

Ezekiel 34:11–24: ¹¹“For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. ¹²As 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. ¹³And 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. ¹⁴I 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 shall feed on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. ¹⁶I 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.

¹⁷“As for you, my flock, thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and male goats. ¹⁸Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture; and to drink of clear water, that you must muddy the rest of the water with your feet? ¹⁹And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet, and drink what you have muddied with your feet?

²⁰“Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them: Behold, I, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. ²¹Because you push with side and shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad, ²²I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep. ²³And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken.

How Does Jesus Feed His Sheep?

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever been so frustrated with an employee or with one of your children who simply won't do a job you've given them and you exclaim, “OK, I'll just do it myself!” That kind of goes along with the saying, “If you want something done right, you've go to do it yourself!”

When you care about a task—whether it's cleaning the house in preparation for company, or getting ready for an important client—you want good work from the people helping you—you

want them to have the same zeal and work ethic you have. But when they don't do the job right, it's frustrating.

Well, I think you would agree with me on this: God has great zeal and love for His people. He wants them to be cared for with the same zeal and love that He has. In the Old Testament, God assigned the task of shepherding His people to the kings and priests of Israel. The kings were shepherds insofar as they were to use their earthly authority to ensure that God's Word was made available to the people. And the priests were tasked with shepherding the people by leading them in the worship of the one, true God, teaching them the Word of God, and rebuking and forgiving their sins.

But in today's Old Testament reading, God speaks against the shepherds of Israel because they failed in their God-given task. The kings made the kingdom a safe haven for the worship of idols—and the priests led the people away from the true God by not teaching His Word. So the Lord says to Ezekiel, “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, 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.”

You can sense God's anger and frustration. He's about to say, Okay, since you won't do the job right, I'll do it myself: “Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep 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 shall feed on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵I 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.”

It’s a pretty strong rebuke when someone looks at your work and says, “I should have done it myself!” But again, see how much God loves His people that He Himself will shepherd them!

3. Don’t muddy up the water, whether you’re shepherd or sheep.

But it’s not just the unfaithful kings and priest that the Lord speaks against. He also speaks against those sheep who make trouble for the rest of the sheep. “As for you, my flock, thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and male goats. ¹⁸Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture; and to drink of clear water, that you must muddy the rest of the water with your feet? And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet, and drink what you have muddied with your feet?”

One of our local pastors knows a thing or two about dairy cattle. He’s relates how the old bossy cows in the herd won’t drink from the edge of a stream but instead they run upstream and storm right into the middle of the stream. There they urinate and defecate and muddy up the water, forcing the rest of the herd to drink the water they’ve muddied with their feet.

This is a picture of those who don't want the pure Word of God taught in their sanctuaries, but instead want their itching ears tickled—and use their influence or position to make it difficult for God's Word to be taught as the Word of God.

So, in our text, God is fed up both with the kings and priests of Israel—who didn't do their jobs shepherding His flock, as well as the flock itself that made the environment difficult for true prophets to lead the people to God through His Word.

But God isn't going to stand for it: “Alright, God says, I will judge those who corrupt my Word and scatter my flock—and I will rescue and I will shepherd. “Behold, I, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. ²¹Because you push with side and shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad, ²²I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep. ²³And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken.”

2. Jesus Shepherds through His Word.

“My servant David” that God speaks of isn't King David. King David is long dead and buried. But David's descendant—the Promised Messiah—is the fulfillment of God's promise to shepherd His flock. Indeed, In Christ Jesus, God becomes man to do the job Himself—to seek the lost, to rescue the scattered—to shepherd and feed the flock that God loves so very dearly. That's why Jesus is the Good Shepherd—for there is no one good but God.

And how was Jesus to shepherd God's people? Well, how were kings to shepherd God's people? How were priests to shepherd God's people? How does God seek and save the lost? How does God bring life and immortality to light? How does God rebuke sinners and forgive

sins? He does that through His Word. Jesus fulfilled God's promise to be shepherd and feed the flock by gathering them to the clean water and luxurious pastures of the Word of God.

You see the fulfillment of God's promise to shepherd His flock in today's Gospel reading. In the account from Luke chapter 15, the Pharisees were like old cows thrusting at the weak with their horns. They wouldn't allow people they considered sinners to hear the Word of God—and they grumbled when such people came to Jesus. But Jesus came to seek especially such people—and proclaim to them the love and forgiveness of God—a message they never heard from the Pharisees. Jesus came to heal and to comfort, but above all, He came to teach. He came to save sinners by giving them the Words of eternal life.

And Jesus Himself is the Word made flesh. And this Word was also rejected by shepherd and sheep. The Word Made Flesh was crucified and died because people didn't want the Word of God. But the Good Shepherd laid down His life willingly, and in His death and resurrection, Jesus has become the ensign—the banner of God's grace and love that beckons all to come to Him and feast on His life-giving Word, and to feast on the very body and blood He gave and shed for the forgiveness of sins.

1. Jesus shepherds through His Church.

And you know what? God hasn't given up on His people. Jesus continues to feed His flock through pastors and congregations. At the end of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus gives His disciples this charge: Go and make disciples. And how is that done? By baptizing and teaching. That's how Christ feeds His flock today—by baptizing and teaching through pastors and congregations.

Congregations are charged with caring for pastors and creating the environment that allows the Word of God to be taught in its truth and purity—and bringing their friends and family to that

Word. And pastors are charged with the task of preaching and teaching and forgiving sins as the undershepherds of the Good Shepherd.

Now, are any of us perfect in this task? Am I a perfect teacher and preacher of the Word? No. Are you perfect hearers and doers of the Word? No, we're not—and for that we run to Jesus daily for forgiveness and help. But God doesn't turn to us and say, "Alright, I'll do it myself!" because He's already doing it! As long as the Word of God is being proclaimed in it's truth and purity, you can be certain Christ is at work feeding His flock—we're just blessed to be His instruments proclaiming His Word and bearing His name in this world, so that through us Jesus still seeks and saves the lost.

Conclusion

A pastor recently told his congregation that he's preparing his seven young children for martyrdom. How's that for shepherding his young flock?! The reality is that these are difficult and precarious times for Christians—and we need to be in God's Word daily—there is no greater truth or hope or comfort than the Holy Scriptures—it's God's greatest gift to mankind, for in them you find Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith.

And through Holy Scriptures, Jesus shepherds you His flock—He feeds you, comforts you, assures you, strengthens your faith, rescues you from sin, forgives you, and guides you to eternal life.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.