

Date: March 9-10, 2024

Title: Return to Me: Lesson of the Purchased Field

Scripture: Jeremiah 32:6-8; 16-25

Speaker: Kurt Bjorklund

Good morning. It's great to be together. Just before we jump into the teaching, I want to just make a couple comments about a few things. Thank you for your generosity toward the Eleos Food Drive and all our different campus locations to support the food banks in our local communities. That is just an awesome thing that you are a part of and allows generosity just to flow in our community.

Also, speaking of generosity, I want to give you a little update at our Wexford campus on the construction, from your generosity over the last couple of years to expand the NextGen Wing, is well underway. You see it a little bit when you walk up if you parked on the top side of the campus, on the bottom side, you miss it. But here's an aerial view of what's going on up there in terms of just making an entire second floor to the NextGen Wing. And so, that's just really fun for us to do.

One of the things we talked about this last year is that in our year-end giving, we would also help support one of the ministries, churches, that we've been partnered with for a long time in the country of Haiti with their construction project. Here's what that looks like, which will ultimately become not just a Christian education wing for the church there, but also a Bible College, which will train pastors who will go out into all the different areas of remote Haiti and plant churches there. And so that is also part of what your generosity has been able to achieve.

If you've watched the news, or listened to any of the stories, I'm sure you've heard about some of the unrest in Haiti. And so I just want to take a moment and pray for the country and what's going on there, but know that what's going on there, it's a little bit like where what we're doing is in a different part of the country entirely than what's happening in the capital there of Port au Prince, but still something to be aware of.

Let's pray together. God, we just ask that you would bring peace to Haiti, where there's unrest, that you would bring resources, where there's hunger. God, we pray for the church that we're partnered with there and the people to be able to bring your hope, your perspective, in a place that feels so desperate right now. Lord, we pray for peace in the Middle East as your word encourages us to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. We pray for that today. And, Lord, we pray as well for peace in the Ukraine. And God, as we're gathered today, I ask that you help each of us to see and understand who you are more fully and that would do something in us that brings about change. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

So, I'm a bit of a person who gets drawn into lists when I'm online. I don't know if you're like this, but when I'm surfing and something pops up in my feed and it says, you know, here are the 27 best chicken dinner recipes ever that take 5 minutes to make. I'm the kind of person who clicks on it, is like, can I really make a great chicken dinner in 5 minutes or less? And I'll look at these different lists that come up and can easily get sucked into that. The other day one of these came up on my feed. It said 19 super common things people do or say that they

don't even realize are super rude. I was like, well, yes, I need to know what those are. And so, I clicked on it. Here are just a few.

Number two on their list, leaving your grocery cart in the middle of the aisle so others cannot pass. It's inconsiderate and infuriating. Anybody else? Stepping off of a full escalator and standing still while looking around, and then their comment is bro, just take four or five steps forward to figure yourself out. They say listening to anything in public with the volume on. Yeah, some of you are saying yes. Getting in an elevator before allowing people to get out of the elevator. Saying you look good for your age. It doesn't even need a comment. Asking a newly married couple when they plan to have kids. Any of you been recently married? You know. You're like, yes, that is annoying. Telling someone you look tired. And then they added this. I won't give you all of them but touching a pregnant woman's belly without asking.

Now, here's my question to you. Are they justified to be annoyed with those things? Some of you say maybe, maybe not. Maybe it's a little over the top. How about angry? What is justified for anger?

Over the last few weeks, we've been looking at some of the stories, the object lessons that Jeremiah gives in the book of Jeremiah. It's an Old Testament book, one of the major prophets. In many ways, one of the themes of Jeremiah is the way that God sees the sin of people. And it isn't just an annoyance, but the word that's used is anger. Sometimes wrath, and sometimes that feels unworthy of God to some of our modern sensibilities. But here we have God with His reaction to people's sin, being angry, not just annoyed. In fact, so angry that what he says he will do is he will bring the Babylonians to take the people away and take them into exile to another land, to rectify the way that they're living. And if you read through the Old Testament, this is one of the dominant themes of the motifs of the Old Testament.

When we come to Jeremiah 32, again, this is one of the object lessons we had, the object lesson of the broken cisterns, soiled loin cloths, broken pots, and the yoke. And here, Jeremiah's told that he should go and buy a field. Now, on the surface, just saying go and buy a field doesn't seem like that much of a thing. Like, you say, okay, why would you be told to buy a field? But when you understand the backdrop of captivity, Jeremiah was about to be taken away into captivity, likely to never return. So, if you were about to be led away, do you think you would take money and say, let me buy a plot of land, let me go get a new car, even though I'll never drive it, I'll never use it. Likely that isn't what you would do. You wouldn't say, oh, that makes sense to me.

What you do instead is you would say, I'm going to try to leverage any of the money I have to help me with whatever's ahead of me. And yet the word of the Lord comes to Jeremiah and says go and buy land right now. So, get a deed of land so that you know that you have this land. And in a way, this is God's promise saying the exile is not permanent.

Now, Jeremiah 32, has this simple plot, verses 1 through 15. He's told to go buy a field. Verses 16 through 25 is basically Jeremiah's objection. This is part of what you heard read. Verses 26 through 34, we basically get to see God's response. Let me just show you a little bit of this. This is Jeremiah 32, verse 23. It says, "They came in and took possession of it, but they did not obey you or follow your law; they did not do what you commanded them to do. So

you brought all this disaster on them." And so, his basic statement here is, why would I buy land? Because you're bringing disaster anyway.

And then in chapter 32 verses 26 through 34, again, you get God's response. But let me just show you a little snippet of this response in verses 37 through 40. He says, "I will surely gather them." So now this is God talking about after this exile, after he's bought the land, after the people have been taken away. He says, "I will surely gather them from all the lands where I banish them in my furious anger and great wrath; I will bring them back to this place and let them live in safety. They will be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me and that all will then go well for them and for their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me."

Now, here's why this comes together in the context of saying buy a field. He says, I'm going to make an everlasting covenant with them. And here's my guess, and that is very few people, when you hear the word covenant, go, oh, this is one of those big biblical words and concepts that I need to know where covenant is some kind of archaic agreement. But this is actually one of those concepts in your Bible that is really important for tying together the whole story, this idea of covenant, because this is the idea of God having made agreements with people. And so, in the Old Testament, what we call our Old Testament, God makes these covenants with people, these agreements and groups of people to say this is the way that I intend to work.

And now he says, but I'm going to make an everlasting covenant. Here, the whole idea of the exile is you're being exiled because you haven't kept the agreement. And yet, he says I'm going to make an everlasting covenant with you that will be around this. One of the things that's significant to understand about this probably is not just a localized idea. And what I mean by that is certainly this was about the people of Israel and Judah and about their exile. But when you look at the promises, the way that God speaks about the restoration, it is so over the top that he's probably talking about a greater restoration, which means the experience of exile or homelessness, of a cosmic sense of not being home is something that is part of the narrative of the whole Bible.

Here's Isaiah 35, again, written in the same time frame. Listen to this and the way that God talks about this restoration. He says, "and those the LORD has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away."

Now, is this exactly how the return from exile played out? As you've read through your Bible, you know that the people came back. They were joyful, but it didn't last. It wasn't everlasting. There are other places, and I won't take the time to trace them. Right now, the talk about this restoration being where the lion and the lamb lie down together. And if you know your Bible, again in the New Testament, in Revelation, that's part of the picture of the restored earth. And so, what this picture is, is not just of localized exile, an event, but the whole sweep of human history played out in a specific instance.

Now, what does that mean for you, for me? How do covenant and buying a field all fit together? Well, it means that it's hopeless as things feel at times, that there is a restoration coming, that God is not done working, and that when you have that perspective and you understand the covenant, and I'll come back to that in just a moment, then you can live with hope in the face of things, whether they're global or personal, that are incredibly difficult and feel at times hopeless.

Paul David Tripp wrote this at one point. He said, "If you don't keep your eyes, the eyes of your heart focused on the paradise that is to come, then you will turn this poor, fallen world into the paradise that it was never intended to be." And what that means is that when things don't go the way that you think they should be, when you give yourself to a career and it's unfulfilling, when you give yourself to a marriage and it's dissatisfying, when you give yourself to parenting and maybe things don't go exactly as you want them to and even when they do, there's a hint of it not being all that you want it to be. That is a sign of this cosmic homelessness.

Here's how Mark Buchanan wrote about it. He said, "Homesickness. This perpetual experience of missing something usually gets misdiagnosed and so wrongly treated. The writer of Ecclesiastes sees himself misunderstood, his own ache, and he went off in the vain pursuit of something, anything to fill him up. It's an old story and a daily one. All our lives, we take hold of the wrong thing, go to the wrong place, eat the wrong food. We drink too much, sleep too much, work too long, take too many vacations or too few, all in the faint hope that this will finally satisfy us and silence the hunger within. We go from relationship to relationship, job to job, house to house, church to church convinced that this one is the right one. And it's not, and it won't ever be. It's better to figure that out now. This world is booby trapped. It's rigged for disappointment. On Earth, everything falls short of some hoped for ideal. Everything good down here has a tragic brevity to it and a funny aftertaste to it. It falls short and shortly falls apart. None of it possesses any ultimacy. "

And what he's driving at, I think, is the experience that our Bible paints in terms of this cosmic homelessness, this sense of exile. And yes, for the people of Israel, it was a literal exile, and it was tied to this idea that they did not keep the covenant that God had made with them.

So, the question is, where does your story, my story fit in with this? Well, the teaching in the Bible is fairly straightforward that all of us fall short of God's glory. In other words, we don't keep what God asks of us, and the Bible calls that sin but it doesn't leave us there. There's this promise that says God still works and ultimately there's this language of this covenant.

And here's why this is so important. In Jeremiah 31, just a little before Jeremiah 32, in this image of the field, we're given what's called the New Covenant, this institution of something that God is talking about. Again, huge concept in the Bible in terms of trying to understand the Bible. Here's what it says. Verse 31 of of Jeremiah 31, "'The days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,' declares the LORD. 'This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,' declares the LORD. 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one

another, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,' declares the LORD. 'For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.'"

Now, here again, you get this this sweeping statement that's bigger than just their return to exile and this promise of this new covenant of God through Jeremiah saying I am going to give you a covenant. You have bought this piece of land, so to speak, even though everything feels hopeless because this isn't the end of the story. I debated about how to explain this covenant in a quick, compelling manner. Sometimes you see stuff and you just say, you know what, that does a better job than I can do. There's a group called the Bible Project that puts together videos, and they often do them on books of the Bible. Their goal is to take complex things that are a lot to explain, make them visual, short, quick, and easy, and they have one on the covenant. I think it's going to do a better job explaining this than I can do. So let me show you this and then I want to come back and drive home the point.

"If you've been around Christians, you've probably heard of the idea of having a personal relationship with God, which could mean different things in the Bible, like having God as a friend or your father or maybe your teacher. But there's one particular way that the Bible talks about this relationship that you find all over. But strangely, we don't talk about it that much, and that's the idea of a partnership with God. A partnership like working alongside someone to accomplish a goal together. And this is actually what you see at the beginning of the Bible. God creates this good world full of all of this potential. And then God appoints these unique creatures, humans, as his partners, in bringing more and more goodness out of all of that potential.

But the humans don't want to partner with God. They rebel and try to create a world on their own terms. And so, this broken partnership is the Bible's explanation for why we're stuck in a world of corruption and injustice and the tragedy of death. It's not like there's just one or two humans who have bailed on this relationship. In the story of the Bible, everyone has abandoned the partnership with God. So, what God does is select a smaller group of people out of the many, and he makes a new partnership with them called a covenant. And in a covenant God makes promises and then in exchange asks his partner to fulfill certain commitments. And the purpose of all of this is to somehow use this covenant relationship to renew his partnership with everybody else.

Now, there are actually four times in the Old Testament that were told God initiates a covenant relationship with Noah, Abraham, the nation of Israel, and King David. And it's through these that God is forming a covenant family into which all people will eventually be invited. So, let's see how these work.

The first one is with Noah. So, in this story, God has just brought the flood to cleanse the world of humanity's corruption, and Noah and his family are the only ones left. And so, God makes a covenant with Noah saying, listen, I know that humans will continue to be evil, but despite that, I'm not going to destroy it like this again. Instead, the earth will be this reliable place for us to work together. Great! So, what does Noah have to do? Nothing. And that's what's so interesting about this first covenant is that God is promising to be faithful, even though he knows humans won't be.

The next time we see God make a covenant is with a man named Abraham. God chooses him, promises to bless him, give him a large family, lots of land where they can flourish, and in return, God asks Abraham to trust him and train up his family to do what is right and just. And the whole reason for this covenant is God says that somehow he's going to bring his blessing to all families of the world through this one family. So that's Abraham.

The next time we see God make a covenant is when Abraham's family grows into the tribe of Israel, and this covenant is with the whole tribe. God asks them to obey a set of laws which are these guidelines for living well as a community of God's partners. And if they do this, then God promises to bless them and that they will become a people who then represent Him to the rest of humanity. That's the covenant with Israel.

The last covenant is with King David. The Tribe of Israel has become this large nation ruled by David, and God asked David and his descendants to partner with him by leading Israel in obeying the laws and doing what is right and just. And God promises that one day one of David's sons will come and extend God's Kingdom of peace and blessing over all the nations. So those are the four covenants that God makes in order to restore his partnership with the whole world.

But here's what happens. Israel breaks the covenant. They worship other gods, they allow horrible injustice, and so they lose their land and are forced off into exile. So, it seems hopeless. But during this time, Israel's prophets talked about a day when God would restore these covenants in spite of Israel's failure, somehow. Yeah, they called it the New Covenant.

And this is actually what's so interesting about Jesus is that he's introduced into this story as the one who fulfills all of these covenant relationships. We're told that he's from the family of Abraham, and so he will bring the blessings of that family to the whole world. We're told that he's the faithful Israelite who is able to truly obey the law, and we're told that he's the king from the line of David. And so, he goes about extending God's kingdom of justice and peace to all. And that's really remarkable for one guy. Yeah. And what it highlights is perhaps the most surprising claim of all made about this man, that Jesus is no mere human, but rather God become human. And God did this in order to be that faithful covenant partner that we are all made to be, but to fail to be.

And so, through Jesus, God has opened up a way for anyone to be in a renewed partnership with Him. So, Jesus calls people to follow him and become part of this New Covenant family. And despite their failures, Jesus is committed to making them into partners who are becoming more and more faithful. The story of the Bible ends with a vision of a fully renewed world full of goodness and peace. And there's this renewed humanity. They're partnering together with God to expand the goodness of His creation. And so, the end of the Bible story is really a new beginning."

Now, I get that that may have been more in the weeds than some of us wanted to go, but I want you to hear how Jesus uses this phrase. This is Luke 22 when Jesus instituted what's known as the Lord's Supper. Here's what he says in verse 19. "And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.'" And the back story that the people would have known sitting in the room was this idea of this covenant. In Genesis 15, where one of the covenants is initiated,

the animals are cut in two as a way to say I'm going to pass through as part of my agreement. And so, Jesus now is invoking that language and saying I am broken because I am the fulfillment that you could not be of this covenant that I've made.

And then listen to what he says in verse 20 of Luke 22. "In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.'" Do you see it? Jesus is taking this and he's saying do you know what I am? I am the fulfillment of the covenant that you could not be. And therefore, you can partner with me even though you can't partner with me. You can come into relationship with me, even though in your own efforts you fail all the time. This is the good news of Jesus Christ, because religion says here's a bar, try to meet it, do your best. Maybe you can, maybe you can't. But what we actually know is that we can't and won't.

And what Jesus does is he says no, I come so that it isn't about your behavior, but it's about what Jesus Christ has done. And this revolutionizes how we see things. Now, I know some of you are probably saying, well, wait a second, does that mean I can do anything I want and I'm still in? Did you notice what the New Covenant language was? What does it say? I will give you a new heart. And the new heart, what that means is that what happens when you come into a relationship with God, your faith relationship, where you're saying Jesus has done it, he is the fulfillment of the New Covenant, God begins putting new desires, a new heart in you, which means if your mindset is cool, Jesus did it, I don't need to do anything. You're actually making a mockery of the New Covenant because your heart will start to be bothered by your disloyalty to God and you'll start to have a hunger to say what are the things of God that would bring beauty to this world. Now, in some ways, this, for many people feels like, you know, this is almost too good to be true. This is such an amazing account.

Savannah Guthrie just wrote a book. She's a host of one of the morning shows about her faith journey. And I don't know much about her faith journey. I haven't read the book. I don't plan to read the book. But she was in an interview I heard, and she made a statement that I thought really captured something. And it's actually a restatement of something that is called Pascal's Wager. Here's what she said about her journey of faith, where she was basically saying I wrestled with this. She said, "I would rather be hopeful and turn out to be wrong at the end than hopeless and turn out to be right." And what she was basically saying was, you know, I believe this is true, and I want other people to believe it's true. It's kind of an evangelistic book. But what she was saying in her way of saying it was what other alternatives do I have? I'd rather live with the hope ultimately that there is a God. And I would add to it that Jesus is the one who keeps the New Covenant and institutes it so that you and I can live with this hope, than to live in a world in which it is hopeless because the cycle of my failure, your failure, our world's failure is endless. And there is nothing to which we buy a field and say our God is a restoring God.

We've been in this series in part because we're in the season of Lent, meaning a time to look and contemplate our sinfulness and yet to understand ultimately that what we celebrate on Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday is Jesus' victory. And so today, our hope, our simple hope is that we would recognize that God is justified in saying you haven't, and yet He has provided an amazing way through Jesus for you and me to share in His Covenant relationship. The question is do you have the new heart? Do you say, God, this is where I have set my life. And if so, then you can come to the table today in a way that says, I am a partaker

in this new covenant because every time you partake in communion, what you're doing is you're saying I am a partaker in what Jesus Christ has done on my behalf.

Father, I ask today that you would help each of us to not just intellectually have some assent to this, but it would work on our hearts in such a way that as we are reminded of what Jesus has done, our hearts would be filled with so much gratitude that we can do nothing other than ask how we can partner with you in this world for the betterment of the world, for our good. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.