



The **Fiery** Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

Text

Jeremiah 38:1-28

Topic

The princes of Jerusalem throw Jeremiah into a pit
in order to stop him from preaching

Title

"Pit Stopped"

Introduction

127 Hours is the film that tells the survival story of canyoneer Aron Ralston who became trapped by a boulder in an isolated slot canyon in Blue John Canyon, southeastern Utah, in April 2003, and was eventually forced to amputate his own right arm to free himself.

He fell and his arm was pinned by a boulder. He discovered that by applying enough force to his forearm he could break it. He gathered the will to do so and eventually severed his arm with a dull knife, fashioning a crude tourniquet out of the insulation from his CamelBak tube and using a carabiner to tighten it.

He then made his way out of the canyon where he was forced to rappel down a 65ft rockface and hike several miles before, exhausted and covered in blood, he finally ran into a family on a day hike. The family sent for help and Ralston was evacuated by a Utah Highway Patrol helicopter.

We commonly use expressions that describe predicaments like Ralston's in order to explain some personal difficulty we find ourselves in. We say we are between a rock and a hard place or that our life is the pits.

That's all well and good as long as we realize one huge difference between our personal predicaments and the physical ones like Ralston's. In his case he needed to do everything he could to save himself because he knew no help was coming. In our cases, as Christians, **we know that help is always coming.**

It is more than coming; it is already available to us because Jesus said He would never leave us or forsake us. No matter how dark or how deep our pit, The Lord is there.

Jeremiah was quite literally thrown into a pit. His physical predicament can be seen as a figure of our personal predicaments when we find ourselves in some pit. Just as The Lord sent Jeremiah a servant, He always has one for you.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 When You Are In The Pit God Will Send You A Servant, and #2 When You Are Out Of The Pit God Will Send You As His Servant.

#1 When You Are In The Pit God Will Send You A Servant

(v1-13)

Our story takes place in the final months of the third and final siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonian armies. Mounds of dirt are being built-up so the soldiers can go over the walls. Battering rams are hammering the gates. Inside the walls famine and disease and pestilence are claiming many lives.

In the pit that Jerusalem had become there were two schools of thought.

Jeremiah 38:1 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 had spoken to all the people, saying,

Jeremiah 38:2 "Thus says the LORD: 'He who remains in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence; but he who goes over to the Chaldeans shall live; his life shall be as a prize to him, and he shall live.'

Jeremiah 38:3 Thus says the LORD: 'This city shall surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon's army, which shall take it.' "

Jeremiah 38:4 Therefore the princes said to the king, "Please, let this man be put to death, for thus he weakens the hands of the men of war who remain in this city, and the hands of all the people, by speaking such words to them. For this man does not seek the welfare of this people, but their harm."

Jeremiah claimed God had made a way out of the pit. All you had to do was have faith in God, believe Him that if you went out and over to the Chaldeans you would live.

The princes listed here made a different assessment of the pit they were in. They thought they must fight to save themselves. Faith or fight - those were the choices. If fight was going to prevail then Jeremiah must be silenced.

Jeremiah 38:5 Then Zedekiah the king said, "Look, he is in your hand. For the king can do nothing against you."

This was a Pontius Pilate moment for Zedekiah. He knew it was wrong to kill Jeremiah but he tried to wash his hands of it by saying he had no power over these princes.

Pontius Pilate moments come in all of our lives. They are the times we must say and do what is right despite the real or perceived consequences.

Jeremiah 38:6 So they took Jeremiah and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the king's son, which was in the court of the prison, and they let Jeremiah down with ropes. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire. So Jeremiah sank in the mire.

This "dungeon" was a cistern, a reservoir for holding water that was hewn out of the ground and covered over with plaster. It would have only a small, roundish opening at the top from which to draw water. This particular one had been exhausted of its water supply on account of the long siege. On its floor was a thigh-deep layer of "mire" - muddy slime.

Jeremiah was lowered into it - probably about fifteen feet or so. He sank into the mire. There would be no clean or dry spot to lie down or to sit. There was little to no light. It stank. In Jeremiah's other book, Lamentations, he mentions that rocks were thrown at him while in the pit.

The king himself had consented to it and powerful princes had carried it out. It was about as hopeless a situation as you could imagine.

Some of you **can** imagine it though, can't you? You've been in pits like that. Not literally, but personally... emotionally... spiritually. Some of you may be in such a pit right now.

You have the same two choices - faith or fight. We are prone to fight, to thinking that no help is coming so we must help ourselves. Though it's not in the Bible, even Christians tend to believe that "God helps those who help themselves."

God helps those who cannot help themselves. God's help is always available by faith.

Think of others who were in pits of sorts. Daniel was thrown into a pit - the den of lions. He survived the night with God's ever present help.

Before Daniel was thrown into the pit his three friends were thrown into Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace. They emerged without burns; they didn't even smell smokey. That's because there was a fourth Person with them in the furnace - a Person Nebuchadnezzar thought looked like the Son of God who we know was Jesus Christ.

The psalmist knew God was with him in his pits.

Psalm 40:1 I waited patiently for the LORD; And He inclined to me, And heard my cry.

Psalm 40:2 He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay, And set my feet upon a rock, And established my steps.

God sent His servant to save Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 38:7 Now Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian, one of the eunuchs, who was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon. When the king was sitting at the Gate of Benjamin,

Jeremiah 38:8 Ebed-Melech went out of the king's house and spoke to the king, saying:

Jeremiah 38:9 "My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon, and he is likely to die from hunger in the place where he is. For there is no more bread in the city."

It would be hard to find a more unlikely source of help than Ebed-Melech. He was a foreigner, a slave, an emasculated harem-keeper. In order to help Jeremiah he had to abandon his post and rebuke the king in public risking execution.

Let me put it a different way. If you were Jeremiah and you wanted to try to fight for your rescue, Ebed-Melech would be the last person in Jerusalem you would think of to come to your aid. You wouldn't waste your one phone call on him.

God's help in the pits of life is not what we expect. But it is always better than we expect.

Jeremiah may not have known him at all. Meaning that the one source of help God would raise-up was someone known only to The Lord.

God's help in the pits of life is not what we expect. But it is always *better* than we expect.

Jeremiah 38:10 Then the king commanded Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian, saying, "Take from here thirty men with you, and lift Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon before he dies."

Jeremiah 38:11 So Ebed-Melech took the men with him and went into the house of the king under the treasury, and took from there old clothes and old rags, and let them down by ropes into the dungeon to Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 38:12 Then Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian said to Jeremiah, "Please put these old clothes and rags under your armpits, under the ropes." And Jeremiah did so.

Jeremiah 38:13 So they pulled Jeremiah up with ropes and lifted him out of the dungeon. And Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison.

He not only pulled Jeremiah from the miry pit - he did it with compassion. He didn't want Jeremiah to get so much as a rope burn during the rescue.

Listen: "Ebed-Melech" isn't this guy's name. He's anonymous; we don't know his name. "Ebed-Melech" means *the servant of the king*.

God has a lot of servants He can dispatch to you in the pit you find yourself mired in.

God can send you a person, like this Ethiopian eunuch. He can send you His angel, like He did for Daniel. He can manifest Himself to you, like he did for Daniel's three friends.

We don't always recognize the servants He does send. We're looking for a person or maybe even an angel. We have our own ideas about deliverance from the pit.

This is how we need to think when we are between the rock and a hard place, in the pit, stuck fast in the mire. By faith, receiving grace. Or mercy. Or peace. Or forgiveness. Or joy. Or any of the very powerful spiritual servants that are ours by virtue of our relationship to Jesus Christ.

We can miss the fact that God always sends His most powerful servant - grace. Grace is God's enabling power that sustains us **in** all things and **through** all things. **There's no pit that can possibly exhaust the grace of God.**

Grace rarely comes alone to your pit. Grace is accompanied by mercy. Or peace. Or forgiveness. Or joy.

This is how we need to think when we are between the rock and a hard place, in the pit, stuck fast in the mire. By faith, receiving grace. Or mercy. Or peace. Or forgiveness. Or joy. Or any of the very powerful spiritual servants that are ours by virtue of our relationship to Jesus Christ.

Faith is not merely believing you can do something; it is knowing that you can through the power of Christ.

Remember something else. God can rescue you *from* the pit or *through* the pit.

When our pits are personal, emotional, spiritual pits, it's most likely God rescues us through them - meaning we must endure them. But we do not endure them without His servants to help us.

God's servants render you mireproof. There is no pit they can't handle.

#2 When You Are Out Of The Pit God Will Send You As His Servant

(v14-28)

God rescued Jeremiah so the prophet could go on ministering. Hard as it might be to believe, God still wanted Jeremiah to minister to Zedekiah. Harder still to imagine, Jeremiah was ok with it.

Jeremiah 38:14 Then Zedekiah the king sent and had Jeremiah the prophet brought to him at the third entrance of the house of the LORD. And the king said to Jeremiah, "I will ask you something. Hide nothing from me."

Jeremiah 38:15 Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "If I declare it to you, will you not surely put me to death? And if I give you advice, you will not listen to me."

Jeremiah 38:16 So Zedekiah the king swore secretly to Jeremiah, saying, "As the LORD lives, who made our very souls, I will not put you to death, nor will I give you into the hand of these men who seek your life."

There was nothing wrong with Jeremiah asking for protection. It's not spiritual to have a death wish.

Jeremiah 38:17 Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "Thus says the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel: 'If you surely surrender to the king of Babylon's princes, then your soul shall live; this city shall not be burned with fire, and you and your house shall live.

Jeremiah 38:18 But if you do not surrender to the king of Babylon's princes, then this city shall be given into the hand of the Chaldeans; they shall burn it with fire, and you shall not escape from their hand.' "

It was a clear choice, not difficult to understand, needing no interpretation.

People often argue that the Bible is unclear, subject to any number of interpretations. It's just not true. At least, not when it counts.

The most beloved, famous, and well-known of all the verses in the Bible - to both believers and nonbelievers - is John 3:16.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

There is nothing complicated about it. It's very clear. There's no need for interpretation. The youngest child can understand and act upon it. You either "believe in Him" and are saved; or you don't and you "perish."

Jeremiah 38:19 And Zedekiah the king said to Jeremiah, "I am afraid of the Jews who have defected to the Chaldeans, lest they deliver me into their hand, and they abuse me."

Zedekiah's unbelief was on account of his fear of man. That's a big one for a lot of people. They are afraid of how others will react to them if they follow Jesus Christ. Afraid of losing face or relationships.

You just might lose face with men but you'll be looking into the face of The Lord.

You might lose relationships with some people but in your relationship with Jesus you gain an enormous forever family of believers - brothers and sisters in Christ throughout all of history past and present.

Jeremiah 38:20 But Jeremiah said, "They shall not deliver you. Please, obey the voice of the LORD which I speak to you. So it shall be well with you, and your soul shall live.

Jeremiah 38:21 But if you refuse to surrender, this is the word that the LORD has shown me:

Jeremiah 38:22 'Now behold, all the women who are left in the king of Judah's house shall be surrendered to the king of Babylon's princes, and those women shall say: "Your close friends have set upon you And prevailed against you; Your feet have sunk in the mire, And they have turned away again."

Jeremiah 38:23 'So they shall surrender all your wives and children to the Chaldeans. You shall not escape from their hand, but shall be taken by the hand of the king of Babylon. And you shall cause this city to be burned with fire.' "

Do it for the sake of the women and children, Zedekiah; hat they might be spared suffering.

Sacrificial living is at an all-time low. Our culture values the pursuit of individual happiness above almost everything else. People aren't even sacrificing for their kids. I don't know how many couples, for instance, that I have encouraged to work-out their relatively minor, selfish problems and to stay married for the sake of their children who have insisted that "divorce is better for the kids." It isn't - at least not in the majority of families.

Jeremiah 38:24 Then Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, "Let no one know of these words, and you shall not die.

Jeremiah 38:25 But if the princes hear that I have talked with you, and they come to you and say to you, 'Declare to us now what you have said to the king, and also what the king said to you; do not hide it from us, and we will not put you to death,'

Jeremiah 38:26 then you shall say to them, 'I presented my request before the king, that he would not make me return to Jonathan's house to die there.' "

Zedekiah was asking Jeremiah to withhold certain information from the princes. Would he do it?

Jeremiah 38:27 Then all the princes came to Jeremiah and asked him. And he told them according to all these words that the king had commanded. So they stopped speaking with him, for the conversation had not been heard.

Jeremiah covered for Zedekiah. I don't want to over-analyze the ethics of his decision. He didn't really lie; he just didn't tell everything. Some fault him for it.

Not the point. What is the point? Obviously we can't say for certain but I see Jeremiah trying to keep a line of communication open with Zedekiah by which he might still convince the king - while there was yet time - to surrender to Babylon. It would spare the people of Judah much suffering.

We should try to do the greater good without compromising our beliefs. Keep lines of communication open - not at any cost but within reason.

Jeremiah 38:28 Now Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison until the day that Jerusalem was taken. And he was there when Jerusalem was taken.

It's a bittersweet postscript. Jeremiah was spared further persecution but Zedekiah never did do the right thing. The city fell - meaning it was burned and its citizens deported to Babylon.

The pit did nothing to quench Jeremiah's zeal. It didn't cause him to tone down God's Word.

Add to that he was not getting any younger. Seriously - he'd been at it a long time and with very limited success.

It's a great reminder to go on serving The Lord with every breath til your last breath.

Life is going to be the pits. Recognize the King's servants; let them lift you up, spiritually speaking; go on serving your King.