

AM Ezekiel 34, John 10:10-18 The Good Shepherd

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[0 : 00] Ezekiel and from the Gospel of John. The first reading is from Ezekiel chapter 34 and we'll read from verse 1 to 16.

So Ezekiel chapter 34 verses 1 to 16. Prophecy against the shepherds of Israel.

The word of the Lord came to me, son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to them, even to the shepherds, thus says the Lord God, ask shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves, should not shepherds feed the sheep?

You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool. You slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed.

The injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, and the lost you have not sought. And with force and harshness you have ruled them.

[1 : 09] So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered, and they wandered over all mountains, and in every high hill.

My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.

Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord. As I live, declares the Lord God, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd.

And because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, have not fed my sheep. Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord.

Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand, and put a stop to their feeding the sheep.

No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them. For thus says the Lord God, Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out.

[2 : 28] As a shepherd seeks out his flock, when he is amongst his sheep, that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep. And I will rescue them from all places, where they have been scattered on a day of clouds, and thick darkness.

And I will bring them out from the peoples, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them in the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country.

I will feed them with good pastures, and in the mountain heights of Israel, shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing, and in rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel.

I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak.

And the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice. Reading from the New Testament is from the Gospel of John.

[3 : 44] From John 10, verses 10 to 18. So, John chapter 10, verses 10 to 18.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd.

The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees.

And the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd.

I know my own and my own know me. Just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold.

[4 : 53] I must bring them also. And they will listen to my voice, so there will be one flock and one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again.

No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.

Thanks be to God for the reading of his holy word. And to his name be the glory and praise. Amen. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word.

And as we study it now, I ask that the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. And I say through your Son, our Saviour.

Amen. Amen. So, when I was here previously, we had looked at the first part of this chapter about Jesus being the gate by which the sheep enter.

[6 : 09] Today, we will concentrate on the final part where he states that he is a good shepherd.

Again, Jesus uses an image that his hearers in the first century would have been very familiar with.

He compares himself to the shepherd. But what image does that create for us today? Is it that he stands looking over the fields, leaning in his crook?

Do we contrast him with those who should care for his flock? Is it that he is a man of the outdoors, who is out in all weathers?

Or does it immediately create a picture of someone who cares for others? Who cares for his flock?

And we'll look at the image of Jesus as a good shepherd this morning. We'll look at three things.

We'll look at his purpose and how he will achieve it.

[7 : 17] We'll contrast him with those that God had actually put in charge over his flock. And we will look at him calling his flock to himself.

So, in verse 10, Jesus declares, I came that they may have life and they may have it abundantly. Jesus did not simply come to be another teacher of the law, to set a good example of good and moral living. He came to give eternal life to man.

And in verse 11, he makes it clear the price of that eternal life. He makes it clear that the price will be his suffering and that he will lay down his life ultimately for his flock.

In verse 11, Jesus alludes to himself as the good shepherd. But perhaps a truer reflection, a truer translation, would be that he is the perfect shepherd.

[8 : 27] Jesus was not just a good shepherd. Not just another shepherd who did a good job, who tended his flock well. But he was an excellent shepherd.

There was none better. He was faultless. In a spiritual sense, he was without sin. He followed the will of his heavenly father without deviation, even to laying his life down for us.

He was not a soldier who went in to fight for a good cause and plans to return home after the conflict. Who went with the intent of returning to his family and friends, but is unfortunately killed.

He deliberately lays down his life for us. Jesus came with the purpose of laying down his life for his sheep. He was not killed by the strength of his enemies.

He did not die because someone else was more powerful or was smarter than him. As Jesus was betrayed by Judas in the Garden of Gethsemane, one of his followers drew the sword and chopped off the priest of the servant's ear.

[9 : 41] And in Matthew 26, 52 to 54, we read that Jesus said, Then Jesus said to him, Put your sword back in its place.

For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you not think that I cannot appeal to my father? And he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels.

But how then should the scriptures be fulfilled that it must be so? Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and God, our Heavenly Father, are the three persons of our triune God.

Their powers are not limited to our earthly powers. Our triune God created all that there is and he made man without his aid.

Jesus could have freed himself and reprieved himself from this coming time of trial. From this time of torture and humiliation and ultimately his death in Calvary.

[10 : 50] But no, he chose to lay down his life for us. He chose to substitute himself for us on the cross. It was in his power as the Son of God to lay down his life and in verse 17 and 18 we read,

For this reason the Father loves me because I lay down my life that I may take it up again.

No one takes it from me but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I receive from my Father.
So there's two points to note here. First, why does he willingly lay down his life? Because he knew that his death was the only way of once more reconciling God back to man.
It was the only way of making atonement for man's sin. In that chapter of Matthew 26 we read that Jesus knew the journey that he was about to make to the cross.
And he asked that the cup of trial and suffering which lay ahead of him could be passed from him. But also that he would do his Father's will.
[12 : 14] He would accept his Father's decision freely. There was no coercion. Jesus, the sinless one was prepared to become sin for us.

That he may be that we may be clothed in his righteousness. We who were so far from God because of Jesus Christ's sacrifice for us can stand once more in a right relationship with God. Because we are covered, we are clothed in Christ's righteousness. Jesus' words contain hope for his believers.

If we think that we come to the cross, we come to Jesus' death, this person who people had hoped would be their saviour, their messiah, suddenly see him crucified.
But his words give us hope. Because he says, I have authority to lay my life down and I have authority to take it up again. so just as he has authority to surrender himself, he also has authority to lift his life again.

[13 : 28] He gives hope to his followers that Calvary would not be the end. John Calvin writes it in his commentary in the Gospel of John. It is as if he said that he would not just die and be swallowed up by death, but would quickly rise again as conqueror.

Without his sacrifice, we certainly would be swallowed up by death as the penalty of our sins. But as the sinless sacrifice, Jesus atones for our sins.
death, and rises as a conqueror of sin. He has given us hope, and when we think of the cross and the crucifixion, we should always remember the resurrection of Christ and the victory he achieved over death and over sin.

That he atoned for our sin and that he died in our place, so that the penalty of sin may be paid and the man could be redeemed.

We go back to verse 12 and we see Christ starting to contrast those who should have cared for the flock compared to the good shepherd.

[14 : 49] We see the start of Christ comparing his conduct with those that God had put in charge. He was referring to the priests and the Pharisees who mislead and mistreat his flock.

Jesus the good shepherd lays down his life for his flock. The Pharisees whom Jesus is referring to here are limited in their care, preferring to look after their own well-being, to look after their own status and their own privilege.

And here we can see a link with the message that God proclaims through his prophet Ezekiel in chapter 34. God had warned the priests and prophets he had placed to care for his flock about their corruption and the neglect of his people.

He had stated that he would replace them in the care of their flock, highlighting their greed and neglect in verses 2 to 4. Ezekiel had written, Thus says the Lord God, As shepherds of Israel, who have been feeding yourselves, should not shepherds feed the sheep?

You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but do you not feed the sheep? The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought.

[16 : 20] Jesus, some 600 years later, says of the Pharisees in verses 12 and 13. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.

He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. The Pharisees, the hired hand, places his own well-being above that of the sheep.

Because ultimately he cares nothing for them. We can see the link between the new shepherd in Ezekiel and Jesus.

As the shepherd in Ezekiel was seen as the awaited Messiah, we see Jesus portraying himself as a good shepherd, links himself to the coming Messiah.

Messiah. This is a reference that would not be missed by his Jewish heroes and one that would cause anger and upset, one that would lead them to wish to stone him towards the end of the passage.

[17 : 34] But Jesus continues to cause further upset. In verse 14, Jesus goes back to that statement that he is a good shepherd.

And he says, he knows his sheep and they know him. It is a personal relationship that we come to know Jesus Christ as our shepherd, not just an academic knowledge.

the personal relationship shows that Jesus is a good shepherd or the excellent shepherd goes beyond that of an allusion to the human shepherd.

In verse 14, 15 it goes, I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own knows me. Just as the father knows me and I know the father and I lay down my life for the sheep.

But here comes a statement that would have shocked Jesus hearers. The Israelites were not, sorry, the Israelites were God's chosen people. They were the people that he had called to themselves, he had made a covenant with and that through them he would bless the nations.

[18 : 50] But Jesus announces that the Israelites would not be the only people called by him. In verse 16, Jesus states, and I have other sheep that are not of this fold.

I must bring them also and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock and one shepherd. Jesus continues this theme in his great commission to his disciples after his resurrection in Matthew 28 and 19.

In the great commission he says to them, go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

So Jesus widens those who would be blessed. It would no longer simply be Israel as the chosen people but people would be drawn to him from across the nations.

But this was all some 2,000 years ago. What relevance has it for us today? Well first, our understanding of the role of shepherd may have changed.

[20 : 03] But the importance of the care and compassion that a shepherd gives is still central. We can still relate to the image that is painted in Isaiah 50 verse 11 of the description of the shepherd.

He will tend his flock like a shepherd. He will gather their lambs in his arms and he will carry them in his bosom. And gently lead those that are with young.

And to Jesus in John 10 and 11 that I am the good shepherd and the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Today we may not expect many shepherds to lay down their lives or to face off wolves but we do expect them to make the sacrifice of going out and caring for the sheep.

For bringing back the strays. And we often look at the Old Testament and contrast it with the message of the New Testament. A God of anger, of wrath and of judgment in the Old Testament. Some would say is replaced with a God of love and compassion in the New Testament. But this can't be further from the truth. God, our God is an unchanging God.

[21 : 22] God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. And that's why we can rely on his promises. He is a covenant God, the God who loved his creation and desired to once more bring man back into a relationship with him.

And has promised to care for his people. But he is also a God of justice and requires payments for our sin, for a rebellion against him.

God, however, knows that we cannot make that atonement ourselves. That we can meet his demands from our fallen nature.

We cannot keep his laws in their entirety. The law only highlights our weaknesses and frailty and their need for a saviour, a need for a good shepherd.

But God so loved us, even after man's first sin against him, that he sent his son to pay the penalty of our sins.

[22 : 32] He is a God of justice and of love, from the book of Genesis right through to the book of Revelation. There is no contradiction between the Old and the New Testament.

Jesus as a shepherd comes to tend our needs and ultimately he laid down his life as a good shepherd for us, for you and for me. He laid down his life for the forgiveness of our sins, that by acknowledging him as our saviour, that we may be saved.

We see the clearest outline of God's care as a shepherd in Psalm 23. We see that those who trust in the Lord will not want.

God, through Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit, will provide for us all we require to fulfil God's desire for us. If we have troubles, he will still our hearts and renew our faith that we can continue in our life of service to him.

Even in death, we have no reason for fear as God is with us. He will comfort us and he will uphold us and gives us a promise that whoever believes in his son as their saviour will have everlasting life with God.

[23 : 59] He blesses us and our dwelling place shall be with him forevermore if we have faith through Christ his son. What a promise, what a reassurance.

Not that our life will be easy, but that God will provide and care for us if we know Jesus Christ as our saviour, if we have a personal relationship with Christ, not just an academic knowledge. when we are overawed in life by its pain, by its trials and grief, God is with us, renews us, and provides for us peace.

Do we have that reassurance, that closeness with God, and hope of his eternal peace? If not, then the sacrifice that Jesus made 2,000 years ago is still offered for you today.

Jesus still waits for the lost and the burdened to invite him in, for them to become in union with him.

[25 : 11] Revelations 3, 20, 21 reads, Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and eat with him and he with me.

the one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my father on his throne.

Are you prepared to make that request for the secure promise of life eternal with Christ? Christ? In verse 14, we hear of the relationship we have with Jesus.

He knows his own and they in turn know him and he likens it to his relationship with his heavenly father. God goes beyond the human shepherd tending his sheep.

Jesus knows not only our behaviours and our outward signs. he's not like the shepherd who looks at the young lamb or the sheep and at the outward signs of its health and tries to figure out if it is doing okay?

[26 : 28] He's not like the doctor who can listen to us telling him the symptoms that we feel are important for him to know or are not too embarrassed to tell him and then tries to make a diagnosis about the state of our health.

He knows all of us and I don't just mean that he knows each of us. He does. He knows each of us personally but he knows all of us. He knows us externally and he knows us internally.

He knows the deepest thoughts of our hearts. He knows the good acts that we do. He knows our good intentions but he also knows the bits that we want to keep hidden.

The sin within us. Secondly, Jesus contrasts his mission and his care for his flock with the Pharisees and we have heard also the contrast declared by Ezekiel of God's care for his people compared to the leaders he had placed over them.

Is there any difference today? Do those who minister to God's people provide true teachings so that Christians can grow in faith and knowledge of God's desire for their lives?

[27 : 45] Or do they forsake God's teachings, corrupt God's message to us and lead people astray? Paul's warning to the church at Ephesus is as relevant today as it was when his hearers first heard it.

Paul wrote, God, I know that my departure, I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you not sparing the flock. And from among your own selves will rise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them.

So the church will be attacked both externally from the world and internally. There will be those who will rise up from within the church and who will look to lead people astray.

There are those who will attempt to bind us to beliefs and rights and practices in order to attain our own salvation. There are those who will deceive us that we are freed from the law by Jesus' death. It holds no sway over us anymore. We are free to live as we please, as we are saved by faith alone. There are those who will say that sin in their lives is of no concern.

[28 : 59] we can live by society's standards. Both are equal distortions of the gospel. Yes, we are saved by our faith in Christ alone.

We are free from bondage of the law. But we are freed from that bondage of the law so that we may give glory and praise to God.

That is to be more Christ-like each day to strive to fulfil God's commands but knowing that our sins are forgiven through Christ. We are called to be the light of the world, to be the salt. We should therefore stand in the world as being different, not another simple part of it. Paul warns us of the dangers of men who will rise up to lead us astray, away from the service of God. We must therefore be prepared. We must know the teachings of his gospel that we may not be led astray from it. If we don't, we will be pulled this way and that by all the new teachings that appear on a regular basis.

[30 : 19] people will say that new ways must be right. They're working, they're drawing people to them. But don't be hasty. Now there is an appeal to popularism.

Rather we must ask in the message that they preach, is it true? Is it scriptural? And can we see the full teachings of Christ in the message they impart?

not just a God of justice and damnation, not just a God of love, but a God of balance, a God of the covenant, a God that cares, but also a God of justice.

The Jews hearing Jesus speak would have been shocked to hear that there was another flock which he must also call, that he will bring them all together under his care.

To the Jews, they were God's chosen people. They were his covenanted people whom he had called to him and through whom the other nations would be blessed.

[31 : 31] To believers, our task is to reach out to all humanity with God's message of salvation. No one is excluded, not by colour, by race, or by gender.

we require to take the gospel message into all the world. As Matthew 28 and 19 said, go therefore and make disciples of all nations.

To a non-believer, I would say please don't hesitate. If you have not accepted Christ as your saviour, do so now. He awaits you.

No one is beyond the pale of salvation through facing Christ as their saviour. Look at Christ's disciples. They were ordinary folk.

They included those who were actually outcasts in society, if we think of Matthew the tax collector. And think of his conversation on the cross in Luke 23, when he declared to the thief hanging there beside him, truly I say to you, today you'll be with me in paradise.

[32 : 41] Christ's message of salvation is for all, no matter their background. Let us pray.

Father, we thank you that you are the good shepherd, the shepherd who laid down his life for us, the shepherd who held nothing back, that by the laying down of your life, you have actually gave us new life.

We are resurrected with you and can once more have a relationship with God our Heavenly Father. We pray for those who have yet to make a decision for you, Lord.

We pray, God, that you pour out your grace upon them, that the Holy Spirit will move in their hearts, and that Christ's message may be acceptable to them, that they will proclaim him as their Savior.

These things we ask in your name, our Savior. Amen. Amen.