubilee component...

*“It is the concept of environmental responsibility. If you're not an environmentalist, you've missed out on a dimension of the Christian faith, for God calls us to take care of the earth, to give the earth a chance to come back to its full glory. You must be an environmentalist if you're going to follow the full teaching of God.”* (Tony Campolo)

I know sometimes this conversation about creation care and environmental responsibility get's politicized and becomes a political debate topic.

In fact, I was reading about this, on this particular issue, studies show that the strongest predictor of whether we accept the scientific consensus is not how much science we know or how religious we are, it is where we fall on the political spectrum. That for many of us, when it comes to the physical creation, we just turn it into a political debate topic.

Sadly, both political parties have often failed to live up to the Biblical standard of creation care. Those political debates are usually unthoughtful and unhelpful for everyone involved. Usually nobody is actually listening to each other, a lot people just trying to win arguments. So, stay out of the political debate. And instead, my encouragement to you is to start becoming informed about what is really happening with our physical world and how your lifestyle is impacting it, because it's actually God's physical world and he told us to care for it.

There are some other great resources out there, that I'd be happy to point you to as you begin your own exploration of this topic.

I'll give you an example.

Do you love the incredible diversity you see in nature, plants and animals? The diversity of flowers in a meadow, butterflies in a tropical forest, fish in a coral reef, or

even birds at a backyard feeder? Richard Lindroth is a PHD professor of Ecology and a follower of Jesus. He's written an article that talks about the noticeable decrease in biodiversity in our world...this refers to the number of different kinds of plants, animals, bacteria and fungi in the world. And he talks about the human impact on this decrease in biodiversity. In other words, because of our lifestyles...species are becoming extinct at a much higher rate. The Natural rate of extinction is estimated to be about 1-5 species per year. Today it is estimated that the current rate of extinction is 1,000-10,000 times that. On average one species goes extinct every hour because of the human life-style impact on our physical world. Let me rephrase that...on God's world that we humans have been tasked with caring for. But most of us are simply unaware, just living our lives.

Have you considered some of these things before?

**What is water conservation and how does taking shorter showers, or not letting the water run while brushing your teeth impact the earth?**

**What are the benefits/advantages/disadvantages of recycling?** Most of what resides in our nation's landfills is plastic, which comes from food, water, and personal hygiene containers that we throw out.

**How does pollution and waste impact the earth...atmosphere...oceans...forests...wildlife?**

**How do gas emissions from our vehicles or industries effect the environment?**

There are 7 billion people on the earth today, the way we live in this world effects the physical environment and **we should know about it and care about it because God does.**

According to Jubilee we can't just live our lives based on comfort, or winning political debates or what seems most profitable or efficient...if it's detrimental to God's creation. God told the Jews to give the land a year to rest...

My mind isn't intelligent enough to understand how what we do today impacts what the earth will look like into eternity, but what I do know is that there is some kind of connection. From creation onward God has chosen to partner with humanity as caretakers of the earth. We cannot say it doesn't matter how we treat this world. We cannot be ignorant of how we live is impacting the earth.

Ok, let's turn and look at the final two Jubilee components. At the heart of Jubilee is

## **II. A radical economic vision for God's people.**

And in many ways, the final two components are pointing us in the same direction and so I have lumped them together.

### **A. The release of slaves & the cancellation of debts.**

**<sup>10</sup>Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants.**

Yes, Jubilee begins with a call to a new perspective of ownership and possessions. And yes, Jubilee very much has an environmental component...but at the very heart of Jubilee is a radical economic vision. Why do some of have so much while others have so little in our world? Is right? Does God care?

Jubilee was a realization that the world's economy is gonna get 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. Some people will have and control an abundance of resources while other human beings die because of a lack of resources and we will find ways to justify it. Humans will enslave and indebt other humans sometimes literally and sometimes in a figurative sense.

Remember last week, we did this visual illustration on the stage about the current state of our world? And we said that *“20% of the worlds population controls 80% of the worlds resources and that means that 80% of the worlds population shares the remaining 20% of the worlds resources.”*

Many people live without the necessities of life (“enslaved” or “indebted”) because the rest of us are using more than we need.

In fact, some of you will know this... Book of Exodus. Remember when Israel is freed from bondage and slavery in Egypt? Ironically, they are freed from slavery...making bricks to store pharaoh’s surplus resources and wealth. God is leading them across the desert and they are hungry and so God provides for them by raining down manna from heaven. And when he does, do you know what one of the first commands God ever gives to his people is?

**Don’t take more than you need.** And if you don’t take more than you need...there will be enough for everyone! But if you take more than you need, what will happen? Do you remember? It will be filled with maggots.

I’ve begun to wonder personally if maybe what I need...what some of us need...are some maggots in surplus.

**“There is enough for everyone’s need but not enough for everyone’s greed.”**  
(Ghandi)

And again, I realize that this is complicated. It’s true that sometimes some people have stuff because they worked hard to earn it and other people don’t have stuff because they didn’t want to work hard. And if you read Scripture you’ll know that God values hard work. Sloth and laziness is condemned in Scripture and is often included in the 7 deadly sins. So, I’m not advocating for laziness and I don’t believe in a system of just giving free hand outs that perpetuate that kind of life. BUT,

BUT...I also know that when I look around this world, there are a lot of people who are doing without, because the rest of us have way more than we need and we're just not doing a very good job of sharing.

It's amazing to think that if we all shared what we have, there would be enough for the entire world.

### **What does slavery and indebtedness look like in our world today?**

I said last week that Leviticus 25:10 is actually inscribed on the Liberty Bell, which includes the words about **"release of the captives."**

William Lloyd Garrison, abolitionist and publisher of *The Liberator*, seizing upon the verse's true context, re-printed a poem, "The Liberty Bell," in 1844. The poem's potent line **"Ring it, til the slave be free"** was intended as a rebuke against the powers; that despite its inscription, the bell did not proclaim liberty to *all* the inhabitants of the land so long as slavery was allowed to persist.

And while there is a sense in which slavery has been outlawed in our world, I sometimes wonder if in the "world's economic system" slavery still persists just in a dressed up, more modern form so that we civilized folk don't get too uncomfortable. I just wonder if we live in a system where some people work under inhuman conditions, to provide goods and services, for the elite and wealthy and where individuals have no hope ever breaking free from that system and where the debts of certain poor countries are basically set in perpetuity without any hope of ever being paid off.

If you're interested in reading and finding out more about this...there's a great website I recommend called "Free the Slaves" that has some really helpful information...here's one of the statements from their website...

**Slavery flows into our homes, offices, and schools through many of the products we buy. Slaves harvest cocoa in West Africa, and it ends up in our chocolate. Slaves make charcoal in Brazil, which is used to run smelters that make steel for our cars. Many food products and raw materials are tainted by slavery—such as tomatoes, tuna, shrimp, cotton, diamonds, iron, sugar, and gold.**

I think I've mentioned two examples of this, that have really challenged me personally over the last year. I'll share them again, because they're so practical and the impact most of us on a daily basis!

**Coffee.** Do you like your coffee? I do, I am a regular and consistent coffee drinker. But have you investigated...how does that coffee get to you...from bean to cup?

What if picking the beans on the other end, is an 11 year old kid who works over 40 hours a week, and get's paid less than 1.00 an hour so that I can have my morning cup of coffee and it the mean he lives in poverty his entire life? Should I know about that? And what is my responsibility as a follower of Jesus according to Jubilee economics?

What about your **cell phone**? This is one that hits hard. Did you know that just about every smartphone, tablet or electric vehicle with a rechargeable battery requires cobalt to charge? Cobalt is a kind of metal. About 60% of the weight of your smartphone is cobalt? More than 60% of the world's supply of cobalt comes from mines in Congo (central Africa)...it is estimated that about 35,000 children work in the mines in Congo to extract cobalt. Doesn't it make you wonder if on the other end your cell phone is 10 year old kid working in a mine? What is my responsibility as a follower of Jesus according to Jubilee economics?

I just wonder if "slavery" and "debt" are still alive and well in our world today.

Basil was an early church Father, he once said, **“If someone steals someone else’s clothes we call them a thief, shouldn’t we say the same for a Christian who has extra clothes in his closet while some don’t have any?”**

What about a Christian who drinks his cup of coffee or uses his cell phone without any concern for how it got to him? I think Jubilee economics cares about that system.

John Wesley, and we Anabaptists, we love much of his theology, he said one time...**“If I die with more than 10 lbs in my pocket (10\$) may everyone call me a liar and a thief...”**

In other words, my wealth and my resources should be shared with those who don’t have as much, that’s what Jubilee economics is about.

I heard a story about Rich Mullens one time. Some of you will know his name, as a singer song-writer of some popular worship music...wrote the song “Awesome God.” He visited Wheaton College one time and said, *“You evangelicals, you’re all into the born again stuff, aren’t you?”* And everyone cheered. And he said, *“You should be, because Jesus told Nicodemus one time that unless you are born again you cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”* More cheers. Then he said, *“But if you tell me I have to be born again, I’ll tell you, you need to go sell all of you have come follow me, cause Jesus told someone that one time, also.”* And he said all of a sudden, the cheers stopped, it got real quiet and awkward in that chapel.

And then he said, *“But I guess that’s why God invented highlighters, so we can highlight the stuff we like in the Bible and ignore the rest.”* (Credit to Shane Claiborne for Rich Mullens story and several of the quotes above)

I told you this Jubilee economics is hard stuff. It hits me right between the eyes. It might be why Jesus told his disciples that it’s harder for rich people to enter the

Kingdom of Heaven than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. Cause we like our coffee and our cell phones and we'd rather not consider the how they got to us.

But I do believe that in Jubilee economics, God was trying to create a way to systemically interrupt human greed. It was a way to level the playing field. To redistribute resources and make sure everyone gets a fair shot. And extravagant, even radical gracious sharing and giving were part of God's solution...free the slaves and cancel debts.

Systems, economic or political, that perpetuate poverty or modern forms of slavery and indebtedness (rich get richer and the poor are exploited) or where it becomes easy to ignore or overlook those who have less, are not Kingdom of Heaven systems and followers of Jesus should know and care. This is Jubilee economics.

### **B. A Closing Thought**

And I told you this hard stuff, isn't it? For me personally in the last couple of months as I've been on my own journey of wrestling with this, there are times it has seemed overwhelming. To the point where it can leave us paralyzed. And honestly that's not my goal. Paralyzed and shame and guilt...these are not helpful and these are not Kingdom of Heaven values. Rather my goal is to have each one us start becoming aware and to begin the process of wrestling with how these Jubilee concepts apply in our lives.

So if I can encourage you in anything this week...**it's to become more aware**. Start becoming more aware of the amount of water you use and especially the amount of water you waste. Using water is good and right. But let's be aware of how much we waste and see if we can begin finding ways to cut back. Become aware of how often you drive your vehicle unnecessarily. Become aware of how certain goods or services come to you? Where does your coffee come from? Your cell phone? Your favorite T-shirt or sneaker brand. Start there. Make a change.

Don't start by trying to save the world. You can't and I can't. And really nations and systems can't either. Only Jesus can. Our job isn't to save the world, it's start living like Jesus. Start in small ways in your life, with your family, with your business.

In fact, one of the most encouraging things about living Jesus Kingdom life is that it always starts small. Remember Jesus said that his Kingdom is more like a mustard seed. The smallest of all seeds, but that little seed grows and has a huge impact. Life in the Kingdoms always starts in such small ways. It started with one man and his family, Abraham. It's 5 loaves and two fish. It's 12 inept disciples. One individual, one family at a time. It's one cup of coffee or one pair of shoes or one shorter shower...start there. He'll take care of the results.