

“What Is the Most Unusual Deal You Ever Made?”

Jeremiah 32:1-15

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What is the most unusual deal you ever made? Did you regret it or did it work to your advantage? Either way, it probably taught you a lot about life, finances, risks and relationships. Anything unusual has a way of doing this.

I feel quite confident I know how the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah would answer the question about an unusual purchase. I think he would grin and say, “The most unusual deal I ever made? Without a doubt, it was the purchase of the field at Anathoth from my cousin, Hanamel.” Let me explain this deal to you and help you understand why it was so bizarre.

Jeremiah was a prophet in Judah during the siege of Jerusalem in 588-587 BC. The Babylonians had controlled Jerusalem for ten years but allowed the Jews that were not deported an excessive amount of freedom in their capital city. In spite of this, rebellions broke out frequently as the Jews tried to throw off the Babylonian yoke. Out of disgust, the Babylonians decided to invade Jerusalem and destroy it. They had grown weary of the rebellious spirit of the Jews and decided to put an end to their uprisings.

The siege and invasion took about a year. The outcome was never in doubt and had the Babylonians not been distracted by a threat from the Egyptians, the destruction of Jerusalem would have been sooner than August, 587 BC.

It was probably during a break in the fighting when the Babylonians were preoccupied with the Egyptians that Hanamel approached Jeremiah about buying a parcel of land. Evidently, Hanamel, Jeremiah’s cousin, was in financial trouble and needed help. It was common in that culture for a family member to buy land from another family member to keep it from falling in the hands of a creditor or being sold to a stranger. Leviticus 25 referred to this as the “Law of Redemption.”

What was unusual about this land deal was the time it occurred, though. The Babylonians were poised to destroy Jerusalem and the surrounding area, including Anathoth. Survivors of the siege would be deported to Babylon and their land would be confiscated. Buying land under these circumstances seemed foolish and irresponsible.

Was Jeremiah aware of the impending disaster or was he naive? Did he know he was buying land that he would never be able to call his own or might soon be worthless? Certainly he did for there is one other thing you need to know. Jeremiah was under house arrest by his own leaders because he encouraged his people not to resist the Babylonian invasion but surrender. He knew the outcome of the siege was predictable and there was no need for senseless violence and bloodshed.

Then why did Jeremiah buy this parcel of land from Hanamel? God told him to do it. *“The word of the Lord came to me. Behold, Hanamel, the 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.’ Then, just as the Lord had said, my cousin came to me in the courtyard of the guard and said, ‘Buy my field in Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin. Since it is your right to redeem it and possess it, buy it for yourself.’ I knew*

this was the word of the Lord, so I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel and weighed out for him seventeen shekels of silver” Jeremiah 32:6-9.

Why did God instruct Jeremiah to do this? He wanted to send a message of hope to the Israelites in their darkest hour. He wanted them to know that they would not always be exiles separated from their beloved homeland. The day would come when God would bring His people back home and property now worthless to them would be bought and sold again. In other words, the Babylonians would not have the final word in the Jews’ lives, God would, and that word would be good.

So, Jeremiah bought the land from Hanamel and paid him seven pounds of silver for it. Furthermore, he gave Baruch these instructions, *“Take these documents, both the sealed and unsealed copies of the deed of purchase and put them in a clay jar so that they will last a long time. For this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel says, ‘Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land’ ”* Jeremiah 32:14-15.

Two questions emerge from this dramatic story that I want to ask this morning.

What is the boldest thing you ever did to reveal your faith in God? What is the most effective thing you did to give someone hope and confidence?

I assure you that what Jeremiah did was bold and effective. It caught people’s attention and created a lot of discussion, which continues to this day. Over two thousand years later we are still talking about Jeremiah’s unusual land purchase and the message of hope connected to it.

How would you answer these questions? **What is the boldest thing you have done to reveal your faith in God?** What kind of risk did you take? Why did you do it? Are you glad you did? Did others notice and did it strengthen their faith?

I listen with great interest to the words of people that are nearing the end of their lives. One thing I have heard repeatedly is this, “I wish I had taken more risks. I was far too cautious. I did not exercise enough faith in God.”

Now, I know there is a thin line between faith and foolishness, but too often we err on the side of caution. Boats were not made to stay tied to the harbor. Neither were we created to live in a cocoon.

What is the most effective thing you have done to give someone hope and confidence? Hope is probably best communicated through action. The resurrection of our Lord is a good example of this.

A young boy was struggling with a muscle disorder and having a hard time walking. Rehabilitation was painful and discouraging. When his birthday rolled around, everyone gave him presents that they thought would cheer him up, coloring books with crayons, video games and pretty clothes. His uncle brought him the most unusual gift, though, and it actually made this boy’s parents angry. He gave his nephew a pair of skates.

The father of this boy chided his brother for being so insensitive only to hear his son say, “Leave him alone, dad. This is my favorite gift. If my uncle believes that I can use them one day, then so do I!”

Let me turn our attention toward our church. What is the most unusual thing we could do to reveal our faith in God and give people hope in these frightening times? Having a capital campaign during a recession when our country is on the brink of war has to rank near the top of the list. Many would say that this is the worst time to have a capital campaign. So, why are we doing it now?

Like Jeremiah, we want to reveal our **faith in God**. We want to tackle a challenge that can only be accomplished with His help. We want to do something so bold that only the grace and power of God can explain it.

Let me be very candid with you. I know it would have been easier to have gone through this capital campaign three years ago. The economy was in much better shape then and jobs were plentiful. It would have required the participation of fewer members to reach our goal of two and one-half million dollars.

Now, everything has changed because of the recession and impending war with Iraq. To reach our goal will require the sacrificial participation of every member. Furthermore, it will require the highest level of faith in God and commitment to His work that we can envision. Three years ago, we would have raised this money because of confidence in ourselves. Today, we shall achieve our goal because of our faith in God. That's a difference I think our community will notice.

Secondly, we want to send this community a **message of hope** that will instill confidence in them. This campaign focuses attention upon where we need to be as a church in 2010 and how we are going to get there. Does this mean we are unconcerned about our current state of affairs, especially the economy, terrorist threats and war with Iraq? No, these issues are in our thoughts and prayers daily. However, our concern over them has not paralyzed or blinded us and what we see beyond them is that this community will need a strong and vibrant church prepared to do ministry long after our latest problems have been solved.

Martin Luther was asked one day, "If you knew the world was going to end tomorrow, what would you do today?" He replied, "I would plant a tree."

Let's start planting trees.