



JEREMIAH & THE CISTERN

LUKE 17:11-19

GOAL



To teach children to hear what God says and then do what God says. This story contains rich examples of those who heard God's warnings and took action, and those who did not. Jeremiah loved and trusted God, and remained committed to his call as a prophet to the people of Israel and Judah and to the nations of the world. Even though he was often rejected because of his message, he continued in courage to say what he was called to say, and do what he was called to do. Another hearer and doer of God's word was the Ethiopian servant Ebed-melech who trusted God more than the king he served, the king's evil advisors, and even the Babylonian enemy he feared. At the risk of his own life, he appealed to the king to save Jeremiah from certain death.

Contrasted in this story of faithful men is the faithless king, Zedekiah. King Zedekiah was more concerned with his own safety and the logic of his own plan to save the city than he was with hearing and doing what God said. He would not repent, and he would not surrender. He rejected God's warning and suffered miserably at the hands of the Babylonian King.



CHARACTERS

Jeremiah: Called to be God's spokesman before he was even born, he was the prophet to the divided kingdoms of Judah and Israel, and to the nations of the world. He is also known as "the weeping prophet" because he knew that the judgment of God was at hand, and he could not persuade the people he loved to repent.

Ebed-melech: An Ethiopian eunuch in the service of King Zedekiah of Israel. When he sees the injustice in the handling of the prophet Jeremiah, he shows compassion and great courage by appealing to the king for his release. God rewards his faith by delivering him from the judgment reserved for the faithless in Judah.

King Zedekiah: Zedekiah is the last king of Judah (the southern kingdom of Israel) appointed as a puppet king by the King of Babylon. He is rebellious, untrustworthy, and treacherous in his dealings with God, his own people, and other nations.

MEMORY VERSES

James 1:22-24: But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.



OVERVIEW

Read Jeremiah 38: The people of Israel continued in rebellion against God and would not repent of their wickedness. Finally, the day of reckoning was at hand and the end of Jerusalem was near. The Prophet Jeremiah warned Judah to surrender to the judgment of the Babylonian forces. Jeremiah urged them that the Babylonians were being sent as God's punishment to them and that there was nothing they could do, but to surrender to it. The palace officials were not happy to hear that they would be on the losing side, so they brought their complaint to King Zedekiah with the request to put Jeremiah to death. The king agreed that Jeremiah should be silenced and gave them permission to do whatever they felt was necessary; so they threw Jeremiah into a cistern where he sank in the mud and was left to die. But God chose an unlikely character to be the prophet's deliverer: an Ethiopian servant to the King named Ebed-melech. He recognized the injustice and boldly stepped in and appealed to King Zedekiah, who promptly changed his verdict and ordered that Jeremiah be pulled out of the pit and placed in the palace prison. Upon the request of King Zedekiah, Jeremiah delivered God's word to him confirming that the enemy would soon defeat them, but also that if Zedekiah surrendered to the Babylonians as God instructed, the city would be spared and his family would survive. Once again, the King rejected the prophet's warning.



SUGGESTIONS

God spoke through His faithful prophet, Jeremiah. God made it clear to the people that He was giving the city of Jerusalem over to the Babylonians as judgment for their rebellion. God warned King Zedekiah that if he did not surrender to this judgment as instructed, he would not be shown mercy, his family would be taken, and the city would burn.

1. The Prophet Jeremiah: The message God sent him to deliver was not a popular one. He was despised, rejected, persecuted, beaten, and imprisoned and left to die. But his trust in God was firm, and he would not back down from proclaiming the message he was sent to give.

2. The Servant Ebed-Melech: This faithful and kind servant was affected by the words of Jeremiah and acted with compassion and great courage to deliver God's prophet from the pit. His faith is rewarded: "Because you trusted me, I will give you your life as a reward. I will rescue you and keep you safe. I, the LORD, have spoken!" (Jeremiah 39:18).

3. The King Zedekiah: He merely heard the words of God, but refused to do as he was instructed. His unbelief resulted in an even more severe judgment that also affected his family and his nation.



**PRE-LESSON
ACTIVITY**

▶ **Mirror of Reflections | Supplies:** Mirror, notepaper or blackboards.

Divide the group into two or more teams. While passing a mirror around for inspiration, have each team think up ways a mirror functions to serve us. The team with the most logical answers wins.

Review the mirror's various uses in order to show the spiritual implications of how the Word of God is a mirror for us. For example, it shows us what needs to change, how God sees us and the world around us, etc.

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**MEMORY
VERSES
MEANING**

▶ **James 1:22-24:** James describes people who hear the word of God but do not do anything about it. They are like someone who looks into a mirror but as soon as they leave it, they forgot what they saw. Zedekiah asked Jeremiah for counsel from God—"hide nothing from me," he urged the prophet. So Jeremiah gave him the same message he had given him earlier, and added that if the king would listen and obey, his judgment would be less severe. But King Zedekiah refused the words of Jeremiah—the warning of God—and set off to do things his own way. He heard the words, but did not act on them as he should have.

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**POST-LESSON
ACTIVITY**

▶ **Well Drop | Supplies:** one regular or large-size tin can, empty and painted to look like a well; one peg person or small action figure.

Have the students stand in a circle and place the can on the floor in the center of the circle. Each student takes a turn trying to drop the Jeremiah figure into the can. You can also have the students sit and drop the figure from the height of their raised arms. Keep going until every student has at least one chance to do the drop. While you play, you can talk about how cold and frightening living in a well must have been. At the end of the game, scoop the action figure into yours or someone else's shirt pocket, and explain that God has always "got" us, no matter what.

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TAKE
HOME

What can we learn from the faithful and faithless characters in this story?

1. The Prophet Jeremiah: He was despised because his message was tough for people to hear. Jesus said that, "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first." (John 15:18). The truth will not always be well-received because it isn't always what people want to hear, but be courageous and never back down from the message God sends you to deliver—the message of Jesus.

2. The Servant Ebed-Melech: Ebed-melech trusted God, and he showed compassion on the prophet, Jeremiah—even at the risk of his own well-being. By his actions, he showed that God's authority ruled supreme over the king of Judah, the king's officials, and the iron will of the people.

3. King Zedekiah: He was a hearer but not a doer of God's Word. He was warned time and time again, but in the end, he did what he thought was the right thing, not what God told him was the right thing. Listen to what God says, memorize and meditate on His words, then act on them as He gives you opportunity.



QUESTION & ANSWER

SLIDE 1



Q1a: Through Jeremiah, what did the Lord warn the people was going to happen?

A1: That the city and anyone remaining in it would be destroyed by the Babylonians.

Q1b: Have you ever had to give someone bad news?

TN: It's not easy or fun to be the bearer of bad news. Jeremiah's job was to warn people of destruction and death, which meant that neither he, nor his message, were welcome; however, because God had called him to this, Jeremiah obeyed and gave the message to those who needed to hear it.

SLIDE 2



Q2a: What did the king's officials want to do to Jeremiah?

A2: They wanted to kill him.

Q2b: Have you ever heard the saying, "Don't kill the messenger"?

TN: These officials wanted to have Jeremiah killed because he passed on a message from God. It wasn't Jeremiah's fault that the people were going to be punished for their faithlessness. But because he was the one God appointed to call them out for their sins, they placed the blame on Jeremiah.



QUESTION & ANSWER

SLIDE 3



Q3a: Where did the king's officials put Jeremiah?

A3: In a broken and empty cistern.

Q3b: Has someone ever caused you pain?

TN: This doesn't have to mean physical pain; it can refer to emotional pain. Remind the students that when this happens, they are not alone. God is always with us; He sees our suffering.

SLIDE 4



Q4a: What did the servant Ebed-melech say to the king?

A4: He said Jeremiah had been dealt with unfairly.

Q4b: Have you ever been dealt with unfairly?

TN: Ask the children to look back on the situation. How did it turn out? Looking back at the situation and its outcome, can they see a way that God may have helped them?



QUESTION & ANSWER

SLIDE 5



Q5a: What did the king tell Ebed-melech to do?

A5: He told him to take 30 men and lift Jeremiah out of the cistern.

Q5b: Have you ever watched a movie in which someone is saved right at the last possible moment?

TN: This can be so suspenseful and frustrating to watch! Why didn't someone do something earlier to save the person. In the case of this story, why didn't God do something earlier to save Jeremiah? Why did He wait until it was almost too late to save Jeremiah? What we see as almost too late is really perfect timing. We will never be able to comprehend the reasons why God does what He does, but we can find peace knowing that He is acting and that He acts on the behalf of those who love Him.

SLIDE 6



Q6a: After they pulled Jeremiah out of the cistern, where did he go?

A6: He was held in the palace prison.

Q6b: Has someone ever cheered you up?

TN: Facing death, Jeremiah was literally at a low place in his life, but God saved him and raised him from the depths of the cistern. No matter what schemes people come up with against us, God will always be there to help; knowing that can give us hope in any situation. No matter how low we feel, God can lift us back up.



QUESTION & ANSWER

SLIDE 7



Q7a: What did the king ask Jeremiah to tell him?

A7: He asked Jeremiah to tell him everything about what was going to happen.

Q7b: What does it mean to tell someone what they want to hear?

TN: At the very least, it means not telling someone the whole truth because the truth would not be a welcome conversation. In Jeremiah's case, the king wanted to hear that he would be victorious over the Babylonians, which was the exact opposite of what God told him was going to happen. Jeremiah stuck with the message God gave him, regardless of the consequences.



**MEMORY
VERSE**

- ▶ **James 1:22-24:** But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.

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BIG IDEA

- ▶ When we hear from the Lord, we should do as He says.

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**CLOSING
PRAYER**

- ▶ Dear Lord Jesus, help us to be faithful like Your prophet Jeremiah—willing to forsake all to serve You. And help us to be compassionate and courageous supporters of Your work, like Your servant Ebed-melech. Help us to be doers, not just hearers, of Your Word. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.



LESSON TRANSCRIPT

SLIDE 1



Pain and grief tore at the prophet Jeremiah as he watched his beloved people worship other gods and refuse to turn back to the one true God. The sorrowful prophet had been met with rejection, imprisonment, banishment, false accusations, and physical brutality because of the message God had sent him to deliver. Now, destruction was moving swiftly toward the nation of Israel at the hands of an invading army. Again, the Lord warned through Jeremiah, “Your city and anyone who remains in it will be destroyed by the Babylonians.” But God showed mercy by adding, “but if you leave now and throw yourselves upon the pity of the Chaldeans, your lives will be spared.”

SLIDE 2



When the king’s officials heard the words of the prophet, they were filled with anger. Losing to the Babylonian king was not part of their plan and not at all what they wanted to hear. They accused Jeremiah before the king, “He is a liar, and he is bringing everyone’s spirits down. If we do not get rid of him, the soldiers will give up fighting, and we will lose the city to the Babylonians. Kill him!” So the king carelessly agreed, “Go ahead and do whatever you want with him.”



LESSON TRANSCRIPT

SLIDE 3



When the king's officials found Jeremiah, they seized him and threw him into a broken and empty cistern, where he began to sink into the deep mud and was left to die. Although Jeremiah was the only man sitting in the mire of that dark and empty cistern, he was not alone. God was with him, and his pain did not go unnoticed.

SLIDE 4



An Ethiopian servant in the King's house named Ebed-melech heard of the injustice of Jeremiah's situation. He went to the king and said, "Please have mercy on Jeremiah, for he has been dealt with unfairly. He will die if he is left in the cistern much longer."

SLIDE 5



This time the King decided to stand up for Jeremiah. He commanded the Ethiopian, "Hurry! Take thirty men with you and lift him out of the cistern before anything worse happens to him." Ebed-melech responded immediately. He believed the words of God spoken through the prophet and risked his own life in order to save Jeremiah. This act of bravery and selflessness would later be rewarded, when his own life was spared during the destruction of the city. God praised him for his faithful actions, "I will surely save you because you have trusted in me."



LESSON TRANSCRIPT

SLIDE 6



The men pulled Jeremiah out of the damp, deep cistern. He was cold, hungry, and covered with mud. They placed him in the custody of the palace prison, where he remained until the King called for him to meet at the temple.

SLIDE 7



The king said to Jeremiah, "I need to hear from God about what is happening. Please tell me everything—hold nothing back." Jeremiah knew the king did not want the truth but only wanted to hear what pleased him, so he said to the king, "You will surely kill me for what I am about to say, and you won't heed my words anyway." The king insisted he would not hurt the prophet. Jeremiah did not trust the vows of a fickle and cowardly king, but he did trust in God. So with courage and determination, he once again presented the harsh truth of certain judgment and gave a strict warning, despite the deadly risk.