

Jehovah Against The Shepherds

Lord's Day 12

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We turn in God's word this morning to Ezekiel 34. As we mentioned last week, we're going to have three sermons on Lord's Day 12 of the Heidelberg Catechism. Last week we looked at the truth that Christ is our anointed; this morning we look at an application of that truth with regard to the office-bearers of the church, for they also are prophets, priests and kings; and next time, Lord willing, we'll look at the truth that all of the members of the church are anointed in Christ and bear the name Christian as prophets, priests and kings.

Now we read Ezekiel 34.

1 And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 2 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? 3 Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock. 4 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. 5 And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered. 6 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. 7 Therefore, ye shepherds, hear the word of the LORD; 8 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; 9 Therefore, O ye shepherds, hear the word of the LORD; 10 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. 11 For thus saith

the Lord GOD; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. 12 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. 13 And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country. 14 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. 15 I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord GOD. 16 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. 17 And as for you, O my flock, thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I judge between cattle and cattle, between the rams and the he goats. 18 Seemeth it a small thing unto you to have eaten up the good pasture, but ye must tread down with your feet the residue of your pastures? and to have drunk of the deep waters, but ye must foul the residue with your feet? 19 And as for my flock, they eat that which ye have trodden with your feet; and they drink that which ye have fouled with your feet. 20 Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD unto them; Behold, I, even I, will judge between the fat cattle and between the lean cattle. 21 Because ye have thrust with side and with shoulder, and pushed all the diseased with your horns, till ye have scattered them abroad; 22 Therefore will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle. 23 And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. 24 And I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the LORD have spoken it. 25 And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods. 26 And I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing. 27 And the tree of the field shall yield her fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase, and they shall be safe in their land, and shall know that I am the LORD, when I have broken the bands of their yoke, and delivered them out of the hand of those that served themselves of them. 28 And they shall no more be a prey to the heathen, neither shall the beast of the land devour them; but they shall dwell safely, and none shall make them afraid. 29 And I will raise up for them a plant of renown, and they shall be no more consumed with hunger in the land, neither bear the shame of the heathen any more. 30 Thus shall they know that I the LORD their God am with them, and that they, even the house of Israel, are my people, saith the Lord GOD. 31 And ye my

flock, the flock of my pasture, are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord GOD.

This is God's holy and inspired word. May he bless it to our hearts this morning.

We turn to the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 12, Question and Answer 31,

Q. 31. Why is Jesus called Christ, that is anointed?

A. Because He is ordained of God the Father, and anointed with the Holy Ghost, to be our chief Prophet and Teacher, who has fully revealed to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our redemption; and to be our only High Priest, who by the one sacrifice of His body, has redeemed us, and makes continual intercession with the Father for us; and also to be our eternal King, who governs us by His Word and Spirit, and who defends and preserves us in (the enjoyment of) that salvation, He has purchased for us.

Beloved congregation in our Lord Jesus Christ, Question and Answer 31 makes clear that there are many prophets, priest and kings in the congregation of Jesus Christ. Now that may not be clear at first reading, at first reading Question and Answer 31 seems to be talking only about Jesus Christ, why is Jesus called Christ, that is anointed? And it is true that Question and Answer 31 is intended to set forth mainly the truth of who Jesus is as our prophet, priest and king, but by clear implication, Question 31 also teaches that there are other prophets, priest and kings among us, and that's evident when the Catechism says Jesus Christ is ordained of God the Father and anointed with the Holy Ghost to be our chief prophet and teacher. Our chief prophet and teacher, the main one, the central one, but there are other prophets and teachers and those other prophets and teachers are the ministers of the Gospel who speak the word of God on behalf of God to us. Christ is the chief prophet but there are under-prophets, so to speak, or under-shepherds who speak the word of God.

Christ is our only high priest. There's only one of those, our only high priest, but by implication there are other priests and those other priests are the deacons in the New Testament church who administer the mercies of Christ, and the Catechism says Christ is our eternal king, implying that there are other kings who are not eternal, and those other kings in the church of the New Testament are the elders to whom God has given the rule of the congregation. And we identify Christ as the anointed and the prophet, priest and king, implied is the truth revealed elsewhere in the word of God that there are under-shepherds under Jesus Christ who serve the flock and that's the perspective of Ezekiel 34 as well. When God speaks to the shepherds of Israel, he is speaking to those men who were ordained of him to have the rule over his flock and to care for his flock, the Old Testament office-bearers, therefore part of the truth of Jesus as the Christ is that there are office-bearers in the church of Jesus Christ.

We hear sermons about office-bearers from time to time, especially at the occasion of the installation and ordination of men into office. We hear about their calling. We hear about their work. This morning, we're going to hear one particular application of the truth of office-bearers and that is the truth that there are times, and I tremble to say this, but there are times in the life of a church when Jehovah is against the shepherds as he has said in Ezekiel 34. "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel," and verse 10, "Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against the shepherds." We are at a time in our denominational life right now when it is good for us as members of a true and faithful church of Jesus Christ to consider again the calling of office-bearers with regard to the churches that we serve and even to repent as office-bearers with regard to the work which we have been called to. This is an especially apt season for us to consider the calling of shepherds because in nine days' time the Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches is going to reconvene in order to examine one of the shepherds, one of the ministers of the Gospel of the Protestant Reformed Churches, and the day after the Synod meets, Classis West is going to meet to consider whether to depose one of the shepherds of the Protestant Reformed Churches. The synodical examination that happens in nine days' time is an indictment against the preaching of one of the ministers of the PRC. Now I love Reverend Overway. I love him as a colleague in the ministry and more importantly, I love him as a brother in Christ but the Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches has determined that there was enough error in his preaching that he must be examined with regard to his orthodoxy. That indictment does not fall on Reverend Overway alone. That indictment falls on me and upon every minister of Classis East of the Protestant Reformed Churches, and that indictment falls upon every elder in Classis East of the Protestant Reformed Churches because although the minister himself is under examination, Classis East for many years has been, if not condoning, then at least not condemning that preaching. It doesn't matter now whether this minister or that elder was speaking up regarding that preaching, the decisions of Classis East are all of our decisions. The fact that a man has to be examined is an indictment upon all of the office-bearers of Classis East and, therefore, it's worth our time and good for us spiritually to hear the word of Jehovah, that there are times he is against the shepherds.

Our office-bearers need encouragement in their work. Our office-bearers need much encouragement in their work and the sermon this morning is not meant to discourage the elders or discourage the pastor in any way. The sermon this morning is meant to call our attention to the necessity of the elders and the minister overseeing the flock and preaching right doctrine lest Jehovah turn in his wrath against our denomination, and lest Jehovah remove the office-bearers in striking and painful ways, and especially lest the sheep, the beloved sheep in the flock of our Lord Jesus Christ be scattered and be devoured by their enemies. The sermon this morning points us as a congregation, then, including our office-bearers, men in the elder's role and pastor in the pulpit and deacons too, but it points us as a church to the blessedness of the Gospel of salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ. If Christ would visit upon this church what my sins deserve as a pastor, we would be destroyed. I shudder, I tremble to think of that, but my hope and your hope for all of us sinners is in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. We mustn't rush ahead to the third point already in the introduction, but let's hear the good news of the third point right at the beginning. As God says in Ezekiel 34:23-24,

23 And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David [that's Jesus Christ]; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. 24 And I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the LORD have spoken it.

There's our hope, there's our confidence as office-bearers and as a congregation this morning, that the Lord Jesus Christ does not forsake his church and, therefore, the calling is believe in him. Cast yourselves upon him and lift up your office-bearers in prayer that they may be faithful in the calling that this chief shepherd has given us.

Let's hear this word of God this morning, then, under the theme "Behold, I am against the shepherds. Lord Jehovah against the shepherds." In the first place we'll consider the shameful reasons. We're switching around the order of the three points from what's listed in the bulletin. First, the shameful reason; secondly, the sobering reality; and then in the third place, the sovereign redemption. Jehovah against the shepherds: the shameful reasons; the sobering reality; and the sovereign redemption.

Ezekiel 34 was God's word to the prophet Ezekiel who prophesied during the time of Judah's Babylonian captivity. God came to Ezekiel and told him, "Son of man," verse 2, "prophesy against the shepherds of Israel." The first question we face, therefore, is who are the shepherds of Israel? It is evident that these are the men about whom the chapter speaks. They are referenced several times in Ezekiel 34. Who are the shepherds of Israel? The answer to that question is the shepherds of Israel were those men who were specially ordained to hold office in Old Testament Israel, especially the kings and the princes but also including the prophets and the priests. Everyone who was ordained to hold office in Old Testament Israel, the shepherds of Israel. In the New Testament application, then, is that the shepherds of Israel are the New Testament office-bearers: the elders and the deacons and the ministers of the Gospel.

We know that this is the proper interpretation of the shepherds of Israel from 1 Peter 5:1 and following where Peter says, "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you." Peter tells the elders which would include the ministers because Peter himself as an apostle and a minister of the Gospel, was an elder. Peter says to the elders, "Feed the flock. Feed the flock." He uses that imagery of the sheep and the shepherd. The shepherds of Israel are the office-bearers of the church of Jesus Christ.

Now that imagery is used of a flock and shepherds and pastures because the work of the office-bearers is essentially the same as that of a shepherd. They are to care for the sheep, in fact, they are to feed the sheep. Just as a shepherd goes in and out among the sheep and makes sure that they are physically cared for; that their diseases are addressed; that the food they eat is good food and the pasture they have is good pasture, so also the calling of the office-bearers in the church is to see to the spiritual health and strength of the congregation and that comes out in Ezekiel 34 when God repeatedly rebukes the

shepherds of Israel for not feeding the flock. That was the main sin, that was the main problem, the office-bearers were not feeding the flock.

Verse 2, at the end, "should not the shepherds feed the flocks?" The end of verse 3, "but ye feed not the flock." Then the end of verse 8, ye have "fed not my flock." The calling of the office-bearers is to feed the flock and that raises the question for us next: what does it mean to feed the flock? What specifically does that work look like in a congregation? We have an insight into what feeding the flock means in verse 4 of Ezekiel 34.

Immediately after God says to the pastors, the pastors and the elders, "ye feed not the flock," he goes on to say, "The diseased have ye not strengthened," that's part of feeding the flock, then, strengthening the diseased, "neither have ye healed that which was sick," that's part of feeding the flock, then, healing the 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."

Feeding the flock means doing all of these things but that still leaves the question: what does that look like in a congregation? "Ye have not strengthened the diseased." Does that mean that we're supposed to make sure the congregation eats their vitamins? "Ye have not healed that which was sick." Does that mean the elders are supposed to drive people to the hospital to see the doctor when they're sick? What does it look like for spiritual shepherds to feed the flock spiritually, and when we begin to look through the word of God to find out what it means to feed them, we begin to see that feeding them means to say something. It means to speak. It means to teach and to instruct. We have that, for example, in Proverbs 10:21, "The lips of the righteous feed many." The lips of the righteous feed many. Feeding involves some kind of teaching. Or Jeremiah 3:15, "And I will give you pastors," there's that idea of shepherds again, "I will give you pastors according to mine heart which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding." They shall feed you with knowledge and understanding so that feeding the flock means to teach; it means to speak with the lips; to speak knowledge; to speak understanding so that by that knowledge and understanding the congregation grows spiritually and is fed spiritually.

That leads to the question: what are the office-bearers supposed to teach? And that answer is simple because it's all over the pages of the New Testament, especially in the book of John where Jesus says, "I am bread and I am water. I'm the bread from heaven, the true bread, and I am the living water." What feeds the congregation? Jesus Christ. The calling of the office-bearers, then, is to teach Jesus Christ to the people; to show them his glory; to show them his will; to teach them his salvation of them. And that teaching of Jesus Christ by the elders and family visiting, for example, by the minister from the pulpit and privately from house to house and by the deacons and their work of caring for the needy, we teach Jesus Christ and that word builds up and feeds and nourishes the congregation unto everlasting life. Jesus Christ is our life. He dwells in us and gives us new life and, therefore, it makes sense that feeding the flock and nourishing them will be teaching them Jesus Christ.

That leads to the next question: how is Jesus Christ taught? And the answer there is simple too: from the word. From the word. The Scriptures are the source. The Scriptures are the material. The Scriptures are the pastures that the office-bearers bring to the people of God which nourish them because the Scriptures teach Jesus Christ.

This is how office-bearers feed the flock. That's evident, too, from our forms of ordination and installation for the office-bearers. First of all, the form of ordination of ministers. We read that the first office or the first duty of the pastors is that they faithfully explain to their flock the word of the Lord revealed by the writings of the prophets and the apostles and apply the same as well in general as in particular to the edification of the hearers, instructing, admonishing, comforting, and reproving according to everyone's need. That sounds a lot like Ezekiel 34 when the ministers bring the word of the Lord which is the Scriptures and they instruct and reprove and admonish according to everyone's need. That sounds a lot like Ezekiel 34 which says strengthen the diseased. This is how those who are weak and sickly in the flock will gain strength, through the word of the Lord faithfully brought. Heal that which was sick, this is how the sick will be healed, by the word of God. Bind up that which was broken, the broken hearts of God's people over their sin are bound up by the preaching of Jesus Christ from the Scriptures. Bring again that which was driven away. Seek that which was lost. All of that is done by the faithful bringing of the word of God and not just for ministers, that's the calling of the elders as well as their form for ordination indicates.

Their third duty is particularly to have regard unto the doctrine and conversation of the ministers of the word to the end that all things may be directed to the edification of the church and that no strange doctrine be taught. The elders are called to make sure that the pulpit especially but all of the minister's teaching, is faithful and according to the word of God that no strange doctrine be brought in which would tear up the flock.

That's the calling of the office-bearers, feed the flock, and that was the main thing that God was against the pastors for, the shepherds for in Ezekiel's day. "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel." Verse 10, "Behold, I am against the shepherds." Why? "Should not the shepherds feed the flock? But ye feed not the flock." And again, verse 8, "The shepherds fed themselves and fed not my flock." That means office-bearers and all of us at the main calling of our office-bearers is to be faithful to the doctrine and the word of God in our teaching as well as in our living so that even by our example the Gospel is adorned. Be faithful to the doctrine of the word of God.

This is where we as shepherds in Israel have much room to repent. We thank God that at the Synod this year, the Synod laid out the pure Reform doctrine according to the Confessions built upon the word of God. The Classis East in not taking hold of that for a time, and I include myself here, I include myself first here, in not taking hold of that and in not rejecting what was taught contrary to the true doctrine, we have not fed the flock and I'm sorry for that before the face of God and before the congregation. Shepherds, our calling is feed the flock of God with the pure word of God.

There were related sins of the shepherds, a related sin was that instead of feeding the flock they sought themselves, they fed themselves, and that's everywhere throughout Ezekiel 34 as well. Take note, for example, of verse 2, "Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks?" The idea here is that there is always a temptation for an office-bearer to be lifted up with the status of his office, "I am Reverend Lanning, or I am Elder So-and-so or Deacon So-and-so." There's a temptation to be lifted up. Satan plays on that natural pride that's in the heart of man and when members of the congregation come to the office-bearers for help, come for answers, come for comfort from the word of God, the minister or the elders can begin to think, "I'm needed here in the church. The Lord really needs me for this congregation." The minister or the elders use that office for their own promotion, for their own advancement so that they're something in the eyes of men. That's what it means to feed themselves. Jehovah condemns that.

Think of the office-bearers in the days of Ezekiel, the office-bearers leading up to the captivity of Judah. They fed themselves. They rejected the word of God, or at least did not defend the word of God, and sought their own prominence and Jehovah was against the shepherds for that. The office-bearers and all of us, hear the warning this morning that pride and feeding ourselves and lifting ourselves up above one another is forbidden in the work of the office.

Then there were other sins that were committed. The office-bearers were primarily guilty but there was guilt that could be spread around over the whole congregation and God addresses that beginning in verse 17, "as for you, O my flock, thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I judge between cattle and cattle, between the rams and the he goats." And what was the sin of the people? The sin of the people was, first, that they were pushing and shoving one another but the sin of the people was, second, that they ate up the good pasture and then trod it under their feet. They drank the deep waters but then they fouled the residue with their feet. And going back to the idea of feeding the flock here, those pastures and those waters are the pure doctrine of the word of God. The people ate the pure doctrine, the good pastures, they drank the deep waters and they despised it. They cared not for it. They trampled those pastures under their feet and fouled the waters with their feet and there is a danger for us as the people of God who have been given the Reformed faith, who have been given the truth and by God's grace maintain the truth, the danger for us is that we become bored with it, that we begin to despise it. "Here we go again. We've got to start the Heidelberg Catechism over. We've heard it 20 times in our lives by now, or 50 times, and we've got to go through it all again. Or here we go again, there's that cross of Jesus Christ again. We heard about that last week, we're going to hear about it next week. Here we go again." Or even if not thinking that way, we simply become indifferent to the truth of the word, indifferent to our Savior, so although he is taught to us, although God has given us Reformed Confessions that faithfully express the truth, we're indifferent and there are 1,000 things in our life that are more interesting to us than the learning of our Savior and eating his pastures and drinking his deep waters. God says this is part of the judgment, on indifference to the truth. "I'll take it away. I'll take it away. No more will you hear the pure doctrine of the word. In fact, I'll send a strong

delusion upon the congregation which loved not the truth but had pleasure in other things, especially unrighteousness instead," 1 Thessalonians 2.

God sends a famine of the word where a congregation does not love the word. There is a warning there and a danger to us that we love not the truth but simply go through the motions of worship and go through the motions of holding to that word and that's shameful for the office-bearers and that's shameful for the congregation because the result is that the flock is scattered. The flock becomes a prey for every beast of the field. Maybe everybody stays in church, maybe nobody leaves but they're scattered spiritually and all of the enemies led by the devil who is going about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, all of the enemies are watching to see, "Is there a weakness here? Is there indifference here that we can fill with some pleasure of the earth and draw their hearts away and the hearts of their generations away from the Lord?" The flock becomes a prey for false doctrine and for wolves. I want to be clear here, I mentioned a minister's name earlier in the sermon, I'm not saying that minister is a wolf. Don't take that to be my meaning but I'm saying that Paul warned in Acts 20 wolves will enter into the sheepfold and when the congregation, and especially the office-bearers, are not feeding the flock and loving that word, those wolves have ready entrance. The congregation becomes a prey.

So Jehovah says, to move into the second point now, "I am against the shepherds and, son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel." That's sobering. That's almost frightening if Ezekiel hadn't ended the chapter the way he did with the Gospel of salvation in Christ. It almost leads to despair. "I'm against the shepherds who do not feed the flock." That's so sobering because every office-bearer, starting with the pastor, admits weakness in his feeding of the flock whether that weakness is some lack of clarity somewhere, or whether that weakness is some laziness somewhere in bringing the word to the needs of the people, or whether it's some failure to go to the people in their homes when they need it to give them good counsel and advice when they are struggling. Every office-bearer acknowledges there is weakness and to hear the word of Jehovah, "I'm against them," makes me tremble and makes every faithful office-bearer tremble.

How is Jehovah against the shepherds? God answers that in verse 10, "I will require my flock at their hand." I will require my flock at their hand. That's God's way of saying, "You answer to me, office-bearers. You answer to me for what you did with my people." The people have to answer too for what they did with God's office-bearers as the forms for ordination indicate. When the office-bearers come with the word or try to schedule a meeting, the response of the flock must be, "When can we meet and we receive the word of God from you?" The congregation is not allowed to say to the office-bearers, "I refuse to meet with you. I want nothing to do with you."

The congregation answers for how they treated the office-bearers too but the emphasis here is that the office-bearers answer for what they did with the people of God, God requires the flock at our hands. As Hebrews 13:17 says, "Obey them which have the rule over you knowing that they must give account, that they may give that account with joy and not with sorrow for that is unprofitable for you." They have to give account of what

they did with God's sheep. And as Ezekiel 33 says, one chapter earlier, "If you stand on the walls and see the enemy coming, watchmen, office-bearers, and you don't say anything, then the blood of all of the people who are destroyed in that raid is on your heads. I require the flock at your hand. If you say something and many are destroyed because they didn't take heed, then their blood is on their own heads. But if you don't say anything, if you keep quiet, then their blood is on your heads. I require my flock at your hand." We must give an account.

The second way that Jehovah is against the shepherds is that he will cause them to cease from feeding the flock. The idea there is they won't be office-bearers anymore. "I will take that office away." In the Reformed churches there is an orderly process, procedure, for taking that office away. It's the procedure of deposition according to Article 79 and following of our church order. The Lord says, "I am against you," by taking that office away.

What then? What now? When Jehovah is against the shepherds, what now? What hope is there for the shepherds? What hope is there for the flock? As sobering as the beginning of Ezekiel 34 is, so heartwarming is the end of Ezekiel 34. The Lord does not leave us in our sin and in our distress. He delivers us. God says in verse 11, "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. And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country." Our hope, congregation, is not in the men who are our office-bearers, our hope is in Jehovah himself; and our work, men, in the office does not depend upon us but depends upon this Good Shepherd, Jehovah himself who seeks out his sheep and is pleased to use us as weak means to fulfill that will.

Our hope is not in the men who serve, our hope is not in ourselves but in Jehovah God. He cares for his sheep perfectly. He cares for his sheep with not laziness. The thought is foolish. The thought is almost blasphemous, even, that God could be lazy. He cares for his sheep with perfect pure doctrine as he feeds them by his own word. And what is more, what is more, God goes on to say, "I'm going to give you someone who is going to do this work. I'm going to give you a prince in your midst and his name is David. Verses 23 and 24, "I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the LORD have spoken it." David, he's going to set up David? David's dead and gone by the time Ezekiel writes. David is long dead and gone. What's he going to do, raise David from the dead? What God is saying here is David is only the typical name. "I'm going to raise up the real David, the son of David whom I have promised." That is, the Lord Jesus Christ. He's the prince in our midst who reigns over us as our King, who teaches us as our Shepherd, who brings us to God as our High Priest and that's the teaching of Lord's Day 12 Question and Answer 31 of the Heidelberg Catechism. There are other under-shepherds but Christ is the Chief

Prophet and Teacher, our only High Priest and our eternal King so that we look to him for our salvation and the covering of all our sins.

God in setting up this David, this Jesus to be a prince, did not just set him up and say, "Now do better or I'll still destroy you after all," but God set up this Jesus as our Savior. Elders, pastor, deacons, the Lord Jesus Christ is your Savior who redeems you from your sins and my sins in the office. All of our weaknesses, all of our failures in this congregation or in the Classis or in the denomination, God redeems us from those sins and covers them in his blood. He doesn't deal with us as we deserve by nature, he doesn't scatter this flock to the winds as our weaknesses would otherwise scatter the flocks over the hills, but he's merciful in David.

Verse 25, "I will make with them a covenant of peace." A covenant of peace. That means Jehovah is at peace with his people and we, covered in the blood of Christ, are at peace with him. There is the calling of the congregation and the office-bearers, then, for all our sins and iniquities, for all our despising of the word or indifference to it, for all of our failure to feed the flock, fly to Jesus Christ in faith and know peace with God through him.

That doesn't mean, then, that our work is finished, that means as office-bearers that out of gratitude for this mercy that we have tasted through Jesus Christ, out of gratitude for this mercy we are to go back to work in the office with renewed zeal and vigor, and that means for the congregation out of gratitude for this salvation we have, we are to love this word and seek this word and not be indifferent to this word, to learn the word and encourage one another with the word. There is work to do but nothing depends on that work. Nothing depends on it because there's one Christ, one Shepherd who is our Prophet, Priest and King.

So this is a sobering word for us to hear Jehovah is against the shepherds, but this is a very glad word for us as well, that Jehovah has turned his anger against the Chief Shepherd and was against him at the cross in Jesus' own experience as he cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" so that we may be sure as office-bearers and as a congregation that God is not against us, but for us for the sake of Jesus Christ. Let us hear that word to the comfort of our souls and be encouraged by the last two verses of Ezekiel 34, "Thus shall they know that I the LORD their God am with them, and that they, even the house of Israel, are my people, saith the Lord GOD. And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord GOD." Amen.

Our Father which art in heaven, bless thy word to us this morning and apply it to our hearts. Forgive our sins. Be merciful. We have nothing to bring to thee to commend ourselves. We have only Christ, our Prophet, Priest and King, and having him, we have all. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Psalter #102. This is a penitential song of which we beseech God to give us hope and peace and not to deal with us after our sins. Notice the first part of stanza 1 where we pray, "Chasten not thy servant, Lord," and all of us are servants of God so this is a prayer

we all make concerning ourselves but there are some in the congregation who are called to be in special office, those servants, and so as we sing this, pray this for your office-bearers too, that God would be merciful to them, to us, and give us the confidence in our salvation in him. The five stanzas, all five of 102.

"In Thy wrath and hot displeasure,
Chasten not Thy servant, Lord;
Let Thy mercy, without measure,
Help and peace to me afford.

Heavy is my tribulation,
Sore my punishment has been;
Broken by Thy indignation,
I am troubled by my sin.

With my burden of transgression
Heavy laden, overborne,
Humbled low I make confession,
For my folly now I mourn.

Weak and wounded, I implore Thee;
Lord, to me Thy mercy show;
All my prayer is now before Thee,
All my trouble Thou dost know.

Darkness gathers, foes assail me,
But I answer not a word;
All my friends desert and fail me,
Only Thou my cry hast heard."

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.