

Answering God's Questions. 5.

A question for Jeremiah **IS ANYTHING TOO HARD FOR ME?** Jeremiah 32v26

The question God is asking us this morning is: Is anything too hard for me?

But first we need to go back to the year 587 BC. Jerusalem has been besieged for 18 months. The population are ravaged by starvation and disease. The Babylonians are about to destroy the city and subjugate the nation. Jeremiah has repeatedly warned the king but now God's judgment is about to fall. But he has also prophesied that God would bring the nation back to inhabit the land once more. The city would be rebuilt. Judgment would give way to mercy, exile to restoration. And to demonstrate his confidence God tells Jeremiah to do something out of the box!

v6-9. Jeremiah's cousin offers to sell him a field which is now useless because the Babylonians have effectively taken over the whole land. Why would Hanamel do this? He is evidently trying to get rid of useless land to raise some funds. But who in their right mind would buy now? Almost certainly his cousin was hostile towards Jeremiah who was out of favour and under royal guard. The offer was a challenge. *"If your faith is so strong then put your money where your mouth is. Buy this field from me."* It didn't make any economic sense. Jeremiah would be long dead when the exiles returned. But because God had prepared Jeremiah for this challenge he was ready to snap the offer up as a bargain.

A few centuries later a Roman historian records something similar happening during the second Punic War in 211 BC. Hannibal and his army had surrounded Rome - but when a field on which his army was camped was offered for sale in the Forum it was snapped up, so sure were they that Roman military might would bring them victory. Jeremiah's confidence was certainly not in Jewish military might. The Babylonians would definitely conquer Jerusalem. His confidence was in God's promises for the future.

v9-15: Jeremiah takes scrupulous care to attest the deeds of purchase and then preserve them. He wants these title deeds to be read in the future. They will be a witness to the returning exiles so they realize God had done what He said He would do and so be encouraged and inspired. Jeremiah's title deeds were put in a "clay jar". We now know how effective this would be in preserving ancient documents. The Dead Sea scrolls discovered in 1948 at Qumran had been preserved in this same way.

Jeremiah then prays, acknowledging God's power, recalling His deeds in the past and then coming back to the present – and his purchase of the field. (v16- 25)

v26: “Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: “I am the LORD, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?” It is such an important question. On the one hand it highlights things which seem humanly impossible – things which are completely beyond us. On the other hand it highlights things that God alone can do because of His almighty power.

And in between these two poles – comes the challenge to faith. Do you believe this or not? Do you believe that what is impossible for man is possible with God?

Remember how Jeremiah started his prayer in v16. *“Ah Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. **Nothing is too hard for you.**”* Don't you just love his reasoning? If God made the universe by His great power, then nothing is impossible for Him! This is why the debate about creation is such a battleground. If this is undermined then there is a ripple effect undermining our faith in every area. But if we look through a telescope or a microscope and see the handiwork of God – then nothing is too hard for Him: changing water into wine, feeding thousands on a few small loaves and fishes, walking on water, healing the sick, raising the dead. Jesus Himself being raised from the dead! Nothing is too hard.

When an angel spoke to Mary about conceiving the Messiah, Jesus, she asked “How will this be since I am a virgin?” In other words – this is impossible! The answer comes, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you **For nothing is impossible for God.**” In the first week of our latest home Alpha, one of the guests said that the virgin birth would be a massive stumbling block to faith for him. But by the third week his perspective had changed. He said he now understood that if you believe in the Holy Spirit everything is possible. This week, he said it again; he has come to the conclusion that if “God is real” – then nothing is impossible.

This isn't just an intellectual issue. If I do believe, I need to be ready to live my life in line with this faith - even if it is very risky and makes me look foolish. Like Jeremiah buying the field when an enemy army are occupying it.

In the film ‘Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade’ our hero is searching for the Holy Grail, the cup Christ drank from at the Last Supper. A trail of clues takes him to a cave where he is faced with a chasm. How can he get across? There is no bridge. The clue tells him *“It's a leap of faith”*. But *believing* means he must step out into a void. It seems suicidal. But as he puts his foot forward he discovers there is a bridge across the chasm; it only becomes visible as he takes the first step. But hey, this is the movies! Indiana Jones is not going to die because he is the hero.

What about us? We can't depend on special effects. We have to take physical, tangible steps of faith. We really do have to trust God, like Jeremiah.

Jeremiah was under no illusions; the immediate future for Jerusalem was devastating. The walls would soon be breached and the city taken.

Nebuchadnezzar would send his top military commander to oversee the complete destruction of the city. The temple was torched. The bronze pillars and furnishings were broken up and carried off. Great fires were set throughout Jerusalem. The royal palace was destroyed and the walls of the city demolished. There was little left in the ruins of any value.

Years ago I came across a rescue story which came to mind again as I was preparing this. A sailor had been shipwrecked but he managed to get to an island. In true Robinson Crusoe style he salvaged a few articles from the wreck and constructed a makeshift shelter. But a few days later, returning after searching for food, he found the shelter ablaze. He collapsed in utter despair. This was the last straw. How could he go on? The next day a ship arrived to rescue him and the captain said, *"We saw your smoke signals"*.

God sees our smoke signals. What we think is the last straw might actually be the very thing that leads to our rescue. As our own best efforts go up in smoke God sees the signal He has been waiting for.

I believe this is how it often works for those who are seeking God. In Matthew's Gospel chapter 19 a rich young man has been seeking to follow Jesus but he turns away sadly because he loves his wealth too much. Jesus then remarks how hard it is for those consumed by riches to enter the kingdom of God – as hard as a camel getting through the eye of a needle. The disciples are astonished. "Who, then, can be saved?" Jesus says, **"With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."** (Matthew 19v26)

It is obviously impossible for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. The idea is utterly ludicrous. So too, Jesus says, it is impossible for men and women to free themselves from the bondages of life – whether it be captivity to debt or drugs, or being captivated by luxury and fame. We need to cry to God for mercy. These things have too strong a hold on us. We need to come to a point where we admit our helplessness and acknowledge that only God can save us. God will see our smoke signals.

The latest Alpha newspaper carries the story of Peter and Nicole Wright who live in Fleetwood, Blackpool. In 2006 they were near breaking point with debt and illness and exhaustion. They faced losing everything, including having their home repossessed at Christmas, when they saw an advert for 'Christians Against Poverty' in their weekly free newspaper. God had seen their smoke signals and sent a ship to rescue them. Read their story for yourself. (Alpha News. July-October 2008)

What also excites me about this story is the way God uses His people to bring about the impossible. The church is to be a supernatural community. We don't just sit around waiting for God to do magic tricks. He catches us up and fills us with His Spirit and sends us out on "impossible" rescue missions like this one.

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God asks each one of us to answer His question this morning. **“Is anything too hard for me?”**

Every one of us can think of some extreme situation which looks humanly impossible. Many of us find ourselves right in the middle of one. We can't see how it can turn around. It is certainly too hard for us.

But is anything too hard for the Lord? No, nothing is impossible for God.

We can't be sure at what point He will step in or how. There may be some step of faith we need to take – like Jeremiah's. Something we have constructed may even need to go up in flames first. But if this book is God's Word – then nothing is too hard for God.

And His purpose is never just to rescue us; it is to restore and pour out on us His abundant, amazing, unquenchable grace in Jesus Christ.

John Wilthew. July 2008