

# Faith in a Field

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ] Let us now turn to the passage that we read, the prophecy of Jeremiah, chapter 32, and we may read at verse 9, and just the phrase, I bought the field.
- I bought the field. And you may possibly be saying, what can be spiritually profitable from examining a commercial transaction?
- 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.
- Remember, Jeremiah was in prison when he negotiated this transaction. Prison is not the most salubrious place to spend one's time.
- Who of us would ever want to be in prison for being judged, to break in the law of the land? I don't know if any of you have ever visited a prison.
- [ 1 : 3 5 ] I can say that I have personally. I have corresponded with prisoners. And I have found corresponding with prisoners quite illuminating, personally for myself.
- Corresponding with some that I knew and who were incarcerated in prison. And I felt a compulsion to correspond with them, to try and encourage them during their time of imprisonment.
- The closest I've ever come to being in prison was in a place in Dublin known as Kilmainham Jail. It's more of a museum today.
- But it gives you some insight into the conditions that were experienced by many who were incarcerated there, more for their opposition to the policies of the then British government.
- And you would see names scratched in the wall and on the door frames of those who had been there. In fact, I saw almost my own Gaelic name scratched on the doorway.
- [ 2 : 5 7 ] And I had to say that it wasn't me. But it's an eye-opener to see such places. Well, Jeremiah was in prison.
- And in a different sense, one can feel a prisoner by virtue, for example, of the debilitating effect of illness in one form or another, when one is confined to a sick bed or to one's immediate environment, whether it be your home or a care home or a hospital ward.
- That can feel like being in prison. The believer can sometimes feel as if they are in prison when they go through times of spiritual darkness without the comfort of spiritual light.
- But Jeremiah was literally in prison at this time. And isn't it strange when you go through the Bible, you find that many eminent people in the Bible and some not so eminent were in prison.
- John the Apostle, a prisoner in lonely exile in Patmos. And yet it was there that he experienced a time of deep, spiritual fellowship with his Lord.
- [ 4 : 3 1 ] There he was given glimpses and insight into glory itself. Paul was no stranger to imprisonment either, nor some of the eminent saints like John Bunyan or Samuel Rutherford, and many more who were imprisoned and experienced much of the ministry and the presence of the Lord whilst they were in prison.

The brothers of Joseph were in prison. They were given time for reflection on their own lives, an opportunity to learn much about themselves.

So that prison in any shape or form is not something that we may desire or crave, it may be that the Lord uses such providence to teach us valuable lessons about ourselves and about himself.

The Lord's dealings with his people cannot always be easily understood. His dealings can be deeply mysterious, and it may be that afterwards, and only afterwards, do you come to recognize how immensely profitable these strange providences may have been?

The psalmist could say, it was good for me to have been afflicted. I'm not sure that he said that during his time of affliction, but with the benefit of hindsight and looking back, he could say, it was good for me to have been afflicted.

[ 6 : 28 ] Well, when Jeremiah was in prison, he was visited by one of his relatives who gave him this opportunity to purchase a field.

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

If there was a nearer relative, he obviously didn't accept the opportunity. And so Jeremiah being the nearest relative to whom Hanamele comes.

And in accordance with the prevailing Jewish law, he's given the opportunity to purchase this field. The purchase price wasn't exorbitant.

In fact, it was a minimal price that was being asked for the field. There was no haggling over the price. Jeremiah bought the field.

[ 7 : 34 ] And the deed was legally drawn up. And 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?

In my view, when you reflect on this transaction, you will discover that there are very precious spiritual lessons to be learned.

So let me set three thoughts before you for reflection. The first, Jeremiah's faith. The second, Jeremiah's obedience, awakening fear.

And thirdly, the encouragement given to Jeremiah. Jeremiah. First, Jeremiah's faith. The field was in the possession of the Chaldeans, the enemies.

Obviously, the seller, considered that 17 shekels of silver in his hand, was of greater profit to him than a field that was under the dominion of the Chaldeans.

[ 8 : 48 ] He had no access to it. He couldn't use it. Now, if you are familiar with the writings of this book, you will be aware that Jeremiah's relatives were not too well disposed towards the prophet.

They wished to have him put to death, even your brother or son, 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. He was even forbidden to mingle with his relatives at a time of sorrow, like death, or even a time of joy, like a wedding.

A kind of gatherings that bring most relatives together. And I think that tells us something of the strained relationship that existed between his relatives and Jeremiah.

Because he was in prison, he was unable to view the field, let alone to put it to use. So you have to ask the question, was this man out of his mind?

[ 10 : 00 ] Had he lost the plot altogether when he parted with his cash to purchase this field? Some would say it wasn't even worth one shekel of silver, let alone seventeen shekels, given that he was a prisoner and the land in possession of the enemy.

And it's difficult to know whether it was considered a high price or a low price, as we're not told even the size of the area.

Certainly, I would think it would be zero market value because it was occupied by the enemy. Now, it's a well-known fact that some people are willing to speculate on property or land.

They make that their business. They are willing to buy when prices are low, when the market is deflated, when matters are bleak and unpromising.

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

[ 11 : 19 ] Is that the kind of person Jeremiah was? Was he a property speculator? And the answer of the Bible is a resounding no.

This was a man who placed his trust in God and was guided by the Holy Spirit. He recognized on the one hand that God would make the country prosper again in the future, but he was also aware of the 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 answer that the Bible gives us is because faith was active in the life of this man. Faith, you could say, derives its warrant from the authoritative promises of the word of God.

God was saying to this man, Behold, Hanamele, the son of Shalom, thine uncle, shall come unto thee, saying, Buy thee my field that is in Anathoth, for the right of redemption is thine to buy it.

[ 12 : 51 ] And his uncle's son did come to see him in prison with the proposition that he buy the field. And Jeremiah states, Then I knew that this was the word of the Lord.

Does that mean that Jeremiah was a little doubtful until that moment? Did he think that it was something that had arisen in his own mind and wasn't from the Lord?

Are we to understand that? It's possible. But he dismissed it when he saw this man coming to his prison cell.

And so he bought the field. His cousin must have thought that, for want of a better phrase, that Christmas had come early and that his relative was somewhat naive.

The normal legal deeds were drawn up, giving ownership to Jeremiah. The title deeds were placed in storage, as was the practice in an earthenware vessel, that they might be kept for a long time.

[ 14 : 08 ] And the deduction that you make from that is that there was no expectation of the deeds being required for a long time in the future.

These vessels were apparently sealed with a kind of tarry substance. It's not too clear where they were kept. However foolish Jeremiah might have appeared in the eyes of his cousin, this was not a foolish action, but the action of faith.

A certain promise had been made, and the Bible tells us faithful is he who has promised. Note the promise, verse 15, Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land.

Now that looked most unlikely. Whoever would have thought that that would be possible when the land is under the dominion of an invading army.

But by purchasing the field, Jeremiah was stating that he was persuaded that the people would return again from exile in Babylon.

[ 15 : 38 ] If you were to ask Jeremiah how that would take place, he may not have been able to answer. It had not yet been revealed.

For the present, given that surrounded by hostile forces, all evidence pointed to God's promises failing.

But this man lived in the light of the unseen and not what was seen. He was basing his purchase on the promises of the inerrant word of God.

Human wisdom could but see what was taking place in the short term. the big picture was hidden from view. Human wisdom could but see the destruction created by a hostile army.

But faith looked beyond that to the invisible God who was fulfilling his purpose even through the discouraging events that were taking place.

[ 16 : 53 ] 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 the apostle Paul summarized his own life 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.

Again in the prophecy of Isaiah you have this marvelous prophecy the ransomed of the Lord shall return come to Zion with singing everlasting joy shall be upon their heads they shall obtain gladness and joy and sorrow and sign shall flee away and that will most certainly be a wonderful day when that is fulfilled in the experience of the church of Christ when in the words of the shorter catechism believers shall be made perfectly blessed in a full enjoying of God to all eternity and you remember how their state is portrayed for us in the book of Revelation they shall hunger no more neither thirst any more the sun shall not strike them nor scorch in heat for the lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd he will guide them to springs of living waters and

God will wipe away every tear from their eyes the hope of the believer is not fictional it is based on solid biblical truth and you may be saying to me oh but all that is very well but what about between now and the eternal home that may be your worry and you may be saying to me if you only knew my current state and my situation and of course I don't that is hidden in the depths of your own being but this I do know that suffering trial and tribulation can be the lot of the believer in life we have just to look at the book of

Job to see how that is borne out many are the afflictions of the righteous sometimes disappointment sometimes hurt sometimes desolation and 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 vibrant and full reminding you of a person who exuded love and happiness and in these kind of situations your soul may be cast down maybe you are facing illness and all that entails I will not pretend that it is easy to rise above our lot in life if we are experiencing suffering or trial even where the grace of faith exists you probably remember the one lovely example we have in the

[ 21 : 03 ] Bible of devastating providence faced by the prophet Habakkuk it was one of total destruction and devastation but do you remember what you wrote even when confronted by such desolation though the fig tree should not blossom nor fruit be on the vines the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls now these were a people who were dependent on an agricultural environment and for all that to fail meant a picture of hopelessness and desolation what was true of the prophet as he looked out over the land in that way was he given over to despair and discouragement quite the opposite and what made the difference he had

God in his life he had God in his life and so if you are here this evening and you feel that your own situation is difficult and so on that you feel empty cast down but you're not really empty if God is in your life if God is your portion and your inheritance you're not really empty do you remember the effect of having God in his life that it had only on the prophet even in that kind of bleak picture that confronted him where any future prosperity looked to be just a dream as far as human vision was concerned but the prophet he was looking beyond all of these things and he was looking at what

God could do and you remember what he says in that kind of situation how he came to sing remember what he said yet yet he says and there is so much emphasis in the original language or not little word yet he says I will rejoice in the Lord I will take joy in the God of my salvation faced with such a bleak and unpromising situation yet says the prophet I will rejoice in the Lord and it seems to me that the prophet Habakkuk and the prophet Jeremiah both lived in the light of eternity and that is how faith must be active to the present day living in the light of eternity living in the light of the great and precious promises of God the boldness of living faith

I bought the field secondly his obedience awakening fears you know often unbelief is fed by dark discouraging providences for example the disciples in the storm remember how they went to wake the sleeping Jesus do you not care that we are perishing every reason for discouragement encourages unbelief but you might be saying to me but hold on surely unbelief doesn't trouble the believer believer are you sure are you sure that unbelief doesn't trouble the believer someone once wrote something like this unbelief above all evils presseth sorely with its load desolates my very spirit grieves the blessed son of

God unbelief does trouble the believer where living faith is to be found you can find unbelief I bought the field is Jeremiah happy is he filled with a sense of the love of God it would seem that he is beginning to question what he had done have I made a terribly foolish decision and he begins to pray it's always a good place to begin isn't it to come to God to the throne of grace in the face of such discouraging circumstances note what he says he's using God's promise and that's often what we do in prayer thou hast said to me O Lord God buy thee the field for money verse 25 in other words he's bringing back to

[ 27:19 ] God the very message that God had given to him thou hast said to me buy the field no that God doesn't suggest the language of assured faith the implication it seems to me is that he is questioning how can this be when the city is to be destroyed not just the city but the population of the country taken into captivity it's as if Jeremiah having taken a step in the obedience of faith is now troubled by unbelief and the core cause of his concern is this how can the judgmental act of God be reconciled to or with the grace of God that left him doubting that left him with fears how could the promises of future blessings be reconciled to the current situation where the country was under the dominion largely of hostile forces and that can also be cause for concern in the lives of believers to the present hour how will you ultimately be in possession of the fullness of blessings and glory does that cause you concern why do you have that concern is it because of what you find in your inner life that is at variance with the word of

God is it because you see yourself coming so far short of what you should be is it because of inner strife in your heart and your awareness that the forces of evil appear to be victorious so often in your life so that instead of progressing in the path of grace you feel that you have been submerged by the forces of evil while you're not alone if that is true maybe that's not of great comfort to you but listen to this do you remember how the apostle Paul wrote of himself and of his own experience as a Christian wretched man that I am who will deliver me from this body of death now that wasn't a cry of despair but the cry of a burning desire in his soul to be rid of the evil of which he was so aware and that brought him into captivity where did

Jeremiah go with his fears and doubts he brought them to God in prayer you may be heard the hymn take it to the Lord in prayer how comforting it is to go to the Lord in prayer isn't it you're not you're not as it were speaking into a void you're speaking to a person you're speaking to an eternal father you're speaking to one who has a care for your soul you're speaking to one who has demonstrated eternal love by laying down his life for you in order that you might be liberated and gloriously set free well that's what we have to go to and so you see here in verse 17 oh

Lord God and as you read these verses it's as if it gives us as it were a window into the inner turmoil that boiled within this man Jeremiah he doesn't try to cover himself with clothing that doesn't belong to him but he comes just as he is with these raw emotions and feelings which he is so aware he comes in his poor humanity honestly as he wrestles with what he doesn't understand he acknowledges that God is the great creator God that is a sovereign God so that nothing is too hard for him perhaps we too do not see too clearly but we believe that

God is omnipotent and it is to the omnipotent God that you come when you're at as it were sometimes your witch end aren't you grateful that God is omnipotent and you see there is something else here he believed that nothing was too hard for God he believed it generally he believed it perhaps with regard to other people but now in his own situation it's as if there's an element of doubt are we not like that at times too we believe that God is able to forgive sin in general we believe that God is able to forgive the sin in the lives of others but when it comes to your own life you're afraid but you know you're not the exception

[ 34 : 11 ] God is able to forgive all sin remember what Paul teaches now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think and so Jeremiah expands in prayer on the power of God his ways are always right this God has knowledge of all that is ongoing in the world not even the presidents of the most powerful nations currently in the world with all the technology at their disposal are in possession of that knowledge but God has perfect knowledge of all that is ongoing in the world and that brings the prophet to reflect on how God had been active in past times in the lives of his people the marvelous deliverance effected in bringing them from

Egypt right up to the present where they are now suffering on account of their disobedience verse 23 but they obeyed not thy voice neither walked in thy law they have done nothing for all that thou commandest them to do he acknowledges that God is just in all that is taking place in the kingdom and the city and so verse 25 thou has said unto me O Lord God buy thee the field for money it's as if he's trying to reach out and grasp the promise it's not as if he's saying it's impossible for this to happen but as if in his mind do you say how can it happen that's often what we ask to how can it take place you know there's a beautiful verse in

Paul's letter to the Romans we know that for those who love God all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose but when you are going through hard times when you are faced with illness or bereavement and you are saying to yourself how can this work for good that your circumstances don't alter the truth that is contained in the verse sometimes we have to believe it even when we don't understand it and finally the encouragement given to Jeremiah behold I am the Lord the God of all flesh verse 27 is there anything too hard for me you know and it seems to me there is so much authority contained in these words behold

I am the Lord the God and these words he is comparing the eternal being of God with the weakness the feebleness of man all flesh speaks of the feebleness of man the temporary nature of man God being the eternal God and so he concludes is there anything too hard for me Jeremiah you don't understand neither do I nor you often but God says I understand and I have the power to outwork this and that's where faith receives a drink that refreshes faith that strengthens faith that encourages faith to go on in the journey towards the end heart

I going to tell a story in conclusion of a woman missionary who was in the South African field and she and her husband were working together there they found it difficult they found it difficult to communicate with the people and they faced many problems for 10 years they worked there and then a spiritual awakening took place but before that happened when everything looked so bleak and so hopeless and so dark this lady missionary received a letter from a friend in Sheffield in England asking if there was anything that she desired to be sent to her as a help in her work and do you know what the lady missionary requested now remember there was no fruit to be seen everything was bleak and dark and she wrote back send us a set of communion vessels we shall need them yet that was before there was a single communicant or the least indication of any conversions but in that bleak spiritual climate this lady by faith saw the autumn sheets the box was dispatched a year elapsed apparently before it reached its destination why that was I don't know it was delivered the day before the first small company of converts sat down at the

[ 40 : 59 ] Lord's table that was the field that this lady bought when still in the hands of the enemy how many of you are buying a field as you prepare for a new ministry and a new minister that Torstor may reverberate to the sound of souls singing the new song of grace and faith looking unto Jesus well we don't understand much but faithful is he that has promised Jeremiah's faith he bought a field at a most unlikely time and in most unlikely circumstances and yet there was a hesitancy his obedience awakened fears and often we have fears fears of the unknown fears of have we done the right thing and so on and then the encouragement that was given to this man

I am the Lord the God of all flesh is there anything too hard for me that is nothing but nothing too hard for God let us pray O eternal God thou art great and glorious thou dost wonderful things may it please thee that we might see some of these wonders and this part of thy vineyard as they await the induction of a new ministry among them may it please thee that it be a time of truly bringing in the sheaves a time of harvest a time of great spiritual joy and the glory shall be thine in

Jesus name we ask it Amen let us conclude by singing to God's praise from Psalm 73 and at verse 23 Psalm 73 page at least verse 23 whom have I in the heavens high but thee O Lord alone in the earth whom I desire besides thee there is none my flesh and heart doth faint and fail but God doth fail me never for of my heart God is the strength and portion forever for lo they that are far from thee forever perish shall them that are going from thee go thou hast destroyed

God but surely it is good for me that I draw near to God and God I trust that all thy works I may declare abroad from verse 23 to verse 26 Psalm 73 Nevertheless continually O Lord I am with thee Nevertheless continually O Lord I am with thee conduct and guide me thou dost me hold by my right hand and still uphold me thou dost me hold by my right hand and still uphold me and guide and to thy glory after word receive me to see me to love high whom hath

I in the heavens high but thee O Lord alone and in and in the earth do I desire besides thee there is none my my my my my my my my my my heart god is the name that god doth fill me never for my heart god is the strength and portion forever and forever now may the grace of the lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit rest on and abide with you all now and forever amen