

Jeremiah 38:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

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— The practical compassion displayed here is remarkable. Ebed-melech didn't merely order Jeremiah's rescue; he personally supervised it and thoughtfully gathered 'old cast clouts and old rotten rags' (בָּלָאִי מִסְתְּבֹות וּבָלָאִי פְּמַלְחִים) to protect the prophet's body from the ropes during extraction.

This attention to Jeremiah's physical suffering amid the dramatic rescue reveals genuine hesed (covenant loyalty/kindness). The 'treasury' (אֹצֶר, otsar) where he found these rags suggests he went to the storage areas under royal authority—using the king's permission to access royal resources for mercy. The specific mention of protecting Jeremiah 'under thine armpits under the cords' (v. 12) shows concern for preventing further injury to a weakened, starving man being pulled from a muddy pit.

This practical mercy exemplifies James 2:15-16: faith without works is dead. Ebed-melech didn't just pray for Jeremiah or express sympathy; he acted with wisdom and compassion. His care for the prophet's physical welfare while rescuing him from death models holistic ministry that addresses both immediate needs and ultimate deliverance. Jesus' healing ministry similarly attended to physical suffering while proclaiming spiritual salvation.

Historical Context

The cistern where Jeremiah was imprisoned (38:6) was a water storage pit that had become filled with mud—likely a dried-up well. Being lowered by ropes into such a pit meant Jeremiah sank into mire, unable to stand or escape, facing death by starvation or suffocation. Ebed-melech's rescue required royal authorization (which weak Zedekiah granted), manpower (he took men with him), and practical wisdom (the rags to prevent rope burns). The 'old cast clouts' were worn-out garments stored in the treasury, valueless except for this merciful purpose. Archaeological excavations have uncovered numerous such cisterns in Jerusalem, some over 40 feet deep.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does Ebed-melech's attention to practical details in showing mercy model comprehensive compassion?
2. What does this rescue teach about combining bold advocacy with practical wisdom in helping the suffering?
3. In what ways might we be tempted to offer sympathy without the practical action that genuine love requires?

Interlinear Text

וְיָבָא	בְּדַיִל	וְיָבָא	בְּדַיִל	וְיָבָא	בְּדַיִל
and took	H0	So Ebedmelech	H853	H376	with him
H3947		H5663		H3027	H935

בֵּית	בְּמַלְכֵה	אֶל	תְּסִתְתִּיחַ	רְאֹוֹצֵר	וְיָקַח	מִשְׁם
into the house	of the king	H413	H8478	under the treasury	and took	H8033
H1004	H4428			H214	H3947	

ירמֵי הָו אֵל יְשַׁלֵּח מֶלֶךְ יִם וּבָלֵי הַסְּפָב וֹת וּבָלֵי וּבָלֵי and old cast clouts and old rotten rags and let them down H413 to Jeremiah H1094 H5499 H1094 H4418 H7971 H3414

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