

## **“Let’s Make a Deal”**

**Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15**

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It was not unusual for Jeremiah to do something out of the ordinary. Jeremiah was a prophet, and this is what prophets often did to drive home a point.

Even by Jeremiah’s standards, though, what he did while under house arrest in Jerusalem defied logic. Jeremiah’s fellow political prisoners had to laugh and make fun of him when he told them what he had done.

**What did Jeremiah do?** He bought a field in his hometown of Anathoth, three miles north of Jerusalem.

**Why was this so unusual?** People buy and sell property all the time. As a matter of fact, land has always been considered a wise investment. Why did Jeremiah’s friends and neighbors think it was unwise for him to purchase a field in his hometown?

For starters, he was an old man, and in all likelihood he would never set foot on the property or enjoy the benefits of it. By this time, Jeremiah’s health was declining.

He had been a prophet in Jerusalem over forty years, and this heavy responsibility of speaking truth to power had taken a toll on him. Jeremiah died the year after he purchased this land, reinforcing the people’s opinion of this decision.

Secondly, Jeremiah was under house arrest when he purchased this property, a political prisoner in his own country. King Zedekiah had Jeremiah arrested as a means of silencing him.

Zedekiah's attempts to mobilize the citizens of Jerusalem to rebel against the Babylonians occupying their land at that time met with stiff resistance from Jeremiah. He warned the leaders their resistance would be met with widespread bloodshed and devastation.

Zedekiah knew of Jeremiah's great influence on his people, so he had him arrested as a way of keeping him quiet. It appeared Jeremiah's arrest would end no time soon, making the land he purchased of no value to him.

Thirdly, at the time Jeremiah bought this field in Anathoth, it had been under Babylonian control for ten years. In 597 BCE, Nebuchadnezzar and his armies descended upon Jerusalem and took possession of the Temple, the city and all of Judah, including Anathoth.

As a result, Jeremiah's friends considered this patch of land he bought of little value to him or his family. As far as they were concerned, Jeremiah threw his money away.

**Knowing all of this, as Jeremiah did, why did he buy this field in Anathoth?** There were several reasons.

First and foremost, God told him to buy it. Twice Jeremiah mentioned that the word of the Lord came to him, indicating this deal was as implausible to him as anyone else. One gets the feeling Jeremiah was defending this decision even before telling his readers what he did. If Jeremiah was going to be faithful, he had no choice but to do what seemed illogical.

Also, if he was going to be faithful to his family, Jeremiah had to buy this land. For some reason, Hanamel needed money, and he appealed to Jeremiah to help him.

Perhaps the occupation of Judah by the Babylonians and the decrease in the local population due to the deportation undermined Hanamel's ability to make money. His debts might have been piling up, and the only way he could keep his creditors away was to sell this parcel of land.

"The right of possession and redemption is yours," Hanamel told Jeremiah. This is a reference to the legal provision that protects the family inheritance. The oldest living male had

a responsibility to keep the family's land intact, even if it meant he had to purchase it from another family member, which Jeremiah did.

There is another reason Jeremiah made this unusual deal. He was sending a message to the ten thousand Jews deported to Babylon that they would not always be exiles.

They would return to Jerusalem and rebuild their homes and businesses. Once again, they would farm the land and rear their children in a familiar environment.

God had a future for them beyond their Babylonian captivity, and Jeremiah had faith in that future. To demonstrate his faith, Jeremiah purchased a field in Anathoth that many considered a waste of money.

“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.’ For this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says, ‘Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land’.” (Jeremiah 32:14-15)

**What lessons can we glean from Jeremiah's words and actions?** I pondered this for some time last week. Let me share a few with you.

***When going through a tough time, think beyond your needs and desires.*** Even as you struggle with your own issues, be sensitive to the plight of others and listen to their stories. Respond to them with the same compassion and mercy you are seeking.

You may not be able to do everything you would do under better circumstances, but do what you can. There is never a time when you have lost everything, so share what you have left.

I have to believe Jeremiah's compassion and generosity helped not only his cousin, but lifted his own spirits. Responding to someone else's needs proved to be the most effective medicine he needed the last year of his life. I believe compassion and generosity can do the same for us.

***Invest in the future, yours and others'.*** Take advantage of every opportunity to make life better for those who will remain after you are gone.

I often encourage people to invest their lives in something bigger than they are that will outlive them. Instead of buying more things you do not need, support the people and organizations that will fulfill God's dreams for the world.

Jeremiah did not buy this land for his own benefit. He purchased it for the welfare and benefit of others, including people who had not yet been born.

All of us can do this now by the way we use our money and in the future by the way we write our wills. Let your influence be felt for generations to come by investing your resources in the future.

**Finally, always balance criticism with hope, judgment with mercy and disappointment with encouragement.** Jeremiah did.

When you read the first twenty-nine chapters of Jeremiah, you hear stern words of criticism and harsh pronouncements of judgment for the leaders of Judah. Jeremiah was terribly disappointed in the way these authority figures arranged their values and priorities and lived their lives. It was obvious to Jeremiah they were far more concerned about their own welfare than the welfare of the people God called them to serve.

Repeatedly, Jeremiah called them to repent and to return to living by the covenant God made with Abraham and Moses. He warned them if they did not, their land would be destroyed, and their people would become exiles in a foreign land.

After this happened in 597BCE, Jeremiah's tone and message changed. Gone were the critical and judgmental words. Beginning with chapter 30, Jeremiah's message was one of hope.

His voice was filled with compassion, mercy, encouragement and the assurance that the Babylonians would not have the final word in their lives. God would, and that word would be a good one.

Jeremiah never left people hopeless, feeling all was lost. He carefully balanced honesty and hope. Yes, the exiles would live in Babylon for several decades and generations, which was why they needed to get on with their lives and make the most of a bad situation, but they would not be there forever. Just as God led Abraham's descendants out of Egypt, God would lead these exiles out of Babylon.

Follow Jeremiah's example. Never let bad news be the final news you share with someone. In ancient Israel, grief was always linked to hope, as it should be with us.

A couple of weeks ago, four of our grandchildren visited us during Fall Break. They range in age from eight to thirteen. We had a great time with them, as we always do.

One day for lunch, I took them to Wallace Station and we ate on the deck out back. We had so much fun on a beautiful fall day.

When some people at another table were leaving, they dropped by to speak to me for a moment. The kids had gone to play horseshoes as I was finishing things up at the table. They bragged on how courteous the kids were and what good manners they had. I told them I was completely responsible for their good behavior, which they knew was not true.

I didn't tell them about an incident that occurred the night before. Seems Robey said something to Jack that upset him, so Jack slammed his elbow into Robey's chest, sending Robey to the floor in pain. While Robey should not have said what he did, Jack's reaction was overboard and dangerous.

I examined Robey to make sure he was going to be all right and then talked to him about calling someone a bad name. I encouraged him to own up to his mistake and apologize to Jack for insulting him.

Then, I sat Jack down and talked to him about how dangerous it was to hit someone so hard in the chest. "You could have hurt Robey worse than you did," I told him. "Is this really what you wanted to do?" Think about what you would like to say to Robey later tonight.

A few minutes later, Robey was up walking and feeling much better. Jack did not come around, though.

I went upstairs and saw him lying on the bed under the sheet, blanket and bedspread. He was completely covered and not coming out.

I laid down beside him and rubbed his back, which was probably hard for him to feel under all those covers. I began talking about how I felt when I was eight years old and did things I should not have done.

I shared two or three stories that were similar to his. Then I told him some things I learned from those experiences.

“Most of all,” I said, “I realized my parents still loved me even though I had done something wrong. They were disappointed in me and frustrated with me, but they did not hold it over my head and lose faith in me. They still wanted me to be a part of our family and did everything they needed to do to help me learn how to handle my anger and move on from my guilt or shame.”

It wasn't long before Jack's head popped out from under the covers. He wanted to know if I really did shoot my brother with a BB gun.