

Friends, I've got a deal for you today. Today and today only you have the chance of a lifetime. I'm presenting you with a John Augustus Roebling original. Roebling's inspiration was from the Gothic Revival style. This item is over 6,000 feet long and 85 feet wide. It sits 127 feet high with a beautiful river view. It has a solid steel frame and walls made of limestone, Rosendale cement and granite that was brought all the way from maine. It rests on caissons of southern yellow pine brought in all the way from St. Simons Island, Georgia. It's an antique estimated to be 140 years old. You're guaranteed to receive at least 100,000 visitors a day. Friends, deals like this don't come around every day. So I'm ready to deal. You can have all of this for the low, low price of \$17,000. Who's ready to make a deal? Why of course I'm selling you the Brooklyn Bridge.

By the way, \$17, 000 was what the notorious con man George C Parker told police he would have been able to sell it for.

As ridiculous as it would seem to think you could buy the Brooklyn Bridge, the reason for Jeremiah's prayer would seem just as ridiculous.

Today we are moving on to Prayers of Dedication. It's our next category of prayer in our series "Lettuce pray: A Spiritual Salad" I am calling this prayer a Diakon of Dedication. Who knows what a Diakon is? It's a Japanese radish. Thank you, Food Network!

Jeremiah offers a prayer to dedicate a field he's just purchased. To dedicate something is to formally declare its use and purpose. This is all well and good. It seems pretty appropriate to pray to God on such an occasion, right?

So, what is the problem then? The problem is that Jeremiah has purchased land in Judah. Judah is only days away from being captured by the Babylonian army. Once that happens Jeremiah's field and the 17 shekels of silver he just spent would belong to Babylon. Worthless.

Invasion is so impending that Babylon is hoisting siege ramps up against the walls of Jerusalem. So, thinking about this purchase at a time like this? Jeremiah? He crazy? He nuts? By any logical investment standard, this is the dumbest thing Jeremiah could ever do. So why did Jeremiah do it? Why did he purchase this field at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour of being invaded.

Before we answer that, let's find out more about who this Jeremiah guy is. Jeremiah was a descendant of a priest named Abiathar. Abiathar got into hot water with King Solomon and was offered a relocation package to a town northeast of Jerusalem called Anathoth. This is where Jeremiah lived. Jeremiah was given, in his opinion, a most distasteful invitation by God. God called him to be a prophet when he was a young boy.

Jeremiah gave several excuses for why he couldn't be a prophet. He was too young. He didn't know what to say. Finally in chapter 1 God gets fed up with Jeremiah and tells him this. "Gird up your loins; stand up and tell them everything I command you. Do not break down before them, or I will break you before them." When God tells you to put your big boy pants on, you better do it.

And Jeremiah did although his worst fears were confirmed. The things he was given to tell people weren't pleasant things. And he was expected to tell these things to the kings of Israel and Judah and to all his other prophet friends.

What did he tell them? He told the kings that they were sinful because they were bringing pagan idols into the temple. They were leading the people to be sinful. He told them that they were more sinful than any other generation to this point. He told the kings that Israel and Judah would be captured. Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed. And everyone, kings included, would be taken away from their homeland.

He told his prophet friends that they were big fat liars. These prophets were telling their respective leaders that they had nothing to worry about. Never mind that Assyria was closing in on Israel, never mind that Babylon was closing in on Judah. God loved them. God would protect them.

Of course this made Jeremiah very popular. Zedekiah was the king of Judah at the time of our passage. King Zedekiah was so happy with what Jeremiah was saying that he threw him in jail. Anytime Jeremiah would try to bring the warnings of God to the kings they would shred ‘em or burn em. Jeremiah’s prophet friends? They called Jeremiah public enemy number one and a false prophet.

That brings us back to our story today. Jeremiah’s crazy land purchase. What did this purchase mean? Did Jeremiah change his mind? Was he going back on all of his doom and gloom prophecies? Not at all. The siege ramps made it clear. Jerusalem was about to be handed over to Babylon. Even as Jeremiah is signing the closing documents, he continues to insist that the Babylonian swords and battle axes would make this purchase worthless in just a few days. Why waste his money on this land? It’s like buying season tickets on the 50-yard line when your team is already out of the playoffs.

You see, just because Jeremiah was a short-term pessimist, doesn’t mean he wasn’t a long-term optimist. Yes, Israel would be invaded. Yes, Jerusalem would be conquered. Yes, the temple would be destroyed.

But Jeremiah remembered that there was more to the story. As God had promised this destruction, God had also promised that God’s people would return and possess the land again. This purchase, this dedication. These were acts of faith and unwavering confidence in God’s mercy.

Jeremiah’s dedication prayer reminds its readers of Israel’s history. The roots of that unwavering confidence. Look, says, Jeremiah at how God delivered Israel out of Egypt. Look at how God led the to them promised land.

Yes, Israel will be exiled but they will return. And when they do, it will be under a different covenant. Look at what God says in Jeremiah 31:31-34. “The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring

them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord, for I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more.” Guess who would be the gateway to this new covenant?

This Diakon of Dedication. It’s truly remarkable for another reason. You see, this wasn’t a way to evade God’s judgement. It was an expression of confidence in God’s saving mercy. During times in our lives when we might need a rededication, let’s not try to turn it into a ticket to get off the hook for the consequences of our sins. Instead let’s make it about choosing to live in such a way that God can put us back to where we should have been all along.

Sin can and mostly does bring devastation. There comes a point where we find ourselves saying, enough is enough, I need to change. This step is good! This step is necessary. But it may not spare us from any immediate hardship or pain that comes from sin.

Reformed drug addicts...must go through the pain of detox. Repentant thieves....may have to spend time in jail. Putting on too many pounds? Forgiven but also in need of what may be a difficult change in eating habits. Renewal, rededication, it’s not a guarantee that the siege ramps of sin will be removed.

Church family. The siege ramps are there. Can you see them? What should we do? Let’s buy that field anyway. Let’s offer up a Daikon of Dedication. Let’s dedicate that field, knowing there is a future. Knowing that God is always faithful to God’s people. Need one more piece of assurance? Let me read the first part of God’s response to Jeremiah in vs 27. “See, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is anything too hard for me?”

Let us pray.