

GET INTO SCRIPTURE - AN ANCIENT FORM OF TEXT MESSAGING

THE MBPC TEXTER

MOUNTAIN BROOK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH/ BIRMINGHAM AL



Sunday, September 29th
26th Sunday in Ordinary Times

Reading 1

1 TIMOTHY 6:6-19

But godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. 8 But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. 9 Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.

12 Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 13 In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you 14 to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever.

Amen. 17 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in

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wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. 18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. 19 In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

ABOUT THE TEXT

Usually, Bible passages about material wealth cause some amount of discomfort or even reprehension among audiences in our modern North Western hemisphere, which has a strong materialistic orientation. On a global scale, many of us would, after all, qualify as “rich.” Moreover, we often tend to associate personal success and happiness with material affluence. Therefore texts such as 1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19 that pose questions regarding riches might be considered a challenge to our entire cultural and economical system. It is important to realize that these stories display people who rely on their material prosperity and have little ultimate concern for God. In the parable of the Rich Fool, for instance, Jesus describes the pleasure of a hedonistic person who thinks that his abundant earthly goods will secure his future (Luke 12:16-21; see also the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas 63). His “insurance,” however, turns out to be void because he will die within a day. The dilemma with such a this-worldly orientation is spelled out in our passage from First Timothy: “...for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it” (6:7).

What is being criticized, then, is rather “the love of money” and “the eagerness to be rich” than material wealth as such (6:10, see also verse 9 and 2 Timothy 3:2). The love of money provides temporary satisfaction, but the love of God lasts forever. It is also helpful to reflect on the association of material wealth and politics within the context of the Roman Empire during the first century CE. For the most part, riches could only be acquired through continuous cooperation with the Roman administration. Those who were rich, therefore, usually supported a system that oppressed the vast majority of the population for the benefit of only few at the center of the Empire. Being a counter-cultural movement, early Christians opposed this system and envisioned a more equal distribution of material resources. This is, for instance, conveyed in the story of how believers shared their possessions in Acts 4:32-37 (see also the episode of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11). But this was not a complete hatred for all Earthly wealth. It was instead a call to use those possession we are blessed with for better purposes. Therefore, those who have riches “are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life” (1 Timothy 6:18-19).

This makes one ask (especially in our weeks of stewardship): How can I use my blessing here on Earth to benefit those around me to convey the call of Paul in this passage?

A Wisdom of Mr Rogers

"Imagine what our real neighborhoods would be like if each of us offered, as a matter of course, just one kind word to another person."

READING 2

JER. 32:1-3A, 6-15

This is 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. 2 The army of the king of Babylon was then besieging Jerusalem, and Jeremiah the prophet was confined in the courtyard of the guard in the royal palace of Judah. 3 Now Zedekiah king of Judah had imprisoned him there, saying, "Why do you prophesy as you do? You say, 'This is what the Lord says: I am about to give this city into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he will capture it. 6 Jeremiah said, "The word of the Lord came to me: 7 Hanamel son of Shallum your uncle is going to come to you and say, 'Buy my field at Anathoth, because as nearest relative it is your right and duty to buy it.' 8 "Then, just as the Lord had said, my cousin Hanamel came to me in the courtyard of the guard and said, 'Buy my field at Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin. Since it is your right to redeem it and possess it, buy it for yourself.'" I knew that this was the word of the Lord; 9 so I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel and weighed out for him seventeen shekels[a] of silver. 10 I signed and sealed the deed, had it witnessed, and weighed out the silver on the scales. 11 I took the deed of purchase—the sealed copy containing the terms and conditions, as well as the unsealed copy— 12 and I gave this deed to Baruch son of Neriah, the son

of Mahseiah, in the presence of my cousin Hanamel and of the witnesses who had signed the deed and of all the Jews sitting in the courtyard of the guard. 13 "In their presence I gave Baruch these instructions: 14 'This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Take these documents, both the sealed and unsealed copies of the deed of purchase, and put them in a clay jar so they will last a long time. 15 For this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land.'

ABOUT THE TEXT

Chapter 32 begins with a historical prologue (verses 1--5), situating this prophetic action in "the tenth year of King Zedekiah of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar" (verse 1), or in 588 B.C.E. The historical context of this passage corresponds to the second siege of Jerusalem just before the eventual fall of the city in 587. Jeremiah is being held captive in the "court of the guard" (verse 2) because of his negative oracles, which predicted the fall of the city and the capture of the king by the Babylonians.

The Lord then comes to Jeremiah with instructions. The LORD instructs Jeremiah to purchase the field, because the prophet has the right to redeem it. This well-known practice in ancient Israel involved the purchase of land by the next of kin, usually when a relative had died, in order to keep property within the clan (cf. Ruth 4). The significance of this action is



profound given the historical context of the second Babylonian siege of Jerusalem. In the middle of the city's impending destruction, Jeremiah makes an investment in the future stock of Judah's eventual restoration, when "houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land" (verse 15). This symbolic action of hope does not cancel out the word of judgment that Jeremiah had already proclaimed. The judgment of the LORD was certain. The fate of the people was sealed. In fact, it was being fulfilled even as Jeremiah was signing the deed of purchase. However, in the middle of this catastrophic set of events, God initiates a word of hope through the prophet's actions. Jeremiah, quite literally, puts his money where his mouth is. These actions put in motion a reality that is nearly impossible to envision given the current state of events. Despite the improbable outcome of this prophetic action, something that Jeremiah acknowledges in the verses following today's passage (verses 16--25), the prophet proceeds to fulfill this command in painstaking detail (verses 9--14). He mentions two deeds, one sealed and one open (verse 14). The practice of signing two documents was common in ancient Near Eastern legal custom. The opened version functioned as a working document, which parties could reference to settle disputes. The closed document preserved a copy of the original to insure that nothing was changed. The detail in verses 16--25 has a meaningful

function in this text. It not only shows the complete extent to which Jeremiah has fulfilled the instruction of the LORD--a perfect obedience. Jeremiah's meticulous fulfillment of this command also points to the prophet's and God's careful attention to a future that is still very distant and hard to see given the current circumstances. This hope is as certain as the Babylonian armies that are at the gate. Thus, the observers of this transaction are not there simply to verify the purchase of land. They are witnesses to the future that the LORD has announced through Jeremiah's prophetic action.

The modern reader might not find much comparison to the destruction that Jeremiah and the people of Judea would face. But instead one could place it in the backdrop of any of our modern looming catastrophes. There is much in today's world that creates anxiety over the future-- climate change, a wavering economy, and increased hostility among nations and religious groups, to name a few. Biblical hope, however, does not resort to despair in such times, nor does it try to cover up anxiety with mere words and false hope. Today's passage reminds us God is invested in the future destiny of humankind. Even when catastrophe was imminent, Jeremiah made an audacious and specific financial act, symbolizing God's declaration that judgment and destruction would not have the final word. Judah would certainly suffer the



judgment that God had announced. Babylon would destroy Jerusalem and Judah and carry off its inhabitants into exile. The prophet, however, activates the future in the present through a symbolic act of purchasing a field. God's people would be restored and would again thrive in the land (verse 15).

Perilous times require the faithful to put into embodied action the hope that God has announced, which is already here, but not yet

Reading 1

1 TIMOTHY 6:6-19

Commentary, 1 Timothy 6:6-19, Chriatian A. Eberhart, Preaching This Week, WorkingPreacher.org, 2013.

Pulpit Fiction, plus podcast. Reflections of lectionary text, pop culture, current events, etc. Robb McCoy and Eric Fistler, 2013.

"All Kinds of Evil," Richard Mario Procida, Modern Lectionaries, 2013.

"How Did It Come to This?" Mark Scandrette, The Hardest Question, 2013.

Commentary, 1 Timothy 6:6-19, A.K.M. Adam, Preaching This Week, WorkingPreacher.org, 2010.

"Righteousness," sermon discussion from Frederick Buechner, Frederick Buechner Blog.

"Run with Perseverance," sermon discussion from Frederick Buechner, Frederick Buechner Blog.

READING 2

JEREMIAH 32:1-3A, 6-15

Dockery, David S. "Jeremiah, Lamentations." The New American Commentary. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1991. N. pag. Print.

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