

When Life is “the Pits”

Grace, mercy and peace are yours, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

“Life’s the pits.” You’ve probably heard this phrase before. You might have even said it yourself. Life stinks. Sometimes it feels like you’re stuck in a hole with no way out. One problem follows another, and the next thing you know you’re buried up to your neck in filth. Your car breaks down, hospital bills pile up, relationships fall apart. At times it feels like the ground you walk on simply falls out from under you. The pit that you find yourself in threatens to drag you under and suffocate you in hopelessness in despair. This can also be true when you share your faith with another. They may treat you with such hostility and anger that you feel like they’ve thrown you in your own pit. However, our First Lesson shows us two things when life is “the pits.” We don’t need to be afraid of that pit, and that we can rejoice in the reassurance that our Ebed-Melek gives us!

Listen again to what was going on in Jerusalem. **(1-6)**

I. Don’t Be Afraid of the Pit

The city of Jerusalem was under siege. The Israelites had rebelled against God and disobeyed his commands for too long, and now they were in some serious trouble. The Babylonian army sat on their very doorstep, threatening to destroy the city. Later, in chapter 39, we find out that the city is in fact destroyed, which means that what we read for today is happening around the year 587 B.C. As the people waited to see what would happen to their city, God sent his prophet, Jeremiah, with a message to give to his people. “You’re all going to die, and the city will be captured. You can escape with your lives only if you surrender to the Babylonians.”

This had to be good news for the people, right? NO of course not! This was exactly the opposite of what someone would want to hear. They would want to know that everything was going to be ok, that the Babylonians would be driven off and defeated. But what was the message that they heard? “There’s no hope. Surrender and live or stay here and die!” Picture the shock, anger, even despair on people’s faces as they heard this message from Jeremiah.

Word of this demoralizing message spread quickly, and soon some of the higher ups caught wind of what Jeremiah had been telling the people. This was outrageous! The people would panic if they continued to hear the truth from Jeremiah. He had to be stopped! And so, they run to the king and tell him what’s going on. Jeremiah has to go. More than that, he needs to die!

Things were really looking bad for Jeremiah now. The officials arrested him, and put him in a cistern, which may have looked like this (ppt. picture). These cisterns were usually about fifteen to twenty feet deep. This cistern was deep enough that Jeremiah had to be let down by ropes. He was not going to get out of that pit any time soon.

In the words of our gospel lesson, Jeremiah had been given a cross to bear. He faced suffering and persecution because of his connection to God. He had been thrown into a pit to die, simply because he spoke God’s truth about sin and repentance.. He proclaimed the damning message, “Repent, or you will surely die!” without fear of the consequences.

Do you approach your own crosses, the persecution that you might face, with the same attitude? Are you unafraid of the pit of suffering and mistreatment that people might try to throw you into? You might say no now but think about how you might feel in the moment. You have the opportunity to share with someone the reality of their sin, and their need for repentance, but there’s something holding you back from saying it. Maybe it’s the fear that they may never want to speak to you again. Perhaps it’s apprehension, knowing that they will be angry with you.

Whatever the reason may be, it all boils down to one thing. The temptation that Satan plants in your heart to doubt God, and to fear the “pit” of persecution. He wants us to abandon the cross we are given to bear. He tries to convince us that it’s better to leave things unsaid than to be thrown in a pit. Why would you want to suffer in the mud and grime of the pit?

Like Jeremiah, we might be persecuted and threatened and thrown in a pit. But we have nothing to be afraid of!

II. Rejoice in the Ebed-Melek who saved you!

Enter the “unlikely hero.” Ebed-Melek. (v. 7-13)

This guy, Ebed-Melek, has an interesting name. The Hebrew for his name literally means “servant of the king.” It’s possible it’s not even his name, but instead just his title. Either way, this servant of the king rushes to King Zedekiah when he hears about Jeremiah’s predicament. He convinces the king to let him save Jeremiah, and Ebed-Melek got right to work.

The irony of this situation is that God’s own people didn’t get it. They were the ones with God’s promise, and they failed to recognize the truth when Jeremiah preached it. And yet it took a foreigner to do what they should have done in the first place! This man was a Cushite, from either Ethiopia or Egypt. He was not a part of God’s chosen people, the Israelites, and yet he acted in a way that demonstrated his love for God not only towards Jeremiah, but also to the king of Jerusalem, and even the people of the entire city.

This servant, this foreigner could have easily ended up in the pit along with Jeremiah, suffering for his faith and for standing up for Jeremiah when he spoke the truth of God’s Word. But Ebed-Melek was serving a higher authority than the king of Jerusalem. He was serving the one true King.

Did you know you have your own “unlikely” hero? The servant of the King, Jesus, went to THE King, our Father in heaven, and spoke to him for you! Whenever you sit in that pit, suffering for your faith in him, he does not forget about you. Though it may be difficult, your pain and suffering will not last forever. He will deliver you from your troubles. **The righteous person may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all** (Psalm 34:19). **Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me** (Ps. 50:15)

But how can we have comfort and peace in the middle of such persecution? How can we be comforted when the insults and harsh words heaped on us by others threaten to drag us under and drown us? Our gospel lesson shows us where we can find this peace. **For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.** The peace and comfort that we have comes from knowing that, no matter what happens to us here on earth, our eternal outcome is secure. Our Ebed-Melek, our “servant of the king” has forgiven us of all of our sins, and that includes our fear and apprehension of suffering that we may face.

And now, because we are free from fear over the pit, we too can boldly, joyfully serve our KING like Ebed-Melek. We serve THE KING by standing up for the truth about sin and repentance. Our purpose in doing this is not for personal gain, or to beat down other people and make them feel bad. We speak this way so that the Holy Spirit may work through us and through our words, sharing the saving message of the cross, which he uses to pull unbelievers and sinners from the pit of sin that they are trapped in.

So is life the pits? Do we have it that bad? No, we really don’t. Next time you’re tempted to think this way, remember this. You were in the pit, with no escape, but Jesus, our “Ebed-Melek” has saved us from certain death. Rejoice, knowing that your sins are forgiven! Rejoice as you serve the King, knowing that you have nothing to be afraid of! Rejoice as you share this message of repentance and forgiveness. Amen.