

Buy the Field

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Date: 22 March 2020

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[0 : 00] The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord in the tenth year of Zedekiah, king of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar.

At that time, the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and Jeremiah the prophet was shut up in the court of the guard that was in the palace of the king of Judah.

Verse 6, Jeremiah said, The word of the Lord came to me. Behold, Hanamo, the son of Shalom, your uncle, will come to you and say, By my field that is in Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours.

Then Hanamo, my cousin, came to me in the court of the guard in accordance with the word of the Lord and said to me, Buy my field that is at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, for the right of possession and redemption is yours.

Buy it for yourself. Then I knew that this was the word of the Lord. And I bought the field at Anathoth from Hanamo, my cousin, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver.

[1 : 15] I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales. Then I took the sealed deed of purchase, containing the terms and conditions and the open copy.

And I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch, the son of Neriah, son of Masaiah, in the presence of Hanamo, my cousin, in the presence of the witnesses who signed the deed of purchase, and in the presence of all the Judeans who were sitting in the court of the guard.

I charged Baruch in their presence, saying, Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Take these deeds, both the sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware vessel, that they may last long for a long time.

For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land. After I had given the deed of purchase to Baruch, the son of Neriah, I prayed to the Lord, saying, Ah, Lord God, it is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm.

Nothing is too hard for you. You show steadfast love to thousands, but you repay the guilt of fathers to their children after them. O great and mighty God, whose name is the Lord of hosts, great in counsel and mighty in deed, whose eyes are open to all the ways of the children of man, rewarding each one according to his ways and according to the fruit of his deeds.

[2 : 58] You have shown signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, and to this day in Israel and among all mankind, and have made a name for yourself as at this day.

You brought your people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs and wonders, with a strong hand and outstretched arm, and with great terror.

And you gave them this land, which you swore to their fathers to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey. And they entered and took possession.

But they did not obey your voice or walk in your law. They did nothing of all you commanded them to do. Therefore you have made all this disaster come upon them.

Behold, the siege mounds have come up to the city to take it. And because of sword and famine and pestilence, the city is given into the hands of the Chaldeans who are fighting against it.

[4 : 00] What you spoke has come to pass, and behold, you see it. Yet you, O Lord God, have said to me, Buy the field for money and get witnesses, though the city is given into the hands of the Chaldeans.

The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah. Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh, is anything too hard for me?

Now therefore, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning this city of which you say, It is given into the land of the king of Babylon by sword, by famine, and by pestilence.

Behold, I will gather them from all the countries to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation. I will bring them back to this place and I will make them dwell in safety. And they shall be my people and I will be their God. I will give them one heart and one way that they may fear me forever for their own good and the good of their children after me, after them.

[5 : 20] I will make with them an everlasting covenant that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts that they may not turn from me.

I will rejoice in doing them good. I will plant them in this land in faithfulness with all my heart and all my soul. For thus says the Lord, Just as I have brought all this great disaster upon this people, so I will bring upon them all the good that I promised them.

Fields shall be bought in this land of which you are saying, It is desolation. Without man or beast, it is given into the hand of the Chaldeans.

Fields shall be bought for money and deeds shall be signed and sealed and witnessed. In the land of Benjamin, in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, in the cities of the hill country, in the cities of Shefella, and in the cities of the Negev.

And I will restore their fortunes, declares the Lord. This is the word of God. Amen. Great. Thanks, Jeremy.

[6 : 36] So, we're going to take a little bit of a break this morning from what we've been looking at over the last few weeks with the Missional Justice series, so that we can kind of come back together and do that really well when we're gathering together.

So, just over these next couple of weeks, we're going to have a little look at a couple of passages to really kind of refocus our minds and our hearts at this time. And so, today, we're going to look at this passage from Jeremiah 32, which actually we were just looking at in our staff retreat just a few days ago.

And so, I want to give us a little breakdown of what is going on in this passage, how then Jeremiah prays in the context of what's going on in the situation, and then think about a few implications for us as a church.

So, before we do that, let me just pray for us that God would really speak to us through His Word. Father, we just thank You that everything else may collapse everything else may fail, but You don't. Because You are the sovereign Lord. You're the one who has been in control from the beginning of history to the end of history. You're the one who holds our lives in Your hands. You're the one who enters into history to bring us and rescue us out of darkness and bring us into light.

[8 : 10] You're the one who knows us. You're the one who cares for us. You're the one who wants to bring Your Word to us even today. And Lord, we just pray that You would be with us as Your church. We pray that we would be the people that You've called us to be at this time.

We pray where there is fear in our hearts, Lord. We pray You would be the Prince of Peace to us. We pray, Lord, where there is doubt and anxiety. We pray that You would come and reassure and rest our hearts in You.

We pray where we're tempted to turn in on ourselves, Lord, that You would lift our eyes up to You and lift our eyes out to other people around us, Lord. Show us what it means to be a light at this time because of the great hope we have in You.

And Father, we just pray for our city and for the world with everything that's going on at the moment. There's many people, Lord, who are going to be struggling, whether it's with jobs, with finances, with health.

Lord, we pray for the medics, Lord. We pray for Graham, who's going to be going into the coronavirus wards. We pray, Lord, Your protection over him. We pray, Lord, for him and all the believers who are going into the city from our church and the churches around this city that we would be just an incredible hope for this city.

[9 : 21] We would bring Your light. We would bring Your joy. We would have this confidence which would cause others to ask what the hope that we have is. Lord, please work in this situation, we pray, because You want to get glory even when we have no idea what You're up to.

So show us Your play. Show us Your plans. Speak to us this morning, I pray. In Jesus' mighty name. Amen. So the situation in Jeremiah 32 is this.

It's desperate. The Babylonian army, the most powerful, the most fearsome army in the entire world, is besieging the city of Jerusalem.

And they have been there for a while. And it's only a matter of time before the defenses come down and they rampage through and they destroy everything. Inside the city, if you can imagine a siege time, famine has hit.

There's no food on the shelves any longer. And when famine hits, malnutrition starts to rise and disease starts to spread. And everyone inside the city will see the bodies lying on the streets of people who, one by one, are dying in the midst of this terrible situation.

[10:39] And in this, Jeremiah, who God has used to speak to the people, telling them again and again to turn back to God, who has prophesied the arrival of the Babylonians and the destruction of Jerusalem, he's been put in prison because he's been speaking God's word.

And he cannot escape at all. So the situation is dire. It's terrible. But then in the midst of this, God gives Jeremiah this crazy command.

He says to Jeremiah, buy a field. And his cousin then comes to him. And basically in the Old Testament, people wanted to keep property within the family for the inheritance.

So he was either next in line or he was one of the people down the line who, this guy, cousin, who presumably is finding it difficult to make ends meet. He needs the money.

So he comes to Jeremiah, buy this field. But this is the craziest investment ever because at that moment, property is worthless because the Babylonians are just about to overrun everything and take everything from themselves.

[11:53] And Jeremiah, at this time, even though this investment is worthless, he cannot even go out and see these fields because he's in prison. So he doesn't know anything about what this field is like and yet the word of God comes to him and he's just got to obey and got to trust God in what he says.

Because you know, sometimes God will speak things which to our own minds don't seem to make sense in our human wisdom. but he wants us to learn how to trust him because he's up to something.

And for Jeremiah, this is the time of famine and when you're in famine, you want to keep all the money you can because prices inflate and yet, he's paying all this money for what seems to be a worthless piece of paper and yet God says, buy this field as a sign that out of death life will come. That this won't last, that there will be property investments again. There will be restoration in my people. And so that's kind of the background to there where I want to focus on the prayer of Jeremiah from verse 16.

And normally when your back's against a wall, in this kind of terrible situation, you see no way out. We normally kind of pray, God, get me out of here.

[13:14] We give him the laundry list of all the things that we want him to do for us. But Jeremiah doesn't start there. Jeremiah starts with great theology, with a perspective of who God is in this situation.

So let's just kind of run through this and here's what he says. He says, Our Lord God, it is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and your outstretched arm.

Nothing is too hard for you. What he's doing, he's saying, God, you are the creator of the universe. From the asteroid belt beyond Pluto to the gecko in my prison cell and all the bacteria and all the atoms and molecules in between, everything of existence has come to be there because of you.

That's power. That means, I know that if you can do that, then there's nothing that's too difficult for you. That's great theology. That's what every Christian should believe because that's who our God is.

God can do anything. And then he goes on. He says, You show steadfast love to thousands but repay the guilt of fathers to their children after them.

[14:29] So what is he saying? He's saying, You're a great lover and you're a great judge. God shows hesed. That's the word Kevin talked about the other week. That means unflinching, unshakable, unmovable love.

He is utterly devoted to his people. You know, many people these days have commitment phobia. We're always looking for a better option. God doesn't look for a better option.

His love is a relentless pursuit of his people and nothing throws him off. But, what he's also saying here is he's a great lover but he's also a great judge.

His love isn't soft. He takes sin seriously which is why the Israelites are in the situation they are right now. It's the judgment of God is upon them.

And then finally he says, verse 19, he says, Your eyes are open to all the ways of the children of man, rewarding each one according to his ways and according to the fruit of his deeds.

[15:36] What he's saying is God sees everyone right now. So, he knows what Donald Trump, Xi Jinping, Carrie Lam are thinking, feeling, desiring, and doing right at this moment.

He also knows how the beggar in the slum in Mumbai is thinking, feeling, desiring, doing right at this moment. He also knows what you are thinking, fearing, desiring, feeling right at this moment.

No one escapes his eyesight. And your future reward and my future reward rest with him. Not with your investments, not with your MPF, not with your career, not with your health policy.

Our entire future rests in him. That's a biblical view of God. That's great theology that Jeremiah starts with in this situation.

He wants us to start with perspective. But then he goes on and he says, it's not just theology. He's also, this is a God of history who works in reality. So he goes through the story of the Exodus.

[16:50] And he says, Israel's great moment of redemption shows that God's power is not just in creation. God's power is in history. We've seen his love and his judgment and his justice in delivering us from slavery.

He's taken us from the worst circumstances before. And it says, even to this day, even right up till now, this is the kind of God we know he has provided for us.

He has done everything for us again and again and again. And as Christians, we might say, we'll look back to the death and resurrection of Jesus and say, we have seen God's power in our lives through forgiveness, through his provision, through his power, through his love and through his justice.

And if you are a Christian and you've been walking with him and seeking to put your faith in him, then you will have stories of seeing how God has been continually faithful to you. You've seen his provision.

You've seen his grace. You've seen his love in your life. And so Jeremiah starts with theology and then God in history to show that actually this God is not just theoretical.

[18:00] But then he brings it down to the reality. The reality of the people here. Because there's a problem. The people of Israel, why are they in this mess?

Because Jeremiah says, we've just disobeyed. We've been like a stubborn, rebellious, spoilt teenager. We did not obey your voice.

We did nothing of all that you commanded us to do. Jeremiah's been preaching for 40 years the same message, calling people back to God.

And for 40 years, they have not listened to a single word that he said. I mean, just imagine preaching a sermon for 40 years and never having anyone listen to you.

In fact, it's not just they don't listen to him. They've thrown him in prison and have tried to kill him multiple times. He's not on Israel's top 10 preacher list. And the reality is because of their hearts, the shelves are empty.

[19:02] The equivalent of ISIS is about to enter into the city. The devastation is total. There's a virus going around. And Jeremiah says, God, I know that you're in this. I know you've promised judgment.

But then you've told me to go and buy a field. That is insane, God. Like, I don't know if you have ever done something that God calls you to do and then had second thoughts about it.

You start getting doubts. But Jeremiah, he's got all this great theology. He's got this history that he knows of God in his life and God in the people of God.

And yet, right now, he's facing a situation where he's going, is that really real? Right now, it's the test for him whether what he knows in his head, what he's known in his experience is actually whether he's going to bank his life on it right now in the reality in the present circumstances that he's facing.

You see, faith in God often remains in your head until it's tested, until it costs you something. Until you have to rely on it. I don't know if you ever saw, a few years ago, Jean-Claude Van Damme, the Belgian actor, did an advert for Volvo trucks.

[20:25] I don't know if you ever saw that. Volvo's claim was that they had the most incredible precision steering on their trucks. So to prove it, what they had were two trucks were going to reverse backwards side by side, and Van Damme was going to have his feet on the wing mirrors of either truck and then the trucks were going to move apart until finally Van Damme was going to do

the splits in the middle of them as they moved backwards.

And you see the kind of the making of this and you see the Volvo mechanic explaining how amazing the Volvo system is. The precision is incredible.

And at one point, Van Damme goes, but, you know, if you move slightly aside, I'm going to fall, right? And the guy says, listen, you've got to trust us because our drivers are the best.

And for Van Damme at that moment, Faith wasn't going, oh, okay, yeah, I believe you, but I don't think I'm going to go on the truck. Faith was actually saying, okay, I will basically bank my life on you guys because I can trust that you are reliable.

That's what faith does. And, you know, afterwards, when he gets off the truck and he's still in one piece, his faith in those drivers would have gone from just being a theoretical faith to now he knows.

[21 : 50] Now he knows. And Jeremiah, he's bought this field, he's wondering, am I stupid for trusting God? This makes no sense.

And God comes to him and says, I am Yahweh, that God that you've just been praying about, God of all flesh, the God of the Babylonians, the God of the Israelites you've been trying to preach to.

Your God is anything too hard for me. Like, is even this situation, is your theology enough for this situation to know that me, God, right now, I am that same God of creation, that same God of history.

And God's just got real with Jeremiah. And he says, it's going to get worse before it gets better.

That's not the news you always want to hear. But he says, no, the Babylonians, like I've been promising, are going to come in.

But I want you to know that I'm doing something bigger than you realize right through this. In 70 years, I'm going to bring the people back to the land. But in 600 years, through Jesus, I'm going to bring in an everlasting covenant.

[23 : 06] And I'm going to change people's hearts. I'm going to do miracles in your life. This moment right now is a little moment in the whole history of what I'm up to.

Will you trust me? So that's kind of the story of what's going on. That's his prayer. That's how God answers him. So now, I just want to bring this down to us and think, how does this really engage with us in times of trial and testing when we go through?

And I think there's three things that I think this passage draws out for us. One, when we face challenging trials and crises, we see it as an opportunity to grow in faith and love.

You know, people, these days, they love talking about the Chinese word for crisis. I think it's ngai gei and the ngai from ngai him meaning danger and gei from gei wui meaning opportunity.

So people say, danger is an opportunity. But what normally happens in crisis is we turn in on ourselves and we just get focused on our own issues.

[24 : 17] we try and protect ourselves. In Jeremiah's day, it's no different. We don't know why his cousin came to Jeremiah to sell his field but it could be that other relatives were not willing to take their responsibility because, man, it's a worthless investment.

You can understand it. When times are hard, you try and batten down the hatches. Right now, in Hong Kong and globally, people are afraid. we feel the crisis.

We feel the economy. We feel whether it's the virus, whether it's the stock market, whether it's the loss of jobs, whether it's the frustration with our kids of what to do with them for the next few months, whether it's the loneliness of isolation.

We can tend to turn in on ourselves. But I wonder whether you see this moment as an incredible opportunity that this is what scripture calls a test, an opportunity for our faith to get real.

You know, we've been talking about being part of God's people means being part of his mission.

But how does that go from being just a head knowledge to actually being real right now in the present circumstances?

[25 : 32] Well, let's take our love offering. Some of you may have planned to give based on your current financial position. You've got it all planned out. And now, your plans are ruined.

Your investments have collapsed. And we're still asking you to consider giving a love offering. And maybe you're going, yeah, but, okay, I would have done that like a couple of weeks ago, but it's insane now.

Not at this time. And God will say, will you trust me? Buy the field. Buy the field. Do you believe nothing is too hard for me?

Put your money where your faith is, where your doctrine is, where your theology is, because then you will see whether I'm truly trustworthy. Maybe it's not money.

Maybe it's sharing the gospel. You've been so worried about everything that's going on, you haven't even thought about the lost people around you. We so often just get wrapped up with how we're feeling.

[26 : 37] But God's word comes to you today and says, buy the field. And what that means is, this week, you're going to have conversations about the virus. You're going to have conversations about the economy, about investments, about people's fears.

And instead of just going, yeah, it's really crazy at the moment, I want us as a church to actually seize the moment and say, God, give me grace for this.

But, to reply in those moments when they're going to come up this week to go, hey, listen, yeah, I know it's been crazy at the moment. But one thing I've realized through this time is that my security has never been in my investments.

My security has never been in just whether everything's working out because this is an insecure world. but I've discovered something that's more secure than any of those things and that's Jesus. Can I tell you about him?

I challenge every one of us this week, be praying because there will be opportunities and God's saying to us, by the field, trust me, the people's response may be, you're insane.

[27 : 46] Your own thoughts may be, that feels insane. But will you trust him? By the field, let's see what I'll do. It's the first thing.

See the opportunities. Second thing, God plays the long game. Jeremiah would never actually get to see his field.

The Babylonians retreated briefly. He tried to go out to see the field while there was a bit of a gap. But then he got arrested on the way because people thought he was going to go and defect to the other side and he gets put back in prison again.

And then he gets dragged off to Egypt, never sees the field. I find this really challenging because we tend to think the world revolves around us.

We tend to think that if I'm trusting God, then it should all work out for me, in blessings for me and for my interests. But what if we trusted God right now and it wasn't us who benefited from it, but there were others down the line who were the recipients of that blessing?

[28 : 54] What if it was generations down the line that the fruit of our faithfulness now was experienced? You know, when we first started Watermark, there was this phrase that we kept using which was, one plants the seed, the next generation enjoys the shade.

What if we planted the seed of the gospel through our words or in our finances but somebody else reaped the harvest? You know, faithfulness to God resounds into eternity.

Babylon is a pile of dust in the Iraqi desert right now. They couldn't even find it until a few years ago. Jerusalem still exists with a property market that's thriving.

Many of us, and even today, we're still reading Jeremiah 2,600 years later what if in 2,000 years time if God allows that?

Hong Kong is a bunch of mountains. Beijing is a pile of dust. But our faithfulness to God is still bearing fruit because He is making something much greater happen.

[30 : 05] God plays a much bigger game and He calls us to be part of it where we trust Him. Thirdly and finally, so He doesn't just want us to see as an opportunity.

He just doesn't want to see us that actually there's a much broader perspective. He also is more concerned about our hearts than just our fields. You know, God makes a promise to the people who will be exiled and defeated by the Babylonians and He says this, I will gather them.

I will bring them back. I will make them dwell in safety. I will give them one heart and one way that they may fear me forever for their own good and the good of their children. Now for Jeremiah, what promise do you think is the most miraculous here?

You know, he's gone out to buy this field when it seems like the whole property market is going to be devastated. He knows it's going to require a miracle for that ever to mean anything again.

For there ever to be a thriving property market which isn't just controlled by the Babylonians. He knows that people are going to be exiled. But Jeremiah also sees that there is a greater miracle.

[31 : 21] Jeremiah, as we've said, he's been preaching for 40 years and not one single sermon has anybody listened to. I don't know, have you ever tried to warn someone not to date a person because you can see their bad news and the person refuses to listen and then six months later they come to you on the phone crying because disaster just happened and you predicted it all along.

But then they go back again to do it again and again and again well for 40 years and longer that's been Israel. And this disaster is God's judgment on rebellious sinners but notice what he says. He says I will give you one heart. I will make with them an everlasting covenant. I will put the fear of me in their hearts. I will rejoice in doing them good.

I will plant them in the land. the greatest miracle in this passage is that God doesn't abandon rebellious unbelieving people like you and me.

He doesn't give up on his people. He takes rebels and he draws them to himself. And notice who's doing it all. This is not kind of clever Jeremiah.

[32 : 43] It's God who takes the hard-hearted and changes them. It's God who takes divided people and makes them one. It's God who takes the disinterested in his voice and brings them to fear him, to love him, to obey him.

And he says he does it through making a covenant. A covenant in blood. Through Christ's sacrificial death on the cross God does what we couldn't do.

Jesus pursues rebels and he will do anything. Even dying on the cross. Even taking them through the most painful circumstances to awaken them to see their need of him.

Because God, is anything too hard for God? Can he even change the hardest heart and turn it back? We cannot revive our own hearts.

We cannot change anybody else's hearts. We cannot stop ourselves from fearing. We cannot stop anybody else from fearing. But nothing is too hard for God. He can change even you and me and the people around us right now.

[33 : 51] You know, Jesus said, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it will not bear fruit. Jesus didn't just buy a field he'll never see.

He poured out his life for people who keep on ignoring him. And yet he has continually chased after us. And we today are the beneficiaries of that love 2,000 years ago.

Again and again. He could have said, it's insane to give so much for people who be so ungrateful, who be so centered on themselves. But he didn't.

Because God's love is so much more expansive, so much more generous than mine is or yours is. The reason we can worship him today and say that theology is real in our lives is because he said, not my will but yours be done to his father.

He entrusted his entire life, not just a field to his father, so that you and I could be his, so we could be secure. Right now, the biggest problem in your life and in the people around you is not the coronavirus.

[35 : 06] It's not the economy. it's not what to do with your kids. It's our hearts. And God shakes everything down sometimes to expose to us the reality of where our hearts are.

You know, one of the best things that is happening in Hong Kong right now in the midst of this tragedy is God is shattering our sense of security and our sense of self-control and our sense of being able to control the world.

God is because in history, when society is stripped of the crutches that it leans on apart from God, when the church realizes it's got nothing left, absolutely nothing left to lean on other than God himself, that's when revivals break out.

That's when you begin to see the awesome power of God coming. Because you see, the way that God works through the cross, he takes you through death to bring you into life.

That's the way the gospel always worked, the cross before the resurrection. God is bringing death in multiple ways in our lives, to our dreams, to our hopes, to our idols, to all kinds of things, because he wants to bring us life.

[36 : 26] That's where he's taking us. He wants to resurrect us through this with his power. So how do we respond? We get on our knees. We repent where we haven't bought the field that he's been telling us to buy.

We haven't listened to him where he's been calling us to risk and step out in faith. And we ask him to revive us. Give us that fear of you so we can step out in faith this week to say, God, what's the field you want me to buy?

I don't just want to have a theoretical knowledge of you. I don't even want to rely on my past history with you. I want an experience and encounter with you today and I want to trust you to know that you're powerful and your love is unailing.

This is an opportunity for us to grow deeper into who God is and our faith to grow and our love for others to grow. This is where we as a church need to arise and be a light in the city. So let me pray for us. Father, I'm just so aware that I can say the right doctrines about you. [37 : 46] We all can. We can say the right experiences and testimonies of you that we have known in our past. But Father, today is the day you want to take us deeper into you.

Forgive us, Lord, where we've been so clinging to other things that we have failed to see you in the midst of all that's going on. Forgive us where we've not been willing to step out in faith to trust you with what you're calling us to, Lord.

Please open our eyes to see you. Speak to us for where you're calling us to buy a field this week, Lord, that may seem insane in this current circumstances.

But because we know that we know that we know that you are the creator, God, nothing is too hard for you. Give us that faith and that confidence to trust you. Please work in our church, revive us, Lord.

Let nothing else provide the security in our lives that you do, Lord. I pray that we would run to you with a new desperation and that you would just bring incredible life, incredible fruit, incredible freedom through this situation, we pray.

[39 : 05] In Jesus' name, Amen.