

GROWTH GROUPS
WEEK 12
WEEK OF AUGUST 30



Growth Group Summer 2020

The Importance of Friends

Week 12 – August 30, 2020 - Jeremiah 38:1-13 and Lamentations 3:52-57

Growth groups are one of the best and easiest ways to find community at a church. In this time of Corona19 and “social distancing” please don’t meet in person, but do continue to check in with each other. If your growth group would like to meet online or if you are aware of needs that the church can help fill, please let us know at connect@ljpres.org. Thank you for loving and caring for each other.

Setting the Context

Jeremiah 37 helps to fill in some of the information we read about in Jeremiah 38. Though some think that Jeremiah 37 and 38 speak of different events, they more than likely describe the same series of events. Jeremiah had left the city gate of Jerusalem to more than likely visit the field he had bought in chapter 32. As he does this, he is arrested on the grounds that he was defecting to the enemy.

As you may recall, King Jehoiachin had been taken away into exile in 598 BC along with most of the leaders of Jerusalem. After this, Zedekiah had been appointed the new king by the Babylonians, but he was just a “puppet king.” He was king for eleven years, yet could never make decisions that lasted. He had numerous conversations with Jeremiah, but he never fully believed all that Jeremiah was telling him. Zedekiah was always wavering and never committing to anything.

Jeremiah is thrown into a cistern after his “arrest.” A typical cistern was dug out of limestone rock and consisted of a narrow neck at the top that was no more than three feet across. It would have been three to four feet deep and wider at the bottom. Water, that had been retrieved from the rains, was directed to the opening and would fill the cistern. Getting into the cisterns was not easy, which explains why Jeremiah was lowered down with ropes.

An Ethiopian (Cushite) named Ebed-melek steps in to save the day. He went to King Zedekiah who was sitting at the Benjamin Gate and dispensing rulings in legal cases. It is fascinating that Ebed-Melek would do this, since he would have been considered an outsider. He would have had no legal standing with Zedekiah and yet he chose to speak up when he saw injustice. He would be a friend to Jeremiah and seek to bring him help, and rescue him.

Zedekiah allowed Ebed-Melek to rescue Jeremiah. Though the thirty men should probably be read as three men, it is clear that Zedekiah does not want Jeremiah to die in the cistern. Notice also the care that Ebed-Melek takes in rescuing Jeremiah. He takes used clothing from under the treasury storeroom to make the ropes more bearable for Jeremiah. This is a glimpse of what compassion looks like.

Our text, from Lamentations 3, gives us a first-hand glimpse at the way in which Jeremiah prayed through this situation. Though he is in the pit, he does not lose faith. Though he is sinking and people are hurling stones at him, he keeps on calling out to God. And God came near! In one of his darkest moments, Jeremiah called out and asked for God to provide relief. God responded by drawing near and telling Jeremiah not to fear.



Exploring the Text

Read Jeremiah 38:1-13 and Lamentations 3:52-57 (English Standard Version)

Now Shephatiah the son of Mattan, Gedaliah the son of Pashhur, Jucal the son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur the son of Malchiah heard the words that Jeremiah was saying to all the people: ² “Thus says the Lord: He who stays in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence, but he who goes out to the Chaldeans shall live. He shall have his life as a prize of war, and live. ³ Thus says the Lord: This city shall surely be given into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon and be taken.” ⁴ Then the officials said to the king, “Let this man be put to death, for he is weakening the hands of the soldiers who are left in this city, and the hands of all the people, by speaking such words to them. For this man is not seeking the welfare of this people, but their harm.” ⁵ King Zedekiah said, “Behold, he is in your hands, for the king can do nothing against you.” ⁶ So they took Jeremiah and cast him into the cistern of Malchiah, the king’s son, which was in the court of the guard, letting Jeremiah down by ropes. And there was no water in the cistern, but only mud, and Jeremiah sank in the mud.

⁷ When Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, a eunuch who was in the king’s house, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern—the king was sitting in the Benjamin Gate— ⁸ Ebed-melech went from the king’s house and said to the king, ⁹ “My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they did to Jeremiah the prophet by casting him into the cistern, and he will die there of hunger, for there is no bread left in the city.” ¹⁰ Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, “Take thirty men with you from here, and lift Jeremiah the prophet out of the cistern before he dies.” ¹¹ So Ebed-melech took the men with him and went to the house of the king, to a wardrobe in the storehouse, and took from there old rags and worn-out clothes, which he let down to Jeremiah in the cistern by ropes. ¹² Then Ebed-melech the Ethiopian said to Jeremiah, “Put the rags and clothes between your armpits and the ropes.” Jeremiah did so. ¹³ Then they drew Jeremiah up with ropes and lifted him out of the cistern. And Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard.

⁵² “I have been hunted like a bird by those who were my enemies without cause; ⁵³ they flung me alive into the pit and cast stones on me; ⁵⁴ water closed over my head; I said, ‘I am lost.’

⁵⁵ “I called on your name, O Lord, from the depths of the pit; ⁵⁶ you heard my plea, ‘Do not close your ear to my cry for help!’ ⁵⁷ You came near when I called on you; you said, ‘Do not fear!’

Questions

If you are answering these questions alone, we would urge you to try journaling. Rather than just pondering the answers, try writing them out along with a prayer to the Lord.

- 1) Who was your “best friend” when you were growing up? Do you still keep in touch with them?
- 2) Have you ever felt like you have been in a situation like Jeremiah faced, where he was sinking quickly in a cistern? Has life ever felt like this for you?
- 3) Lamentations 3:56-57 says, “You heard my plea: “Do not close your ears to my cry for relief.” You came near when I called you, and you said, “Do not fear.” What does it mean for God to come near to Jeremiah? Have you ever prayed and felt the “nearness” of God? What did that feel like?
- 4) Think about the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. Do you see any similarities between the parable that Jesus tells and the actions of Ebed-Melek?
- 5) Proverbs 18:24 says, “One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother/sister.” Do you have a friend like that? How have you all cared for each other over the years?
- 6) Why do you think Ebed-Melek was willing to risk his own life to get Jeremiah set free? Why would he care about Jeremiah?
- 7) We were blessed this week to have Pastor Noel and Pastor Jere from Ebenezer Church share their words of wisdom and insight. What was one of your takeaways from their sermon? What did they share that resonated with you?
- 8) Is there a place in your life where you need to take a risk like Ebed-Melek did? Is there some place where you are playing it safe, even though God keeps calling you to step out in faith?