

SEALED AND OPEN EVIDENCES

NO. 2297

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 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Thus says the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel; Take these deeds, this deed of the purchase, which is sealed, and this deed which is open; and put them in an earthen vessel, that they may last many days.”
Jeremiah 32:14.

THE discourse of this evening is suggested by the transaction of Jeremiah with his uncle's son in the purchase of a field at Anathoth which he conducted in a business-like and legal way. I will begin with just a few remarks upon the transaction itself.

Jeremiah was called to forego the comforts of the present for the blessings of the future. He was a poor man and he was shut up in prison. A little money must have been a very great thing to him at such a time—even food could not be purchased during the siege except at fabulous prices—and his allowance was very small. Yet he paid down 17 shekels of silver—not a great sum in itself, but very great to him in such circumstances—to buy the field which, as I said in the exposition, he could not go and see, for he was a prisoner, and which he could not have reached even if he had been free, for it was in the hand of the Chaldeans and laid desolate by the invading army. He was commanded by the Lord to buy a field which, speaking after the manner of men, was on the moon! It was what we call, “an estate in Spain,” which Jeremiah could not possibly visit, but because he had God's orders to buy it, he did buy it and he paid the purchase money right cheerfully.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, this is exactly what we have to do—we have to pawn the present for the future! We must be satisfied to give up *anything* which Christ may require of us for the sake of that which is yet to come. Our inheritance is not on this side of Jordan. Our joy is yet to be revealed. I grant you that we have much thrown in, for the Lord is a good Paymaster, but on the road to Heaven He gives us only our spending money. Our inheritance is in the land of the hereafter, in the regions of the blessed—and we must not look for it here—*this is not our rest!* It is worth while to give up a great deal that belongs to the present for the eternal inheritance which is yet to be ours. “There remains a rest to the people of God.” And if ever it should come to this, that your present comfort, yes, and your present *life*, must be given up for the sake of the land of promise and the Covenant heritage, make no delay. Do not hesitate for a moment, but yield everything up, that the greater blessings of the future may be assuredly yours.

My second remark is that, when a man acts by faith, he ought still to act in a clear, business-like way. We who believe in God are no fools. Some may think that we are; but they would not find us to be so if they had to deal with us in matters requiring judgment and consideration. Jeremiah buys the field in the presence of witnesses, weighs the money, and has the purchase deed drawn up, and the counterpart of the deed, all after a legal manner, just as Abraham did when he bought the field of Machpelah from the sons of Heth. That passage in Genesis is an ancient legal document, containing just such words as you would find in an Oriental purchase deed of the present day. The man of God counts things, which to others are dreams, as realities, and he treats them as such.

Faith is sanctified commonsense. It believes in God—is that stupidity? It believes in God's promises—is that foolishness? It believes that God will keep His Word—is that a folly? If so, we purpose to be more foolish, still, but, knowing that it is not folly, but truest wisdom, we act in this case as we act in other matters and we make sure as far as we can. “Fast bind, fast find,” says our proverb and, therefore, we exercise in the things of God that discretion and prudence which we use in the things of men. Faith is not folly—and the Believer must not, *in anything*, act like a fool!

Perhaps you might wonder why Jeremiah, whose business it was to prophesy, should be set to buy land? There is nothing like division of labor. Let the politician attend to politics, let the keeper of a theater supply amusement to the people who want it—and let the Christian minister keep to his preaching. Yes, but Jeremiah was commanded *by God* to do this because he was really *preaching* by what he did! The preacher must believe in what he preaches and it may be that he will be called to do something which will be, to his people, the best possible proof that he really *does* believe it. Jeremiah believes that the city, though it was to be destroyed, would afterwards be rebuilt and that land would be valuable, trade would be restored and agriculture would again flourish. He has *said* this—he has now to *prove* it. The few shekels that he has, he must invest in a bit of land which is worth nothing, today, but may be worth a good deal, if not to himself, yet to his heirs. He must buy the field to prove his sincerity!

Oh, Beloved, if we are called to preach, we must believe what we preach, or else we had better give it up! “I believed, therefore have I spoken,” is a text which should be written over every minister’s study door, and over his pulpit, too. What have we to say if we have a doubt about it? How can we move others if we have no fulcrum for our lever, if we are not, ourselves, sure and certain? If there is no element of dogmatism in our message because of our confidence concerning what we have to deliver, in God’s name, let us go to bed and hold our tongues until we believe it! The monk that shook the world owed his power, under God, to the fact that the world could not shake him! Martin Luther believed with an unshakable faith and, therefore, he had power over others. God called Jeremiah to effect the purchase of this little estate to prove to the people that he believed what he preached!

And now, leaving Jeremiah, I am going to make a parable, not to bring out what the text teaches, but to use it parable-wise. When he bought this piece of land, it was transferred to him by two documents. The first was a purchase deed, drawn up and signed by witnesses and then sealed up, not to be opened, anymore, unless required to settle a dispute. That was his real purchase or title deed. Then there was a counterpart of this transfer made and signed by witnesses. This was not rolled up and it was not sealed—but it was left open so that Jeremiah might refer to it and that, when desired, the open deed might be read and examined by others. It is not at all a bad custom and one which we, to a large extent, follow, that there should be two deeds of transfer, the one to be kept and laid up by itself, only to be opened in case of litigation, or absolute necessity—the other being the certified *copy*—the open deed or evidence for daily use if anybody wished to examine it and see how the property had been transferred.

Now, with regard to our redemption, our inheritance which Christ has bought for us at an immense price, we, too, have two sets of deeds or evidences. The one is sealed up from all eyes but our own. In part, too, I might say that it is sealed up from our own eyes. The other, the counterpart of that, equally valid, is open to ourselves and open to others. So I shall talk, first, about *the sealed evidences of our faith*. And, secondly, about *the open evidences of our faith*. And, then, thirdly, about *the use of these two sets of evidences*. May the Holy Spirit make us wise to speak things to edification and to heart searching, as He, alone, can!

I. First, then, I want you to think a little OF THE SEALED EVIDENCES OF OUR FAITH, the evidences which are sealed, at least in a measure, from our fellow men.

And, first, I would say, among the sealed evidences is this—*the Word of the Lord has come to us with power*. If anyone asked himself, “Have I a right to the Covenant of Grace and to the ‘all things’ which are ours if we are in that Covenant? Have I a right to the purchased possession? Have I a right to the Lord Jesus Christ and all that comes to Believers in Him?” In part, the answer must be, “Has the Word of the Lord come to you with power, not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the Word of God?” Some of my hearers will not understand what I am now saying. I noticed, in one of the daily papers, this remark about a sermon I preached a few Sunday mornings ago, “Mr. Spurgeon will admit that it needed an education to understand him.” Yes, I do admit it. And I admit another thing, namely, that very many newspaper writers have not that education and that, therefore, they cannot understand what we preach.

It is with our preaching of such things as it was with Dr. Hawker, when preaching at Plymouth. One of his members brought down from London a great scientist and he thought that the learned man would like to hear Dr. Hawker, the eminent preacher of the Gospel. The next morning, this member said to the doctor, “I brought So-and-So to hear you yesterday.” “Did you?” “Yes. And what do you think he said, Dr. Hawker? He said that he did not understand a sentence of what you were talking about.” “Did he?” said Dr. Hawker, “Well, there were lots of old women in the aisles who understood it all.” They had been taught of God and the other person had not!

Now, only he who has felt it will know what I mean by this expression—the Word of God has come with power to our soul! There is a mystic influence, a Divine unction which really goes with the Word of God, in many cases, so that it enters the heart, sheds a radiance upon the understanding, pours a flood of delightful peace and joy upon the soul—and affects the whole mental and spiritual being in a way which nothing else does! You cannot explain this to others! Do you know it yourself? If so, that will be to you the *sealed evidence or deed* that the eternal heritage is yours! The Lord has *given* you the *spiritual* perception of these things. You had no such faculty when He gave it to you, but He took you from being carnal, in which state you could not understand *spiritual* things, and he made you spiritual! And now His spiritual Truth has come with the demonstration of the Spirit to your heart and you now know, by a witness which you cannot communicate to anybody but yourself, that these things are so and that you have a part in them!

The next one of these sealed evidences is this—if, indeed, this heavenly heritage is ours—we *have a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ*. “As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.” Unless fearfully deceived, some of us can say, tonight, that we are resting wholly upon Christ. We depend upon the blood of Christ for cleansing, the righteousness of Christ for clothing, the death of Christ to be the death of sin, and the life of Christ to be our life unto God! All that we have we derive from Him. As for myself, I have not a shadow of a shade of the ghost of a hope apart from the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ—and I know that many of you can say the same.

Well now, the possession of that confidence, that child-like trust, that real faith, is an evidence to you that the heritage is yours. “Without faith, it is impossible to please God,” but he that believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. He that accepts Christ and His great Sacrifice to be the one ground of his trust—and does this with all his heart and soul—has that sealed evidence which others cannot read, but which he may read with confidence, for Christ said, “He that hears My Word, and believes on Him that sent Me, has everlasting life.” “He that believes on Him is not condemned.” He is a justified man and, “being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

I can give you only just a hint or two upon these evidences. Another sealed evidence of our interest in Christ is that *we have life in Jesus*. Of this nobody but yourself can judge—and you must be sure to judge very carefully according to the Word of God. It is *not* the old life *educated*. It is *not* the old nature *improved*. It is a distinctly *new* life, so that you have hopes to which you once were strangers. You have fears which once never affected you. You have come into a new world—you are, indeed, born again! All around you seems new, it is with you as with one I spoke to the other day. She said to me, “Sir, either I am new, or else all the world is.” And I said, “Yes, but the world is *not* new—that remains old.” “Oh, but!” she replied, “my relation to it, my thoughts about it, my thoughts about everything are totally different from what they ever were before.”

You can tell if this change has been worked in you. If a horse could suddenly be inspired with mental faculty so as to be able to understand astronomy, what a new life it would be for it as it began to study the stars! Ah, but *yours* is a greater change than *that*! You have risen from the lower sphere of mere soulish life into the higher condition of *spiritual life* and now you consort with God, you speak with Christ, you have become familiar with heavenly things and are raised up to sit in the heavenlies with Christ Jesus! It is a new life altogether with you and you feel it beating within your soul. You cannot tell this to everybody. If you did, perhaps you would have your testimony received with a laugh. To yourself, however, it is a sealed evidence, but a very sure one.

And this leads me to the fourth evidence, which is that *we now have communion with God in prayer*. Worldlings may pray after a sort, that is, they can utter a few good words, or repeat a form of prayer. But true Believers speak with God as a man speaks with his friend! We tell Him our daily troubles. We detail our needs, we express our joys. Prayer is, to us, a reality—and God hears it and He answers us—and gives us many evidences of His love in the answers to our prayers. Some of these we can tell to the praise of His Glory, but there are 10 times as many which we would not tell for all the world, for they are like love passages between two enamored souls—they are too precious to be whispered to other ears! It would be casting pearls before swine if the spiritual man, who dwells with God, were to tell all that he asks of God, and all the Lord’s answers to his prayers! But, oh, believe me, you cannot enjoy real fellowship with God in prayer and come out of the closet with Luther’s, “Vici! Vici!” “I have conquered! I have conquered!” on your lips, and live to enjoy the fruits of your victory in wrestling with God in secret—and then have any doubt whether you have a right and title to the eternal heritage! That is a sealed evidence, but it is a sure one. You cannot but look back upon it with extreme satis-

faction. The prophet Micah said, “My God will hear me,” and if you can truly, from your soul, say the same, you have a blessed evidence that you are an heir of Heaven!

But, next, I rank very highly among the sealed evidences of our inheritance the fact that *we have the fear of God before our eyes*. Fear looks like one of the minor Graces, but it is a very leading one in the spiritual life. That holy awe of God, that consciousness of His majestic Presence, that dread of doing anything contrary to His will, that tender, loving, filial fear which love does not cast out, but rather nourishes and cherishes—he that has this holy fear is a child of God! They sometimes speak in indictments against criminals of their “not having the fear of God before their eyes,” and, mark you, if a man has not the fear of God before his eyes, you need not wonder at anything that he does. Take away the fear of God from a nation and to what lengths of evil will it not go? Remember the great and terrible Revolution in France, when, at the end of the last century, she had cast off all fear of God? When a nation comes to that point, rebellion against authority is the least thing to be looked for. The horrors of the guillotine and the constant flow of blood will be sure to come—but in the child of God there is a holy, filial fear, which keeps him from doing things that others do. Remember how Nehemiah says, “So did not I, because of the fear of God”? A Christian is not held back from a certain course by a dread of punishment, but by that loving dread of offending so good and so gracious a God as he has.

Now, if you feel, tonight, that you can honestly say that you walk in the fear of God all the day long—that is a sealed evidence—and it is a very sure proof that the inheritance of the saints really belongs to you.

Another evidence is this—*we have secret supports in the time of trouble*. Here one could expatiate at great length if time would permit. “Underneath are the everlasting arms.” You are sustained when enduring awful pain, comforted under deep depression of spirit, strengthened for the work for which, in yourself, alone, you are quite unequal, borne upward with holy joy in the midst of cruel slander! Surely that is enough evidence for you!

Besides, the Lord gives to His people *secret delights* and we sing, “He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love.” At such times, the Lord gives us *secret directions and instructions* which come to the soul directly from Himself. Do not think me fanatical, for it is even as I say. These love tokens come to the soul with a demonstration and a power, a delight and a rapture which no words can ever express. They cannot be expressed, seeing that, in many instances, we hear, in the time of ecstatic joy, words which it is not lawful for a man to utter! We wrap these proofs up among the sealed evidences of our right to the heavenly inheritance!

Another sealed evidence is *the secret love which the child of God has to all others of the children of God*. “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.” As to the love we have to Jesus, “We love Him because He first loved us,” and our love to Him is one of the evidences of His love to us. We also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. “God, my exceeding joy” is a sweet name that David gives to the Lord, and then he adds, “I shall yet praise Him who is the health of my countenance, and my God.” I love to sing it as the hymn version puts it—

*“For yet I know I shall Him praise,
Who graciously to me,
The health is of my countenance,
Yes, my own God is He.”*

If you feel this intense love to the Lord and to His people, that is one of your sealed evidences.

But once again, and I should like to enlarge on all these points, but I must not, those *inward conflicts* which you now have, that struggling in your soul between right and wrong, the new man seeking to get the victory over the old corrupt nature—all these are your sealed evidences. So, also, are the *victories* which God gives you, when He treads evil passions beneath the feet of the new-born man-child, who is the image of Christ within you, when you conquer yourself, when you subdue anger, when you go forth to do, by the strength of God, what otherwise your nature would shrink from—all these are blessed evidences, signed and sealed, to be rolled up and put away—to be seen by no eyes but your own—and the eyes of the Most High. These, then, are the sealed evidences of our faith.

I have been obliged to hurry over this part of my subject because I need just a few minutes, now, to dwell upon the open evidences.

II. Let us consider, secondly, THE OPEN EVIDENCES OF OUR FAITH. There is a counterpart, or copy, of the sealed title, or purchase deed. What are these open evidences of our faith?

They are such proofs as *others can see*—and the first of such evidences that we are the children of God must be the *open Word of God itself*. I read the Bible and I say, “Well, if this Book is true, I am a saved man! If this is really a Divine

Revelation, then I am saved!” Beloved, have you that open evidence of your salvation? That is the best evidence in the whole world! When Peter was writing concerning the Transfiguration of Christ, he added, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto you do well that you take heed, as unto a light that shines in a dark place.” The Lord Jesus said, “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” I believe in Him, therefore I shall not perish, but have everlasting life. The open volume of the Word of God is our open evidence of salvation!

Next to that, the open evidence of our right to the inheritance is *a thorough change of life such as other people can see*. Is it so with you? Has there been a distinct crisis in your being? Have you been turned from darkness unto light? Have you been brought from the power of Satan unto God? Does your husband know of the change? Does your wife see it? Do your father and mother notice it? Does your master perceive it, if you are a domestic servant? I think that, in some persons, conversion works so marked a change that the people of the neighborhood in which they live must see it! Distinctly do I recall, here, a man whose voice was uncommonly loud when he prayed at the Prayer Meetings. I was only a child, then, but I said to myself, “I have heard that man’s voice before,” and so I had, but I was surprised to hear it in *prayer*, for I had heard him swear on board ship! He was a captain and he swore as if he had swallowed a trumpet—and there he was, converted, and he was speaking in the same trumpet-tones to the praise of the glory of God’s Grace! When a man has been a gross offender, there will be a conversion which men and angels and devils will be sure to see—and this is one of the open evidences that he is a Christian. May you all be such Epistles of Christ that you may be known and read of all men!

Another open evidence is *separation from the world*. A man who is really a child of God cannot, after his conversion, consort with his old companions. As one said to me this week, “When I was in the shop, they began to talk some lewdness and to utter filthy words. And I just took up my hat and went away, for I heard this text in my ears, “Come out from among them, and be you separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” Separation from the world is one of the open evidences of a child of God. You do not come away from them because you dislike the people, but because you cannot bear their evil ways. They find pleasure in that which is a sorrow to you—that which is food to them is poison to you—and you say to yourself, “My Lord would not wish to come and find me in this society,” so you et away from them.

The next open evidence is found in *union with the people of God*, making them your companions, taking a delight in them. Depend upon it, we shall forever go with those who are our chosen friends here—the people who are our companions on earth will be our companions in the world to come! Tares will be bound up in bundles with the tares, but the wheat will be bound up with the wheat. This, then, is another open evidence of your adoption into the family of God—when you love the people of God and seek their company.

One very clear open evidence is *strict honesty, uprightness and integrity in business*. Do not tell me that you are a child of God if you can cheat your follow men! You may tell that to whomever you like, but it will not be believed by any man who reads his Bible. Straightforward honesty should always be the mark of every professor of the religion of Christ! Your word must be your bond, and you must sooner fail in business than do the smallest thing that would be contrary to the strictest integrity. This will become, to many, an open evidence which they can read.

One very open evidence of a change of heart and of our possession of the inheritance, is a *readiness to forgive*. If you cannot suffer a wrong and continue to cherish resentment for it, how dwells the love of God in you? How can you ever pray the prayer of the Believer and say, “Our Father which are in Heaven,” when you have to stammer as you come to, “Forgive us our sins; for we also forgive everyone that is indebted to us.” Cheerful readiness to forgive any injury done to ourselves—to overlook any wrongdoing whatever—is one of the open evidences that we are the children of God!

Another open evidence is one which we often get and do not like, that is, *the opposition of the world*. If any man will serve God faithfully, he will be sure to have the dogs of Hell at him. If you were to go through a village where you had never been, before, the dogs would come out and bark at you. But if you belonged to the parish, they would know you, and they would not take any notice of you. If you are a stranger to the world and a citizen of Heaven, the devil’s dogs will howl at your heels! They cannot help it, for it is their nature. Thank God, Isaac, when Ishmael mocks you, for it is a mark that you are of the true seed and that Ishmael is not!

Another open evidence, and one that is very sweet, is *a holy patience in time of trouble and especially in the hour of death*. Often have God's people, when racked with pain, been able to rejoice in God. And when heart and flesh have failed them and the death-sweat has been standing on their brow, they have been able, even then, if not to sing, at least to say, "The Lord is my Shepherd." "Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff they comfort me."

III. I wish that Time would have paused for a while, tonight, but he has not. I must not keep you beyond our usual hour, so I will close with just two or three words upon THE USES TO WHICH WE PUT THESE EVIDENCES.

One of them is that *they often yield us comfort*. There is truth in Dr. Watt's hymn—

*"When I can read my title clear
To mansions in the skies,
I bid farewell to every fear,
And wipe my weeping eyes."*

It takes the sting out of every trouble when we know that the heavenly inheritance is surely ours.

Then again, these evidences *answer the unjust charges of Satan* when he comes and says, "You are *not* a child of God." Ah, but we have the evidences of our salvation, the sealed evidence and the open evidence, and we answer him boldly!

And above all things, I think that we ought to value these evidences because they will be *produced in court at the Last Day*. That is the most solemn thing of all. See how the Lord Jesus, the great Advocate of His people, produces the evidence in court—"I was hungry, and you gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink," and so on. He produces this evidence of a work of Grace in their hearts, and says to them, "Come you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

Brothers and Sisters, do you possess these evidences? If you have none, do not try to counterfeit them. For God's sake and your own sake, do not commit forgery in such a matter as this! If you have not these evidences, pray God that you may know that you have not, and go straightway to Christ, tonight, as a *sinner*. You have plenty of evidence that you are a sinner and Jesus came into the world to save sinners! Put your trust in Him, now, and receive from Him the evidence that you are one of His people. If you have bad evidences, worthless evidences, counterfeited evidences—fling them away and pray God that you may get rid of whatever false comfort you have ever derived from them! If God has given you the true evidences, still come to Jesus, just as you are, for it will be your continual coming to Christ that will be your best standing evidence that you are truly in Him!

The Lord bring you all to Jesus, tonight, just as you are, whether saints or sinners—and then shall you rejoice in Him! The Lord bless you, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON. *JEREMIAH 32:6-41.*

Verses 6, 7. *And Jeremiah, said, The word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Behold, Hanameel, the son of Shallum, your uncle, shall come unto you, saying, Buy you my field that is in Anathoth: for the right of redemption is yours to buy it.* God gave His servant an intimation of what was about to happen so that he might know how to act. It did seem a very strange thing to come to a poor Prophet in prison and to ask him to buy a piece of land when the Chaldeans were in possession of it—and when there seemed to be no hope that he would ever see it! One said, "I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it," but Jeremiah could not do this, for he was shut up in prison, and the enemy had possession of the field he was to buy! Still, the thing was of the Lord, and therefore it was right. And there is many an action which, in itself, might seem absurd, but which, nevertheless, is to be performed because it is according to the will of God.

8. *So Hanameel, my uncle's son, came to me in the court of the prison according to the word of the LORD, and said unto me, Buy my field, I pray you, that is in Anathoth, which is in the country of Benjamin: for the right of inheritance is yours, and the redemption is yours; buy it for yourself. Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD.* Should a minister be concerned about the buying of land? Yes, if God bids him buy it. He is not to be entangled with the affairs of this life, but Jeremiah certainly could not be entangled with this field.

9. *And I bought the field of Hanameel, my uncle's son, that was in Anathoth, and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver.* They always paid by weight to make sure that the amount was correct.

10, 11. *And I signed the deed and sealed it, and took witnesses, and weighed him the money in the balances. So I took the purchase deed, both that which was sealed according to the law and custom, and that which was open.* The transaction was all in proper legal form. We are not to be neglectful in business because we are the servants of the Lord, but in all things we should act as men of prudence and commonsense.

12-14. *And I gave the purchase deed unto Baruch the son of Neriah, the son of Maaseiah, in the sight of Hanameel, my uncle's son, and in the presence of the witnesses that signed the purchase deed, before all the Jews that sat in the court of the prison. And I charged Baruch before them, saying, Thus says the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel; take these deeds, both this purchase deed, which is sealed, and this deed which is open; and put them in an earthen vessel, that they may last many days.* They had no iron safes in those days, so their practice was to put their documents into earthen vessels and bury them deep in the earth, where they reckoned they would be secure.

15. *For thus says the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel; Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land.* Therefore, as an act of faith in God, the Prophet bought this meadow.

16. *Now when I had delivered the purchase deed to Baruch, the son of Neriah, I prayed unto the LORD, saying.* Jeremiah completes the business, puts the securities into safe keeping, and now he prays. It is always well to be free from care before you pray. Let nothing remain to be done, if it is possible, and then get alone and let your heart be free to speak with God. I do not suppose that Jeremiah prayed any the less or any the worse because he had attended to this business transaction. A man who lives near to God ought to be able to go from his counting-house to his closet with a happy heart!

17-19. *Ah Lord GOD! behold, You have made the Heaven and the earth by Your great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for You: You show loving kindness unto thousands, and recompense the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them: the Great, the Mighty God, the LORD of Hosts, is His name, great in counsel, and mighty in work: for Your eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men: to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.* Whenever you are troubled, think much of God! Speak much of Him. This is true adoration. It will be a great help to your own spirit. Your own littleness will be forgotten in the greatness of your God.

20-24. *You have set signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, even unto this day, and in Israel, and among other men; and have made You a name, as at this day; and have brought forth Your people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs, and with wonders, and with a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with great terror; and You have given them this land, which You did swear to their fathers to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey; and they came in, and possessed it; but they obeyed not Your voice, neither walked in Your Law; they have done nothing of all that You commanded them to do: therefore You have caused all this evil to come upon them. Behold the siege mounds!* The earthworks thrown up about Jerusalem completely surrounded it and the Chaldeans were hard at work breaking down the walls to capture the city while the people were dying of famine and disease.

24, 25. *They are come unto the city to take it; and the city is given into the hands of the Chaldeans that fight against it, because of the sword, and of the famine, and of the pestilence: and what You have spoken is come to pass; and, behold, You see it. And You have said unto me, O Lord GOD, Buy you the field for money, and take witnesses; for the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans.* Observe, it is hardly a prayer that Jeremiah utters—it is just a statement of his condition—and yet that *is real prayer*. When you do not know what to ask God, state your difficulty, for that is the very best thing you can do. When you cannot see any way out of the maze, never mind—it is for God to show you the clue. There is often much sanctified commonsense in laying the difficulty before the Lord, spreading the letter before Him, and leaving it there. When you cannot ask for deliverance in this way or that, it will be sufficient just to state the case as Jeremiah did.

26, 27. *Then came the word of the LORD unto Jeremiah, saying, Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there anything too hard for Me?* This is a grand question, an unanswerable question!

28-31. *Therefore thus says the LORD; Behold, I will give this city into the hands of the Chaldeans, and into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he shall take it: and the Chaldeans that fight against this city, shall come and set fire on this city, and burn it with the houses, upon whose roofs they have offered incense unto Baal, and poured out drink offerings unto other gods, to provoke Me to anger. For the children of Israel and the children of Judah have only done evil before Me from their youth: for the children of Israel have only provoked Me to anger with the work of their hands, says the LORD. For this city has been to Me as a provocation of My anger and of My fury from the day that they built it even unto this day; that I should remove it from before My face.* Jerusalem was such a sinful city that it must be destroyed. The very roofs

of the houses had been defiled by the sacrifices offered to idols. If these words were true of Jerusalem, surely they are also true in great measure of London! It has been a provocation of God's anger, "from the day that they built it even unto this day."

32. *Because of all the evil of the children of Israel and of the children of Judah, which they have done to provoke Me to anger, they, their kings, their princes, their priests, and their Prophets, and the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.* They seemed, from the very highest to the lowest, determined to provoke the Lord, to show how little they cared for the Most High.

33. *And they have turned unto Me the back, and not the face.* Like men who wished to insult a king in his very court.

33. *Though I taught them, rising up early and teaching them, yet they have not hearkened to receive instruction.* It is a great aggravation of an offense against God when He has taught us and yet we "have not hearkened to receive instruction."

34, 35. *But they set their abominations in the house, which is called by My name, to defile it. And they built the high places of Baal, which are in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire unto Molech; which I commanded them not, neither came it into My mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.* If God had commanded them to offer up their children, they would have stood aghast at such cruelty, but they willingly sacrificed them to Molech in opposition to His will.

36, 37. *And now, therefore, thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning this city, of which you say, It shall be delivered into the hands of the king of Babylon by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence. Behold, I will gather them, out of all countries where I have driven them in My anger, and in My fury, and in great wrath; and I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely.* God is angry, and yet gracious! The rest of the chapter is full of tenderness and love. It is enough to make our eyes fill with tears as we note how God speaks concerning those who had rebelled against Him.

38. *And they shall be My people, and I will be their God:* This is, indeed, a Covenant of Grace! It is not dealing with men after their sins, but according to the inexhaustible bounty of eternal love.

39, 40. *And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: And I will make an everlasting Covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me.* There is, here, a promise of double bliss! The Lord will not turn from His people and they shall not turn from Him. What more could God do than He, here, promises? It looks like a trial of strength between sin and Grace! Sin was like a mountain, but the Lord's love was like the flood which prevailed till even the mountains were covered!

41. *Yes, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with My whole heart and with My whole soul.* See how God puts His whole heart to the work when He is blessing His people? When He forgives sin, it is with His whole heart and soul. May we, with our whole heart and soul, repent of our sins and then, with all our heart and soul, serve the Lord! Amen.

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