

## “Buy My Field!”

Jeremiah 32.1-3a, 6-15

Rev. Bill Pinches

Mason First Presbyterian Church

Mason, Michigan

September 29, 2019

How do you hold onto hope in the midst of very dark times? How do you trust in the promises of God when it feels like everything is crumbling around you? That’s what our passage today is about.

It’s an episode in the life of the prophet Jeremiah, nearly six hundred years before the birth of Christ. It is, unfortunately, not a very well-known episode; few people today know many details of Jeremiah’s life. It takes place in the midst of a terrible siege: the city of Jerusalem is surrounded by the invading armies of the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar. Conditions are horrible; there is no way in or out of the city; food supplies cannot get into the city; the residents of Jerusalem are starting to die from lack of food and water. It was a standard military tactic: starve the people, weaken their resolve, diminish their ability to put up a fight; then eventually take the city by force. That is what the Babylonians planned to do – and it is, in fact, what they did; the once-proud city of Jerusalem fell in the year 587 BC under the crushing force of the Babylonian army. Its people were decimated and those that manage to survive are scattered; the beautiful temple was utterly destroyed; the city laid waste.

As this story opens, Jerusalem hasn’t fallen yet, but the siege is underway. Despair fills the heart of all the residents of Jerusalem – from king to commoner, from young to old, from the priests to the merchants, they all have this foreboding sense of dread: *we are probably all going to die.*

Jeremiah, meanwhile, is locked up in prison. All Jeremiah has wanted to do throughout some thirty or forty years of his adult life is proclaim the word of God. He has condemned idolatry, he has chastised the priests for their greed, he has cried out against the false prophets who only tell people what the people want to hear. It was a very unpopular message. He was from a family of priests; even some of his own kin had tried to kill him. As time wore on, Jeremiah began proclaiming a message of doom for Jerusalem, for he knew – God had revealed it to him – that Babylon was going to make an end of the nation of Judah. This was God’s judgment against the country that had repeatedly spurned the God who had given them life and the very land to live on. Jeremiah knew what was coming, and he knew *why* it was coming. But very few people were interested in listening to his views. Indeed, the king’s officials took Jeremiah and lowered him by ropes down into a cistern, filled with mud, where they intended to let him starve to death. Someone with a greater degree of honor and decency rescued him from the cistern, but Jeremiah remained locked up, under guard. The king had no interest in listening to Jeremiah’s words. He had a political situation to deal with. He wasn’t willing to consider the possibility

that the political situation might be a direct result of his – and the people’s – rebellion against God.

So things are bad. Things are really, *really* bad. The nation is on the verge of collapsing, and one of the few decent, honorable men who might have some words of wisdom to offer is locked up tight.

Sometimes God comes to us in the darkest of times. God came to Jeremiah, while Jeremiah was locked up in that cell, with a simple message: Jeremiah’s cousin, a man named Hanamel, was going to come to Jeremiah, offering a field in the village of Anathoth, Jeremiah’s hometown. Basically, Hanamel wants to sell the property, and because Jeremiah is part of his family, Jeremiah gets first dibs on it.

Now, stop and think about this for a second. The city of Jerusalem is surrounded by the Babylonian army. The Babylonian army has *already gained military control over the land outside the city*. Jerusalem is the last remaining stronghold to be beaten down. That means that this field is *worthless*. The Babylonians have probably already been walking all over it! They’re *taking* the land from the Israelites; there’s no point trying to do any buying and selling of property at this point; this is an *invading army* we’re talking about here. They could care less whose name is on the property title!

Hanamel, of course, probably just wants some cash. Some extra cash sure might come in handy in the midst of the crisis – money to buy some food, money to offer a bribe, money for who knows what. So coming to Jeremiah, offering Jeremiah a chance to buy his field – well, he’s *taking advantage of his cousin*, to be sure. Maybe he thinks Jeremiah is a little loony in the head, and he might be willing to go along with this crazy scheme. It would be an act of utter *stupidity* if Jeremiah bought that field!

Well, guess what Jeremiah does: *he buys the field*. And he doesn’t just *buy* it, he makes a *grand production* out of it. There are legal documents, there are copies of those documents, there are witnesses, there are scales for weighing the money, and there is Jeremiah’s trusty scribe, Baruch, to whom Jeremiah entrusts the copies of the deed. This whole transaction takes place in the dungeon or prison or wherever it is that Jeremiah is being held. He’s probably got chains on his wrists as he’s signing the documents! But, sign it he does. Hanamel walks away with seventeen shekels of silver; Jeremiah comes away from the deal with a deed to a piece of land that he’ll probably never even have a chance to *see*, let alone use. It’s *crazy*! It’s one of the *stupidest* financial transactions in history!

Except ... except for the fact that there is more going on here than what appears on the surface. *God had told Jeremiah to buy that field*. Why? Because *it was a sign of HOPE for things to come*. “Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land,” declares Jeremiah – another message that *God* had given him. Jeremiah proclaims that in the presence of all those witnesses. He tells his scribe to put the deed in a safe place, a jar sturdy enough to withstand the destruction that the Babylonians will bring upon Jerusalem, a jar that will keep that deed secure for a *long* time. That deed might not matter a whit in the midst of the siege, but someday, Jeremiah knows, it *will*. Someday, people will once again be able to buy and sell houses and fields and vineyards in and around Jerusalem.

See, what was going to happen was that the Babylonians would ravage Jerusalem, kill many of the inhabitants, and carry many more off into exile. But down the road – some *70 years* down the road – those exiles would be allowed to return home. The city would be rebuilt, and Jews would live there

once again. Jeremiah didn't know the details of how all that would happen, but he knew one thing. *God had told him that there would be peace again in the land, sometime down the road.*

And Jeremiah knew that God was as good as God's word. Just as surely as Jeremiah knew that Jerusalem would be destroyed, he also knew that it would be rebuilt. This wasn't just wishful thinking; this wasn't some pipe dream. Jeremiah *knew*, deep down in his bones, that *God's word was trustworthy and true*. If God said Jerusalem would be destroyed, *it would be destroyed*. If God said that Jerusalem would be rebuilt and people would once again live in the land in peace, *it would be rebuilt and people would once again live in peace*. Whatever God said would come to pass, *would come to pass*.

There is a kind of *trust* here in God that is special and rare. There are all kinds of people who *say* they believe in God. But there are some who really *do*. I mean, *really* do. We live in difficult times; there is a tremendous amount of bad news in our world; it is easy to get cynical, easy to say, "I'll believe it when I see it." We've all had our share of disappointments, setbacks, heartbreaks. We've all had times when we feel like some important promise that was made to us has been broken. Is there really *anybody* in whom we can place our trust? *Anyone* whose word really is trustworthy and true?

You bet there is. *God's word is trustworthy and true*. *God's word stands the test of time*. *God's word alone endures from generation to generation, from one century to the next*. Nations rise and nation fall; there come times of want and times of plenty, times of war and times of peace, times of illness and times of health, times of mourning and times of rejoicing. Life can throw us about like a tempest; sometimes it feels like we're just hanging on for dear life; but there is *One* whose word is sure, whose word endures, whose word stands true, *no matter what*. And that one, of course, is *God*.

Do you know what God's promises are? *God's promises for you?* For this world? For the world to come? One of the most fruitful exercises you can do is look to the scriptures to see how God *makes good on his word*. There are a very large number of *promises* throughout the pages of the scriptures. Start at the beginning, and just start making a list of God's promises. Many of those are fulfilled in the pages of the Old Testament. Many more are fulfilled in the New. And there are a whole bunch that have yet to be fulfilled. If you want to know how trustworthy God is, look for all the ways God has fulfilled so many promises already. There remain some promises outstanding. The promise of our inheritance in heaven. The promise of Christ's return. The promise of the ultimate victory of good over evil. So many more. If God has been true to every single promise he has made in the past, why would any of us doubt in God's ability to see the *rest* of the promises through? There comes a point where you look at everything that God has already done, and you realize: *God really is trustworthy and true*.

Once you realize that, the rest falls neatly into place. When the bad news comes, when you or a loved one gets the dreaded diagnosis; when you lose the job, lose the contract, lose the marriage; when your financial future suddenly looks bleak; when something goes terribly wrong in any aspect of your life; when things feel *really, really bad*; there is *Someone* whose word is trustworthy and true. *Someone* whose word you can hold on to for dear life. *Someone* who wants to give you a future filled with hope. *And that someone is as good as their word*. He *will* make good on his promises. You can *count* on it.

© 2019 Rev. Bill Pinches