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Faith Operating in a Dark Day

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Our motto for 1970 circles round the declaration of Jeremiah in chapter 32, verse 17 of his prophecies: "Ah, Lord Jehovah... there is nothing too hard (wonderful) for thee." This declaration was made in circumstances of extreme difficulty. Recall that situation.

Jeremiah was himself in prison, perhaps in a dungeon. His ministry, after forty years, was in a state of suspense, perhaps finished personally. Jerusalem was besieged by the Chaldeans, and about to be taken, and the land overrun and destroyed. The people were about to be taken into far captivity, and Jeremiah knew that it would be for seventy years.

In that seemingly hopeless situation the Lord told Jeremiah that his cousin Hanamel would be coming to him as the next of kin who had the right of redemption to ask Jeremiah to buy - redeem - the family land, the field in Anathoth. It may have been a bit of shrewd business on the part of Hanamel for Jeremiah might most likely be killed and the field be lost if it had not been redeemed. Perhaps Hanamel was not accepting Jeremiah's gloomy prophecies and still believed that the country would be saved. However, for Jeremiah it was another situation; his prophecies were - he knew - going to come true. To buy the field was either foolhardiness or faith. He proceeded in faith, and carried out the transaction meticulously; and he left no question as to whose right it was. So Hanamel had been, and the Deed of Purchase was signed, sealed, and settled. Jeremiah, by right of redemption, was the owner of a field which, for long years, would lie under the heel of a foreign power. For *himself*, he knew that he would never occupy it. Was he - maybe - enacting a parable which had a far greater context? Was the far-seeing Spirit of God making Jeremiah's action a prophecy? Was there Another Redeeming Kinsman in the shadows of Jeremiah's transaction, One who would redeem His rightful inheritance and have to wait long years, while the enemy - the prince of this world - ruled in it? Was Jeremiah just yielding to the pressure of circumstances?

No, two things governed his action. One, God had told him to buy the field, and his dream, vision, verbal intimation (whatever it was) concerning Hanamel had come to pass. Two, his own prophecies had contained a break in the far-distant horizon, seventy years hence, and that was a ray of hope in the dark present. On that streak of light his faith acted, and, not thinking of himself, he acted for posterity. Someone has spoken of his action as "faith staking a claim". But, as is usually the case, faith was tested by

Reaction

Jeremiah suffered this come-back. He seems to have come alive to the implications of what he had done, and a battle took place. He had to call to his help the omnipotence and sovereignty of God. "Ah, Lord, Jehovah, behold, thou hast made the heavens and the earth by thy great power and by thine outstretched arm; there is nothing too hard for thee."

This, surely, is a foreshadowing of "the faith of the Son of God".

Now, there are some valuable lessons for us in this incident:

1. There are times when we are so sure that the Lord has led us in a certain way, to take a certain course, to do a certain thing, or to a certain purpose. It comes to us with much life and assurance. At the time there seems to be real corroboration that it is of the Lord. Even our Hanamels turn up on time. We make our committal, set ourselves to the call or demand, and faith is all agog. Then, we are invaded by the adverse forces, like the prison in which we are found, or like the armies of the Chaldeans besieging. The temptation is to wonder if we have been mistaken, misled, and a trick has been played on us. A battle in the dark ensues and the whole question of the faithfulness of God is raised.

How true to history it is that the Lord's people, and His servants in particular, can never take a position with Him without - sooner or later - being tested severely by that very position! That important factor in Jeremiah's action must be borne in mind. Jeremiah acted without any *personal interest* influencing him. He was detached from his action, for he knew that he would not live to see the redemption made good. Faith was selfless and looked beyond his own lifetime. That is a very real test of its genuineness. Such thoughts never weakened his action! Perhaps the very reactions and assaults of doubt are only allowed in order to test the quality of faith.

A dungeon and an enemy host are sufficient to test the reality of vision!

2. "While we look, not at the things that are seen, but at the things which are not seen."

Jeremiah had an overwhelming amount of the impossible, the "too hard" in his seen situation. It would have been so easy at any time to surrender to existing conditions. Every servant of God who has been given "the heavenly vision", and been made acquainted with God's "eternal purpose" has, after a thoroughgoing committal, and some encouraging corroborations, come to the time of severe testing by circumstances which raise ultimate questions. The conditions argue that it is a vain hope; life will pass in disappointment.

Think of the vision of Peter, John, Paul, and then consider the state of the churches. They must have had some vision which eclipsed and transcended "the things which are seen". Paul said: "... we *look* at the things which are *not* seen." "Things", not imaginations, make-beliefs, vapours, but

actual things not seen. These are the "eternal" and, like Jeremiah, the horizon of realization is beyond this hour.

How easy - to our time-fettered life - it would be to say that the Church is in ruins and irreparable; we labour in vain if we pour our lives out for the ideal! Well, the saints of old, the Prophets, the Apostles, and above all, our Lord Jesus in His humiliation, rebuke us. "Faith is the title deeds of things not seen." Jeremiah with the Deeds of Anathoth fits right in there.

Jeremiah linked this whole issue with God's Throne. This is the refuge of the sorely tried in faith. "There is nothing too hard for thee."

3. We must ask the Lord to, first, cleanse our hearts of all personal, and worldly motives and interests; to plant the Cross fairly and squarely in our soul-ambition, and then enable us to "buy the field" in confidence.