

August 2, 2026

The Prophet Jeremiah
X. Buying a Field in Anathoth
Jeremiah 32:1-15

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“Jeremiah said, The word of the Lord came to me: Behold, 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.’” But buying that field would be about the most impractical, absurd, crazy, irrational, and unrealistic thing Jeremiah could ever possibly do. One, because Jeremiah was currently in jail deep in the bowels of the king’s palace in Jerusalem, with little hope of release. King Zedekiah had gotten fed up with Jeremiah prophesying that the Babylonian Empire would soon conquer Jerusalem – and so had put him in prison. And two, because the Babylonian Empire was currently doing just exactly that – laying siege to Jerusalem, which soon would fall. Which means that, three, that field in Anathoth currently had Babylonian soldiers camped out on it, most likely having destroyed already every olive tree and grapevine and blade of wheat to be found on that property. So, again, for Jeremiah to buy that field in Anathoth – from jail, with the Babylonian army besieging Jerusalem and camped out on that property – would be just about the most impractical, absurd, crazy, irrational, and unrealistic thing he could ever possibly do.

Unless . . . unless God really was in control of the situation. Unless God really was the One who held all power. Unless God really was the One who ultimately holds the future. Unless God, and not Babylon, was the most important reality with which Jeremiah, and Israel, had to deal. Unless the essential reality, the most important thing above all other things, was not that Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, or even that Jeremiah was in prison – but that God was working out His plan for salvation, not in spite of Babylon, but even through Babylon. If those things were true, then for Jeremiah not to buy that land in Anathoth would actually be the most impractical, crazy, absurd, irrational, and unrealistic thing for him to do.

And so it is for us as well. If God really was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself; if God really is, even now, at work in this world bringing all things round to good; if God really is preparing the way even now for His Kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven; if God truly is both the creator of our lives and the One to whom we go at our life’s end – then the most impractical, absurd, crazy, irrational, and unrealistic thing for us to do is to live our lives with this world only in view. To live our lives solely on the basis of what this world considers to be practical, realistic, not crazy. Impractical, absurd, crazy, irrational, and unrealistic to live our lives as if none of that God-stuff has anything to do with how we live our lives on a daily basis. To live our lives as if the Penthouse, and not the Father’s house¹, was life’s highest reward.

So, as one Christian puts it:

*If you really do believe that everything belongs to God;
 if you really have received grace because what Jesus did on the
 Cross, He did for you;
 if you have ever received assurance that your sins are forgiven;
 if you really have received the promise that you are going to live
 with God in Heaven forever one day;
 if you really have been given the Holy Spirit to dwell in your heart;
 if you really have been given the Scriptures to guide you;
 if you really have been given a church where you can be known and
 loved;
 if you really have been given spiritual gifts so that you can know
 significance and meaning –
 then Jesus says,
 Get at least as intentional and fired up as some guy who's living his
 whole life just to pile up a bunch of stuff that's going to be
 discounted at a garage sale or on eBay five minutes after he dies.
 Get at least that fired up for Jesus.²*

Because to live in any other way – would just simply be impractical, absurd, crazy, irrational, and unrealistic.

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For Jeremiah to buy that land in Anathoth while he was in prison and the Babylonian army was besieging Jerusalem would truly be impractical, absurd, crazy, irrational, and unrealistic – unless. Unless faith is not merely about believing in God, but about trusting in God. About trusting in God enough to obey God, to do what God tells you to do. Unless faith is not merely about belief in God but about obedience to the Word of God – about being willing to put your money where your mouth is, so to speak. God tells Jeremiah to buy that land, and he does so – literally puts his money where his mouth is. Because Jeremiah understands that not to do what God tells you to do, not to put your belief into practice, not to put your money where your mouth is – that that is, in fact, the course of action which is truly impractical, absurd, crazy, irrational, and unrealistic. And so also for we who believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord, as well as our Savior.

Imagine a conversation between two friends, one of whom is named Pete, and Pete is afraid to fly. First friend says:

“What do you mean you’re afraid to fly? Don’t you believe in planes?”

“Yes,” Pete answers, “I do believe in planes.”

“Do you believe they fly?”

“Yes, I see them in the air almost every day,” he responds.

“Do you acknowledge that planes rarely crash and that you are far more likely to get hurt in a car crash, hit by lightning or attacked by a shark than be in a plane crash?”

“Yes,” Pete replies.

“Okay. Then let’s go to the airport.”³

They go to the airport. Imagine Pete and his friend checking in at the counter, removing their shoes at security, walking down the terminal to their gate. All is going well. Their flight is called, and with boarding passes in hand they approach the gate agent. They walk down the connector toward the door of the plane. And just at the threshold of the plane itself, Pete freezes and will go no further. In that moment, what is clear is that Pete doesn’t really believe in airplanes, or flying, after all. He can give mental assent to airplanes and to flying, but he is unwilling to commit his life to what he says that he believes.⁴

What about us? Back when we were reading through the Gospel of John, Jesus said to us and to the Pharisees: *“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.”⁵* It was Jesus who also warned us, saying, *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”⁶* So for us, as for Jeremiah, the most impractical, absurd, crazy, irrational, and unrealistic thing for us to do is not to seek daily to put God’s Word into practice; not to read our Bibles and then try, every day, to put what we have read into practice – whether it is turning the other cheek⁷, forgiving as we have been forgiven⁸, caring for those who are in need⁹, seeking first His Kingdom and His righteousness over every other priority, no matter how pressing¹⁰. If the Word of God is both true, and to be trusted with our lives – to be put into practice – then the most practical, smart, not crazy, rational, and utterly realistic thing for us to do is, like Jeremiah, to put our money where our mouth is, to seek to put into practice – with the help of the Holy Spirit, of course – to seek to put into practice all that Christ commands.

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For Jeremiah to buy that land in Anathoth while he was in prison and the Babylonian army was besieging Jerusalem would truly be impractical, absurd, crazy, irrational, and unrealistic – unless. Unless the hope he had in God’s plan of salvation would not disappoint. Unless, as God told him, that it was going to come true that one day in the future, *“Houses and field and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.”* Unless God really was using the Babylonians to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. Impractical, absurd, crazy, irrational, and unrealistic to buy that field – unless the coming of the Messiah would mean, just as God had promised Abraham, that God’s blessing of salvation and the restoration of all things, would go out from Israel into all the earth, to all the other peoples and nations on earth.¹¹

And unless buying that land – even though he personally would never even set foot upon it – unless buying that land was one of the most profound witnesses Jeremiah could make to the hope that we also have, you and I, in Jesus Christ. If the hope we have in Jesus Christ will not disappoint us because, as Paul writes to the Romans, *“God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us,”¹²* then the only truly impractical, absurd, crazy, irrational, and unrealistic thing for us to do is not to bear witness to that hope through our own lives – to bear witness to that hope which is ours in Christ Jesus, to bear witness to those who still stand outside of Christ, and so stand still in desperate need of that hope.

I read an article this week by a Christian named Bill Borror entitled, “The 5½ Habits of Remarkably Ineffective People” – an obvious nod to Stephen Covey’s best-selling book, The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, which Borror confesses he has never actually got around to reading. Number two of Borror’s list of ineffective habits is that we should not network for success, but instead seek to be of service to others. That is certainly impractical, absurd, crazy, irrational, and unrealistic – unless the hope we have been given in Christ shows forth best in service to others rather than in worldly success.¹³ Habit number four is “Do not ‘do you,’” but instead do God.¹⁴ Same thing – impractical, absurd, crazy, irrational, and unrealistic unless the power and work of God is the ground of our hope, and not our own efforts.

But it was habit number three which most caught my eye: “Avoid positive thinking.” Borror writes:

To be clear, I am not saying you should purposely think negatively, and I believe goal-setting is an important component of living well. But positive thinking and “manifesting” have become modern-day versions of alchemy. The truth is that secular optimism makes no sense in the face of inevitable suffering, and often requires that we cover up the harder things about life and pretend they are not happening. Frankly the Christian varieties of this—“name it and claim it”—are equally obnoxious (and harmful).

But hope is of a starkly different order. Hope looks directly at the painful things in life and says that nothing is impossible with God.¹⁵

“*Nothing is impossible with God.*” That caught my eye because that is exactly what God Himself says to Jeremiah just a few verses beyond the end of our reading this morning. Jeremiah, having bought the land in Anathoth as commanded, then turns to God privately and asks God why in the world God wanted him to do such an impractical, crazy, absurd, irrational, and unrealistic thing. And God lays out for Jeremiah how God is using Babylon to further His work of ultimate salvation, not just of Israel, but of all peoples. And since that sounds incredulous, even to Jeremiah, God adds this assurance. He says to Jeremiah, “*Nothing is impossible for God.*”¹⁶

In other words, the hope we have in Jesus Christ will not disappoint. Which means that the only rational, non-crazy, practical, and realistic thing for us to do is to abide in that hope in all circumstances, and to bear witness to others about the God for whom such things – the redemption of all things and the bringing round to good of all that we have suffered on earth – that for God such are not impossible. That God will indeed – the hope that is in us – that God will indeed bring all these good things to pass before He is done. For “*nothing is impossible for God.*”

This is the way my teacher, Elizabeth Achtemeier, put it in her commentary on this passage:

That is the Word of the Lord that comes to us from this passage in Jeremiah—that when everything is hopeless on our human scene, God still has a plan for the future. When we stand

beside the grave of a loved one, and all the pain floods over us; when we realize that we can never more say what we wanted to say and can never more do what we wanted to do for that dead one—God has a plan. When everything lovely and gracious and pure in our world seems to fall victim to corruption and evil; when no good work seems to endure and no project of love seems to bear lasting fruit; when every act we do is tainted by selfishness—God has a plan. When the meek, the peacemakers, the pure in heart, get trampled into the dirt; when the weak constantly are sacrificed on the altars of power and the tongues of the proud and mighty strut through the earth—God has a plan. When there seems to lie ahead of us nothing but a crucifixion; when the Gethsemane of prayer is darkened by the shadow of a looming Golgotha; when we would rather do any other thing than obey the will of the Father and we cry out to him to remove this cup from us—God has a plan.

It is a plan of love to save us and our world, despite the fact that we, like Judah, deserve nothing but God's condemnation of death. It is a plan to re-create the good and abundant and eternal life on earth that God intended for his world in the beginning. It is a plan to make a new people, a new community, that knows how to live together in justice and peace and righteousness, under the lordship of God . . .

. . . God will do good to his people, with all his heart and soul! Surely that is the promise he has kept for us in our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁷

And that, finally, is why Jeremiah buys that field in Anathoth, despite being in a prison cell, despite the city being besieged by the Babylonian army, despite circumstances seeming as bleak and as hopeless as they possibly could. And it is the same reason – this hope that we have in Jesus Christ – which enables us to do the same. Which means that we too should do that same and only practical, realistic, and not crazy thing: buy our field in Anathoth, lay hold now of that eternal home, that eternal redemption, that eternal joy that we, and all who belong to Christ, shall one day share in the Kingdom of God.

¹ John 14:1-3.

² Source unknown.

³ Todd D. Hunter, Christianity Beyond Belief (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2009), p. 49.

⁴ Hunter, pp. 49-50.

⁵ John 5:39-40.

⁶ Matthew 7:21.

⁷ Matthew 5:38-39.

⁸ Matthew 6:14-15.

⁹ Matthew 25:31-46, Luke 10:25-37.

¹⁰ Matthew 6:25-33.

¹¹ Genesis 12:1-3.

¹² Romans 5:5.

¹³ Bill Borrer, “5½ Habits of Remarkably Ineffective People,” in Mockingbird, “The Success and Failure Issue,” No. 20 (Spring, 2022), p. 53.

¹⁴ Borrer, p. 54.

¹⁵ Borrer, p. 53.

¹⁶ Jeremiah 32:17, 27.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Achtemeier, Jeremiah (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987), p. 98.