

Nothing is too hard for the LORD

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn now to our Bible reading this morning, and you'll find it in the prophet Jeremiah. If you have one of our church visitors' Bibles, I think it's page 660.

If not, it's kind of about in the middle of your Bibles. And we're in Jeremiah chapter 32. Last week we were reading in this great chapter 31 about the promise of the new covenant, and this chapter continues on in that same way, although it has a dark side to it as well, as we'll see.

Jeremiah 32 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, Nebuchadnezzar the great king of Babylon.

At 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, for 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 hands of the king of Babylon, and he shall capture it.

Zedekiah, 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. And he shall take Zedekiah to Babylon, and there he shall remain until I visit him, declares the Lord.

[1 : 36] Though you fight against the Chaldeans, you shall not succeed. Jeremiah said, The word of the Lord came to me.

Behold, Hanamel, the son of Shulam, your uncle, will come to you and say, Buy my field, that is Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours. Then 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. And I bought the field at Anathoth from Hanamel, my cousin, weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver.

I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on the scales. Then I took the sealed deed of purchase, containing the terms and conditions and the open copy, and I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch, the son of Neriah, son of Meshiah, in the presence of Hanamel, my cousin, in the presence of the witnesses, who signed the deed of purchase, and in the presence of the Judeans, who were sitting in the court of the guard.

I charged Baruch in their presence, saying, 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.

[3 : 05] But thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land. After I'd given the deed of purchase to Baruch, the son of Neriah, I prayed to the Lord, saying, Our Lord God, it is you who has made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm.

Nothing is too hard for you. You show steadfast love to thousands, but you repay the guilt of fathers to their children after them. O great and mighty God, whose name is the Lord of hosts, great in counsel, mighty indeed, whose eyes are open to all the ways of the children of man, rewarding each one according to his ways and according to the fruit of his deeds.

You have shown signs and wonders in the land of Egypt and to this day in Israel and among all mankind and have made a name for yourself as at this day.

You brought your people, Israel, out of the land of Egypt with signs and wonders and with a strong hand and outstretched arm and against great terror. You gave them this land which you swore to their fathers to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey.

And they entered and took possession of it, but they did not obey your voice or walk in your law. They did nothing of all you commanded them to do.

[4 : 33] Therefore, you have made all this disaster come upon them. Behold, the siege mines have come up to the city to take it and because of sword and famine and pestilence, the city is given into the hands of the Chaldeans who are fighting against us.

What you spoke has come to pass and behold, you see it. Yet you, O Lord God, have said to me, buy the field for money and get witnesses.

Though the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans. The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah. Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh, is anything too hard for me?

Therefore, thus says the Lord, behold, I am giving this city into the hands of the Chaldeans and into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and he shall capture it. The Chaldeans who are fighting against this city shall come and set the city on fire and burn it with the houses on whose roofs offerings have been made to bail and drink offerings have been poured out to other gods to provoke me to anger.

For the children of Israel and the children of Judah have done nothing but evil in my sight from their youth. The children of Israel have done nothing but provoke me to anger by the works of their hands, declares the Lord.

[5 : 57] This city has aroused my anger and wrath from the day it was built to this day so that I will remove it from my sight because of all the evil of the children of Israel and the children of Judah that they did to provoke me to anger.

Their kings and their officials their priests and their prophets the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem they have turned to me their back and not their face and though I have taught them persistently they have not listened to receive instruction.

They set up their abominations in the house that is called by my name to defile it. They built the high places of Baal in the valley of the son of Hinnom to offer up their sons and daughters to Moloch though I did not command them nor did it enter my mind that they should do this abomination to cause Judah to sin.

Now therefore thus says the Lord the God of Israel concerning this city of which you say it is given into the hand of the king of Babylon by sword by famine and by pestilence.

Behold I will gather them from all the countries to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation.

[7 : 20] I will bring them back to this place and 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 for the good of their children after them. 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.

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. For thus says the Lord just as I have brought all this great disaster upon this people so I will bring upon them all the good that I promise them.

Fields shall be bought in this land of which you're saying it's a desolation without man or beast that's given into the hand of the Chaldeans. Fields shall be bought for money and deeds shall be signed and sealed and witnessed in the land of Benjamin in the places about Jerusalem and in the cities of Judah in the cities of the hill country in the cities of Shepela and in the cities of the Negev. For I will restore their fortunes declares the Lord. Amen.

[8 : 56] And may God bless us with this His word. Now could I ask to have your Bibles open please at page 606 a Jeremiah 32 and we'll have a moment's prayer as we before we look at this passage.

Let's pray. God our Father we thank you that we hold in our hands not simply the words you once spoke but the words that are eternal the words that are living the words that are powerful words that will cause our hearts to burn words that will open our eyes and above all words that we pray will lead us to the Lord Christ the living word in whose name we pray.

Amen. The poet Blake said when the sun rises what do you see?

Do you see a golden disc that looks like a coin or do you hear a multitude of the heavenly host crying holy holy holy is the Lord God almighty?

Fact is both are true and both represent different ways of looking at reality. We have the way of looking if you like through the created order to see the power of the creator himself looking beyond the circumstances to see the truth of the everlasting covenant and we have the actual experience of every day very often the difficult very often the dismal very often the trying and tedious experiences of everyday life and we have got both of these in Jeremiah.

[10:51] Now in chapters 31 and 32 chapters we looked at the last two weeks there is the poetry the multitude of the heavenly host crying holy holy holy Lord God almighty the wonder the excitement the rich poetry of Jeremiah as he celebrates the new creation.

Here if you like we come to the prose the circumstances and the feelings in which Jeremiah received that revelation and they are difficult and dismal.

Jeremiah is in prison the city is only months perhaps only weeks from its final destruction.

Remember Jeremiah had been prophesying the destruction of the city and beyond it the coming of the covenant.

Now we are here in the same place in this chapter but we learn an awful lot more about the circumstances of Jeremiah the feelings of Jeremiah the situation he was in.

And we need both. If we are simply going to if you like recite the poetry we're going to have unrealistic expectations of life on earth. We're going to claim for the Christian life on earth what's only true of the church in heaven.

[12:02] And we're going to end up disillusioned. When we meet difficulties when we meet problems and we find that the glowing stories don't seem to be true we are in danger of going astray even losing our faith.

On the other hand if we simply judge reality by our own feelings and our own experiences and what's happening we are also going to become disillusioned. You see we need both.

We need the vision and we need the perseverance to keep on going and the two are very closely related. Now the structure of the chapter is very clear. We have a story in verses 1 to 15.

We have a prayer in verses 16 to 25 and we have the reply of the Lord himself in verse 26 to the end of the chapter.

Powerful words for perplexing times is what I'm calling this. I just thought as we were singing that hymn I would have been better to have taken the title from the chapter itself.

[13:06] So since the title and the order of service is not written in stone I'm going to change the title to nothing is too hard for the Lord. That seems to me a better title.

It's always good if you can get the title from the passage itself. Anyway let's first of all look at the story. This is about faith which takes risks. Verses 1 to 15.

Faith is about taking risks. The times are bad. Both as I say both for the city and for Jeremiah. And remember this is the context in which he's received the wonderful revelation of the new covenant and now of the everlasting covenant.

And this story really falls into two parts. The first few verses down to verse 5 is about the realism of faith and the irrationality of unbelief.

Now very often the opposite is said by skeptics isn't it? It's said that faith is irrational that faith is foolish but here the realism of faith.

[14:11] Jeremiah is in prison and he's in prison for telling the truth. And the truth is pretty grim. Not just that the city is going to fall but the city is going to fall because the Lord himself is giving it into the hand of the Babylonian king.

Verse 3 Zedekiah king of Judah had imprisoned him saying why do you prophesy thus? Says the Lord behold I am giving this city into the hands of the king of Babylon and he shall capture it.

Zedekiah the last king of Judah the son of the great Josiah inherited none of his father's godliness none of his father's gifts of leadership. Zedekiah comes across as a born loser.

In fact there are a pretty miserable bunch of kings on the whole from Rehoboam an income poop if ever there was one to Zedekiah the born loser. Well there are one or two bright stars notably Josiah Hezekiah one or two relatively good like Jehoshaphat but on the whole it's not a pretty picture.

You see the whole idea that God would abandon the city that he would give it to its enemies is absolutely foreign to them. Way back in chapter 7 Jeremiah said do not say this is the temple of the Lord the temple of the Lord the temple of the Lord.

[15:30] In other words the king and his advisors are attempting to prop up an institution which God has already judged. Don't we hear these voices today all around us propping up decaying

institutions which God may once have blessed but blesses no longer.

Loyalty to institutions loyalty to establishment over which to use an Old Testament phrase the word Ichabod where is the glory the glory has gone is written comes from an earlier story when the Philistines captured the sacred ark and Eli's daughter named her child Ichabod the glory has gone. That's the irrationality of unbelief absolute refusal to accept that as an institution crumbles before their very eyes that God has not judged it.

You see that's what happens it's not just internal decay it's not just institutions growing old it's that God has judged it and why has God judged it we'll come to that in a moment or two and clutching at straws now chapter 37 which is happening at the same time as this chapter 37 verse 5 tells us that Pharaoh's army had come out of Egypt and the Chaldeans had withdrawn from the siege and of course they think you see the irrationality we depend on the old enemy the old enemy Egypt will rescue us from Babylon now Egypt had long long past its greatest days but it was still a formidable fighting force we know now from other sources that the Pharaoh had no intentions of saving Jerusalem he was on his way to get tribute from the ports of Tyre and Sidon but you see people who will not accept reality will clutch at any kind of straw any kind of straw in the wind that makes them feel better so we have the realism of faith that trusts in the word of the Lord and we have the irrationality of unbelief that refuses to see what's unfolding that's the first part now the second part verses 8 sorry 6 to 15 is almost a kind of acted parable

Jeremiah does something which appears to be crazy he buys a field now what's the point of buying a field when the city and the fields are going to be destroyed but you see this is the apparent craziness of faith which takes the long view his cousin comes to him Hanamel my cousin verse 8 came to me in the court of the guard and says Jeremiah buy this field so that it won't be lost to our family I mean think about it for a moment this guy Hanamel must have been an insensitive boor coming to the guy in prison and saying look I don't have any money will you buy it for us as Derek Kidner says in his little commentary was there ever a more insensitive prison visitor but I mean and this is the apparent craziness of faith but you see what Jeremiah does without fully understanding he trusts in the word of the Lord verse 8 then I knew that it was the word of the

[18:47] Lord you see what's happening here is Jeremiah has made these prophecies God will bring back the people the city will be rebuilt agriculture and commerce will flourish in it and around it it's almost that the Lord is saying look Jeremiah do you believe this yourself are you willing to buy a field which shows your own trust this is going to happen that God will bring them back indeed God does move in a mysterious way his wonders to perform and you'll notice all the technical details the verses 9 and following the money is paid out the deed is signed witnesses and the terms and conditions and then they're stored in earthenware jars which can preserve things for a long long time like the Dead Sea Scrolls which were discovered in 1947 where manuscripts of the scriptures had lasted for many many centuries so you see the realism of this but behind this story is a much older story

Jeremiah is saturated in the words and in the stories of Moses remember how in Genesis 25 Abraham bought a field in the land of the Hittites bought a field which was planting a stake in the promised land Jeremiah knew there was going to be the exile in Egypt and yet he buys a field and the cave of Machpelah that's a very interesting name Machpelah is a Hebrew word which means the place with two entrances I believe that's a little in itself it's another little illustration tiny thread if you like in the whole tapestry of scripture it's a burial cave but there is a way out there is a way in there's also a way out pointing forward to resurrection new hope and restoration so here Jeremiah demonstrates his faith and I'm going to buy this field and his scribe

Baruch the man to whom we're almost certainly indebted in human terms for preserving the whole book of Jeremiah Baruch when we meet first here and his name is mentioned several times he was the man almost certainly who gathered together the oracles and sermons and sayings of Jeremiah and preserved them so that's the first thing faith which takes risks contrasted with the unrealism of unbelief which refuses to see what is staring them in the face and that merges into verses 16 to 25 a prayer which honestly wrestles with God Jeremiah as we sang takes it to the Lord in prayer that's what he does here you see in many ways this is both a specific prayer and a model prayer it's specific to the time it's specific to the individual specific to the place in many ways it's a model prayer and there are two parts to this prayer you'll notice how he begins verse 17 our Lord God it is you who made the heavens and the earth and by your great power and by your outstretched hand nothing is too hard for you in other words he begins with the greatness of the

God to whom he prays now that is at the very heart of prayer that's why the often quoted phrase prayer changes things is so inadequate strictly speaking prayer changes nothing it's the God to whom we pray that changes things remember Elijah and the prophets of Baal all day prayer meeting increasingly fanatical increasingly excited they pray they pray they pray they knock at Baal's door and Baal is not in the important thing about prayer is the God to whom we pray there's a brief but powerful summary of the God to whom he's praying verse 17 it is you who made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched hands the very heart of Israel's faith my help is in the name of

Yahweh who made heaven and earth now if he made heaven and earth nothing in heaven and earth can oppose him nowhere in heaven and earth is outside his empire no throne stands higher no writ runs that can overturn his and this runs through the scripture the triumphant affirmation of Romans 8 nothing height nor depth nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord that's the bottom line if you like to whom are we praying we're praying to the one who made heaven and earth the one who fills heaven and earth and the one to whom nothing is too hard and we'll come back to that in a moment because God himself echoes that phrase in his answer in verse 27 then his power in history his power in time and space the exodus story bringing his people out but notice the specific thing that's said about him verse 18 you show steadfast love great covenant word heseth the word that's used about the special love

[24 : 18] God has for his people in other words it's not just power it is love this God isn't just if you like a tremendous power who crushes lesser powers not some kind of juggernaut through history crushing everything in his path this is a God whose love is as great as his power that is why the Jeremiah is making that is why the supreme example of both is the cross is it not where love and justice meet where God's power and God's love come together and notice of course the human responsibility instead we pay the guilt oh great and mighty God whose name is the Lord of hosts then he runs through briefly the history of his people signs and wonders in the land of Egypt and among all mankind verse 20 you verse 21 you brought your people Israel out of the land of Egypt very heart of

Israel's faith every Passover they remember this God who brought them out of Egypt but there's still perplexity in the present isn't there verse 24 the siege mounds have come up to the city to take it and because of sword and famine pestilence the city is given into the hands of the Chaldean read the book of Lamentations and see something of the terrible conditions in Jerusalem during this siege what you spoke has come to pass verse 25 so you O Lord God have said to me buy the field for money and get witnesses though the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans see how important it was that Jeremiah begins with who God is the kind of God he is his power and his love if it were simply some arbitrary random God he was praying to he couldn't really trust him could he after all the pagan gods were capricious the pagan gods were fickle the pagan gods could never be trusted but this is a

God who can be trusted so with the faithfulness of God the driving force of the prayer but still perplexity in the present and don't let don't let's try to be super spiritual and pretend we don't have these perplexities when we pray because we do we pray and we genuinely believe but we still wrestle with fear and with worry remember what James says a double minded person will receive nothing from the Lord now James is not talking there I believe about the uncertainties and fears we all have when we pray James there I think is talking about when we pray and don't really mean what we pray when we ask for changes we are not prepared to make and so on but this is the prayer of faith Lord it looks crazy Lord I don't know why you're asking me to do this but I am going to do it like what Puddle says in the silver chair I hate this it's awful but Aslan's asked us so we've got to do it and I think the faith of Puddle is far more honest than the faith of the super spiritual so that's the prayer the prayer which wrestles honestly with God and then that merges because the chapter is very beautifully constructed into the answer of God verses 26 to the end verses 26 to 44 the answer which is both humbling and reassuring verse 26 the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah behold I am the Lord the God of all flesh is anything too hard for me you'll notice how he encourages Jeremiah by echoing the very words that Jeremiah had spoken in verse 17 nothing is too hard for you but you see once again this is echoing an earlier story once again echoing the story of

Abraham these words is anything too hard for the Lord come first of all in the book of Genesis chapter 18 Abraham and Sarah after long long years of waiting and frustration are told the child is

going to be born Sarah of course cannot believe this how on earth am I when I am old going to happen and she laughs you see and then God says look Sarah is anything too hard for the Lord reminder the very existence of God's people depended on a miracle miracle of the birth of Isaac so you see how powerful that is in the context God's people are down as it were they're not yet out but they're certainly down purpose of God seems to be running into the sins it did seem in that earlier story so anything that's going to happen now any good that's going to come is going to come because nothing is too hard for the

[29 : 37] Lord now the answer really is in two parts just to the prayer was in two parts so is the answer first of all in verses 28 to 35 God says the exile is God's just judgment you see God confirms the words of Jeremiah Zedekiah refuses to believe this the establishment refuses to believe it God says Jeremiah you're telling the truth I am going to destroy the city you see if God is who Jeremiah says he is the faithful unchanging holy God he cannot simply ignore the sins of his people verse 28 I am giving this city into the hand of the Chaldeans into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon he shall capture it the explanation for the exile also occurs in Daniel at an earlier stage of the exile

Nebuchadnezzar comes against Jerusalem and we are told the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand and the reason for it is a grim tale beginning if you like with routine you might call routine idolatry I call it routine because this has become more or less a way of life the Chaldeans offerings made to bail and drink offerings being poured out other gods to provoke me to anger now excavations in the in Jerusalem of the time of this has discovered in house after house little figurines of pagan gods showing that Jeremiah was not exaggerating as Ezekiel and other prophets were telling the truth routine idolatry which sadly began with the great Solomon himself in his later years 1 Kings 11 when he ceased to worship the Lord exclusively and turned his heart to pagan gods and it is true of both kingdoms verse 30 the children of

Judah and the children of Israel it's idolatry that I mean idolatry like other diseases isn't particular about the company it keeps and it will spread anywhere and that's emphasized in verse 32 the evil the children of Israel the children of Judah did and notice it spread through the whole of society the kings and their officials their priests and their prophets the leaders led the way in idolatry but the people followed and the inhabitants of Jerusalem that's been the problem the whole of society has been infiltrated with idolatry God's people en masse have turned against him and culminating in the last verses they have turned to me verse 33 their back and not their face I have taught them persistently words of Jeremiah himself words of other prophets Isaiah and an earlier generation prophets like

Habakkuk Nahum and others who had come and brought the word of the Lord and much earlier still Elijah and Elisha and before them Samuel beginning with Moses himself then verse 35 the culmination this awful offering up their sons and daughters to Moloch the Canaanite Phoenician cult of baby sacrifice this terrible terrible outrage to the Lord which had been introduced by Zedekiah's grandfather Manasseh who had systematically undone all the reforms of his great father Hezekiah you see that is the story how could that city not be judged so the exile is God's just judgment there needs to be a clearing out the rubbish must be got rid of there must be a cleansing there must be a purifying but verses 36 to 44 beyond the exile there is hope and the hope lies verse 40

I will make with them an everlasting covenant now we're going to develop that next week because it's particularly talked about in the following chapter 33 see the covenant isn't just new it's everlasting this is picked up in the book of revelation and it's called an eternal gospel this everlasting covenant as I said last week is not new in the sense that no one's ever heard it before but it is new in the sense that it's going to culminate in Jesus Christ himself the one who is to die in this very place not just for the sins of Jerusalem but for the sins of the whole world and there will be radical conversion verse 38 they shall be my people and I will be their God the essence of covenant I will be their God that was always true even when he was judging them but they will be my people that is the part that had been broken that's the part that's going to be put right verse 39 they may fear me forever for their own good and the good of the children after them partly of course in this world but more fully in the world to come

[35 : 07] I will make with them a never lasting covenant and then verse 41 once again God is reassuring the prophet he quotes the words he gave to the prophet in chapter 1 the prophet remember had a negative ministry a ministry to tear down to get rid of what was evil he also had a positive ministry to build and to plant verse 41 I will plant them in this land that of course is the

imagery of the vine the vine which was Israel which the Lord took out of Egypt planted in the promised land and it produced a bad and desperately sour harvest of grapes that vine is going to be replanted remember the words of our Lord himself I am the true vine what Israel failed to be I am and whoever is planted in me whoever is a branch grafted onto me that will grow you see there's a very interesting phrase at the end verse 41

I will plant rejoice in doing good I will plant them in this land in all faithfulness and then this word which you could almost not notice with all my heart and all my soul that's used elsewhere calling God's people to love him with all their heart and all their soul uniquely here it's used of the Lord himself in other words we can only love him with our heart and soul because he loves us we love him says John because he first loved us radical conversion confirmation of the truth of Jeremiah's words and in the last few verses verse 42 for thus says the Lord just as I have brought all this great disaster upon these people I will bring upon them all the good that I promised them as I had already said that I the Lord create good and evil there is no dualism in the universe there's no equal and opposite power the Lord controls everything but look at verse 43 field shall be bought in this land of which you are saying it is a desolation without man or beast given into the hands of the Chaldean what's the Lord doing the Lord saying Jeremiah you were right to buy that field because buying that field it's not just you who's buying the field I am going to restore the fields I am going to restore the various parts of the land verse 44 deeds shall be signed and sealed and witness exactly what Jeremiah had done as an act of faith the various places cities of Judah and the various parts of the kingdom they are going to be restored it's painful it's bitter it's hard but you see how the story how the prayer and how the answer hang together the story gives us the pros if you like this is the actual situation the prayer looks beyond the actual situation to a much bigger situation the Lord restoring and the answer confirms that God is faithful what he has promised will happen why is that because nothing is too hard for the

Lord Amen let's pray Lord God we come to you in great weakness we admit the fickleness and feebleness of our faith for our lack of real conviction so often we praise you Lord that you are the Lord who loves us with all your heart and all your soul you're the God who one day will restore fortunes you're the God who will one day bring in the kingdom for which we long because nothing is too hard for you Amen been Amen you go heaven you a büyow no