

AM Ezekiel 34:1-16 & Matthew 23:13-26 Jesus' Warning about False Shepherds

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Preacher: Rev David Parker

[0:00] 7.3 if you're using a pew Bible. Ezekiel 34 and we're going to read verses 1 to 16.

Some of those prophets confronted the leaders of the nation and not just the civil leaders of the nation, the religious leaders of the nation.

And confronted them about their failure to carry out what was their duty if you like.

And this is what you're going to hear in these 16 verses. Let's read this then. This is the prophet Ezekiel addressing in a way the leaders.

Perhaps especially the religious leaders. The word of the Lord came to me. Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel.

[1:21] Prophesy and say to them, even to the shepherds, thus says the Lord God. Ah, 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. When he's talking about feeding the sheep, he's talking about the people. 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. And with force and harshness you have ruled them.

So they were scattered because there was no shepherd. And they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered, says God.

[2:21] They wandered over all the mountains on 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 and 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 myself will search for my sheep.

[3:27] And will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among 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 on the mountains of Israel by the ravines.

And in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them with good pasture. And on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land.

And on rich pasture. They will feed on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep.

[4:27] And I myself will make them lie down. So there it is.

There's Ezekiel confronting the leaders of Israel. Both civil and religious. Who should be looking after the people. And we can think, can't you, in our day and age of all the news that we hear. About even royal people. And about people that are meant to be looking after us. And the kind of things that they are up to. It was a similar situation that the prophet was confronted with there. At that time in the Old Testament. When Israel was constituted the people of God. Then I want you to go to Matthew chapter 23 in the New Testament.

One of the four gospels. The very first one. Matthew chapter 23. Matthew 23.

[5:50] And we're going to be reading. It's on page 999. Perhaps quite appropriate that number. 13 to 26.

Verses 13 to 26. Let me just try to put this in context. For you. So we're now in New Testament times.

It's now about AD 28. Back then in Ezekiel. It was more like BC 600. So we're now in New Testament times.

And Jesus Christ. Has been. Ministering. For nearly three years. For nearly three years. If you like. Around that Mediterranean.

Point. Where Gaza. Israel. And all these places are. And one of the leading religious communities and groups. Were Pharisees.

[6:49] And this is what Jesus thinks of them. Wait till you hear how he speaks of them. And they're there. He's confronting them. We'll pick it up at verse 13.

Woe. To you scribes and Pharisees. Hypocrites. For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves.

Nor allow those who would enter to go in. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees. Hypocrites. For you travel across sea and land. To make a single proselyte or convert.

And when he becomes a convert. You make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves. Woe to you blind guides. Who say if anyone swears by the temple.

It is nothing. But if anyone swears by the gold of the temple. He is bound by his oath. You blind fools. Which is greater. The gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred.

[7:54] And you say if anyone swears by the altar. It is nothing. But if anyone swears by the gift that is on the altar. He is bound by his oath. You blind men.

For which is greater. The gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred. So whoever swears by the altar. Swears by it and everything on it. And whoever swears by the temple.

Swears by it. And by him who dwells in it. And whoever swears by heaven. Swears by the throne of God. And by him who sits upon it. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees.

Hypocrites. For you tithe mint. And dill and common. And have neglected the weightier matters of the law.

Justice and mercy. And faithfulness. These you ought to have done without neglecting the others. You blind guides. Straining out a gnat.

[8:52] And swallowing a camel. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees.

Hypocrites. For you clean the outside of the cup. And the plate. But inside.

They are full of greed. And self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee. First clean. The inside of the cup. And the plate. That the outside may be clean.

Amen. Now that's quite a. I'm sure you would agree. Severe critique. Of the current religious leaders.

Of Jesus' day. Who were the custodians. If you like. And the shepherds. Of the law. The religious law of Moses. And yet they missed.

The. The center of that law. And all their stuff was. Outward. And hypocritical. And everything else. And I'm sure.

[9:51] All of us know religious leaders. That fit that description. Even in our own. Day. And age. We're going to. Sing again then. From the.

Norman. Norman. Is this the one. That corresponds. With the pew bibles. Yeah. So. I'd like you then. To turn. In the new testament.

To. John's gospel. And it's chapter 10. And you'll find that. On page. 1080. In your pew bible.

1080. In your pew bible. I'm going to.

Read. Just a couple of verses. Before. Chapter 10. And then we'll read. Some verses. Of chapter 10.

[11:14] Jesus heard. That they had. Cast him out. This is a. Person who was born. Blind. That Jesus had.

Healed. And. He had gone. To the synagogue. And the. Pharisees. That we've just been. Reading about. Had been quizzing him.

And questioning him. As to how. He. He had been healed. And. That. That finished up. With. The. Pharisees. Actually. Throwing him out. Of the synagogue. Because. He kept telling them. It was Jesus. That had healed. Healed him.

And. Let's put it this way. The Pharisees. Didn't like Jesus. Jesus. Jesus heard. That they had. Cast him out. And having. Found him.

[12:10] He said. Do you believe. In the son of man. He answered. Who is he sir. That I may believe in him. Jesus said to him.

You have seen him. And it is he. Who is speaking to you. He said. Lord. I believe. And he worshipped him. Jesus said. For judgment. I came into.

This world. That those who. Do not see. May see. And those who see. May become. Blind. Some of the Pharisees. Near him. Heard these things. And said to him. Are we also blind? Jesus said to them. If you were blind.

You would have no guilt. But now that you say. We see. Your guilt remains. And then.

[13:07] It says this to them. So I want you to be aware. That this is said. In the presence. Of the Pharisees. Truly. Truly.

I say to you. He. Who does not enter. The sheepfold. By the door. But climbs in. By another way. That man. Is a thief. And a robber. But he who enters. By the door. Is the shepherd. Of the sheep. To him.

The gatekeeper. Opens. The sheep. Hear his voice. And he calls. His own sheep. By name. And leads them out. When he has brought all.

Brought out. All his own. He goes before them. And the sheep. Follow him. For they know his voice. A stranger. They will not follow.

[14:04] But they will flee from him. For they do not know the voice of strangers. This figure of speech. Jesus used with them. The Pharisees.

And other people that were around them. But. Listen to this. They did not understand. What he was saying.

He's just healed the blind man. The Pharisees think they can see. They can see that Jesus is not the Messiah. But they're blind. And you heard Jesus saying that.

In Matthew 23 as well. They're actually in darkness. Although they're religious leaders. So Jesus again said to them. Truly truly.

And by the way. When you see that double. Truly truly. Think of it like this. With absolute certainty. I declare to you. I.

[15:03] Am the door. Of the sheep. All who came before me. Are thieves and robbers. But the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door.

If any man enters by me. He will be saved. And will go in and out. And find pasture. The sheep. The thief comes only to steal.

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's 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.

[15:59] And I lay down my life for the sheep. 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. 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. Okay. We're going to look at this passage together. I just want to say to you that. Jesus is probably about ten days from being crucified. That's where we are in this gospel.

[16:58] After this really. We read about Lazarus. And we read about Jesus going to spend his last days with his disciples.

And then he's arrested. And then he's crucified. And then there's the resurrection. So this is where he is. This is almost his last confrontation and critique of the religious leaders of his day.

Particularly this community of the Pharisees. And John is a writer who likes to thread in symbolism and unspoken, if you like, ideas.

And it's no accident that he has this incident of the blind man and the Pharisees who found Jesus. And who confessed Jesus as the Son of Man. It's no accident that he has that pretty close to this talk about who the real shepherd of the people, of the sheep, is.

[18:22] What would it take for you to be convinced that Jesus is the Savior of the world?

Jesus had conducted many, many signs or miracles. John likes to call them signs and rightly so. Because they're not miracles for the sake only of miracles.

They're miracles that tell us something. They point to the identity of Jesus. They point to his relationship with God.

Tell us that Jesus used a figure of speech here to address the Pharisees who have just thrown out of the synagogue the blind man healed by Jesus.

This was a very common figure of speech that Jesus used. Because in Jesus' day, sheep overnight were generally kept in an enclosure.

[19:45] And sometimes there was a gatekeeper or, if you like, a guard. Somebody sort of guarding the sheep.

Because in these days, it was very easy for the sheep either to be attacked by wild animals or to be stolen. And Jesus uses this picture and this image to get across to the Pharisees.

That far from being the shepherds of the people of God, they're thieves and robbers. And far from being the shepherds of the people of God, they more resemble hirelings who don't care about the sheep.

And because the sheep don't belong to them, these hirelings that sometimes were used if they couldn't find a shepherd to watch the sheep.

These are people that are not shepherds. These are people that don't care about the sheep. And these are people that would run if there was any danger to the sheep.

[21:05] Not like Jesus, who never even ran from the ghastly horror of the cross in order that he might redeem the sheep.

I want to look at the portrait of the sheep, the shepherd and the sheep, that Jesus gives in verses 1 to 6.

Jesus says in verse 2 here, But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

The Pharisees had made themselves self-proclaimed so-called shepherds. But you know, when you read these four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, about the life and times of Jesus and the kind of society that he lived in, and what like the religious leaders and people were, particularly the Pharisees, you discover that the Pharisees put sinners almost in ghettos.

The ordinary people, if you like. That they had no message of hope for them.

[22:35] That they condemned them if they were doing a tiny little thing wrong. And they saw them as people, themselves, as people very much set apart.

And they used to parade in their garments, religious garments, and so on. But Jesus says that he who enters by the door is the shepherd.

Is the true shepherd, is the genuine shepherd, and is the real shepherd. And certainly Jesus entered into his role as shepherd, in a genuine and authentic way, did he not?

Because he had come, as we read in this Gospel of John, from God the Father. He had come from his existence in eternity, of being the Son of God.

As part of the being of God. Part of the mystery of God. And he had come and donned a human flesh.

[24:01] In order that he might be our sacrifice. In order that, as the very first line of the psalm that we sang, he might redeem his people.

And he is someone that knows the sheep. We see that in verse 3.

The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name. The sheep are his sheep.

As the true shepherd, who has become man. The Son of God. Who has donned a human flesh. And entered into our history, and into the stream of real humanity. He knows who his sheep are.

[25:00] And they hear his voice. His sheep know that he is the true shepherd, and that he is the real redeemer of human beings. Sinful human beings.

And look at verse 4. When he has brought out all his own. This is an image that he is talking about. And note, he is talking in general terms at the moment.

He is talking, if you like, in the third person. In verses 1 to 6. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

Far from running away from the sheep. Far from not caring for the sheep. He actually goes ahead of them, as a shepherd did in these days of Jesus Christ.

And he leads them, and so that they follow him. And by the way, that statement about the sheep following the shepherd, is also a wonderful picture of the Christian life.

[26:16] Because when we strip away a lot of stuff from the Christian life, we're left with this. The true believer, the true disciple, is a follower of Jesus.

And we'll hear more about that relational side, of Christianity today. And Jesus says, a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him.

Who are the thieves and robbers?

Who were the thieves and robbers then? And who are the thieves and robbers now? Keep that question in your mind, as we look at what Jesus says, in verses 7 to 9.

In 7 to 9. And I want you to notice, in verses 7 to 9, Jesus moves from talking in the third person, and from talking in general, and basically bringing an image, in a picture of the true shepherd, and false shepherd, before those Pharisees, and even before the people.

[27:46] And he now, notice, talks in the first person. Again, Jesus said to them, with absolute certainty, I'm just paraphrasing this a wee bit, I declare to you, I am the door of the sheep.

All who came before me, are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them.

Here Jesus is now becoming much more explicit, and he's saying to them, I am the door of all of God's sheep, whether the sheep back then, or the sheep in the New Testament, or the sheep post New Testament.

I am the door of the sheep. You know, sometimes, I've been told that, if a shepherd of his sheep, could not find someone, to guard his sheep overnight, or there wasn't a proper gate, if you like, that shepherd would actually lie down, on the ground, guarding the sheep.

And he would act as the door, if you like. So, Jesus is speaking about something, that is common knowledge to people, and that they would connect with, and register immediately, and they would say, yeah, I get what you're saying.

[29:34] I get what you're saying. So, you're the door of the sheep. You're the one that would be lying, on that ground. And, you know, no matter, whether you, are a professor, of theology, no matter, whether you, you have a high religious position, if you don't come, through Jesus Christ, you may have a lot of talents, and a lot of gifts, and a lot of knowledge, but you will not, have Jesus as your saviour, if you have gone, not gone through him, for your salvation.

If anyone enters by me, says Jesus Christ, here, in verse 9, he will be saved, and he will go in, and out, and find pasture.

Remember, he prefaced that, by saying, with absolute certainty, truly, truly, I declare to you, or I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.

Now that's a, what would you call it, a difficulty statement, in our day and age, because, certainly, in the western world, we live in so called, pluralistic society, we live in a kind of, relative, kind of, idea, of truth, truth is, whatever you think, is the truth, and that, we've long since, lived in an age, where, the idea is that, all religions, are precisely, the same, they're all heading, towards the same goal, and so on.

Now, I am not suggesting, for a minute, that, other religions, have no value, of course they do, and there are things, we can learn, and there are truths, in those religions, I'm not suggesting, if I was born, somewhere else, I might be, I might be, an adherent, of another religion, but, what I am saying, is that, Jesus Christ, is saying, I am the door, door, and there's no other door, to enter, into, salvation, so, Jesus, has said, two things, so far, he said, he said, I am the, I am, I am the real shepherd, and, I am the real, route, to salvation, I want to just finish, by looking at, verses 10, to 13, verses 10, to 13, of this chapter,

[32:58] Jesus, says, the thief, comes only, to steal, kill, and destroy, I came, that they may have life, and have it abundantly, what does he mean, the thief, comes only, to steal, kill, and destroy, he means, the, phony, shepherds, the failed, shepherds, like, the ones, that Ezekiel, was talking about, back there, and the ones, that Jesus, is talking about, in Matthew 23, and here, is saying, these people, actually, keep, the people, away, from the kingdom, of God, and from coming, to salvation, through Jesus Christ, Christ, because, they have no, message of, forgiveness, for them, and, they have no, saviour, or messiah, for them, the best, that they can offer them, is, it's up to you, if you can keep, the, the, the, 600, 612 laws, that the Pharisees, had added, on to, the whole code, of the Mosaic law, no wonder,

Jesus once said, come to me, all you who labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest, these are the people, who are stealing, the opportunity, of, of, the great masses, and it's the same, in our day and age, if there are, false shepherds, in, in churches, in temples, or wherever they might be, and they are not, preaching that message, that Jesus Christ alone, is the way, the truth, and the life, then they're stealing, something are they not, from the people, they're destroying, their, their, their opportunity, of hope, and forgiveness, and salvation, Jesus said, I have come, that they might have life, in verse 10 there, and have it abundantly, now, one of the themes, in John, is this theme, life, and, you find, in the New Testament, there are two words, for life, and one is, bios, which is, biological life, that's the kind of life, that all of us, have just now, which is, a life, that actually, I know it sounds, a bit morbid, but, is travelling, towards death, every one of us, every single, one of us, inescapable, one of the great, facts, I think there was, a great literary person, I can't remember, his name just now, and he says, there's only two, certainties in life, taxes, and death, but, the word, when Jesus says, here, in verse 10, I have come, that they may have life, he's not using, the word, bios, he's using the word, the word, the word is called, in Greek, zoe, zoe, zoe, and, that, that life, that he's talking about, is not bios, it's in a different, plane, from bios, it is, the life, that only God, gives, and it's the life, in which,

God inhabits, if you like, and it's the life, that Jesus, that's what Jesus meant, when he said, I can give you, eternal life, a, zoe life, it's not even so much, the emphasis, isn't so much, in, in the, unendingness, of that life, but in the quality, of it, a life, on a different plane, on a different planet, if you like, and here's the funny thing, about it, is it not, people will say, I don't want to become, a believer, or a Christian, or a disciple, of Christ, or a follower, of Jesus, I want to hold on, to my life, but, the life, that they're holding, on to, is a life, that inexorably, culminates, in death, and if that is, the only life, that we have, that's why Jesus says,

I have come, that they might have life, and have it, more abundantly, have a life, that is, the true life, that God, offers, each one of us, if we come, to Jesus Christ, I finish, by, wanting you, to, to note, in this gospel, of John, there are, seven, statements, from Jesus, that begin, with the following words, I am, I am, two of them, are here, when he says, I am, the good shepherd, and, I am, the door, now, a couple of things,

[39:18] I want to say, about that, these statements, of Jesus, are a window, into, the self-consciousness, of Jesus's mind, mind, he, truly, truly, believes, his language, is, incredible, the language, of, every, Old Testament, prophet, was like this, thus, says, God, whoever, that

prophet, would be, of whatever religion, that's the language, of the prophet, thus, says, God, but notice, the language, of Jesus, I, say unto you, and notice, these,

I am's, I am, the door, and, notice, how they're prefaced, truly, truly, with absolute certainty, no question, about it, Moses, when God, called Moses, you can read, about this, in Exodus, chapter 3, when God, called Moses, to go, and, save, the people, of Israel, who at that time, had been held, in slavery, for decades, perhaps even, centuries, in Egypt, Moses, said, to God, who am I, that you should think, I should go, and try, and, and, and, and, and, such an enterprise, and, liberate, a whole community, from, the, the, the powerful nation, of Egypt, and, then, he says to God, and, also, who will I say, sent me, this is what you read, in Exodus, tell them,

I am, I am, sent you, honestly, that's, that's what's said, tell them, I am, now, the actual, grammar, of I am, is, the present tense, of the verb, I am, I exist, to be, or not to be, I am, I exist, to be, to, to exist, or not to exist, it's not without, eh, interest, is it, that Jesus, uses seven of those, I am, sayings, indeed, in John chapter 8, he says this, before Abraham was, I am, because, here is this man, in confrontation, with Pharisees, but, who is he really, and, what right, has he got to say, I say to you, none, unless he is, the great, I am, bear that in mind, as you read, through John's gospels, watch out, for these, great, I am, sayings, truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door, by me, if anyone, enter in, he or she, shall be saved, amen, let's close,