

And I bought the Field

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Preacher: Rev Donald A Macdonald

- [0 : 0 0] Let us now turn to the passage that we read, the prophecy of Jeremiah, chapter 32, and let us read again at the beginning of verse 9.
- These words, and I bought the field. I bought the field. Now you might be saying, what can possibly be spiritually profitable from examining a commercial transaction?
- It's the kind of thing that happens frequently, and I dare say that people in this community, as in every community, are no strangers to buying a field.
- But if you let me elaborate a little, I think you will come to appreciate that this text is a rich spiritual minefield and very profitable for reflection.
- You notice what it says, I bought the field. It doesn't say, I bought our field. In other words, there's something specific about the field that was bought.
- [1 : 2 8] Remember, Jeremiah was in prison when he negotiated this transaction. It's not the most salubrious place to spend one's time.
- Who of us would ever want to be in prison? In the most literal sense, comes about one is judged guilty of breaking the law of the land.
- Thankfully, I have never been incarcerated in a prison, at least yet. The closest that I've ever been to a jail or been in a jail was in Dublin when I visited Kilmainham Jail.
- It lies empty. It's used on the tour guides, used as a means of telling part of Ireland's past history.
- Many were imprisoned there, who were involved in the struggle to become a separate nation, resulting in the formation of the Irish Free State, which then went on to become the Republic of Ireland.
- [2 : 4 8] And as you went through the passages there, and some of the passages were very low, I had to stoop almost double. And my imagination was working overtime, thinking of the people who were placed there.
- Many who were placed there because they were trying to seek freedom as a nation. Many who were oppressed. Names scratched.
- A myriad of names scratched on the walls. And I was trying to imagine myself in their situation. Of course, I failed miserably. But you know, I saw my name scratched on the wall.
- Not that I was ever there. I saw my name scratched on the wall. You know, in Ireland, they have a name, D-O-L-A-N, Dolan. Now, my name, as I was, my parents always referred to me as Dolan.
- Although I was Donald, I was called after my mother's brother, who died the year I was born. And it gave me many thoughts, thinking of who were those people whose names were scratched on the wall.
- [4 : 0 3] Well, you can be in prison in other ways. In a different sense, you can be a prisoner by virtue of the debilitating effect of illness in one form or another, confined to a sickbed or to one's immediate environment.

You can be in prison in other ways. Believers can at times feel that they are in prison, as those who are in spiritual darkness, without the comfort of spiritual light.

Well, Jeremiah was literally and physically in prison at this time. He wasn't imprisoned for being a lawbreaker, but he was imprisoned for being a faithful servant of God, for being the mouthpiece of God in his day.

There are others who have also been imprisoned. John was a prisoner in lonely exile in Patmos, and yet it was there that he enjoyed a time of deep spiritual fellowship with his Lord.

It is there that he was given glimpses into glory itself. Paul, too, no stranger to imprisonment, nor many others, like John Bunyan, Samuel Rutherford, and many more, who experienced much of the presence and the ministry of the Lord during their time of imprisonment.

[5 : 38] The brothers of Joseph, too, were placed in prison. They were given time for reflection on their lives, an opportunity to learn much about themselves, so that although prison, whether it is in the literal sense or metaphorically, and although it is something we do not crave, yet it may be that the Lord uses such providence to teach us valuable lessons about ourselves and about the Lord.

The Lord's dealings with his people are not always easily understood. They can be deeply mysterious, and it may be that it is afterwards that we come to recognize how immensely profitable these difficult providences have been.

I don't know if I have ever mentioned, I may have done, on another occasion, an individual who made such an indelible impression on my own life.

He spent 40 years of his life in what was then known as the County Hospital in Stornoway. And going to visit him in those early years of my Christian life was like stepping into Bethel.

Such was the evident fragrance of the Lord's presence in the room that he occupied. It held a magnetic attraction for those of us who were young Christians at that time.

[7 : 25] Forty years in a hospital bed. When Jeremiah was in prison, he was visited by one of his relatives who gave him the opportunity to purchase this field.

It's not very clear from the narrative whether Jeremiah was the closest living relative to this man or had the closest living relatives rejected the opportunity to buy this piece of land.

You may remember another example from the Bible, from the book of Ruth, how the nearest relative did not take the opportunity that was afforded to him, leaving Boaz free to purchase what once belonged to Elimelech, her father-in-law, and to Mary Ruth.

If there was a nearer relative, he obviously did, or she did not, he did not accept the opportunity. And so Jeremiah is the one to whom Hanamel comes.

In accordance with the prevailing law, Jeremiah has afforded the opportunity to purchase the field. Without any haggling or any delay, Jeremiah bought the field.

[8 : 49] The deed was legally drawn up. You might still be saying, well, what a fuss over a piece of land. All very well. But what on earth has that got to do with us in the 21st century?

Well, in my view, when you reflect on this transaction, you will discover, I hope, that there are very precious spiritual lessons to be learned from it.

Let me place three thoughts before you. For reflection. First of all, Jeremiah's faith. Secondly, Jeremiah's obedience, awakening fears.

And thirdly, Jeremiah's encouragement. First of all, Jeremiah's faith. This field was in the possession of the Chaldeans.

Obviously, Hanamel, the seller, considered that seventeen shekels of silver, equivalent to about seven ounces of silver, that seventeen shekels of silver in his hand was of greater benefit to him than the field which was then under the jurisdiction of the enemy.

[10 : 12] Being in the possession of the enemy, the seller had no access to the field. Nor was he able to use it.

So what good is a field even if you are the owner, if you are not able to use it and you are not able to do anything with it. And if you are familiar with the writings of this book, you will be aware that Jeremiah's relatives were not too well disposed towards him.

They wished to have him put to death. You will find this written in the book. Even your brothers and the house of your father, even they have dealt treacherously with you.

They are in full cry after you. Do not believe them, though they speak friendly words to you. And it was even forbidden to Jeremiah to mingle with his relatives at the two most likely times that the circle of relatives are likely to meet once relatives have dispersed here and there.

At a time of sorrow because of death or at a time of joy because of a marriage. And that surely tells us something of the strained relationship that existed between the relatives and the prophet Jeremiah.

[11 : 43] Again, Jeremiah was in prison. He was unable to view the field, let alone put it to use.

So you have to ask, was this guy, was he out of his mind? Had he lost the plot altogether when he parted with the cash for this field?

Some would say it wasn't worth one shekel of silver, let alone seventeen shekels, given that Jeremiah was a prisoner and that the land was in possession of the Chaldeans of the enemy.

It's difficult to know whether it was a high or a low price. We're not told. We're not even told the size of the area. Certainly, I think, the market value would be zero because it was occupied by the enemy.

Now, it's a well-known fact that people are prepared to speculate on property or on land. That's their business.

[12 : 50] They are willing to buy when prices are low, when the market is deflated, when matters are bleak and unpromising.

These speculators are prepared to take the risk that one day the market recover, that both property and land prices will rise and they expect to make a handsome profit on their outlay.

Is that the kind of person Jeremiah was? Was Jeremiah a property speculator? And the answer that comes back to these questions is a resounding no.

He wasn't a speculator. He wasn't the kind of person that was looking to make a profit on this transaction. This was a man who placed his trust in God.

a man who was guided by the Holy Spirit. He recognized on the one hand that God would make the country prosper again in the future.

[14 : 00] But he was also aware and realistic enough to recognize the bleak current situation where any future prosperity looked to be just a dream.

At least as far as human vision was concerned. The enemy were at the gates of the city of Jerusalem. Hopes of deliverance were extremely slim.

Why then should anyone with a grain of common sense buy this field? And the reason we find is this. He takes God at his word.

Faith is active in the life of this man. And oh my friend you have to ask yourself are you and I taking God at his word? Are we trusting in the word of the living God?

Or are we looking to our own resources and our own limited wisdom rather than consulting the God who is wisdom and power and holiness and justice?

[15 : 11] Are we looking to the almighty God? Are we taking him at his word? Faith is active in the life of this man. Faith derives its warrant from the authoritative promises of God's word.

And God will say to this man behold Hanamel the son of Shalom your uncle will come to you and say buy my field that is Adonathoth for the right of redemption by purchase is used.

And in accord with the word of God his uncle's son came to see him in prison with the proposition that he buy the field. Jeremiah states then I knew that this was the word of the Lord.

Then I knew he says that this was the word of the Lord. You cannot help but at the back of your mind wonder was he initially a little doubtful until that moment.

But here was confirmation if he required confirmation that this message had come from God the moment he saw his uncle's son coming into the prison he knew that this was confirmation of what God had said to him.

[16 : 32] I'm not sure about that but at any rate he sees it confirmation of the promise of God and so he bought the field.

His cousin must have thought him to be nuts to quote a colloquial expression to engage in this transaction when he had no hope of using the field humanly speaking.

The normal legal deeds were drawn up giving ownership to Jeremiah and the title deeds were placed in storage in an earthen wear vessel that they may last for a long time and the deduction that I make from that is that there was no expectation of requiring the deeds for a somewhat lengthy period.

These earthen wear vessels were sealed with a kind of tarry substance. It's not very clear from the context where they were placed for safe keeping.

There were no safe deposit boxes in a bank vault or strong room. But I think you can also read into that whenever they were to be opened and the content read, the fact that they were witnessed and sealed, it would mean that they would come across as prophetic proclamation so that what was done bears the stamp of divine authority.

[18 : 10] Now, however foolish Jeremiah might have appeared in the eyes of his cousin or in the eyes of his contemporaries who may have heard about this transaction, this was not a foolish, spur-of-the-moment, impulsive action or decision.

on the part of Jeremiah, it was an act of faith. The writer to the Hebrews says, faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

A certain promise had been made and the Bible tells us, he who promised is faithful. This was the promise, thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, houses and fields and vineyards, shall again be bought in this land.

Well, that looked very unlikely with the Chaldeans surrounding the city of Jerusalem, erecting their siege weaponry in order to breach the walls of the city, in order to enter the walls.

And yet by purchasing the field, Jeremiah was stating that he was persuaded that the people of captivity would return from exile in Babylon. If you were to ask Jeremiah how this would take place, he may not have been able to answer at that particular moment.

[19 : 39] It had not been revealed for the present, given that they were surrounded by this hostile army. And the evidence from a human perspective points to God's promises failing.

But you see, this man lived in the light of the unseen and not what was seen. That's how faith operates.

It lives in the light of the unseen and not in the light of what is seen. It goes beyond the perception of man.

He was basing his purchase on the promises of the inerrant word of God. Human wisdom could only see what was taking place in the short term.

The big picture was hidden from view. But faith looked beyond this to the invisible God who was fulfilling his purposes even through the discouraging events that were then taking place in the country of Judah.

[20 : 58] And is that not how faith should still behave despite trial and tribulation that there will be deliverance in the life of the believer?

Remember how Paul put it, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen for the things that are seen are transient but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Can you find this promise? The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to him with singing. Everlasting joy shall be on their head. They shall obtain gladness and joy and sorrow and science shall flee away.

And that will most certainly be a wonderful day when in the words of the shorter catechism believers are made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity.

And the Bible paints a picture of life and glory. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more. The sun shall not strike them nor any scorching heat, for the lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd and he will guide them to springs of living water and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

[22 : 15] Is that not the hope and the expectation of those who live by faith? Is that not what is promised in the marvelous gospel of redeeming grace?

And you might be saying, well, that's all very well, I have no difficulty in accepting that. But it's what lies between me now and that step out of time into the eternal realm that is my main anxiety at present.

If you only knew minister, my present state and my current providence, well, obviously, I do not because those things are hidden deep in the psyche of your individual life.

But this I do know that trial and tribulation are the frequent portion of believers as they journey through life, even if we just look at the book of Job, does that not prove to us that many are the afflictions of the righteous?

These can be created sometimes through disappointment, sometimes through hurt, sometimes through desolation of one kind or another, sometimes through pain in the light of separation by death, an empty place in the home, confronting you every day, reminding you of a place that was once full, a place that was vibrant, a person that exuded love and happiness.

[23 : 46] And in these kind of situations your soul may be cast down, it may be something different for you, it may be trialed by illness and all the anxiety that that involves or brings.

I would not for a moment state that it is easy to rise above whatever is your particular burden or affliction or trial, even where the flame of the grace of faith has been lit.

Do you remember in the Old Testament the peculiar providence that was in the life of the Old Testament prophet Habakkuk? As he looked around the country, there was failure of crops, there was no growth, just total destruction.

And as he stares into the abyss of hunger and destitution, you remember what he says, though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive have failed, and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the field, and there is no herd in the stalls.

A picture of total and utter desolation. What was true? Was the prophet caught in the grip of abject despondency? Was he lying in the trough of self-pity?

[25 : 12] No. Although all earthly comforts and prosperity denied, this was still true. He had God.

Friend, you may be conscious of a peculiar death in your own life. But stop to reflect if God is your person, then you are not destitute.

You remember how that encouraged the prophet. Remember, he was singing in desolation, and he wasn't singing a lament. Yet, says the prophet, oh, the tremendous significance attached to this little word, yet.

Yet, he says, I will rejoice in the Lord. I will take joy in the God of my salvation. Both Habakkuk and Jeremiah were living in the light of the unseen.

And that is how faith ought to operate to the present and beyond. That is how Paul looked at matters. I have already quoted, we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self has been renewed day by day for this light momentary affliction, he says, is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

[26 : 41] As we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are temporal or transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Oh, where, my friend, is your vision focused on this night? Is it focused on the things that are unseen? Or is it focused on the transient, on the fleeting, on the things that belong to this transient world alone and that will soon pass away?

Is a vision going beyond that to the things that are unseen? Well, he was living in the light of the faithful promises of God.

The boldness, you might say, of living faith, I bought the field, says this man. Oh, man, can you make the same?

Can you make the same kind of a or a similar assertion that you are stepping out on the basis of the promises of Almighty God?

[27 : 51] His faith, but secondly, his obedience awakening fears. You know, often fears and doubts are fed by dark, discouraging providence.

For example, you remember the disciples when they were in the storm on Galilee and you remember how their fears were awoken despite the fact that they were crossing in obedience to Christ and he was with them in the boat.

Do you remember what they said to him? Do you not care that we are perishing? You know, every evidence of his care was right before their eyes. He was with them in the boat, in human form.

True humanity, evidence of his care, he had come into the world. He was with them in the boat. But the storm, as it were, clouded their judgment.

The storm, as it were, awoke and kindled the fears. Do you not care that we are perishing? You see, every reason for discouragement encourages fears in the lives of believers.

[29 : 10] Ah, but you might be saying, hold on, minister, unbelief doesn't trouble the believer. Doubts don't trouble the believer. Are you sure, my friend? Are you sure, my friend?

Let me put it, ah, in a translation of Bardock that was once composed by the late Dr. MacDonald of Herrentosh.

He composed the Gaelic. It was translated by someone else. But a heart that's hard and wicked, and a wretched carnal frame, and remorseless unbelief are still my sorrow and my shame.

Unbelief above all evils presses sorely with its load, desolates my very spirit, grieves the blessed son of God.

Can you identify with that picture in your own life? faith? Can you identify with these forces rising up to contradict the faith that is in your life?

[30 : 26] I bought the field, says Jeremiah. Is he happy? Is he ecstatic? Is he filled with a sense of the love of God? God? Well, it doesn't appear so.

But what appears is that he is beginning to question what he has done. It's almost as if Jeremiah is asking, have I made a terribly foolish decision?

And he begins to pray. Well, that's always a good place to go, isn't it? When you're perplexed and bewildered, that's a good place to go.

In the face of such discouraging circumstances, note what he says, yet you, O Lord, God, have said to me, buy the field for money. Yet you, O Lord, have said to me.

That doesn't suggest the language of assured faith. The implication is that he is questioning how can this be when the city is to be destroyed?

[31 : 35] Not just that the city fall into the hand of the enemy, but the population of the country taken into captivity. It's as if having taken a step in the obedience of faith, he is now troubled by fears and unbelief.

And what lies at the heart of this element of doubting is this, surely. How can the judgmental act of God be reconciled to or with the grace of God?

How can the Lord's promise of future blessing be reconciled with the imminent prospect of national overthrow? Because that's the judgment he's referring to.

That's what leaves the prophet wrestling with fears. How can the promises of blessings come to be reconciled with the destruction of the country as they know it?

And so it is perhaps in your own life tonight there are fears which you are unable to reconcile with the promises of the blessings of the Most High.

[32 : 49] Perhaps you are asking how will you be ultimately in possession of the fullness of blessing that is to be found in glory? Is that part of your own thinking tonight?

How can you expect to be there? You find so much that is at odds with what you should be. You recognize how very far short you come in comparison to what you ought to be.

In that inner conflict in the depths of your own life are you concluding that the forces of evil are gaining the upper hand so that rather than enter into the liberty of the sons of God and Christ more and more you are concluding that you have been captivated by such dark forces in your struggles there is a feeling of isolation of being cut off well you know you are not alone in that kind of scenario that is true of you this evening now I know that may not be of any comfort to you that you are not alone but because you feel so alone you feel so cut off you feel so isolated but do you remember the experience of the apostle Paul in a similar situation as he wrestled inwardly with such inner strife he makes it plain that he is speaking not as an unbeliever but as a believer wretched man that I am who will deliver me from this body of death oh that's not the cry of despair but the cry of grace at work the cry that speaks of a burning desire to be rid of the powerful forces that were causing this inner strife and that were bringing him into captivity where does

Jeremiah go with his problems he takes them to the Lord in prayer oh that is what you and I have to do too note how he begins oh Lord God our Lord God this I believe gives us gives us insight into the inner turmoil that boiled within his heart he makes no attempt to clothe himself in some kind of clothing that will hide or gloss over a situation comes to the Lord with all the wealth of feelings and inner experience that leave him wrestling with his fears he comes you might say in his broken humanity and he frankly acknowledges that he does not fully understand he acknowledges the greatness of the creator God he acknowledges the supremacy of the sovereign

God so that nothing is too hard for you and as if he's saying we do not see or understand but you are omnipotent and on the God who is omnipotent he calls on in prayers you know when you are at to quote a phrase that you'd be men's or maybe at wit's end corner you ever stood there it's a lonely place wit's end corner not a pleasant place to be are you not thankful that there is a God who is all powerful a God who is gracious a God who hears and answers prayers and this man he believes that nothing is too hard for God

[37 : 05] I have no doubt that when that when Jeremiah spoke these words he believed in the general sense that nothing is too hard for God and when he spoke these words I believe he believed in relation to other people that nothing is too hard for God but now could he believe it in his own individual situation that was the element of doubt would I be correct in assuming that there are experiences like this in your own life too you believe that nothing is too hard for the Lord and the lives of others you believe that there is forgiveness for them but oh dear oh dear in your own life there is the question can there be forgiveness for you you are of course the exception to the rule but you know sometimes that's how you reason in your blindness and in your darkness happiness how easily in your introspective self-analysis you fall into that way of thinking well my friend do you remember

Paul's words of encouragement now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think and so Jeremiah here expands in prayer on the power of God how all his ways are right this God has knowledge of all that takes place in our world there is nothing hidden from his all seen eyes you know despite the advanced level of technology and it's almost unbelievable to someone my age anyway how far technology has advanced no country can claim to have minute knowledge of all that takes place in the world but this God this God has knowledge of everything he has knowledge of everything and so the prophet reflects on how

God has been active in the past in the history of the world and more especially in the redemptive history with regard to his people Israel he thinks of the marvelous deliverance effected by the Lord and bringing a suffering enslaved people out of Egypt no military power or might and he follows that right up to the present where they are suffering because of their disobedience but they did not obey your voice or walk in your law they did nothing of all you commanded them to do he acknowledged that God is just in his dealings with Judah and Jerusalem and in all that is taking place at the time no matter how difficult it is to understand Jeremiah is convicted of this God is just note how he speaks of the siege ramps erected in order to breach the walls for the city and then in verse 25 yet you

O Lord God have said to me buy the field for money it's as if Jeremiah is trying to grasp this in his own understanding you know and he's trying to come to terms with it you know when you read Romans chapter 8 and you find these words written and we know that for those who love God all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose you believe it but it is the how that is to be worked out that you are unable often to grasp isn't it how is it going to work for good as the good Dr.

MacDonald expressed it in the English translation all but can survive a creature one of nature so unclean never expect to reach the presence glorious in a spotless sheen isn't that the question when you're doing an introspective analysis of your own life you're seeing so much that is unclean so much that is impure so much that belongs to sin and to self and where is your hope based is it not based where MacDonald speaks of the precious blood of Jesus will my filthiness remove there is nothing else there is no efficacy there is no power anywhere else except in the application of the blood of the lamb in the application of the work finished work of Christ in the efficacy of the cry of the shed blood within the veil and because that is true yet I shall reach the palace where's the fullness of his love but the time is good

[42 : 57] Jeremiah's faith Jeremiah's fears Jeremiah's encouragement behold you'll read in this chapter further on than we have read behold he says I am the Lord the God of all flesh that's in verse 27 I am the Lord the God of all flesh the authority that accompanies this statement behold I am the Lord the God of all of all flesh it's as if in these words he is comparing the eternal being of God with the weakness and the feebleness of man all flesh oh put the two things side by side I am the Lord the God

I am the eternal being I am the one from all eternity and in all flesh and it speaks of weakness lack of power feebleness humanness with all its failings and the unfailing God the God of the spirits of all mankind and there is the categorical assertion of the all embracing rule of the one true God and so we come back to the question I am the Lord the God of all flesh is anything too hard for me now ah Jeremiah do you see you were before asking is anything too hard for the

Lord but you hadn't quite grasped who had given the command and so your fears were awakened and stimulated but now I am telling you I am the Lord the God the one of omnipotent power and glory is anything too hard for this great God and Jeremiah could say well I do not understand and maybe you and I do not understand but God is saying I understand and I have the power to fulfill what I promise this is where faith receives a drink of refreshment this is where faith is strengthened and encouraged to persevere and you remember and you how he too trusted in the promises of God thou shalt arise he says and mercy yet thou to

Mount Zion shalt extend her time for favor which was said behold is now come to an end oh my friend is that where your faith finds encouragement and strengthening and invigorating in the God for whom nothing is too hard I'm going to conclude with a story that I read that is relevant to a text maybe some of you have read it it's a story of a lady missionary and she was working in a certain area of South Africa and she and her husband had worked there for a long time it was very hard the people were living in ignorance and corruption but an awakening took place and before that happened when the darkness was still prevailing this woman received a letter from a friend in England asking if there was anything that she desired to be sent to her as a help in her work and she wrote back that's what she wrote back send us she said a set of communion vessels we shall need them yet now that was before a single communicant or the least indication of any conversance and I think of that now and in that bleak spiritual climate this lady by faith she saw says the writer the autumn sheaves and the box was dispatched now this was a long time ago a year passed before it reached its destination and the box was delivered the day before the first little company of converts sat down at the

Lord's table how wonderful is that this was the field that that lady missionary bought when still in the hands of the enemy and when we look at our world tonight and we see many discouraging things in our world and when we do not understand how this will work for good or how God will fulfill this or that or the next thing God understands and God sees and God's purpose will be fulfilled what we are asked to do is to buy the field to step out with God and he will fulfill the how is in his hands not in my doesn't matter how unpromising things might look we are asked to step out and to buy the field oh my friend do you have that kind of faith tonight is your faith in the living

[49 : 46] God or is your faith in yourself I have to tell you that if it's in yourself it will suddenly fail it will leave you shipwrecked at the end of life on the shores of eternity only faith in the Christ of God will see you through I bought the field says the prophet a statement of faith yes there were struggles but the struggles were worth it because he came to see where encouragement was to be found and God the Lord let us pray let us pray alone amen to thank you for you