

Ezekiel 34:25-31. ²⁵ "I will make a covenant of peace with them and rid the land of wild beasts so that they may live in the desert and sleep in the forests in safety. ²⁶ I will bless them and the places surrounding my hill. I will send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessing. ²⁷ The trees of the field will yield their fruit and the ground will yield its crops; the people will be secure in their land. They will know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke and rescue them from the hands of those who enslaved them. ²⁸ They will no longer be plundered by the nations, nor will wild animals devour them. They will live in safety, and no one will make them afraid. ²⁹ I will provide for them a land renowned for its crops, and they will no longer be victims of famine in the land or bear the scorn of the nations. ³⁰ Then they will know that I, the LORD their God, am with them and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, declares the Sovereign LORD. ³¹ You my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, are people, and I am your God, declares the Sovereign LORD."

Our Good Shepherd promises peace.

- 1. In love he gives us what we crave**
- 2. In grace he gives us what we do not deserve**

Today there is peace in Boston. After a week of terror, of turmoil, and unrest it seems the men who are responsible for the terrible bombing at the Boston marathon have been brought to justice in one way or another. A city that was on edge for most of the week and in lockdown for most of the day on Friday saw people jumping and dancing in its streets when a measure of peace was finally restored. Some waved flags, some set off fireworks, and others simply stood in silent security. As citizens of this city are still reeling from the latest act of terror to hit our nation now there is at least a touch of relief. There is both sorrow and frustration comfort and jubilation; but reaching over all of this there is finally a sense of peace. There is some semblance of peace throughout this entire nation as life goes back to normal in the city of Boston.

As human beings we crave peace. We want to feel secure. We want to feel safe and at ease. Unrest and conflict make us anxious. Fear and terror can wreak havoc on our mental morale and even our physical well being. We crave peace. Therefore there is reason to celebrate when peace is restored; when terror threats are snuffed out; when wickedness is overthrown and justice triumphs, there is reason to stand in silent comfort. There is reason to shout in relief and jubilation. Peace is that precious to us. Peace is that important to us. Even in the midst of turmoil the expectation of peace gives hope to those whose lives are burdened with fear and terror and

anxiousness. As human beings we instinctively crave peace and we are comforted and strengthened by the promise of peace.

Our God knows that, after all, he knows us. He created us and he cares for us. He is our Good Shepherd and we are the sheep of his pasture. He knows his sheep. He knows that when the troubles of this world effect and touch and rip through our lives he knows we need comfort. Our Shepherd is indeed good, he will not leave us comfortless, but rather he gives us his covenant of peace. He promises to be with us. He promises to deliver us from our enemies. He promises to rescue us from trouble. He promises one day give us the perfect peace of being with him forever in heaven.

Terror and unrest, sorrow and turmoil are certainly not unique to our day and age. Ezekiel would have known those feelings quite well. He was a prophet in exile. He had experienced the terror of being led away into captivity of a foreign nation. The people to whom he had been sent to serve would see their homes destroyed, some saw loved ones killed, and most of them would be hauled into captivity by the Babylonians. Their nation once peaceful and proud had been plundered and desecrated by an evil enemy. But in the midst of this sorrow and turmoil God supplies a message of hope and a covenant of peace. In the midst of their anxiety and uncertainty the Lord gives his people a sense of security and the promise of his gracious blessings.

The blessings of security and the promise of peace would certainly be undeserved. The people had deserted him. They were lazy in their obedience. They were anything but loyal, rather they were downright unfaithful. Their leaders, men whom God appointed to be shepherds to guide his precious people in the ways of righteousness, were dreadful in their roles as leaders. They neglected the instructions of the Lord and as a result lead the people headlong into danger.

The Lord would discipline his children for their unfaithfulness. He would send his prophet with stinging words of chastisement for the leaders of the people. God's people, his precious sheep as he described them, would be scattered throughout the known world, throughout the empire of Babylon. This proud people would be reduced to nothing because they had deserted him and wandered away from him. They would be all alone with no one to care for them or even look for them. This was the result of their sin. God, however, would respond with his grace. He would respond with his undeserved love.

Our lesson for today was given to God's people words of chastisement had already been spoken and now God would speak of peace. He would give healing to their wounded hearts. He would give hope to those who were crushed in spirit. He would make a covenant of peace with those who craved peace. God in his love would lead his people to repentance and then give hope and peace to those who still held on to the promises of God.

Chief among those promises was the promise of a Messiah. God would deliver his people. He would rescue them from exile and return them to their land. But most

importantly with these words of comfort and assurance he would set their minds on an eternal Savior, a gracious Shepherd-King. This Shepherd would be from the line of David, but would exceed even David's greatness, for he would be God himself. He would be the promised Messiah. He would bring security and peace that would last for all eternity.

When Jesus made the claim that he was the Good Shepherd he was clearly making the connection back to this promise that God gave his people and others like it. Jesus would be the Good Shepherd who would search for, find, and graciously care for his sheep. Like his famous forefather he would rule as a Shepherd. He would rule over his people with tender care and firm authority. His rule would bring blessing and security. Unlike his forefather David the Shepherd King would rule forever and he would rule in perfect peace.

The rule of the Good Shepherd here is described in terms of such joy and blessing for his flock. For his sheep the ideal conditions would include the presence of a loving shepherd and the absence of wild beasts that threaten the flocks. God would send rain at the proper time so the land would be fruitful and productive, their fields and orchards would free from attackers who might destroy and steal, and there would be no domination by a foreign power who would demand the produce of the land. Everything that a lamb could wish for God would give his people. They would not be the scorn of nations, but the envy of many.

This language and imagery of sheep in pasture would easily relate with ancient people as many made their living by raising sheep and others were familiar with seeing such flocks and shepherds. We here in Minnesota live in an agricultural setting, but there are no longer that many who raise sheep for a living. However, the Lord explains what this scene means in such a way that it remains a very useful illustration. In short, there would be tremendous peace and security that came from these blessings. The Lord would give his people everything they needed. The Lord will provide for them. They will be free from harm. They would be set free from the fear of their enemies. Set free from terror, instead the Lord says, ***They will live in safety, and no one will make them afraid.*** Their Good Shepherd would supply them with perfect peace.

Even though the sight of a shepherd and his sheep is far less common today the illustration of Shepherd and sheep is simple enough that it still very much resonates. This picture is one that depicts the tender and often one-sided relationship that God has with us his people. This picture is the one that is so very precious to many of us that we can recite Psalm 23 from heart. It is so precious to us that we love to refer to the Lord as our Shepherd. We are not hesitant to call ourselves his sheep. We love to call little children little lambs, and our hearts melt when we hear children sing, "I am Jesus little lamb". This is a message that we find great comfort in: Jesus is our Good Shepherd. We are his precious sheep. Jesus supplies our every need. He cares for us. He leads us through trouble and rescues us from evil. He will keep us free from harm

and he will bless us. He will keep us safe and we will lie down in the green pastures of his peace. He will refresh us whenever we sip from the quiet refreshing waters of his word and then one day we will enjoy perfect peace with him (and because of him) in the lush pastures of his heaven.

This is the promise, the covenant God makes with us, and it is certainly undeserved. If he is our Good Shepherd who is perfect in his care then we are his sheep who are far from perfect in our obedience. We are sheep who love to wander. We stray from his guidance. We follow our own foolish ways. We bring trouble and pain, anxiety and fear upon ourselves because of our sin and disobedience and yet, and yet the Lord has mercy on us. The Lord our Good Shepherd tends to us. He comes after us when we wander. He calls out to us with the firm yet tender voice of his word. He lovingly rebukes us when get out of line. He rescues us when we wander into temptation and protects us when our enemies attack. He picks us up, holds us close, and restores us when we stumble into trouble. With a firm grip he holds us close to himself when the devil terrorizes us or threatens to snatch us away. He comforts us when we are frightened by the events of this dark and sinister world.

He is our Good Shepherd and we are his sheep. He is our Good Shepherd who is there to guide us with his presence and give us peace in the midst of this imperfect world. He is our Good Shepherd who loves his sheep so much that he laid down his life for us so that we might have the strength and the hope and the joy that comes with the promise of perfect peace in heaven. This is undeserved covenant of peace that God makes with his people. This is a promise that touches our hearts; that gives to us the comfort and peace that we crave, and the security that we need. In this world so full of turmoil and evil, in this life in which we bring so much unrest upon ourselves because of our mistakes and sins what could be a better than promise than eternal security and peace?

We rejoice that peace was restored in Boston, but such events have become a reality that is much too familiar in this world so troubled by sin and filled with evil. Rather than peace that comes from faith in humanity which often is so flawed and temporary the Lord gives us peace that comes from faith in Jesus our Good Shepherd. This is dependable peace. This is lasting peace. Our Lord promises that he will guide us through this evil world. Even if evil touches our lives we have the peace and security that he can use this to strengthen us and bring us closer to him. He also reassures us that nothing in this world can snatch us out of his hand, nothing can take away his promise, his covenant of eternal peace.

In his undeserved love our Good Shepherd gives us the security that we crave, he gives us the promise of perfect peace of heaven. Let us stand in silent awe of our gracious God, let us praise our God with shouts of joy, let us celebrate our loving Savior who gives us lasting peace. We are his sheep and Jesus is our Good Shepherd. We are his people. He is our God. Alleluia! Amen.