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Beachfront Property for Sale

Jeremiah 32:1-3, 6-15

1 Timothy 6:6-19

Introduction to Jeremiah: The prophet Jeremiah is being held prisoner in Jerusalem, even as the Babylonian Army lays siege to the city. Jeremiah is imprisoned because he has said that God is fighting on the side of the Babylonians and that Jerusalem will be destroyed by this foreign nation. Essentially, the King and many other prophets essentially say to Jeremiah – if you are a prophet of the God of Israel, why are you not on our side? How can you say that God is not on our side, but is on the side of the Babylonians?! And in answer to their question, Jeremiah tells them and us, in great detail, about a real estate transaction. Jeremiah's cousin, Hanamel, comes to ask Jeremiah to buy a field. The language here lets us know that Hanamel is in financial difficulty and is hoping that Jeremiah will purchase the field to get him out of a financial pinch. Leviticus 25:25-28 tells us of this ancient practice of allowing property to be kept in a family by offering the rights of first purchase to another family member when the owner of the land had to sell. This week, I just couldn't help but read this passage in the "light" of Hurricane Dorian. Whether it is the Babylonian Army outside of the Jerusalem City Walls or a category 5 hurricane that bears down on the coast, the request of Hanamel to purchase a field is like the offer to purchase a beautiful, beach-front home on the coast in the direct path of an incoming hurricane. What in the world was Jeremiah thinking!?

Introduction to 1 Timothy: The Apostle Paul contrasts the right understanding of Christian faith with a false or wrong understanding. He says that those who argue without end and who generate envy, dissension, slander and suspicions and who think that being faithful is going to get them riches (see 6:5) are "depraved in mind and bereft of the truth." Instead, a right understanding of what it means to serve God through Christ looks like this.

If we searched for two more appropriate or current texts of Scripture, I doubt we could find them. Despite the fact that these two passages are over 2,000 years old, they feel like they could have been written yesterday.

We live in an age when it is very difficult to tell what the truth is, and when people with authority and influence will proclaim – with certainty – that they are telling the truth. But what they say, cannot be reconciled with what others – also in authority – are proclaiming as truth. At times, I feel like throwing up my hands in frustration because it feels impossible to discern what is really true. It can't all be true. Who are we to believe? What is true?

When we find Jeremiah imprisoned in the Jerusalem palace, the discernment of truth is literally a life and death matter. The Babylonian Army is encamped outside the walls of Jerusalem. What does God want? What is going to happen? Jeremiah says that the Babylonians are going to destroy the city and take the people into exile and that this is what God intends to have happen. The destruction of Judah is the consequence of their absolute rejection of God as sovereign and Lord. So, Jeremiah counseled the king and people to surrender to the Babylonians. But at the same time, there were many prophets in the city and palace who said, “No! God is the God of Israel, and God will protect us as God has done before. Resist the Babylonians. God will save us and Jeremiah is preaching falsehood, treason and he no longer believes in God’s power to save!

In the life of the early church, Timothy is faced with a church community who is fighting over who has the “true Gospel”. Can you imagine such a thing?! Opposing camps are fighting with each other and there is at least some faction in the church that says that God will reward those who are faithful, so that the rich and powerful are clearly more right than the poor and powerless. A prosperity gospel is one in which faithfulness to God is rewarded in financial terms. But Paul counsels Timothy to stop evaluating faithfulness by the wrong standards. Instead we are instructed to measure faithfulness and truth by a list that sounds a lot like the “fruits of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22-26). It is not money or power or success that define the true Gospel of Christ, but instead it is production of the fruits of contentment, righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness (1 Tim 6:11) in us and the Church that marks us as true and faithful.

In both the Old and New Testaments, whatever we are most attached to, trust in and depend on is our god. And attachment to, trust in and dependence upon anything other than the God revealed to us in Scripture is idolatry. So the basic questions of faith are questions like:

- What do we want more than anything?
- In who or what do we trust most?
- Who and what do we depend on for security and comfort?
- To what and to whom are we most attached?

More than anything, the Jerusalem court was attached to being known as God’s people. Judah believed that they were chosen by God because they still possessed the land, the Temple and they had their own king (economic and political independence). And it seems that more than anything, the misguided Christians in Timothy’s church were attached to being in control, having privilege, power and wealth and were attached to being right or certain.

And what Jeremiah and Paul say is that whatever we are attached to – when it is not God – is an idolatry that will lead us into heartbreak and exile – away from God. Those things are not bad in and of themselves. As Paul writes to Timothy, it is the love of or attachment to money that is the root of all evil. Money is morally neutral. He even gives instructions for how those of us with money are to live faithfully in verses 17-19. What is being judged is not money, power, wealth or national independence. What is being judged is the attachment to those things instead of being ultimately and completely attached to and dependent upon God alone – the one who “is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. It is he alone who has

immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.” (1 Tim 6:15-16)

A few weeks ago, I watched a movie/documentary called “*Generation Wealth*.” It tracks the work of photojournalist Lauren Greenfield’s career who has photographed life – all over the world – of the rich and the “want to be rich”, the famous and the “want to be famous”. She documents the rise in fame of the Kardashian girls and shows photographs of them when they were in high school. She spoke with and photographed a child beauty queen and a disgraced hedge fund manager, among others. The movie is not an easy watch, but I recommend it highly to you. The movie is more about wanting to be rich, than it is about being wealthy. It is about finding out that when we are attached to money and power there is never “enough” or contentment. You know who is “rich?” The folks who have just a little bit more than I do. There is never a time when we say, “That is enough. That is good.” And the stories Lauren Greenfield tells do provide an “exhibit A” in Paul’s argument that the “love of money is the root of all evil.” If you are not certain yourself what is true and good and lasting or if you think you would be happy if you just had “more”, then don’t take my word for it. I challenge you to watch this documentary and see if it helps you answer that question.

What is true?

What is eternal?

What really is worth the investment of our lives?

When do our attachments and use of the things of this world fall over into idolatry? When does our commitment to earn, save and spend become idolatry? When does our patriotism blind us to how our nation has become unfaithful and to how God uses all nations of the world to serve God’s purpose? At what point do the frenzy of activities (church, sports, social, etc.) become that which prevents us from worshipping God and investing in those we are committed to love?

The children of God have always been called to singular attachment and loyalty to God. And we have always tried to hedge our bets by investing in political capital, wealth, beauty and power at the same time as we professed ultimate allegiance to God.

In times of crisis – personal or national – our commitments are put to the test. What are we willing to let go of, and what will we hold to at all costs?

When Jeremiah bought his cousin Hanamel’s field, he was not purchasing an investment that would pay him dividends in the financial sense. What Bible Scholars believe is that when the Babylonian army did breach Jerusalem’s walls and take the city, Nebuchadnezzar offered Jeremiah the opportunity to come and to live in safety in Babylon, because the King believed that Jeremiah had been a Babylonian sympathizer. He had counseled the King of Jerusalem to surrender to the Babylonian Army, so Jeremiah must have been on the Babylonian side – right? That is clearly what Jeremiah’s own people thought. But Jeremiah refused to go to Babylon. He was neither a Babylonian sympathizer nor a traitor to Judah. He was a prophet of God who spoke that which God commanded him to speak, even when it was bad news for his own people. Eventually, Jeremiah was sent to live with a group of people who, Nebuchadnezzar thought,

would not kill him, and Jeremiah was taken against his will to live in Egypt where it is believed he died. Jeremiah himself never speculated in real estate again as far as anyone knows. So, it looks like he actually did buy beach front property just ahead of a giant hurricane. So, we could say - What a sucker!

Or could it be that Jeremiah purchased that field from his cousin to witness to his lack of attachment to the actual land, and to illustrate his total attachment to the God who rules all lands and who can ultimately be trusted with our lives and future? Regardless of what happened to Jerusalem, Jeremiah reminds us, the people of Israel belong to God and God alone is able to secure and to save – even in the face of national ruin and idolatry. Paul says that godliness combined with contentment -ALONE – will lead us to live the life that really is life.

So – want to buy some beach front property?

What is true? What is worthy of our ultimate attachments and loyalties? The discernment of the truth is up to us. The answer of Scripture and the answer of our faith is absolutely clear –

God alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light . . . to [that God] belong honor and eternal dominion. All else will fail us, and nothing else is worth our allegiance.