



## **GOOD NEWS FOR THE POOR**

### **Leviticus 25:8-55**

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to the book of Leviticus. Leviticus. So I was talking with a church member this week, and she told me, "I've got to be honest with you, David. I did a happy dance when we finally finished reading Leviticus." She was smiling so big, I almost didn't want to tell her. But I looked at her and I said, "You'll never guess what book I'm going to preach from one more time." And immediately my wife's smile dropped, and she said, "Are you serious?" I said, "Yes."

This text—I'm really excited about this text. Leviticus 25, I'm convinced, may be one of the most radical texts in all the Bible. And if we're not careful, we'll just read over it and miss it, and miss its mammoth implications for our lives. So if you're visiting The Church at Brook Hills for the first time tonight, or maybe you came for the first time last week—maybe even put your faith in Christ for the first time last week—we want to welcome you, obviously, but we are on a journey as a faith family where we are reading through the Bible over the course of two years. We started in January, and our goal, our hope, Lord willing, is that two years from now, we'll have read, actually through the Old Testament once—which is the first almost two-thirds of the Bible -- and the New Testament and Psalms twice.

So what that involves is reading a couple of chapters each day, usually one chapter from the Old Testament—which is where we've been in Leviticus, and we're now into Numbers—and the other chapter is either from the New Testament or Psalms, which is a part of the Old Testament. So right now we're in Numbers and Psalms. And Brook Hills, I promise, we're going to get to some of these psalms. These psalms are good. But every week we are spending time in one of these texts that we've been reading the last week when we come together.

And as I prayed this week about where to land tonight, this text just rose to the top for reasons that I think will be evident, particularly by the end of our time together in the Word. So what I want to do is I want us to read Leviticus 25. We're going to start by just reading verses 8 through 12 that will kind of lay the foundation, and then we'll read through some other parts of this text over the next few moments. And really, it's just a simple picture, but like I said, it has significant implications for our lives in this room. So follow along with me. This is the Word of God. Leviticus 25:8:

*You shall count seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the time of the seven weeks of years shall give you forty-nine years. Then you shall sound the loud trumpet on the tenth day of the seventh month. On the Day of Atonement you shall sound the trumpet throughout all your land. And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his clan. That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you; in it you shall neither sow nor reap what grows of itself nor gather the grapes from the undressed vines. For it is a jubilee. It shall be holy to you. You may eat the produce of the field. (Leviticus 25:8-12)*

Let's pray. God, we bow our heads before you right now with our Bibles open in front of us, and we pray through the next few moments you would speak to us. God, we do not enter into this time lightly, casually. This is not just routine. God, help us even now as we're praying to focus, to realize what we're doing, and to anticipate what you're about to do. Lord, we want to hear from you. God, I beg for grace, for me to speak your Word clearly and accurately. I don't want to speak my thoughts, my ideas, my opinions, but I pray that your Word would be clear. And we pray that you would help us to hear your Word clearly and accurately, humbly.

Lord, help us to submit to it, help us to obey whatever you tell us to do in and through it. Lord, we pray that your Spirit would take your Word and just apply it in a myriad of ways all around this room over the next few moments in ways that affect our lives and, God, in ways that affect many others' lives who are not even here right now, but whose lives will be affected because of your work and your Word in us in this room. So we pray this in dependence on your Spirit, asking you to lead and guide our time together over the next few moments. In Jesus' name we pray these things. Amen.

Okay, so this text describes what is known in the Old Testament as "The Year of Jubilee." So you may be familiar with that term—you may be totally unfamiliar with that term. What I want to do is I want to ask three questions. One, what is the Year of Jubilee? Second, what was its purpose? And third, what in the world does any of this have to do with our lives in this room, with your life right where you are sitting?

## **What is the Year of Jubilee?**

### **It happened ...**

So very simply, first, what is the Year of Jubilee? And there's a summary of this at the top of your notes, just to make sure we're all understanding what's going on here. It happened every fiftieth year. So seven weeks of seven years, 49 years, would go by. Now, just out of curiosity, how many of us in this room are under 50 years old? Just raise your hand really high. Okay, keep them raised for a second and just kind of look around. All right. That's a lot of people in this room. You can put them down.

But I ask that question just to emphasize that what we're reading about here is really a once-in-a-lifetime kind of deal for most everybody. You may have been a part of the people of God for 40-plus years, and you still would not have experienced this. This is only something you've heard about. It seems distant to you. Maybe, even if you were alive when it came around, you were young and you could hardly remember it. So you're looking forward to it.

### **It involved ...**

This happens just once in a lifetime, every fiftieth year, and it involved two main things. First, in that fiftieth year, everyone's land was returned. We'll read about this as we get into Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Joshua, but once the people of God got in the Promised Land, would apportion that land to different tribes and different families. Every tribe and every family would have an allotment, an inheritance of land.

So you'd have land that belonged to your family, as part of your tribe, but over 50 years, things would happen in your life, and things would happen in your land that would affect your financial standing and your status in that land. So you might have a family member

get sick or even die, and as a result, you're not able to work the land like you once were able to. Maybe drought comes on the land. Or maybe you actually mismanage the allotment of land you've been given. All sorts of things would happen, and many times people would be forced to sell their land in order to provide for themselves.

And when this happened, God set up a way for His people to be able to get back their allotment of land. Look down at verse 25. Leviticus 25:25-28 talks about paying a redemption price, a price to redeem the land, to buy it back. Listen to verse 25,

*If your brother becomes poor and sells part of his property, then his nearest redeemer shall come and redeem what his brother has sold. If a man has no one to redeem it and then himself becomes prosperous and finds sufficient means to redeem it, let him calculate the years since he sold it and pay back the balance to the man to whom he sold it, and then return to his property. But if he has not sufficient means to recover it, then what he sold shall remain in the hand of the buyer until the year of jubilee. In the jubilee it shall be released, and he shall return to his property.*

So, before Jubilee, you could get back your land by paying a redemption price, and that redemption price was calculated in part based on how many years were left until the next Jubilee. The point was that the original owner of the land could buy back that land at any time if he was able to pay the redemption price. And then, even if he wasn't able to pay the redemption price, when the Year of Jubilee came along every fiftieth year, automatically you would get your allotment of land back. So everyone's land was returned to its original owner every 50 years in the Year of Jubilee.

The second thing that happened was everyone's freedom was restored. So if you faced financial trouble, one option was to sell your land to a relative or a near relative, or if things got really bad, maybe to a stranger, or maybe to get a loan on the land, but even if you were still in financial trouble after that, you could get to a point where you would sell yourself to another Israelite—or even a non-Israelite if things were really bad. Look down at verse 39, where God talks about this. God set up a system of servanthood, whereby an impoverished brother could sell himself into slavery in order to escape poverty. Look at verses 39-43.

*If your brother becomes poor beside you and sells himself to you, you shall not make him serve as a slave: he shall be with you as a hired servant and as a sojourner. He shall serve with you until the year of the jubilee. Then he shall go out from you, he and his children with him, and go back to his own clan and return to the possession of his fathers. For they are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves. You shall not rule over him ruthlessly but shall fear your God.*

Notice, when you hear, "slavery," here, don't think of pre-Civil-War slavery in the United States. It's a very different picture. In fact, that's why God said, "*You shall not make him serve as a slave: he shall be with you as a hired servant.*" (Leviticus 25:39-40) So picture like basically a contractual agreement here with an employee to work in a household until you can establish yourself again as a free and full citizen among the people of God, which a person would have an opportunity to do every seven years on their own, or another family member could redeem, could buy you out of that picture. You could earn that on your own. Or, if nothing else, every fiftieth year when the Year of Jubilee came along, every Israelite's freedom at that moment would be totally restored.

### **It was ...**

So imagine the effects of all of this on the people of Israel. It was good news for the poor. The Year of Jubilee was great news for the poor. I mean, put yourself in this picture. For over 40 years your family, for a variety of reasons, may have spiraled downward into poverty. First, you lost your land, then you lost your freedom, and you found yourself serving in another person's house with no land to call your home. Until one day, these trumpets just start blasting all throughout that land.

And at that moment, just like that, all your debts are cancelled. Your freedom is just like that given back to you. And the land that belongs to your family becomes yours again, and you're free to enjoy it. That's good news for the poor. You've spiraled into poverty, and just like that, you have a total do-over. Start fresh.

This was also sobering news for the wealthy. Think about the other side of this. You may have had a very prosperous 40-plus years, or 30-plus years or 20-plus years, whatever. But you would have had less motivation, wouldn't you, to acquire more and more and more land and wealth, when you knew, when it came to the fiftieth year, everything was going to be returned to its original family anyway. And in this way, you couldn't keep acquiring more and more and more and more, because every 50 years, in a matter of one year, you and everybody else would find yourselves in the exact same financial situation.

So you may have made it big, acquired all this land, and then in an instant, just like that, you have the exact same amount that someone who had nothing the day before had. You're all on the same plane afterwards. So this is good news for the poor and sobering news for the wealthy.

## **What Was Its Purpose?**

### **To acknowledge the holiness of God.**

So what was the purpose of all this? Why did God set this up among His people every 50 years? Well, the reasons are five-fold. On one hand, the purpose of the Year of Jubilee was designed to acknowledge the holiness of God. You look back up in verse 23 at the holiness of God. You see basically the theological foundation for why God set this up. He said in verses 23-24, *"The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine. For you are strangers and sojourners with me. And in all the country you possess, you shall allow a redemption of the land."*

Notice midway through verse 23 there, that phrase, *"the land is mine."* This whole picture was an acknowledgement that God alone is holy, God alone owns all things, that the land ultimately belongs to God, that He is separate from us, wholly above us, and anything we have ultimately comes from Him. This land that He's given us is the land that He has given us. Even when it says "the land you possess," we possess it to a certain extent, but ultimately He possesses. So it's designed to acknowledge the holiness of God, that all things—including all land and all possessions—belong to God.

### **To support healthy families.**

Second, Jubilee was designed to support healthy families. So the Year of Jubilee was designed to strengthen the family unit, to enable families to come back together on their land with their freedom. In verses 39-43, you've heard about how someone who's been a servant in your household is able to go free along with his children. They're able to start over again all together as a family. It's designed to support healthy families.

### **To prevent hopeless poverty.**

Along those lines it was designed to prevent hopeless poverty. Just think about it. On average, every person, every family, had at least a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to start fresh. No matter how irresponsibly they may have handled their finances or how far into debt they may have fallen, how difficult the circumstances they may have faced in their life—by the end, they would have a chance, somewhere in their life they would have a chance to start over.

Look down at verse 47. Just see how this chapter closes out, and hear God's provision for the poor. He says,

*If a stranger or sojourner with you becomes rich, and your brother beside him becomes poor and sells himself to the stranger or sojourner with you or to a member of the stranger's clan, then after he is sold he may be redeemed. One of his brothers may redeem him, or his uncle or his cousin may redeem him, or a close relative from his clan may redeem him. Or if he grows rich he may redeem himself. [In other words, he can come out of this slavery.] He shall calculate with his buyer from the year when he sold himself to him until the year of jubilee, and the price of his sale shall vary with the number of years. The time he was with his owner shall be rated as the time of a hired servant. If there are still many years left, he shall pay proportionately for his redemption some of his sale price. If there remain but a few years until the year of jubilee, he shall calculate and pay for his redemption in proportion to his years of service. He shall treat him as a servant hired year by year. He shall not rule ruthlessly over him in your sight. And if he is not redeemed by these means, [so here are all these potential provisions, but if none of that] then he and his children with him shall be released in the year of jubilee. For it is to me that the people of Israel are servants. They are my servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.*

So God designed this whole picture that we read about in Leviticus 25 to prevent hopeless poverty among His people. And for that matter, like we talked about just a second ago, to prevent excessive wealth among His people. The Year of Jubilee was a fresh start for the poor and for the rich. Neither of them were going to spend an entire lifetime either in excessive poverty or excessive wealth.

### **To promote holistic worship.**

Fourth, the Year of Jubilee was designed to promote holistic worship. You look back at verse 55, which we read just a second ago, talking about how God brought His people out of Egypt. We've studied before in the past, in Exodus, how God brought His people out of slavery in Egypt—this picture of bringing them out of Egypt for the glory of His name, for the sake of His name, for the worship of His name. And this is how God was glorifying Himself, by providing for His people in a holistic way.

### **To foreshadow hope in Christ.**

Now this part of the Year of Jubilee was really the ultimate part, but it was unrealized among most Jews in the Old Testament, because the Year of Jubilee was designed ultimately to foreshadow hope in Christ. The whole point of Jubilee was to point to Jesus. Did you notice, back in Leviticus 25:9, when I read that first passage, did you notice on what day the trumpet blast was sounded in the Year of Jubilee? In verse 9 it says, "*You shall sound the loud trumpet on the tenth day of the seventh month.*" Here it is. "*On the Day of...*" what? "*Atonement you shall sound the trumpet throughout all your land.*"

Atonement. That's the day that we talked about some the two weeks before Easter. If you missed those weeks, this was day when the people of God would gather together in the Old Testament around the tabernacle or eventually the temple, and the high priest would go into the Holy of Holies and offer a sacrifice on behalf of the people's sin. It was a picture of atonement, being at-one with God, being reconciled to God. This sacrifice would provide a covering for their sin against God. This was the one day that was set aside to celebrate reconciliation with God through sacrifice. And it's this day in that Jubilee year when the trumpets would blast, and it would be the sound of, not just reconciliation with God, but reconciliation with each other, restoration of land and freedom.

Now with that picture in the Old Testament, turn with me over to Luke 4 in the New Testament. You've got to see this. Luke 4. So Luke is beginning his story of Jesus' ministry, and this is where he chooses to begin the story of Jesus' life on earth, and His ministry on earth. We've got His birth before this in Luke 2, and we've got the temptation of Jesus in the beginning of Luke 4, but when it comes to Him beginning ministry, this is how Luke announces Jesus' ministry. Look at Luke 4:16. The Bible says:

*And [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,*

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives  
and recovering of sight to the blind,  
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

*And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."*

Now, if we were sitting in this Jewish synagogue in the first century, we would recognize this quotation from Isaiah as a direct allusion to the Year of Jubilee that we just read about in Leviticus 25. When you hear this proclamation of "*the year of the Lord's favor*," that's a reference to Jubilee. So Jesus reads this—this announcement of the year of the Lord's favor, restoration, redemption has come—then He sits down and He says, "*Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.*"

In other words, this is Jesus saying, "I am Jubilee. I have come to provide atonement, to cancel debt, to free slaves. I have come to restore men to God and to one another. I am good news for the poor. I am good news for the blind. I am good news for the captives. I'm good news for the oppressed. I have come to restore and redeem you."

Oh, non-Christian friends who are here tonight, we are so thankful that you are here, and more than anything, in what we sing tonight and how we pray, and even in what we're talking about here, maybe you're wondering, "Why am I sitting here listening to him talk about Leviticus, Year of Jubilee, and economic distribution?" We'll get to that in a second.

But, more than anything we want you to hear that, though you and I and all of us in this room have sinned against God and are separated from God as a result of our sin, of our

turning away from God to ourselves, God in His love has sent His Son to free you and me -- us -- from sin, to free us from sin's penalty and sin's power, and to free us from the payment of sin, which is death. Jesus has come. He would die on a cross for sin. He would rise from the grave in victory over sin. This is why He came. This is why this is good news, because anyone in this room who turns from their sin and puts their faith in Jesus can be reconciled to God. That's Jubilee. That's celebration.

You, right where you are sitting tonight—not based on anything you have done or ever can do in the future or based on anything you can do right now, but simply based on trust in what He has done in His coming—you, right where you're sitting can be reconciled to God forever. So we invite you, we implore you tonight to put your trust in Jesus, to turn from your sin, trust in Him.

## **How Does This Apply To Our Lives?**

And when it comes to "How does this apply to our lives?"—first and foremost, this text beckons every single one of us in this room to put faith in Christ, to be reconciled to God and to celebrate what He has come to do for you. God loves you. God desires to save you from your sin, and He has made that possible through the sacrifice of His Son on a cross on your behalf.

And so then when you put your faith in Christ—and so for Christians in this room—what we need to be careful not to do with Leviticus 25 is to try to take that text and make a direct correlation between this economic picture in Israel and our economic pictures today, say in the United States, or any other country for that matter. Because people have taken Leviticus 25 and tried to use it as economic justification for governmental redistribution programs that take from the wealthy and give to the poor.

Now let me be absolutely clear. My goal is not to dive into a discussion of economic theory or to start dividing this room along political party lines based on what you think about economic theory. I just want to acknowledge major differences between this Old Testament picture and our contemporary economy. So we are not an agrarian society whose lives revolve around what land we own. For that matter, the land that we own was not assigned to us directly by God in the way it was divided among the clans, tribes and families in Old Testament Israel.

And then, much like we talked about a couple of weeks ago, we're not under the Old Covenant that we're reading about it in the Old Testament. We don't have a trumpet guy on staff that's going to come out every 50 years and play some tunes. And even if we did, I mean who are we fooling? Nobody else is going to do anything outside of The Church at Brook Hills. It's just going to be us. And how do you decide when to start the 50 years? This is not direct correlation and we need to start doing this every 50 years.

### **God is the owner of all things.**

But that doesn't make this text totally irrelevant to us, though. This text is extremely relevant to us. So what I've got in your notes is there are four primary takeaways from this text for our lives, for your life, right where you are sitting. So first, this passage reminds every single one of us that God is the owner of all things. These are going to sound simple, but if we really believe these things, it changes everything. God is the owner of all things. Just as the land in Israel belonged to God, so everything in the world—including everything in our lives—belongs to God.

And so follow this, because God is the owner of all things, we are His stewards. We're His stewards. So think about this in Leviticus 25. The land that belonged to certain tribes and families ultimately belonged to God. And the Israelites were mere stewards of that land. "The land is Mine," God said. And that mindset must be our mindset in our lives and our families. God is the owner of all things; we are His stewards.

And when you stop and really think about this and process this, you begin to realize that stewardship is not just some sub-category of the Christian life. Stewardship, in a very real sense, is the Christian life. What do you have that does not ultimately come from God and ultimately belong to God? Everything belongs to Him. Everything we have we are stewards of what we've been entrusted with. We're stewards of the breath we breathe and the minds we have. We're stewards of every single possession we own. We say we own it, but we don't ultimately own anything. It's been entrusted to us by the owner of all things.

Turn over to Luke 19 with me. It's just one example. Let me read this story, and there are other stories very similar to it in the Gospels. But this is one that's just nearby here to Luke 4. So Luke 19 is a story that Jesus tells to illustrate this truth that God is the owner of all things and we are stewards. Look at Luke 19:11. The Bible says:

*As they heard these things, [Jesus] proceeded to tell a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately. He said therefore, [so here's the parable, here's the story] "A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return. Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, 'Engage in business until I come.' But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.'*

*When he returned, having received the kingdom, he ordered these servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by doing business. The first came before him, saying, 'Lord, your mina has made ten minas more.' And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.' And the second came, saying, 'Lord, your mina has made five minas.' And he said to him, 'And you are to be over five cities.'*

*Then another came, saying, 'Lord, here is your mina, which I kept laid away in a handkerchief; for I was afraid of you, because you are a severe man. You take what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.' He said to him, 'I will condemn you with your own words, you wicked servant! You knew that I was a severe man, taking what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow? Why then did you not put my money in the bank, and at my coming I might have collected it with interest?'*

*And he said to those who stood by, 'Take the mina from him, and give it to the one who has the ten minas.' And they said to him, 'Lord, he has ten minas!' 'I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me.'"*



Now, obviously, we don't have time to dive into all the details of this parable, this story, and dive into the study of it. But even if we did, we'd have to be careful when we come to parables not to miss the overarching point. And the overarching point here is reflecting exactly what we're looking at in Leviticus 25.

So here's the picture. A nobleman gives each of these servants a mina. A mina was about three months' wages for a laborer. So the nobleman gives generously resources to these servants. And the nobleman has expectations for how those resources are going to be used while he's gone. He expects his servants to use this money wisely, to work hard, to do business—the text says—to make a profit. So the nobleman leaves for a time and then he comes back. And when he does, he calls each servant to give an account for how that servant has stewarded the money that was entrusted to him.

So this parable and others like it depict how God has been generous in entrusting resources to you and me on this earth as His servants. Christ has gone away and is coming back. Part of the purpose here in Luke 19, the context here, is talking about His coming and coming Kingdom. But in the meantime God expects us as His servants to use wisely what He has entrusted to us. And every single one of us in this room will give an account, an eternal account, for how we have used what He has entrusted to us. God is the owner, and we are stewards.

This means every breath you breathe, the mind you have, every single thing you possess ultimately comes from God, and He has expectations for how your breath, your mind, and your possessions are to be used. Which means we must be focused. We're stewards. We must work diligently and responsibly with every single thing God's entrusted to us. We want to be faithful to do what He calls us to do with the resources He's given us to do it. We want to work hard. We want to work wisely with everything we have—our time, talents, our mind, our money—everything, knowing that He's coming back soon, and we want to be ready. We want to be ready for the day.

When you and I—just think of it, this is sobering—you and I will stand before God to give an account for how we have stewarded all that He has entrusted to us. And on that day, it will not matter at all what anyone in this world thought of us. It won't matter how many people called us great. It won't matter if 10,000 people were at our funeral, or no one was at our funeral. It won't matter what the newspapers or history books say or don't say. The only thing that will matter, the only thing that will matter, is what God—who gave these things to us—says on that day.

### **God is the Savior of His people.**

He's the owner of everything. We are His stewards who will give an account. God is owner; we're stewards. Which leads to the second takeaway here: God is the Savior of His people. So, God, the Savior of His people. Twice back in Leviticus 25—Leviticus 25:42 and Leviticus 25:55—twice God emphasized how He brought the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. And in both of those instances God says, "They are my servants." This is why He said, "You don't treat them as a slave, because they're my servants. They serve me."

So we see that reality in Leviticus. Now think about it in our lives. God is the Savior of His people, and we are His servants. Let's take Leviticus to bring it into our lives in a much, much greater way. Even as an Israelite in Egypt needed God to save them from slavery, we in our lives need God to save us from slavery—from slavery to sin, from the punishment of sin. When we think about that day when we will give an account before God, who among us in and of ourselves could stand? Not one of us, no matter how good a steward we may have been. All of us still have lives stained with sin.

But the beauty of the gospel is that God has saved us. He's freed us from the power and the penalty of sin. He's put us in Christ, who is now our life, and we serve Him. This is why one of Paul's favorite descriptions of himself in the New Testament was *doulos*. He's a servant. He's a slave of Christ. So see that this affects everything about how he lives. Once you realize this, you put all this together. God is the owner of us. God is the Savior of us. We are stewards. We are servants.

This totally changes your perspective on everything in life. Our lives don't belong to us. We—you and I—don't determine where we live. God determines that. So we're praying over the next month for Turkey. And there are 70 million people, and only about 4,000 believers. So as we're praying for Turkey, part of what we're praying—this is what I'm calling us to, church; this is what the Word calls us to—part of what we're praying is, "Lord, are any of us supposed to go to Turkey?"

And what we're saying is, "Any of us will go to Turkey if you're leading us to go to Turkey." This is what it means to worship. Our lives belong to Him. We're not just gathered together on a Sunday night to sing some songs. We're gathered together to surrender our lives and say, "Our lives are yours and we're your servants. You speak, we obey." That's not a radical version of Christianity. This is biblical Christianity. This is what it means to be a follower of Christ.

There's a lot of Turkish population up in Nashville. Lord, are any of us supposed to go to Nashville? He owns us. We're His servants. The breath we have, the possessions we have, the families we have—we're stewards of. We don't call the shots; He calls the shots. We don't determine where we live. We don't determine how we live, our lifestyles, or our spending patterns. We submit that to Him, to His Word. We report for duty.

It's one of the things I love, even right before this in Luke 18. It's where you see a rich young man who comes up and says, "What must I do?" And Jesus says, "Go sell everything you have. Give it to the poor." And He's the owner. If He says, "Go, sell everything you have and give it to the poor," then that's what we do. You go back another chapter, Luke 17. "*So you also, after you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what is our duty.'*" (Luke 17:10)

That's what I want to say on the last day of my life. I want, by God's grace, to be found in Christ and look back and say, "I've only done what I was commanded to do. I've only done my duty." It's what it means to be a servant of God—to report for duty and to do whatever He says to do. God is the Savior of His people. We are His servants.

### **God gives second chances to us.**

Third takeaway from the truth of this text: God gives second chances to us. So this is part of the heart of the Year of Jubilee. Every fiftieth year God saw to it that every single person among His people would get a second chance. Every single person who lived long enough would have one opportunity to start over completely during their lifetime. Now, again, the Year of Jubilee is not something we celebrate today in our culture or in the church, but has anybody in this room ever gotten a second chance from God? How about a third chance? Fourth, fifth, over and over and over again?

I praise God that He gives chances to start over. Ladies and gentlemen, we are recipients of extravagant grace. God is so gracious to us. I'm confident part of His Word for all of us in this room tonight is to hear He loves you. He loves you. He loves you. And go back to non-Christian friends of mine, you may be hearing the gospel for the first time tonight, or you

may have heard it a million times before tonight. And He's giving you another chance. He's giving you another chance.

By God's grace, He's giving you another chance to trust in Him tonight. Why delay? Don't presume upon the patience of God. There comes a point where the nobleman returns, and it's too late. Even Christian brother or sister who may be struggling, indulging in this or that particular sin—I don't know what it is—but you know what's going on in your life. Hear the grace of God calling you out of that tonight. Confess your sins. *"He is faithful and just to forgive you of your sin and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness."* (1 John 1:9)

### **God gives clear commands to us.**

We're recipients of extravagant grace, and He gives second chances to us, which leads to the last takeaway. God gives second chances to us, but at the same time, God gives clear commands to us. Meaning He has told us, in the words of Luke 19, "Engage in business until I get back." There is work to be done with the grace He has entrusted to us. So we're recipients of extravagant grace, which means we now reflect His extravagant grace. It's what it means to be a steward, right? What it means to be a servant given much grace. To whom much is given, much is expected. We reflect it.

Now, there are so many ways reflecting His extravagant grace can play out in our lives. But let us hear tonight what God is teaching us through Leviticus 25. God set up this celebration as good news for the poor. And the application may not be the exact same in a time when we don't celebrate the Year of Jubilee, but we have been commanded to proclaim good news to the poor. So we work in our lives and in the church to give the poor a chance to succeed.

You think about how this law of Jubilee was designed, not just to give a lump sum of cash to those who were in need. Instead, Jubilee gave them something far better. Jubilee gave them opportunities, gave them assets to land, freedom to work that land, privilege, responsibility to create, maintain sustainability. So this wasn't a free handout that might lead to irresponsible laziness. Instead it was a joyful call that would, hopefully, lead to responsible work for that person, that person's family, ultimately for God's glory.

So this is what we do. We've talked about this. In this room are some of the wealthiest people to ever walk planet earth. Put all this together. God has entrusted you and I—think about this—God has entrusted you and I in this culture with more financial resources than just about anybody else in all of history. We're going to be accountable for how we stewarded what He's given to us. We're servants. We've been given extravagant grace, so how are we going to reflect that extravagant grace, on behalf, specifically, of the poor?

And this is where, oh, I just want to encourage and commend you as a faith family. I hadn't planned on addressing this, but this morning I was standing here at 11:00, and over here to my right, I'm looking at Mark Whitehead, who leads Neverthirst, a ministry started out of brothers in our faith family that just celebrated five years of bringing clean water the poor. Five years. Over the last five years, I think over 200 water projects and over 300,000 people that now have clean water as a result of what these brothers and others of them have been doing, and what many of you have been involved in doing, and what we as a church have been involved in giving to it. India and Sudan and Cambodia and Nepal—different places around the world, now have clean water. And along with bringing clean water, they are bringing news of Living Water through the local church. It's just been awesome to see the fruit of God's grace being reflected in that ministry.

So I'm looking at my right there and seeing that, and then on my left over here is Micah, who leads Vapor Sports Ministry. Many of you know the thrift store right around the corner here. Vapor is a ministry that is involved in Togo, West Africa, and Kenya and Haiti, and using sports, using soccer specifically, in those countries as an outreach and to share the gospel, and they are making disciples in the middle of slum areas. And along with that, they are helping create sustainable business opportunities and income flow for brothers and sisters who are struggling in desperate poverty.

And then, to think about what we as a church have the privilege of being a part of, even over the last few months. It was just the end of the fall, in October, that I shared with you all about WorkFaith Birmingham. And this is something we as elders had been praying about for years really, and we as a church had been working on for years. Because a few years ago, when we did the Radical Experiment, that's when we began to focus on Eastlake and Gate City in Birmingham, and said, "How can we be a part of spreading the gospel in this urgent spiritual and physical need right here in Birmingham, in addition to all this stuff around the world—right here in our own city?"

And members of our church have packed their bags and moved into that area of our city, where there is a church, The Church at South Eastlake, that has begun working alongside other churches there. But along the way, we were saying, "How can we best serve men and women in this part of our city and come alongside churches in that process?" And we came to the conclusion that the best way we could do that was by creating a jobs initiative, basically a jobs preparation and placement program that would happen all in the context of gospel-centered relationships, gospel-saturated mentorships, where people could come through and get training for job preparation and in the process develop a biblical work ethic alongside a biblical worldview and begin looking for jobs, finding jobs, and doing that with brothers and sisters who are just pouring the gospel into their hearts.

So I shared that with you in October, and I have the joy tonight of sharing with you now, in April, that as of this last Thursday, we have now officially graduated two classes of students from this jobs ministry, with graduates ranging in age from 26 to 69 years old, all of them living in some level of poverty, looking for a chance to succeed, and many of them with challenging pasts. Seventy percent of these graduates have had convictions of various sorts, and 50% of them have had felony-level convictions ranging from possession of illegal substances to armed robbery and attempted murder.

What unites all of them though is that their lives are changing by the second, third, fourth chance grace of God. Most of these graduates are relatively new Christians, and a couple of them on the verge, we hope, of trusting in Christ. We are walking alongside them now as they're looking for jobs. Some of them have already found one. So I want to introduce you tonight to Tracy and ask Tracy to join me up here. Tracy recently went through this training, and graciously agreed to be here all day today and just to give us a glimpse into her story and how that's intersected with this ministry. So Tracy, will you share with us?

**Tracy:** My name is Tracy Hardin, and I'm 28 years old. I currently live at the Lovelady Center in Eastlake. My childhood has a lot of gaps in it. You see, I grew up in a home that was filled with anger, drugs and abuse. My parents were constantly fighting, and peace was almost non-existent in our home. I don't doubt that my parents loved their children, and they were good parents for a time, but that would all end as the walls of our family came crashing down.

By the age of seven, the never-ending fighting between my parents led to divorce. I remember the day that my mom loaded up me and my brothers and sisters in her attempt

to start a new life for us. My dad wasn't in the picture much, so I know my mom became lonely, which led to her trying to fill her loneliness with the wrong type of men. On New Year's Eve of 1992, my mom left me alone with one of these men. That night he overstepped the line with me physically, and for the next eight years, many of the men who my mom brought into our home would repeatedly overstep those same lines.

By the age of 15, I began to realize that this type of behavior was wrong. That same year, my mom introduced me to drugs, and I felt that using drugs was the way for me to earn my mother's love and affection. Using drugs was also a way for me to escape the shame, guilt and pain that I felt inside. As a result of drugs being introduced into my life, my grades in school quickly went from A's and B's to me dropping out of school altogether.

I moved to an abusive home with a man who said he would love and care for me. This was a move that would continue my dependence upon drugs, and as if things were not bad enough, the same year my mom was diagnosed with breast cancer. When I was 17, my grandparents found out their daughter had cancer and moved to Alabama to help care for me and my mom. My grandparents quickly became my best friends. I found love and affection there, and they required nothing of me in exchange for their love.

Two years later, at the age of 19, I was pregnant with my first child and my mom passed away. After my daughter's birth and my mom's death, I dove back into drugs as a way to cope with my pain. My addiction to drugs was in high gear, and I had to find a way out and pay for this habit. I started forging checks as a way to pay for my use, which soon led me to prison for the next several years.

I was released into the care of the Lovelady Center in July of 2013. It was here that I would learn of the Lord Jesus Christ and His love for me. I learned that He paid the penalty of my sin and rescued me from my life of despair. I now have been clean for ten months, and I look forward to celebrating a year of sobriety in just two short months. Being at the Lovelady Center has taught me a new way of living, depending on Jesus instead of the drugs. I learned that there is a way out of abuse and drugs, and that way is Jesus Christ.

In March of this year I was afforded the opportunity to attend the Job Readiness Workshop at WorkFaith Birmingham. During this workshop I learned how to put a resume together, how to deal honestly and ethically with potential employers about my past and help them to see the changes that I made which will carry me down a different path. I will say being in each class gave me the confidence I needed to get a job. I graduated WorkFaith Birmingham on Wednesday, March 18th, and by Friday, March 20th, I got the job of my dreams.

I now work at Caldwell Mill Animal Clinic, and I know I would not have this job if it wasn't for WorkFaith Birmingham. My goal in life is to show women like me that they can move forward in life through the power of the gospel. And lastly, Brook Hills did not underestimate the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes.

**Pastor David:** This is Jubilee. This is celebrating. This is better than some trumpet guy shouting it out. Like, this is a chance to start over and it's a chance that we all have to be a part of by God's grace in our own lives and as a reflection of God's grace in others' lives. I didn't even know when I decided, okay, we need to be in Leviticus 25 today. I didn't know that it was planned, already scheduled, that this afternoon there was a training for those who wanted to be a part of this ministry, volunteering as mentors, as mock interviewers and other things. It's kind of late for you guys, but I was able to tell the earlier worship guys that they could be a part of that, and a ton of people came as a result of this morning.

But that doesn't mean there's no outlet for you. So even when we finish tonight, I know Keith, our Pastor of Local Missions who oversees this whole picture, as well as Tracy and others, will be out in the lobby and would love to connect with you. But this is the picture. Your life is not your own. You're a servant. He's the owner; we are stewards. We're recipients of extravagant grace, and so we ask the question, how are we going to reflect this extravagant grace? By working to give the poor a chance to succeed and living to share the gospel with those in need.

Now I want to be really, really careful here, that we don't get a picture of Tracy or maybe others with similar stories, maybe similar paths, as that's someone in need. I want us to realize the picture is—and this is what this Table reminds us of every single week—we're all in need. We're all in need. Where would any of us be apart from the grace of God, the mercy of God, the second chances of God? This Table is a reminder to us every week that apart from the body and the blood of Christ, apart from the gospel, His love for us expressed in Christ, we shudder to think where we would be. But because of His grace, He's met us at our deepest point of need, so now it just makes sense for that grace to overflow from us.

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