

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' (בְּלוֹאֵי הַסְּחָבוֹת וּבְלוֹאֵי הַמְּלָחִים) 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' (אוֹצָר, 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 armholes 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

וַיֵּבֶ אֶ	בְּיָד וְ	הָאֲנָשִׁים יָם	אֶת	מִן לֶךְ	עָבַד	וַיֵּקֶחַ
and went	with him	H376	H853	So Ebedmelech	H0	and took
H935	H3027			H5663		H3947
מִשָּׁם	וַיֵּקֶחַ	הָאוֹצַר	תַּחַת	אֶל	הַמֶּלֶךְ	בֵּית
H8033	and took	under the treasury	H8478	H413	of the king	into the house
	H3947	H214			H4428	H1004
יִרְמְיָהּ הוּא	אֶל	וַיִּשְׁלֵחַ	מֵלֶכֶת יָם	וַיִּבְלֹי	הִסְתֵּב	וַיִּבְלֹי
to Jeremiah	H413	and let them down	rotten rags	and old	cast clouts	and old
H3414		H7971	H4418	H1094	H5499	H1094
בַּחֲבָלִים:	הָב	אֶל	וְ			
by cords	into the dungeon	H413				
H2256	H953					

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