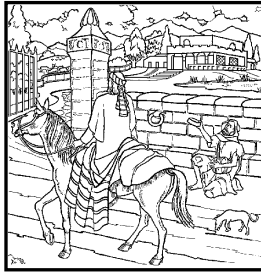


## RICH MAN, POOR MAN



*Scripture:*

**Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15**

1. The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the tenth year of King Zedekiah of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar.
2. 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,
3. where King Zedekiah of Judah had confined him.

.....

6. Jeremiah said, The word of the LORD came to me:
7. Hanamel son of your uncle Shallum is going to come to you and say, 'Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours.'
8. 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 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.
9. And I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver.
10. I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales.
11. Then I took the sealed deed of purchase, containing the terms and conditions, and the open copy;
12. and I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah son of Mahseiah, 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.
13. In their presence I charged Baruch, saying,
14. 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 jar, in order that they may last for a long time.
15. For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.

**Luke 16: 19-31**

19. 'There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day.
20. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores,
21. who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores.
22. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried.
23. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side.
24. He called out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames."
25. But Abraham said, "Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony.

26. Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.”
27. He said, “Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house—
28. for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.”
29. Abraham replied, “They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.”
30. He said, “No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.”
31. He said to him, “If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.””



### **RICH MAN, POOR MAN**

Good morning. It is a privilege to be invited to be in this pulpit this morning. I’ve been retired a long time, so all the mistakes I make can be attributed to the fact that I’m old!

I was a pastor in Terra Linda for seventeen years. Of course that’s in the same Presbytery as you are, so I had a lot of contact with this church in years past. I remember “The Church Built in a Day.” Was anybody else here when that happened? Ah, there are a few. Right; well, I’m not the only old person in the crowd.

Frank Hamilton and I were classmates in seminary so we had all kinds of reasons to be together. So it is a real privilege to be here this morning.

The scripture for the day is found in the Book of Jeremiah, chapter 32, verses 1-3 and verses 6 through 15. And then in the Gospel according to Luke, chapter 16, verses 19 through 31. (Dr. Upshaw read the scripture lessons that are printed above.)

The God we worship, being the God of the universe, is one who is great and wonderful and complex, and the more we learn, the more fantastic the universe in which we live gets. It just seems impossible to know anything that you can nail down and make sure that it’s true. So I’ll just tell you what I perceive as I read these scriptures this morning.

### **JEREMIAH AND HANAMEL**

For one thing, it looks to me like Jeremiah is an awful sucker. Jerusalem is being invaded by a great and powerful king, and he is going to win. Jeremiah has to know that. The land is going to be taken over by the Babylonians. This is not the time to buy a piece of property!

Now, I can’t help trying to figure how it was that God spoke to Jeremiah. I can see something like this happening: Jeremiah is captured and in the court of the guard, and he gets the word about how the battles are going, and he knows Nebuchadrezzar is going to win. He’s going to take us over. I’ll bet my cousin, Hanamel, is going to come to me and try to sell that piece of property.

(The way they handled property was that they couldn’t just sell it to anybody. You had to sell it to

somebody in the family, because they liked the property to stay in the family for generations and generations.)

So Jeremiah is thinking, “Poor old Hanamel; he knows as I know that Nebuchadrezzar is going to take this property. He’s going to try to sell me this property so that he’ll get the money and I’ll get the property and lose it when Nebuchadrezzar takes it away from all of us.” And sure enough, old Hanamel comes to Jeremiah and says, “Hey Jeremiah, I got that piece of property up in wherever it was, and I’m ready to get rid of it. Do you want to buy it? It’s your duty as a member of the family to buy it, you know.”

### **THE ULTIMATE POWER**

And Jeremiah says, “God is trying to tell me something. I need to do something that will help us in the midst of this war to have faith in God. So I am going to trust God, and do what is my duty, and I’m going to buy that piece of property even though it doesn’t make sense from the point of view of profit or likelihood of ever being able to really own the property.” So he buys the piece of property.

I think that’s one of the ways God may speak to us, that there’s something God wants in the midst of pain and difficulty and trouble.

**In this case, God seems to want to have the people hear that somebody believes that Nebuchadrezzar is not the ultimate power in the world. God is.**

If we begin to act as if God is really in charge, even though it doesn’t look like it right now, then that’s what God wants, and that will work.

### **AN ACT OF FAITH**

Well, so he brought the property. Now that was an act of faith. It wasn’t an act of knowing, it was an act of doing the best he could with what he had, and taking the action he believed was the best action that he could take at that time. Now, to me, that’s faith.

I think all of us would feel more comfortable if we could know, if we could take an action and know it’s

the right thing to do. It seems very seldom to work that way. We don't know; we have to look at the situation the best we can and do what we believe God would have us do or what God is trying to get us to do with God, in faith and trust in God. So that, to me, is faith.

### **A YOUNG MINISTER**

I tried so hard during the first five years as a minister to be right, and get the words out of the Bible and tell them to the people and trust that they would believe the Bible because it says so. Then they would appreciate me for giving them all that good advice. I found I couldn't do it. I was going crazy – at least that's what I blame it on. I got some help from a dear friend and psychoanalyst, and what he made me do was think for myself and decide for myself what I believed faith really was.

**I decided that faith is not *knowing*,  
but it's believing in something enough  
to act upon it and be responsible to the God  
who revealed himself in Jesus Christ.  
This was a great relief! I don't have to be right;  
I don't have to know all the answers.  
If I did I'd go crazy!**

### **RICH AND POOR**

You must be thinking this morning that Jesus seems to be saying that rich people are going to go to hell and poor people are going to go to heaven. If that's the case, we Presbyterians are in trouble. Fortunately, I don't believe that Jesus was trying to say that. I believe that Jesus was telling the story about a rich man in such a way that he was trying to point out to the Pharisees, who loved money, that that's not really going to get you where you need to be ultimately. It helps, but you can't give your whole life to that, to making money. I think that's what Jesus was talking about. That's my act of faith. The problem with the rich man was not that he was rich. The problem with the rich man was that he never asked what God wanted, and he never looked around to see other people and ask himself what they needed that he could do?

He dies and he gets into hell, and is still trying to get Abraham to do his will. He never says, Lazarus, I remember you. I remember I passed by you everyday and it didn't occur to me to help you in your needs. I'm sorry. Will you forgive me? It never occurred to him to do that. It never occurred to him to ask God –

“God, I'm in hell. How do I get out? Please help me. Is there something you want me to do that I can do that will help me get out of here - something to understand, something to believe? Is there some way that you can help me get out of here?” It never occurred to him to do that. He keeps trying to tell God what to do.

### **TELLING GOD WHAT TO DO**

Did you ever know anybody who keeps praying and asking God to do what that person wants God to do? I know a fella that does that all too often. Lord, I'm in trouble. Please help me thus and so. Or – God, I really want thus and so. Will you help me get it? I know a fella like that. I want to tell you about it; I know it's true, because I'm the fella.

### **A STORY ABOUT FAITH**

I want to tell you a story about faith. It happened to me. I learned that prayer is tremendously important. Sometime when I pray, I get what I call “*The Great Silence*.” I think that's what Jesus meant when he talked about the great chasm. What he's saying is that you are never going to get anywhere by praying that way. I discovered that by praying that way.

For example: I really like to be right, and I wanted to buy a computer about ten or twelve years ago. I wanted to buy a computer, but I wanted to be sure that God approved of my spending that kind of money on myself. So I prayed, “Lord, shall I buy the computer?” And I got what I've come to call “*The Great Silence*.” “Lord, shall I buy the computer?” Well, nothing happened. So I said, “God, shall I not buy the computer?” And I got “*The Great Silence*.”

I think something like that is what Jesus meant when he said to the rich man, “There's a great chasm between us. I can't help you as long as you're trying to tell me what to do.”

So I'm praying this way, and I'm thinking: What's the matter with you? I'm asking you, should I buy it and you don't answer me, and I ask you should I not buy it and you don't answer me. How come you don't answer my prayer? And I get “*The Great Silence*.”

Then, I was given a great gift which was to ask God where I'm wrong? It occurred to me, if I ask God should I buy the computer and then there comes some real need that could use that money, I'll say, “Well, it's not my fault. I prayed and asked God, and God said, ‘Go ahead and buy it.’ I can't do that because you'll blame me for stuff that's your own responsibility. Now think it over.”

## ANOTHER ACT OF FAITH

So I thought it over in the context of this definition of faith that means do what you believe in. So I said OK. I have to take an act of faith; I'm not going to get an answer. Right? I'm going to get "*The Great Silence*." So what I have to do is come up with an act of faith. If I buy it, it's an act of faith; if I don't buy it, it's an act of faith, so whatever I do is going to be an act of faith.

My first step in the act of faith would be to call up the computer company and get some information. What do I need to be a beginning computer person? What kind of programs do I need? How much hardware do I need? How much would it cost? Maybe I can't afford it. So I thought that's a good step, a good act of faith. I'll do it.

### CALLING THE COMPUTER COMPANY

I called up the computer company, which happened to be Gateway because through other investigation I had found out that's probably the way for me to go. That also was an act of faith. So, I called up Gateway. *Ring, ring, ring*. "Good afternoon, this is Gateway. How may I help you?"

I said, "I'm a person interested in buying a computer, and I don't know anything about it. I need somebody who can help me."

"Fine; let me connect you with somebody in the sales department."

*Ring, ring, ring*. "Good afternoon; this is the sales department. How may I help you? This is Faith speaking."

Now what would you do with that? Would you say that's a great coincidence? Or would you say that God has a sense of humor? Or would you say maybe I'm being guided? I still don't know; it's got to be an act of faith. So I said, "Is your name really Faith?"

She said, "Yes, it is."

I said, "Please be kind to me because you can sell me just about anything you want to."

She asked me a lot of questions and sold me quite a bit of equipment. I used it until it wore out. Recently, I bought another one without going through all that. I didn't ask for Faith. I got it from Costco.

But I think what's happening in my life and yours is that what Jesus is trying to tell us and what the Old Testament is trying to tell us, the Law and the Prophets, is that what God really wants is trust. We don't know everything that's right, but we take acts of faith that God respects and that draw us closer to God in our lives.

**I don't think it's very possible for you and me to be right all the time, but I think we can be faithful disciples of Jesus and do the best we can, trusting him and taking him into our plans and our purposes.**

I thank you for listening.

Let's pray. Dear gracious Lord, you are gracious in being here, in trusting us to be your church, to be the body of Christ in the world. We don't always know what we should be doing, but we thank you that the words of Jesus are still true: ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you; for everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to those who knock, it shall be opened. So give us faith to ask, seek and knock and do the best we can to take you and your will and your purpose into all our decision making.

Bless our country this day and all the problems that we have. Guide your church as we disagree about who should be ordained, who should really own the church's property. Help us to deal with our differences in respect and appreciation and love.

Bless this church and this congregation in its ministry to the community and to each other, to our children and our young people. And Lord, there are problems that we don't always share; help us with the burdens that we carry, to be open to you and to be with you in our decision making and in our service.

Hear us, Lord, as we pray together the prayer that Jesus taught us – (The Lord's Prayer). Amen.



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