

5TH WEDNESDAY OF LENT

MARCH 13, 2013

CHRIST IN A REMOTE FIELD

Pastor Jim Dunn

Jeremiah 32:1-4, 6-12, 16, 24-26, 30-44

(Based on the sermon, *Invest*, by Reed Lessing in the sermon series, *Christ in the Strangest Places*)

Jeremiah Buys a Field During the Siege

32 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** 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. **3** For Zedekiah king of Judah had imprisoned him, saying, "Why do you prophesy and say, 'Thus says the Lord: Behold, I am giving this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall capture it; **4** Zedekiah king of Judah shall not escape out of the hand of the Chaldeans, but shall surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and shall speak with him face to face and see him eye to eye.

6 Jeremiah said, "The word of the Lord came to me: **7** Behold, Hanamel the son of Shallum your uncle will come to you and say, 'Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours.' **8** Then Hanamel 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. **9** "And I bought the field at Anathoth from Hanamel my cousin, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver. **10** I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales. **11** Then I took the sealed deed of purchase, containing the terms and conditions and the open copy. **12** And I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch the son of Neriah son of Mahseiah, in the presence of

Hanamel 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.

16 “After I had given the deed of purchase to Baruch the son of Neriah, I prayed to the Lord, saying:

24 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. What you spoke has come to pass, and behold, you see it.

25 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.’”

26 The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah:

30 For the children of Israel and the children of Judah have done nothing but evil in my sight from their youth. The children of Israel have done nothing but provoke me to anger by the work of their hands, declares the Lord. **31** This city has aroused my anger and wrath, from the day it was built to this day, so that I will remove it from my sight

32 because of all the evil of the children of Israel and the children of Judah that they did to provoke me to anger—their kings and their officials, their priests and their prophets, the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. **33** They have turned to me their back and not their face. And though I have taught them persistently, they have not listened to receive instruction. **34** They set up their abominations in the house that is called by my name, to defile it. **35** They built the high places of Baal in the

Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to offer up their sons and daughters to Molech, though I did not command them, nor did it enter into my mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.

They Shall Be My People; I Will Be Their God

36 “Now therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning this city of which you say, ‘It is given into the hand of the king of Babylon by sword, by famine, and by pestilence’: **37** 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. **38** And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. **39** 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 them. **40** 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. **41** I will rejoice in doing

them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul.

42 “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 promise them. **43** Fields shall be bought in this land of which you are saying, ‘It is a desolation, without man or beast; it is given into the hand of the Chaldeans.’ **44** 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 the Shephelah, and in the cities of the Negeb; for I will restore their fortunes, declares the Lord.”

It would have been like investing in Enron, Lehman Brothers, General Motors, Eastern Airlines, and the Chicago Cubs.

All commercial enterprises in Judah were collapsing. Property values were plummeting. Actually, property values were the last thing on the minds of the Israelites at that moment. King Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylonian army had overrun their last outposts. His troops had begun to lay siege to the prize, the jewel, and the crown, Jerusalem. Epidemics and diseases were sweeping through the city. The prophecy of Jeremiah was coming true: “I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and daughters, and they will eat one another’s flesh during the stress of the siege imposed on them by the enemies who seek their lives.” In all of that chaos, the Lord said to Jeremiah, “Invest your money in a field!”

The field to which the Lord was referring would have been, under normal circumstances, a good investment. It might have been the perfect place for Jeremiah to retire. The field was prime real estate outside of the city but not too far. Only three miles from Jerusalem, it was in Anathoth, Jeremiah’s hometown. But prime real estate or not, it was now in the hands of the Babylonian army. Jeremiah was about to lose his shirt on a bad real estate deal when he needed every shekel he had to buy food.

Ah, risky investments. It is not in our nature to roll the dice or to bet on the horses. Even when it comes to the church's ministry and doing the Lord's work, we get concerned about the return on our investment, both on money and time. We prefer to invest in efforts that will be *successful*.

Invest in the field outside the city in Anathoth? Where Nebuchadnezzar's army of engineers was probably already salting the fields so that they would grow nothing. Jeremiah, why would you take such a risk and lose your shirt?

"I knew that this was the Word of the Lord, so I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel."

Well, what else would you expect from a guy who buried his underwear near the Euphrates River just because the Lord told him to do it (Jeremiah 13)?

So, Jeremiah counted out the 17 shekels of silver, signed and sealed the deed, and had it witnessed. Why? Why make such a risky investment?

Jeremiah answers, Jeremiah 23:6: "'The days are coming,' says the Lord, 'when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a king who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In His days, Judah will be saved. This is the name by which He will be called. The Lord is our righteousness.'" Jeremiah had a king who was his righteousness. That's why he bought that remote field. Jeremiah 29:11: "For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'" He had a God who promised him hope and a future. That's why Jeremiah bought that remote field.

Buy a remote field? Invest in urban ministry? Anticipate a harvest in the urban core? Israel's greatest prophet once made such risky investments. He offered living water to a Samaritan woman. To a blind man whose name meant "son of filth," He gave sight. With an unscrupulous tax assessor named Zacchaeus, He had dinner. And in full view of His jealous opponents, He raised a dead man.

Because of such risky investments, this prophet lost His shirt. Matthew 27:35: "And when they had crucified Him, they divided up His clothes by casting lots." Jesus lost more than His shirt, though. He lost His friends at Gethsemane. He lost the skin off His back at Gabbatha. He lost the presence of His Father at a prime piece of real estate outside of Jerusalem known as Golgotha. Spit and blood caked His cheeks. His lips were cracked and swollen. His lungs screamed with pain. His stretched ligaments threatened to snap. Why would someone make such an investment and lose everything?

Again, Jeremiah answers. Jeremiah 31:3: "The Lord says, 'I have loved you with an everlasting love.'"

Let it be known that three days later that ground salted with Jesus' blood, ground intended by Rome to never grow anything, suddenly sprouted life. What was uprooted at Golgotha budded forth at an open tomb. The righteous Branch of David and the Lord our righteousness! Jesus Christ.

They saw Him alive in Jerusalem, Emmaus, and Galilee. There is nothing dead about Jesus. There is life beyond Babylon and beyond the grave. What a risky investment. We have been purchased and won from sin, death, and the power of the devil, not with gold or 17 shekels of silver but with Jesus' holy precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death.

So that we may be His own forever. Empowered to invest our money and time and energy into this ministry. Bought in blood, we are not only called but we are also delighted to lose our shirts for Jesus. "And though the city will be handed over to the Babylonians, You, Lord God, say to me, 'Invest in the field.'" And Jeremiah did. And so will we, by God's grace. AMEN