

The Shout for Freedom and Rights

Lev. 25: 13, 14

Serbians, Croatians, and Bosnians are embroiled in a struggle, which ranks with the most bitter this world has seen. Even the control of inches of land has brought out the deepest of hatreds that could be expressed by one group of people against another.

In another part of the world, Somalia, warlords of clans are fighting incessantly for chunks of land and power.

At home in America, it is twenty-eight years since the major civil rights legislation of the Sixties was passed. It is thirty years since Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke the famous "I have a dream" speech at Washington's Lincoln Memorial. He quoted from scripture:

"Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together." (Isaiah 40:4,5)

It is now 130 years since the Emancipation Proclamation started the process of freeing people owned by people in America. And it is 217 years since the Declaration of Independence asserted that all men are "created equal." Yet, all people have not been able to share in the "dream." While civil rights laws are difficult to legislate—legislating attitudes is impossible.

What do these struggles throughout the world have in common? The resounding theme rising from every continent of the earth today is the cry for freedom from oppression and abuse. The echoing cry reverberates for the inherent rights of every man, woman, child—born and unborn, even for the whale, the owl and the tree. They represent the oppressed crying for their rights. But who hears?

God's Laws of Restitution

When it comes to human rights and dignity, there is a set of laws which God legislated for ancient Israel almost 3,500 years ago. These laws are the Laws of the Jubilee. They are the most unique set of laws the world has ever known. Not only did they provide for equity in the distribution of land, but they even provided for leveling out inequalities that might arise between people.

Moses' law provided for a restitution every fiftieth year—the Jubilee year. This law prevented the accumulation of property, for whatever reason, in the hands of a few. (Lev. 25:9,13-23,27-30) If a man became involved in debt, he might be obliged to sell a part—or even all of his property—and then, with his family, go into servitude. But God made a bountiful provision for the unfortunate. He arranged that such adverse circumstances might not continue forever, but that all their accounts—credits and debts—must be

reckoned only to the Jubilee Year. At that time all—land and people—must be freed from old misfortunes to make a fresh start for the next cycle of fifty years.

The system did not work perfectly, but it helped. Equality could not be legislated back then either. But what was important was that this Jubilee system served as a model of a greater reality when all people would have equal rights and fair distribution of properties and privileges. Paul calls the features of the Jewish Law "a faint outline of the good things to come" (Hebrews 10:1, Good News Bible). Jesus also explained, "Remember that as long as heaven and earth last, not the least point nor the smallest detail of the law will be done away with—until all its teachings come true" (Matthew 5:18, GNB).

What does the Jubilee Law teach? It teaches that equal property rights and equal rights of personal liberty will some day be reinstated. Because of sin, man has lost his right to life. He is a slave to death. Because of sin, he has lost equality as far as his property rights. Through the centuries of man's history the few have oppressed the many by taking away their rights and dignity. How long will this continue? When will the Jubilee's "teachings come true"? After all, Jesus died almost two thousand years ago.

When is this time of Restoration?

It is the purpose of Jesus Christ's second advent to restore everything lost in Adam. "And he [God] shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." Acts 3:20, 21
"Restitution" is indeed the object of his return! What does "restitution" mean? [The same word was translated "restore" earlier in the Book of Acts (1:6) when the disciples were asking about restoring the nation of Israel to its former status.] "Restitution" literally means "to reconstitute in health, home and organization" (Strong's Concordance #605, #600). Since it is the "times" (plural) of restitution, this implies various stages in a process of restoration. Since it is the "times of restitution of ALL things," this also implies a very comprehensive restoration process.

How did "all the holy prophets" talk about the "times of restitution"? They did not mention the word "restitution" in spite of the fact that the Apostle Peter says they all "spoke" about it. But the prophets of the entire Old Testament, in fact, pointed to this time of restoring everything man lost in Adam—his home, his health and his life rights. Moses, also a prophet, verbalized this time of restoring in the Law. On Mt. Sinai, he received the Jubilee law too from God Himself. This time of restoration is the Kingdom of God in the hands of the Christ Messiah. This Jubilee for the world is not a year but a thousand years long—it is the Kingdom of Christ so long prayed for by Christians. For the world of mankind this will mean a release from the bondage of the tomb and all the misery leading to it.

How Did the Jubilee System Work?

When the fiftieth year came around in Israel, could one imagine that everyone was happy to give back the lands to the rightful owners? Was it a joyful occasion to release their bond servants? No, rather, there must have been considerable resistance to this equalizing process. On the other hand, might it be imagined that those demanding their lands back might be asking for perhaps a little more than their due? Legislation is one thing. Human nature another. No doubt, the Jubilee year was a clamorous, agonizing period of time. No doubt, disputes needed in many cases to be brought to courts of law. Counter claims, no doubt, complicated the real issues. The entire year must have been required to arrive at any state of equality for all of Israel.

Regarding the time for the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth in the hands of the returned Lord Jesus, the prophets spoke extensively about a time of trouble. The era of blessing and restoring of rights and life will have its inauguration in a heated social struggle and violent political strife. The cry for Jubilee rights against inequalities and oppression have already ascended to a crescendo in these last days.

The Book of James speaks of a particular cry concerning a particular kind of oppression—that is, the oppression of the laborer by the rich.

"And now, you rich people, listen to me! Weep and wail over the miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches have rotted away, and your clothes has been eaten by moths. You have piled up riches in these last days. You have not paid any wages to the men who work in your fields. Listen to their complaints! The cries of those who gather in your crops have reached the ears of God, the Lord Almighty. Your life here on earth has been full of luxury and pleasure. Be patient, then my brothers until the Lord comes."
James 5:1-6 (GNB)

Labor unions emerging at the end of the nineteenth century did much to address the needs of the common laborer. But these unions have their limitations and have brought with them their own abuses and are not the answer by any means.

The yoke of colonialism—and more recently communism—throughout the world has been broken off the necks of oppressed peoples. Each little ethnic subgroup is demanding its right to a place under the sun and its own separate identity. The minorities within each country are no longer quiet, but are rising up to demand both their just and fancied rights. As might be expected, there are excesses. There are imagined rights as well as legitimate rights. While no human has a right to oppress another human being, the time of change has seen nations which claim to be "Christian" taking affirmative action for the fancied rights of homosexuals.

The clashing cries for the rights of the unborn verses the rights of the woman over her own body ("Pro Life" and "Pro Choice") are a very heated controversy. So important are these claims that they have continually become presidential campaign issues. Where does

the Christian stand on these issues? Our sympathies lie, of course, with the whole groaning creation crying for just rights and justice. But the Christian was not asked to throw his or her efforts into social reform, improved legislation or political issues. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world, else would my servants fight." (John 18:36) The Christian really cannot condone the methods advocated and employed to right some of these wrongs. Often they are inappropriate or violent. But far from being disinterested in these issues, the Christian longs for the time that these injustices will be fully and fairly addressed in God's Kingdom.

What we see today is the beginning of the Jubilee cry. THE TIME IS AT HAND states that the Jubilee "will open with sweeping reforms, with recognition of rights, liberties and possessions long lost sight of; but the work of completely restoring (to the obedient) all that was originally lost will require all of that age of restitution—a thousand years." (p. 179)

Then truly the "dream" of all mankind will be realized. All will be given an equal opportunity to find eternal life and happiness in Christ's Kingdom. The "valleys" of the oppressed will be elevated and the formidable "mountains" of the oppressors will be made low in this kingdom. (Isa. 40:4,5)

You may already have a copy of the book THE TIME IS AT HAND. If so, or if you recently requested one, please read the chapter on "Earth's Great Jubilee," which treats precise lines of scriptural reasoning on the exact timing of the Jubilee system. Also available is an article, "The Jubilee of Restoration," which we will be happy to send you for your study of this important subject in greater detail.