

Matthew 18:21-22 *“Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?” 22 Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.”*

Sabbath, Rest, and Forgiveness Pt. 1

How many times a year do preachers mention these verses. I suspect it's in and around seventy times seven. Isn't this the most popular verse in the Bible? I totally agree with my pastor that forgiveness is the key to life overflowing. The weight of guilt is a life stealer. Jesus said he would lift our burdens. Proverbs 17:9 *“Love prospers when a fault is forgiven, but dwelling on it separates close friends.”* From one end of the Bible to the other there are parallel lines regarding forgiveness. Leviticus 25 begins one of those lines. A line straight towards Jesus and forgiveness of sin.

Leviticus 25: 54 *“Even if someone is not redeemed in any of these ways, they and their children are to be released in the Year of Jubilee.”*

This line of thinking might be a reach. Yet, I don't think so. A few months ago, I was listening to a sermon on Leviticus 25 and it hit me. Jesus and his teaching are woven all thought this Old Testament book. I have tried to show you connections throughout the previous studies in this series. It all began for me here. God had given the Israelites the sabbath. A time for rest from work. Yet, it went deeper. The line went from rest to forgiveness. Some historians want to attach slavery to God. Yet, slavery began in the Bible through debt. The Israelites sold themselves into Egyptian slavery for over 400 years. Some say even 490 years. Then appeared Moses and God's forgiveness.

Exodus 3:8 *“So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.”*

A theme is found throughout the Old Testament. God will reclaim his chosen people. We all have heard of the rescue of the Israelites from Egypt and crossing the Red Sea. God was bringing them into the promised land. Yet, another theme is scattered in the Bible too. The people rejected God and sinned over and over. What they needed was not just a rescue from slave masters but from their own wickedness. In comes Jesus. I see a parallel line between the year of Jubilee and forgiveness. It seemed impossible that God would take the Israelites out of Egypt. It had been over 400 years. It seemed impossible that God would redeem the Israelites from the Romans because it had been over 400 years. Yet, God does forgive grumbling and sin if we will return to him.

In comes Matthew 18. It would be nice if the return of Jesus as the Messiah coincided with the year of Jubilee. They call this year also the atonement year. A time of sacrifice for sin. A chance for people to reclaim their freedom. Slaves in the Bible were only slaves because of their debt. The year of jubilee forgave that debt. During these seven consecutive sabbath years was a chance to rest the people and the land. That also included debt. God insisted people could be redeemed for their debt. Restored to what was originally theirs.

Luke 4:18-19 *“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*

Jesus, in Luke 4, read from Isaiah 61. Some call the year of Jubilee the year of the Lord’s favor. I have talked a bunch on this year of Jubilee; forgiveness, and God’s redemption of the

Israelites. Yet, what does it all have to do with forgiveness in Matthew 18? I have decided to leave that as a cliff hanger for next time. However, I will say that Jesus told Peter to forgive seventy times 7 times. That is 490. There is way more to this but let's keep it here. God asked his people to forgive debt. He asked them to rest. He even asked the farmers to give the land a rest every seven years. They were to trust in God that He will provide during the rest. To this day farmers do indeed rest the land. Yet humanity is enslaved to sin. They have rejected God like the Israelites did so very long ago.

As you go into the week ahead. Think about the cost of forgiving debt. Maybe it's a wrong done to you. Is there someone you could forgive but won't forgive? Is there no rest for you in unforgiveness? My mother and I did not speak for thirteen years and she died with that unforgiveness unresolved. All those years I had wondered how to get past our problems. I know it's not that simple. Yet, I cannot fix now. At the time it seemed impossible just like it seems impossible to forgive 490 times! For many of us, our hearts yearn to forgive. It seems impossible. Our lives are like the land. There is no rest or redemption when we don't forgive. Something will always be restless in our lives. There is a parallel line between the rescue by God and forgiveness. Let's talk more next week.