

## **Sermon Guides for Ezekiel – Malachi**

**Series Title:** Faith When It Counts

**Tag Line:** Comfort and Challenge in Exile

**Dates (2020):** August 2, 9, 16, 23

**Key Verse:**

He delivers and rescues, he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth; for he has saved Daniel from the power of the lions. (Daniel 6:27 NRSV)

### **Series Overview**

What happens to our faith when we are tested? Do we cower in fear, or do we claim a strength that only God can provide? As our journey through the Old Testament comes to an end, we hear some final stories of encouragement from some of the Bible's most iconic characters. Each one teaches us some aspect of how to have faith when we are most tested. These remarkable individuals teach us that our greatest trials can be the setting for our greatest triumphs.

### **Colors, Images, Mood, Vibe:**

Bold colors that connote courage and bravery.

Images that suggest determination, perseverance.

Feelings of strength and tenacity.

## **Sermon 1**

**Title:** Faith When It Counts: Vision

**Scripture:** Ezekiel 37:1-14

**Key Word:** Vision

**Theme:** Ezekiel and the vision of the wheel

**Main Idea:** God helps us see new life when all we see is despair.

### **Sermon Description:**

Ezekiel was a prophet during the Babylonian captivity, and his oracles contain some of the most vivid, most imaginative scenes in the Old Testament. Among them are the famous “vision of the wheel” and the “valley of dry bones.” Ezekiel reminds us that even when we see a reality that is dire and desperate, God gives us the capacity to imagine a future that is better than the present.

## **Sermon 2**

**Title:** Faith When It Counts: Faithfulness

**Scripture:** Daniel 6:10-28

**Key Word:** Faithfulness

**Theme:** Daniel in the lion's den

**Main Idea:** God is with us through the toughest times, and will see us through.

### **Sermon Description:**

Daniel was a young Jewish man, part of the captivity in Babylon. His story gives us the clearest glimpse of life in exile, and the temptations that people like him faced in a culture that was far removed from his own. For any part of our faith that feels like it is in exile, Daniel's stories give us encouragement to remain faithful. He chooses to care for his body rather than eat the king's food. He surrounds himself with friends who can support him. He trusts in God's provision even when it could cost him.

## Sermon 3

**Title:** Faith When It Counts: Reluctance

**Scripture:** Jonah 1:1-17

**Key Word:** Reluctance

**Theme:** Jonah flees God, then does God's work.

**Main Idea:** God never gives up on us, and we should never give up on others.

### Sermon Description:

The story of Jonah is unique among all the prophet stories. It is almost a parody of prophet stories, beginning with his reluctant call story and ending with his reluctant ministry. In the end, the greatest transformation that takes place in this book is not the forgiveness that God bestows on the Ninevites, but the work that God does in Jonah's heart. Jonah learns that God's grace is wide enough to encompass those whom we would rather exclude, and it is even wide enough to encompass our own waywardness.

## Sermon 4

**Title:** Faith When It Counts: Justice

**Scripture:** Micah 6:8

**Key Word:** Justice

**Theme:** What the Lord requires

**Main Idea:** God requires of us justice, kindness, and humility.

### Sermon Description:

Micah 6:8 is one of the most famous prophetic texts, and is a theological foundation for much of our social justice efforts today. It is important to remember that this verse is not a multiple-choice text. We cannot choose justice and kindness without humility, lest we make justice work about ourselves. We cannot choose kindness and humility without justice, lest we fall short of making lasting change. And we cannot choose justice and humility without kindness, lest we fill the world with the kind of hate that we are called to overcome.