

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 23,24. ¹¹ "For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. ¹² As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. ¹³ I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. ¹⁴ I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. ¹⁶ I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice. ²³ I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. ²⁴ I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken.

Jesus is our Shepherd King

- I. He rescues us from clouds and darkness**
- II. He guides us to rich pastures of his kingdom**

The contrast would be stark, and it would be wonderful. Instead of kings who cared chiefly for themselves and misled the people and brought them harm, God promised a King who would care about and care for the needs of the people. He promised a King who would deliver his people from harm and would tend to their greatest needs with continual care and love. What a blessed leader this would be! The Messiah, the promised Savior and King would come and he would be a king and leader like no other. He would come just as promised, and thankfully he still tends to our needs today.

Jesus is our shepherd King. He rescues us from the clouds and darkness. He guides us to the rich pastures of his kingdom.

God had certain expectations for the kings of Israel and Judah, but we see over and over again that they did not meet these expectations. A quick scan of Old Testament history reveals that after David there were no good kings in the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the good kings of Judah were few and far between as well. God had commanded the leaders of Israel, especially the Kings, to be shepherds over his people. They were to watch over God's people and to take care of their needs. They were to do this as a shepherd would personally look after and care for his sheep. But those kings fell short. Instead, they ignored the needs of the people and ruled harshly and selfishly – often looking out only for themselves. They had viewed this as a position of glory for themselves rather than a position of service which God had intended it to be. So God spoke through Ezekiel and told the people that he would cast those shepherds aside

because they had turned out to be more like wolves than shepherds and he would rescue his people from their mouths.

After this stinging chastisement of the shepherds, God delivered a message of hope and comfort to the sheep. ***I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep.*** God's people had nothing to fear. God would personally be among them and look after them, care for them, feed them.

During the time of Ezekiel, most of the people of Judah had been taken into captivity and were scattered throughout the Babylonian empire. They were hundreds, even thousands, of miles away from their homeland, transported to a foreign country, and under the rule of a foreign empire; but they had nothing to fear. God promised them through Ezekiel that he was their shepherd and He was right there with them. He was among them wherever they were.

Put yourself in the shoes of an Israelite at that time. Life as you know it has been flipped upside down. You are unable to worship in God's house, and you were separated from family and community. Think about that tremendous cloud of fear and doubt that each one of these people must have had hanging above their heads. Surely many may have been asking, *What is happening? Has our God forgotten about us? What are we to do?* And some even turned their backs on the Lord because they thought God had turned his back on them.

Have there been times when you have had those same questions run through your head? Amid this recent crisis and turmoil, when financial burdens trouble you, and health issues come along, when all four walls seem to be closing in on us, or when a loved one dies, is there not a temptation to give in to the darkness of frustration and despair and even unbelief. God knows our thoughts, he sees us even when we are tempted to turn our back on him and he provides us with the same message of comfort that he first supplied to the exiled and scattered people of Judah.

God assures his people over and over again that he personally will be with and care for them. ***I myself will search for my sheep... I will rescue them... I will bring them out... I will pasture them... I will... I will... I myself will...*** God promised to be with them and protect them and care for them personally. Wherever they were, he would be with them. God has given us the same promise. We have the tremendous comfort that God is always with us, wherever we are, whatever we are going through.

God pursues his people and through the words of the prophet Ezekiel he speaks to comfort his people and to assure them of his love and care. God would also provide the ultimate comfort for all his people by promising to send a Savior for all of his sheep. And through these promises God makes it known that the Savior would come near to them and take action to tend to their needs, he would rescue them all from the dark and threatening cloud of sin. ***I will rescue them from all the places they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness.*** Without that Savior, all people, including you and me, would have been forever held captive by that cloud of sin and death. From birth - even conception - all human beings are sinful, and we need to be rescued from that endless pit of hell that stands by like a trap waiting to swallow us up.

But God saw that his sheep were in danger, so he sent us a shepherd and a king. That one shepherd king would tend to us, care for us, defeat our enemies, and also rule over us. God promised this through his prophet Ezekiel saying, ***I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the Lord***

will be their God, and my servant David will be prince (or ruler) among them. I the Lord have spoken.

After hearing those words you might be thinking to yourself, what does this have to do with the Savior, the only shepherd and servant mentioned here is David? Well, David had at this time already been dead for 400 years... so these words of God take on special meaning. These words are not simply talking about an earthly shepherd or ruler, but these words speak of the man Christ Jesus, born from the line of David. He would care for his sheep so much that would from heaven above to earth he would come to lay down his life for them. He would come from his throne on high and put their need for salvation ahead of his own well being, and in this way, he would save us and free us from our captors of sin, death, and the devil.

In our Gospel lesson, we see the extent of his love and how far he was willing to go save us. Remember this awful scene and know he endured this for us and for our salvation. ***They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him.*** What a far cry from what we usually expect our heroes and kings to be. His appearance was a stark contrast with typical kings, and that is because Jesus is a Savior and king like no other. The Son of God laid aside his divine glory and suffered and died for us. In love he came, he took action, and he still very much tends to our needs. In this different kind of King, we see our perfect shepherd king. Instead of looking for fame and glory or wealth and riches as so many earthly leaders do, Jesus put us first. He looked out for us and cared for us like a shepherd, making sure that his sheep were taken care of first and foremost. Even if it meant putting himself between us and eternal punishment and danger. And because of this personal care, those who believe in him have been rescued from the terrible fate that awaited us. We have been set free from the predators that pursued us, namely sin, death, and the devil. Because he set aside his glory to save us, we have been given a share of his eternal glory. And to reassure us that this is all true and to put his stamp of approval on Jesus' rescue mission and our blessed inheritance in heaven God the Father raised Christ Jesus from the dead and crowned him with glory once again. He is our Shepherd, and he is our King who reigns!

To be clear the work of Christ did not end on Easter morning, or even on Ascension when he was taken back up into heaven. But his work continues, as he rules over us from his throne in heaven as our King of Kings, and everything is under his feet. And on that last day, he will come again, to guide those who believe in him to the green pastures of heaven. And this time he will come in all his glory. He will meet and far exceed the expectations we have for kings and heroes. He will come with fanfare and pomp that goes far beyond any earthly king, president, or ruler. He will come down on the clouds in all his glory and he will judge the people of the whole world. Every tribe and nation and people will stand before him.

This is a description of doom for others, but for those who believe we know that he provides us with peace and brings us into his kingdom. He has searched us out and found us as he has gathered us into his kingdom. He says as much in his word. And with that same means of communicating his grace, he tends to our eternal needs. Under his care, he provides us with peace in this life and the next as he leads us to the good grazing that he provides for those who believe in him. In his care, there is security and comfort, forgiveness and life. Give thanks to our Shepherd King!

But this is because of nothing that we did. In fact, this is despite what we have done. He called us out of the clouds of darkness. By nature, we were more than happy to roam around in

the dark. In our arrogance, we still have this sinful tendency to wander away from our shepherd. We push aside his Word. We ignore his voice. In our sinful stubbornness, we think that we are strong enough to survive on our own. Even after he has called us and as he cares for us, we continue to wander in front of the wolves of temptation. We refuse to let our shepherd lead and guide us. How many times have you either willingly or half-mindedly wandered into the same sin on a consistent basis? How many times have we brought harm upon ourselves when we ignored his voice and did what we wanted to do? What stupid sheep we are! And yet somehow, still we constantly fool ourselves into thinking that we should be calling the shots, and we should be masters of our domain, and rulers of our existence.

Jesus is the Shepherd King that we need, and he seeks us out and finds us and we are blessed to be in his care. His law crushes us and so that we realize how foolish and sinful we have been. And after being crushed by the law our shepherd attends to us with his irreplaceable gospel as he gathers us close to his heart with his saving hand. Listen to his word! Listen as the Sovereign LORD speaks to us with power and with personal love and care! Give thanks for Jesus our Good Shepherd and he is our King!

It is true that while Jesus was on earth, he did not quite meet the usual expectations we have set for Kings and rulers. No, the contrast was stark, but we see that it is wonderful. Jesus is our King Most Wonderful for he is our Savior. In his extraordinary love, he saw our need and came to help and save us. He set aside his glory, and not only did he take on our flesh, but he took on our guilt and shame for he came to save us from the dark clouds of sin, death, and the devil. In love, the Shepherd laid down his life for the sheep to save us... but wait... there is more. God raised him up from the dead and took him up to heaven now he rules again in all his glory in heaven. The king is seated on his throne and he rules as our victorious King and one day he will come again to bring us to the glory that he has prepared for us. Until that day he is our Shepherd who personally watches over us with a watchful eye. He cares for his sheep, he seeks out the lost, and even those who have willingly gone astray. He calls and calls and is persistent and relentless in his love and care. And someday, and it may be soon, he will graciously lead those who believe in him to lie down in the richest pastures of heaven. Thanks be to our Shepherd and King!

As Thanksgiving approaches, we certainly have something to be truly thankful for. Even as trouble and darkness seem to rain down on our parade and put a damper on our celebrations, we still have so much reason to rejoice and praise our Lord for he is our Shepherd King. He comes near to rescue us from the clouds and darkness. He gathers us to himself and tends to our needs. He remains near through his Word as he shows us how deeply he cares for you and me. And according to his personal care and his gracious rule, he will watch over us now and forever as he leads us to lie down in the quiet pastures of his love. Give thanks to the LORD! Praise our King! ***“For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them!*** Thanks be to our Lord, our Shepherd, and our King. Amen.