

ECONOMICS OF FAITH – Part II

LEVITICUS 25:1-55

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S VIEW ON MONEY AND POSSESSIONS REQUIRES US TO ADOPT ECONOMICS OF FAITH.

This sermon addresses point "III. Acknowledging Responsibility." Refer to the sermon "Economics of Faith – Part I" for points I & II.

I. EXERCISING PERSONAL FAITH (VS 1-7)

It Takes A Great Deal Of Faith To View Money And Possessions The Way God Does.

- A. THE IMPORTANCE OF SABBATH (1-2)
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We Must Start From The Truth That Nothing Belongs To Us. God Has Merely Given Us Money And Possessions To Manage For Him.

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In Faith Economics, We Are Responsible For One Another.

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IV. EPILOGUE

Economics of Faith – Part 2

Leviticus 25:1-55

Last time we talked about the Sabbath Year. The land was to rest. It was a rest for all of creation. We started also to study through the Jubilee Year as it related to the rest and restoration of the land. We said that it took a lot of faith in God to obey these commands. Remember, Israel was an agricultural nation. They lived off of what the land produced every year. God commanded them not to work the land for one year out of every seven. And after seven cycles, they were commanded to add on another year of rest for the land. It would take a great deal of faith not to work the land for two years in a row.

In fact, there is no indication that Israel ever obeyed these commands. Further we said that it would take a great deal of faith for us to view money and possessions from God's perspective, to acknowledge that everything we have belongs to God, and then to live based on those truths and commands.

This morning we are going to continue with the theme of the Jubilee Year. But it seems that people get really angry when pastors talk about money.

And so, that is why my friend called me to his church to preach a sermon on stewardship. He felt that his people might be more likely to listen if an outsider came to preach on this subject.

I started out the sermon with my first point. I said, "Now let the church walk." A deacon responded, "Amen, pastor, let the church walk."

I started feeling a little confidence welling up in me and so I moved on to the second point, "Let the church run," I said. Again, another deacon responded, "Amen pastor, let her run."

Feeling better and better about the sermon, I went on to point number three and said, "Let the church fly brothers and sisters." Another deacon actually got up excitedly and said, "Preach it pastor! Let the church fly."

I figured I now had them hooked and so I gave them the conclusion, "Now it's going to take money to make the church fly." All the deacons responded as one, "Let it walk pastor. Let the church walk."

I know that I don't preach enough about God's view of money and possessions but Jesus summarized it like this, "Where a person's treasure is, so lies their heart."

This morning's sermon is a continuation from last week's sermon. The main idea is **UNDERSTANDING GOD'S VIEW ON MONEY AND POSSESSIONS REQUIRES US TO ADOPT ECONOMICS OF FAITH.** Interestingly enough, I think that we can see from this whole chapter that our view of money and possessions will influence our view of social justice.

Refer to the sermon Economics of Faith – Part I for points I & II.

I. EXERCISING PERSONAL FAITH (VS 1-7)

It Takes A Great Deal Of Faith To View Money And Possessions The Way God Does.

II. ACKNOWLEDGING THE TRUTH (VS 8-24)

We Must Start From The Truth That Nothing Belongs To Us. God Has Merely Given Us Money And Possessions To Manage For Him.

We summarized verses 1-7 by saying **IT TAKES A GREAT DEAL OF FAITH TO VIEW MONEY AND POSSESSIONS THE WAY GOD DOES.** Then we went on to say that in order for us to live as authentic Christians, **WE MUST START FROM THE TRUTH THAT NOTHING BELONGS TO US. GOD HAS MERELY GIVEN US MONEY AND POSSESSIONS TO MANAGE FOR HIM.**

III. ACKNOWLEDGING RESPONSIBILITY (VS 25-55)

In Faith Economics, We Are Responsible For One Another.

It is only by accepting these two ideas and committing ourselves to understanding God and obeying God that we can come acknowledge our responsibility as laid out in verses 25-55. In other words, **IN FAITH ECONOMICS, WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR ONE ANOTHER.**

After the fall, when Adam and Eve realized they were naked, they hid. They hid from God and they hid from one another. After the fall, human beings have lived by the rule of exposing the other's nakedness while covering up their own. Even modern day sports are built on this principle of covering up our own weaknesses while trying to exploit the weaknesses of others. It's the same in business, school, and even relationships.

After Cain killed his brother Abel, God confronted Cain by asking him where his brother was. Cain responded sarcastically, "... Am I my brother's keeper? (Genesis 4:9 / NIV).

The answer is truly and emphatically, "Yes!" from God's perspective. We are our brother and sister's keeper. I know the world will never get this but God laid out His vision for society with His chosen people. Let's continue on to see what God expects out His people.

A. THE LIBERATION OF PROPERTY (VS 25-34)

Liberation was God's theme as He delivered the Israelites out of their slavery in Egypt. Liberation was the goal of Jesus when He died on the cross for us. Liberation is the theme of this Jubilee Year.

In verses 25-34 the liberation of personal property is described. Let me just review quickly. Every seventh day, the Hebrew was to stop work, rest his family, rest his servants, and rest the animals. Every seventh year, the land was to rest. The Hebrews were not to plant, cultivate, or harvest the land. And after seven cycles, that was every 50th year, they were to have a Jubilee Year in which property and people were liberated. The Jubilee Year is all about freedom and redemption.

We have to keep all of this in mind when we study through the ministry of Jesus. The ministry of Jesus is to set us free from our bondage of sin and to restore our relationship with God and with one another.

In order for us to understand these verses, I need to go back and remind us of the underlying principle found in verses 23 and 24.

God said, ²³And remember, the land must never be sold on a permanent basis because it really belongs to me. You are only foreigners and tenants living with me. ²⁴With every sale of land there must be a stipulation that the land can be redeemed at any time" (Leviticus 25:23-24 / NLT).

The underlying principle is this. God is the owner of all the land the Hebrews are about to possess. He is allowing them to live on it and profit from it. It's a little confusing because God talks about giving them the land and ensuring every family has a portion that will be kept in the family for generations to come. So in one sense it seems as if the Hebrew owned his portion of land. On the other hand, God makes it clear that none of us can truly own anything because in reality, He owns everything. Again, by grace, He allows us to possess things, but we must hold on to things lightly since everything in all of creation belongs to God. Further by grace, God only asks us in general to return to Him 10%.

In this section, the situation described is one where things get bad and the owner of the land is forced to sell his property. Keep in mind that the property is his God given inheritance. The

important thing to realize is that this is never meant to be a permanent loss that will affect future generations. The transaction is meant to be a temporary solution to difficult financial setbacks. Here is where family and community come in. The closest relative to the person who was forced to sell his land should come and redeem the property in order to keep it in the family. This would be the best option. In other words, let's say a man fell on hard times and in order to feed his family, he had to sell his property. In the meantime, one of his cousins found out about his trouble. This cousin is not bound by law to go buy the property back. However, he ought to do it out of love for God and love for his cousin.

- **STANDARD REDEMPTION (25-28)**

The second option is that the man who sold the land gets back on his feet and is able to go buy his land back. In this case, the person who purchased the land is legally bound to sell the land back to him. Again, the new landowner is not allowed to take advantage of the guy buying his land back. Everything is figured out by dating it according to the next Jubilee Year. So the current owner would have to deduct the amount of money based on the number of years he owned it. There was no haggling over the price. It was a fixed amount based on each year it was used in relation to the next Jubilee Year.

For example, let's say that the man sold his inheritance during the 40th year of the cycle. That means there were 10 years before the Jubilee Year. The land would be worth X number of dollars. Let's say the man then went back and bought it back in the 45th year of the cycle. That means that the land would be worth less by 5 years making it worth y number of dollars. That was the price required. The reason that the price was fixed according to the Jubilee Year becomes clear by the final option.

If the man never manages to make enough money to climb out of his debt, on the Jubilee Year, he gets his property back free of charge. Let's say we are investors. If we buy land in the first year of the cycle, we have 49 years in which we can make money off it. On the 50th year, we have to give the land back to the original owner for free. So each year we own the land, the less valuable it becomes until it is worthless to us on the 50th year. That's why value is based on how many years remain until the next Jubilee Year.

At any rate, the message is clear. God's design is that no one's children or grandchildren should ever be born into hopeless poverty. Every 50 years, families would get a fresh start. But I think that the less obvious message is that we are required to help our brothers and sisters in Christ. In Galatians, the Apostle Paul puts it this way:

"¹⁰Whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone, especially to our Christian brothers and sisters" (Galatians 6:10 / NLT).

We should always take time to think about how we are spending our money and using our possessions. The message seems to be clear. But we all know that life is not always so simple.

- **SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES (29-31)**

In verses 29-31 we run into some special circumstances. We must always keep in mind that Israel was an agricultural society, land was their inheritance, and the way God divided it up was rural. In other words, every family received a portion of land to farm or raise livestock. When cities were developed, different land ownership rules applied. In this case, the person who sold the land had one year to redeem it. During that year, he was allowed to buy it back. The new owner could not refuse. However, after the year passed, the new owner could do what he wanted with the property.

- **PRIESTLY CIRCUMSTANCES (32-34)**

Verses 32-34 describe priestly circumstances. In order to understand this better, we must remember that each tribe of Israel was given a region within the borders of Israel. All tribes received this except the Levites. Here's what God says about the Levites' inheritance:

"²³The Levites must serve at the Tabernacle, and they will be held responsible for any offenses against it. This is a permanent law among you. But the Levites will receive no inheritance of land among the Israelites, ²⁴because I have given them the Israelites' tithes, which have been set apart as offerings to the LORD. This will be the Levites' share. That is why I said they would receive no inheritance of land among the Israelites" (Numbers 25:23-24 / NLT).

Instead, they were given towns scattered throughout all of Israel to live in. They were given towns and pasture lands to live on. That's why the rules here in verses 32-34 are different. They had 48 towns scattered throughout Israel. The rules that apply to other cities don't apply to the Levitical towns. A priest can always redeem his house at any time. And if he can't it reverts back to him during the Jubilee Year. The one restriction on Levite property is that pasturelands belong to the town and they can never be sold.

We can see in this section that God designed society in a way that preserves everyone's dignity and prevents everyone from permanently falling into hopeless poverty.

B. THE LIBERATION OF PEOPLE (35-55)

It would be good for us to observe that kind of Jubilee that required people to exercise faith, to exercise social justice, and to exercise true living sacrifice. That applied to the redemption of property. And in verses 35-55, it will apply to the liberation of people. Listen to how Jesus describes His ministry:

"¹⁷The scroll containing the messages of Isaiah the prophet was handed to him, and he unrolled the scroll to the place where it says: ¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has appointed me to preach Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the downtrodden will be freed from their oppressors, ¹⁹ and that the time of the Lord's favor has come." ²⁰He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. Everyone in the synagogue stared at him intently. ²¹Then he said, "This Scripture has come true today before your very eyes!" (Luke 4:17-21 / NLT).

• FOUNDATION OF FREEDOM (35-43)

Jesus came to set us free from our bondage to sin, Satan, and death. Jesus came to redeem us. Verses 35-43 lay out the foundation of freedom. This section talks about someone falling on hard times and selling himself into slavery. The first issue that has to be addressed here is that this is nothing like modern day 18th, 19th, 20 and 21st century slavery. Modern day slavery is dehumanizing and it is incredible that Southern churches used passages like these to defend slavery. It is a blatant misuse of Scripture.

In verses 35-38, things start to get bad for an individual. A Hebrew runs into a string of bad luck. He finds himself in a state of poverty and needs help to survive. His neighbors should come to his aid. They are to lend him money, help him with food, shelter, and the like. They are not to make any sort of gain from this person's misfortune. If they lend him money, they are not to take any interest. God Economics are based on what God says in verse 38:

"³⁸I, the LORD, am your God, who brought you out of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God" (Leviticus 25:38 / NLT).

Remember, the Israelites were all slaves in Egypt. God redeemed them, set them free, and later settled them in the Land. Since they were all once slaves, they should be neighborly to one another.

In verses 39-43 things get worse. Now the guy finds himself in a situation that in order for him and his family to survive, he must sell himself into slavery. Again, pay attention to verses 42 and 43:

"⁴²The people of Israel are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt, so they must never be sold as slaves. ⁴³Show your fear of God by treating them well; never exercise your power over them in a ruthless way" (Leviticus 25:42-43 / NLT).

Again, God put life in perspective for the Hebrews and He puts life in perspective for us. From the beginning of time, God gave human beings dominion of plants and animals, but He never gave human beings dominion over one another. Just as all land belongs to God, all life belongs to God. We were all created for God's pleasure and we were created for the purpose of being in a relationship with God.

Let's talk about what this meant specifically for the Hebrews. God set them free from their slavery in Egypt. Their slavery in Egypt was dehumanizing. God made it clear that even if things got so bad for a Hebrew and that he had to sell himself into slavery, he is to be treated with respect and dignity. The Hebrews were not allowed to mistreat their slaves in any way. They were bound to preserve the dignity and welfare of the person who had to sell himself into slavery. Again, this was a measure meant to preserve the dignity and well being of the person who had fallen on bad times. This type of slavery was not meant to enable rich people to prosper. And furthermore, the slavery was always temporary. It had to end each Jubilee Year. Therefore, no family would ever find itself hopelessly enslaved.

For Christians, we would do well to remind ourselves every morning and every night of the horrible fate Jesus rescued us from. We were all born into sin. From the moment we took our first breath in this world, we were headed for hell and our eternal destinies were death, to be separated from God from all eternity. To complicate it further, we were born as slaves to sin, Satan, and death. I know that there are many people that think they are pretty good and think that humans by nature are good. That is false theology and enslaving theology. Unless we realize that we were all born into this world guilty and added to that guilt by our personal rebellion against God and harming others, we can never become authentic Christians. We need to verbalize what the thief on the cross verbalized:

"³⁹One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, "So you're the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself—and us, too, while you're at it!" ⁴⁰But the other criminal protested, "Don't you fear God even when you are dying? ⁴¹We deserve to die for our evil deeds, but this man hasn't done anything wrong." ⁴²Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom" (Luke 23:39-42 / NLT).

It is only when we approach Jesus with this same contrite attitude that we can legitimately hold on to Jesus' promise for our lives as He reassured this repentant sinner:

"⁴³And Jesus replied, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43 / NLT).

When dealing with people we must always remind ourselves that we are to be sure saints, but only saints based on the finished work of Jesus, nothing more and nothing less.

- **GOD'S PRIORITIES (44-55)**

We are graphically reminded of God's priorities in verses 44-55. In these verses, God permits the Israelites to own foreign slaves, but in other passages, they are forbidden to mistreat even their foreign slaves. But most of all, they are never ever to look at fellow Hebrews as property.

Verse 47 describes the worst possible situation for a Hebrew. The situation is now at a point where the Hebrew is so desperate that he has to sell himself to a foreigner living in Israel. But the same rules apply to the foreign slave owner as applies to the Hebrew slave owner in regards

to a Hebrew slave. They must be able to be redeemed by a family member at any time. And even in the worst-case scenario, where the Hebrew is never able to be redeemed by a relative or by himself, on the Year of Jubilee, he is to be set free.

Verse 55 summarizes a point that we often forget. Listen to how God applied this to the Hebrews:

"⁵⁵For the people of Israel are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt. I, the LORD, am your God" (Leviticus 25:55 / NLT).

The Hebrews were bound to live under God's Economic plan of faith. We forget that everything belongs to God; all of creation to include our lives, our bodies, our money, our possessions, and our relationships all belong to God. Even though this passage applies particularly to sexual purity, it summarizes nicely what Paul says in other letters about all of life. Listen to how the Apostle Paul puts it:

"¹⁹... don't you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, ²⁰for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body" (I Corinthians 6:19-20 / NLT).

So we can hear him say also that we must honor God with our bodies, with our money, with our possessions, and with our relationships. God does care what we do with our money and our possessions. **UNDERSTANDING GOD'S VIEW ON MONEY AND POSSESSIONS REQUIRES US TO ADOPT ECONOMICS OF FAITH.**

IV. EPILOGUE

But before we can understand where we have to go, we must first understand where we came from and where we are. Derek Tidball summarizes this section up like this:

"Richard Foster observed that 'because we lack a divine Centre our need for security has led us to an insane attachment to things'. Describing what he considers a psychotic lust for possessions in western society, he points out how we have revised our language to reduce our guilt about our consumerist lifestyles. 'Covetousness we call ambition. Hoarding we call prudence. Greed we call industry.' How would we fare, I wonder, if the Lord said to us that we were to take a sabbatical year, not once in a lifetime but as a regular spiritual discipline to free us from our dependence on things?"