

Buy the Field Anyway: A Case for Stubborn Hope

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[0 : 00] So Friday nights were her favorite. On these Friday nights, she would see her grandfather in his purest form, eyes welling in gleaming reflection of the heights of his greatest joys before falling and mourning of his deepest heartbreaks.

! Friday nights were her favorite. On these Friday nights, Ward Abu Ali and her family would gather at her grandfather's house, whether crowding him on his red couch or snuggling near to him by the crackle of a fresh fire on a cold winter day.

See, in his home in Jordan, her grandfather painted pictures of a life that felt like a fleeting memory or maybe a dream. He spoke of countless hours of soccer in the streets with his cousins and brothers, days that felt like they would never end.

He spoke of his home in Naboulos, a communal centerpiece with a vast garden and flowers dancing in every corner, a beauty that often made it a wedding venue of their community where he'd solely take melaves, a candy-coated almond sweet, always present in any Arab grandparent's home, his venue payment.

He engraved upon their hearts a nostalgia as a lighthouse, an inheritance of ambition and a reverence of grief. You see, Friday nights were Ward's favorite.

[1 : 32] Friday nights were when her grandfather told of her or told her and her cousins of their homeland. Palestine. Creating another generation of benefactors of this legacy and eventually these keys.

You see, these keys are a symbol for Palestinians. They are more than instruments to unlock doors to homes that were once theirs, which were stolen in the 1948 Nakba by Zionist militia groups and beyond, right?

These are symbols of hope. Symbols that these Palestinians living in exile and asylum sometimes across the world might one day return home and turn those fleeting memories into present realities. So good morning, Table Church. My name is Trevor Wendt. I am one of the members of the preaching team here, and we're in the middle of a series called Stone to Flesh, Becoming Tender, Becoming Whole.

It's the second part of our series where we're looking at the book of Jeremiah as we discuss the contours of trauma, religious trauma rather, and how we can move from numbed hearts of stone to hearts of flesh that can embrace the mystery of God and become re-enchanted.

[2 : 55] So this morning, I'm going to walk us through the first 15 verses of the 32nd chapter of Jeremiah and allow for it to illuminate how we might embody an anticipation of homecoming in these moments that can feel like exile.

So we're going to rock out the first five verses first, so feel free to head there in your Bibles, Jeremiah 32, and the verses will also be on the screen. And also, Table.Center.

Yeah, you ain't ready for this. It's got sermon notes. There's a little sermon note button. You can hit that. There's fill in the blank sections. You can follow along. Stay active. You ain't got to do like I do on how to draw during service because I can't stay focused.

So head to Table.Center if you'd like, or check out the verses on the screen, and we're going to jump into this thing. But before we jump into this, I want to give you a quick recap of what's going down in the book of Jeremiah right now.

See, Jeremiah is a prophet from the Bible in about 627 BCE to around 586 BCE in the kingdom of Judah, where the Israelite people live, right? And Judah's been tripping.

[4 : 08] Their leaders are corrupt, and in turn, so is much of their city. There are people who are faithfully seeking God, but they are absolutely a minority. And you're seeing everything from idol worship to child sacrifice to a point where the most vulnerable people in society, the widows, the

orphans, the immigrants, the kids, are all being taken advantage of.

See, social injustice was high, and God wasn't having it. Jeremiah is tasked with speaking truth to power and telling the rulers of Judah, hey, God is going to let this whole thing fall apart, get conquered by Babylon if y'all don't horse correct.

So from the faithful to the unfaithful, from the righteous to the unrighteous, everyone is going to be impacted because of these people and their debauchery.

And instead of these leaders changing, they ignore Jeremiah's warnings. So where we'll pick up is Babylon is currently fighting Judah and is attempting to overtake them.

And Jeremiah gets arrested, and the king calls him up from the jail to talk to him. So, Jeremiah 32, verse 1 through 5.

[5 : 24] The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord in the tenth year of Zedekiah of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. At that time, the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and the prophet Jeremiah was confined in the court of the guard that was in the palace of the king of Judah, where king Zedekiah of Judah had confined him.

Zedekiah had said, Why do you prophesy and say, Thus says the Lord God, or says the Lord, I'm going to give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it. King Zedekiah of Judah shall not escape out of the hands of the Babylonians, but surely shall be given into the hands of the king of Babylon, and shall speak with him face to face, and see him eye to eye, and he shall take Zedekiah to Babylon.

And there he shall remain until I attend to him, says the Lord. Though you fight against the Babylonians, you shall not succeed. So, Jeremiah is under arrest right now, and king Zedekiah hits him up and says, Yo, why do you keep coming to me, saying this same prophecy that I know by heart right now, because you've said it to me so many times, that we're about to lose, we're getting besieged, and I'm finna get kidnapped.

Why do you keep saying this stuff? So, Zedekiah is stressed out. See, Babylon has already conquered some of Judah, and sent different groups of people of Israel, right, of these Judaites, of the Israelites in this space, into exile.

And he's beginning to see the writings of the wall. Maybe this thing that Jeremiah said is going to happen is actually going to happen. And so, he's looking for a way out. He's looking for rescue. And so, look how Jeremiah responds.

[7 : 06] 32, verse 6 through 8. Jeremiah said, The word of the Lord came to me. Hanamel, son of your uncle Shalem, not sure how to say that, is going to come to you and say, Buy my field that is in Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours.

Then my cousin Hanamel 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 in 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. I love this. See, Jeremiah doesn't answer the king's question at all.

Keep in mind that Jeremiah has been telling these leaders over and over what they need to do to get out of this predicament. And all of a sudden, Jerusalem's being besieged, and Zedekiah decides to ask a question that he already knows the answer to.

And so, God gives word to Jeremiah for a different audience, the faithful ones in Judah. God rolls up on Jeremiah and says, Yo, your cousin is going to slide through, and he's going to ask you, Yo, do you want to buy this field in your homeland?

[8 : 16] Anathoth. So, boom. His cousin Hanamel comes to jail and says, Jay, buy my field back home in Anathoth, and the right of redemption is yours. Scripture doesn't give a reason why Hanamel is trying to sell this land, but we find out at the end of this chapter that Anathoth has already been besieged by Babylon at the time of this whole situation going down.

And so, remember that Babylon is also currently besieging Jerusalem, the capital, right? So, this mess is going from bad to worse and fast. So, why on earth would Jeremiah buy land, especially in a place that is already in the hands of Babylon at this point in time, and these fools is losing?

It gets deeper. Jeremiah 11, the people at Anathoth, the place where his cousin is trying to sell him this land, have already tried to kill Jeremiah.

So, I don't know if his cousin is part of this crowd, but consider for a moment that he was. So, he tries to kill him, and then wants to sell him the land in the city that he's already tried to kill him in,

which is already occupied by the evading army.

Who would take an offer like this? So, let's see what Jeremiah does. Verse 9, And I bought the field at Anathoth.

[9 : 41] Yo, what is man's arm? All right. All right, Jeremiah. Let him cook. All right. And I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel and weighed out the money to him, 17 shekels of silver.

I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, weighed all the money on the scales. Then I took the sealed deed of purchase containing the terms and conditions, and then the copy. And then I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch, son of Neriah, son of Mashiach.

In the presence of my cousin Hanamel, 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. In the presence I charged Baruch, saying, Thus says the Lord God, or the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, take these deeds, both this sealed deed and purchase, deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware jar in order that they may last a long time.

For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land. So Jeremiah buys the field.

And not only does he buy the field, but he is meticulous about it. He weighed out the money, got the deed, sealed the deed, made a copy, gave it to the scribe, Baruch, gave it to the scribe, who is Baruch, had him seal it in a jar, had his witnesses peep, this whole situation going down.

[11 : 03] He's intentional about every single detail of this seemingly mundane and nonsensical task. Wow, he's being held as a prisoner in the court of the guards.

Jeremiah, what are you doing, cub? Don't you know that Anathoth is already in the hands of Babylon? Of what worth is a deed in a besieged land?

Of what worth is a deed to an imprisoned prophet? Of what worth is a deed to a people in exile?

Jeremiah says to Baruch, God says, take the deeds, put them in a jar to preserve them for a long time.

Because houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land. See, this business transaction that seemed to be some sort of tangent of Jeremiah's personal life, right?

And poor decision making. In the midst of his homeland that's being conquered, turned out to be a message from God for the people.

[12 : 19] It turned out to be a message of hope for the faithful people of Judah that although times are bleak, that God will restore. consider this whole narrative.

The king of the nation has been oppressing women and orphans and immigrants that has been killing children, right? And abusing power and denying every opportunity for change.

And he looks at Jeremiah and asks the question that he already knows the answer to and God says through Jeremiah, let me tell you a story about hope for the marginalized here. Let me tell you a story about hope for the faithful.

We can glean so much from this because whether you're living in Judah at this time as a part of these Babylonian territories or if you're in the Roman Empire in the New Testament days or you're in the United States of America at any point in its history, the people who are serving God faithfully and seeking truth and those who are doing these things are also among the victims of, or gosh, let me say this again.

I'm not going to mess this up because this is important. We're going to get this right. The people who are serving God faithfully and seeking truth and those who are among the victims of the oppressive empire are still a part of the peoples of those countries, right?

[13 : 42] Exile affects those people too. Empire affects those people too. So you can be faithfully seeking God while your country drops bombs on school children across the world and funds genocides and starves the vulnerable in need of food and living assistance in its own country and proclaims it all as God blessed.

You can be speaking truth to power while the leaders of your country are abusing and assaulting children in islands of debauchery and degradation. You can be loving your neighbor while the church you first encountered Jesus in is telling you that you're evil or hellbound because of your sexual orientation or that black lives don't matter or that immigrants aren't deserving of dignity.

You can be chasing after God with everything that you got yet find yourself within a Saturday. Find yourself feeling hopeless questioning what is the point of any of this.

Maybe even questioning that encounter that you had with Jesus was even real in the first place. It can all leave you questioning where is hope?

Where is the hope for a Jeremiah? Where is the hope for those faithful in Judah? It'd be so easy to get bitter and to harden your heart.

[15 : 11] But Jeremiah says that God says that houses and fields and vineyards shall be bought again in this land. And this is significant because those three categories represent the most common characteristics.

the most common characteristic elements of their economic lives. So God tells Jeremiah to tell the people that though your world might crumble, though you may lose your home, though you may lose your community, though you may lose your church, though you may lose your resources, your land, there will come a day when I restore the life that you've lost.

It may not look exactly the same, but I will restore it. There will come a day when I restore my people, whether in this life or the next, this land will be born again.

Even in the face of catastrophe, you have to hold on to hope. Eugene Peterson describes Jeremiah's act of buying this field in Anathoth, saying, Jeremiah knew that buying the field, buying that field looked impractical and foolish.

It was against history, against reason, against public opinion. But he didn't buy the field on the advice of his broker, but by the leading of God. See, buying a field takes a future perspective.

[16 : 35] It's considering the joy set before you far greater than the circumstances that are surrounding you. It's an act of opening up your heart and saying, God, this is scary and I'm afraid, but I'm trusting you.

So what does buying the field look like in this landscape that we're living in? What is that literal act of faith which seems so pointless to the world around us, but chooses hope instead?

That action that helps move our hearts from hearts of stone to hearts of flesh. We can look again to Ward and her family, the Palestinian diaspora, holding with them the weight of their loss and exile and genocide of their people and brutality and colonization, looking into a situation where all hope seems to be lost, where the concept of a free Palestine is something that feels completely impractical.

And yet they hold on to their keys. And they sit around fires and they pass down stories and traditions and legacy and history.

They instill resistance and empathy and passion for who they are and build amidst these new conditions and still hold on to their keys. The promise of return.

[18 : 03] We can look at the Palestinian children in Gaza, hard-pressed on every side by death, destruction, rubble, starvation, and unimaginable heartache, trauma, and pain, and somehow, through all of that, breakdance in the rubble.

What is your field at Anathoth? If we zoom into our community with many wrestling through a process of restructuring your faith and reconstructing your faith through forms of rubble and destruction that you've experienced, and you don't know what to do at times to soften your heart to God's self again, I'm going to keep it a buck.

I'm going to keep it a hundred, real, some of y'all need to go to a barbecue. I am not playing at all. Some of y'all need to either throw a barbecue or find one to go to.

You need to eat some good ribs or some good barbecue chicken, a good veggie burger, whatever your thing is, you need to eat it. I am serious. Because you know the Black Panther Party had barbecues, right?

Yes, a group of revolutionaries like the Black Panthers had barbecues, and here's proof. Bobby Seale, co-founder of the Black Panther Party, said in a 1988 Chicago Tribune interview about his barbecue cookbook, I believe a revolutionary can go fishing in the morning, cook a meal, write poetry in the afternoon, work for the community at night.

[19 : 46] All through the Black Panther days, I would cook barbecue for thousands of people. See, what Bobby understands here is that food and art and culture and tradition act in hope.

They subvert catastrophe of today and they look in tomorrow and say, I'm going to have something to pass down. I'm going to experience today. I'm going to love today.

I'm going to create today because one day the sun will rise again and all things will be made new. So I will build for tomorrow regardless of the circumstances of today.

Some of y'all got to slide to the function, cub. You got to party. You got to hit the barbecue. For others, you might be like the Jeremiah's, the Baruch's. Your trust is sound and full in God, right? But Judah is still under siege. You're just looking for, yo, how do I walk in faith, trusting God that God's going to do the work that God said God would do, right?

[21 : 01] Is God at work in this too? I'm going to tell y'all one more story. Some of y'all know I wrestled back in high school and college. My first two years of high school wrestling, dog, those joints were rough.

I was just a junior varsity kid and sometimes I showed some glimmers of potential. But dog, I was getting hurt. I was getting injured left and right.

I'm talking about injury, physical therapy, bruise, injury, physical therapy. Like it was a trip, right? And it got to this point where it was such a vicious cycle where like my varsity teammates got frustrated, right?

And they were just like, yo, you need to quit. I had cats telling me like, daily, you need to go. And I wasn't a star student. I wasn't a star athlete.

My home life was hell in many ways. It was just unstable. It was just unstable. And this one thing that was at least consistent, people were telling me to quit.

[22 : 09] So you know what I did? I started saying I was going to be a state champion. What the heck was going on in my head? I'm not kidding. To the point where my older brother designed and laminated a poster for me that said I was going to be a state champion my senior year and I hung it up in my locker.

See, somewhere in there, I believed that there was nothing that God couldn't do. So if I put my faith to action, right, and I bought into every workout and every training session, I went for those runs. I used to run with a backpack filled with my stuff, like my weights and stuff. It was a trip. If I went to the tournaments in the off season and trained with my coach and was going to these tournaments with the different dads and stuff on the team, if I did all that, then I would be good.

And so I started for my first time in varsity my first year and I didn't make it to regionals or states. But I still believed I would be a state champion. Tripping.

And I gave wrestling everything. Yet again, my senior year hits and I won the district. And I placed in the region and I was all state.

[23 : 29] Now I fell short of a state title. But placing that state set me up to be offered a two-third scholarship to wrestle at NCAA D2 College where I wrestled out the rest of my career.

This was my buying my field at Anathoth. It looked impractical. It looked illogical to everyone around me. But I knew that it wasn't too hard for God.

And I prepared myself like that. Meticulously. See church, embodying anticipation of homecoming means living in hope rather than languishing in despair.

Say that again. Embodying anticipation of homecoming means living in hope rather than languishing in despair.

Eugene Peterson says, hope determined action to participate in the future that God is bringing into being. These acts are rarely spectacular. Usually they take place outside of sacred settings.

[24 : 35] Almost never are they perceived to be significant by standards, right? So what does that look like for you? What's your field?

What's your key? What is your literal actionable step to buy and to hope today? To open yourself up to the mystery and the wonder of God's self.

To move from a heart of stone to a heart of flesh to open up to the work that God wants to do in your life? It would be so easy to give up.

Babylon is laying siege and we are in just a single moment, right? We're in a time where a single moment could change everything and make everything fall apart.

And whether that's the space that you're wrestling with that trying to find out like what's that action of faith, whether it's your relationship with God or your job status or wrestling with your vocation or your activism and advocacy or your family struggles or your mental health or your physical health or your housing situation or your desire to make friends, it would be so easy to give up.

[25 : 52] But we continue to act in hope because we believe that Jesus can do as he said and make all things new. on earth as it is in heaven.

On earth as it is in heaven. So I'm going to close with this. I love that the prophecy here is that houses and fields and vineyards will be bought again in this city, in this land.

It reminds me again of Lord's grandparents, right? and their home in Nablus and what it represented for them. You see, because houses are more than just shelter.

They're time capsules of laughing babies and burnt dinners that became takeout and dance routines and first kisses and movie nights and birthday parties and weddings.

Fields are more than just plots of land but soccer fields and campsites and stages for gymnastics routines and vineyards. Vineyards are more than just lands of sustenance and commerce but cornerstones of celebration and deep conversations and traditions.

[27:16] it's almost like this prophecy is saying that God cares about the fullness of our lives, our needs, our desires, our pleasures and our purpose that no matter how grand or minute, God cares and desires for us to experience abundant life.

So what's your field? What's your field? how might you walk in faith today believing that God will restore the lamb, that it'll be born again?

How might you move believing that Jesus will make all things new? Amen.

Amen.