

Sermon for November 26, 2023 – Christ the King

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 23-24 (NIV84)

Theme: The King of Love, My Shepherd is.

- 1) As both God/Man he laid down his life for His sheep.
- 2) He leads us to the rich pastures of His Gospel.
- 3) He restores and protects our souls.

¹¹ "For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. ¹² 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. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. ¹⁶ 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. . . . ²³ I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. ²⁴ I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken.

Introduction

Judah's religious leaders said that it would never happen, but it did: Jerusalem fell! The Lord's temple was reduced to a smoldering heap of rubble. Woe to them: the LORD had forsaken his people! Because of their sin and refusal to heed his call to repent, he removed his presence from them. At first they didn't want to believe it, but now it became utterly obvious. There they stood – naked and helpless in a cold and dangerous world. Forsaken by their own God, they were being led captive to Babylon. Would they, like the northern tribes of Israel, be lost forever?

No, even though they were faithless, the LORD would remain faithful to the covenant he swore to Abraham. He would not let anything prevent him from sending a Savior. He would bring his people back from their captivity. Moreover, even though the idolatry of Judah's previous kings helped drive the people away from their God, the LORD would install a future king who would gather his scattered people back to himself.

Like the people of Judah after Jerusalem's fall, we too were once without hope. Our sinfulness had separated us from God and made us the devil's captives. We were harassed, helpless and lost – like sheep without a shepherd. Sure, we tried to make the best of things – pretending that everything was ok, but deep in our hearts we knew it wasn't.

The LORD saw our condition and was moved to mercy. Yes, he is angry with our sins and wants us to understand this. But he does not take pleasure in the thought of our eternal destruction. No, he would rather that we repent of our sin, run to him for forgiveness and live.

He also knows that, because we are like helpless sheep in the dark wilderness of this world, we can't find our way back to him on our own. This is why he decided to provide a special Shepherd for us: one who would both rescue us from our enemies and bring us back to his fold. With the prophet Ezekiel as our

guide, let us consider who this great Shepherd is and how he has brought us back to His fold under the theme: **The King of Love, My Shepherd is.** 1) As both God/Man he laid down his life for His sheep. 2) He leads us to the rich pastures of His Gospel. 3) He restores and protects our souls.

Part One: As both God/Man he laid down his life for His sheep

¹¹ "For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. ¹² As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. . . . ²³ I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. ²⁴ I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken.

Oh what love God the Father has for us! Even though we ran away from him – lustfully pursuing the pleasures of sin and coveting the things of this world – the LORD did not abandon us to die in a wilderness of sin. No, he provided a shepherd to search after us – one who is described as both “David” and the LORD himself.

Now let’s be clear: when Scripture calls this shepherd “David,” it is not referring to King David who had been dead for some 400 years before this prophecy was made. No, this shepherd is Jesus – a descendant of king David by being born from the virgin Mary – and yet of the same essence with God the Father, having been conceived by the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the good shepherd God the Father sent to suffer and die for the sins of the whole world so that whoever believes in him might not perish, but have eternal life.

Jesus himself once said: *"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. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. ¹⁷ The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life--only to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."* (John 10:14-18 NIV84)

The first thing Jesus had to do before He could bring us back to God, is win back the righteousness we lost and suffer the punishment our sins had incurred. Being both God and man, Jesus was able to do this. He was tempted just as we are, but remained sinless. He also took our sins upon himself and offered up his life on the cross in payment for them all. And to prove that they were fully paid for, he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven – from where he will come to judge the living and the dead.

Part Two: He leads us to the rich pastures of His Gospel

Having accomplished this work for us our text says: *¹² 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.*

During Jesus’ earthly ministry he sought the lost sheep of Israel by going town to town – preaching the good news of His kingdom. But, how does he search for his lost sheep today? The same way he did during his earthly ministry: through the proclamation of his word.

Whenever a Christian shares the Gospel with someone, the Bible promises that God himself will give him the words to say. In other words, whenever you, dear Christian, share the Gospel with a family member or friend, Christ himself is speaking through you!

And so, as Jesus's modern day disciples proclaim the Gospel through out the world, the LORD's promise is fulfilled: ¹³ *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.*

Just as the LORD would restore his lost people back to the land of Israel seventy years after their captivity in Babylon, so also the Lord brings us – his spiritually lost and scattered people – back to the spiritual promised land from which we were exiled because of sin.

And what exactly is the spiritual land of “Israel” to which the LORD leads us? It is the place where God himself dwells: the Holy Christian Church. And this Church is truly a wonderful Kingdom – a true melting pot of peoples from every tribe, nation, people and language on this earth, who have been found by Christ, harkened His call and follow Him.

Do you know what the Greek word for Church (“ecclesia”) really means? It means: “those who are called out for gathering.” The Lord has personally called each of you out of the darkness of the world into the wonderful light of His Gospel. For some of you this happened very early in life when the LORD moved your parents to bring you to the waters of baptism so that God might wash away all your sins and adopt you as his dearly love child - placing his holy name on you. For others it happened later in life, when He summoned you through the preaching of the Gospel – moving you to repentance and creating faith in your heart. The point is that he has called you out of this world, and gathered you to his fold to feed on his pastures and remain under his protection until the day comes when He will take you to be with him in the glorious new paradise that he is even now preparing for all believers.

Regarding the sheep he has called out of the world to himself, the LORD says: ¹⁴ *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.* ¹⁵ *I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD.*

What is the pleasant, rich pasture to which our Shepherd King leads us to find nourishment and rest? It is the Gospel in Word and sacrament! Just think about it: every Sunday morning God calls us to find comfort and peace in the promises his Word proclaims. The baptismal font reminds us that we have been washed clean from all sin and adopted into God's family. The altar, reminds us of the once for all sacrifice Jesus made for our sin. In the LORD's Supper, Jesus offers us the very body and blood he used to make that sacrifice for us.

Yes, the Word and the Sacraments are the rich and peaceful pastures to which our Good Shepherd leads us every Sunday. And why? To restore our soul, and grant us peace, as He says.

Part Three: He restores and protects my soul.

¹⁶ *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.*

Jesus knows how sin has ravaged our spirits. He knows what it means to face suffering and death. He knows what it feels like when a loved one dies. He understands the pains we feel when we are sick. Having walked on this earth in our flesh, experiencing every temptation we face and bearing the load of guilt our sins have earned, Jesus knows how hurt and helpless we are. And this is exactly why he searches and calls out for us – especially when we begin to stray.

God's wonderful promises certainly do begin to sooth our earthly pains, but our true healing will come at the end of time, when Christ will judge the world with justice.

On that day the LORD will separate the sheep from the goats, and all those who refused to believe in him and tried to bully God's people for personal gain (this is what the sleek and strong represent) will, in justice, be destroyed. But all those who, in humbleness of heart, looked to Jesus for forgiveness and responded to God's love for them by loving others will be welcomed into Christ's eternal kingdom, where He himself will wipe every tear from their eyes and make sure nothing will ever harm them again.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: rejoice in who your good Shepherd is and what he has done for you. Even though you have sinned against him in countless ways, the LORD, in his compassion has sought to be your shepherd by laying down his life for you, leading you to the rich pastures of his Gospel and restoring your soul with the promise of heaven. Amen.