

Do you ever have times when you just feel like quitting? Do you ever have days when you awake at 3 am in the morning and you lie in the bed and you ponder something in your life that you want to give up on? Have you ever had days when you did say, "I give up" and you really meant it this time?

I give up. My guess is that we would be lying if we did not say we have uttered those three words at least once in our life. I give up. Maybe you have said those words once or twice in your life about your family, marriage, friendships, favorite college football team, vocation, school situation, church, country. I give up. And you really, really, really meant it.

When I was in seminary we had a basketball team that played in a church league. There was one team in that league that dominated all of the others. I was the point guard when we played them and we were being shellacked. Toward the end of the game when we were losing by 60 or so points I lost the ball on the dribble and the other player stole it from me. I am not too proud of what then came out of my mouth. As the referee called a technical on me he reminded me that "this is a church league." At that point I took myself out of the game and just quit.

If there was ever someone who was in a situation where they would have permission to say these three words it would be Jeremiah. Jeremiah as we have been learning over the past few weeks was a prophet who lived about 600 years before the birth of Christ. He lived during a time when God's people living in Judah and Jerusalem were about to be conquered by the Babylonian Empire under the leadership of King Nebuchadnezzar.

Jeremiah spent his life telling God's people living in Jerusalem that they needed to change their behavior for God's judgment was about to come upon them. He even told them that if they did change their behavior then God might change God's mind and not cause a calamity to come upon them.

So what is the reward that Jeremiah receives for his faithfulness to God and following what God leads him to do and call upon God's people to be faithful to God? Jeremiah is put into prison. In the text we are about to read, Jeremiah is in prison having been put there by the king of Judah.

The king of Judah accused Jeremiah of being a collaborator with the Babylonians because Jeremiah was saying that Jerusalem would be conquered and the kingdom would fall.

While he is in prison and while he knows that the Babylonians are about to take over the land, Jeremiah engages in a rather strange economic act. Let's listen as Jeremiah buys a piece of property.

Read Jeremiah 32:6-15

In the middle of Jeremiah's story and prophecies we have a very detailed purchase of real estate. There is a transfer of cash, there is signing of titles and deeds, there is verification by witnesses, and there is a public filing of copies of the transaction.

This piece of land already had Babylonian invaders living on it. Jeremiah believes that this land will come under Babylonian control. But even with this bad future, Jeremiah buys this land.

Why would Jeremiah do this? Why would Jeremiah purchase a piece of land that was occupied by a foreign invader? Why would Jeremiah make such a bad investment? Was he trying to do his own personal stimulus plan and boost the economy?

Instead of saying “I give up,” Jeremiah instead buys a piece of property. A piece of property that becomes an act of trust. An investment that says, “I know that things look bad. But I am going to place my trust in God that one day, some day, God will restore this land and its people.” An act of complete hope and trust in God. Eventually God does restore this land. Although not in Jeremiah’s lifetime.

There is a Native American proverb which says that “we do not inherit the earth from our ancestors but we borrow it from our children.” (repeat)

When we say, “I give up,” we are focused on the past. When we say, “I give up,” we are only focused on what we have seen from the past. When we say, “I give up,” we are not focusing on what God is doing in the future. A future which we cannot see.

Henry Ford once said that “those who believe they can do something and those who believe they can’t are both right.” (repeat)

I want to finish up with a story about someone who had come to the point in his life where he said, “I give up.”

This businessman looked around the vacation villa in Puerto Vallarta. Plain, but clean and well furnished. A good place to grab a few days away from his failing business and troubled marriage. He had brought a large supply of sleeping pills and had requested several bottles of Tequila to be brought to his room. Perhaps he could at least drown a few of his worries.

He watched as the housekeeper stocked the villa's kitchen - frozen dinners, some dry cereal, and thankfully, four large bottles of liquor - they had paid careful attention to his unusual requests. The frozen dinners would be easy - he could focus on his lonely drinking, and lose himself.

Jim noticed the housekeeper's slow movements, the stoop in her shoulders, the stubby yellowed teeth. It was somehow comforting to see that other people could be even worse off than he was. Even with his company troubles and impending divorce, Jim was sure he could always find the money to keep his teeth whitened and in good repair - even find the money for the hair transplant he had promised himself. He shivered a little, just thinking about those teeth.

The woman shuffled over to him. "Senor, you not look happy. TV dinner not good. I am Maria, I cook. I bring you real food."

"OK, OK." Jim didn't want to talk with anyone, and certainly not with this woman. Besides, a taco might be better than microwave food - if it showed up on his table.

The enticing smells of spicy meat and corn filled the villa. Maria stood over him, offering a plate of tamales. "Senor, eat. You feel better."

Jim reached for one, took a hesitant bite, and relaxed a little. Before he knew it, the heaping plate was almost empty.

Maria moved the nearly empty plate to the kitchen counter. "You were hungry. Get a nice hot bath. I come back," and she moved toward the door.

"How much do I owe you," Jim called out, remembering her apparent poverty.

"Nothing. My gift. You were hungry," and she was gone.

The next afternoon, another home cooked meal appeared. Jim had drunk less the second night, and was even more appreciative of the good food. Again, Maria would not accept payment.

"I have money. You must need money, please take it," Jim almost pleaded.

Maria replied, "I am rich. Please come to my home tonight. I will show you. I come back at seven."

At exactly 7 PM, there was a knock on the door. Jim followed Maria into the warm twilight. They walked silently through the tourist area, then turned sharply down an alley. They emerged into a neighborhood of partially finished stucco dwellings. Iron reinforcing rods spiked the tops of the unfinished verticals. Plastic sheeting substituted for glass in the unfinished windows. Maria led Jim to one of the unfinished stairways and began to climb.

Opening a door on the fourth floor, Maria smiled at Jim and beckoned him to enter. The walls and floor were bare except for small rugs and weavings that combined bright reds, oranges, and yellows. A small sofa and a few chairs lined the walls. The small room was dominated by a long plank table covered with food and surrounded by a dozen happy-looking eaters of all shapes and ages - newborns to nineties. The delicious smells welcomed Jim.

Near tears, Jim turned to Maria to thank her, but words didn't form.

Leading Jim to the table, Maria introduced him to her family, saying, "I am rich. I have my family. Where there is love, nothing is missing. My family is now your family."

Jim Valvano, former basketball coach at NC State, once said before his death, "Don't ever give up."

Is there something in your life that you have given up on? Some relationship? Some dream? Somebody? Have you given up on yourself?

Maybe Jeremiah's act of buying a field is a sign to us that now is not the time to give up. Maybe it is time to make a greater investment in that relationship or that dream. Maybe there is a future there which we cannot see. Maybe it is not time to give up on yourself.

It may be time to invest more in something important to you, not less. The future is in God's hands. AMEN.

-Huie, Jonathan Lockwood, "Where there is love, nothing is missing," and found at <http://www.dreamthisday.com/inspirational-stories.php>

-Text: Jeremiah 32:1-15 / Hebrews 11: 1-3

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