

## **Jubilees**

You were all given a rock today when you came in today. If you don't have one, just raise your hand and someone will get one to you.

Some of you have bigger rocks than others. It might feel heavy. It might be a bit of a nuisance to hold – but I want you to keep it in your hand this morning as I speak. It's a symbol of the weight you carry around with you every day.

Each week, as your pastor, I hear about past weights and new weights that you carry. Some of you carry huge weights that hunch you over with the pressure. What's your rock a symbol of today?

- Maybe it's the heaviness of failure where things didn't quite go the way you wanted things to go. You still carry that around.
- Some of us are weighted down by the stuff ups of our lives. It might be a known sin of some kind that became public. It might be an ongoing struggle that we have that nobody else knows but it you. You carry that shame around with you and the guilt that goes with it.
- It might be financial debt. I spoke a few weeks ago about spending statistics for kiwis where we spend below our means – Three years ago the figure was \$1.16 for every \$1 earned. Maybe that's caught up with you. Maybe the weight of your mortgage, credit card debt weighs on you today.
- Maybe your work situation is getting you down. It might be that you have a job but there are particular issues that are heavy for you. Or, you'd love to have a job and find some financial stability once again.
- This rock might symbolize the anxiety of health issues you are carrying. It's heavy load you are carrying.
- Maybe, it's the constant demand on you; the tedious activity of day after day after day after day. You just want some rest – need some rest!

All of us carry weights of some type and size.

For many of us, it's nothing that big. It might have stated as a pebble size in your shoe but day after day after day, that pebble has irritated you causing blisters and making it difficult to move from A to B. It's hard to journey. Though it's a pretty small weight, its nagging weight has left a wound on you.

For others, the rock you have holding and carrying has caused calluses in your life. It's led to bitterness or fear or anxiety. It's not just the weight anymore – it's the stuff that that weight has produced in you. You don't like it but your scared from it.

For some of you the weight feels more like a chain. It's heavy, rusty, binding. It's hard to move. It might be the shame of repeated stuff ups. You know it's not right but you feel enslaved to this habit in your life.

Everyone around you seems to experience release and smiles and happy times. But, the burdens of life and the demands of life weigh down on you, don't they?

Many of us come up with ways to help get us through the day and manage the weight. Make a bag and put the weight in it to hide it and you carry it on your shoulders. But, eventually your shoulders have to bear the weight and the stress comes out somewhere else.

Or, you might paint your rock to blend it in so that it doesn't stand out and get noticed. But, it's still there. In a crowd of this size, I'd say, most of us carry huge weights of various kinds and sizes.

We long to let go of the weight and experience release.

If that's where you at today, I want to invite you to look at a year-long celebration that God designed for his people solely for the purpose of helping His people let go of the weight and experience release.

### **I. God designed a year for those who were weighted down to let go of their weights and experience release**

God designed some rhythms for his people.

First, there was the weekly Sabbath. Every seventh day, the people were to take a day off. We saw that a few weeks ago in a message entitled 'soul spa.' One of the reasons for the Sabbath was to remind us, as the people of God, that we're not God. We're creatures that are always in need of God. Ultimately, all that we have comes from God's involvement in our lives.

There was also a yearlong Sabbath where the land was able to rest every seventh year. Then, every seventh Sabbath year, every 50 years, there was what was called a year of Jubilees.

In that Sabbath year and the Jubilee Year, several things happened.  
***First, the land was left to rest.***

There was no planting of crops, or pruning the fruit trees or vineyard. No picking fruit and grapes. No harvest. Nothing. It was left fallow and uncultivated.

<sup>1</sup> :While Moses was on Mount Sinai, the LORD said to him, <sup>2</sup> “Give the following instructions to the people of Israel. When you have entered the land I am giving you, the land itself must observe a Sabbath rest before the LORD every seventh year. <sup>3</sup> For six years you may plant your fields and prune your vineyards and harvest your crops, <sup>4</sup> but during the seventh year the land must have a Sabbath year of complete rest. It is the LORD’s Sabbath. Do not plant your fields or prune your vineyards during that year. <sup>5</sup> And don’t store away the crops that grow on their own or gather the grapes from your unpruned vines. The land must have a year of complete rest. <sup>6</sup> But you may eat whatever the land produces on its own during its Sabbath. This applies to you, your male and female servants, your hired workers, and the temporary residents who live with you. <sup>7</sup> Your livestock and the wild animals in your land will also be allowed to eat what the land produces.” - Lev 25:1-7 (NLT)

Now, if you were a farmer at this point, you probably have a question on your mind. “So, how are we going to survive? Nice idea God, but I have to grow something for my family to eat at the end of harvest time.” ‘God, remember, this is an agrarian society. My livelihood depends on producing something from the land to feed my family. There’s no bank around that I can invest in over six years to fund a seventh year! God, this might sound good in theory but how’s it going to happen? Yep, I hear you God – “cease from planting and pruning. Don’t gather grapes. Don’t prune. Don’t plant.’ But how?”

<sup>20</sup> But you might ask, ‘What will we eat during the seventh year, since we are not allowed to plant or harvest crops that year?’ <sup>21</sup> Be assured that I will send my blessing for you in the sixth year, so the land will produce a crop large enough for three years. <sup>22</sup> When you plant your fields in the eighth year, you will still be eating from the large crop of the sixth year. In fact, you will still be eating from that large crop when the new crop is harvested in the ninth year. – Lev 25:18-22 (NLT)

So, the sixth year, God would send enough for the people to eat what they needed during the sabbath year and enough for them to eat while they waited another year for crops to come!

In addition, they could eat whatever the land naturally produced:

<sup>11</sup> “This fiftieth year will be a jubilee for you. During that year you must not plant your fields or store away any of the crops that grow on their own, and don’t gather the grapes from your unpruned vines. <sup>12</sup> It will be a jubilee year for you, and you must keep it holy. But you may eat whatever the land produces on its own.” - Lev 25:11-12 (NLT)

As we read in other places, the whole land effectively was to become one vast common place, open to all people and animals. Those who owned land ceased cultivating it and

had no exclusive rights to its spontaneous produce. Everyone could access what they needed from the land, share it, and live in dependency upon God.

All this no doubt sounds incredibly strange to our ears. We can see some common sense here in the land needing to be fertilized and leaving it to bear for a year would help with soil nutrition for future years. But, in this process, God was keen to remind his people about tangible truths.

Truths like - The ultimate landowner is God! God owned the land. The people were effectively leasing it off him. What they had they needed to be grateful for and not take for granted. He had brought them out of slavery and placed them in this promised land.

Truths like – In God we trust. He wanted his people to trust in Him. He was the one that enabled the crops to grow. He provided the right amount of rain and sunshine. Over time, it’s easy to assume it will just happen. But, they needed to trust God and see it from his hand. Leaving it for a Sabbath year, meant they had to trust in God to provide what he promised and to look after them and their families. He was the One who provided manna and water for the people back in desert times. He could take care of his people again in the land during these Sabbath Years and the Year of Jubilee.

There’s another thing that happened on the Year of Jubilees.

### **Second, land was to returned to its original owner.**

When the people came into the promised land, it was evenly distributed among the tribes and among the families. Every person had land. After all, without land in an agrarian society, you’re sunk. Land was how you provided for your family. Land was how any wealth was made. It was made from growing crops and produce.

But, like all cultures, people made some mistakes. It might be that your great grand-dad got himself into a situation where he had to borrow money and could not pay. Maybe, it was from poor farming techniques. Maybe, it was laziness. Whatever it was, that act would put the wider family at risk. The only asset they had was the land. When it was sold, there was no other way for the people to make money.

Every 50<sup>th</sup> year was a Jubilee year where land was returned to its original owner.

*“... It will be a jubilee year for you, when each of you may return to the land that belonged to your ancestors and return to your own clan.”  
Lev 25:10 (NLT)*

You would only experience this once or twice in your life-time.

On my phone there is a button I can press to reset everything to its original factory settings. It’s not something I want to do a lot but I’ve had to use it when something in

the phone isn't working as well as it should. There's a program glitch of some kind. Pressing the factory reset takes it back to the way it was originally and enables me to rebuild everything again.

Effectively, the Year of Jubilees is a national 'reset' button for everybody. Whatever mistakes your grand-dad had made that meant land was sold to others resulting in your parents and your family struggling along with no hope of getting out of your dilemma changed with Jubilees. Land was returned back to the family again! You had the opportunity to grow and harvest once again.

Effectively, when someone bought land from another, they were leasing it until Jubilees. The sale price of the land was to take this into consideration:

*<sup>14</sup> "When you make an agreement with your neighbor to buy or sell property, you must not take advantage of each other. <sup>15</sup> When you buy land from your neighbor, the price you pay must be based on the number of years since the last jubilee. The seller must set the price by taking into account the number of years remaining until the next Year of Jubilee. <sup>16</sup> The more years until the next jubilee, the higher the price; the fewer years, the lower the price. After all, the person selling the land is actually selling you a certain number of harvests. <sup>17</sup> Show your fear of God by not taking advantage of each other. I am the LORD your God."*

- Lev 25:14-17 (NLT)

The people were to treat each other with justice and fairness. Jubilees realized that people need a second change. It stopped the growing gap between rich and poor and provided an opportunity for everybody to provide for their families and for everybody to get ahead in life.

This is radical, isn't it? If you're a land owner you might not have felt all that great about it. But, it reminded land owners that God was the actual owner of the land and even they were ultimately leasing it from God:

*<sup>23</sup> "The land must never be sold on a permanent basis, for the land belongs to me. You are only foreigners and tenant farmers working for me." - Leviticus 25:23 (NLT)*

The wealthy were not being punished. They knew they had this extra land for a season. At Jubilees, all growing land would be returned to its original owner. That way, all the people were to have access to fields to grow and plant and harvest.

By the way, if you had a house in a walled city, that could be permanently kept if you had bought it fairly. After all, you've done all that renovation to enjoy, right? So, you can keep the house in the city. Jubilees is about sharing the working land so that everybody could provide for their families fairly.

Jubilees provided the people with hope. The slate was wiped clean. The people could start over. It was a new beginning.

There's another thing that happened in the Year of Jubilees.

### ***Third, slaves were released***

When we think of slaves, we probably think of slave ships bringing Africans to America and the harsh treatments many slaves endured. That's not really the picture here.

What occurred in ancient times was that people might find themselves in a position where their debt is so heavy that they needed to sell themselves and even their families in order to survive and pay their debt.

This is tied in quite closely to the land. At the end of the day, if grand-dad had made a poor choice and had to sell the land, you had limited ways to provide for the family. You might find casual day work but there were no guarantees throughout the whole year.

Without land, it was highly likely that you would end up having to sell yourself and your family into slavery. Your owner would then provide food and housing for you in exchange for you working for them.

The Bible instructed him not to treat you as a slave but as a hired worker living with you.

*<sup>39</sup> "If one of your fellow Israelites falls into poverty and is forced to sell himself to you, do not treat him as a slave. <sup>40</sup> Treat him instead as a hired worker or as a temporary resident who lives with you, and he will serve you only until the Year of Jubilee. <sup>41</sup> At that time he and his children will no longer be obligated to you, and they will return to their clans and go back to the land originally allotted to their ancestors." - Lev 25:39-41*

[actually slaves is wrong term. They were temporary workers until Jubilees. God had brought them out of slavery and was adamant that the people not be slaves again, regardless.]

While not quite slaves, it's not a great condition to be in. There is no way out – except for Jubilees! Every Sabbath year and Jubilee year, all Israelite slaves were released!

*"If a fellow Hebrew, a man or a woman, sells himself to you and serves you six years, in the seventh year you must let him go free. And when you release him, do not send him away empty-handed. Supply him liberally from your flock, your threshing floor and your winepress. Give to him as the LORD your God has blessed you..."*

Once again, the people are reminded about the past when they were slaves.

*“...Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you. That is why I give you this command today.” – Deuteronomy 15:12-15 (NIV)*

There’s one other thing that happened in the Year of Jubilees.

**Fourth, all debt was cancelled!**

There’s no point returning you to your land and freeing you from slavery if you’re still in debt up to your eye-balls! So, God instructed his people to cancel all debt!

*“At the end of every seven years you must cancel debts. <sup>2</sup> This is how it is to be done: Every creditor shall cancel any loan they have made to another Israelite. They shall not require payment from anyone among their own people, because the LORD’s time for canceling debts has been proclaimed.” – Deut 15:1-2 (NIV)*

Imagine getting a letter from the bank. ‘Dear Mr Dove. It’s Jubilees next month so we’ve taken your mortgage of \$301,200 and chosen to cancel it. Please call us at the bank if you wish to discuss this or have any concerns. Sincerely, Joe Blogs, Bank Manager.’

Talk about radical! Imagine how you would feel. That’s how the people felt every year of Jubilees.

At Jubilees, these four things occurred: 1) land was left fallowed 2) land was returned to its original owners 3) all Israelite slaves were freed, and 4) all debt was cancelled.

The common theme in them is rest and release. The land rests and is released from obligation to perform for a year. The original land owners are released from the weights of bad past decisions, financial debt, chains of slavery and are released to be land owners, providers, and free citizens!

This was a year of much celebration!

Such a year was announced just after the Day of Atonement, which we’ll look at next week.

*<sup>9</sup> “Then on the Day of Atonement in the fiftieth year, blow the ram’s horn loud and long throughout the land. <sup>10</sup> Set this year apart as holy, a time to proclaim freedom throughout the land for all who live there. ” – Lev 25:9-10 (NLT)*

In that feast, the people had just been ceremonially made right with God. Their sin was atoned for and dealt with. The guilt and shame and sin was gone. When that was completed, the Shofar, the rams horn would sound – (play) and the people would celebrate for those heavy weights that they had carried for so long were let go. The people could experience release!

## **II. But, as much as the people needed such a year to let go of their weights and experience release, they never seemed to have experienced it!**

Maybe some of them practiced Sabbath years and Jubilees, but there is no historical record of the nation having practiced a year of Jubilees. If they did, you could count the times on one hand!

The people were left with their weights. Those weights got heavier. Their hands became calloused. The poor became poorer. The rich became richer. The gap between them grew. People remained in slavery. Land owners secured more land. Debt accumulated. The land never experienced the rest it needed to keep producing.

I’m not sure why. Maybe the decision makers were landowners themselves and this was a big, big deal to apply. Maybe some applied it but to get the whole nation to practice a Year of Jubilees was political suicide. It was just too hard.

Then the exile period came where the whole nation was taken into captivity due to turning away from God. One of the reasons we’re given in the Bible for the exile occurring is to give the land its Sabbatical.

*<sup>21</sup> “So the message of the LORD spoken through Jeremiah was fulfilled. The land finally enjoyed its Sabbath rest, lying desolate until the seventy years were fulfilled, just as the prophet had said.” – 2 Chron. 36:21 (NLT)*

So, for 70 years the people were in exile to make up for the 500 years they had failed to keep these Sabbaths and Jubilees.

## **III. Though the people never experienced it, they longed for it!**

They longed to let go of their weights and experience release. As each year went by, the Year of Jubilee became a cherished promise to look forward to in a day to come. When Messiah would come, he would bring Jubilees. When Messiah comes, surely he will take these heavy weights, these chains of slavery, and allow us to experience release. Restoration and release would surely come with Messiah!

As Isaiah spoke about the coming of the Messiah, he looked to the Messiah bringing about a glorious day of Jubilee. Listen to what he prophesies – using *present language to describe something what to come*:

*<sup>1</sup> “The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me,  
for the LORD has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted  
and to proclaim that captives will be released  
and prisoners will be freed.*

<sup>2</sup> *He has sent me to tell those who mourn  
that the time of the LORD's favor has come,  
and with it, the day of God's anger against their enemies.*  
<sup>3</sup> *To all who mourn in Israel,  
he will give a crown of beauty for ashes,  
a joyous blessing instead of mourning,  
festive praise instead of despair.  
In their righteousness, they will be like great oaks  
that the LORD has planted for his own glory.”*  
- Isaiah 61: 1-3 (NLT)

What words of hope. For people carrying heavy weights and longing for release, this promise of better days when Messiah would come kept them going.

And, then Jesus came!

#### **IV. [Jesus declares that the time has come to let go of the weights and experience release]**

This is what we read:

<sup>16</sup> *When he came to the village of Nazareth, his boyhood home, he went as usual to the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read the Scriptures. <sup>17</sup> The scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where this was written:*

<sup>18</sup> *“The Spirit of the LORD is upon me,  
for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released,  
that the blind will see,  
that the oppressed will be set free,  
<sup>19</sup> and that the time of the LORD's favor has come.”* – Luke 4:16-19 (NLT)

If that quote sounds familiar, it should. You heard it a minute ago from Isaiah 61, the promise that Messiah would come and bring the experience of Jubilees to the people.

That word “released” and “set free” come from the same Greek word translated from the Hebrew word “Jubilee.” Jesus is referring back to the Year of Jubilees.

Jesus reads this passage. You can see him pause.

<sup>20</sup> *“He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. All eyes in the synagogue looked at him intently. <sup>21</sup> Then he began to speak to them. “The Scripture you’ve just heard has been fulfilled this very day!”* – Luke 4:20-21 (NLT)

Jubilees is here. But, Jubilees is no longer about a year but a person! Jesus. Jesus declares that the time has come to let go of the weights and experience release.

The weight you are carrying and have been carrying for days, months, years – throughout your life – you can let it go and experience release that Jesus brings.

No longer do you need to carry the heaviness of past failure/known sin/shame. No longer do you be weighted down by the stuff-ups of your life . . . No longer do you need to carry the anxiety around about your work situation, health situation, or financial debt. Jesus is in the process of restoring all things and wants to bring a genuine feeling of release. That’s what happens in the kingdom of God. It’s all about God’s restoration program.

Whatever your weight is . . .no matter what it’s size . . .no matter what it’s shape . . .no matter how long you’ve carried it . . . you can leave it with Jesus and experience Jubilees.

Jesus takes the weight and the chains and the load and the burden upon himself on the cross. He dies for the sin and brokenness of the world. In his resurrection, the power of God comes to restore a broken and lost world and bring hope and rest and relief to the world.

Jubilees is in a person. We experience the release now and in a day to come. It’s now but not fully yet. That’s where hope comes in. We can let go of the weight and experience release in the hope of what is to come; a hope that all of creation shares.

Paul writes,

*“For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.”*

But, it’s not just creation . . .

*“Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our*

*bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.” – Romans 8:20-25(NIV)*

We have a taste now and the ultimate expression of Jubilees to be experienced in a day to come. But, we don't need to carry these weights around. We can leave them with Jesus and experience release.

Not only should we let go of our weights and experience release. But, that's our mission to others. To bring Jesus and Jubilees to others.

Others around us, friends, neighbours, people overseas carry huge weights and burdens too. I meet them. You meet them. I hear about them on TV. You do to.

What I love about our church is the way we are engaging in significant ways with people in our local community. This past week we kicked off a new initiative at Mt Albert Primary by sponsoring a program called Crackerjack kids. It has sports celebrities come in and teach kids about sports and character. . .

We have a history of also been engaged globally and want to take even further steps in that area in the future. That's why we had you complete a global questionnaire last week. We want to see what God has wired us as a church, in our DNA, and what small ways we can significantly impact others.

Sometimes people ask whether outreach should be word or deed. It's not hard to answer that when you look at the nature of the kingdom of God and Jubilees. It's both. It always has been. Jesus engaged with people physically and spiritually. He brought word and deeds. Our mission is also to help people drop their weights at the feet of Jesus and experience release.

We saw earlier that Jubilee was announced by way of blowing the shophar, Rams horn. You can imagine the feel in the air when the noise of that horn was sounded loud and clear. The people knew that the weight they had been carrying for so long, day after day after day after day – could be dropped. They were no longer slaves. They were no longer in debt. They didn't have to be in chains or carry these weights. They could experience release.

Church, today, is Jubilees. It's not about a time or place. It's about Jesus. Jesus brings Jubilees. Today, you can drop the weight and chains and experience release!

So, I'm going to ask Isaac to come up with his trumpet. (get balloons).

Here's what's going to happen:

1. in a moment, Isaac will play his trumpet and announce Jubilees. For us, it's in Jesus. It's a defining moment to say, 'Jesus, I am leaving this weight with you. I

am experiencing the release you bring and long for the ultimate release to come.'

2. When he does so, I want us to stand and cheer. Cheer like you people should cheer who have discovered freedom and liberty in exchange of bondage and debt and weight.
3. I'm going to release these balloons as a visible way of seeing release.
4. Then, a song is going to be played. It's from the rock band, U2. It's a song called, 'It's a Beautiful Day" written by Bono and inspired by *Jubilees*. It's about a man who loses his material things but actually feels better because he realizes what he has and the freedom and release that is his. [8:45 – *Instrumental – MWSmith, Freedom*]
5. During the song, while you're standing, come forward to the three stations. Leave your rock there. Take communion – the release that Jesus brings because of his life and death and resurrection.
6. Then go back to your seat. Hold the elements in your hand. We'll take it together after the song, together in celebration.

Jesus says, "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*" – *Matthew 11:28-29 (NIV)*

Today, you can leave the weights. You can experience release. When Isaac sounds the trumpet, stand and celebrate as a people who have discovered freedom and liberty!