

**“I Myself will search for my sheep”**  
Ezekiel 34:11-16 & John 10:1-5; 11-15

Good morning and welcome to worship on this beautiful Lord's day. Our call to worship this morning is taken from a somewhat unusual place, **Deuteronomy 31:1-6** which says:

***“Then Moses went out and spoke these words to all Israel: <sup>2</sup> ‘I am now a hundred and twenty years old and I am no longer able to lead you. The Lord has said to me, ‘You shall not cross the Jordan.’ <sup>3</sup> The Lord your God himself will cross over ahead of you. He will destroy these nations before you, and you will take possession of their land. Joshua also will cross over ahead of you, as the Lord said. <sup>4</sup> And the Lord will do to them what he did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, whom he destroyed along with their land. <sup>5</sup> The Lord will deliver them to you, and you must do to them all that I have commanded you. <sup>6</sup> Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”***

I do not know what is going on in your lives right now, I do not know where you are in life or what you are going through. There are times where we might look at our lives and just think to ourselves, ‘we are leaderless, we are alone and does anyone see?’ Sometimes it feels like we are about to cross that river and we have no idea what lies ahead of us, what lies on the other side. But the Lord, He knows, and He has gone before you. He has rescued you already and is working in you. Be strong and courageous trusting in Him because He has not left you nor has He forsaken you.

**Let us pray.**

**Opening song: Psalm 23 - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-qLa\\_2GPcM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-qLa_2GPcM)**

Our scripture readings this morning is taken from Ezekiel 34:11-16:

***<sup>11</sup> “For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. <sup>12</sup> As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. <sup>13</sup> I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. <sup>14</sup> I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. <sup>15</sup> I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign Lord. <sup>16</sup> I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.***

This is such a beautiful passage which highlights, for each and every believer, the care which God has for us. The entire chapter looks at this concept of shepherds and sheep. From the very beginning of the chapter, the Lord makes known His displeasure with those who have been appointed as shepherds over the nation of Israel. This was of course a common term used to describe one whom God had called as a servant or leader for the nation and was applied to all kinds of people from prophets to priests and even included kings. These people were responsible for the well-being of the people of God, to care for them,

to love them, to lead them in all things God related. And yet, hear what God says about these shepherds in **34:2**, ***“Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?’”***

It is no secret that the leaders of Israel, these so-called shepherds, left much to be desired. We often understand this fact from a New Testament perspective, the Pharisees, Sadducees, teachers of the Law: each one of them missing an integral part of godly worship in the service of God's people and that is the service itself. There are agendas that have been set by them, there are political stances taken so as to lessen the burden upon themselves, wheels set in motion so that the leaders (these shepherds) could gain as much for themselves as possible with no regard for the people whom they are supposed to lead. And what we see from Old Testament passages such as ours this morning, this issue was not a new thing. What is also such a beautiful connection between the Old and New Testaments is the fact that when the shepherds fail, when the shepherds fall short and lose sight of that which they are called to do, God intervenes. He steps up and bridges the gap, caring for those sheep who have been scattered, those that have gone astray, those that have been lost in the wilderness.

At this point in the Book of Ezekiel, he is prophesying about the return of the nation of Israel from exile. In the preceding verses, we are told in no uncertain terms that the Lord will deal with the faithless shepherds and in so doing, makes it known that the sheep would not be left to fend for themselves, they will not be abandoned nor will they be forgotten. The Lord makes it known that He Himself will not only search for the sheep but amazingly, listen to the language He uses when He says: ***“I will look after them, I will rescue them (12), I will bring them out from the nations, I will pasture them (13), I will tend them (14), I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak (16), I will shepherd the flock with justice (17).”***

These are not simply empty phrases used by the Lord to make His people feel good about themselves, to make them feel good about their current situation. They are not empty platitudes nor are they simply morale boosters. This is the promise of God to His people. It is the promise of redemption, the promise of restoration, the promise of righteous justice. And these promises, for the nation of Israel, were of course fulfilled when Babylon fell and 538 BCE. Yet, I want to suggest that this prophecy does not only speak of the immediate restoration for Israel. When we look at this incredible promise from the Lord, it is virtually impossible not to have our attention drawn to John 10. I believe that this prophecy from Ezekiel foreshadows the coming of Christ who is the Good Shepherd. This is what He says in **John 10:1-5 and then 11-15:**

***<sup>1</sup> “Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. <sup>2</sup> The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup> The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup> When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.”***

***11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. 13 The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.***

***14 "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.***

The promise given to the people of God in Ezekiel 34 is not just a short-term promise. That promise of redemption, restoration and righteous justice carry out through all eternity, more so, they do not act in isolation from all that God has promise or has done. They are inconceivably bound together in one incredible characteristic of God – that is His Holy and Righteous Love.

The fulfilment of this in its truest sense and most fundamental form is seen at the cross of Christ. It is here where the darkness of this broken world and the glorious love of God collide. It is here that true redemption, restoration and righteous justice are exemplified and given freely to the sheep of God's pasture. It is here where the sinner is set free, where the debt is paid in full and the slate wiped clean. It is here where cleansing happens, where the stains of sin are removed, and we are renewed by the grace of God. It is here where life and eternity begin.

We have a Good Shepherd, and His name is Jesus. Jesus who calls the lost sheep, Jesus who calls all those who have been scattered, Jesus who tends to His flock, Jesus who cares for us, Jesus who rescued us, Jesus who binds up the injured and gives strength to the weak. And it is Jesus who will shepherd His flock with righteous justice even to the point of His own death.

Thanks be God our Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Let us pray.

**Song of praise: The Lord is gracious and compassionate -**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vjCyib5rMQ4>

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