

The Coming King

Ezekiel 34:1-24

Outline: We Are Needy Sheep Desperate For a Good Shepherd

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1. How shall we live?
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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?**

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

⁴The 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.

⁶ My sheep were **scattered**; 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,

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.

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.**

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.**

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. (This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.)

Intro

Good morning. It's coming and we have 11 days to prepare - there are gifts to buy, decorating the house, baking cookies to give away, making sure there is enough scotch tape to wrap the presents and cards to write. Guys, no doubt you've been preparing - checking out how late stores are open on the 24th?

There is a different kind of preparation we need be engaged in. The English word "advent" comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which means "coming" or "visit." Advent is *a season of preparation for Christmas*. The Christmas season crowds out the quiet spaces, leaving little room for reflection. Culture is crowding out Jesus from this season, in the songs played on the radio, parades, what you experience in the malls. We spend most of our time preparing, not for a celebration of the coming of Jesus, but for fulfilling the demands of the season.

Advent is about preparing our hearts for Jesus Christ. Advent is meant to help us remember our need. It is about growing our longing for the Light of the World to light our darkness.

For, the people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned (Isaiah 9:2).

This morning we are preparing for the celebration of the birth of Jesus by understanding the darkness we walk in and how much we need a Saviour who will bring us light to drive out the darkness. Let's turn in our Bibles to Ezekiel 34:1-24. Read the text.

Text Summary

What is this text saying? In light of the fall of humanity in sin and death, apart from Jesus Christ human leaders can't lead and sheep don't follow. Ezekiel 34 is full of darkness but also promises a great light.

In the time of the exile in the OT period leaders and followers, shepherds and sheep were wildly unfaithful to God and to each other. God confronts His shepherds and demands an accounting for the abuse suffered by His flock. He also rebukes the sheep for their own part in the injustice. The Lord takes matters into His own hands and promises to act on behalf of the sheep as their shepherd. In this passage the great hope of a new Davidic King is promised. God will lead his people to a place of protection and provision, through his servant David.

Here's what God wants us to know: (write) We Are Needy **Sheep** Desperate For a Good **Shepherd**

1. Shepherds Don't Lead (1-10)

Shepherding was a significant part of Ancient Near East societies and biblical life. In the ancient east, the title *shepherd* was a term of honor given to rulers. It stood for a just ruler, a benevolent provider, and a powerful defender.¹ The shepherd's staff (ill'n) was a symbol for governance, something given to kings to symbolize the shepherd's call. To lead = shepherd. Get it?

¹ Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart*, 58.

The good shepherd-king ruler did not see himself as owner of people but rather as one entrusted with responsibility and duty.² So, to be a ruler, a leader, was to be entrusted with a high calling,

The Old Testament uses the title of shepherd and the shepherd metaphor as a title for prophets, priests, and kings. In the NT shepherd is a term used for Christian leaders. The shepherd we will need to be most concerned with this morning is God. Ultimately, the Bible uses the shepherd metaphor to teach humanity about God and his leadership (x2). In the grand sweep of biblical narrative (Big Picture) God is the Shepherd is leading his flock out of Egypt, through the wilderness to a place of peace and rest in the Promised Land.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pasture – Psalm 23 ...@ 400 years later

I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God – Ezekiel 34:15

The image of the people of God as a flock of sheep under God's care occurs repeatedly throughout the Bible. Here's an example in Psalm 95:6-7,

*Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the **people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.***

To shepherd is to unpack what is intended for biblical leadership.

A shepherd was to lead his sheep to food, protect them from attack, nurse to health the injured sheep, and search for any that strayed and got lost.

A shepherd is to act in this way for it is a picture of how God acts towards His people. Let's see how the shepherds in Ezekiel's day were doing in their high calling. What did their report card say?

After David's 40-year reign as King, Israel's leaders became corrupt and the flock was led into a spiritual and political crisis. The false shepherds had brought Israel to ruin. Isaiah ministered during the decades when Judah proudly assumed they were unshakable and impenetrable. Israel's shepherd-leaders had forsaken God by injustice and reliance on political alliances. Eventually Israel was attacked and invaded. In 586 B.C. Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians.

In Jeremiah, the Lord, through the prophet, rebuked the unfaithful shepherds who failed to understand the character of God and his care for the needy. In our passage, Ezekiel criticized the rulers and placed the blame of judgment on Judah's unfaithful shepherd leaders. It was not only the leaders who received God's words of judgment but the people as well. Ezekiel 34 is his clearest description of false and ideal shepherd leadership. Ezekiel's words were written in a time of exile following oppression, after the completing of Jerusalem's destruction. Leaders neglected and abused the sheep, forgetting whose sheep they were. These rulers preyed on the very people they were called to protect.

The Word of the Lord came to Ezekiel addressing whom? The Shepherds of Israel. Who were they? National leaders, princes and judges, the priests and Levites, government officials, and kings especially.

² Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart*, 70.

Jer. 50:6

"My people have been lost sheep. Their shepherds have led them astray

Q. How did this happen? The people of God made a big mess for themselves and became vulnerable when they made a very tragic error. They rejected God the Shepherd of Israel (Ps 80:1) and removed Him from His place as leader. Q. Why did they do this? Because they wanted to be like the nations and have a human king. You ask where do we find this in the Bible?

1 Sam 8:5-7, 9

*Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations." ⁶ But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the LORD. ⁷ And the LORD said to Samuel, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, **but they have rejected me from being king over them...**" ⁹ Now then, obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them."*

Here in Ezekiel 34, the sheep are paying the price for their choice of leadership. They were warned. They got what they wanted & received what they deserved. They wanted to be like the nations around them. In so doing they rejected the rule of God over them. They wouldn't listen to His voice. The Word of the Lord proved true.

What was the problem with the human shepherds? Look at vs. 2.

*Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel **who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep?***

The shepherds were rebuked for their self-interest and lack of care. Jeremiah (23:1-2) Zechariah, and Ezekiel all point out the flaws and failures of Israel's leaders. They have been unfaithful, and negligent. They have, at the expense of the sheep cared only for themselves and neglected. Look at vss. 3-4.

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.*

What is God's expectation of his leaders?

*"God's appointed leaders are called to instruct, care for and shepherd God's people under God's authority."
Brian Croft*

These leaders failed. They were put in charge by God but were unfaithful. They abused their power. They viewed the flock as a source of wealth to be exploited rather than a trust to be protected. They "fleeced" the sheep. Because of the fall of humanity, corruption, neglect, exploitation, domination, brutality, injustice, characterized their leadership.

Notice vs. 4, *with force and harshness you have ruled them ...* word used with reference to the conditions of slavery in Egypt. The shepherds were behaving just like Israel's former brutal slave owners. That's a far cry from being the human agents under God that they were called to be.

What were the results? When God's leaders fail, the God's sheep go astray and suffer. Look at vss. 5-6

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

6 *My sheep were scattered; 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.

We have our own reference points for abuse in our day – turn on the TV tonight or go to CNN.com to see the latest tyrannical dictators and fanatical leaders; we feel great indignation and anger at their abuse. We feel compassion for the neglected, used and abused. // Such was the anger of God against these false shepherds and their injustice. These shepherds forgot who were they were; simply undershepherds, accountable to the Chief Shepherd and responsible for His sheep. God did not turn a blind eye - He will act in judgment against false shepherds.

Vs. 2, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Thus says the Lord GOD. Vs. 10, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep.

These false shepherds were held accountable for their actions. The Lord will deal with them - a day of reckoning is coming! The Lord is against these leaders but He is for His flock and justice will be restored.

2. Sheep Don't Follow

What do we know about sheep? They make itchy sweaters and cute animals for stories. They are delicate, needy, dependent, and defenseless creatures, lacking much intelligence, poor in eyesight, prone to wander and unable to find their way back to a sheepfold though it might be in sight.³ In a word: dumb.

Is. 53:6

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way;

Here is the indictment against sheep, that's us, we reject the ways of God and go our own way. How does that work out? We all have story to tell about that one. It is not only the Shepherds who receive the judgment from the Lord; the sheep are also called to account and to repent. It is not only the shepherds who fail to live up to God's standards, but also the sheep. Look at vss. 17-19

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?”*

³ Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, eds., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1998), 782.

The prosperous and powerful sheep followed the conduct of the shepherds; (monkey see monkey do), they took all the good things of the land and denied those things to others less powerful and prosperous. They trampled the pasturelands and even muddied the streams so that other sheep were left with less-than-desirable vegetation and drinking water. They lived a life of excess and waste. As a result the weaker and poorer sheep were robbed of the necessities of life at the expense of the greedy. These fat and powerful sheep bullied and brutalized the lean sheep. They butted the weak sheep with the horns of their might and power, to drive them away.

Gal. 5:14 - 15

For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

The law of God (love) was absent – instead they consumed one another. God will not permit these wicked practices to continue in His community. These oppressive sheep were held accountable for their actions. The Lord will deal with them - a day of reckoning is coming! The Lord is against these sheep but He is for His flock and justice will be restored. He will judge between one sheep and another (v. 22; cf. v. 17).

Summary

Ezekiel 34 is a snapshot of the dark human condition - leaders not leading as God intended. Sheep not following the law of God and live in community as God intended. This text is about bad leaders and rebellious sheep. Judgment and wrath is coming for the sin in the leaders and in the sheep. It is not simply a bad social system they are dealing with, or bad structure, sin resides inside. Both leaders and sheep were living out the selfishness, greed, envy, and pride of the sinful human heart.

The OT tells us about our state, our plight and our need. It's about our state before God and with one another - it's about unfaithful shepherds and stubborn sheep – we are imperfect people in a world of imperfect leaders.

Shepherds don't lead, sheep don't follow and here's the third point,

3. We Need Jesus (11-16, 22-24)

Maybe after the first 2 points you are ready for some good news. All in favour? look at vs. 22

I will rescue my flock. (help is on the way!)

We all need the rescue of God (say that)

The struggles of Ezekiel 34 are our struggles. The problems with leaders seen there are problems we face today; mismanagement, corruption and brutality. We struggle as leaders, as followers, as children in a family, as spouses, as an employee under the authority of someone else. It is hard to lead a family, build a marriage, lead a staff team. Our troubles stem from sin in our lives. We are all broken, selfish, greedy, angry, fearful, and proud - there is only one answer. Christ is the answer to our problems.

We need the intervention of God – 15x He says “I will...”, notice,

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.

In contrast to the failure of the shepherds and the failings of the sheep a great hope is promised. The Lord doesn't give up on us. In spite of our sinful rebellion and detestable conduct, He says,

15 I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, “I will....”

search, seek the lost, rescue, bring them out, bring them back, gather them, bring them in, bind up the injured, feed them strengthen the weak, destroy the wicked ones and give them justice.

Wow. How would you like to be under the care of someone like that? How is our God going to do all this?

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

Here is the hope, God has spoken. He has a plan. It's going to happen. God's servant David is coming. Who is this person? The reference to David does not mean that the ancient king David –(He obviously is dead). The idea is that the coming ruler will have the exemplary attributes of David— Quick review of David: he was a shepherd, a warrior, a leader, a king, a worshipper, the Lord delighted in him. David's life was like an arrow shot at the sun, but fell short of God's ideal. God promised One who is the perfect David, a perfect Shepherd, but more than just a human leader, this Shepherd is God in the flesh.

It is through David's descendants that Messiah, God's redeemer, Shepherd and King will come. The one promised from of old, Gen through the exile. This Shepherd will reign forever. Jesus Christ is the ideal David, chosen of God, after His own heart, faithful, a servant, whose kingdom was extended, who won the Lord's battles, who fought the Lord's fight and destroyed the Lord's enemies. Jesus is the perfect leader, just, wise and benevolent. Jesus is perfect in faithfulness who willingly lays down His life for His sheep. Jesus is the Shepherd of his people who leads, feeds, provides for, and protects his flock.⁴ All the “admirable personal characteristics of

⁴ Genesis 49:24, Psalm 80:1, Ezekiel 24:15-16, Psalm 78:52.

shepherds are his superlatively.”⁵ He is the Royal Son of David, the perfect King and the King is coming!!

We know the consequences of failed leadership. We know how others can trample us and how we can trample others. We have seen the enemy and it is us. Listen: we long for justice, safety, peace, equity; there is a promise of comfort for the Lord will come to our rescue. Though human leaders repeatedly falter and fail, God will not fail in doing his work; He remains faithful. Jesus is our only rescue, the only Saviour. Jesus alone can bring change to the human heart, in an ongoing, transforming way, by His Spirit at work in us.

Luke 1:32-33

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the birthplace of David the shepherd-king. God was selecting a new ruler to shepherd his people. He raised up a new shepherd leader after his own heart. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of Ezek 34 – He referred to his disciples as his “little flock”. Jesus our Shepherd, confronts and judges the false shepherds, finds the straying, rescues the lost, heals the sick, protects the weak, restores the broken, feeds and tends His flock, brings them safely home. Jesus looking at the oppressed and beaten down crowds had compassion for these sheep without a shepherd. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who will lay down his life for the sheep. In Jesus the Messiah, we see the tender compassion and the just Ruler of the God of the OT.

Jesus loves, obeys and follows God perfectly. He is the perfect follower. Jesus leads with justice, integrity, righteousness and compassion. He is the perfect leader.

Leading means healing. Jesus spoke healing words, touched and brought healing and knowing what it means to be shepherds of God’s flock, to see the grave consequence of failed leadership and to see the absolute faithfulness of Jesus the Good Shepherd, we can anticipate how Jesus Christ our Good Shepherd will relate to us in the Kingdom yet to come. Peter says, Jesus the Good Shepherd is coming back for us.

In Ezekiel 34 and the promise of a Good Shepherd we see great central things of the gospel —

“The holiness of God, the ugliness of sin, the helplessness of man, the death of Christ, justification by faith alone, the sanctifying work of the Spirit, the glory of Christ’s return and the final judgment.” Piper

Application

Humanity has demonstrated over and over that rather than submitting to God, we rebel against His authority, and reject His wise and loving care. Adam and Eve wanted to rule, not be ruled by God. The people of Israel rejected God and wanted to have a human leader over them. We want to be in control and run our own lives. Run leads to “ruin”. That puts us in a place of danger, destruction and damnation. Live apart from the rule of God to your own peril. We are desperate for a Saviour. The Bible tells us that only God can intervene to save us. We need the rule of God over our lives.

⁵ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 464.

How Are We To Live? - Under the Lordship and Kingship of Jesus,

Our children's catechism asks: *Why do you need Christ as a King?"*
Answer: *Because I am weak and helpless."*

Helpless? What do you mean? You say, "I have a job, I am skilled. I have intellect. I am university educated. I have strength. That may be true, but you can't save yourself. You can't deal with your own sin. You can't run your own life. You can't make it to heaven in your own righteousness. You can't do anything of eternal value in this life by yourself.

Matthew 5:3

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The King reigns and brings His kingdom, forgiveness and healing to those who know they are in bad shape and lost without Him. Through Jesus' life, death and resurrection, we can be restored and reconciled to the Shepherd of our Soul.

1 Peter 2:24

²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵ For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

*Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the **people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.***

How are we to lead?

We have been given gifts. We have been entrusted with talents. We have been given grace by God. We have been given families. We have been given employment. We have been entrusted with opportunities for service in the church. In our leadership, in our homes, church, workplaces, and community how are we to lead?

Human leadership is a derivative of divine leadership. Human leadership is dependent on God's Spirit for effectiveness. We are to lead under the authority and in the power of Jesus Christ.

Shepherd-leaders are stewards of God and servants of God's people. To serve Christ as his under-shepherd is to serve his people.

The heart of God is deeply moved for the lost and astray. God loves His sheep. He wants his followers to see helpless and harassed sheep as he did, and thus become extensions of his own ministry. He wants us to lead with His heart.

Those called to lead by caring for souls and serving in Christian ministry will be held accountable. Our motives will be judged. Are we here to fleece the sheep or serve the Lord? Do I use things and love people or love things and use people? Am I here to serve or be served? Is sacrifice in my vocabulary? Am I prayerfully dependent on a regular basis as I do the work of God? We must watch and work and lead in such a way as to lead like the Good Shepherd, who loves His sheep.

God leads His people and cares for them through the one He appoints. Jesus Christ the Royal Son of David. He is our Shepherd, our Saviour, our King, our Rescue, our Redeemer. We live under His Lordship. We lead in light of His Word. We live and lead knowing that in this advent season, our King is coming back again for us, and the perfect rule of His perfect Kingdom will never end. This is our hope and this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.