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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

JUBILEE AS GOD'S INSTITUTION OF JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

Rev. Dr Yoon-Jae Chang (Dean of School of Theology, Ewha Womans University)

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Prologue

First of all—congratulations, a little early, on CWM's 50th anniversary in 2027! That year will be your Jubilee. And what is Jubilee? It's this bold and beautiful world we find in Scripture—a world we're called to revisit together, today. I'm already excited to read the upcoming *A CWM Jubilee History 1977–2027*, and to see all the amazing things God has done through CWM over these past 50 years.

I'm already looking forward to CWM's Jubilee Assembly in 2028. I truly hope to be there—because by then, I too will be entering my own time of Jubilee rest. After 22 years of teaching, I'll be retiring from Ewha Womans University in 2027. So yes—2027 will be a Jubilee not only for CWM, but for me as well. And just imagining a life free from work and responsibility brings me joy even now. So please—feel free to send me your congratulations too, a little early.

I recently learned that the report from CWM's Assembly last June included the phrase “an age of disaster.” In a recent interview with a major Korean newspaper, General Secretary Jooseop Keum referenced that report and said, “The disaster timeline has accelerated.” He pointed to several signs of this acceleration: the worsening climate crisis, the growing spread of war, and the retreating of democracy worldwide, such as the December 3 martial law emergency in Korea.

We truly are living in an age of disaster. It's a dark and uncertain time—one in which we can hardly see what lies ahead. We live with anxiety and fear, constantly tense and uneasy. And yet, in times like this, we hear a voice from Scripture—a voice that calls the world toward freedom, liberation, justice, and restoration. We hear the gentle voice of God calling us into "a new heaven and a new earth," where those once sold into slavery return home to their beloved families... where crushing debts are lifted from weary shoulders... where the land—exploited to feed us—is finally allowed to rest. That's the vision of Jubilee. And I stand here today because I want to share that vision with you—to imagine, together, what kind of missional future God is inviting us into. Thank you, truly, for welcoming me here.

And now, I'd like to begin by sharing a little about the reality I see here in Korea—my home.

1. "Disposable Youth"

Let me tell you about something that happened very recently here in Korea. At a thermal power plant, a man in his 50s died in a terrible accident. His body was caught in a machine. It was brutal. He was a subcontracted worker. But here's the part that's hard to believe: the very same thing happened at that same power plant back in 2018. That time, it was a young non-regular worker—a contract laborer—who was killed in exactly the same way, his entire body pulled into the machinery.

There was a similar tragedy in 2015. In one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in the heart of Seoul, a young man in his twenties was repairing a subway screen door when his body got caught in the mechanism. He didn't survive. Like the others, he was a non-regular worker—employed by an outsourced contractor. And then, just a year later, it happened

again. Another young man—this time not even 20 years old—was fixing a screen door at a different subway station in Seoul. He had been working hard, dreaming of one day becoming a full-time employee of Seoul Metro. But the day before his 19th birthday, he lost his life in the same way.

After he died, they opened his backpack—and inside, they found a single cup of instant noodles, still unopened. He had probably packed it hoping to eat it during a short break, since he didn't even have time for a proper meal. Now, in K-dramas, cup noodles might look like a fun or quirky food for curious viewers overseas. But for many young people in Korea, cup noodles are what you eat when you simply can't afford a real meal. They've become a symbol of poverty.

Right now, in Korea, many young people are dying. Countless non-regular, subcontracted youth workers are being exploited—easy targets for companies that hide behind the mask of so-called “passion pay.” As someone who teaches young people at a university, this is not just a news story to me. This is deeply personal. It matters—deeply.

In fact, in Korea's 5,000-year history, there has never been a generation in their twenties as capable as the one we have today. Their digital fluency—with computers, technology, and everything online—is among the best in the world. Their English skills have surpassed those of my own generation. And yet, in all of Korea's history, there has never been a generation as unhappy as today's twenties. From a very young age, they've been pushed to chase one goal: getting into a “top university.” That meant spending their evenings—often until 10 or 11 PM—going from one private cram school to another, endlessly solving practice problems. To get into one of those so-called elite universities, it's said that a student has to solve at least a million test questions between elementary school and high school.

But even after getting into college, many students find themselves taking semesters off, then coming back, again and again—as tuition debt continues to pile up. And when they finally graduate, they hit the thick, unyielding wall of youth unemployment. Some even become credit delinquents—before they’ve had the chance to land their first job. Still, they keep going. They build up their résumés—their “specs,” as we call them—running from one opportunity to another, doing everything they can. And eventually, some of them do find jobs. But even then, nearly half of all young employees are in non-regular, insecure positions.

Henry A. Giroux calls these young people “disposable youth.” That’s the phrase he uses. He says we are turning our youth into scapegoats—and as a result, poor and marginalized young people are being treated as if they’re disposable. As if they’re nothing more than social waste.

And of course, this isn’t just a Korean problem. Around the world, young people are being treated as if they’re a burden—something to be managed or pushed aside. We, the older generation—myself included—have driven our youth into a tunnel of endless competition, a tunnel with no clear exit in sight. And now we have to ask ourselves: Where does that tunnel lead? What’s waiting at the end?

2. “A Society Where You Live Alone, and Die Alone”

In the end, issues like aging, low birthrates, and the rise of single-person households have become serious social problems in Korea. As of this year—2025—Korea has officially entered what we call a “super-aged society,” meaning more than 20% of the population is over the age of 65. And in just two more years, I myself will be contributing to that number! I’ll even get to ride the Seoul subway—which, by the way, is considered one of the safest and best in the world—for free. Yes, Korea is a country that prides itself on

honoring its elders.

One major reason Korea has become a super-aged society is that young people aren't having children. For over a decade now, Korea has been classified as an ultra-low birthrate country. In 2023, the birthrate dropped to just 0.78. That means, on average, fewer than one child is born per woman. And when the birthrate stays below 1.0, the population is steadily shrinking. No job means no marriage. No marriage means no children. And no children, of course, means population decline. Right now, Korea's population is about 50 million. By 2050, it's expected to drop to 44 million. By 2100, 35 million. And according to projections, by the year 2300, the population could disappear entirely. One professor at Oxford University even made this chilling prediction: "Korea will be the first country on Earth to go extinct due to population collapse."

Korea isn't just the country with the lowest birthrate in the world—it's also the country with the highest suicide rate. Even now, one person in Korea takes their own life every 40 minutes. As single-person households continue to increase, the lonely deaths of elderly people living alone—what we call "godoksa"—have already become a major social issue. But now, something even more heartbreaking is happening. The lonely deaths of people in their 20s and 30s—what we call the "2030 generation"—have emerged as a growing crisis. And in truth, it's not just the young. In Korea, the age group with the highest rate of lonely deaths is actually those in their 50s. In fact, men in their 50s and 60s account for nearly half of all such cases. So we have to ask: What happened to middle-aged men in Korea? What did they go through?

I once read a newspaper feature titled, "A Society Where You Live Alone, and Die Alone—Japan." In Japan, tens of thousands of people each year die alone, with no one discovering their death until four days—or more—have passed. Tens of thousands also die with no next of kin—no family or relatives to claim their bodies. Today, in Tokyo, 3 out of every

10 people who die are taken straight to the crematorium without a funeral. And really—if there's no one to cry for you, why have a funeral at all? There's no one to cry because they never had the chance to build a family.

In Japan, over the past 30 years, the population declined, corporate revenues fell, jobs decreased, and that led to a cycle of shrinking consumption. As the number of children dropped, neighborhood bakeries began going out of business. With youth unemployment rising, new car sales plummeted. Older adults, who hold 75% of the country's financial assets, felt anxious about the future—so they simply stopped spending. And young people without jobs... even if they wanted to spend once before they die, they had nothing to spend.

And so Japan became a society where people live alone and die alone. What made that report so disturbing for me was this: Korea's population trend is following Japan's almost exactly. And just like Japan, Korea could also become a society where people live and die alone. A society with no funerals. A society overflowing with unclaimed deaths and lonely deaths. The moment the sound of babies disappears from this land, and the bright smiles vanish from the faces of our young people—that will be the moment this country begins to disappear.

Extinction—that's where we are right now. And extinction isn't just a problem for the created world out there. Yes, one species goes extinct every 20 minutes—but this isn't just about other species. One scholar described the 20th century as "an age of extinction and expansion." What we've driven to extinction are the very things life depends on: green forests, clean water, clear air. And what we've expanded are things that harm life: CO₂, toxic substances, waste. Now, the very beings who caused the extinction—are facing the risk of extinction themselves. That is the context we are in. And that is the context in which I speak to you today about Jubilee. And God asked this question: "Why would you

choose death? Turn back—and live.” (Ezekiel 18:32)

3. 50 Years of Neoliberalism

So then—what caused all this? How did our world end up like this? We need to dig deeper. We need to get to the root of the problem. Behind youth unemployment, low birthrates, aging, population collapse, and ecological destruction—there is an economic problem. We cannot talk about Jubilee without talking about the economy. Because Jubilee, above all, is about economic matters: wealth and poverty, the line between greed and need, interest and debt. One theologian said this: “Christians talk about love, love—but love without economics is an empty rhetoric.” (Sallie McFague)

At the heart of the problem is neoliberal economic policy, which has dominated the world for the past 50 years. And the result of that neoliberalism? Extreme polarization. Widening inequality. And deep injustice.

Neoliberalism, simply put, is a modern economic movement that began in the 1970s as a reaction against Keynesianism and socialism—an attempt to revive 19th-century classical liberalism. Back when Keynesianism ruled the stage, Austrian economist F.A. Hayek was dismissed as a fool. But in 1974, to everyone’s surprise, he won the Nobel Prize in Economics—and that’s when neoliberalism stepped into the spotlight.

The world Hayek dreamed of throughout his life was what he called a “liberal utopia.” And two major features of that liberal utopia were: a complete denial of social justice, and an open rejection of the Christian ethic of loving one’s neighbor. For Hayek, the very idea of social justice didn’t make sense. Why? Because in his view, the order of society is shaped by an impersonal market—and any inequality that arises within that system is no one’s fault. He also fiercely attacked the biblical ethic of loving one’s neighbor. He called it a

primitive morality—something modern capitalism could never accept. He argued that applying the clan-based ethics of 2,000 years ago—ethics from the small village of Nazareth where Jesus lived—was completely out of touch with today's world.

In short, Hayek—the so-called “father of neoliberalism”—taught that the market is like water or wind in the natural world. It can't be controlled by humans, and it shouldn't be. He treated the market as something mysterious—even sacred. So, he said, we shouldn't waste our time talking about whether society can or should be changed through human reason or knowledge. That's nonsense, he argued. Instead, he told us to entrust the fate of humanity entirely to what he called the market's “spontaneous order.” If we did that, he promised, a rich and prosperous “liberal utopia” would eventually cover the earth.

This kind of “market fundamentalism” has ruled the world for the past 50 years. And like Islamic fundamentalism or Christian fundamentalism—it's dangerous. Neoliberalism isn't just a free-market economic theory. It's a kind of religious faith—a belief that the market never fails. It's a doctrine—that human beings exist for the sake of the market, not the market for the sake of human beings. As M.P. Joseph points out, under the rule of neoliberalism, the market has become a soteriological principle—a principle of salvation for humanity.

4. A Cry Toward Heaven

The belief that everything would go well if we just left it all to the market—has turned out to be wrong. Fifty years of neoliberalism have brought extreme polarization, deep social inequality, and widespread injustice. And now, we're seeing the consequences of that all over the world. I've seen it myself—through the changes happening right here in Korean society.

In trying to jump onto the neoliberal globalization train, Korea opened its capital markets too quickly—and in 1997, we experienced a national bankruptcy known as the IMF crisis. That was the first time I realized something: I knew that households and companies could go bankrupt—but I didn't know a whole country could go bankrupt too. That winter was bitterly cold. Thousands were forced out of their jobs and into the streets. For the first time, we saw homelessness in Korean society. Many took their own lives. Korean society was pulled into a kind of suffering that none of us had imagined.

After 1997, Korean society began to tear apart—as extreme polarization and inequality broke down our sense of community and fueled social conflict. Since then, Korea has entered a period of what we now call “three-zero growth”: growth with no new jobs, no wage increases, and no redistribution. This led to an explosion of low-wage and non-regular workers. Before 1997, many believed in what's called the “trickle-down effect”—that economic growth would naturally reduce poverty. But after 1997, that illusion was shattered. We began living in a society where, even if the floor near the stove is boiling hot, the other end of the room stays ice-cold.

To make things worse, economic inequality in Korea has now become inherited. Korea is known for its intense passion for education. In the past, education was the one path to upward mobility. The old saying “A dragon can rise from a muddy stream” really meant something. But now, education has become a tool for passing down social class. It no longer breaks the cycle—it reinforces it. Today in Korea, what matters more is not who a person is, but whose child they are, and who they marry. And that, I believe, is a sign that we are slipping back into a class-based society—and that our democracy is beginning to unravel.

And this isn't just a Korean problem. According to the *2022 World Inequality Report*, income and wealth inequality around the globe are staggering. The richest 10% of the

world's population earn more than half of all global income—52%, to be exact. Meanwhile, the poorest 50% earn just 8.5%. When it comes to wealth, the top 10% own 76% of everything. The bottom half? They own just 2%. And believe it or not, just 67 people hold half of the world's total wealth. Pope Francis once said, "You can judge how great a society is by how it treats its poorest—those who have nothing but their poverty." These numbers tell us very clearly what kind of society we're living in.

Since the 1980s, when neoliberalism began to promote deregulation and liberalization policies, income and wealth inequality have increased almost everywhere in the world. According to the *2022 World Inequality Report*, today's global inequality is as severe as it was in the early 20th century, when Western imperialism was at its peak. Gender inequality is even more striking. Women account for less than 35% of total labor income worldwide.

The report also shows that global income and wealth inequality are closely tied to ecological inequality and disparities in contributions to climate change. The top 10% of the world's population is responsible for 50% of all carbon emissions, while the bottom 50% accounts for only 12%. It is the wealthy regions of the world that are driving climate change, yet it is the poorest regions that suffer the most because of it. This is a double injustice.

As I lift my eyes and look out at the world, I hear a cry rising from every corner of the globe—a cry for healing and restoration, for freedom and liberation, for life and peace. This cry comes in the wake of fifty years of neoliberal ideology, which swept through our world like a storm, declaring war on the values of social justice and love of neighbor. It is a cry directed toward heaven. It is the desperate voice of the poor—crying out from the very bottom of a world where it feels as though even God has turned away.

This is the missional reality we are facing today. This is precisely the kind of world that

calls us to return to Scripture and rediscover the promise and vision of Jubilee. The late Jürgen Moltmann described our present world—full of suffering and cries of despair—with these words.

“We live in a social structure where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. We work within a competitive society that divides people into winners and losers. We participate in a political system that separates the strong from the weak. We eat and drink and live in a human society that systematically destroys the earth and reduces the diversity of plants and animals every year. We enjoy our present by sacrificing future generations, and our children will have to pay the price for our generation’s wrongdoing. This system is unjust—and it turns us, who eat, work, and live within it, into sinners. In such a system, it is not the evil we commit that condemns us, but the good we fail to do.”

In today’s unjust system, we are all sinners. In this kind of world, it is not the evil we do that condemns us, but the good we fail to do. Sin is not only doing what we’re told not to do—it is also not doing what we are called to do. So what is the good we are failing to do? What are we so afraid of that we dismiss the radically new world of the Bible—the world of Jubilee—as just an old, outdated story?

Overcoming extreme polarization, inequality, and injustice must become a central missional task. Governments and corporations have offered various solutions over the years. But now, we must move beyond those tired strategies and limited imaginations. We need a new and radical alternative—one grounded in the power of the gospel. That alternative is Jubilee. And it’s time to live it.

Jubilee is not just a one-time event or a special program that happens every fifty years. Jubilee is a paradigm. Jubilee is a system. Jubilee is an institution. It stands as both a

resistance to—and an alternative to—neoliberalism, which once called itself an “institution of liberty.” Jubilee is God’s institution of justice and equality. The biblical Jubilee is not just an ancient story from old Israel. Now, in this post-neoliberal age, Jubilee is our “ancient future.”

5. Proclaim the Jubilee!

Is there a Christian alternative—one that can move beyond the tired imagination of governments and corporations, overcome economic polarization, and bring justice, healing, liberation, and restoration? Yes, there is. That alternative is found in the book we love—the Bible. And that alternative is Jubilee. We must understand this biblical vision more deeply, and creatively apply it to our world today. In an age of climate collapse, growing war, and the decline of democracy, we are called to proclaim and live out Jubilee as a real and urgent alternative.

As many of you know, in the Bible, Jubilee refers to the year that comes after seven cycles of seven years—after forty-nine years of sabbatical rest. On the Day of Atonement, with the sound of a ram’s horn, Jubilee is proclaimed, and liberty is declared for all who live in the land (Leviticus 25:10). Everyone returns to their own property and to their family clans. No farming is done during the Jubilee year (Leviticus 25:11). Land is not to be treated as a commodity for speculation—because the land belongs to God, and humans are merely strangers and temporary residents upon it (Leviticus 25:13). No one is to wrong a neighbor in buying or selling (Leviticus 25:14). Taxes and interest are strictly forbidden, and all debts are to be canceled (Leviticus 25:37). Those who had been sold as hired hands or servants are to return home to their families (Leviticus 25:39).

The Jubilee laws recorded in Leviticus reflect the faith and conviction of the Levites—the people’s priests—who sought to reform and restore a deeply divided Israelite community.

These laws emerged after the Babylonian exile, during a time when Israel was marked by slave and peasant uprisings, extreme poverty among debtors, and unchecked abuse of power by the wealthy and the elite.

This vision of Jubilee was proclaimed once again—this time by Jesus Christ at the very beginning of his public ministry. When he returned to his hometown synagogue in Nazareth, he opened the scroll of Isaiah and read from chapter 61. These familiar words are, in fact, his mission statement—the reason he came into the world: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4:18–19) That “year of the Lord’s favor” is Jubilee. Jubilee was the very reason Jesus came.

After reading these words, Jesus looked out at the people watching him and said, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:21) It’s the shortest sermon in the world. And honestly, I wish I could preach like that—just one sentence, and be done. But this one sentence means everything. What Jesus was saying is that Jubilee—the year of the Lord’s favor—is no longer just a recurring event every fifty years, and it’s not something we wait decades to experience. It is now a present, eschatological reality that happens anywhere, anytime, in and through Jesus Christ. Just like that old hymn says, “Whether on the mountain high or the rough and barren plain, in a cottage or a palace—wherever Jesus is, that place is heaven.” (Korean Hymn 438) In Christ, heaven is here. In Christ, the rule of God’s Jubilee is already breaking in. That is our faith. That is our confession.

Therefore, Jubilee must not remain a distant story buried in Scripture—it must become a lived reality for today. Jubilee is not just a religious utopia from 3,500 years ago in ancient Israel. It must become part of our daily life, right here, in the twenty-first century. It must

become a system that is practiced—a structure that transforms the way our world works.

What we lack is not knowledge of the Bible. What we lack is faith in what it says. What we truly lack today is not doctrine, but the courage to believe God's word as it is—and the will to live it out. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for," says Hebrews 11:1. That means what we actually choose to live out in the world right in front of us—that is our faith. Do we have that kind of faith?

6. A Line We Must Not Fall; A Line We Must Not Rise Above

We can present the biblical vision of Jubilee to the world as a principle—or a covenant—that confronts today's extreme social polarization. Herman Daly, an ecological economist from the United States, once offered a way to apply the concept of Jubilee to modern society. According to Daly, Jubilee begins with the acceptance of private property, but it sets clear social limits on how much inequality can be tolerated. In other words, while ownership is allowed, inequality must remain within a just and bounded range. From Jubilee, Daly found a compelling insight: our world must shift from unlimited inequality to limited inequality. For him, the idea of Jubilee can serve as a guiding principle to prevent destructive levels of inequality and polarization.

Daly doesn't believe that the Jubilee laws of ancient Israel can or should be revived literally in our time. But he does believe that the core principle behind them—what he calls "limited inequality"—can be institutionalized today as policy. Specifically, he proposes setting both a maximum and a minimum threshold for income and wealth. In short, a society should not allow people to become either too poor or too rich. I find it encouraging that an economist would draw such inspiration from Scripture. Daly also points to the New Testament—particularly 2 Corinthians 8:13–15—where Paul reflects the

same spirit. Referring back to the story of manna in the wilderness, Paul writes:

"I'm not trying to make life easy for others and hard for you, but to create a sense of equality. Right now, your abundance can supply what they lack. Later, their abundance may supply what you lack. In this way, there will be equality. As it is written: 'The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little.'"

The issues of wealth and poverty are deeply connected—they are two sides of the same coin. The strength of the rich and the weakness of the poor are interlocked. So if we truly want to address poverty—and ecological destruction as well—we must also confront the problem of excessive wealth. If we only focus on poverty, we will miss the other side of the equation: wealth. And the same is true in reverse. What this means is simple: the needs of the poor can only be met if we are willing to set a limit on the income and consumption of the rich.

Recognizing this, the global church has already begun to speak about what it calls the "greed line." Just as we talk about a poverty line—an absolute minimum below which no one should fall—the World Council of Churches has proposed that we must also define a maximum: a level of wealth above which no one should rise. This relational and holistic understanding of wealth and poverty offers an important perspective for addressing inequality and redistribution. The biblical vision of Jubilee may offer us a powerful framework—a social principle and institutional guide—that sets both a poverty line we must not fall below and a greed line we must not cross, to stop the extreme polarization and injustice of our time.

7. A Society That Encourages Debt

The biblical Jubilee can also be proclaimed today as good news in the midst of a predatory financial system—a system that encourages debt and keeps people trapped. In this world, we often treat debt as solely the borrower's responsibility. Of course, irresponsible spending or poor financial management can be part of the problem. But before we blame individuals, we must ask a deeper question: is there something wrong with the financial capitalism we live in—a system that pushes people into debt and then profits from that debt?

Since World War II, the global economy has gone through two major phases. The first was the era of so-called industrial capitalism, which lasted until the early 1970s. The second began after the collapse of the fixed exchange rate system and the restrictions on cross-border capital flows. This new phase—financial capitalism—has continued to this day. Under the rise of neoliberalism, the past 50 years have seen a dramatic transformation, and perhaps the most significant and dangerous shift has been the rise of financial capital as the dominant force in the global economy.

Privately controlled financial capital has two major characteristics. First, it lacks public accountability. It will chase profits wherever they seem to exist—but when its expectations turn out to be bubbles, the financial sector quickly shifts the cost and loss onto society. In other words, the poor end up paying the price.

Second, privately controlled financial capital is not really about investment—it's about speculation. The vast majority of astronomical capital flowing through international currency markets is short-term and speculative in nature. Someone may profit, yes—but no new jobs are created, and no factories are built.

Under today's financial capitalism, our financial system—perhaps shockingly—creates money by creating debt. Money doesn't come into the world because someone worked

hard. It comes into existence because someone goes into debt to a bank. All money is credit. That means all money is debt. Over 95% of the money that exists in the world today was created because someone borrowed from a bank. Banks don't lend the money they actually have—they simply "create" money by issuing debt. And because debt can grow infinitely, money supply can grow infinitely too.

The real problem is this: when money can be created limitlessly and so easily, the system ends up demanding limitless production and transactions in return. If the money supply keeps increasing but the real economy—the actual goods and services—doesn't grow at the same pace, the value of money starts to fall. So the economy must keep growing. And to do that, we have to keep consuming more resources and energy. It's like riding a bicycle—you have to keep pedaling or you'll fall. But in this system, to keep the bike from falling, we end up turning more of nature into waste... and more people are born into the world every day already in debt. Debt isn't just a personal issue. It's a structural one. We live in a society that encourages debt—a predatory financial system that thrives on it.

In fact, the pressure that bank-created money puts on the goods and services we use every day is steadily increasing. Because of this pressure, the economy is constantly forced to grow. Within a limited economy, debts can be repaid by exploiting the socially vulnerable. But once that limit is crossed, we end up pulling resources from the future—using what rightfully belongs to the next generation. This is what so-called economic development often looks like today: development that comes with pollution and environmental destruction. Simply put, it's exploitation—of the future and of those who will come after us.

But even exploiting the vulnerable and the environment isn't enough to keep the system going. When neither of those paths works out smoothly, we often end up with war. The late Korean ecologist Kim Jong-Cheol pointed out that nearly every war since the modern

era has fundamentally stemmed from structural flaws in the capitalist financial system. Today's accelerating climate crisis, the spread of wars, and the global backsliding of democracy—all of these are rooted in the deep, systemic problems of the international financial order.

Living under financial capitalism, we are all slaves to money and debt. The Apostle Paul's cry, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24), is really our own cry today. In this system of mutual destruction, how can we even begin to speak of life and salvation? Living under a financial capitalist system that creates something out of almost nothing—almost godlike in power—how can we dare to speak of God's rule and sovereignty?

Then, if we truly want a new society of life in the 21st century, we must ask this: What kind of sustainable alternative can we imagine and put into practice, in place of the current monetary system that can only function through endless growth? This is the heart of the issue.

Jubilee is a good news—a gospel of freedom and liberation. As Leviticus 25:10 proclaims, it is the year when all debts are forgiven and the enslaved are set free. In South Korea, Christians have taken this message to heart by establishing a very special kind of alternative bank: the Jubilee Bank. It was created in response to the cries of young people burdened by predatory interest rates and in solidarity with those left behind by the machinery of financial capitalism. Today, over 600 members contribute to this effort, offering small, interest-free savings. Together, they've raised nearly 800 million won (about 600,000 USD), which is being used for interest-free refinancing loans, housing deposit loans for young people, and the construction of shared housing communities. This is not just charity—it's a quiet revolution. It is the gospel lived out in practice.

The original source of debt forgiveness is none other than God. In Scripture, God's mercy is sometimes expressed through voluntary sharing. But knowing human limitations, God didn't leave justice up to goodwill alone—instead, God established institutions like the Sabbath year and Jubilee. That's right: Jubilee is an institution. Jubilee is *God's Institution of Justice and Equality*. It stands in direct resistance to the so-called "institution of liberty" celebrated by neoliberalism—a system that emphasizes only the freedom of the powerful and the free reign of markets. Jubilee offers a different kind of freedom: one rooted in restoration, fairness, and shared dignity for all.

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." This is, in essence, a *Jubilee prayer*. In the language of Scripture, *debt* and *sin* are deeply intertwined—debt is sin, and sin is debt. So when we pray for the forgiveness of debts, we are praying for the heart of Jubilee: the liberation and freedom that comes through release from the burdens we carry—whether spiritual or material. The freedom from debt is the promise of Jubilee.

The Apostle Paul shows us what Jubilee looks like in action—even in personal economic matters. When he sends Onesimus back to the believers in Philemon, Paul doesn't just vouch for him spiritually. He takes full economic responsibility, writing, "If he owes you anything, charge it to me... I will repay it" (Philemon 1:10–19). He calls Onesimus "my son, whom I became a father to while in chains," revealing both deep personal affection and a commitment to restorative justice. I understand that CWM has an "Onesimus Project," which carries this spirit forward. This shows us that the Jubilee vision is already embedded in CWM's programs—an effort to respond to injustice with love, responsibility, and tangible action.

In the face of extreme economic polarization—where people take on debt just to survive, to study, and then are hunted down, exploited, even forced to sell their organs or driven

to death when they cannot repay—Jubilee is nothing less than an urgent emergency relief plan. For these neighbors of ours, Jubilee is not a lofty idea—it is hope. It is justice. It is rescue. We can respond by creating a “Jubilee Fund,” by establishing a “Jubilee Bank,” or by declaring a “Jubilee Sunday.” Through these actions, we can spark a widespread movement of debt cancellation, offering real freedom and dignity to those trapped by an unjust system.

Truly, the Jubilee in the Bible is a sacred safeguard—a divine safety net designed to protect those who have fallen to the very bottom of society or are crushed under the weight of predatory lending and exploitative interest. Jubilee is not a human invention; it flows from the compassionate heart of God. Today, in our world dominated by a “debt-pushing” financial system, we are called to proclaim the Year of the Lord’s Favor—Jubilee—to those who have become slaves to debt. May we continue to explore and create more concrete, diverse, and imaginative ways to bring this grace and joy of Jubilee into the lives of those who need it most.

8. “The Power to Stop a Train”

In ancient Israel, the land was given rest every seven years. In the book of Exodus, the law of the sabbatical year was proclaimed: “For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it.” (Exodus 23:10-11)

But even more astonishing is the law of Jubilee. In Leviticus, it says, “The fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you; do not sow and do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the untended vines.” (Leviticus 25:8-11) So not only did they rest the land every seven years, but they also gave the land two full years of rest every fifty years. That’s because in the 49th year—the sabbatical year—they rested, and again in the 50th year—the Jubilee—

they rested again. Which meant that the food harvested in the 48th year had to last for three years in total: the 49th sabbatical year, the 50th Jubilee year, and the time it took to reap the harvest of the 51st year. Can you imagine? How could they have possibly survived like that?

God responded to that very question. "You may ask, 'What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest our crops?' I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years." (Leviticus 25:20–21) But did ancient Israel really trust this promise and put it into practice?

According to A.P. and A.H. Huetterman, both scientists and authors of *Ecology in the Bible*, they believe the answer is yes. They argue that the Jubilee wasn't just a lofty religious ideal—it was something that truly happened.

According to A.P. and A.H. Huetterman, the people of ancient Israel were unique along the Mediterranean coast in their use of something close to what we now understand as compost. This compost, they argue, was enriched with sodium nitrate gathered from the Jordan Valley. The Huettermans believed that the God who gave Israel the Sabbath and Jubilee laws also gave them the wisdom to use sodium nitrate—that is, compost—so that even in their barren land, a rich and life-giving harvest could flourish. As a result, they confidently claim that ancient Israel's agricultural yield was the highest in the world at that time.

The Korean poet Baek Mu-san once sang about *The Power of Stillness* in these words: "The power to stop a train—that is the power by which it runs. / The power to pause time—that is the power by which we move into the future. / The freedom not to do—through it, we come to know what must be done. / The freedom not to become—by that strength, I become who I am. / The power to stop the world—by that power, we press

forward. / When we reach stillness, we understand why we move. / Be still like a seed—flowers bloom by the power of rest.”

Jubilee—it is the power to bring the world to a halt. It is the force that stops this mad world of endless competition and greed. Jubilee—it is the freedom not to do. It is also the freedom not to become. And through the strength of this pause, of this freedom, we are able to move forward. We are able to recover. We are able to be healed. We are able to be made new.

What would have happened if ancient Israel had ignored the laws of the land—like the Sabbatical and Jubilee years? They would have collapsed. God once said, “I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God. I punish the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but I show love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments” (Exodus 20:4–5). At first glance, this might feel deeply unfair. Why should children suffer for the wrongdoing of their parents? In a modern world that values individual autonomy, this can be a hard teaching to accept.

But when it comes to “crimes against the environment,” the situation is entirely different. Environmental destruction always comes with a price that must be paid—by our children, our children’s children, and their children too. Ancient Israel understood that if they overused the land out of greed, it would take up to four generations for the land to recover. So, to survive, they practiced the Jubilee of the land. And this isn’t just about those who lived close to nature—it applies just as much to people living in cities today. As one Korean economist, Hong Ki-Bin, once put it, “Modern civilization is the only civilization in history that affirms unlimited human desire by producing endless goods destined to become trash.”

The Sabbath and Jubilee laws in the Bible show us that ancient Israel had an ecological

understanding of nature, even three thousand years ago—or perhaps even earlier. Unlike the surrounding nations, they lived a different kind of life: one that cherished the soil, honored the land, and pursued a sustainable relationship with the earth. And they did this because of God's word. Because of God's promise. Within our Scriptures lies a hidden wisdom—wisdom that could heal our wounded planet and restore our broken civilization. What we lack today is not doctrine. What we truly lack is the will to trust in God's word and promise, and to live it out faithfully and steadfastly.

9. From Unlimited Growth to Sustainable Development

The Earth has entered an era not just of global warming, but of global boiling. We are no longer facing a climate crisis—we are living through climate collapse. The catastrophe has already begun. Viruses that lay dormant deep in frozen ground are awakening due to climate change. Hantavirus and anthrax are beginning to emerge. In Siberia, where the permafrost had remained frozen for tens of thousands of years, average temperatures are now soaring above 35 degrees Celsius, causing the ground to thaw. Anthrax outbreaks are claiming lives, and herds of reindeer are dying *en masse*. Even viruses from 30,000 years ago are coming back to life.

The greatest danger of the climate crisis—which is already our reality—is this: if we don't stop now, we may never be able to stop. We can't just think, "It'll be fine if we start tomorrow." We can't sit by passively, hoping things will somehow work out, while watching the world get worse by the day. Climate change is not a distant concern. It's an immediate and urgent threat to our very survival.

This is the prophecy of the Cree, an Indigenous people of the Americas, titled "Only After the Last Tree Has Been Cut Down": "Only after the last tree has been cut down, / Only after the last river has been poisoned, / Only after the last fish has been caught, / Will

people realize / That money cannot be eaten."

According to a climate research institute in Europe, global warming has already reached 1.6°C as of last year. The 1.5°C threshold, once agreed upon in Songdo in 2018, has effectively been broken. If this trend continues, average global temperatures could rise by as much as 3.5°C by the end of this century. Time is running out. We must stop now. We must turn around. It won't be easy, but if we don't act now, there will be no future for us. By 2030, global greenhouse gas emissions must be reduced by 45% compared to 2010 levels. By 2050, we need to achieve a carbon-neutral society. That's less than a generation away. This is our last chance. We are almost out of time. A fundamental transformation of the world's economic and social systems is needed. The biblical Jubilee must serve as the vision and direction for that change.

Right now, we are facing two crises at once. On one hand, there is extreme inequality. On the other, we are confronting an ecological collapse that makes it impossible to share prosperity through continued growth. Capitalism is dangerous not only because it creates inequality, but because it is ultimately unsustainable. Whether or not we succeed in implementing progressive taxation on capital, we must come to terms with a painful truth: our planet simply cannot sustain even a 1% annual growth rate indefinitely.

Therefore, if humanity and all other living beings are to survive on this one and only planet, we must come to accept the "limits of growth." What we have called growth up until now has essentially been an attempt to force every person and every part of nature into an industrial economic system. But that is no longer possible—because the Earth simply cannot bear it any longer.

Nevertheless, we find ourselves trapped in an obsession with growth, pressured constantly by the demand to keep growing. But now is the time to fundamentally shift the entire

economic paradigm to align with the limits of finite energy and the Earth's resources. This means adapting human economies to the Earth's ecosystem—a system that develops but does not grow. To do this, we must learn to distinguish between “growth” and “development.” Growth refers to an increase in material quantity or size, while development points to a qualitative transformation into something more whole and mature. That's why the true alternative to “unlimited growth” is not “sustainable growth” or “green growth,” but “sustainable development.” And this sustainable development is what we call the economy of Jubilee.

10. The Secret Behind the Revival of the Korean Church

CWM is the organization that sent John Ross, the missionary who translated the very first Korean Scripture—*Jesus' Holy Church Gospel According to Luke*. It also sent Robert Thomas, the missionary who was martyred at the Daedong River in Pyongyang. It was through the dedication and sacrifice of these missionaries that the Korean church was born. And the early Korean church, built upon that foundation, lived out the Jubilee. One defining trait of those early believers was their simple, steadfast faith—a faith that took the Word of God at face value and put it into action.

There was a man named Pastor Jong Soon-il. He was originally a nobleman from Ganghwa Island and a wealthy man who had lent money to many people in his village. One day, before he became a pastor, something happened that changed his life. While reading the Bible, he came across the parable in Matthew 18—the story of the servant who was forgiven a debt of ten thousand talents. It struck him so deeply that he could barely breathe. After days of reflection, he called all the villagers to his home. Then, in front of them, he burned every single debt record. “I have been forgiven an enormous debt by God,” he told them, “and if I do not forgive your debts, then I am the wicked man in this parable.” As the villagers watched their debt documents go up in flames, they were

stunned. And from that day on, they began to believe in Jesus and come to church. That, right there, is the secret behind the revival of the Korean church.

In Closing

In his profound reflection on the Hebrew Bible, the late Walter Brueggemann once said, "The Sabbath is resistance." He argued that Sabbath-keeping is a form of defiance—against a market ideology that pushes us to endlessly desire, to never feel satisfied, and to never stop working. To remember and observe the Sabbath is to say no to that ideology and to choose a different rhythm of life. Sabbath insists that production and consumption do not define the worth of our lives.

Yes, "those who work must be given rest, and there must be appropriate times of renewal for bodies that have been spent and exhausted through labor" (Leviticus 25:3–7). This is the heart of the Jubilee. It is resistance. It is an alternative to the dominant logic of the market. And this alternative—we must choose to live it.

The future can change depending on the policies and systems we choose. Human history is the history of the systems and policies we build—and because of that, our choices today can shape a very different tomorrow. We must go forward with the belief that "this imperfect order is not necessary." We must keep moving toward Jubilee.

Just like the lyrics of the Korean Christian song "Marching Toward Jubilee" say: "Even if we fall seven times seven times, we hold fast to the promise." With hands joined together, let us walk toward a world of Jubilee, where "justice flows like a river, peace spreads like wildfire, and love shines like sunlight." The song goes on to say, "Sowing with tears through years of suffering—look, before our eyes, a new heaven opens wide."

To CWM, who has faithfully sown those seeds with tears over the fifty years from 1977 to 2027, carrying forward the mission of God's justice, peace, and life: I hope and pray that a new heaven and a new earth of Jubilee will truly unfold before you. Let us live with joy the Jubilee, an institution established by God Him/Herself, and realize that institution on this earth. Congratulations on CWM's Jubilee in 2027! Thank you for listening.