

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 23-24

¹¹For this is what the LORD God says: I myself will seek the welfare of my flock and examine them carefully. ¹²As a shepherd examines his flock when he is with his sheep that have been scattered, so I will examine my flock and rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. ¹³I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land. I will shepherd them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys, and in all the settlements of the land. ¹⁴I will pasture them in good pasture, and their grazing land will be on the high mountains of Israel. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and they will pasture on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵I myself will shepherd my flock, and I myself will let them lie down, declares the LORD God. ¹⁶I will seek the lost. I will bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured. I will strengthen the weak. I will destroy the fat and the strong, and I will shepherd them in justice.

²³Then I will raise up over them one Shepherd, and he will tend them, my servant David. He will tend them, and he will be their Shepherd. ²⁴I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David will be the Prince among them. I, the LORD, have spoken.

Our Shepherd King

I.

Decades ago the juice maker Tropicana introduced their Twister line of juice beverages. Their marketing campaign read: “Flavors Mother Nature never intended.” Tropicana wanted you to believe that, while the fruits being blended together didn’t sound much like they would taste good together, you should try them and see—they were really an excellent blend.

Ezekiel’s words that serve as our Old Testament lesson today blend two concepts that don’t seem at first glance as though they go together, but they do. He combines the images of Shepherd and King when talking about the coming Savior. It doesn’t seem to be a combination that would work. Shepherd is a very humble occupation; those who lived and worked as shepherds were rough and tumble people. Their clothing was coarse and rough, and so were their social graces—they wouldn’t seem to belong in polite company. Kings, of course, were just the opposite. Their bearing and wardrobe were regal. They could speak with authority and wielded great power. Despite the seeming disparity, Ezekiel tells us the Savior is both of these.

Much of what Ezekiel says emphasizes the Shepherd nature of our Savior. “For this is what the LORD God says: I myself will seek the welfare of my flock and examine them carefully. ¹²As a shepherd examines his flock when he is with his sheep that have been scattered, so I will examine my flock and rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness” (Ezekiel 34:11-12, EHV).

So often did the people of Judah ignore God’s will that eventually God permitted the Babylonians to conquer Judah and carry the people off into captivity. In this way God was disciplining and teaching his people to trust in him alone. Ezekiel was among those who were living in Babylon. God was reassuring his people at that time that he had not forgotten them. God himself would be the Shepherd who would be with his people and bring them

out of captivity and back to their own land when his time was right. Even while they were exiled in Babylon, the people needed to realize that God always preserved a remnant—a flock of the faithful would remain for God to return to their homeland.

In every age and generation there are enemies of the cross of Christ. In every age and generation God preserves a remnant who are faithful to him and his Word. The faithful are scattered among all the enemies of God in this world, but Christ continues to examine his flock and rescue them from the enemies of the gospel, no matter how far-flung they are scattered, no matter what difficulties they face.

“I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land. I will shepherd them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys, and in all the settlements of the land” (Ezekiel 34:13, EHV). Though he expresses the leading of his people as shepherding them, God here speaks as a King. He has the power and the authority to bring them to their own land—to settle them and to provide for them. God would eventually bring the people of Judah back to their own land and reestablish them there.

We can't see the reality, but Christ is our King. No matter where we are, the whole world is Christ's Kingdom. He establishes us as his own and protects us in the Church—especially from the wiles of Satan and the forces of evil.

“I will pasture them in good pasture, and their grazing land will be on the high mountains of Israel. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and they will pasture on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵I myself will shepherd my flock, and I myself will let them lie down, declares the LORD God. ¹⁶I will seek the lost. I will bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured. I will strengthen the weak. I will destroy the fat and the strong, and I will shepherd them in justice” (Ezekiel 34:14-16, EHV). It is as both Shepherd and King that our Lord Jesus provides for us.

“I will shepherd them in justice,” God says at the end of verse 16. Justice. The justice of a righteous King cannot leave misdeeds unpunished. Our sinful wandering that caused us to be scattered and in need of being rounded up was placed on Jesus. King Jesus didn't just lead us *into* battle, he fought our battles *for* us. On the cross he battled sin, death, and Satan in our place. “It is finished,” he declared as the work of salvation came to a successful conclusion.

It is because he acted as our perfect King, dealing with our mortal enemies for us, that the Lord Jesus can also act as our Good Shepherd, providing for the welfare of his sheep. To be sure, Jesus is concerned about our physical needs, but much more concern does he have for our spiritual needs. Now that victory has been attained, The Shepherd King can provide for us. The words of these verses call to our minds the 23rd Psalm. Our Good Shepherd Jesus provides for our spiritual welfare. The rich pasture and good grazing lands are the gospel in both Word and Sacraments which we use and enjoy in our worship and devotional lives. Securely protected against our enemies, we lie down in the good grazing land.

“I will seek the lost. I will bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured. I will strengthen the weak” (Ezekiel 34:16, EHV). What comfort we find in the words about our Shepherd King! Have you ever felt spiritually wounded? The Shepherd himself binds those spiritual wounds. Nearly every Christian feels spiritually weak at times. The Lord promises that the Shepherd strengthens you. As you remain in the rich pasture of his Word your faith

will grow stronger. When you are lost or straying, the Lord doesn't just abandon you, but seeks you out yet again to return you to his grazing land.

II.

In the last two verses, Ezekiel focuses on the fact that the Savior is King who is a Shepherd. I will raise up over them one Shepherd, and he will tend them, my servant David. He will tend them, and he will be their Shepherd. ²⁴I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David will be the Prince among them. I, the LORD, have spoken" (Ezekiel 34:23-24, EHV).

Here the great King David's name is used repeatedly. David was the most renowned, benevolent, trusted and beloved king in the history of God's chosen nation of Israel. The name of that greatest king of Israel was often used by the prophets to refer to the Messiah. And so the name David is invoked to refer to King David's greater Son—the heir who would be the ultimate and final King for God's people.

David had been a faithful shepherd for his father Jesse, and then the king of Israel. God had said to King David: "When your days are complete and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up after you your seed, who will come from your own body. I will establish his kingdom. ¹³He will build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (2 Samuel 7:12-13, EHV). Jesus is the ultimate seed of David, whose Kingdom God established forever by his work of salvation for all people. Following in the footsteps of David, but far exceeding them, Jesus would do both these things the shepherd boy turned king named David had done.

King David had been a great shepherd for the people of Israel. His reign had brought them security and prosperity. The reign of the Messiah is even better. Jesus gives us eternal security and prosperity in heaven.

King David's rule had been an age of power and glory for Israel. The reign of the Messiah is better. Jesus rules with the Father in God's perfect and righteous kingdom of heaven.

A shepherd can identify all the sheep in a flock. A king never knows all his subjects by name. But Jesus is the Shepherd King who certainly *does* know each one of us personally and individually. Each one of us has access to the throne of power, because we personally know the King.

The combination of Shepherd and King in our Savior is not something that is twisted or weird. Far from being awkward, unnatural, or uncomfortable, our Shepherd King brings us everything we need—both from a powerful King who can provide for the every need of his people, as well as the leader who tends us like a gentle Shepherd.

As we wait to enter the eternal pasture land of heaven, we rejoice that Christ is our King and Shepherd for all eternity. Amen.