

Series: God Cares #1485

Title: Jeremiah 38

*God Saves Jeremiah in Jail*

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world! Welcome back. This will be the last in our series of broadcasts and podcasts affirming that God cares. I hope this has been an encouragement to you. You and others you share this with can listen to this again, anytime, at our website: [godisministry.org](http://godisministry.org). I've only had time to focus on certain realities we deal with – showing you from the Scripture how God cares. And today let's visit again with the prophet Jeremiah when he goes to jail.

We have already seen and shared in his experience of being in solitary confinement, all alone in a dungeon, the vaulted cell, a cistern, a pit. He was neglected and not even fed. That was in Jeremiah chapter 37. Now we come to Jeremiah chapter 38 and again Jeremiah has to deal with just horrifying conditions. *But*, God has not forgotten him and God will use an unlikely character to deliver Jeremiah. Listen as I read beginning in verse 4 of the thirty-eighth chapter of the Book of Jeremiah.

If you are finding that in your Bible, some background: Jeremiah has been transferred to the court of the guardhouse. He is being held within the prison system of that day. But here, at least, he can receive visitors. What is it like where you are? Are you able to receive visitors? I hope so, but more importantly I hope the people who come to see you in prison are helpful to you; they encourage you and build you up. Jeremiah was speaking on behalf of the Living God. He is, after all, a prophet. As he speaks the princes, some government officials are listening in (as they still do today), and they do not like what Jeremiah has to say. Listen now as these officials speak to King Zedekiah.

Jeremiah 38, beginning in verse 4, **“Then the officials said to the king, ‘Now let this man be put to death, inasmuch as he is discouraging the men of war who are left in this city and all the people, by speaking such words to them; for this man is not seeking the well-being of this people but rather their harm.’** <sup>5</sup> **So King Zedekiah said, ‘Behold, he is in your hands; for the king can do nothing against you.’**” Jeremiah is in really hot water now. They want to kill him, *and* the king tells his officials, “Go ahead. I’m just king, what can I do?” I told you Zedekiah was a piece of work, a real coward. He has lost all authority in Judah. As John Calvin puts it, “He was a slave to his own counsellors.”

Verse 6, **“Then they took Jeremiah and cast him into the cistern of Malchijah the king’s son, which was in the court of the guardhouse; and they let Jeremiah down with ropes. Now in the cistern there was no water but only mud, and Jeremiah sank into the mud.”** This cistern was empty. Because of the siege all the water had already been consumed by the people of Jerusalem, trying to survive, and what’s left was mud. And it’s so thick and deep that Jeremiah’s feet sink right down into it. He will certainly die down there. The conditions will do him in, especially without fresh food or water. And, in a minute, we will learn he is quite a ways down into the earth. It is not like he can easily escape if no one is on guard duty.

It sure looks like Jeremiah is doomed. Ah, but let’s continue the reading at verse 7 of Jeremiah 38. **“But Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, a eunuch, while he was in the king’s palace, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern.”** Ah, we meet a man named Ebed-melech. He is an Ethiopian and he is a eunuch who serves in King Zedekiah’s palace, as was common in those days. Please notice this man was an outsider in Israel. He was a foreigner. An Ethiopian. A Gentile, a non-Jew. Not one of the people of God. And yet he is about to do something remarkable on behalf of the prophet *while* Jeremiah’s fellow Jews stand by and do nothing, in fact they perpetrate the throwing of him into the cistern.

Verse 7 continues, **“Now the king was sitting in the Gate of Benjamin...”** Just a note here, the city gateway was often used as a courtroom or a kind of town hall, if you will. Zedekiah was probably there to settle some legal matters and so, verse 8, **“Ebed-melech went out from the king’s palace and spoke to the king [at the Gate of Benjamin], saying, <sup>9</sup> ‘My lord the king, these men have acted wickedly in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet whom they have cast into the cistern; and he will die right where he is because of the famine, for there is no more bread in the city.’**

**10 Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, "Take thirty men from here under your authority and bring up Jeremiah the prophet from the cistern before he dies."** Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, the foreigner, wants to save Jeremiah! Zedekiah vacillates again and agrees that Jeremiah should be brought up out of the cistern before he dies. Calvin, writing about Ebed-melech vs the Jewish government officials says, "[The Jews] preferred the favor of the ungodly to their own duty. But there was an Ethiopian so courageous...A similar case is represented by Christ in a parable, when He says that a Levite and a priest passed by a wounded man, and disregarded him, but that help was brought to him by a Samaritan (Luke 10.30-35).

[Christ's] purpose, no doubt, was to condemn the Jews, *even* the Levites and the priests, for their barbarity in caring nothing for the life of a miserable man in his extremity. So also, in this place, the Ethiopian is set forth to us as an example, for he alone had the feeling of kindness and humanity, so as to bring help to the holy Prophet and to rescue him...from immediate death and the grave (*Commentary on Jeremiah, 259*)." Unquote.

Let's read the rest of the story. Jeremiah 38, verse 11, **"So Ebed-melech took the men under his authority and went into the king's palace to a place beneath the storeroom and took from there worn-out clothes and worn-out rags and let them down by ropes into the cistern to Jeremiah. 12 Then Ebed-melech the Ethiopian said to Jeremiah, 'Now put these worn-out clothes and rags under your armpits under the ropes'; and Jeremiah did so. 13 So they pulled Jeremiah up with the ropes and lifted him out of the cistern, and Jeremiah stayed in the court of the guardhouse."** Ebed-melech figured out a creative way to haul up Jeremiah from the bottom of the muddy pit. Tying together old clothes and rags into ropes will do. They lower them down, Jeremiah puts them under his armpits and they hoist him up and out. Ebed-melech the Ethiopian saves Jeremiah's life in prison.

God cares for Jeremiah in jail. And God provides Ebed-melech to save Jeremiah's life. Are you in a similar circumstance to Jeremiah? Cry out to God. Ask Him to send you an Ebed-melech. Or, might you be the Ebed-melech to one of your fellow prisoners, helping them in some way? Being a friend. Listening. Sharing the Good News of the gospel. Starting a Bible study. Praying for him or her. Sharing what you have with another inmate who has not. For those of us on the other side of the prison bars and fence, how can we function like Ebed-melech? What can we do for a prisoner to show him or her that God cares for them?

There is a lot of despair in our penal institutions. As Christians we are called to "remember the prisoners as though in prison with them." Ebed-melech did this, even though he lived long, long before Hebrews was written. Jeremiah, in his Book, certainly remembers what this Ethiopian eunuch did for him. Who can you help today? How can you demonstrate God's care for the incarcerated?

And just this reminder before we go. Especially if you are an incarcerated person, or a family member to someone in prison, will you write me and tell me you listen to *God Is*? Maybe you have been listening for a while, maybe you are a new listener. Either way, I would like to know you are a part of our family. My mailing and email addresses (I do use CorrLinks) are forthcoming, so stay tuned for them.

And when you write, tell me a little bit about yourself and how I can pray for you. And tell me how you listen: by radio (on what station) or the podcast. The point is, I remember you! And I want to connect with you so that I can learn more about your circumstances, struggles, cares, and concerns. Of course, also feel free to tell me what God is doing in your life in positive and encouraging ways. Tell me how He is using you to have ministry in your prison. Share your testimony with me, would you? I will be honored to hear from you, and I will reply.

By regular mail: God Is, PO Box 802, Winchester Massachusetts 01890. By email (and you can use CorrLinks, if you access to it): [mark@godisministry.org](mailto:mark@godisministry.org). Mark with a K at [godisministry.org](http://godisministry.org). Join us again next time as we continue to discover who God Is.

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