

Prophets

Part 3, Jeremiah 32:1-15

¹ This is 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. ² The army of the king of Babylon was then besieging Jerusalem, and Jeremiah the prophet was confined in the courtyard of the guard in the royal palace of Judah.

³ Now Zedekiah king of Judah had imprisoned him there, saying, "Why do you prophesy as you do? You say, 'This is what the LORD says: I am about to give this city into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he will capture it. ⁴ Zedekiah king of Judah will not escape the Babylonians but will certainly be given into the hands of the king of Babylon, and will speak with him face to face and see him with his own eyes. ⁵ He will take Zedekiah to Babylon, where he will remain until I deal with him, declares the LORD. If you fight against the Babylonians, you will not succeed.'"

⁶ Jeremiah said, "The word of the LORD came to me: ⁷ Hanamel son of Shallum your uncle is going to come to you and say, 'Buy my field at Anathoth, because as nearest relative it is your right and duty to buy it.'

⁸ "Then, just as the LORD had said, my cousin Hanamel came to me in the courtyard of the guard and said, 'Buy my field at Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin. Since it is your right to redeem it and possess it, buy it for yourself.'

"I knew that this was the word of the LORD; ⁹ so I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel and weighed out for him seventeen shekels of silver. ¹⁰ I signed and sealed the deed, had it witnessed, and weighed out the silver on the scales. ¹¹ I took the deed of purchase—the sealed copy containing the terms and conditions, as well as the unsealed copy— ¹² and I gave this deed to Baruch son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah, in the presence of my cousin Hanamel and of the witnesses who had signed the deed and of all the Jews sitting in the courtyard of the guard.

¹³ "In their presence I gave Baruch these instructions: ¹⁴ 'This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Take these documents, both the sealed and unsealed copies of the deed of purchase, and put them in a clay jar so they will last a long time. ¹⁵ For this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land.'

We have been looking at power partners and prophets, how the spirit works with us and the church. I want to look back to God's people in Jeremiah, before Pentecost, before the outpouring of the spirit and see what God message for us is.

A few years ago I got an email from the tax office and it said that they had \$200 in refund that they owed me so I clicked on the link and went to the ATO website and had a few boxes to fill in: name, address, tax file number and credit card number... and I thought hmmm... I had a decision to make: do I take a risk to try to get the \$200 or will I just get scammed. Anyway I rang the ATO and found out it was a scam.

But here we have this story about Jeremiah getting scammed. He is buying a field just as the Babylonians are about to sack Jerusalem. It sounds like he is being totally

ripped off by his relative who want to sell him this land for a decent price, just as it's about to become worthless. It's like buying an apartment in a burning building.

This passage is happening just as Babylon is laying siege to Jerusalem.

All through Jeremiah, the prophet has been saying God will bring his iron fist down on Israel we have turned away from him and will be destroyed because of it. Other prophets were saying: no, no, no, Jerusalem will never be taken, its God's city, his temple. Jeremiah was making enemies everywhere by preaching this message of doom. In verses 2-3 we see that the king had imprisoned Jeremiah because of the things he was saying. But by chapter 32 judgement day has arrived... the time has come to see who was right.

The army of the Babylonians is camping around the walls of the city, food is getting scarce, the water is drying up, and disease is starting to spread. Will God save them now? Because they need a miracle to get out of this one. The occupation force is here and who know what tomorrow will hold? Will they take my land, my car, my house, put me in a camp? This is the desperate situation the people of Jerusalem were in.

Then they have a small release from the pressure. It is likely that this particular passage came at a time where the Egyptians has sent some relief against the sieging army of the Babylonians, and lifted the siege for a period of time. The people of Jerusalem where beginning to think there was hope that the Egyptians would be their saviours and keep them from exile and occupation. Their salvation had come in the form of the Egyptians. But Jeremiah tells them plainly no in verse 5 – there is no hope from Egypt, they will not save us because is it God who condemns us not mankind.

In the midst of all this chaos and fear and uncertainty God says to Jeremiah, buy this field (verses 7-8). His relative is probably trying to sell it because he want to flee, the land is worthless because the Babylonians could very well take all its produce, send the workers into exile. So it's completely useless. The entire economy is about to collapse, the Babylonians will loot everything. If he can sell it off now, find some sucker he could flee with the money to Egypt. And God says to Jeremiah, buy this land because one day this land will be fruitful again – this is my promise.

Half this passage is this long boring legal process: take form 34b to be notarised in triplicate by the department of revenues... blah blah. On and on it goes through verses 9-14. And you're reading it thinking, why are they telling me this? What's the point? But what we are being shown is this is not some shady backdoor deal but a legal real estate transaction, taken very seriously because the land has value even in the face of the Babylonian destruction and occupation. This land that will literally be worthless for 70 years will be restored. God's Promised Land will be once again owned by his people.

The purchase of this land was like a sacramental promise given to Jeremiah and the people of Jerusalem. Noah had the rainbow as a sign of God's promise to them. Moses had the cloud over the tabernacle as a sign of the presence of the Lord and Jeremiah has a field! Not as spectacular but just as significant.

Verse 15 spells out that this all means for the people of Jerusalem.

For this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land.

There will be restoration for Jerusalem, there will be a rebirth for Israel. The time will come when normal life in Israel will return, trade will return, the people will return and the Promised Land will be restored.

This is the significance of the exile to the Jewish people: God promised Abraham, nation, fame, blessings and a promised land and now God's Promised Land, that he won for them through the conquests in Joshua, that land is being taken and defiled and they are being thrown out. What do they make of God promises now?

But even in the ashes of Jerusalem, God promised hope and his promised will never be forgotten.

I believe this story has a powerful message for the church today because sometimes I feel like the church is just like Jerusalem. We are under siege, we are outnumbered, our people are weakened and tired. I hear stories of churches struggling, ageing, areas where it seems all the churches are in decline. And often I fall into that trap of feeling hopeless about it, where is our future?

But God says buy this field don't give up hope, don't pack it all in because God can and will restore his kingdom once again. God will reclaim his land and make it profitable.

And what does he ask of Jeremiah to do? He tells him to invest. Invest his money in what looks like a hopeless cause. When you invest your money in a company, it's because you believe in that company. You believe in what they do and believe that can be successful.

God says, invest in me.

And this is the message for us: we need to invest in God's church. Because we believe that, with God, all things are possible. Because our God is the God of restoration.

Last week we spoke about how we need to step out in faith, make changes in this service to reach the next generation. Sometimes it can be difficult and scary but I believe God is calling us invest in his promises. Invest our time our money our effort because we believe God's word has power. Because we believe in the Spirit.

We believe that the spirit can change lives, that the hardest heart can be softened his presence. We believe that the spirit empowers us today. We believe his church IS the body of Christ, Jesus' physical representation on earth.

My question is: Do we believe in these things? Do we believe God keeps his promises?

This is not a rhetorical question do we believe these things?

Because if we do then we will invest ourselves in what God has called us to do. We will invest in the people God has called us to be.

I believe we are being called to invest in the community of Pittwater – to put our money on the line, our time, our effort – because we believe that God can do miraculous things.

But the miracles will only happen if we invest. If we invest our prayers, invest our time, our resources. If we just sit back and wait for God to do it all, well ... then we are in trouble.

God tells Jeremiah to put some skin in the game. He says to Jerimiah, you believe I will restore this land, well then buy this field.

Where is our field in Pittwater and how can we invest in God's promises?