

AM Zechariah 13:7

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- [0 : 0 0] I'm going to read now in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 26, and we'll read from verse 17 to verse 35, and then from verse 47 to verse 56.
- That's Matthew chapter 26, reading from verse 17, and we're reading from the English Standard Version. Now, on the first day of unleavened bread, the disciples came to Jesus, saying, Where would you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?
- He said, Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, The teacher says, My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.
- And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover. When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve, and as they were eating, he said, Truly I say to you, one of you will betray me.
- And they were very sorrowful, and began to say to him one after another, Is it I, Lord? He answered, He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me.
- [1 : 2 2] The Son of Man goes as it is written of him. But woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.
- Judas, who would betray him, answered, Is it I, Rabbi? He said to him, You have said so. Now, as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it, broke it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat, this is my body.
- And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.
- I tell you, I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom. And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.
- Then Jesus said to them, You will all fall away because of me this night, for it is written, I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.
- [2 : 3 2] But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee. Peter answered them, Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.
- Jesus said to him, Truly, I tell you this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times. Peter said to him, Even I must die with you.
- I will not deny you. And all the disciples said the same. And then from verse 47. While he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd, with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people.
- Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, The one I will kiss is the man. Seize him. And he came up to Jesus at once, and said, Greetings, Rabbi.
- And he kissed him. Jesus said to him, Friend, do what you came to do. Then he came up, and laid hands on Jesus, and seized him. And behold, one of those who were with Jesus, stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear.

[3 : 45] Then Jesus said to him, Put your sword back into its place, for all who take the sword, will perish by the sword. Do you 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, and it must be so. At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, Had you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me?

Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But all this has taken place, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.

Then all the disciples left him, and fled. May God bless to us this reading. Let's join together in prayer.

The word we're going to turn to, the book of the prophet Zechariah, chapter 13, and we're going to look at verse 7. The prophet Zechariah, chapter 13, and verse 7.

[4 : 56] Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me, declares the Lord of hosts. Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.

I will turn my hand against the little ones. Now, this morning we are here to remember the Lord's death.

In the Lord's Supper, the communion as we generally call it. And it's fitting that we are going to reflect on the Lord's death at the Lord's table, through the symbols that have been provided of his death.

It is appropriate that prior to that, we think about these things through the word that he has given to us. So that the word may direct us in our thinking about, and our experience of, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

And this passage is one that describes the death of our Lord. Now, it describes more than that. The passage actually is quite a complex one, and I'm not going to go into it in detail.

[6 : 14] I'm going to, in a sense, take the easy way out, inasmuch as I'm going to limit my explanation of this to its fulfillment in the immediate experience of Jesus. But there's no doubt at all that whatever else it may teach us about this passage, it is fulfilled at least at one level in the experience of Jesus, because he himself said so.

We've read in Matthew the account of Jesus at the Last Supper, how his thoughts were on death very much, and all the suffering that that would involve.

And it was in that context that he brings in this prophecy. And Jesus clearly understood the striking of the shepherd as a reference to himself.

And the reference to the sheep being scattered, he understood it in reference to his disciples forsaking him and fleeing. So we can take this verse and we can say, Jesus saw this as a fulfillment of his own experience in his own days.

What does it mean for us, at least at that level this morning? And in this way, we'll try and open up the word so that we may have thoughts in our minds appropriate for coming and taking part in the Lord's Supper.

[7 : 35] Now what I'm saying is that believers, nothing new, it's not anything particularly practical. My aim really is to have a meditation, to fill our minds with appropriate things so that through the influence of the Spirit, these may be useful to us to participate in the Lord's Supper.

At the same time, although it is a meditation rather than a strongly applied sermon, nonetheless, I do think one theme that undoubtedly should come to us from this is the marvel of this.

There are things here that are just paradoxes, that is, they look as if they're contradictory and yet they're put side by side and really there's no full explanation given to them, in fact, there's no full explanation possible in some cases.

So these are things that the human mind doesn't understand, that human ingenuity would not have thought up. It's not that they're unreasonable but that they go beyond human reason and I think perhaps we might see a couple of these paradoxes and that would especially direct our minds to this idea that this is marvelous, this is human ingenuity, this is God in his uniqueness providing a plan for salvation for us that goes beyond the human mind to understand and grasp.

Now we're going to look at this verse under three headings. The nature of the one who is struck, the nature of the striking and the result of the striking.

[9 : 15] So we've got the nature, maybe even the nature and work of the one who is struck. Now here, it is quite plainly the Lord of hosts that is speaking.

Yahweh, Jehovah, the Lord. And he's speaking and who is he speaking about? Well, this person is described in two ways here and that's what we're going to look at.

First of all, he's described as the man who stands next to me and then he's described as the shepherd. My shepherd indeed.

So here is Jesus, no doubt about that, and he's described in these two ways, the man who stands next to me and my shepherd. Now this phrase, the man who stands next to me, is translated in a variety of ways.

The man who is close to me, the man that is my fellow, him who is with me, the man who is my associate. But they all tell this truth and this is the astonishing truth.

[10 : 19] They speak of a person who is both a man and who is also an associate of God. Now this is not strange to us who have been brought up in the faith, in the evangelical faith at least.

It's not strange to us and we perhaps pass it over because it's so familiar to us. But really, that is a remarkable idea and it's one that most people find astonishing to such an extent that they can hardly believe it.

The Jews to whom this came would have been puzzled by it. To them, God was so different from people that you couldn't even take his name on their lips.

He was so holy that you couldn't even mention his proper name. And so, to have this idea that somebody that's an associate of God that's at his side, that goes against the grain and it must have been a real problem to people at that time to whom this first came.

As it is indeed to Jewish people still today. To the Muslim today, this also is a stumbling block. God is God and no one can be like him.

[11 : 35] He can have no associate. That would be to demean God because he stands alone without a companion. But here's this passage that goes beyond human reason.

And when folks would say, actually, how can that be so? How can a great God have a companion? He hears the teaching of the scriptures. In the marvellous purpose of God, this is the way he does things.

There's a person who is both man and his associate. And of course, we know who that is. The Old Testament spoke about it. Isaiah spoke about it. The virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emmanuel, God with us.

So there you see is the humanity of this person. He is conceived. He is born. He is a human being of flesh and blood. But at the same time, he is God with us.

So here's a person that is both a man and an associate of God. Close to God. God himself. And of course, the fulfilment of that in the New Testament is equally familiar to us.

[12 : 46] Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary. She conceived. She bore this child. He was flesh and blood like us. He grew up.

He grew in stature and in wisdom and in favour with God and man. He had a real body, a real mind, a real psyche if you like to call them that, real emotions.

He was a real person, a real man. And yet, at the same time, there was this other side to him. God with us. The word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us.

But who was the word? The one that was with God and the one that was God. Or as John also spoke about him, God, the one and only who is at the Father's side.

Now that's the one that's spoken about here. And it's only when we see the mystery of Jesus in God incarnate, God in human flesh, it's only when we see him that we can understand who this passage is talking about.

[13 : 46] And that's whom we meet at the Lord's Supper. We meet with somebody that is truly a man, one of us. We see that in the bread and in the wine because these are symbols of mortality.

They're symbols of a body that was broken. They're symbols of a blood that was shed. They're symbols of a death that was died. They're symbols, therefore, of humanity.

Here is somebody that we're thinking about who was indeed a man and we meet him at the Lord's Supper. And we meet him there as God. Now I can't define this and say that passage speaks about it.

But you just listen to the words of institution of the Lord's Supper and you say, who is speaking with such authority? Take, eat, this is my body, it's broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

Who's commanding us with such authority? Who's speaking of such wonderful things? Who's making such beautiful promises? Who's speaking of the forgiveness of sins?

[14 : 49] God alone can forgive sins. And the whole attitude, the whole atmosphere of the Lord's Supper is that here God is addressing us and Jesus is talking to us in his divine nature and using these symbols to point to his human nature, if you like, to put it that way.

So in the Lord's Supper, this is the one that we're meeting, the one who is man, who is an associate of God. Then again, of course, we've got the next thing.

He is also my shepherd. Awake, O sword, against my shepherd. Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered. Here's this picture of the shepherd.

God has appointed him to act as the pastor of his people, to look after them and to supply for them. Now, in this case, to the people of that time, there was no problem about this.

Because, first of all, they needed a pastor. We didn't read other bits in this book, but other chapters are speaking about shepherds who have been raised up and they don't care for the flock.

[16 : 06] They're meant to look after the flock, but they don't do so. And in contrast to that, the people would immediately recognize, in contrast to these false shepherds that have been denounced and that we'll refer to again later, here is the true shepherd, God's shepherd, appointed by God to look after his people.

So, that's the first reason why they would recognize this and understand what he's talking about. They needed it in the particular historical context in which they were placed. The second reason why they would immediately recognize this is that the Messiah of David's line was of course the king, the anointed king, the descendants of David who would sit on his throne forever and ever.

And that person is called of course the Messiah and we think about his kingly rule. But we must remember that in those times the role of the king was very much looked upon as a pastoral matter.

That is, he had also the role of the shepherd connected with kingship which would be a good idea for folks with authority over us. They're shepherds of the people. Well, we'll not say more of that.

They're shepherds of the people. That's the pattern that there was in those days. And so when this passage says my shepherd, they're immediately thinking of the Messiah.

[17 : 30] Because after all, David was a shepherd and came to kingship. He's the fountain of it all, the shepherd king. And that's the way that he was spoken of in the Old Testament prophets.

Here's something from Isaiah. He tends his flock like a shepherd. He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart. He gently leads those that are young.

And this is Ezekiel. I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them. He will tend them be their shepherd.

My servant David will be king over them and they will all have one shepherd. So here are these Old Testament passages and they're speaking one moment of the king and the next moment of the shepherd because the two roles are one.

The kingship includes the pastoring of God's people at one level at least. Caring for them, looking after their interests, defending them, protecting them. The king is the shepherd.

[18 : 32] So as I say for the people here there would be no great problem about this. They'd say ah yes this is the Messiah in his pastoral role. This is the shepherd king of David's line that he's talking about here and that would be no great problem.

And there's no great problem for us either in that because in the New Testament there's this is the way that Jesus spoke about himself. I am the good shepherd. And I wonder if that's just a contrast to the other shepherds that are mentioned here in Zechariah as false shepherds and to people in Jesus' time who also were false shepherds.

He's the good shepherd in distinction from others who aren't. He's the real shepherd, the true shepherd. That's what Jesus said about himself and we know that passage and we don't have to develop that.

So once again we have a clear understanding that the person that is spoken about here is Jesus himself in his role as the Messiah pastor, as the Messiah shepherd.

And that too is something that we can reflect on as we come to the Lord's Supper. Here he is gathering his flock together. Here he is feeding his flock, giving them bread, which in its normal use nourishes the body.

[19 : 52] But if we look in faith at these symbols of his death, this will nourish us spiritually, or rather he will nourish us spiritually through this. Here is the shepherd feeding his people and that's something we can well reflect on as we come to the Lord's Supper.

So when we think about the nature and work of the one who is struck, we think about Jesus as the God-man who fulfills the role of the pastor of his people.

But that of course is a paradox. There's a paradox involved in this. There's an apparent contradiction. Strike my shepherd, a weakly sword against my shepherd.

Now that's strange. You wouldn't think that that would be the case. God sets the shepherd up and he commands the short sword to strike him down. God says, here's the Messiah and then he has him put to death.

It's not natural this. It's not the way that many, many people thought about it. Even Peter, remember, when he first confesses Jesus as the Messiah, says, you are the Christ, that is the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

[21 : 14] And then Jesus commends him for that. Spiritual insight he's got there. But then he goes on to say, Jesus goes on to speak about his death and Peter says, don't think about it.

It's never going to happen to you. So the Messiah that they had in mind wasn't the Messiah that was going to be put to death. And this is a puzzle unless you understand the basic teaching of the gospel which many people come into, of course, first don't understand.

And this, of course, is the same with Muslims also. They say if Jesus is a king or an appointed shepherd, why did God strike him down?

It doesn't make sense to them, it can't be true. That's what they say. So here we've got a puzzle, we've got a paradox, we've got something that seems contradictory. How come the appointed shepherd is struck down by the sword?

God. And that leads us therefore to think about the nature of the striking. The nature of the striking. We've seen the nature of the one that struck, now the nature of the striking.

[22 : 22] And actually what we're going to say here is just to deepen the sense of paradox of how this from the human perspective doesn't fit together properly.

Because you see, first of all, this is divinely initiated. The one who appointed the shepherd is also the one who commands the sword. Awake, O sword, against my shepherd.

God is commanding that his shepherd be struck down. God presides over both these activities. He sets his shepherd up. He strikes his shepherd down.

Now it is true that God is not envisaged here as actually wielding the sword and doing the striking. but he is clearly the one who is in command of the situation and who initiates the process.

He addresses the sword and tells it to do the work. By his command and will, the forces are set in motion which led to the shepherds being struck down.

[23 : 27] And we see this paradox coming out in the New Testament as well. This is what Peter said on the day of Pentecost. this man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge.

So there is God's hand at work. And you with the help of wicked men put him to death by nailing him to the cross. So there is the appointment by the express, determinate counsel of God that he be put to death.

It was done by the hands of wicked men but it was done in the full knowledge of God and it was part of his predetermined counsel and purpose.

And so there is this remarkable paradox that the shepherd that is set up by God is the one who is also struck down by him. And that is something that deepens this sense of mystery and makes us realise this is beyond human understanding.

This isn't some plan devised by human thinking. something deeper, more mysterious, more wonderful than that. It's divinely instituted, it's divinely initiated.

[24 : 41] That's the first thing about the striking. The second thing about the striking is it's the punishment of the unfaithful shepherd. Now we've indicated that there's a lot of background to this which we're not going to go into.

It's very tangled actually but nonetheless I'm just going to mention a wee bit about these shepherds that we've already referred to. There were false shepherds that were not pastoring their sheep but were in that position simply to enrich themselves.

And in Zechariah 11 the worthless shepherd is described. He is one who will not care for the lost or seek the young or heal the injured or feed the healthy but will eat the meat of the choice sheep tearing off their hoofs.

So there's the shepherd who only is there to make a profit out of the flock and to satisfy his own basic appetites.

And what is God's judgment on these false shepherds? Woe to the worthless shepherd he says. In other words may the punishment of God, may the judgment of God come upon these false shepherds.

[25 : 57] That's what Zechariah says earlier. Woe to the worthless shepherd who deserts the flock. And how is this going to come? May the sword strike his arm and his right eye.

That's the judgment of God that he had pronounced already upon the false shepherds. And that's what's happening now to God's shepherd, the true shepherd.

Woe to him. That's what happens to him. He dies under condemnation. He dies with God turning his back upon him in the sense that all sense of God's presence deserted him.

And he felt so alone that he cried out, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? That's the call of somebody who knows that the woe pronounced by God has come upon him.

And so what has happened is that the sword of judgment has been raised against him and strikes him down. And the shepherd, the good shepherd here, the real shepherd, God's shepherd, he's receiving the punishment that was due to the worthless shepherd that had been pronounced just a couple of chapters earlier.

[27 : 04] And there you see this paradox in its fullness we might say. Here is something that needs explanation. How is it that this punishment against God's shepherd is initiated by God?

How is it that this punishment to the good shepherd is that which was due to the false shepherd? That's the paradox as we've got it here.

Now of course this is what we do know about from the New Testament teaching. This is typical of what Jesus came to do. Typical in the normal sense of that word. This is just characteristic of what Jesus came to do.

Here is Jesus and what has he come to do? He's come to represent others. He's come to stand in for people that could not make it themselves. He's come to do for others what they could not do for themselves.

Acting as the representative. Acting in their name. So he came in his life to obey God's law and he did it on behalf of his people. He did it in their name. So that what righteousness he accomplished by keeping God's law and fulfilling his will becomes available to them to cover all their sins.

[28 : 17] He's acting as the representative of others who did not dare and could not possibly meet the standard themselves. And so it is with his death on the cross.

He didn't die for his own sins. He was representing others. He was acting in the name of others. And those that were sinners he took that punishment upon himself just as this good shepherd God's shepherd in Zechariah takes the punishment of the worthless shepherd upon himself.

And that's the meaning of it all as those that know the gospel know very well. And that's the big thing that we notice when we were looking at the Lord's Supper. What we're looking at is one who took our place and acted as our representative.

And when we could not possibly think about standing before God in judgment, if God counts our sin against us, who can stand we've been singing. And that's the feeling that we have when we come under conviction of sin and the Holy Spirit of God works in our hearts and brings us to a sense of what we are.

If I should have to give an account of myself to God, who could stand? If I were to think of feeling the punishment in myself that is due to my sin, what hope would I have?

[29 : 28] And it's in that situation that we have this wonderful news that here is the Saviour who came to act for us and who so acted for us as to feel the weight of our sin upon himself and the sword of judgment that ought to fall upon each one of his people actually fell upon him.

And he felt the full weight of God's wrath and curse that was due to the sins of the people whom he was representing. And that's the way this paradox is resolved. And this is what makes this gospel so wonderful.

Who would have ever dreamed of that from the human perspective? People looking at this think it's folly, a crucified king, folly. That's the way most people look at it.

They look for something more sophisticated than that. But this doesn't appeal to human reason. Because it goes beyond human reason. And that's the wonderful gospel that we've got.

And this is what we're remembering when we come together at the Lord's table. This is my body. This is my blood that was shed for you. This is my body given for you.

[30 : 32] And so on. That's the idea. Here he is acting for his people. Standing in for them. As the worthless shepherd deserved that punishment. But the good shepherd felt that punishment.

So sinners deserve that punishment that he was to feel on the cross. And he took it upon himself. And that's what we're remembering at the Lord's table. So we've had the nature and work of the one that struck.

We've had the nature of the striking. And lastly, and as briefly as we can manage, we've got the result of the striking. Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.

Lord, I will turn my hand against the little ones. Now, this is generally thought of as one fate that's going to overcome them.

There's the scattering of the sheep which is quite plain. And then the turning of God's hand against them seems to imply an infliction of punishment. If God's hand is against us, we generally think of it in negative terms as God's punishment of us.

[31 : 43] And we generally think that this is one fate, as it were, that is described here. The two things go together. The sheep are scattered and God's hand is therefore turned against them.

But there is another way of looking at this. And this translation actually just helps us along these lines a wee bit. But the idea is that God turns his hand against us does not mean that he comes against us like that.

But that he turns his hand in protection against us. And that's I think the meaning that we've got to think of here. Yes, the sheep are scattered but here is some scattered sheep and he turns his hand in protection around them so as to support them and to care for them and to protect them.

And therefore there are two things that are happening here. There are some that are scattered and there are those that are protected. And you may find that difficult and indeed it is difficult perhaps.

But if you look at the rest of this passage which is even more difficult you discover that that's the sort of way that he's speaking. Two thirds will be struck down, one third will be left.

[32 : 49] The remnant will be left and there be cared for. So he'll scatter his sheep but he'll protect the remnant. And that's the thinking of this passage and it refers really to the Jewish people I think but we're not going to go into that.

We're just going to look at this in regard to its fulfilment in the experience of Jesus. Was there a scattering of the sheep then? Was there a putting a hand around them in protection?

Yes there was both of these things. The most obvious thing is that the sheep were scattered. This is what Jesus said in the upper room. This very night you will all fall away on me you will all fall away on account of me for it is written I will strike the sheep but the sheep of the flock will be scattered.

So there in Jesus' application of these words to his situation the falling away was very much a matter of their being scattered according to the prophecy. So this is fulfilled in the immediate experience of Jesus when the disciples were scattered.

And that's what we read about in the last bit of the story. Then all the disciples deserted him and fled. That's the scattering. And there's Peter's denials.

[34 : 02] Israel as well. Similar thing. The disciples deserted him. The sheep were scattered. And all this Jesus says this has all taken place that the writings of the prophet might be fulfilled.

So the scattering, the deserting was all part and parcel of the prophecy including this one here. But what about the protection given? Well it's not perhaps too obvious at this but in John's gospel the story of Jesus being taken captive in the garden of Gethsemane is quite significant.

He says to those who are coming to arrest him if you're looking for me then let these men go. There's meant to be a contrast there. If you're looking for me then let these men go.

So he's saying you can have me. You can strike me down with the sword but let these people go. Don't touch them. And that you see is the way that Jesus was looking at things.

Yes they're going to flee and desert them but he's not left them. He's got his hand around them and he's asking that these be protected.

[35 : 19] And then again he says to them in the upper room after I am raised up I will go before you to Galilee and when the disciples discover the empty tomb they're reminded of this.

He's going ahead of you into Galilee there you will see him just as he told you. So when he spoke about their scattering he also talked about the way back. He also said this isn't the end.

We're going to be together again. A promise of protection and care. A promise of a resumption of the old relationship. And that's particularly brought out of course when he talks to Peter.

Who had denied him. He says to Peter do you love me? Three times he said that. And three times Peter said yes. And three times he said feed my lambs feed my sheep. You know the story so there's more to it than that actually.

But you know the story and I only wanted an outline. Here's Peter who had denied him so badly. Who had deserted him and fled like the rest. And Jesus is as it were putting his hand around him.

[36 : 20] Turning his hand against him to draw him back to himself and to restore him to a place of discipleship and to service once more. There is Jesus when they were scattered putting his hand around them and bringing them back to himself.

Caring for his people. Sustaining them. Protecting them from evil. So that they became his disciples in the fullest sense once more. And in that way this part of the prophecy I think was fulfilled.

world. And we can think about that in the Lord's Supper as well. Here is Jesus putting his hand around us. In the normal way of doing it of course we all come together but because of Covid we're not doing that at the moment.

But generally in our setting at least we all come together. And that's very nice to think about. Here's the shepherd calling his sheep out. Bringing them together putting his hand around them saying this is my flock and I'm going to speak to them and I'm going to feed them and I'm going to encourage them and I'm going to assure them that they are mine and I'm going to build them up and sustain them.

Turning his hand against them in protection and care. That's what we've got in the Lord's Supper. So these are just thoughts as I say that are capable of a greater application obviously but think about such things as these.

[37 : 46] Who are we meeting? Whom are we meeting? at the Lord's Supper? We are meeting the one who is a man but an associate of God.

We are meeting with the true shepherd of the sheep. What are we remembering at the Lord's Supper? We are remembering the sword of God's judgment that descended upon Jesus acting as the representative of his people.

We are remembering the sentence of condemnation passed in our name upon him that it might not be passed upon us. What are we experiencing in the Lord's Supper?

We are experiencing the shepherd gathering us together to protect us and care for us and feed us. And if we keep in mind such things as these as we come to the Lord's Supper surely surely we will know the blessing of God.

May he bless to us his word. God. Now we'll just have a short prayer.