

Ezekiel 34

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[0:00] Ezekiel chapter 34 and I'll start out the same way that Pastor Mike Kane of Emanuel Bristol in England started out his portion of Ezekiel 34 at the grace preaching conference last year.

! For us, as we go through these next four weeks in Ezekiel, but what a privilege it is each time to be up here sharing, as Justin said a few weeks ago, the treasures from God's word.

I want to give credit where it's due. A lot of my thoughts and ideas were heavily influenced by Pastor Kane in this conference, and that has helped me move forward with this chapter.

Homeless is where we find God's people, Israel, in the book of Ezekiel, separated from their promised land, possessions, jobs, perhaps friends or family.

Israel's been carted off into exile by the nation of Babylon, some 900 miles from home, in 598 BC. But how could this happen to God's chosen people, the nation through whom all the peoples of Europe would be blessed, the people who would dwell in the land flowing with milk and honey, the lineage through whom the Messiah would come?

[1:34] Unlike many of life's unforeseen events, Israel's situation could have been avoided. Time and time again, through his spoken word and through the prophets, God warned Israel of what might happen if they stopped listening, if they stopped following him.

Obedience, blessing for obedience, curses and judgment for disobedience. One example can be seen in Leviticus 26, where the Lord says this, But if you will not listen to me and will not do all these commandments, I will set my face against you.

And you shall be struck down before your enemies. Those who hate you shall rule over you. I will send pestilence among you. You shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy, and I myself will devastate the land.

You see, God had made a covenant that Israel knowingly proceeded to break. Should we pity them? We might say Israel deserved what it had coming to them, as we see a nation sitting in exile because of its own sinful choices.

Yet the Lord does not abandon his own. Amen. After five years in exile, God comes to the young priest Ezekiel in chapter one with a powerful word for his people.

[2:51] Chapters one through thirty three of this book covers the seven years of prophecy after Ezekiel's initial vision. Pronouncing judgment against Israel and foreign nation.

God's glory leaving the temple in Israel in chapter 10. And then prophecy predicting the fall of the temple in Jerusalem, the city itself. In Ezekiel 33, 21.

This happened. In the twelfth year of our exile, a fugitive from Jerusalem came to me and said, the city has been struck down. The dwelling place of God with them, the temple destroyed.

The city left in ruins as if they had more to lose. Right. Surely they've hit rock bottom. A pitiful, weak looking people stuck in a foreign land who have now lost their temple.

How could life ever be the same again? We see God's people. At the end of chapter 33 in Ezekiel, not only homeless, but also hopeless.

[3:58] But at last, the tables turn when we arrive at chapter 34, where we see a definitive shift in the book, moving from 33 chapters of condemning prophecy towards prophecy for restoration for God's people.

Write that down. Restoration for God's people. And this restoration is what the remaining chapters of the book are looking forward towards, the beginning of which we have the pleasure of unwrapping for the next three Sundays as we move through Ezekiel 34 through 37.

So for today, the first installment of this restoration, a timely message for the homeless and hopeless of Ezekiel's time. Here's the message of Ezekiel chapter 34.

The good shepherd leads us to hope by bringing us home. The good shepherd leads us to hope by bringing us home.

Notice I use the word us. Not simply leads Israel to hope by bringing them home. And my aim is to help us see that our mistakes are the same as theirs.

[5:17] Our need for a shepherd is the same as Israel's and that we too are hopeless and homeless apart from the good shepherd. The good shepherd leads us to hope by bringing us home.

Pray with me, church. Lord, as Psalm 119 says, Open our eyes. Open our eyes. That we may see. The wondrous things in your word.

Shepherd, lead us your sheep today. Amen. In our chapter in Ezekiel is absolutely drenched in this metaphor of shepherds and sheep.

And we see this metaphor throughout scripture. It simply means that just like actual shepherds and sheep, human shepherds lead and human sheep follow.

In Ezekiel 34, I think can easily be broken down into three sections with these titles. Write these down. Bad shepherds. Verse 1 to 10.

[6:24] The good shepherd. Verse 11 to 24. And good news. Verse 25 to 31.

Bad shepherds. The good shepherd. Good news. First, bad shepherds. Read with me Ezekiel 34, 1 through 10. I'm going to try to read speedily as we have 31 verses in this chapter.

34, 1 through 10. 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.

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 did 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. And with force and harshness you've ruled them.

[7:27] Verse 5. So they were scattered. Because there was no shepherd, they became food for the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered. And they wandered all over the mountains and every high hill.

My sheep were scattered over the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them. Verse 7. And therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord. As I live, declares the Lord God, surely because my sheep have become a prey.

My sheep have become food for the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd. And because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, 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. I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the sheep, shepherds, feed themselves. I'll rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them. Verses 1 through 10 are clear and harsh words against Israel's shepherds, aren't they?

[8:27] What were their failures? We just read them. Verse 3. They didn't serve the flock. Not even close. They served themselves instead. They put their own interests before the flock, caring first for themselves.

Sheep were taken advantage of. Verse 3. You eat the fat. Clothe yourselves with wool. It's as if the shepherds couldn't have cared less about their sheep. What other failures?

Verse 4. They treated the people harshly, not with compassion and care, neglecting the weak, sick, injured, straight, and lost. Their other failure, and their greatest failure, was that the sheep became scattered.

Ezekiel was alluding to the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, which had scattered Israel and Judah among the nations. Shepherds had been unable to prevent the very thing they were appointed to guard against, reads one commentary.

And losing sheep is the single greatest mistake a shepherd can make. Right? That's the whole point. A lost sheep's in grave danger.

[9:37] And Israel's shepherds failed monumentally. But we can't forget that these leaders, these shepherds, aren't what God had in mind for his people.

And Israel had a king. They had a shepherd, a leader, they had God, but they rejected him. They preferred to look and operate like the other wicked nations that were around them.

And by doing that, they rejected divine leadership for that of humans. That was a fail. Look at 1 Samuel 8, 5 through 8.

All the elders of Israel said to Samuel, you are old and your sons do not follow your way. Now appoint a king to lead us such as all the other nations have. When they said, give us a king to lead us, this displeased Samuel.

So he prayed to the Lord and the Lord told him, listen to all that the people are saying to you. It's not you they've rejected. They have rejected me as their king. And the sheep are helpless, foolish, defenseless.

[10:50] And God has created mankind as sheep who need a shepherd. We're in desperate need of God, who is the only shepherd that is to lead us according to his design.

See, bad shepherds lead and influence people, allowing them to stray away from home and from the true shepherd, don't they? And listen to this. Israel's Israel's physical distance from God, right? In exile is indicative of their spiritual and relational distance from him. Hope we see that. It's really important. The physical distance is indicative of their relational and spiritual distance from God. Remember the tabernacle and the temple as physical, they stood as physical symbols of God dwelling and communing relationally with man. So being cut off from home, cut off physically from God is actually an indication of Israel's spiritual state.

Spiritually cut off or distant from God. That's what they were. The sheep with the assistance of bad shepherding have strayed from the true shepherd as they've chosen their own bad shepherds and selfishness over their relationship with God.

[12:14] They have broken their covenant with him. And just as God had promised, as we saw in Leviticus 26 earlier, this has brought them to a self-induced situation cut off from their land and their God.

Guess what? Now hopeless and homeless. So who or what shepherds you? Who or what leads you other than God?

Who or what do you follow? It's personal. And there's a lot of things vying for our attention right now and vying for our following if you look at current events like these already COVID, racial tension, Supreme Court nomination, presidential election, overseas fighting.

And those are just the recent things, right? There's always the usual things fighting for our attention and following. Culture, secular leaders, social media, your desires, things that interest you the most. And all these things, they tempt us to follow them, right? They're beckoning us, they're calling us. The shepherd called sheep is saying, come. They want us to submit to them and alternative shepherds will fail to lead and protect us.

[13:46] Instead, they'll make us, they'll lead us away from home, from God. Our urge is to serve ourselves and follow self-appointed shepherds, usurping what God has chosen for us already, ultimately leads us to complete, leads us completely away from him, does it not?

Spiritually and relationally distant from the chief shepherd. But God longs to dwell near to sheep, doesn't he? But don't we look a lot like Israel?

we become scattered sheep far from home, i.e. far from God, deceived, vulnerable, afraid, lost, without hope, perhaps. As sheep, we follow the other people, things, ideals, principles, etc.

And these things will fail us and their failures lead us to lost hope. And that shouldn't surprise us. we foolish sheep submit ourselves to imperfect, counterfeit, self-generated, self-destructive shepherds. And we find ourselves like Israel far from God and with little hope. Sheep need a shepherd to lead them back to God. That leads us to section two, the good shepherd.

[15:09] Section one was bad shepherd, section two, the good shepherd. The good shepherd gathers his sheep. Let's read chapter 34, 11 through 16.

Thus says the Lord God, behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out as a shepherd seeks out his flock when he's among his sheep that I've been scattered. So will I seek out

my sheep.

I will rescue them from all the places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. And I'll bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and will bring them to their own land and I'll feed them on the mountains of Israel by ravines and all the inhabited places of the country.

Verse 14, I'll 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 and a rich pasture they'll feed on the mountains of Israel.

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

[16:17] I'll strengthen the weak. The fat and the strong I'll destroy. I will feed them in justice. The Lord intervenes, he says, enough is enough.

God himself will be their shepherd. And I see God doing six things in this group of verses we just read. six things. First off, he strips the shepherds of their authority and rule over the sheep.

Second, he gathers the scattered sheep from four nations. He gathers. He brings them back home to the mountain of Israel with good pastures making them lie down.

Seen in verses 14 and 15. And God beckons his sheep back to him. He says, come and leads them with kindness and with wisdom, bringing them back both physically and also spiritually and relationally to himself.

only the Lord knows the needs of his sheep. Thirdly, he one by one reverses the failures of Israel's shepherds and the bad choices of the sheep.

[17:36] He reverses the failures. And you can compare verse 16 to back, back to verse four. the sick, the ones that are spiritually ill and in unhealthy place and need of healing.

The injured, those who have given themselves and have been stabbed in the back or double-crossed or deeply bruised, taken advantage of by uncaring worldly shepherds.

the strayed, those whose decision to submit to ungodly leaders have caused them to drift, perhaps slowly, over time, further and further from God.

finally, the lost. Those who have lost all hope in God or perhaps who have completely lost sight of him.

I wonder if any of these descriptions resonate with you today. Are you a victim of your own following and the reckless leading of uncaring shepherds?

[18:46] How else does the Lord intervene? Fourthly, he makes it clear that he will be Israel's leader. He makes it clear. It is amazing how many times Yahweh says, I will.

Fourteen times I counted in these six verses. There's no, there's no mistaking who will lead his people. I will. Fifthly, God judges between the good and bad, the good and bad sheep.

That's found in verses 17, 17 through 22. And we won't read this section of verses, but bad shepherds produce bad sheep, don't they?

And we shouldn't be surprised by that at all. but we can't solely blame the leaders. The sheep in verses 17 through 22 were wicked towards each other of their own volition.

Perhaps mimicking the leaders they were following, caring for themselves, being destructive and reckless towards others instead of giving preference to them. and God vows to sort between the good and bad sheep.

[20:01] Don't be mistaken, there is a harsh punishment and judgment for those who mistreat the Lord's flock. Be it those who appear to be from within or those outside the flock.

So we've seen in the second section that the good shepherd gathered his sheep. Look at the care, the compassion, the authority, the joy of God, our good shepherd.

I will do it, he says, with confidence and love. Unlike the bad shepherd, he tenderly cares for his sheep. Unlike the bad shepherds, he listens to, tends to, and watches out for the needs of the flock. He utterly rescues the stray and lost by leading them home. And this happened for Israel in 538 BC as they returned to the land some 70 years after they were taken.

70 years in exile. And by returning home, we see that they return back to him relationally. What a loving shepherd, friends.

[21:24] The good shepherd leads us to hope by bringing us home. What this chapter teaches us. So far, we've seen five ways God intervened.

And now, here's the sixth and final thing that we see in this second section he appoints a Davidic shepherd. Read verses 23 and 24 with me.

I will set over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God.

And my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the Lord. I have spoken. The most important thing that God does in taking over leading his people is that he appoints an adequate shepherd to lead them.

And we'll hear more about him very shortly. And our third and final section is the good news. The good news, verses 25 through 31.

[22:30] these verses reveal that God will make a covenant or an agreement of peace. And it's reminiscent of the blessings promised in Leviticus 26.

And we also need to know that it's implemented in three phases. Phase one, God's covenant of peace means, write this down, immediate restoration.

Phase one, God's covenant of peace means immediate restoration. Good news for Israel. Why? Well, they'll no longer be homeless. They'll return to their land with some agricultural and safety blessings from God.

Verse 25, banishing the wild beasts, creating a secure dwelling. Verse 26, the land would be a blessing to others. Also, verse 26, showers and rains of blessing.

28, no longer a prey to the nations. 29, renowned plantations, no longer will they hunger. Immediate restoration means they're no longer homeless, but guess what?

[23:40] They're no longer hopeless. their relationship with God has been renewed. Verse 30, they shall know that I am the Lord their God with them and they are the house of Israel, my people.

Eventually, the temple is rebuilt in Jerusalem and God's glory and God's glory returns to dwell in it. And Ezekiel has this vision in chapter 43 of the book.

So God, the good shepherd, leads Israel to hope by bringing them back to himself as he resumes his dwelling amongst his people.

Israel. So this covenant of peace, this phase one, immediate restoration for Israel is great news. Yet, this is only a partial fulfillment of the covenant.

And there's even better news. Phase two, God's covenant of peace means a restored relationship through the coming of Christ.

[24:45] Restored relationship through the coming of Christ. And this once and for all Davidic shepherd is Jesus Christ, God's only son.

John 10, 14, and 15. Christ says, 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.

He lives amongst the sheep in relationship with them. Leviticus 26, 12. And I will walk among you and will be your God. Right? Christ did that.

He did it. Look at the fulfillment. It's amazing. The last part of John 10, those verses says, I am the good shepherd and I will lay down my life for the sheep.

Christ made a covenant of peace through the blood of his cross. and his sacrificial death is the guarantee of the covenant promises from Leviticus and Ezekiel because Christ once and for all reconciles the distance between God and man that had been created by sin, our idolatry and our abandoning the good shepherd to follow counterfeit shepherds.

[26:03] Colossians 1.20 tells us Christ has reconciled to himself all things whether on earth or in heaven making peace by the blood of his cross.

So those who trust this truth through faith following and obeying that which God has commanded Jesus, the good shepherd says later in John 14 that Christ will come to him and make his home with him.

Christ once for all restores the broken relationship. It's phase two and by doing this Christ brings to fruition the ultimate goal of the covenant.

Go back to Ezekiel 34 verses 27, 30 and 31. These are powerful words and they shall know that I am the Lord when I break the bars of their yoke and deliver them from the land from the hand of those who enslaved them and they shall know that I am the Lord their God and with them and that they the house of Israel are my people declares the Lord God.

You are my sheep human sheep of my pasture and I am your God declares the Lord. God longs so deeply for us to know that he is the Lord our God and to know and live that truth for all time which is more good news because of phase three.

[27:41] God's covenant of peace means permanent eternal restoration. Permanent eternal restoration. Peace in paradise that is heaven forever.

forever. The Davidic king he'll reign forever and he has paved the way for the restoration beyond imagination. Finally fully and for all time bringing to completion his covenant promises.

he the shepherd king on the throne and we his sheep bowing down in humble worship. An eternal fully restored perfect home with him and hope through him.

This final restoration is as true for Israel then as it is for believers now. So this is a timely message for the homeless and hopeless of Israel but it should also be helpful for us.

Remember our key phrase the good shepherd leads us to hope by bringing us home. So in closing I'll ask which shepherd which shepherd or shepherds are you following?

[29:02] Are you more influenced by the bad shepherds than the good true shepherd? Maybe you've become injured sick or you're straying or even lost.

Are your relationship with others in God's flock healthy and edifying? Have you distanced yourself from home? Have you lost hope?

who or what is your shepherd? I think we may all find ourselves in these positions at different times and when we do shoreline may we follow the leading of the good shepherd only.

Allow him to lead you daily to him keeping you at home restoring your life and relationship to him infusing you with true hope.

Psalms 95 verse 7 says the good shepherd is our God and we are the people of his pasture the sheep of his hand.

[30:17] Today if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts says the psalm. So friends may our ears be open and hearts soft to respond to the tender voice of the true good shepherd.

May our lives be a continual offering of praise to him who has promised full and complete restoration a permanent home and eternal hope in store for his flock.

And would we day after day echo the words of David in Psalm 23 the Lord is my shepherd I shall now want.

Let's pray. Good shepherd thank you shepherd lead us open our ears help us to follow you and trust your lead we love you amen