

## *You, Your Church and the Credit Crunch.*

*Jeremiah 32:6-15*

### Jeremiah buys a field

#### Where we are

These are difficult times for nearly everyone; there's a lot of concern and worry and fear out there.

We know about the credit – I fear we have not yet felt the full force of the crunch. Companies are folding, businesses shutting down, there are more empty shops every week on the streets of our local towns. People are losing their jobs, many of which they've had for years. It's difficult to get other work.

Instead of a regular wage or salary, people are going on to benefit.

Some are struggling to pay the rent or mortgage, and are losing their homes.

Those depending on their savings to produce income, are seeing their returns plunge.

Only the very rich, are unaffected, and as St Paul said in another context, in the church *'there are not many rich'*.

Who'd have thought three years ago, that today the government would control a number of major High Street financial institutions? – RBS, Lloyds, HBOS, Northern Rock – where will it all end? Fancy - New Labour *nationalising* things!

I don't suggest it's like the war, a time that some of you can remember, but the sense of uncertainty is something we can almost touch.

#### The effect

It's not only individuals who are suffering. Every week there are letters from major charities in desperate terms; their income has shrunk and they need lots of help to maintain their existing programmes, and they cannot hope to do new things.

We all know the financial pressures on our churches over the last 3-4 years have become harder to deal with, and they can only get worse as the months roll on.

So I want to look at J and his field, and see if that can give us a new vision, because that is what we surely need. As another OT prophet says: *Where there is no vision the people perish.*

#### The reading

It's 588BC. The armies of the king of Babylon have invaded Judah, and are laying siege to its capital, the city of Jerusalem. J has been prophesying that it will all

end in disaster for the nation, and for his trouble, has been locked up in the Court of the Guard. But he will not keep quiet: king Zedekiah and many of the chief priests will be carried off captive into exile. And that came to be – you know Psalm 137 that goes: *By the waters of Babylon, we sat down and wept, when we remembered Sion (Jerusalem)..... how can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?*

Then something happened that J recognised as *the word of the Lord*. It came to him that his cousin would come to offer him the chance to buy a field belonging to the family. (The Jewish people did not like family land to go out of family ownership). The cousin arrives with the offer – the chance has come to J, under the rules that govern these things. Will he take it, and buy the field?

Yet on the other hand, there's a vast army outside the City, and when it was captured, the possessions of the defeated would be shared out by the victors – that's what happens in war.

I'm sure J's solicitor told him: this is not a good time to buy.

But buy it he did, for the full price – 17 shekels of silver- all weighed out, with the deeds properly prepared, all in front of the witnesses, and taking care the records would be kept safe; it was an *extraordinary* thing to do, in the circumstances. But as J saw it, God was saying: *houses and fields and vineyards will again be bought and sold in this land.*

J saw this as an affirmation that we will get through what is happening; there is hope still.

He felt we can have confidence in God, even when times are as black as this; better times will come.

And he considered: I am prepared to show that I believe that, by putting my money where my mouth is, by buying this field. I'm in this for the long haul.

### The challenge

So there's the challenge to us: how much confidence do we have in the church and what it stands for, and in the God whose church it is?

The church is always talking about hope, about faith, and confidence in a faithful God. People in our communities who are going to be seeing rough times in the months ahead, are going to be asking how we react, what signs of faith and hope and confidence we can give.

I believe this is a time when we are challenged to stand up and be counted, because I'm sure that things will get worse before they get better.

### Practical responses

- 1) For those who are not so much affected, this is a chance to make up, compensate, for what others can no longer do. Those who've lost their

jobs, or seen their incomes fall, can't be expected to give, as they did before. Others are not so affected, and that is our opportunity to step in. 2 Cor. 9 v6: *those who sow sparingly, will reap sparingly; those who sow bountifully, will reap bountifully...* So, if you are in that situation, do something now.

- 2) This is about *commitment*. So whatever you decide to give, make sure you give it *every week*. Sometimes we miss church, but don't miss out on your giving.
- 3) Coupled with that, *let our giving be our first responsibility*. It's not for me to tell you what to give, but what we give should be our priority, not what we have left at the end of the week. If we give a percentage of our income (whatever and however we assess that), let that be our first thought; if it's 5%, I'm sure we'll be able to manage on the other 95%. In 1 Cor 16, Paul talks about putting our gifts aside *on the first day of the week*.
- 4) There's a story of a priest who challenged his congregation to give during Lent, rather than to give something up. *Just for Lent*, he said, *double your giving, but just for Lent*. At Easter, he said, *well how was it? Did you suffer? Did you find you could not manage? Well then, in that case*, he said, *you can go on giving at the higher rate*.

If you read on, you'll find J had second thoughts, and wondered if he'd gone mad. He pours out his concerns to God, who then asks him: *if you really meant what you said, why are you now doubting? I am the Lord, the God of all flesh – is anything too hard for me?*

## Conclusion

We are not going to avoid the pain over the coming months, but we shall know God through what is happening.

Are we in this only for the good times, or for the long term? Do we have confidence in God, or not?

In these times we need courage – and *Courage is fear, that has said its prayers*.