

The Year of Jubilee

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[0 : 0 0] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 20th of July 2003. The preacher is Paul Barker.

His sermon is entitled The Year of Jubilee and is based on Leviticus 25 verses 1 to 55.

Well, it's astonishing to me that there's some people here tonight. I would have thought that after three weeks of Leviticus we'd have all been turned off by this dry and dusty book and after a 50-minute sermon last week, which I promised not to repeat this week, I thought everyone would have stayed home.

But here we are, the last of this little series on Leviticus and an extraordinary chapter. So let's pray before we look at what God's speaking to us through these words. Heavenly Father, we acknowledge and thank you that you speak to us through the words of Scripture, both Old and New Testaments.

And as we come to this passage in Leviticus 25, we pray that you may speak to us afresh tonight. Teach us truths about yourself, about how we are to live in the light of relationship with you as your people.

[1 : 1 8] And we pray that not only will our minds be informed, but our lives reformed and transformed by your Holy Spirit that we may bring glory and honour in our life to Jesus Christ. Amen.

Well, here's a little maths test for you to start off, see who's awake, who's alert, who's been studying for exams. Annual income, \$20. Annual expenditure, \$19.95.

What's the result? Happiness. Annual income, \$20. Annual expenditure, \$20.05. Result, misery.

Well, they're wise words from Mr. McCorber. Mr. McCorber, you may remember, was one of those eccentric characters in Charles Dickens, in David Copperfield. Annual income, \$20, but annual expenditure, \$19.95.

Might only make \$0.05 a year, but the result is happiness, he says. But if your annual income is \$20 and your annual expenditure is \$20.05, then the result is in fact misery.

[2 : 2 3] Because debt can be miserable. To be in debt can be crippling, can be enslaving, it can be depriving. Take the Jode family, for example.

The Jode family were from Oklahoma. They had a little farm, things were going well, but then the Depression hit in the 1930s. And as a result, they sold up.

They believed the myth that life would be better in California. And they set off with their truck, in effect, or Ute, I suppose we'd call it, loaded with all their worldly possessions to arrive in a California that didn't meet the myth.

And in the end, they became totally destitute and impoverished, almost working as slaves. That's the story of John Steinbeck's novel, The Grapes of Wrath, one of the great books of the 20th century.

Or take Fontaine, a French woman, single mother, trying desperately to support her daughter, whom she entrusts to some rather unsavoury innkeepers.

- [3 : 27] And she has to keep working and working and working to provide what they keep demanding for her upkeep. She sells all she has. She sells her jewellery and her locket. She sells her hair. And in the end, sells her body. And ultimately loses her life. One of the characters in Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*.
- And we could take many third world countries to give it a corporate dimension of debt that is crippling and miserable, enslaving and depriving. Well, this chapter of Leviticus 25, a long chapter with some detail and nuances about different laws and aspects within the bigger picture, is about the year of Jubilee.
- As Andrew has said, it's a radical law in effect. These are not easy laws to keep. They're actually quite far-reaching in their scope. And I think they challenge us about how we live today.
- And though these laws are not binding on us in this exact form that's given to us in Leviticus 25, largely because we're not tribal Israelites in the Promised Land of Israel, nonetheless the major principles of these laws still are applying to us.
- [4 : 45] And they are just as challenging even though we don't live in the exact situation in which ancient Israel lived. Firstly though, before we get to the year of Jubilee, the opening paragraph is about what's called the Sabbath or sabbatical year.
- See, not only were ancient Israelites to have a Sabbath day each week, the seventh day, as we saw mentioned last week, twice in fact in Leviticus chapter 19.
- The day that would begin at sunset on Friday, end at sunset on Saturday, a day of no work, a day of rest, a day of family life, a day of also worship, a foretaste if you like of heaven.
- Not only were ancient Israelites to live and have a sabbatical day each week, but indeed they were to have a sabbatical year every seventh year.
- And the laws of the opening paragraph here of Leviticus 25 tell us that every seventh year the land is to lie fallow. That is, you're not to till the land.
- [5 : 45] You're not to harvest crops and plant crops and all the sorts of things that you do with the land regularly for six years, not in the seventh year, because in the seventh year the land shall have a rest.
- You are to have a rest every seventh day, but there's also a sense in which the land is to have a rest every seventh year and you as an agricultural farmer, that's what most of ancient Israel would have been anyway, they are to have a rest every seventh year from tilling, harvesting, all those other sorts of cultivating type ideas to do with land every seventh year.
- Well, that's quite a radical thing to have a fallow year every seventh year. Now, some of the reasons are given in this chapter for this. There may have been other reasons, but this is at least what we can glean from these verses.
- The land itself needs rest for it to be, in a sense, long-term sustaining of crops and animals. So the land needs rest.
- The land can't be harvested season by season, year by year, without any rest for it. I guess the only time when we think of land having a rest these days is things like, you know, a spare week in the football season where Telstra might have a little bit of a much-needed rest or they might replant some of the land.
- [7 : 08] But here we're talking about harvesting crops, maybe looking after animals, but certainly the crop side of it, the land is to have a rest so that the land is sustainable long-term. Our local council here in Manningham is just launching a project on sustainability.

Sustainability seems to be part of the principles lying here, and probably as Christians, we ought to be people who are concerned with the sustainability of our land and of our world in general, and to be wise in the way we relate to our world and the land that God has given us, although I'm sure that the motivation from our local council is probably fairly different from the motivation here in Leviticus 25.

A second principle, though, behind this is that the land is God's. Verse 23 makes that very clear. The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine.

With me you are but aliens and tenants. Now the principle there is that the land is not ours to use and abuse to the full.

We, in effect, are tenants or stewards of the land that ultimately belongs to God. And that principle applies both to land ownership but also to land cultivation or stewardship.

[8 : 22] The land we live in is God's land. And though in particular that applied to the promised land where ancient Israel lived, there is a general sense in which it is still true that this whole universe is God's, as the Psalms say, and belongs to him.

And we're stewards and not owners and therefore we come under the owner's laws, that is, God's laws. But thirdly, and importantly, I think, this leaving the land fallow for one year in seven was an exercise of faith. It was an exercise of faith because you had to trust that there would be sufficient for you to live off the surplus of the sixth year and what you might just pick up from what the land produces naturally in the seventh year.

So look at verse 20. Should you ask, what shall we eat in the seventh year if we may not sow or gather in our crop? And God's reply, I will order my blessing for you in the sixth year so that it will yield a crop for three years.

And going back to the earlier part of the first paragraph, verse 5, you shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your unpruned vine.

It shall be a year of complete rest for the land. You may eat what the land yields during its Sabbath, you, your male and female slaves, and so on. That is, whatever the land produces naturally, you may eat, and there will be blessing in the sixth year so that there is sufficient for the seventh year.

[9 : 55] So this is an exercise of faith, of trust in God and trust in his promised blessings. It's not how many of us think about our work, about our wealth, about our produce, or about our study.

Our world and we tend to be people who are eager to make the most that we can from the resources that we have. So to plough and sow and cultivate and harvest every year rather than leave it fallow free.

What a waste that looks like. We're not going to earn as much if we leave our land fallow for the seventh year. But this exercise of faith is to inculcate a trust and a dependence upon God rather than a self-sufficiency and a self-dependence.

See, we in our world and our society would think that this sabbatical year type idea for the land is really economic madness. Who really is going to leave their land fallow for a year and therefore not reap the possibility of a bumper harvest to build bigger and bigger barns to store it in just in case one year's a bit off, a bit of an El Nino drought or something like that.

What a wasted opportunity to adhere and submit to this law that leaves the land fallow. And what a threat this sort of principle is to those who are greedy, eager to accumulate the absolute wealth that we can and also what a threat this is as the Sabbath day principle is too for those who are workaholics as well.

[11 : 37] You see, this is a confronting law. Many of us and much of our society live by working as hard as we can for as much as we can gain every day, every week.

More and more people are working seven days a week or longer and longer hours. More and more we are exhausting our resources both humanly and in our land and in our society in general.

More and more we are devoting ourselves to our work or our studies seven days a week. But you see, God knows what's best. And what's best is not necessarily the accumulation of the maximum wealth, the greater security from working flat out so that we can store some away for a rainy day.

That's what our society lives by. Okay, don't have a fallow year this year, your seventh year. Earn as much as you can. Build a bigger barn. Store it away for a rainy day so that you can become more and more secure.

No, God says. That's not the principle by which to live or by which to work. Now, it may be that in our non-agricultural society, we're not talking about, you know, little vegetable patches in the back of our home.

[12 : 51] We're talking about our whole attitude to our work and indeed to our study, to our wealth and so on. And God says the right principle is not to build bigger barns and to be more and more secure because you've got more stashed up for rainy days in retirement.

The right principle is to trust God and to trust God with Sabbath days and sabbatical years, so to speak. I'm not sure that we can apply this principle to say that every seventh year you just take off work, but there's something in this about rest for the land and for the people of God.

That would be very confronting for many of us economically if we were to seek to apply some of these principles to the way that we live and work, what we do with our income, how we approach our accumulation of wealth and also what we rely on because these laws are calling us to rely upon God and not the labours of our hands and not the wealth and accumulation that we seek to achieve.

Are we relying on God or bigger and bigger barns? And for those who are not earning but studying, the same sorts of principles I think apply.

Sabbath day and sabbatical year. There is a right rhythm where we need a day of rest and a day with God. And so to pour ourselves into our work or our study seven days a week, even though the actual principle of Friday night to Saturday night sunsets may no longer need to apply for us, the principle still applies.

[14 : 32] God knows what's best. And part of it is an exercise of faith to trust God. I know what the pressure's like when I was studying. You think I've got exams in a few weeks, I will study every possible day, then I'll catch up on my rest.

But the seventh day rest, even in the midst of frantic study, is God's pattern and we entrust ourselves to him by taking that rest and rely upon him and not our own hard work.

So this rhythm of rest for the land for ancient Israel would stir up their faith and trust in the promised blessings of God of verse 21. I'll order my blessing for you in the sixth year so that it will yield a crop for three years.

And I'll bet you at the end of the sixth year with a bumper crop that year, enough in your barn to last a whole year, I will bet you that most Israelites will think, let's keep it stored away and let's keep the land under crop.

Even when God delivers his promised blessing, so greedy are the hearts of most of us that we wouldn't probably put the land to fallow for that seventh year.

[15 : 47] Now even more radical than these laws of the opening paragraph here in chapter 25 are the laws that take up the rest of the chapter to do with what is called the Jubilee year. Every 50th year.

So that after seven cycles of seven sabbatical years, then it seems the 50th year is like another sabbatical year. Now there are some who say this is actually the seventh sabbatical, so it's the 50th year but really the 49th year because of the way you might count inclusively.

But it does seem to me that you have seven complete cycles of six years tilling the land, a seventh year sabbatical. Do that seven times, that's 49. For those who are good at maths, seven sevens are 49.

And then you've got your 50th year. And on that 50th year it's like another sabbatical year. So that in that year you're actually leaving the land in a sense fallow for two whole years.

And therefore trusting God even more that he would provide bumper crops in the 48th year to last you through two fallow years as well as whatever the land might produce naturally that you can go and use and eat.

[16 : 54] But it's not just another sabbatical year. It's got additional requirements and laws and provisions embedded within it. The name Jubilee, as we call it, comes in fact from the Hebrew.

One of those rare words in English that does come from a Hebrew root. Yobail, probably meaning the ram's horn because this year of Jubilee was announced by the blowing of the trumpet or the ram's horn at the end of the Day of Atonement.

That's when it begins. And so for those who were here two weeks ago, think back to the significance of the Day of Atonement. That the year of Jubilee begins when the people of God are right with God.

Their sins are atoned for by the blood of that sacrificial animal taken behind the curtain and the other animal that's taken out as the scapegoat over into the kitchen out there as you might remember from two weeks ago.

So it's beginning when the people are right with God after all sorts of religious ceremonies to express atonement and to celebrate and enjoy fellowship with God as forgiven and atoned for people.

[18 : 05] Now the basic provision of the year of Jubilee is that property is returned to its original owner. That's basically the law of Jubilee.

Property is returned to its original owner or at least the original family because presumably in a 50 year period a number of people might die. So it might then go to the son or the grandson even of people if they'd sold their land early in the 50 year period.

Land goes back to its original family owners. Behind all of this lies the fact that when Israel entered the land under Joshua in a few years after these laws were given in Leviticus the land was divided up fairly strictly to tribal inheritances for each of the 12 tribes of Israel and within each tribe to various clans and family groups as well.

So it was very clear from the beginning of Israel's inheritance in the promised land which tribe had which land and which families and clans within each tribe had which bits of that tribal land.

Each had its own area and in a sense that was meant to be a perpetual ownership or rather stewardship of that land that was entrusted from God. Remember that we're dealing with specific land here.

[19 : 24] We're dealing with the land that God promised some 600 years before these laws in Leviticus to Abraham. The land that God would show Abraham and when he showed it to him in Genesis 12 God said this is the land I will give your descendants after you.

A promise reiterated to Abraham's son Isaac and to his son Jacob and then to all the sons of Jacob from where you get the 12 tribes names. So this is promised land. Land that God gave to the descendants of Abraham.

A land that was distributed in the books of Deuteronomy and Joshua to the 12 tribes each having its own area. It nonetheless is God's land it's his to give or rather probably to entrust to the descendants of Abraham.

It's also sufficient land. Sufficient so that all the people of God provided that all the people of God would share. Not in the sense of a communist equal nobody really owns anything everybody's got exactly the same amount.

Not like that. The tribal areas were not uniform in size nor were the tribes uniform in size but the idea is that there is enough land here for everybody to have sufficient provided that the various economic laws in Leviticus and Deuteronomy and Exodus were adhered to so that everybody was catered for.

[20 : 45] Also we must bear in mind that this particular land God promised abundant blessing if the people kept all his laws. Not just the economic and land laws but the laws of sacrifice and the laws of property and the laws of sexuality and so on.

If the people of God were obedient to all of God's laws then the land would reap great blessing rain would come in its season crops would grow animals would be fertile etc.

They were the promises embedded in these opening books of the Old Testament. That's the land we're dealing with. But the Jubilee law in Leviticus acknowledges that things go wrong.

So the law is not ideal in the sense that it's sensitive to the fact that things go wrong. People might lose their land their crops might fail one year that might be their stupidity and fault or it may just be how the seasons go how the weather goes.

They may lose animals whether that's from an invading army from someone else whether it's theft from somebody else or just their inability to look after animals it could be all sorts of things.

[21 : 59] See the Jubilee law acknowledges that some people's fortunes go up and some people's fortunes go down. It may be their fault it may not be their fault indeed this chapter apportions no blame anywhere to a person who ends up impoverished because of their loss of land and crops and so on.

And so verse 25 acknowledges that at some point somebody may need to sell their property. Now we must bear in mind one other thing here.

Property was crucial in this agricultural society. You see even though the great Australian dream is to own your own property, quarter acre block with a house or these days a sort of tenth of an acre block without any garden and a three storey townhouse or something, back then the ownership of property was your income because it was an agricultural society and most people needed crops and or animals in order to live and to barter what they had with what other people had and so on.

So we're not just talking about your land for your house, we're talking about land for food and for crops and animals. That's part of the issue here. Well sometimes it doesn't go well and for whatever reason these Jubilee laws anticipate that somebody may need to sell their property.

Verse 25, if someone of your kin falls into difficulty and sells a piece of property then the first thing that could happen is that a kinsman, a family member, a cousin or an uncle or somebody like that, a brother or sister, they might come to their aid and redeem what the relative has sold.

[23 : 47] So for some reason my crops have failed, I've got into debt, in order to survive economically I sell my land or some part of my land. The first part of the Jubilee provision is that a member of your family, a kinsman, is to redeem that land, that is to buy it back for you.

Not so that you now become indebted to your kinsman but that you're free from debt altogether. That's quite a significant law when you think about it. you imagine that your brother or sister has lost their land, they've sold it, they've got the money from it and now this is saying your obligation as a family member is in effect to buy back their land if you can do it.

And not so that they become indebted to you either. That's a significant family responsibility within the people of God. But that may not always be possible because there may not be somebody to redeem it or perhaps your kinsfolk can't afford to redeem it.

So the second step then is that if the person has, this is the verse 26 and 27, if the person has no one to redeem it but then prospers and finds sufficient means to do so, the years since its sale shall be computed and the difference shall be refunded to the person to whom it was sold and the property shall be returned.

So you imagine you're fortunes have gone down for whatever reason, your fault or maybe not, you've sold your land and with the income somehow you've prospered. Now it is your right to buy back your land, indeed more than your right, your responsibility to buy it back.

[25 : 26] And imagine that you're the fellow Israelite who bought that person's land. And you think this is good, I've got my own land and now I've got his, but he comes to you and says I've now got the money, I'm buying back my land. And you as an Israelite are under obligation to sell it back to him for the fair price.

So you work out how many years he's had the land, how many years to jubilee, all that sort of thing, and now this is the fair price and you have to sell it back to him. That's a significant responsibility as an Israelite to your fellow Israelite.

But that may not happen either because that person may not prosper. And so the third step or the third possibility, the final step if you like, verse 28, if there's not sufficient means to recover it, what was sold shall remain with the purchaser until the year of jubilee.

And in the jubilee it shall be released and the property shall be returned. That is at the end of the 50 year period, and of course it may not be 50 years, if you're halfway through the period of 50 years it may only be 25 or even less.

At the end of that time the land comes back to you. You don't pay for it, it's back to you free. And so the person who purchased it from you in the first place knows that they only have the use of that land no more than to the next jubilee year, but maybe less if you prosper or less if a kinsman comes forward on your behalf.

[26 : 46] And they can't hold on to it because at the year of jubilee land goes back to its original owners. Now there's an exception to the rule.

The exception is if you own a house in a walled city, verses 29 and 30. If anyone sells a dwelling house in a walled city it may be redeemed until a year has elapsed since its sale, the right of redemption shall be one year.

If it's not redeemed before a full year has elapsed, a house that's in a walled city shall pass in perpetuity to the purchaser throughout the generations. It shall not be released at the jubilee. Now that's because the issue in jubilee land is land that has crops and animals to produce income and food and sustenance.

And so what this is saying is that if you've just got a house in a walled city, that house is like an additional possession, it's not your income bearing sort of possession, you've got one year from selling it to buy it back, after that it's gone forever.

But now there's an exception to the exception because the tribe of Levi, they didn't own land. They only really lived in cities. So if a Levite needs to sell their house in a walled city, at the year of jubilee it comes back to them because that's all the Levites had.

[28 : 03] They're the priests within the tribes. They had to live on what they received from the other tribes' land and crops and produce and partly through the sacrificial system. Also, if you owned a house that wasn't in a walled city, that came back to you at the end of jubilee and that's because, that's in verse 31, and that's because that house in a non-walled city would be like a part of your rural property.

The houses would be gathered together and your farms and so on would be around the village. So that had to come back to you. So there are those, a few exceptions if you like, in verses 29 through to verse 33.

But what if things got worse? What if you'd sold your land, you'd got some money for it, but now that money's running out? Now what happens? Well in verse 35, if any of your kin fall into difficulty and become dependent on you, you shall support them.

So now it seems the second step of poverty. You've lost your land and it looks like you've pretty much lost your job and you've lost your money that you got from the sale of that land.

Now you're dependent on your kinsfolk, the extended family that is. Not only your brothers, sisters or parents or children, but uncles and cousins and, you know, second cousins and all that sort of stuff.

[29 : 24] And you shall support them. It's not an option for you to say, no, look, I'm not going to support my second cousin. You shall support them. And it's not an option to say, it's their stupid, stupidity, their bad business practices that meant they lost it.

You shall support them. A very significant responsibility to your family in ancient Israel. That's verse 35. See, God's people have a basic family responsibility with each other here in ancient Israel.

Not only shall you support them, they shall live with you as though resident aliens. That means they don't own land. They're sort of second class citizens, but they're not slaves.

You can't abuse them and treat them harshly. In fact, verse 36, do not take interest in advance or otherwise make a profit from them. So you can't support them and sort of clock up an account and add interest to that account of what they owe you back.

But fear your God and let them live with you. You shall not lend them your money at interest taken in advance or provide them food at a profit. Well, it may be that this impoverished second cousin of yours comes along, they've lost their land, they're running out of money, you lend them money.

[30 : 36] They may be obligated to pay that money back but not with interest. So that the poor cannot be exploited by those who are rich. You cannot take advantage of somebody who's poor.

I am the Lord your God, verse 38 says, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan to be your God. You see, the model for generosity, the model for treating impoverished people, indeed enslaved people, is God himself.

But it could still get worse. It could be that for some reason there are no kinsfolk to support you or your plight is even worse than that. And so now you're sold or you sell yourself into slavery.

Verse 39, if any who are dependent on you become so impoverished that they sell themselves to you, you shall not make them serve as slaves. Now they've run out of resources.

They can't really even, in a sense, depend on you for support. They're too far gone for that. So they sell themselves to you. But you cannot treat them as slaves.

[31 : 44] They shall remain with you as hired or bound labourers, verse 40. They shall serve you until the year of jubilee. That is, you as a fellow Israelite or a kinsperson of this impoverished person, you don't have the option to say, look, I don't want them.

You're under obligation to look after them, to have them as a hired labourer, pay fair wages for their work for you until the year of jubilee comes.

Their period of servitude or almost like slavery, but not really, is limited to the year of jubilee. After that, they're free.

The property is returned to them and we're all back to square one again. Verse 41 makes that clear. The Israelites were to treat other Israelites with respect, not with harshness.

So verse 43 says, you shall not rule over them with harshness, but you shall fear your God. You were allowed to have foreigners as slaves and at the year of jubilee they could remain slaves beyond the year of jubilee.

[32 : 46] But this is a law here for fellow Israelites. They're the people of God. Behind such a law is the fact that the people of God were the slaves or servants of God.

And because they're God's servants, he says, don't make them your servants. So verse 42 says, for they are my servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt.

They shall not be sold as slaves are sold. And the very end of the chapter, the same sort of idea, for to me, the people of Israel are servants. They are my servants whom I brought out from the land of Egypt.

I am the Lord your God. You see, God is the one who's redeemed slaves, servants. Israel were enslaved to the Egyptians. The book of Exodus begins with a picture of the deprivation of their slavery to Pharaoh and the harsh and cruel labor they endured.

But God redeemed them from that. He paid the price, in effect, to bring them out of slavery towards and into the promised land. And so he says, you all are my servants, so don't make each other your servants.

[33 : 54] Treat each other when someone in your midst as a fellow Israelite becomes impoverished and has to sell themselves. Treat them as a hired laborer, but not as a slave. For you are all my slaves and my servants, God says.

Now I wonder what your reaction to these laws is. Some of you may well find these laws quite appealing, I suspect. We ought to, I think. It wouldn't be great to be able to limit poverty with laws like this in our society.

Wouldn't it be fantastic to say that the year 2005 will be our jubilee year in Australia and land will be returned to how it was 50 years ago? So the big businesses and those great wealthy tycoons, they might go back to their little quarter acre block somewhere.

And debts are cancelled, in effect, because that's what happens. The debts are cancelled because the property's returned. And many of us would think, well, this would be a radical economic, but actually very appealing.

It would be fair, it would be equitable, and so on. Wouldn't it be great to have the debt slate wiped clean? But what if a person lost their land and lost their money because of their bad practices, their stupidity, maybe their greed?

[35 : 14] Is it fair then to give them freedom at the 50th year and the year of jubilee? You see, these laws, at one level might be appealing, but at another level they might actually great.

Because we might think, well, here's a person who's been particularly shrewd in their business management. They've built up quite a little, you know, property empire, Mayfair, Park Lane, and the greenhouses up the other end of the street and all that sort of thing.

They've got a few hotels and houses, and they've worked very hard and they've worked very well. They've been very good businessmen. They actually deserve their accumulation of wealth. And here is Joe Blow over here.

He can't even manage Old Kent Road. He's lost that. It's his fault. He did stupid deals earlier on, underhanded and shady deals. He bought dodgy properties because he didn't actually look carefully.

Well, he actually doesn't deserve to get back on an equal footing. You imagine you're playing Monopoly, and after sort of five rounds or 50 rounds, you all go back to square one.

- [36 : 12] If you own Mayfair and Park Lane, you'd be thinking, hey, this is not a very fair rule here. And if you owned Old Kent Road, you'd think, well, I probably don't actually deserve to come back to square one here because I haven't done very well.

See, these laws are models of grace and expressions of love amongst the people of God, from God. It's about what is not deserved and yet provided for by a gracious God.

It's all based on his own grace in freeing Israel from redemption in Egypt, something they didn't deserve, but nonetheless he graciously did. It's to protect the poor and it's to prevent their exploitation.

A slate is wiped clean at the year of Jubilee. Well, for all their appeal, we know that Israel didn't keep these laws. We know that the rich exploited the poor because the prophets kept telling Israel off for doing just that.

Isaiah did, Amos did, other prophets as well. Clearly, you see, these laws confront us at the place of our greedy hearts. Our greed and our pride cause us to want to ignore these laws and brush them to one side.

- [37 : 26] So how do we respond today, 2003 AD, a long time after these laws of Leviticus, 1400 BC, in a different land, very different land, how do we respond?

One response, rightly, would be to repent of our greed. People are greedy. We want more and more and more.

And these laws at every point tell us not to be greedy. Not to be greedy by leaving land fellow, not to be greedy because we've got to give back things at the Jubilee year, not to be greedy because we're to support our fellow Israelites who are impoverished, even if it costs us and we don't get that money back, to repent of our greed, our workaholicism, our accumulation of wealth, our lack of compassion.

And the flip side is to learn to trust God for what he will provide for us. A second response, we don't belong to tribal Israel. We don't live in the confines of the land promised to Abraham in Genesis chapter 12.

And so at one level, rightly, these laws don't apply, at least in that form. But the principles of the law, and this is the point I was making last week about how to deal with Old Testament law, the principles are still abiding.

- [38 : 46] There is a family responsibility to the poor and the underprivileged within our family. But even more importantly than that for Christians is that we now belong to the family of God adopted through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross for us.

So we not only have a family responsibility to our brothers and sisters and parents and uncles and aunts and, you know, all those sorts of things, but we have a greater responsibility to our fellow Christians because we are part of an eternal family.

And so we should be on the lookout for our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who are impoverished. And though the economic sort of structures of our society are vastly different from ancient agricultural Israel, nonetheless there is an obligation on us to care for, provide for, even at our own cost, for those amongst our fellow Christians who are in need.

There is a third principle here about wiping off debt. Sometimes that is perhaps the right thing to do. But fourthly, this is about promoting the principle of compassion for the poor.

Yes, reject and repent of our greed. On the other side, to promote our compassion of poor people. I don't think we're very good at that. A few little coins in a plate at Christmas or occasional check to a charity or some sort of guilt feeling when we see impoverished people on television.

[40 : 17] But very often our hard hearts are telling us that anyone who's unemployed is a dole bludger. Anyone who's on social benefits is a sort of welfare junkie. They don't deserve our provisions.

So the issue is not whether they deserve it, but whether they need it. See, some of these people in this chapter have lost their stuff because of their own stupidity, guilt, greed, whatever.

They don't deserve the help of their fellow Israelites, but the fellow Israelites are commanded to help. Thirdly, these laws remind us that we are just stewards of God's land.

It's not our land, not even Aboriginal land actually. It's God's land. It's his land and we're stewards of it. Sustainability is indeed a proper concern for Christians, even if a seventh year fellow land may not be quite the right practice to sustain the land.

But fourthly too, the Jubilee has been announced. It's not year 2005 or four or three or 2000 as many people thought.

[41 : 24] The Jubilee was announced when someone stood up 2,000 years ago and said these words in a Jewish synagogue quoting from the prophet Isaiah. Words that we saw on the screen earlier on this evening.

Jesus Christ said, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind to let the oppressed go free to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

The year of Jubilees occurred with the coming of Jesus Christ and the beginning of his adult ministry. And our debts with God are wiped clean. That's what it's about in the end.

Not just our financial debts but our spiritual and eternal debts. Wiped clean. Paid for by God. Though we do not deserve it. Wiped clean forever.

And that is the model of how we're to treat others with compassion, grace, forgiveness. Not keeping up little accounts of what people owe. Yet it's not just finishing there.

[42 : 32] Because these laws are also pointing forward to the final trumpet. The final trumpet that brings about the total fulfilment of what Jesus announced in that synagogue in Nazareth 2,000 years ago.

The final trumpet when we and all God's people will be ushered home to our eternal promised land. A land of eternal rest. A land of eternal equity, justice, compassion.

A land with no poor people. A land where we will enjoy the spiritual riches of the blessings of God in Christ forever. Amen.