

St Paul's Dorking Small Group Study: March 11th 2007

Set all free A step on the way: Luke 4:16-22

Key points from Sunday's sermon:

What did this passage mean to Jesus' Jewish listeners?

The usual readings of this passage are inclined to completely spiritualise its meaning. Jesus is typically understood as only proclaiming release to those who are captives of sin, giving sight to those who are spiritually blind, and offering liberty to those who are oppressed by the bondage of evil. Whilst this is true - the Old Testament background to this text enriches and expands its meaning considerably. Commentators suggest that the "Year of the Lord's favour" refers to the Old Testament Jubilee and helps us discover both a spiritual and practical understanding of the implications of the Messiah's mission.

3 shake ups occurred in the Sabbatical year.

- **Land was given a vacation:** Crops were not to be planted or harvested and the Lord promised a plentiful year in the sixth year to provide for the seventh (Exodus 23:10 Lev 25:2)
- **Slaves were released on the seventh year.** Most slaves in the Old Testament became slaves because they could not pay off their debts. After 6 working years it was deemed they had paid their debt and they were to be released (See Exod :21:1-6 Deut 15:12-18)
- **Debts were also erased.** Since Israel was originally an agricultural economy, the debts were primarily charitable loans rather than commercial loans- the radical teaching was that these debts must be cancelled every sabbatical year (Deut 15:1-6)
- **On the 50th or Jubilee year:** A fourth shake up was added to the land, debt and slave restoration. The land itself was returned to the original occupants who owned it at the beginning of the Jubilee period (See Lev 25:10)

So what is this all about?

The whole purpose of the Jubilee was God's master plan to prevent rampant on-going exploitation of the poor, the needy, and the marginalised.

In this economic model the rich didn't continuously get richer and the poor were NEVER permanently locked into economic slavery

So what was this Jubilee all about ... Why had God instigated it and wanted it to be upheld?

1. **A reminder of God of God's ownership.** All things come from God and we are to be reminded that we are only stewards and sojourners ... Not owners (Lev:25:23)
2. **A reminder of God's liberation.** (Lev :25:38) God's people were required to participate in this unusual vision as a regular reminder of God's decisive act of liberation. Let no one forget ...Deut 15:15
" You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you therefore I command you this today..."
3. **A reminder of God's grace and provision.** The Jubilee is rooted in a joyous response to God's gracious liberation and deliverance. As the people recalled how God had redeemed them out of slavery, the only logical response was to pass it on (Deut:15:13-14)
4. **A reminder of God's compassion.** The Jubilee respondent has one eye on history ...on God's gracious acts of deliverance. The other eye looks around him to see with compassion those who are crushed down by the social and economic structures...
" You shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your brother...you shall open wide your hand to your brother - the needy and to the poor in the land" (Deut: 15:4-11)

In short the Jubilee was God's way of maintaining an *upside-down revolution ...it levelled the pyramids structures of society with a few rich owners at the top and a mass of poor and needy at the bottom...it is all about the good news of restoration:*
Donald Kraybill

So how is all this relevant to us today?

"The Jubilee provides the principles of faith that should inform our economics ... God's acts of salvation moved the community to forgive debts, free slaves and return land. The fact that the Jubilee prescriptions were not always followed speaks to what we know only too well ourselves ...Economic loyalties often take precedent over faith.

Christian obedience does not mean we try to duplicate the details of the Jubilee as we no longer live in a theocracy- but the theological principles undergirding the Jubilee can with great relevance inform our Christian economic philosophy"
Kraybill : The Upside Down Kingdom

So what is our response to God's act of salvation as captured in the Jubilee principles?

We are forgiven debtors, and released slaves...

So why wouldn't Jesus' chain-reaction principle kick in here?

"Forgive as I have forgiven, be merciful as I have been merciful, love as I have loved, give freely as I have to given you" ...

In short ...**His mercy moves us!**

So ... Can we see some of this economic philosophy and Jubilee work at action in the life of Christ ? - Can we see a signpost to how we might live?

Jesus' life demonstrated 3 very Jubilee-like tendencies ...

- **A bias to the poor**, the sick, the marginalised, and a compassion for those enslaved. Whether it was Lepers, Women, Samaritan's , Poor widows, tax Collectors, hated Romans, Children, or the beggars we see Jesus going out of his way to make a difference to the lives of the misfits
- **A turning of the tables**: Quite literally we see Jesus in action to condemn economic exploitation in the story of his overturning of the tables on the money changers in the temple Courts.
So what was going on here? ...Well the rich Sadducean elite licensed money changers and animal hawkers to develop a rich trade of exploiting the poor by deeming that any offering of money or animal sacrifice they bought was deemed unfit for use...and had to be exchanged for only pure coins and pure animals ...of course this exchange incurred a fat margin. Thus Jesus wasn't just speaking out against the fact that the house of prayer had been turned into a lucrative animal and money market...he was striking out at the very heart of the Jewish elite and their flagrant exploitation of the poor.
- **An upside down theology**: Which we see alive in the contrasting stories of Zacchaeus ...and the Rich young ruler.

You see Zacchaeus might have been on the face of it the bad guy ...but Jesus showed actually things were actually quite upside down. The rich young ruler has his theology down pat ...but there's no obedience. Zacchaeus has a lousy theology...probably none but he practises Jubilee!

The ruler call Jesus "good teacher" but the cheater calls him "Lord". The rich young ruler has good attitudes but no acts.

The cheat has a change of attitude which produces economic action

On the one hand we have good theology, no Jubilee and condemnation ... on the other hand we have lousy theology, real Jubilee action and salvation

Our practical response?

- **Be informed ...**

Today's slavery is bigger than you might think ...12 million worldwide are enslaved by modern-day slave-masters and nearly 2 Billion are enslaved by global poverty and injustice.

Our newspapers today are full of articles about "*ethical living*" as carbon emissions and our responsibility for the environment and future generations has become in vogue.

Perhaps as Christians we can speak up for ethical living for today's generation and not just on issues of the environment but on socio-economic issue too. I think it's good that as Christians we are well informed and can speak intelligently on issues of economic slavery , poverty and justice. I can recommend Tear Times and this new book 50 Reasons to Buy fair trade as excellent resources : See Jubilee 2000 Proverb: Proverbs 31:8-9

"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly... defend the rights of the poor and needy."

- **Be wise, responsible ... even radical?**

I am not suggesting that all of us have to become rampant poverty demonstrators but I might suggest that we need to make a difference...be responsible with our purchasers and as John Arnold challenged us last week ...Using our economic consumer power to make a difference

Or why not find out find about Besom and how this initiative is and will make a big difference to some of those in real need here in Dorking

- **Let's start by opening our heart to compassion and some new possibilities to make a difference**

We often here the phrase "**Compassion fatigue**" and I know what that feels like...Sometimes we just seem bombarded by need. But let us ask God to have his Spirit change our hearts and breathe into them his own compassion , mercy, justice and Jubilee good news ...

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

He sent me to proclaim release to the captives

And recovery of sight to the blind

He sent me to release the oppressed

To proclaim the year of the Lords favour

Questions to discuss:

- **Introduction:** Can anyone share their experience maybe from travelling the world or seeing first hand examples of "modern day slavery"?
- To what extent do you think the good news that Jesus proclaimed was "spiritual good news" rather than "physical/practical good news"?
- What do you think of the principles and practise of the Sabbatical and Jubilee that God ordained? Were they smart or impractical, did they have the potential to insure a better socio-economic balance ...or were they just doomed to failure?
- Reflect on the life of Christ how do you see his lifestyle and actions demonstrate a bias to the poor and rejection of slavery and economic exploitation?
- Can anyone share how they have found in their life some ways to express a new attitude to money, exploitation, and/or a new sense of justice and ethical living because of Jesus?
- What do the contrasting stories of Zacchaeus and the Rich young ruler have to say to us?
- Share how we might respond to this weeks study...how might we be more informed, more responsible and discover a new compassion to make a difference?