

EBED-MELECH: THE BROTHER WHO RESCUED JEREMIAH (A Black History Sermon)

Jeremiah 38:8-13

(8) Ebed-Melech went forth out of the king's house, and spake to the king, saying, (9) My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon; and he is like to die for hunger in the place where he is: for there is no more bread in the city. (10) Then the king commanded Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian, saying, Take from hence thirty men with thee, and take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon, before he die. (11) So Ebed-Melech took the men with him, and went into the house of the king under the treasury, and took thence old cast clouts and old rotten rags, and let them down by cords into the dungeon to Jeremiah. (12) And Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian said unto Jeremiah, Put now these old clouts and rotten rags under thine armholds under the cords. And Jeremiah did so. (13) So they drew up Jeremiah with cords, and took him up out of the dungeon: and Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison.

Introduction

These were terrible days in Jerusalem. Unrest and fear had placed a terrifying hand upon the people. There was corruption and sin in high places. To make matters worse, a Babylonian invasion seemed imminent. Jeremiah preached against the sin, and his prophecies about the invasion were not what they wanted to hear.

The people's anger against Jeremiah reached a boiling point, and they wanted to kill him. The King Zedekiah knew he was outnumbered and overpowered and said they could do as they pleased with Jeremiah. The mob could not bring themselves to actually killing Jeremiah, for they could be charged with shedding innocent blood. So, they put Jeremiah in a dilapidated, contaminated cistern, which was an old muddy pit that had been formerly used as a dungeon. They hoped that, in time, he would die of thirst, malnutrition, or some other disease.

Ebed-Melech, a foreign official from Ethiopia, approached King Zedekiah and appealed to him. He told the king that the treatment of Jeremiah was inhumane, cruel, and despicable, and that it should end immediately. The King Zedekiah, who was the last of the evil kings of Juda, fortunately listened to Ebed-Melech and allowed him to take thirty men on a covert operation and rescue Jeremiah. The vacillating, spineless king usually agreed with the last person who spoke to him, and Ebed-Melech in his watchfulness took advantage of it. After the rescue, Jeremiah was put in protective custody in the king's courthouse. Ebed-Melech is one of those biblical personalities we do not hear too much about, yet he had a significant role to play in the unfolding of God's will. Let's look at a few of his many great attributes.

Exposition.

1. He Was Morally Superior To His Surroundings.

(He Had A Way Of Kindness.)

(He Had Integrity And A Sense Of Decency.)

2. He Had The Courage Of His Convictions.

(He Took A Risk.)

3. He Did A Great Service With Meager Means.

(Old Rags, Worn-Out Garments, And Cords To Make A Rope.)

4. He Executed Thoughtful Implementation Of The Mission.

(He Gave Jeremiah Specific, Practical Instructions.)

(Don't Try To Hold The Rope With Your Hands - You Are Too Weak.)

(You Will Get Half-Way Up And Fall And Hurt Yourself.)

(Don't Put It Around Your Neck, You Will Hang Yourself.)

(Put The Rope Under Your Armpits - That's The Best Way.)

5. He Was Rewarded For His Faithfulness.

(He Was Spared During The Destruction Of Jerusalem.)

(See Jeremiah 39:15-18.)

Closing Thoughts

The story of Ebed-Melech is the story of a man who lent a helping hand out of obedience to God and out brotherly love. The role he played in God's scheme of things was just as crucial as Jeremiah's, even though he is not well known. There are many unnamed heroes and heroines. I like the fact that Oscars and Emmys are given to the best supporting actresses and actors. We have a lot of people at Antioch - Lithonia who support our work behind the scenes. As we celebrate Black History, let us thank God for the people whose names are household words; moreover, let us also thank God for the nameless supporters who worked behind the scenes. Give God Glory! Give God All The Glory.

End Notes

1. Some scholars say there were three men rather than thirty who assisted Ebed-Melech in rescuing Jeremiah. Some of the newer translations say three. The number really does not change the story. Hebrew has a bunch of little dots, dashes, and symbols above, below, and beside the consonants. I call them squiggles. They can easily be misinterpreted, especially since the original copies were hand written. Since I am on this topic, some of the Scribes during the time that Jesus walked the earth, deliberately changed these squiggles to give a different reading and meaning of a particular Scripture. Jesus addressed this in Matthew 5:18. I brought this up so you will not be surprised if you are studying from one of the newer translations.

2. Some scholars assert that translational prejudice may exist. Every time a high-ranking official from Ethiopia is mentioned, whether in the Old Testament or the New Testament, the word is always translated as eunuch, not as ambassador or statesman. Could it be that the early translators could not conceive a person from Ethiopia to be able to network as equals with the high-ranking officials of Israel? As we all know, the same word can mean many different things according to the context. A strike in bowling is good; a strike in baseball is bad. This is just food for thought. See Jeremiah 38:7 and Acts 8:26-39.

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