

Jeremiah 32:1-15
Field of Dreams
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I don't know about you, but there are a few pieces of popular culture that have just become synonymous with periods of my life. One example from my childhood was the movie Field of Dreams. As you may have gathered already, I really like baseball. I like watching it, I like reading about it, and I LOVE to play it. And thanks to this movie, I even love to romanticize or wax philosophical about the game. As a kid I dreamt of and about baseball.

Which is why this next clip is so poignant. Iowa Farmer Ray Kinsella, whose troubled relationship with his father, and his love for the game of baseball, particularly Shoeless Joe Jackson, leads him to see a vision of a field, more specifically a baseball field in the middle of his Corn Field where a baseball team and his relationship with his dad might be redeemed. But to those around him, even his in-laws this dream makes no earthly sense.

Clip

We're in a series of messages time in between. In between the events and experiences of life and when we are able to understand their meaning in God's grand purposes. The Apostle Paul uses the metaphor of looking through dim or foggy glass. We can see in part, but the promise is that because Jesus Christ is making all things new, though we see in part now, one day we will see clearly. And so, until that day, the day of Christ Jesus, we live in between times, we live in tension.

This morning we read of another man who bought a field in the midst of unimaginable circumstances. For Jeremiah, buying the field at Anathoth even as the Babylonian army—Israel's captor—was camped upon it, ready to finish leveling Jerusalem made even less sense than plowing up corn to build a baseball field. But this is how dreams behave, they give us access to vision and insight that's not always available to us.

So I invite you to open with me to Jeremiah 32, beginning at verse 1.

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. ²At 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. ³For 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; ⁴Zedekiah 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. ⁵And he shall take Zedekiah to Babylon, and there he shall remain until I visit him, declares the Lord. Though you fight against the Chaldeans, you shall not succeed?'"

⁶Jeremiah said, "The word of the Lord came to me: ⁷Behold, 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.' ⁸Then 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. ¹³ I charged Baruch in their presence, saying, ¹⁴ ‘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 vessel, that they may last for a long time. ¹⁵ For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.’

Now by way of a brief introduction, Israel has been in a long period of evil kings who have abandoned God’s word and leading, desecrated the city of Jerusalem with idols and pagan cult worship, and have forsaken the leadership of their people. The bible says time after time, with regards to these Kings, “they did what was right in their own eyes.” Gone are the glory days of Israel’s Kings David and Solomon.

Jeremiah is a young man—probably not more than 17 or 18 years old—was born during the last decade of the most cruel and godless king in Israel’s history. Manasseh did more to defile and dismantle the presence Yahweh in Israel than any other king before him. For Manasseh, there was seemingly no bottom to his pit of evil and cruelty--and this went on for 55 years. In 2 Kings 21:9 the historian writes: **“Manasseh led them off the beaten path into practices of evil even exceeding the evil of the pagan nations that God had earlier destroyed.”**

This young prophet Jeremiah receives a word from God telling him, **“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations. “Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord. “Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.”**

17 years old, can you imagine being told this at 17?

Well, plea after plea from the Prophets, and now Jeremiah’s as well, went ignored, until finally God’s judgment came. In 597 BC Babylonian armies rolled in and captured the city, taking its leaders and most of its people off into exile. But, to add insult to injury, there was a small population of leftovers remaining in Jerusalem—people of so little consequence, it didn’t matter if they were taken or not.

And because Prophets are not always the most popular among their peers, even the overlooked and outcast, Jeremiah was put under house arrest in the palace of the king of Judah. In this prison—which was a kind of loose confinement in the palace court, where he had access to visitors—Jeremiah did what at the time must have seemed absolutely insane: he bought a field. And not even

a terribly impressive one, he bought a seventeen-dollar field, three miles east of Jerusalem in a place called Anathoth.

And what made this deal even crazier was that at the very moment Jeremiah was signing the purchase agreement, the Babylonian armies were camped on the very same property. Jeremiah was in prison with no prospects of getting out. The enemy was about to break down their doors, and at that moment Jeremiah bought a field. A field he would never till, a field on which he would never plant a single grapevine or olive tree, a field Jeremiah may never even see.

Why in the world would he do this? He did it for the most wonderful of reasons—he did it because Jeremiah was a dreamer. Jeremiah believed that all the trouble and all the heartache, all of the persecution they were experiencing was actually part of God’s plan to restore and redeem their land. Jeremiah bought this property believing that God was already preparing Israel for their come-back story, and he was getting it ready for God’s next building project.

What I love about Jeremiah, and am coming to appreciate more and more about this prophet, is that he didn’t rub it in Israel’s nose after his prophecies came true. When his community members were carried off, he didn’t say: “See, I told you guys, and did you listen? No.” Jeremiah had no ego to inflate. Jeremiah is a dreamer, all he wants to see is his people’s life with God restored and renewed and for the people of Israel to know who they are, and whose they are.

Instead of speaking a word of judgement, Jeremiah speaks a word of hope, Jeremiah prophecies a wonderful dream. What has happened to Israel is judgement, yes, and it is harsh. But it is God’s judgement, and God’s judgement in the Old Testament is always for a greater purpose, it is always for the restoration of Israel. This is Yahweh’s chastening, now begin to prepare yourselves for a time in which you will emerge from this dark place alive. Doom and gloom never have the last word, they are always being used for redemptive purposes.

Eugene Peterson puts it this way: “Judgement is necessary because of centuries of hardheadedness; its work is to open our hearts to the reality beyond ourselves, to crack the shell of self-sufficiency so that we can experience the inrushing grace of the healing, merciful, and forgiving God.”

Importance of Dreams

When Jeremiah’s cousin Hanamel came to him with this offer, it was, at the time, as ridiculous as being offered an acre of property on Mars. In no world does this make any logical sense. And instead of Jeremiah saying, “You know Hanamel, I’m not really talking about a physical field for planting, I’m talking about your interior life, you heart.” But he didn’t do that, because he knew the value of dreams.

We know about dreams too. You know about dreams, because God has given each of you a dream. And I’m not talking about the dream of owning a nice car or a boat, or even the dream of becoming a pro ballplayer when you’re 38 with rickety knees. I’m talking about the kind of dreams that are born from a much deeper place, the kinds that spring out of the very marrow of our beings. Dreams that envision life and families and communities differently. These are God-breathed and God-sized dreams.

Jeremiah knew how risky it was to buy the field, it ran counter to history, counter to reason and counter to logic. He didn’t buy the field on the advice of a broker, he bought it by the move of the

Holy Spirit. But even still he couldn't help but see the overwhelming odds that were against him. But this is the way it is with God-sized dreams, dreams that are worthy of your life. We can't face them or accomplish them on our own, we will only ever see the meaning and make the investment as we do so with God, on our knees in prayer.

The risk of dreaming

But there is a serious risk to dreaming, it's a part of the tension we face putting our faith in God. Jeremiah faced it too. There was a serious risk that Jeremiah would never see the fulfillment of his investment.

I get this, this is a hard truth for me to accept right now, because I'm living this risk. By now probably most of you are aware or have heard about a sign planted in the ground in front of our house, it reads: FOR SALE. Well what you may not know are is that the sign no longer reads FOR SALE, but SOLD. Now, being the walking rumor mill that I am lately, I want to assure you that we are not leaving, actually quite the contrary, we are moving across the river, and closer to church. Actually just up North Miami Street from this place.

But what you also may not know is that this move began years ago with a dream, Amy's dream. Recovering from surgery after surgery, Amy began to feel a longing for us to move to a home that could be a place where our children and our family would flourish in the next season of life, her comeback story. Where we could extend hospitality to neighbors and people in our community, that our home could be a place where God's love could be tangibly felt and experienced, not only in our kids, but for anyone who needed a touch of it.

That dream did not come to fruition in her lifetime, and this week has been acutely painful for that reason. But that doesn't mean that when the owner is no longer here, that the dream is gone too. All the great dreams are like this, they capture the attention of others and catch fire, spreading wildly. Dreams like Martin Luther King Jr.'s that is still coming to pass—sometimes slower than we would hope. The dreams of many of you in this church, that one day there would be the sound of little feet and little voices once again. Dreams of families and a community that is no longer in the destructive grip of addiction. These are the kind of dreams that live forwardly, but at the risk of not being fully realized in one person's life.

The Apostle Paul will later write in 1 Corinthians 3:6: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth." We plant, another may water, but it's always God who causes our dreams to become the beautiful reality of what God once planted in our hearts.

Living in Hope

Buying the field at Anathoth was an act of hope for Jeremiah. Nebuchadnezzar's army has only last job to do, to destroy the Jerusalem and carry off the remaining people to captivity. Jeremiah can see that it's going to get worse before it gets better. But even still, he hears the word of the Lord saying:

Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me? I am giving this city into the hands of the Chaldeans. Then in verse 37 he begins to speak hope into their future: **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, I will make them dwell in safety. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. 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.

Jeremiah is receiving a word of hope in a desperate time. William Stringfellow writes: Hope is reliance upon grace in the face of death: the issue is that of receiving life as a gift, not as a reward and not as a punishment; hope is living constantly, patiently, expectantly, resiliently, joyously in the efficacy of the word of God.

Hope is buying into what we believe. Or to paraphrase the great line from Field of Dreams: “If you buy it, they will come.” Action rooted in hope, the dreams God plants in your life and mine, becoming the future into which God is leading us. And what the world needs now is most certainly dreamers of dreams worthy of their lives.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, let’s pray...