

God Will Shepherd His People | Ezekiel 34:1-24

❖ Introduction

- There is a particular kind of pain
when the person who was supposed to care for you is the person who failed you.
- A stranger can hurt you.
But betrayal is different
when it comes from someone you trusted to protect you.

❖ Invitation to the Text

- That is where Ezekiel 34 begins.
- Ezekiel is a priest without a temple,
writing to a congregation without a country.
- Jerusalem has fallen.
The temple is a pile of stone.
The people have been marched east to Babylon,
and they are scattered across an empire that is not theirs.
- Their leaders had assured them this day would never come.
 - It came anyway.
- And the question underneath this whole book is one you would be asking:
Is God finished with us?

❖ Series Introduction

- For the next three weeks, we are going to see God's answer.
 - This morning in chapter 34: Scattered people, and God who gathers them.
 - Next week in chapter 36: Sinful people, and God who gives them a new heart.
 - And the third week in chapter 37: Dead people, and God who gives them life.
- And across all three weeks, listen for two words: "I will."
God is the subject—He is the One doing the action.

❖ Primary Claim

- That in mind, the main idea for this morning is that:
God restores His scattered people
by coming Himself as their true Shepherd-King.

❖ Outline and Transition

- And the chapter moves in four parts:
 - I. God removes the shepherds who fed themselves (vv. 1–10)
 - II. God Himself comes to shepherd the flock (vv. 11–16)
 - III. God judges among His sheep (vv. 17–22)
 - IV. God gives His people one Shepherd-King (vv. 23–24)
- With that outline in mind, let's turn to our first point.

I. God removes the shepherds who fed themselves (vv. 1–10)

❖ Biblical Text

1 The word of the LORD came to me:

2 “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?

3 You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep.

4 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.

5 So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered;

6 they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.

7 “Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD:

8 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,

9 therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD:

10 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.

❖ Explanation

- So what is going on here?
- Here, the “shepherds of Israel” are Israel’s rulers—leaders entrusted with the care of God’s people.
- And the charge against them is simple: they fed themselves.
- So, in v. 2, God asks the obvious question, “Should not shepherds feed the sheep?”
- Verse 3 then lists what they did instead:
 - They took the fat.
 - They took the wool.
 - They slaughtered the healthy ones.
 - They took everything the flock could give and gave nothing in return.

- If that wasn't bad enough,
v. 4 lists what they did not do:
 - The weak, they did not strengthen.
 - The sick, they did not heal.
 - The injured, they did not bind up.
 - The strayed, they did not bring back.
 - The lost, they did not seek.
 - Five needs. Five failures.
- And looking at the end of v. 4,
what they did do, they did with "force and harshness."
 - That phrase, "force and harshness," is not generic.
 - It is the same expression Exodus uses
for the way Egypt treated Israel in slavery.
 - And generations later,
Israel's shepherds had become Egypt to their own people.
- And to be clear, these were not simply leaders who were bad at their work.
 - They were very good at the wrong work.
 - They were not incompetent.
 - They were hungry.
- As a result, the sheep were scattered.
 - They wandered everywhere, and no one went looking,
because the shepherds were too busy feeding themselves.
- It is a bleak situation,
but God has not turned a blind eye to it.
- He gives these shepherds a message no leader should ever want to hear:
 - *"I am against the shepherds . . . I will rescue my sheep from their mouths"*
- In other words, justice belongs to the Lord, and so do the sheep.
 - The shepherds may think they are getting away with it.
 - The sheep may think no one is coming.
 - But God sees both.
 - And because the sheep are His,
He will take them from the shepherds mouths.
- Why?
 - Because the sheep are His.
 - Eight times in these ten verses God says, "my sheep."
 - The flock was never the property of the shepherds.
 - It belongs to God.
 - And every shepherd answers to Him.
- God's appointed shepherds have become the sheep's predators.
 - But God sees it, and He declares that He will put a stop to it.

❖ Application

- Before moving on, what does this reveal to us?
- The immediate target here is Israel's leaders.
But the principle reaches anyone God has entrusted with the care of others.
- It applies especially strongly to me as your pastor.
 - Anyone called to shepherd God's church should feel the weight of this warning.
 - So pray for your pastors.
- But this also reaches many of us in this room.
 - Parents shepherd children.
 - Some of you lead LIFE Groups, teams, classrooms, or workplaces.
 - Anywhere someone's wellbeing depends on your faithfulness, you are holding something that belongs to God.
 - And every steward will give an account to the God who sees it all.
- And if you were failed by a leader who should have cared for you—hear this clearly:
 - God saw it.
 - He was not neutral about it.
 - And though justice may seem delayed, it belongs to Him.

❖ Transition

- So what is God's remedy for shepherds like these?
- Not better shepherds.
- And that leads us to our second point.

II. God Himself comes to shepherd the flock (vv. 11–16)

❖ Biblical Text

11 “For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out.

12 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.

13 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.

14 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.

15 I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD.

16 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.

❖ Explanation

- If you ever wonder whether God cares for His people, listen to the verbs:
 - I myself will search.
 - I will seek them out.
 - I will rescue them.
 - I will bring them out.
 - I will gather them.
 - I will feed them.
 - I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep.
- More than a dozen first-person promises in just these six verses.
- In short:
 - God’s answer to bad shepherds is not better shepherds.
 - God’s answer to bad shepherds is Himself.
- And look at the contrast between the shepherds of Israel and the way God shepherds His people.
 - God provides good pasture.
 - Rich grazing land.
 - He makes them lie down.

- Does that sound familiar?
 - This is Psalm 23—heard from the Shepherd’s side of it.
- And look at v. 12.
 - He searches for them on a day of clouds and thick darkness.
 - Even when everything has come apart, His sheep are not beyond His search.
- Then look at the list in v. 16.
 - The lost, He seeks.
 - The strayed, He brings back.
 - The injured, He binds up.
 - The weak, He strengthens.
- That is the list from v. 4.
 - The very list the shepherds dropped, God picks up Himself.
- And notice what the passage does not say.
 - Nowhere does it say
the sheep must clean themselves up first.
 - The lost do not have to make themselves findable before He searches.
 - *They are His sheep,*
and unlike Israel’s shepherds,
God cares for what belongs to Him.

❖ Application

- And let this be a much-needed reminder
to the believer who feels unseen—
to the believer beaten up by life,
wondering whether God has lost sight of you
or written you off with the wreckage.
- You may not understand what God is doing,
but you can know what kind of Shepherd He is.
 - Verse 11: “I myself will search for my sheep.”
- Let that be something to cling to.

❖ Transition

- But before we move on, notice how v. 16 ends.
 - *“The fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.”*
- The arrival of the Good Shepherd
is not good news for every sheep in the field.
- And that brings us to our third point.

III. God judges among His sheep (vv. 17–22)

❖ Biblical Text

17 “As for you, my flock, thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and male goats.

18 Is 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?

19 And 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.

21 Because you push with side and shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad,

22 I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep.

❖ Explanation

- Our passage takes a turn here.
- God has judged the shepherds, but now He turns to the flock itself.
 - Verse 17: “As for you, my flock...”
- And who does God address?
 - The strong sheep—those who have prospered at the expense of the weak.
- And God’s charge in v. 18 gives us a picture of what they were doing.
 - They ate the good pasture and trampled what remained.
 - They drank the clear water and muddied the rest.
- It wasn’t merely that they took for themselves.
 - They ruined what they left for everyone else.
- And Verse 19 tells us who suffers for it:
 - God’s weaker sheep eat trampled grass and drink muddy water.
- And then look at v. 21.
 - They push the weak with side and shoulder until they are scattered.
- That is the same result we saw back in v. 5.
 - The shepherds scattered the sheep,
and now the sheep are scattering each other.
- So the shepherds are not the only ones God will judge.
 - Some of the sheep have learned to treat the weak just like their shepherds did.
- And in v. 22, God’s answer is clear:
 - “I will rescue my flock.”

❖ Application

- Now, it is natural to hear a passage like this and immediately think of someone else.
 - Someone who failed you.
 - Someone who used their strength badly.
 - But this part of the chapter turns the question toward us.
- You can be genuinely wounded in one direction and genuinely dangerous in the other.
- God cares about His sheep enough to confront evil inside the flock.
- So the Shepherd's concern for the weak must become the flock's concern for the weak.
- So, ask yourself:
 - Where has God given me strength that I can use for someone else's good?
 - It may be as simple as noticing the person sitting alone or meeting a need you're able to meet.
- The principle here is:
that if God cares for the weak in His flock,
then His people should care for them too.

❖ Transition

- But Ezekiel is not finished describing the Shepherd God will give His people.
- And that brings us to our fourth and climactic point.

IV. God gives His people one Shepherd-King (vv. 23–24)

❖ Biblical Text

23 And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd.

24 And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken.

❖ Explanation

➤ Three things here.

- First, v. 23 says, “one shepherd.”
 - Singular.
 - After all these failed shepherds—plural, God does not promise new recruits.
 - ◆ Israel’s problem was not a shortage of shepherds.
 - ◆ It was the absence of a true one.
- Second, God calls this shepherd “my servant David.”
 - David had been dead for roughly four hundred years.
 - So this is not simply another king.
 - God is reaching back to His promise to David—that He would raise up a son whose kingdom would endure forever.
 - And despite everything that had happened to Israel, that promise still stands.
- Third, look at how v. 24 holds two things together.
 - “I, the LORD, will be their God,”
 - and,
 - “my servant David shall be prince among them.”
 - Do you see the tension?
 - Back in v. 15 God said, “I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep.”
 - Now in v. 23 He says, “I will set up over them one shepherd.”
 - God Himself will shepherd His people, and David’s Son will shepherd His people.
 - Ezekiel leaves those promises standing side by side.

➤ And roughly six centuries later, Jesus, a man from the line of David, stands in Israel and says:

- “I am the good shepherd.”

➤ Against the backdrop of Ezekiel 34, this is far more than a nice pastoral image.

- Jesus is telling us who He is.

- The One who said in Ezekiel, “I myself will shepherd my flock,” was the LORD.
- Now Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd.”
 - He is putting His name
in the empty space of Ezekiel 34.
- Then Jesus says something that exceeds all expectation:
 - “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”
- The shepherds of Israel fed themselves on the flock.
- But the good shepherd took up a cross
and gave Himself for the flock.

Conclusion

❖ Closing

- Who will care for God's scattered people when the people responsible for them will not?
- Ezekiel 34's answer is not:
 - better shepherds or better systems.
 - *God Himself will.*
- He removes the shepherds who feed themselves, seeks the scattered, judges within the flock, and gives His people one true Shepherd-King.
- So if you are scattered this morning— if life feels as though it is coming apart— remember what kind of Shepherd you have. You are not beyond His sight or His care.
- And if God has put anyone in your care, remember who they ultimately belong to. The Shepherd's concern for His sheep should become our concern for one another.
- And if you do not yet belong to Christ, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, laid down His life for sinners— turn to Him in faith and receive His mercy.
- We are not a flock without a Shepherd.
 - We have one.
 - And He is good.