

A Way of Hope

Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15

** 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.

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.’

** If you know just a handful of stories or verses from the book of Jeremiah, chances are you know a little about today’s passage, which describes Jeremiah’s purchase of a field.

As the chapter opens, we join Jeremiah “shut up in the court of the guard” (vs. 2)- which is a nice way to say that he was in jail! You can read the full story of his imprisonment in chapters 37 and 38, but in short, like so many other Biblical characters, he continued to speak God’s word openly, and as a result, he continually irritated the king (Zedekiah) and that’s how he found himself thrown into prison in the first place.

A Way of Hope

While there under guard, God 'visits him' and gives him a heads up concerning his cousin, Hanamel, who was on his way to sell Jeremiah a piece of the family's property.

So, even though the basic story of chapter 32 is fairly familiar to us, we don't get the full impact of it until we pay attention to the setting of this transaction. First of all, remember, this visitor is a relative. We last hear of Jeremiah's family all the way back in chapters 11 and 12 when Jeremiah learns of their plot to *kill him!* What we can infer from that is that it is doubtful that Hanamel has come to Jeremiah out of the kindness of his heart – more likely, what's really happening is that he's looking to make a buck and head for the hills!

And that is because of this second observation about the context of this story: you see, the *Babylonian invaders are camped on the land* Hanamel wants to sell to Jeremiah. So the family farm is swarming with angry Chaldeans who have been keeping themselves busy by killing, capturing, and deporting Judeans. (Location, location, location!)

Thirdly, Jeremiah is keenly aware of the coming exile and he has – as God's spokesman – warned about the 70-year period in which this piece of land is going to be nothing more than a desolate waste land.

And finally, the context here, again, is that Jeremiah is a condemned man and he's in prison. So, even if the land is useful, it is doubtful Jeremiah will ever see it, its doubtful that he will ever grow a single grain of wheat or graze a lamb or otherwise and make any use of it. In today's terms, if we're evaluating a business transaction, we might

A Way of Hope

certainly ask, "So, what's in it for me?" And the *practical* response to that would be...

"Nothing!" Nothing at all!

So what does Jeremiah do? (vs. 9)

*** ... so I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel and weighed out for him seventeen shekels of silver.*

This is likely the worst real estate transaction in the Old Testament! Jeremiah buys the field. Some other details are significant as well. Jeremiah goes through the entire legal process necessary for this kind of contract and then gives the documents to Baruch (his scribe, or secretary) for preservation.

So, the questions for *us* are these: why does Jeremiah buy this useless field and why does he preserve the documents? The answers to these questions are his message.

*** Look at verse 15*

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

Jeremiah does not buy the land for its immediate promise or for its investment potential, but he buys it in faith, hoping, trusting in God's promise that the land will someday again be populated and fruitful. Jeremiah believed that God was powerful enough to keep his promises, and he acted on his belief. This transaction literally makes no sense unless you truly believe that about God.

In commenting on this story, Eugene Peterson said that *all* Christian hope is an act. Hope is always expressed in actions. If we hope in God, the actions of our lives - the insignificant and the significant - will reflect our hope that God will accomplish His word. Jeremiah's act of hope was for his fellow Judean prisoners (vs. 12), for his future descendants who would again settle on this very piece of property, and for *us* who need to learn what it means to live a life of hope in God.

A Way of Hope

I read this week an awesome quote,

** *“Live your life in such a way that it makes no sense apart from the existence of God.”*

Jeremiah’s purchase of the land makes absolutely no sense unless God exists and is able to fulfill his promises to his people.

And it leads to questions like these: Does my life reflect that kind of hope? Does yours? Is it truly the case that the only way to explain our lives and our choices is to conclude that God exists and that He is faithful? Does my life make sense apart from that?

** Two weeks ago, in Karen Murray’s Christian Education message, she reminded us of the passage from 1 Corinthians 10: 13¹, (remember, where Paul reminds us that with every temptation God will provide a way of escape?) And she asked us, ‘what is our escape plan?’ In other words, how are we building into our lives the mechanisms needed to be able to discern those ‘ways out’ of temptations - (those decisions that will take us in the wrong direction)? Of course, that was an excellent Christian Education message because we build these things into our lives through application of God’s word, which we have studied, and applied, and ‘hidden in our hearts’.

** And in my message the week before that, we talked together about how all of our choices have consequences. Both of these messages had a similar theme, i.e., that there is a Way that leads to life, (and there is a way that leads to death) but *it is up to us to recognize which is which and choose the right way.*

¹ No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

A Way of Hope

Which means that the focus of life for a disciple of Jesus is to constantly be discerning *what God's way* is for *us*. Every choice, every decision, every priority – we consider, what does the ‘world’ suggest, vs. what choice best honors God? Sometimes the difference is clear cut, other times, it might require extra counsel, thought, prayer, study... but real disciples are committed to the ‘long haul’. It’s not simply a ‘one time choice’ – it is a lifetime of constant choices.

** I just took a week off which overlapped last weekend. Spent some quality time with my son and daughter in law, and also took some awesome Motorcycle rides (some with Dianna) in upstate New York, and Vermont –about 1200 miles total of beautiful scenery.

But, in order to get Dianna *and* the motorcycle in Ticonderoga at the same time, I had to ship her up on the train (its a 350+ mile ride, which she’s not interested in doing). So, anyway, last Wednesday, the day we returned, I dropped Dianna off at the Fort Edward Amtrak station (after an hour ride through some Adirondack fog at 48°! Brrrr!!), kissed her good- bye, and headed south to NJ.

I wasn’t absolutely sure how to get to the Northway (Rt. 87) from that station, so I punched in “Albany” to Google Maps on my iPhone, (which connects to my helmet via Bluetooth). I figured that once I was on 87 heading towards Albany, I could take it from there.

What I didn’t think about at that moment, was that as far as Google Maps was concerned, from that moment on, my *final* destination was Albany. Not Rt. 87 *close* to Albany, but *downtown* Albany. And I realized what was going to happen as soon as it

A Way of Hope

started telling me to ‘get off at the next exit’, and would read the sign to me. But I’d go by that exit... and then it would say, “Continue ___ miles to exit ___” and take *that* one.” And I, of course, kept passing them by – because I really didn’t want to go to Albany, but neither could I stop ‘the voice’ in my head while traveling at 70mph on a MC. (You think texting in a car is bad, (and it is) but that, friends, is even worse!)

After passing about eight exits, when it was truly starting to get ... annoying ... I came upon a pull-off that was labeled a ‘texting stop’ (what a great idea!). And I pulled in and turned Google Maps off.

But, then I started thinking about these past messages concerning ‘choices’ as well as this week’s message about Jeremiah buying the field, and suddenly, that ‘annoying voice’ became a beautiful illustration of how God guides us into the ‘way of Hope’.

See, once my destination was locked in – when I chose to say “this is where I want to end up”, that became the only thing that mattered, to Google Maps, and there were multiple opportunities to get there. So, if I missed one, there would be another. And another after that. Now, on the other hand, had I truly wanted to get to Albany, the *best* route would have been to take the *first* exit that was suggested. Every one I subsequently missed, frankly, would have made the trip to Albany just that much longer, and more complicated. But I think that this is part of the beauty of this illustration!

God’s design for our lives are the *best* for us. As I said a couple weeks ago, God’s purpose in giving us his commands and guidelines, is not to make us miserable, or to see how many hoops we will jump through for no reason other than his questionable

A Way of Hope

entertainment. God wants us not only to live, but to *thrive* - to have not just life, but *abundant life*.

** That's the 'goal' (that's Albany, if you can follow me). There is a way to get there, so God has a plan for us. Keep his commandments, live a life of giving and service, pray and worship regularly, study the Scripture, do things like this (we're going to talk about these things over the next number of weeks) - and we will find ourselves on the road to life and peace... and this entire road is the road of Hope. Because we *know* based on God's own faithfulness that we *will* get there. It's God's promise to us. And God is faithful.

If we miss an exit, he'll revise the plan, and we'll still get there... eventually. It's a beautiful thing!

** (blank) But one part of this picture that Jeremiah adds is a sobering reminder of the one aspect of this life of Christian discipleship that causes so many people to 'take themselves out' of the race. Jeremiah buys this ground, but as I mentioned, it was extremely unlikely that he would ever receive anything from it *for himself*.

For one thing, Jeremiah himself warned the nation of the coming exile, which was going to be 70 years. That's a long time. And Jeremiah is no longer young. When the Babylonian armies finally breach the walls of Jerusalem, they find that Jeremiah is gone – because he has been forcibly taken to Egypt – in direct defiance of the Word that God gave the people through Jeremiah. (That's the last we hear of Jeremiah, by the way. There are many traditions which follow, but the most likely is that he was stoned to

A Way of Hope

death in Egypt by his own countrymen.) [They just couldn't stop that voice...eh? *Take the next exit!*]

But, here's the thing... Jeremiah bought this field as a sign of hope. *But, it wasn't for him.* Now, let that sink in a bit. This says so much about what a life of following Jesus is like. One of his last public acts – buying this field – was a sign of Hope, but it was intended for many people who likely would not see its fulfillment, mostly it was for a people yet to come. To remind them all of God's faithfulness.

It was a powerful reminder to those who were exiled – not to *Egypt*, as the small group who took Jeremiah away were disobedient to God's word; they removed *themselves* from the Way – but to the ones who went to Babylon. As they 'sang the songs of the Lord in a foreign land', as they remembered the promises of God and the sequence of events that so humbled them as a once proud and powerful nation, bringing them to this place... don't you think they also remembered that back 'home'... back *home*, there was property. Officially signed for, paid for, sealed up... it was theirs. Waiting... Home!

When they thought about that, to me, *that* is the consummate picture of Biblical Hope. It is awaiting the promises of God to be fulfilled. It is waiting with full knowledge that these promises *may* or *may not* take place in our lifetime (at least in their entirety), but still, waiting with the confidence that God never goes back on his word. Waiting with a hope that causes us to *act* in ways that are significantly different from the world around us. A hope that leads to a life that without the existence of God would make no sense.

A Way of Hope

** At Christmas we often read from Luke's gospel the story of old Simeon blessing the baby Jesus in the temple courtyard. And he begins with words that have been persevered in the liturgy of the church ever since...

*"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace. . .
For my eyes have seen your salvation,*

Let's not forget, Simeon was old, and he had been waiting for this promise his entire life. But, generations before him had also waited, yet had not seen what Simeon saw. Nevertheless, theirs was the *same hope*.

Because they knew that God does not renege on his promises. God came to earth in Jesus Christ, and we killed him. Hope seemed to die. But he rose! And in that one act of God, all his promises to us took on depth and strength. Our hope is real.

On Easter Sunday 2009, our nation was reeling from events that many still have yet to recover from. The mortgage crisis was in full swing. The roller coaster nature of Wall Street was making everyone sick to their stomach. Long—trusted financial institutions were being shut down or bought out at an alarming rate. Unemployment rates skyrocketing.

Sensing heavy hearts in his congregation that Easter, John Ortberg, pastor of Menlo Park Presbyterian Church in Menlo Park, California, and author of a number of Christian books, offered a powerful reminder about the hope of Easter—a reminder that would serve us well still on this September Sunday 2013. Ortberg ended his message with these words:

A Way of Hope

** ...People have not gathered for the past 2,000 years to say, "The stock market has risen. It has risen indeed." They have not gathered to say, "The dollar has risen. It has risen indeed." Or, "the employment rate has risen." Or, "the gross domestic product has risen." Or, "General Motors has risen." Or, "The value of your 401(k) has risen." Here's the one hope that has held up human beings across every continent and culture for two millennia of difficult times of poverty, disease, pain, hardship, [and] death itself:

"Christ is risen. He is risen indeed."²

And in his resurrected glory, he invites us to 'follow him' into life... the way of hope.

Trusting that his promises are good, today, tomorrow and forever.

Amen.

² John Ortberg, in the sermon "Resurrection: Metaphor or Miracle?" Menlo Park Presbyterian Church (Menlo Park, CA) (preached 4-12-09)