

Rev. Timothy Tutt
Pastor, United Christian Church
Austin, Texas
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“God and Donald Trump”

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the tenth year of King Zedekiah of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. At that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and the prophet Jeremiah was confined in the court of the guard that was in the palace of the king of Judah, where King Zedekiah of Judah had confined him. Zedekiah had said, “Why do you prophesy and say: Thus says the LORD: I am going to give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it; King Zedekiah of Judah shall not escape out of the hands of the Chaldeans, but shall surely be given into the hands of the king of Babylon, and shall speak with him face to face and see him eye to eye; and he shall take Zedekiah to Babylon, and there he shall remain until I attend to him, says the LORD; though you fight against the Chaldeans, you shall not succeed?” Jeremiah said, The word of the LORD came to me: Hanamel son of your uncle Shallum is going to come to you and say, “Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours.” Then my cousin Hanamel 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. And I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver. I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales. Then I took the sealed deed of purchase, containing the terms and conditions, and the open copy; and I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah son of Mahseiah, in the presence of my cousin Hanamel, 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. In their presence I charged Baruch, saying, Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware jar, in order that they may last for a long time. For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.
-- *Jeremiah 32: 1-3a, 6-15*

The Bible is a very complicated book. It was written over hundreds of years by many different authors. Sometimes you can't keep all the characters straight – in today's passage there are names like Jeremiah, Zedekiah, Nebuchadnezzar, Hanamel, Shallum, Baruch. It's hard to know who is who. There are also all of those places – Judah, Babylon, Chaldea, Anathoth. It's confusing.

But the Bible is important. So, what I've done is prepare a chart for you to follow along. If you'll look in your bulletin inserts, you'll find a piece of paper that says, “God and Donald Trump” in big letters. It has three columns.

I would like for you to look at that piece of paper and follow along as we take a trip through this scripture passage.

First of all, the column on the left is the scripture passage. The middle column is a synopsis of the passage – sort of a “Cliff’s Notes” version or “Jeremiah for Dummies.”

The column on the right I’ve labeled “Reflection on the Scripture.” There are five points that I think we need to know -- five points that can have an impact on your life and mine.

The story starts in 587 BCE. King Zedekiah is on the throne in Judah. Judah is the southern half of Israel. The country had been one kingdom under David and Solomon, but had split in two. So, Zedekiah is the King of Judah. Judah is invaded by the country of Babylon. In 587 BCE, the Babylonians came riding across the Middle East conquering every country in sight.

In telling this story, the writer of Jerusalem is very clear to include all of these details – all of these names and events. I think the writer of Jeremiah did this as a way to say that God is in the midst of time. God is not sitting off in heaven watching, munching on Snickers bars while we go about our lives. God is in the details of our lives. Another way to say that would be to say: God cares how you and I live; God cares about us.

So, verse 2 says that Judah is being invaded by Babylon. The prophet Jeremiah was a citizen of Judah. And, in the middle of this invasion, he criticizes his own country. It’s interesting to note that Jeremiah doesn’t criticize the enemy. He criticizes his own country. So King Zedekiah throws Jeremiah in jail for treason – he is speaking badly about his country during a time of war. That is an interesting point for us to consider since we live in a country at war. How do we disagree? How do we treat dissenters? What do God’s prophets have to say about war?

King Zedekiah’s answer was to throw Jeremiah in jail. That’s verse 3. And, it is while he’s in jail that God speaks to Jeremiah.

Verse 6 says, “The word of the LORD came to me.” Jeremiah was in jail. And God spoke. That’s a reminder that God is with us in the worst of times. During bouts of depression, during times of grief, in pain, in illness, in prisons, God is there.

Verse 7 is where this story gets more confusing. In verse 7, God tells Jeremiah to buy land from his cousin, Hanamel. In verse 8, Hanamel shows up and says to Jeremiah, “Buy this field that I own near Anathoth.” Verses 9 through 15 go into great detail of this real estate transaction. I’ve called this sermon, “God and Donald Trump” because Trump is a real estate magnate – that’s how he made his fortune. This passage is about a real estate deal.

There’s an important idea here. In this passage, God uses a symbol, but it also shows an important idea – God cares about business and money. God cares about economics.

Over and over in the Bible, there are words that God is concerned about your money and my money. “Support the widow and the stranger,” the Bible says. “Give the first tenth of your crops as an offering.” “Use true weights and measures in your dealings.” “Blessed are the poor,” Jesus said. “Sell all you have and give the money away,” Jesus said. In hundreds of ways, the Bible reminds us that God is interested in our money. And God is interested in how much you are interested in your money. That’s all symbolized in this story.

So, Jeremiah, understanding the importance of money and financials transactions, goes through with this deal. He buys the land from his cousin. Then in verse 14, Jeremiah puts the real estate documents in a jar. For Jeremiah, an earthen jar was the equivalent of a safe deposit box. That’s how people kept documents secure.

The point of protecting these papers was so future generations would know about this transaction. Remember all of this took place in the middle of a terrible war. The Babylonians were destroying Jerusalem. Land had absolutely no value, but Jeremiah was buying it. It would have been like trying to sell a farm in Virginia in the Middle of the Civil War or trying to sell a shop in Berlin in 1944.

But Jeremiah bought the land and put the documents in jar so that people sometime in the future would look back and say, “Hey, even in the middle of a terrible conflict, this guy name Jeremiah had enough faith to buy land.”

Jeremiah was acting on faith. Patrick Miller, who was a professor at Princeton Seminary, in thinking about this passage, said, “The story of Israel and of the church is continually one of being called to bet on the future. Betting on the future is a risky act of trust and hope. Christian hope goes against common sense and against the tides of human affairs. Christian hope is always in relation to the promises of the One who shapes the future. Faith bets against the future because it knows that God controls the future.”

When Jeremiah bought this land and put the papers in a jar, he was looking beyond himself. He was looking beyond his own time. He was look to a new day.

The story of this real estate transaction ends with a beautiful sentence, “For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.’ ”

With this transaction, Jeremiah was saying, “God does not want us to live in conflict and fighting. God wants us to live in peace. God wants us to lead good, kind, ordinary, everyday lives where the regular routines of life take place.”

God is with us in the details of our life. God is with us in times of trouble. God cares how we spend our money. God cares how we live our lives. And God says that war and worry are not the purposes of our lives. God does not want us to live with trials and tribulations. In this passage, God paints for us a picture of peace.

Quoting Patrick Miller again, “The social vision of restoration in Chapter 32 [of Jeremiah] is not to be missed. God’s future sets forth a detailed picture of renewal that takes place in social and economic ways. The vision of God’s future and of God’s blessing that permeates the scriptures is spiritual, interior and personal—and richly material, life-enhancing, socially sustaining and enjoyable.”

God gives us hope. Thanks be to God. Amen.