

## **Jeremiah 32:1-44; Text, 32:6-15**

### ***Preface:***

Last week we talked about the way God's promise through Jeremiah of a "New Covenant" came through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. There were other promises made in Jeremiah 31 that we could have talked about, but what's really significant about them is the way that they follow the first promise God made, which wasn't a nice one. It was a promise that Babylon would come and Judah would be exiled. So these nice promises follow the first: The exile of Judah is certain. It's a given. So now what, right? And the "now what," as far as 31 32, other chapters of Jeremiah go, is that God is going to make sure Israel isn't exiled forever. They'll be returned to Jerusalem, to Judah. God's promises to Abraham will persist past exile. Exile may be a given, but before that God made promises to Abraham that nothing people can do will keep God from bringing about. God will restore Israel; God's promised it, and God's People should expect it. The promise that exiles should return is what today's passage is about.

Let's pray, and we'll talk about that passage.

## **Prayer:**

### **The Scene:**

**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.’**

Some back story here. Jeremiah is from Anathoth. It's his hometown. And it's a Levitical city, given to the priests as their share in the Promised Land of Canaan. It's not far north of Jerusalem. But what's more important than that is that Babylon really did a number on Anathoth. We know from Nehemiah, from Ezra, that only 128 men from there returned from Babylonian exile. And it's more than likely that they were exiled in the first exile, and it seems like what's happening here is that Hanamel is coming to Jeremiah

and forcing him to buy what's essentially a useless, inaccessible field that Babylon's might even have, like soldiers camping on or something. Hanamel knows he can cash out the field, and goes for it, and if it wasn't for God telling Jeremiah to do this, he wouldn't.

But God did tell Jeremiah to do this.

### **Actions:**

***“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[b] 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.'***

Baruch, by the way, is a hero. He's Jeremiah's scribe, his, oh, personal agent, his secretary. He's a real hero of faith. You know he is, because way later some wrote a book that pretended to be by him, which didn't make it in Scripture because it was weird. But, still: Faithful hero.

### ***Speech-Act:***

This whole field thing is really a prophetic speech-act, a sign meant to speak to Judah, and reveal the truth that "Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land," as God declares.

People will come back. Fields will matter. Hanamel was looking to make a buck off a worthless plot of land an Empire had taken over; God says that field isn't worthless, it has value, and the Empire will disappear from Judah's life. (This is why I ordered a t-shirt that says "Don't be a Hanamel!")

Jeremiah's sign gives teeth to the hope that he's been speaking. It challenges the pragmatic short-sightedness of Hanamel, which is really a hope-less response, a response without any hope in it. But focus on the hope Jeremiah shows, here. Without hope Jeremiah really is a sucker, Hanamel made a few bucks, and the land is utterly worthless. Jeremiah actually claims the future in the actions taken today; the pot, the deed, the burial, it's an act that says that what God declares will be true will be true. Jeremiah--and Baruch's--actions here embody hope.

And of course, trust stands behind hope, right? Especially this act of hope, which depends on trusting that God will keep the promise God is making to bring Israel back. Hanamel certainly doesn't trust God here; he trusts his own hustle.

For those of us of faith, trust lies at the heart of hope.

### ***Romans:***

Paul knew this. At the end of Romans, after his long, beautiful, complex argument about how the Gentiles fit into God's Promises--even promises that Jeremiah made. He references Jeremiah 31, last week's

passage, in Romans, too--Paul says this, in his last word of blessing: ***“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”***

### ***Firm Place:***

In context, Paul's just saying this: We gentiles, we non-Jews, finally can live for God and not ourselves. We really couldn't before Jesus, you know? Before New Covenant came around. Because of Jesus our hope can settle somewhere that's stable and permanent and safe: we don't have to hope in our resources--whether those are skills or training, money or other resources, "who we know" relationships, or skilled deceit and manipulation. Our hope is secure. And it's secure because hope, for us, means trusting "the God of hope." We are hoping in someone who is stable, who is trustworthy, who keeps promises. Our hope isn't in things that fade, it's in a person who persists, God.

And this means things for us. It means so many things for us. It means we can grieve well, when we are faced with loss, because we know that grieving is okay and that loss, Christian loss, is never permanent.

It means that we can live among others in a way that is confident and compassionate no matter the level of sadness or confusion about life that we may feel.

And it means that we can risk in this life in ways that non-Christians cannot ever risk. The Holy Spirit who lives in and among us gives us hope, and hope bears in us joy that is unrelated to circumstances--a pleasure that has nothing to do with how bad things are--and peace that doesn't make any sense--a calmness and certainty in the face of great trouble. Our trust in God--that God has never failed us and will not let us or those we love crash and burn in the hard moments we face--that's something that helps us to risk. And to risk in a very specific way: risk all the self-protective mechanisms we have learned to live with.

I mean, life teaches us not to share with others, because they'll hurt us, not to trust others, because they'll betray our trust, not depend on others, because they'll disappoint us, and not to make room for others needs as we try to meet our own. Trusting that God has given us the Church to depend on and has given us the Holy Spirit and will help us to not just live with peace and joy and wide hope no matter what, but to act on them--that's a different sort of way to be alive

that most people ever get to experience.

I don't know how each of us are doing in this area? I don't know how we are each trusting God. I don't know what we're putting our hope in. Frankly, we're all tempted right now to put our hope in scientific wonders, in good strategic plans, in financial balance sheets. A pandemic, and the ways we people figure out how to overcome it, causes our hope to shift easily from the God who is trustworthy to things that come and go.

I don't know how we are not trusting God, and what we each need to increase our trust, or where in each of our lives "overflowing hope" is being felt.

If we lack trust, we do need to do one thing, though, which is to remember what Jeremiah has been saying to us in these recent chapters: God will not abandon His People. This clay jar, buried in a field commandeered by Babylon proves it. Paul's argument in Romans proves it: God never, ever gave up on humanity, never gave up on providing a rescue from sin and death for us. Never abandoned the New Covenant promise that Jeremiah made.

God's faithfulness stretches back to well before we were born, and right up to the present moment in our lives--and in our group life. God has been faithful and will be faithful to us, and we can put our trust in him, and live with hope and the wonderful derivative stuff that Paul mentions in Romans--Joy, Peace, more hope to pass around buffet-style.

### ***Actions:***

To trust the God of Hope that Paul and Jeremiah knew meant different things to each of them. For Jeremiah, it meant being the anti-Hanemal, committing his energy, his finances, his time, and his public honor to a future that God promised, putting a clay jar in the ground. For Paul, it meant realizing his life was like a clay-jar full of treasure, a jar that God would protect because of how valuable he was to God, no matter the hardships Paul faced, the threat of being broken. And behind this, of course, to face those hardships.

What hope looks like for a person of faith is taking action. What hope looks like for a person of faith is acting. Because we trust that God will keep promises to us, will see us through this present moment, we act in line with the future we believe God is guiding us toward. Again, we act in line with the future we

believe God is guiding us toward. We do right, because we believe in the future we will be done right by--by God who is with us. We choose to act faithfully now--in very particular, personalized ways, and in broad, general ways--because we know that the trust that Jeremiah and Paul knew.

We and those around us have experienced God's faithfulness. Jeremiah trusted in the God who offered him a particular hope: That Israel would return from Exile. Paul trusted in a particular, hope, too: That Jesus would return, and God's promises even to Jeremiah would be finally fulfilled. I don't know how many particular, personal promises God has made to us, but I know that God has made many promises to His People about what we can expect in this life and what we look forward to in the life to come. And just frankly, we are hopeful people. Every time we invite prayer, we're saying, in effect, "Hope with me that God will bring about what I hope God will bring about."

But, again Hope is not an internal "tilt of the will," but activity. Faithful hope is not a noun, but a verb. To "hope so," but not do anything is to simply "wish." Hope invites activity--whether it is praying, or watching and waiting, or choosing to do this or that

thing. To hope is to bring something more than our interior feelings to bear.

So if we ask ourselves what we hope for, we have to ask ourselves, too, how is our internal hope affecting the posture we take and the choices we make? How is our internal hope changing our behavior?

Hope, once it is realized, will be followed by something. If what we hope for comes about, then something else will follow it. Not a surprise: This is how time works. There's a dot on a timeline, a moment, and then, all the time that spreads out afterward. Hope isn't a period, it's an ellipse. And, really, whatever it is we're hoping for right now, there will be life after it. We all get to live, must live, past the other side of hope coming true.

### ***Negative Hope:***

I mention this because there is a way of hoping for something that can consume us, overwhelm our long-term thinking, distract us from the reality that whatever comes, we'll have to persist past it, live past it, if we live at all. A particular hope can become an idol, a thing that sucks all our attention and energy and power into it, and then when it is realized in some

way or another, we're left deflated, unsure how to move forward or what to do with ourselves. If all God's People lived for in Jeremiah was return from Exile, but not life after returning, then what's the point of the return? If all Paul wanted to do was survive his troubles, what's the point of survival without life on its other side? It's very easy to mistake hoping for something in our lives as the purpose of life itself. We can get so wrapped up in some thing happening, some hope being realized, that we live for it. And when it comes to pass, if it comes to pass, we're left unprepared for the day after and the day after that. If hope is more than an internal bent of our will, an internal desire, but is a verb that causes us to act and do and live in certain ways, if all we end up hoping for is this or that thing to happen--this new job, that retirement, this moment in our child's life or our parent's life or our company's life--if all we're doing is living for that hope, then we've functionally given up on preparing to embrace every good thing that might come after it.

We may have been acting toward some future we hope to see, doing all sorts of things that line up with the hope we want realized, but along the way forgotten the trust that sits at hope's heart. We may

have forgotten “God of hope” who will see us through on the other side of hope being realized or unrealized. We can live with hope, but we can’t live for it. We live for the God who who died and lives again for us.

### ***Conclusion:***

So what are we hoping for? And how in our lives are we revealing that hope in the choices and behaviors and postures we take? What are we hoping for? And how in our lives are we revealing that hope in the choices and behaviors and postures we take? What are you doing with your hope?

And has hope for something eclipsed living well? Has our hope for some good thing caused us to neglect the fact that there’ll be a tomorrow after it, if it comes about, and that tomorrow will be just as important as the day our hope was realized? Are we living just for a particular thing to come to pass? Because if we are, we’re giving up on all sorts of things that are necessary for a good life on the other side of hope.

Has our hope for something eclipsed our trust in the God who makes promises and sees them through? If we could lose God, but get that one thing, would we? And if our answer is a knee-jerk, “No way!” but our

actions reveal something else, then let's pay attention to that. Because to hope is to act, to have a hope is to do something faithful, whether that's buying a field or persisting through troubles, knowing the God of Hope will not forsake us.

Lastly: If we're hopeless, if we no longer have whatever it takes to trust God, or even others who are trying to trust God, and we don't have the energy to imagine a future that doesn't exist or an intimacy with the Spirit that surprises us with God's goodness--if we're hopeless, I mean--then please just let someone know. That's an act of faith itself; an act of hope. If we can pull that off, we're well on our way to a better future.