

When God's word is not what we want to hear

By Elise L. Moore, C.S.

In honor of Martin Luther King, I was thinking about a courageous Ethiopian who spoke the truth even when it was unpopular.

Ebedmelech was a high-ranking Ethiopian who served Zedekiah, king of Judah from 597-586 B.C. (Jeremiah 38). Zedekiah was an indecisive king, appointed by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon to rule over Judah and Jerusalem. The people of Judah chafed under Babylonian domination. However, instead of turning to God for guidance and deliverance, they turned to human reasoning and the king of Egypt. With promises of military aid from Egypt, Zedekiah and the people rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar. In retaliation, Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem.

For years Jeremiah the prophet had futilely urged the people to turn to God and be obedient to His commandments. In the last months of the siege, Jeremiah's words were more than the rulers could bear. They wanted support for their choices. They didn't want to hear the truth.

So they imprisoned Jeremiah. The description is graphic, "and they let down Jeremiah with cords. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire: so Jeremiah sunk in the mire."

When Ebedmelech learned of Jeremiah's dire situation, he went immediately to King Zedekiah. Ebedmelech spoke up when others were intimidated. He stood boldly for the word of God and the righteousness of His ministers when popular opinion openly went the other way. Oblivious of race, rank, or nationality, Ebedmelech confronted the king and fearlessly told him the truth. "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 like to die for hunger in the place where he is."

His honesty and courage touched Zedekiah. The king allowed Ebedmelech to rescue Jeremiah.

In every age there seem to be injustice, racial and national prejudice, domination. The human tendency is to look for a kingdom of Egypt or human superpower to deliver the underdog. But isn't the answer truly to be found in God? While the message from God may not be what we want to hear, any more than God's word through Jeremiah was not what the rulers of Judah wanted to hear, still it is the truth which brings long-term blessings.

M. L. King spoke the truth when it was not popular. He boldly challenged prejudice. He preached non-violence and the power of love to reform and dissolve hatred. The effect of his words was to lift hundreds of thousands from the miry pit of degradation.

The courage of Ebedmelech was so noteworthy that his words and actions were recorded in the Holy Bible. May we be as receptive to God's word, especially when it flies in the face of popular wisdom and cultural tradition. Obedience to God brings ultimate freedom and improves the human condition for all mankind.

Rev. King's words ring true today as they did more than 30 years ago, "I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up, live out the true meaning of its creed: we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

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