

6/8/25

Sermon Title: King Zedekiah, Who Feared People More Than God

Preacher: Pastor Kim Soonbae

Scripture Passage: Jeremiah 38:1–28

(Jeremiah 38:1) Shephatiah son of Mattan, Gedaliah son of Pashhur, Jehukal son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur son of Malkijah heard what Jeremiah was telling all the people when he said,

(Jeremiah 38:2) “This is what the LORD says: ‘Whoever stays in this city will die by the sword, famine or plague, but whoever goes over to the Babylonians will live. They will escape with their lives; they will live.’

(Jeremiah 38:3) And this is what the LORD says: ‘This city will certainly be given into the hands of the army of the king of Babylon, who will capture it.’”

(Jeremiah 38:4) Then the officials said to the king, “This man should be put to death. He is discouraging the soldiers who are left in this city, as well as all the people, by the things he is saying to them. This man is not seeking the good of these people but their ruin.”

(Jeremiah 38:5) “He is in your hands,” King Zedekiah answered. “The king can do nothing to oppose you.”

(Jeremiah 38:6) So they took Jeremiah and put him into the cistern of Malkijah, the king’s son, which was in the courtyard of the guard. They lowered Jeremiah by ropes into the cistern; it had no water in it, only mud, and Jeremiah sank down into the mud.

(Jeremiah 38:7) But Ebed-Melek, a Cushite,^[c] an official^[d] in the royal palace, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern. While the king was sitting in the Benjamin Gate,

(Jeremiah 38:8) Ebed-Melek went out of the palace and said to him,

(Jeremiah 38:9) “My lord the king, these men have acted wickedly in all they have done to Jeremiah the prophet. They have thrown him into a cistern, where he will starve to death when there is no longer any bread in the city.”

(Jeremiah 38:10) Then the king commanded Ebed-Melek the Cushite, "Take thirty men from here with you and lift Jeremiah the prophet out of the cistern before he dies."

(Jeremiah 38:11) So Ebed-Melek took the men with him and went to a room under the treasury in the palace. He took some old rags and worn-out clothes from there and let them down with ropes to Jeremiah in the cistern.

(Jeremiah 38:12) Ebed-Melek the Cushite said to Jeremiah, "Put these old rags and worn-out clothes under your arms to pad the ropes." Jeremiah did so,

(Jeremiah 38:13) and they pulled him up with the ropes and lifted him out of the cistern. And Jeremiah remained in the courtyard of the guard.

Zedekiah Questions Jeremiah Again

(Jeremiah 38:14) Then King Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah the prophet and had him brought to the third entrance to the temple of the LORD. "I am going to ask you something," the king said to Jeremiah. "Do not hide anything from me."

(Jeremiah 38:15) Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "If I give you an answer, will you not kill me? Even if I did give you counsel, you would not listen to me."

(Jeremiah 38:16) But King Zedekiah swore this oath secretly to Jeremiah: "As surely as the LORD lives, who has given us breath, I will neither kill you nor hand you over to those who want to kill you."

(Jeremiah 38:17) Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "This is what the LORD God Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'If you surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, your life will be spared and this city will not be burned down; you and your family will live.

(Jeremiah 38:18) But if you will not surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, this city will be given into the hands of the Babylonians and they will burn it down; you yourself will not escape from them.'"

(Jeremiah 38:19) King Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, "I am afraid of the Jews who have gone over to the Babylonians, for the Babylonians may hand me over to them and they will mistreat me."

(Jeremiah 38:20) "They will not hand you over," Jeremiah replied.

“Obey the LORD by doing what I tell you. Then it will go well with you, and your life will be spared.

(Jeremiah 38:21) But if you refuse to surrender, this is what the LORD has revealed to me:

(Jeremiah 38:22) All the women left in the palace of the king of Judah will be brought out to the officials of the king of Babylon. Those women will say to you:

“They misled you and overcame you— those trusted friends of yours.

Your feet are sunk in the mud; your friends have deserted you.’

(Jeremiah 38:23) “All your wives and children will be brought out to the Babylonians. You yourself will not escape from their hands but will be captured by the king of Babylon; and this city will be burned down.”

(Jeremiah 38:24) Then Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, “Do not let anyone know about this conversation, or you may die.

(Jeremiah 38:25) If the officials hear that I talked with you, and they come to you and say, ‘Tell us what you said to the king and what the king said to you; do not hide it from us or we will kill you,’

(Jeremiah 38:26) then tell them, ‘I was pleading with the king not to send me back to Jonathan’s house to die there.’”

(Jeremiah 38:27) All the officials did come to Jeremiah and question him, and he told them everything the king had ordered him to say. So they said no more to him, for no one had heard his conversation with the king.

(Jeremiah 38:28) And Jeremiah remained in the courtyard of the guard until the day Jerusalem was captured.

Even while imprisoned, the prophet Jeremiah faithfully proclaimed God's warning to the people of Judah and King Zedekiah until the very end.

He did not give up, but cried out to the people of Judah that the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon was God's will and that they must surrender—otherwise, they would die by the sword and by plague.

(Jeremiah 38:1) Shephatiah son of Mattan, Gedaliah son of Pashhur, Jehukal son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur son of Malkijah heard what Jeremiah was telling all the people when he said,

(Jeremiah 38:2) “This is what the LORD says: ‘Whoever stays in this city will die by the sword, famine or plague, but whoever goes over to the Babylonians will live. They will escape with their lives; they will live.’

(Jeremiah 38:3) And this is what the LORD says: ‘This city will certainly be given into the hands of the army of the king of Babylon, who will capture it.’”

“This city” refers to Jerusalem—the location of the temple, the place where the Ark of the Covenant resided, and the place where God dwelled.

Living in this city was once considered a privilege and a source of pride.

However, God no longer dwells in this city.

Because it has betrayed Him, God became angry and departed from it.

Now, this city will fall into the hands of Babylon.

The officials accused Jeremiah before the king, claiming that his message was discouraging the soldiers and the people.

When the king accepted their accusation, they took Jeremiah and threw him into a cistern belonging to the king's son, Malkijah, intending for him to die there without shedding his blood by their own hands.

(Jeremiah 38:4) Then the officials said to the king, “This man should be put to death. He is discouraging the soldiers who are left in this city, as well as all the people, by the things he is saying to them. This man is not seeking the good of these people but their ruin.”

(Jeremiah 38:5) “He is in your hands,” King Zedekiah answered. “The king can do nothing to oppose you.”

(Jeremiah 38:6) So they took Jeremiah and put him into the cistern of Malkijah, the king’s son, which was in the courtyard of the guard. They lowered Jeremiah by ropes into the cistern; it had no water in it, only mud, and Jeremiah sank down into the mud.

King Zedekiah was appointed by Babylon after Jehoiachin was taken into exile.

From the beginning, his reign lacked legitimacy.

Most of the people of Judah still considered Jehoiachin to be the rightful king and expected his return.

Therefore, in making any decision, King Zedekiah was constantly mindful of the people's opinions.

This situation was no exception.

As can be inferred from the titles they used, the officials did not acknowledge Jeremiah as a true prophet.

Although Zedekiah himself recognized Jeremiah as a prophet and secretly inquired of him to hear what God was saying, he still sacrificed Jeremiah to appease the officials—out of fear of what they might think.

In contrast, a foreigner—Ebed-Melek, a Cushite eunuch in the royal palace—heard of Jeremiah's plight and courageously approached the king to plead for the prophet's rescue.

(Jeremiah 38:7) But Ebed-Melek, a Cushite,^[c] an official^[d] in the royal palace, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern. While the king was sitting in the Benjamin Gate,

(Jeremiah 38:8) Ebed-Melek went out of the palace and said to him,

(Jeremiah 38:9) "My lord the king, these men have acted wickedly in all they have done to Jeremiah the prophet. They have thrown him into a cistern, where he will starve to death when there is no longer any bread in the city."

(Jeremiah 38:10) Then the king commanded Ebed-Melek the Cushite, "Take thirty men from here with you and lift Jeremiah the prophet out of the cistern before he dies."

Hearing Ebed-Melek's petition, King Zedekiah immediately ordered that Jeremiah be lifted out of the cistern.

In obedience to the king's command, Ebed-Melek quickly took some men with him and rescued Jeremiah from the pit.

(Jeremiah 38:11) So Ebed-Melek took the men with him and went to a room under the treasury in the palace. He took some old rags and worn-out clothes from there and let them down with ropes to Jeremiah in the cistern.

(Jeremiah 38:12) Ebed-Melek the Cushite said to Jeremiah, "Put these old rags and worn-out clothes under your arms to pad the ropes." Jeremiah did so,

(Jeremiah 38:13) and they pulled him up with the ropes and lifted him out of the cistern. And Jeremiah remained in the courtyard of the guard.

Because of this act, Ebed-Melek received a promise from God that he would be saved when Jerusalem was destroyed.

(Jeremiah 39:15) While Jeremiah had been confined in the courtyard of the guard, the word of the LORD came to him:

(Jeremiah 39:16) "Go and tell Ebed-Melek the Cushite, 'This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I am about to fulfill my words against this city—words concerning disaster, not prosperity. At that time they will be fulfilled before your eyes.

(Jeremiah 39:17) But I will rescue you on that day, declares the LORD; you will not be given into the hands of those you fear.

(Jeremiah 39:18) I will save you; you will not fall by the sword but will escape with your life, because you trust in me, declares the LORD.'"

After Jeremiah was rescued from the cistern, King Zedekiah secretly summoned him and inquired whether there was any new word from the Lord.

(Jeremiah 38:14) Then King Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah the prophet and had him brought to the third entrance to the temple of the LORD. "I am going to ask you something," the king said to Jeremiah. "Do not hide anything from me."

(Jeremiah 38:15) Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "If I give you an answer, will you not kill me? Even if I did give you counsel, you would not listen to me."

(Jeremiah 38:16) But King Zedekiah swore this oath secretly to Jeremiah: “As surely as the LORD lives, who has given us breath, I will neither kill you nor hand you over to those who want to kill you.”

Jeremiah knew well the weak character of King Zedekiah.

He was aware that even if he delivered the word of the Lord, it would have no real effect.

Moreover, knowing that if the officials insisted, the king might even hand him over to be killed, Jeremiah sought assurance for his life.

In response, King Zedekiah swore by the Lord, the Giver of life, that he would not hand Jeremiah over.

To swear by the living Lord meant that if one broke the oath, the Lord—who has authority over life—could rightfully take that person’s life.

Having received assurance of his safety, Jeremiah boldly delivered the word of the Lord to King Zedekiah: that the fate of the king, his family, and the entire city depended on whether or not the king obeyed the Lord.

(Jeremiah 38:17) Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, “This is what the LORD God Almighty, the God of Israel, says: ‘If you surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, your life will be spared and this city will not be burned down; you and your family will live.

(Jeremiah 38:18) But if you will not surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, this city will be given into the hands of the Babylonians and they will burn it down; you yourself will not escape from them.’”

Surrendering to Babylon was the only way for the king, his family, and the city to be saved.

Then King Zedekiah confessed that, although he believed Jeremiah’s words were true, he was too afraid of the Judeans who had already surrendered to Babylon and therefore could not bring himself to surrender.

(Jeremiah 38:19) King Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, “I am afraid of the Jews who have gone over to the Babylonians, for the Babylonians may hand me over to them and they will mistreat me.”

King Zedekiah was indecisive and lacked the courage to follow Jeremiah's words. He feared not only the officials but also those who had already surrendered to Babylon.

Instead of fearing God, he feared people.

Jeremiah warned him of the dreadful consequences that would come from rejecting the voice of the Lord God.

(Jeremiah 38:20) “They will not hand you over,” Jeremiah replied.

“Obey the LORD by doing what I tell you. Then it will go well with you, and your life will be spared.

(Jeremiah 38:21) But if you refuse to surrender, this is what the LORD has revealed to me:

(Jeremiah 38:22) All the women left in the palace of the king of Judah will be brought out to the officials of the king of Babylon. Those women will say to you: “They misled you and overcame you— those trusted friends of yours.

Your feet are sunk in the mud; your friends have deserted you.’

(Jeremiah 38:23) “All your wives and children will be brought out to the Babylonians. You yourself will not escape from their hands but will be captured by the king of Babylon; and this city will be burned down.”

Jeremiah told King Zedekiah that not only would the king be handed over to the king of Babylon, but also that his wives and all the women remaining in the palace would be taken by the officials of Babylon.

It was common practice at the time for the conquering king to take all the women from the palace of the defeated nation.

He also warned that the city of Jerusalem would be set on fire.

Yet even after hearing this, King Zedekiah continued to be concerned with what people would think.

He asked Jeremiah to keep their conversation a secret.

Zedekiah even instructed Jeremiah on what to say when the officials came to question him about their discussion.

(Jeremiah 38:24) Then Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, “Do not let anyone know about this conversation, or you may die.

(Jeremiah 38:25) If the officials hear that I talked with you, and they come to you and say, ‘Tell us what you said to the king and what the king said to you; do not hide it from us or we will kill you,’

(Jeremiah 38:26) then tell them, ‘I was pleading with the king not to send me back to Jonathan’s house to die there.’”

(Jeremiah 38:27) All the officials did come to Jeremiah and question him, and he told them everything the king had ordered him to say. So they said no more to him, for no one had heard his conversation with the king.

At the time, most of the officials were pro-Egyptian or anti-Babylonian.

Therefore, even though King Zedekiah wanted to surrender to Babylon, he was too afraid to do so, fearing that the officials might kill him.

As the king had expected, the officials came to Jeremiah and questioned him about his conversation with the king.

Jeremiah answered them just as King Zedekiah had instructed him in advance, and so the matter was settled.

As a result, Jeremiah remained in the courtyard of the guard until the day Jerusalem was captured.

(Jeremiah 38:28) And Jeremiah remained in the courtyard of the guard until the day Jerusalem was captured.

Beloved members of Church of God Dreams,

The prophet Jeremiah, even to the very end, did not give up.

He continued to proclaim God's warning to the people of Judah and to King Zedekiah—warning them of the coming destruction upon the king, his family, and the city.

He urged them to surrender to Babylon.

That was the final opportunity given to King Zedekiah and the nation of Judah.

However, King Zedekiah feared people more than he feared God.

Concerned with how others perceived him, he missed the final chance God had offered.

As a result, he and his family met a tragic and unspeakably painful end, Jerusalem was burned, and the kingdom of Judah was destroyed.

Whom do you fear as you live your life?

Do you fear people? Or do you fear God?

Do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul.

Rather, fear the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Only then will you receive salvation and live eternally.