

Text— Ezekiel 34:11-16

Fellow redeemed sinners, redeemed by the blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ,

Ezekiel was an Old Testament prophet of the true God, for we read in Ezekiel 1:2-3, “In the fifth day of the month, which was the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity, The word of the LORD came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was there upon him.” Hence, Ezekiel was given God’s Word to proclaim.

At that time, the people of Israel and Judah were held in captivity in the Babylonian empire, because they had turned from the true God to idolatry. For years the people had been misled by false prophets, while the true servants of the Lord were few and far between, and were not heeded.

In Ezekiel 34:1-6, prior to our sermon text, the faithful prophet Ezekiel writes, “the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them. And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered. My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them.”

Thus, the Lord God was very disappointed and angry with the shepherds – the preachers, teachers, and rulers – who did not rightly feed and

lead His flock, the people of Israel and Judah, with the food of His Holy Word, nor care for them spiritually and physically in the manner He desired and specified.

Hence, Ezekiel 34:7-10 reports that the prophet Ezekiel also said, “Therefore, ye shepherds, hear the word of the LORD; As I live, saith the Lord GOD, surely because my flock became a prey, and my flock became meat to every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, neither did my shepherds search for my flock, but the shepherds fed themselves, and fed not my flock; Therefore, O ye shepherds, hear the word of the LORD; Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them.”

Indeed, because the shepherds – specifically, the preachers and teachers of Israel and Judah – for the most part failed to do the job the Lord would have them do, the Lord God Himself would correct the situation. Accordingly, our sermon text informs us regarding:

“THE LORD’S WORK AS SHEPHERD”

With that as our theme, may we, in view of our text and with the help of the Holy Ghost, see—

- 1) The necessity of such work of the Lord
- 2) What the Lord’s work as shepherd is

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Verses 11 & 12, ----- (Ezekiel 34:11-12)

Ezekiel the prophet did not speak his own thoughts and opinions concerning the preachers and teachers of the people of Israel and Judah, for Ezekiel said: *thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out.*

So, it was Jehovah God, the Lord who rules all things, who would Himself search His sheep and seek them out, for He also declared: *As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day.*

Think about the loving heart of the Lord God toward His people who had rebelled against Him and turned to idolatry. The Lord God still cared about those folks and desired to help them. Likewise, the Lord is still gracious and merciful to those who sinfully rebel against Him today. It's as Lamentations 3:31-32 relates, where we read, "the Lord will not cast off for ever: But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies."

Indeed, when we sinful human beings rebelliously turn from the Lord, He rightly chastens us; but then, He calls us back to Himself, moving us to sincere repentance, for Psalm 103:8-14 plainly states, "The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust." Let us therefore thank and praise our loving Lord God, our Good Shepherd, for calling us back to Himself when we sinfully stray.

Oh beloved, bearing the aforementioned facts in mind, we see the necessity of the Lord's work as Shepherd, for we human beings are lost and scattered sheep by nature, since we must all in honesty confess, as did David the sweet psalmist of Israel, Psalm 51:5, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." Furthermore, we all commit sins in thoughts,

words and deeds daily, for Ecclesiastes 7:20 declares, "there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not." Therefore, it is not only Israel and Judah of old who needed the Lord's work as Shepherd; we people today ALL need the Lord's work as Shepherd!

Looking again at the first two verses of our sermon text, we read: *thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day.*

Now, the people of Israel and Judah were lost and scattered both physically and spiritually. Nevertheless, the Lord God Himself would search them out, seek them, and deliver them from the darkness that their sins had brought upon them, since their shepherds had for the most part failed to rightly serve the Lord and care for His people.

It is quite wonderful to note that the Lord God took a PERSONAL interest in the people of Israel and Judah. Even more wonderful is the PERSONAL interest the Lord God has taken in ALL PEOPLE, for John 3:16-17 informs us, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." Yes, it is Jesus Christ our Lord, "Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." — as Romans 4:25 reports.

Furthermore, let us never forget that God's only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, IS the Lord God, the Good Shepherd, "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." — declares Colossians 2:9. And, Jesus Christ, who cannot lie, says in John 10:11-15, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and

leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep." Hence, we see that unfaithful under-shepherds are but hirelings who fleece the sheep, rather than caring for the sheep; it was the case with Israel and Judah of old and it remains the case to this very day. So, we all need Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, who works to this very day through His Word, when read by us and when rightly preached by His faithful under-shepherds.

Therefore, faithful under-shepherds are instructed in 1 Peter 5:2-4 as follows: "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." So, note well that Jesus Christ Himself, the Lord God, is and remains the Good Shepherd, yea, the CHIEF SHEPHERD.

Hence, the necessity of the Lord's work as Shepherd continues until He visibly returns on the Last Day to judge the world. The Lord still works as the Good Shepherd through His under-shepherds who faithfully preach and teach HIS WORD, the Holy Scriptures.

My friends, the Lord's work as Shepherd is a necessity since Holy Writ declares in no uncertain terms: "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of

God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 3:23-26; 6:23; Mark 16:16; Romans 1:16-17; 10:17)

Accordingly, fellow Christians, let us never forget the necessity of the Lord's work as Shepherd, for it is the Lord who has delivered us from never-ending doom in hell since the Lord Jesus has kept God's Law perfectly for us and has paid for our lack of keeping God's Law; Jesus has paid for all of our sins in full with His own holy and precious blood that He shed while nailed to the cross of Calvary. Furthermore, the Lord Jesus Christ is who gifted us with the faith we have in Him, for His Holy Spirit has worked through His Word in our hearts, creating the very faith which personally receives the forgiveness of sins and salvation which Jesus earned for us. All praise, honor and glory be to the Lord God!

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As we continue to ponder our sermon text to its conclusion, let us see what the Lord's work as Shepherd is.

We've already observed, in the first two verses of our sermon text, that the Lord God searches and seeks His lost sheep, and delivers them. We've noted that it is not only the people of Israel and Judah of old who benefit from the Lord's work as Shepherd, but ALL people have been redeemed by the work of the Lord Jesus Christ who is THE GOOD SHEPHERD, for He kept God's Law perfectly for all people, died for our sins, and rose victoriously and bodily from the dead after three days in the grave. Furthermore, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, by His Holy Spirit, calls folks to faith in Him through His Holy Word – the Gospel of Christ in particular –

whom His faithful under-shepherds preach and teach. Accordingly, it is quite obvious that the Lord's work as Shepherd is a work of love, care, concern, mercy and grace.

Fellow Christians, let us never forget the following words found in Ephesians 2:8-10, "by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." Indeed, God-given faith personally receives the forgiveness of sins and salvation Jesus Christ has earned for the world.

Verses 11-13, -----. (Ezekiel 34:11-13)

Recall that the people of Israel and Judah had been carried away captive to Babylon because they had turned from the Lord God to idolatry. Nevertheless, after years of captivity, the Lord God again had mercy on the people, for He was going to bring His people of Israel and Judah back to the land of Israel and care for them.

It's as we also read in Ezekiel 37:21-23, "Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all: Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwellingplaces, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God."

Consequently, the Lord later fulfilled His promises and did bring His people back to the land of Israel. Jews returned under Zerubbabel in 536 B.C. The temple was gradually rebuilt and was dedicated in 515 B.C. Ezra led back a caravan of Jews in 467 B.C.

Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem in 454 B.C. and began to repair the city walls. Thus, all came to pass as the Lord God said. [Dates taken from "The Annals of the World" by Ussher (which includes Scripture proofs)]

Verses 14-16, -----. (Ezekiel 34:14-16)

Consider carefully the words just read, for it is the Lord God who said in regards to His care for His people: *I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel. I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord GOD. I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick: but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment.*

It is the SPIRITUAL feeding and care of the people of Israel and Judah that the Lord especially referred to. Think about it. The Messiah, Christ Jesus, appeared on the scene and provided the ultimate spiritual food and care for the people—first for the Jews and then for all other people.

Even Jesus' enemies had to say, as John 7:46 relates, "Never man spake like this man." Of course, Jesus' followers also acknowledged Jesus' Words to be necessary spiritual food, for on one occasion Simon Peter rightly remarked to Jesus, as we read in John 6:68-69, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." Accordingly, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, says in John 10:27-28, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." Thus, the voice of Christ, the Word of the Lord God, is the means by which He grants and sustains saving faith in Him in the hearts of those who then are His sheep, His followers, His Christians. Hence, the Lord's work as

Shepherd continues as He works through His Word touching hearts.

Notice in our sermon text, it is repeated for emphasis, that the Lord God does the feeding of His sheep and grants them rest. The Lord God goes so far as to seek the lost, brings again that which was driven away, and binds up that which was broken.

My friends, Jesus Christ once declared, as recorded in Luke 19:10, “the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” Yes, Jesus Christ, true God and true man, came to this earth to seek and save those lost in sin and headed for hell. Jesus came with His saving Gospel; and, those who rightly acknowledged their lost condition, repented of their sins and believed on Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord, thereby received the forgiveness of sins and salvation. Jesus Christ still comes through His Word as the Good Shepherd, seeking and saving the lost, binding up the broken-hearted who realize their sinfulness and their dire need for Him as their Savior. Such is the Lord’s work as Shepherd.

On the other hand, those who are fat and strong – those who are stuck on themselves and their own works in high self-esteem and impenitence – the Lord will destroy, feeding them with judgment. Yes, that too is part of the Lord’s work as Shepherd, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him. For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.” (2 Corinthians 5:10; John 3:36; Galatians 5:6)

Take it to heart that being one of the Lord’s sheep in name only will not save anyone. God-given, sincere, heart-deep faith in Jesus Christ as one’s personal Savior and Lord is absolutely necessary if one would be saved.

Let us therefore daily and sincerely repent of our sins. Let us – with God’s help – keep our full trust and confidence in Christ Jesus as our personal Savior and Lord. And, let us go forward in gratitude to God for the Lord’s work as Shepherd, because our salvation fully depends upon His gracious work. Amen.

m.e.l.