

Sermon Summary: Sabbath & Jubilee

Leviticus 25

Overview

Leviticus 25 describes the Sabbath year and the Year of Jubilee, when land rested, families could recover their inheritance and people trapped by poverty could receive a fresh start. Lenny used the joy of hearing “you are debt free” in Christians Against Poverty (CAP) ministry to illustrate the freedom proclaimed at Jubilee. These laws reveal God’s concern for justice and mercy, but above all they point to the greater freedom Jesus brings from sin, Satan and death.

1. The Sabbath Year: Rest for the Land

Every seventh year Israel was to stop sowing and harvesting its fields as usual. Whatever grew could be eaten by households, workers, foreigners, livestock and wild animals. The whole field became available for gleaning, extending the generosity normally shown to the poor at harvest time. The land itself was given rest, reflecting God’s wise pattern of work and recovery.

Lenny noted the parallels with modern agricultural practices that allow land to recover. He also connected Israel’s failure to give the land its rest with the exile described in 2 Chronicles 36. The broader lesson is that God made us for rhythms of work and rest; neglecting rest eventually catches up with us.

2. Jubilee: Liberty and a New Beginning

After seven cycles of seven years, the trumpet was sounded on the Day of Atonement to announce the fiftieth year: “Proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants.” Families returned to their allotted property, and those who had fallen into severe hardship were given the prospect of a new start.

The timing mattered. Jubilee was announced on the very day that symbolised the removal of Israel’s sin. The release from financial misery and servitude was a visible picture of a deeper release from guilt and bondage.

3. Land, Fairness and the Ownership of God

Israel’s land belonged ultimately to God, who had assigned it to families. A struggling person could transfer the use of land, but not sell the inheritance permanently. The price depended on how many harvests remained before Jubilee, preventing a buyer from exploiting a desperate seller. A relative could also redeem the land sooner.

The repeated command is not to take advantage of one another. God’s gifts are entrusted to people to steward, not to use as weapons against those in difficulty: “The land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants” (verse 23).

4. Helping People Without Exploiting Them

If a fellow Israelite became poor, others were commanded to help them remain within the community. Loans made to meet desperate needs were not to become opportunities for profit. Lenny distinguished this exploitative lending from borrowing for investment or other productive purposes. He used the example of buy-now-pay-later credit offered for basic groceries as a troubling sign of how hardship can be monetised.

Even when a person entered indentured service to survive, the law required humane treatment and provided routes to redemption or release. The goal was not simply to relieve immediate pain, but to restore opportunity and dignity.

5. What Jubilee Teaches Us Today

Lenny cautioned against transferring Israel's economic arrangements directly into modern society. Israel's land had been specifically allotted by God, whereas modern economies and property systems operate differently. The lasting principles, however, are clear.

First, do not exploit people in hardship. Instead, look for practical ways to give them a hand up, enabling them to regain responsibility, stability and hope. CAP's debt work was offered as an example of helping people towards a fresh start rather than simply handing over money.

Second, remember that everything belongs to God. The poor could look towards Jubilee with hope; the wealthy were reminded not to cling to possessions as though they could keep them forever. In the end, everyone leaves their wealth behind. Our resources are entrusted to us for a time, not the purpose of our lives.

6. Jesus Is the Ultimate Jubilee

The sermon's central point is that the Sabbath year and Jubilee ultimately direct us to Christ. In Luke 4, Jesus read Isaiah's promise of good news for the poor, freedom for prisoners, sight for the blind and release for the oppressed. He then declared that the Scripture was fulfilled in his hearers' presence.

Jesus did feed the hungry and heal the blind, but his mission reached deeper than material relief. Humanity is enslaved to sin, death and Satan, and owes a debt to God that it cannot repay. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus announces true freedom: forgiveness, new life, restored sight and rest in him.

The joy of a CAP client being told that their debts have been cleared is therefore an echo of the greater gospel announcement. Jesus is not merely a teacher of Jubilee's principles. He is the fulfilment of Jubilee itself.

Big Idea

God's Sabbath and Jubilee laws reveal his concern for rest, fairness, mercy and freedom. They challenge us to help those in need, refuse exploitation and hold our possessions lightly because everything belongs to God. Above all, they point to Jesus Christ, our ultimate Jubilee, who cancels the debt we could never pay and sets us free to live in him.