

Son of David, Have Mercy on Us | Advent of the King

David, the Shepherd We Need

12.11.22 (Advent Week THREE)

Jeremiah 33 *'In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous **Branch of David** to spring forth; and He shall execute justice and righteousness on the earth. ¹⁶ 'In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell in safety; and this is the name by which she will be called: the LORD is our righteousness.' ¹⁷ "For thus says the LORD, '**David** shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel; ¹⁸ and the Levitical priests shall never lack a man before Me to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings and to prepare sacrifices continually.'"* ¹⁹ *The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying, ²⁰ "Thus says the LORD, 'If you can break My covenant for the day and My covenant for the night, so that day and night will not be at their appointed time, ²¹ then My covenant may also be broken with **David** My servant so that he will not have a son to reign on his throne, and with the Levitical priests, My ministers. ²² 'As the host of heaven cannot be counted and the sand of the sea cannot be measured, so I will multiply the descendants of **David** My servant and the Levites who minister to Me.'"*

Ezekiel 34 *"Because you push with side and with shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns until you have scattered them abroad, ²² therefore, I will deliver My flock, and they will no longer be a prey; and I will judge between one sheep and another. ²³ "Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant **David**, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd. ²⁴ "And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant **David** will be prince among them; I the LORD have spoken. ²⁵ "I will make a covenant of peace with them and eliminate harmful beasts from the land so that they may live securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods.*

Ezekiel 37 *"My servant **David** will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances and keep My statutes and observe them. ²⁵ "They will live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons and their sons' sons, forever; and **David** My servant will be their prince forever. ²⁶ "I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. ²⁷ "My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. ²⁸ "And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.'"*

Following our Fall Series on the Life of King David (from about 1,000BC) we're looking to see how the Hebrew Prophets understood and applied the gigantic promises God made to David and to David's descendants (line or future generations). What is meant that David would be king...even though he'd died?

Today we look at two more of the Major Prophets, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Both spoke or wrote about the same time (like 400 years after David) when Jerusalem (the Southern Tribes) were about to be conquered by Babylon. The Temple would be destroyed, the city ransacked and many people (including Ezekiel) exiled TO Babylon.

And one of the big themes in both these prophets is the need for good guidance. The people had been listening to prophets who weren't speaking for God. Their messages were foolhardy and nationalist (like – "hold on, all

you nay-sayers: Jerusalem will rise again and we will defeat the bad Babylonians. God will never allow His Temple to fall... He'll defend us if we rebel from exile IN Babylon and defeat them from within.")

And God shows Jeremiah and Ezekiel that these priests and lay-leaders and prophets and the influential Israelites in Jerusalem and in Babylonian Exile – they're BAD SHEPHERDS and they're going to get a lot of people who listen to them hurt or killed.

And the question for US is... do we need shepherds today? Is the organized church and leaders in the church, and clergy, ministry leaders, counselors, elders and deacons... ARE they necessary today? Aren't we passed that and why not just trust every believer to follow God as he or she sees fit? (Trix are for kids! ... And shepherds are for cults!)

Let's look at: **1) Why We Need Shepherds**

2) The Shepherd We Need

3) Walking With the Shepherd-King

They say that sheep... as domesticated animals are unable to tend to themselves. Not only are they almost entirely defenseless against predators but their fleece, their wool... if it's not cut/shorn it will continue growing until the animal is immobilized.

God's people are human... but we ARE likened to sheep. And while we may be quick to say with David, "*The LORD is my shepherd...*" ARE we also open to the Lord using others in that shepherding process.

I think we all sense at some level that we need other people in general ("no man is an island" and all that) and yet we also harbor thoughts of or even quests for independence... We don't like to depend on others.

Add to that this modern Western idea that spirituality is a private and personal thing... there's some potent mythology at the root of this... We don't have a State Church so that must mean we believe in separation of Church and State. And THAT must mean that we should never bring religious ideas into the policy decisions of government (One assumption in this thinking is that some ideas are religious and some are not... In reality, ALL ideas stem from basic beliefs) Then comes the thought that MY spirituality is my business and YOURS is your business... Grandma told us to never talk about politics or religion.

Protestants (as we are) have another reason to NOT need or want shepherds...and that is the Reformation doctrine of "The Priesthood of ALL Believers" – "You clergy aren't any closer to God than lay-people. I already have a High Priest! And doesn't the Bible say that a church is wherever two or three believers are gathered? So I don't need an organized church, thank you very much!"

Additionally there's a kind of hyper-egalitarian and libertarian impulse where "everyone has the same rights and everyone is basically the same. There's NO hierarchy, no rank, no one and no thing is inferior or superior... We're all the same... so why do I need experts, clergy, leaders?"

Now, in these modern objections to the need for shepherds and objections to organized religion I see some truths and some logical fallacies/errors.

However, NO ONE doubts: the modern flight from church and from religious leadership has been fueled by scandals in the church. They've been real and numerous and tragic. Religious authority misused, sexual abuse, cover-ups, celebrity-clergy and T.V. preachers (who are smiling faces, lyin' to the races). It's all enough to repulse anyone from leaders in an organized church especially if you've been a victim.

This was the case in the day of the prophets. Ezekiel (in the second paragraph) says, *"Because you push with side and shoulder and thrust all the weak with your horns until you've scattered them abroad..."*

Leaders in the Hebrew Church being rough on people and (symbolically) controlling and pressuring the weak. Jeremiah and Ezekiel will rail against the religious AND political leaders who'd allowed the church in their day to degenerate. They were not feeding the flock or protecting the people from errors and lies and allowing the flock to scatter. In the earlier part of Ezekiel 34 (2nd para) there are some 40 references to sheep, shepherds, flock, rams, goats.

The two big indictments are that the shepherds don't feed the sheep and they don't gather them – they allow them to wander and die. It was abuse by neglect and under that kind of bad leadership the church got sick... sin-sick and twisted and the church (even WITH the Temple) turned again to spiritual weirdness and even child sacrifice (2 Kings 16.3; 2 Chr 33.6) and after generations of this BAD leadership and bad SHEPHERDING the church became ripe for judgment and... judgment came: Babylon.

Josiah was one of the final kings over the Southern Tribes... He was a good man. He found and read the Book of the Law as all kings were required to do (but didn't – it was lost!) and then he repented and imposed sweeping religious/moral reforms but, in a mix of too-little/too-late AND that reforms merely imposed do nothing to change the heart... his reforms were apparently soon forgotten.

And yet, God does NOT say, "I will do away with the shepherds..." as if we really don't need leaders and helpers to TEND to us... BECAUSE WE DO (David said "the LORD is my Shepherd" but the Lord used Nathan to shepherd David. In that way, we really ARE sheep-like... we need tending by someone with "skin-on" as Bill Iverson likes to say.

So, God goes back to this ideal king, David. David he was far from perfect but he did know a few things about shepherding. He laid down his life to defend the flock on more than one occasion (1 Sam 17.34-37). In his best moments he was willing to die for God's flock!

"I will cause a righteous Branch of David to spring forth and he will execute justice and righteousness on the earth... Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant, David and HE WILL FEED THEM himself and be their shepherd... My servant David will be king over them and they will all have one shepherd and they will walk in My... statutes and observe them... and David will be their prince forever..."

God will give a David i.e., an ideal king who will shepherd His people well. He's David in the sense that he comes from David's lineage AND He'll rule, feed and protect the people in the way God wants – a Shepherd after God's own heart.

But this Shepherd will rule the earth (Jer 33.15) an international nation of all races, a catholic church (w/o headquarters). He'll die (as David died) but He won't stay that way. *"And David, My Servant will be their prince forever..."*

Under Him will be the Levitical priests (Jer 33.18). It's almost like this David is the Head of a Body and the priests under Him comprise...the Body.

It's a picture of the coming of Jesus Christ. Is it a coincidence that God invited shepherds to the birth of this One Shepherd? Is it for nothing that Jesus Christ gave a whole discourse in John CH 10 in which He uses this sheep/shepherd imagery and says again and again, *"I am the good Shepherd... and they will become one flock with one shepherd..."* (Jn. 10.16)"

He's the One Shepherd God promised, the Shepherd we need who's able to go beyond what even the best reformer could do by imposing law and reforms on His people... He'll be able to liberate our will so that what we HAVE to do becomes what we WANT to do and are, by His Spirit's empowering we're ABLE TO DO (*"both to will and to do His good pleasure"* Phil 2.13). *"They will walk in My ordinances"* because their Shepherd leads by this eternal covenant of peace!

"I am the Good Shepherd", says Jesus Christ, *"and the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep."* (John 10.11) He wins us with love. He sacrifices Himself to atone for our sins and guilt. When we GET that, we begin to soften. We get free to walk in the Way of Love.

He's the Shepherd authorized by God. His coming and the terms of His agreement are irresistible/unstoppable. In vv. 20-21 (1st reading) God says, "You can stop His work in your life about as easily as you could stop the sunrise tomorrow morning or prevent the sunset this evening. "I won't break My covenant with the sun and..."

The results of His Shepherding will be innumerable. The promise to Abraham about a progeny, offspring as numerous as grains of sand on the beach... That every nation will be blessed by Abraham's people and the singular Seed of Abraham, Jesus Christ (Gal 3.16) that promise here repeated in v. 22 and come to full flower in the Last Book, *"After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb..."* (Rev. 7.9) Racism is anti-Christ.

In Jesus Christ's Shepherding God is among us. *"My dwelling (or Tabernacle) will be among them"*. (Ezk 37.27) *"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt (tabernacled) among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth"*. (Jn. 1.14)

In Jesus Christ and by His Spirit, God has come to LIVE WITH and shepherd us. He is God with skin on.

And what? Now we need no human guidance and leadership? To the contrary. It's a part of this whole context of the near restoration from exile AND the ultimate restoration by the doing and dying of Jesus, there will be, as it were, under-shepherds. God said in (1st paragraph, v. 18) *"the Levitical priesthood shall never lack a man to offer burnt offerings..."* It's as if Jesus Christ's catholic Church is a Kingdom of Priests (Exo 19.6; Rev. 1.6, 5.10)

We do believe in the priesthood of ALL believers. I DO believe I have a role to play in the church but it's NOT because my prayers are somehow more powerful than yours. We all have ONE Mediator, Jesus Christ.

And we ALL have a priestly role to play. We stand as priests in this world, this community or city, we stand as intercessors for our neighbors, co-workers and friends. We are to be and see ourselves a Kingdom of Priests, representing the people to God and God to the people... He's Head and we're the Body and we all have a role to play and gifts to use to help the Body.

So... no clergy? No leaders? All the same roles? No need for organization or community because spirituality and religion are private and personal?

Well, one of the blessings of the New Covenant is shepherds. Here's God's promise in Jeremiah CH 23, *"I will also raise up shepherds over them and they will tend them; and they will not be afraid any longer, nor be terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the LORD*". (v.4)

Jesus Christ tells Peter, *"Tend My Lambs, Shepherd My Sheep, Feed My Sheep!"* (John 21.15-17)

Peter later writes transferred those words to elders in all the Churches, *"shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."* (1 Pet. 5.2-4)

The Apostle Paul agrees with Peter and said this to the Ephesian Elders, *"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after I leave savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock..."* (Acts 20.28-29)

We need shepherds... to feed us, tend us, warn us, keep us gathered (not scattered). These shepherds are the elders and deacons of the church but also there's a function for us ALL to play. We're the Body, the Kingdom of Priests. We still need someone with skin on... BUT... exercise the greatest care because these aren't any old farm animals – this is the Church of God purchased with Christ's own blood.

Two more notes: First...on behalf of all our elders I'll quote Johnny Cash (lyrics by Trent Reznor): *"I will let you down – I will make you hurt."* We WILL sin and make mistakes and disappoint one another.

I wish it weren't so but the shepherds are sheep too... We sometimes get it wrong. We sometimes make bad decisions. We sometimes (often-times) sin.

I'm grateful for a good system of Church Government in the Presbyterian Church... other churches authorized to step in should we go sideways...

Last: Jesus Christ said these urgent words: *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me..."* (Jn. 10.27)

If you hear His voice, RUN to Him. Trust Him and come among us – NOT because we want to add to our tribe but because He has designed the Body to live in harmony and function – every limb/organ attached.

And you could have it all

My empire of dirt

I will let you down

I will make you hurt

- Johnny Cash, "Hurt" (from the 2002 album, *American IV: The Man Comes Around* (lyrics by Trent Reznor)

Racism also denies catholicity. Not long ago, white American churches stationed 'color guards' to bar black worshippers, directing them to a suitable congregation on the other side of the tracks. The church has often been put to shame by its failure to practice true catholicity and to condemn racial prejudices.

...Every true church of Christ is a manifestation of the new people of God, composed of citizens of heaven, not of devout people forming their élite club.

Catholicity must be precious to Christians, for it means submission to the Lord of the church. He alone can build it, and he chooses for his living stones not many wise, powerful, or wealthy. It is composed of losers – those who have lost everything for Christ's sake but have found everything in him.

– Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church* (1995; pp. 97-98)