

(The Full Gospel) 15. What a Happy Year It Will Be

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen's sermon teaches that embracing forgiveness and living in a state of jubilee leads to true happiness and fulfillment in the Christian life.

Scripture: Leviticus 25:10, Jeremiah 15:19, Matthew 7:2, Matthew 18:23, Mark 2:27, Luke 15:11, John 7:38, Galatians 3:13, Colossians 2:14, Hebrews 4:9, 1 Peter 4:8

Topics: "Sabbath Rest", "Forgiveness And Grace"

Description

Zac Poonen preaches on the significance of the Sabbath and God's laws, emphasizing that they are meant to benefit humanity and bring happiness. He highlights the importance of starting each day in rest and fellowship with God, following the pattern set by Adam, and the need to forgive and release others as God has forgiven us. Poonen delves into the concept of the Sabbath rest under the new covenant, symbolizing a continuous state of jubilee where debts are forgiven and relationships are restored. He stresses the power of gratitude in serving the Lord under grace and the necessity of forgiving others daily to maintain God's forgiveness towards us.

Transcript

"The Sabbath (and so also each of God's laws) was made to benefit man, and not man to benefit the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27).

All of God's laws are meant to make us happy. God did not create man because He needed creatures to keep some laws that He had already made. No. On the contrary He made the laws after creating man - so as to make man supremely and perpetually happy.

God made Adam in the second half of the sixth day. Thus the seventh day (the Sabbath) was man's very first day of existence. Adam did not have to work for six days before getting a Sabbath. God in his goodness gave him a day of rest first before asking him to work for six days. That first day was to be a day spent at rest and in fellowship with God. Out of that fellowship with his Creator, was to flow Adam's service for God during the next six days. This is the pattern that we are called to follow - for this is how God intended things to be for man, from the beginning.

The Bible begins with the words, "In the beginning God...". And that must be true of everything that we do in our lives: God must be in the beginning of our every activity. We must begin everything as Adam did - entering into the rest of fellowship with God, before we seek to serve Him.

Martha served the Lord. But because she served Him with a spirit of agitation, the Lord rebuked her (Luke 10:38-42). Mary however was at rest, and this is what the Lord said was "the one thing needful".

Many serve the Lord today, but they do not know the Sabbath rest of fellowship with God in their inner beings. Thus they serve the Lord in a legalistic spirit and "never cease from their own works" (Hebrews 4:10).

The New Testament speaks of "a Sabbath rest for the people of God" (Hebrews 4:9). What does this new-covenant Sabbath refer to?

Under the old covenant, God gave the Jews many types of Sabbaths. The weekly Sabbath is well-known. There were however some lesser known Sabbaths as well. One was the Sabbath year that came at the end of every six years (Leviticus 25:2-4). Another was the fiftieth-year Sabbath that came at the end of every seven Sabbath years (after every 49 years). This fiftieth year Sabbath was called "the year of jubilee" (Leviticus 25:8-12).

In the year of jubilee, the Israelites were "to proclaim liberty throughout the land to all enslaved debtors", and it was to be "a time for the cancelling of all debts" (Leviticus 25:10 - TLB).

The Lord had commanded the cancellation of all debts at the end of every seventh year as well, when "every creditor shall write, 'Paid in full', on any promissory note he holds...because the Lord has released everyone from his obligation" (Read Deuteronomy 25:1-10 carefully).

God had a great interest in people releasing their debtors. This was why He instituted two Sabbath years - one every seventh year and one every fiftieth year - in which all debtors were to be released.

The Sabbath years were to be times of great blessing and joy. The word "jubilee" means "a shout of joy". The year of jubilee was to be a year full of joyous shouts - because every debt had been forgiven, and every debtor released. Therefore the Lord told the Israelites concerning that year, "What a happy year it will be for you" (Leviticus 25:11 - TLB).

Now, under the new covenant we celebrate the Sabbath day every day of the week, for every day is holy unto the Lord.

And we celebrate the Sabbath year every year - for every year is a year of jubilee - a year of rejoicing in which we release and forgive all who have harmed us and cheated us. Thus every single year of our lives can be happy - for every year is meant to be a year of jubilee for us.

In the year of jubilee, the Lord commanded that "each of you shall return to his family" (Leviticus 25:10b). All who have been estranged from their brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ (due to whatever reason) must now return to the family of God. This is God's command under the new covenant. Every debt (sin) must be forgiven, and every slave (the ones against whom we have some demands) must be released. This too is the Lord's command. Only then will each year be a happy year for us.

God has forgiven us so much that to forgive others from our hearts is the very least that we can do as an expression of our gratitude to Him Who loved us and gave Himself for us.

It is written of King Hezekiah, after he was miraculously healed by the Lord from a serious sickness, that he "gave no return for the benefit he received" (2 Chronicles 32:24, 25). He did not give back to God according to the measure in which God had blessed Him.

What about us? Have we given back to the Lord in the same measure as we have been blessed by Him? Have we forgiven others as freely as God forgave us? EVERYONE? Is there even one left out, still unforgiven?

Because King Hezekiah acted in pride and ingratitude, the next fifteen years of his life were the worst period of his whole life. He produced a son during that time (Manasseh) who became the worst king that Judah ever had (2 Kings 21:11). Hezekiah who began his reign in a spirit of revival, ended it in grief.

When we don't forgive and release others, the remaining years of our life on earth will be really bad.

Our calling is to be merciful to others just as God has been merciful to us. That phrase, "JUST AS GOD HAS BEEN TO US" is the motto we must keep in mind at all times in our dealings with all human beings.

We have received much freely from the Lord. Then let us give freely to others as well (Matthew 10:8) - not in a miserly or stingy way, but liberally and with a large heart. If we are tight-fisted and demanding in our dealings with others, God will be tight-fisted and demanding in His dealings with us as well (See Psalm 18:25, 26).

We must never lose the wonder of the forgiveness that the Lord has granted us so freely. OUR WHOLE LIFE MUST NOW BE LIVED AS AN EXPRESSION OF GRATITUDE TO THE LORD FOR ALL THAT HE DID FOR US ON CALVARY'S CROSS.

Under the Law it was through threats of judgment that people served the Lord. But under grace, it is to be through the power of gratitude.

In Matthew 18:23-35, Jesus told His disciples a parable of a kind king who had forgiven his servant a large debt of thirty crores rupees (Rs.300 million). That servant's debt was so large that he could never have repaid it in his own lifetime or for generations to come. So he should have been immensely grateful for the forgiveness that he had received.

But, he did not render to others in the same measure as he himself had received. He went out from his master's presence and immediately went to the house of another man who owed him sixty thousand rupees. Now, Rs.60,000/- is certainly not a small sum of money that we can easily overlook. But it was a mere drop in the ocean compared to the Rs.300,000,000 that he had been forgiven! But what did this man do? He "grabbed the other man by the throat and demanded instant repayment". And when the other man could not repay, he had him arrested and jailed. This was reported to the king who immediately called for the unmerciful servant and calling him "an evil-hearted wretch", handed him over to the torturers, until he repaid the entire amount.

And then Jesus said, "So shall My Heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart" (verse 35).

That certainly teaches us that if we don't forgive others, God will withdraw the forgiveness that He once granted us and He will make us pay for the sins that He had once blotted out from His sight, and that He had once promised never to remember again. God's forgiving of our sins is always conditional on our CONTINUING TO forgive others.

The prayer that the Lord taught His disciples in Matthew 6:9-13 is a prayer that was obviously meant to be prayed daily, since He taught us there to pray for our DAILY food. If that be the case, then this part of the prayer also must be one that must be prayed daily: "Forgive us our debts (sins), as we also have forgiven our debtors (those who have sinned against us)". We have to forgive others every day of our lives, because every day someone or the other will hurt us in some way (either consciously or unconsciously).

Jesus cancelled the certificate of debt that we had to God, and He destroyed the letters of accusation that the Law had against us, when He died on Calvary (Colossians 2:14). Have we done the same to our debtors? Or do we still retain letters to accuse others with, and memories of the wrongs that others have done to us in the past. If so, then God has no alternative but to hand us and our families over to the torturers (evil spirits) to harass us until we have learnt to forgive.

The king in this parable had wanted his servant to show mercy out of gratitude. It was only when the servant failed to act out of gratitude for the mercies that he himself had received, that the king adopted Method No. 2 - that of torture. It is the same with God. He desires primarily that we forgive others out of gratitude for what He has done for us. It is when we don't respond to that call of grace, then God places us under the Law, hoping that we will respond at least to the threats of the Law. Then He seeks to teach us to forgive others, by handing us over to the torturers. The reason why many believers never seem to be able to enter the Sabbath rest of God and are unsteady, unpredictable in their behaviour, often gloomy, long-faced, depressed and irritable is because they haven't forgiven others. The torturers are working on their spirit.

We must make a bonfire of the "letters of accusation" that we have carefully preserved to accuse others with. And we must determine with an inviolable determination that we will never, under any provocation, bring out old certificates of debt to charge others with at any time.

Under the old covenant they could have a happy year (a year of jubilee) only once every fifty years. How much better it is for us under the new covenant - for we can have a happy year every year of our lives.

An unforgiving spirit gradually begins to wish evil to those whom it has not forgiven. When you wish evil for another person, it is equivalent to cursing him. We read in Galatians 3:13 that Jesus took the curse of the whole world upon Himself. So when we curse another, we are actually cursing Jesus Himself who took everyone's curse. Think of that the next time Satan tempts you to wish evil for someone else or his children.

If the Pharisees who brought the woman caught in adultery to Jesus, had started stoning that poor woman, Jesus would have stood in front of that woman and received the stones Himself and said, "Kill Me first". That is what He did for us on Calvary. He stood in front of us and received the "stones" that we should have received. The spirit of Christ is the spirit of the new covenant, and it is the exact opposite of the spirit of the Pharisees. Only one who has the Spirit of Christ can enter into a lifetime of perpetual happiness.

A true story entitled "Love's Atom Bomb", was published some years ago about a godly Christian in Korea whose young son was shot dead by a Communist youth. That godly father went and sought out his son's murderer and not only forgave him but adopted him as his own son and brought him up. Such a man certainly understood "the new and living way" far better than many who know only the doctrine and the Scripture-references! Jesus did not teach the way as a doctrine. He walked it all through His life. He loved those who hated Him to such an extent, that He gave His life-blood to save them. This is the new and living way.

We are now called to follow in Jesus' footsteps - not putting a curse on others by wishing evil for them, but by blessing those who curse us. The world is full of people who wish evil for others and who go around cursing and complaining and speaking evil of others. Let us go around instead doing good and blessing and releasing people everywhere we go in this year of jubilee!

In Galatians 3:13, 14, we are told that since Christ has taken our curse, we can receive "the blessing of Abraham" upon us now. This is possible for us through being continuously filled with the Holy Spirit.

In John's gospel, Jesus used the symbol of water to describe three levels of spiritual development possible through the Holy Spirit:

Level 1: In John 3:5, He spoke of being "born of water and the Spirit". This is "the cup of salvation" (Psalm 116:13), with which we begin our Christian lives. With this cup of water, we are cleansed and brought into God's kingdom as his children.

Level 2: In John 4:14, Jesus went further and spoke of that cup becoming "a well (spring) of water". This is a deeper experience of the Holy Spirit, where all our inner longings are met by Him, so that we live in perpetual victory and joy, lacking nothing. A man who has a well in his own compound is not dependent on the city corporation's water supply. No outsider can turn off his water supply, for he has the source of water within his own compound. This is how it is with the Christian who has found the secret of perpetual abundance in Christ. No-one outside of him can cut off his supply of joy or peace or victory (John 16:22).

Level 3: In John 7:38, Jesus went still further and said that the well would now become a river, and many rivers, flowing out of the believer. This is a picture of overflowing abundance. Such a believer is able to quench the thirst of many needy people around him. Whereas a well satisfies only our own longings, rivers of living water make us a blessing to many people, wherever we go.

The blessing with which God blessed Abraham was, "I will bless you...and in you ALL THE FAMILIES of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:2, 3). This is the blessing that can now be ours through the Holy Spirit (Galatians 3:14).

When God blesses us to the point of rivers flowing out of us, many families in many parts of the country and even in the whole world can be blessed through us.

Only a cursed person hurts and injures other people wherever he goes. This is how most of the children of Adam live. They only know how to wish evil for others, hurt them with their rude remarks and defile them with their backbiting. Unfortunately even many "believers" live like this, proving thereby, either that their conversion was false or that they have backslidden to the point of having lost their salvation.

The good news of the gospel is that we can be saved from such a miserable existence. We can now have rivers of living water flowing out through us constantly, and be a blessing to every family that we meet.

We can be merciful to others just as God has been merciful to us.

We can release others just as God has released us.

We can bless others just as God has blessed us.

We can give freely to others just as God has freely given to us.

We can be large-hearted to others just as God has been to us.

A.W. Tozer in his article Five Decisions For Spiritual Power says:

"If you are really serious about your spiritual development - the gaining of new joy, new power and new life - then you should make certain decisions in your heart concerning your life, and proceed to keep them".

"One decision is: Never pass on anything about anybody else that will hurt him".

"'Love covers a multitude of sins' (1 Peter 4:8). The talebearer has no place in God's favour. If you know something that would hinder or hurt the reputation of one of God's children, bury it forever. Let God take care of it. 'With what judgment you judge, you will be judged' (Matthew 7:2)."

"If you want God to be good to you, you must be good to His children. The rules of our Father's table demand that you don't tell stories about others who are sitting around that same table with you, no matter what their denomination, their nationality or their background." (From the book THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS)

It will be a good thing if all of us make that decision today - never to pass on anything about another that will hurt him or his reputation - and keep that decision, not just for the rest of this year but for the rest of our lives. Those who have lived by that decision in past years have found that when they discarded the worthless from their daily conversation, and spoke only what was edifying and profitable, God in turn, fulfilled His promise, and made them His spokesmen - His mouth (Jeremiah 15:19).

Although Judas Iscariot was a deceiver and a betrayer, yet Jesus never spoke about him to the other eleven disciples in all the three years that he was with them. That was why none of them knew at the last supper who the betrayer was. Jesus never indulged in gossip. He may have spoken to Judas personally. But He never spoke of him behind his back, until God Himself exposed Judas. We too must be patient for God to expose evil people. He is well able to do that without our having to help Him with our backbiting!!

When we deal with sinners and backsliders, we can behave towards them either like the father of the prodigal son, or like the elder brother of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32).

In that parable, the house is a picture of the church. The father is a picture, not only of God, but also of a true father in the church. And the elder brother is a picture of the Pharisees who are found in every church on the face of the earth. God uses sinners and backsliders (like the prodigal son) to expose the Pharisees in the church.

Pharisees may have righteousness, but they have neither goodness nor humility. They find it difficult to accept a backslider as an equal. They feel that he must be put in the servant's quarters for a few months on probation when he comes back. God however doesn't do that, for He is not a Pharisee. He clothes the repentant sinner with the robe (of Christ's righteousness) as soon as he comes back. He gives him the

ring (the anointing of the Holy Spirit) immediately on his return. And He gives the sinner a place at His right hand at once.

Jesus, Who never sinned even once during His entire life on earth, entered paradise, after His death on Calvary, with a repentant thief who had spent his entire life on earth in sin. Only grace can accomplish such a wonder. But Pharisees don't understand such grace, and so they become hard and unforgiving. Thus they destroy themselves. Remember that, at the end of the parable, the elder son is outside the father's house - having lost his salvation because of an unmerciful attitude towards his younger brother. That is the ultimate end of all who despise others.

The younger son, through all his folly and sin, finally came to see his own need, became poor in spirit, and inherited his father's kingdom. The elder son however, never came to such poverty of spirit, because he never saw his own need. He only saw the sins of others. And so he was lost, despite his claim to have faithfully kept all his father's commandments (Luke 15:29). A legalistic obedience can lead believers to such Pharisaism that their last state becomes worse than their first.

This year - and every year - can be a happy year for all of us, if we release everyone who owes us anything, or who has hurt or harmed us in any way. Bury those grudges permanently and be merciful to all men and thus make a new beginning with the Lord today.

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