

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 5/6/2022

Dear Friends in Christ,

An important and unique expectation that God had for God's people beginning in Old Testament times was the Year of Jubilee. Every seventh year, God wanted the land to have a sabbath rest, just as the last day of the week is to be a sabbath. You could plant for six years, but in the seventh year, no crops were to be planted (which meant you had to plan well those six years to make sure you had enough for the seventh, though you could gather whatever grew on its own that seventh year). God also promised to send a special blessing of large crops the sixth year to help carry farm families over through the seventh year. Jubilee then came at the end of forty-nine years according to Leviticus 25, a sabbath year at the end of seven sabbath cycles.

In the Jubilee Year, the fiftieth year, a number of important things would happen. First, all slaves and prisoners would be freed, so the Year of Jubilee was sometimes called the Year of Release. Next, all debts would be forgiven. And all property was to be returned to the family who first owned it. If a family had to sell their property and they were unable to later buy it back, it was to be returned to them in the fiftieth year. Wow! Think about the implications of such an event.

But also think about the implications for the poor. Jubilee was to be a recovery of identity, especially for those who were poor and who had no choice but to sell property, go into debt, or to sell themselves into servitude to survive. It was not to be just about caring for the poor or correcting economic difficulties. Again, it was to be about restoring identity and family history.

What do you know about your family's history? My mother's parents immigrated to the United States from Denmark and were able to get 160 acres of land, a homestead, in what later became the state of South Dakota. They farmed it for many years, but then had to sell it because of economic hardship. They then secured a farm in Minnesota which is still in the family today. But, according to Jubilee, they should have received that original homestead back in the fiftieth year.

Several of the prophets called for a Year of Jubilee. Jesus spoke several times about Jubilee, though He called it "the year of the Lord's favor" (i.e., Luke 4:19). Jesus even implied that His coming as the Messiah was to be the fulfillment of Jubilee. It's interesting that in the entirety of the history of Israel, the Year of Jubilee has never been observed.

Many spirituals, sung particularly by slaves in America spoke of Jubilee. Song like "Steal Away," "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," and "If I Have My Ticket, Can I Ride?" spoke of the hope of the freedom that would come at Jubilee. Those who were enslaved often had little hope but for what God might bring.

Jubilee reminds us of some important teachings. The call for Jubilee tells us that we follow a God who brings freedom and hope, especially to those who feel bound and in despair. Jubilee tells us that God's passion is for grace and for restoration, not just economically, but relationally, too. Most of all, in the Year of Jubilee we celebrate every Easter, God resets all of our lives in the death and resurrection of Jesus. That event becomes the basis for our hope in the future, the promise of a new creation of which we, though undeserving, will be a part.

In Christ's love,
Pastor Jeffrey