

I AM the Gate, the Good Shepherd for the Sheep

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 22-23; John 10:7-16

The Gospel of John Sermon Series - Part II

Kenwood Baptist Church

Pastor David Palmer

May 18, 2014

TEXT: Ezekiel 34:11-16, 22-23; John 10:7-16

This morning we continue in our series on the Gospel of John Part II, Jesus' I AM declarations, these seven breathtaking statements that our Lord makes throughout the Gospel of John. Each one of these is a revelation of Christ's divinity, His unique status as beloved Son sent into the world for you and for me. Last Sunday, we heard Jesus' announcement that He is the Light of the World. This exclusive claim to be **the** Light seems a very narrow way, but we get a very broad inclusive claim as well, for Jesus says, "I am the Light of the **World.**"

This morning, we turn to Jesus' statement, "I am the Gate, the Good Shepherd for the sheep." Again we hear Jesus calling to us, revealing His divinity. He is the Gate, the good Shepherd for



the sheep. Christ desires this morning to be your Shepherd, your pastor, to watch over you, to provide for you, to protect you from danger, to care for you when you are bruised, broken, lost, or confused, and above all, He offers to us His divine presence to enfold us into His flock and to lead us safely home forever. The statement which Jesus makes in John 10 is in conversation with another portion of Scripture, Ezekiel 34, where the Lord God speaks a word of indictment against false shepherds and promises that He Himself

will Shepherd His people. Then we come to hear Jesus' words anew with power when He stands and says: "I am this promised, good, single Shepherd. So we will travel along that road in Ezekiel 34 and let it take us to John 10 with our eyes wide open.

Ezekiel 34 begins with a prophetic word. First, we want to look together at the first ten verses of the section just prior to our passage this morning. In Ezekiel 34:2, the word of God comes to Ezekiel and says:

"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 shepherd the sheep?"'"

There is an indictment made against false or corrupt shepherds in the beginning of Ezekiel 34,

and it's a devastating criticism. It says of them in Ezekiel 34:3:

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

Although as Americans we try to avoid fat, in antiquity, the fat portions of the meat were actually the good portions. It's the fat portions, it's taking the very best, and these shepherds are taking the best portions for themselves. Not only do they eat the fat portions, they also clothe themselves with the wool of the sheep. They slaughter the fat, plump sheep, and yet they do not pasture or shepherd the flock. In Ezekiel 34:4, there is a very devastating and sad progression of ideas. It says of these false shepherds:

"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, but with force and harshness you have ruled them."

He was saying that among the flock, those who are tired, those that are sick are not given care; those who were injured are not bound up; those straying off from the flock are not brought back; and those who are completely lost are not searched for. These shepherds are poor leaders of the flock. There is an increasing danger to the sheep in this picture. Notice that at the beginning, it's just those who are weak and tired. Some of us know what it's like to be tired and to seek strength in the midst of that. One of the things that happens when our immune system gets weakened and we're tired is that we become sick more easily. These sick sheep are not even given basic medical care. A next level of danger is a sheep who has stumbled along the ravine and maybe broken a leg, and these shepherds do not even bind up this injured limb. A greater degree of danger for the sheep is to wander off from the flock, and the shepherds do not bring them back. The greatest danger for a sheep is to be completely separated from the flock, lost, perishing, vulnerable. It's a picture of profound neglect.

The picture of these sheep is one of sheep who are in great danger. They are not cared for or tended. Their situation becomes even worse in Ezekiel 34:5:

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

As a result of this lack of shepherding, the sheep end up dispersed and scattered. They are wandering. They are scattered precisely because there was no shepherd, and in this state of being scattered, the sheep end up becoming food for the wild beasts. Sheep have no defensive mechanisms. They can bleat, but they're not fast; they don't have armor. They are very vulnerable when they are separated and scattered. The Lord looks down at this flock and says they are being devoured, one at a time. It's a very sad picture to see a sheep alone, frightened, and then being snatched up by a wild animal. The sheep are scattered, and they are wandering over every high hill. In Ezekiel 34:6, the Lord says:

"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."

God says His sheep were scattered, scattered over the face of the earth. And then, one of the saddest lines of the whole Bible is at the end of this verse when He said: "But there was no one to search for them, no one even looked for them." They were isolated, lonely, in danger, neglected, and God says no one is even looking for them, no one even notices their plight. God paints a picture that is emotional and sad, and then He speaks a word of judgment against these false shepherds, condemning them. He says in Ezekiel 34:10:

"I am against the shepherds. . ."

Yet the passage takes a breathtaking turn in Ezekiel 34:11. We see the scattered sheep, the vulnerable sheep, the sheep being picked off one at a time, sick, injured, wounded, lonely. No one is searching for them. They are desperate, alone, crying out for help, like some people that you and I know. But in Ezekiel 34:11, the Lord, the sovereign Lord, turns this passage around. This is what the sovereign Lord says:

"I Myself will search for My sheep and look after them."

The God of the Scriptures says: "I see you in your isolation, the loneliness, the desperation, the vulnerability, the lostness, the wounds. I see you, and I'm going after you." Our hearts just swell up within us. The Lord God Almighty says: "I will search for My sheep Myself." In Ezekiel 34:12-13, Lord says:

"I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. 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."

In Ezekiel 34:15 the Lord declares:

"I Myself will tend My sheep and I will have them lie down."

That progression of danger begins to be overturned by God's watchful and ever-present shepherding. I love that God begins in our worst scenario. The Lord picks up this devastating progression and begins to reverse it. God meets us in our place of greatest danger. He starts on the extreme, the perimeter, of our lives, and He says in Ezekiel 34:16:

"I will search for the lost . . ."

God's first act is to find that sheep who is in its most extreme situation. It's that sheep that's on the edge of the cliff, bleating, confused, totally lost; one more step, and it's sure death. The Lord God Almighty begins there, and He begins to claim the field, to search out the lost one to claim them as His own, to reach out His shepherd's hand, His shepherd's staff. The Lord searches first for the lost, and then He continues in Ezekiel 34:16:

". . . and bring back the strays."

He will bring back the stray, the sheep that's gotten just a little bit excited by some glimpse of a ravine, the possibilities of lush green grass. It's that distracted sheep who says: "What about that?" and just starts to wander. The Lord says: "I will bring that sheep back." That's what the curve is for on the end of a shepherd's staff. The Lord goes to the absolute limit to find the one

that's totally lost. The Lord grabs ahold of that wandering sheep and pulls that sheep in closer. God works from the outside in. As Ezekiel 34:16 continues, the Lord says:

"I will bind up the injured . . ."

When a limb is broken, it must be reset; it must be bound up; and that's the image. A limb that is not bound will heal in a way that will forever be broken, and the sheep will never be able to walk in a normal way again. But, the Lord God Almighty says: "I will bind up the injured one." God then says in Ezekiel 34:16:

". . .and strengthen the weak."

God will strengthen the weak and the tired one. God emerges in Ezekiel 34 as the Shepherd of His people. God says: "I will save My people. I will come, and I will tend them Myself."

The final scene of this passage in Ezekiel is an image in which God says this shepherding, this guiding, will happen for His people through the figure of the Messiah. In Ezekiel 34:22, the Lord says:

"I will save My flock, and they will no longer be plundered."

God's people will no longer be plundered, snatched off, one at a time. He says in Ezekiel 34:23:

"I will place over them one shepherd, My servant David, and He will tend them; He will tend them and be their shepherd."

There will be one Shepherd, one flock, and David will shepherd them. When Ezekiel is prophesying these words, David has been dead for 400 years. It's not the historical David to whom He refers, but it's the Son of David, the coming King, who will shepherd God's people and care for them Himself.

Patricia St. John, missionary to North Africa, whose writings I love, has written a number of short stories, and she has a short book that's called *The Young Person's Guide to Knowing God*. It's a wonderful book filled with illustrations born out of her experience as a missionary in this part of the world and her seeing Scripture played out in real lives in modern times. She writes this reflection from an incident that she saw from an Arab Sheik, Sheik Ali. Reading it made me think about this text, that God seeks after us, lost, broken, and hurting. He goes Himself to get us. This reflection is called: *Why Sheik Ali Ran*. She writes:

"Ali, an Arab Sheik, sat at his table in his rich apartment, a beautiful room looking down on the garden irises and narcissuses which grew in the shade of a great twisted mulberry tree. The Sheik was the master of a large estate. His ledgers and account books lay spread out in front of him, and his secretary was hard at work. He concentrated on his books, but occasionally his gaze strayed out of the window to where a little boy climbed on the great gnarled boughs of the mulberry tree. Black-eyed, black-haired, he looked like any other boy, but this was Sadiq, his only son and heir, the light of his father's eyes, playing down below, and that was why the accounts seem to be moving slowly that morning.

“Sheik Ali turned the pages of his diary thoughtfully. Important guests were coming that night for a wedding. Well, he had many excellent servants, so he pressed the bell and messengers glided in noiselessly. ‘Fetch Abdullah and the cooks,’ said the master. A moment later they stood before him in their spotless uniforms. Abdullah was to go to market and buy all that was necessary for the wedding. He bowed and withdrew. The cook was to bake and roast and serve the banquet. Inclining his head, he left the room. ‘Fetch the gardener,’ ordered the master, and in he came. He was to pick the choicest fruit and flowers. He smiled as he went away. He loved displaying the harvest of his garden and orchard. There were letters to deliver, interviews to arrange, a wall was crumbling near the sheep fold. The foreman was consulted. A dozen matters needed attending to. A dozen servants went quietly off in different directions.

“The master sipped his black coffee, never moving from his desk. He had no need to move, only to give orders. And suddenly, a loud cry came from the garden. The master leaped up and ran to the window. His son had fallen from the mulberry tree with a scream, and he lay in the bed of irises, holding up his arms and crying for help. Sheik Ali did not ring the bell. He did not send for a servant. He ran. He ran down the stairs past the porter who sits staring at the Sheik as he charged down the path. ‘I’m coming, my son!’ he cried, and stooping down, he lifted up the bruised child in his arms, supported carefully the twisted ankle, holding the boy tight against his expensive suit, wrapped his ankle, and carried him back into the house.”

“I am the Good shepherd,” Jesus will say. God says, “I will go Myself.” Even if you are injured, confused, lost, and hurting, God says, “I will go Myself.” Some of you this morning are living unaware of this covenantal promise, and some of you this morning are living without knowing the promise and provision of the Lord God Almighty to be your Shepherd. Jesus, in His earthly ministry, looked out and saw the crowds. Matthew 9:36 says:

“When He saw the crowds, He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

Jesus’ heart was stirred. Mark 6:34 says similarly:

“When He went ashore, He saw a great crowd, and He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.”

This is the background for Jesus’ teaching to us this morning in John 10. God has promised to be the Shepherd Himself, to come, to seek the lost, to bind up the broken, to strengthen the weary and tired, to separate sheep from those who have neglected them. Jesus says in John 10:7-8:

“I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before Me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them.”

Jesus uses this image, but don’t let the imagery confuse you. He says, “I am the Gate,” meaning “I am standing at the gate; I am the gate for the sheep.” In John 10:9, He says, using the very language of Ezekiel 34:

"I am the gate; whoever enters through Me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture."

The Shepherd positions Himself at the gate, not an emissary, not a hired hand, but the Shepherd Himself stands at the gate. The sheep come in at night; they go out during the day; and they find pasture. Jesus speaks this word of prophetic indictment, as we read in Ezekiel. Just as the false shepherds destroyed, the thief comes to steal kill and destroy. But Jesus says in John 10:10:

"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

Jesus speaks to us that He Himself is the fulfillment of this great promise and hope. Jesus says in John 10:11:

"I am the Good Shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep."

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus says that He Himself will lay down His life for the sheep. Jesus says in John 15:13:

"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."

And in John 15:15, He says:

"I have called you friends."

Jesus stands inside this prophetic image of God's people as a flock needing to be cared for and shepherded. The Latin word for shepherd is *pastor*, to care for, to guide. Jesus knows that there are people who claim to want to guide and direct our lives, and yet when danger comes, these people flee. Jesus says He is not one like this.

One of the scariest moments of my life was when I was making a transition from the western border of China to Kazakhstan, and we had thought we had the right papers that we needed. We left China on a train. At the border is a great transition. The train gauge changes from the Asian gauge to the European gauge, and they lift the train cars off and set them on a different width of track in the middle of the desert. One man that was seated next to us on the train was a government official for all of Motta, the capital of Kazakhstan. He looked at our papers, and he said, "I think these are okay, but if not, I can advocate for you. I will help you to get there." We were asked to get off the train at the end of an AK-47 in the middle of this desert. My heart was pounding, and I thought, "This is it!" The papers weren't good, and we didn't have what we needed. It was very frightening, and one German traveler said to me as we were jumping off the train, "What is your home address? We want to find out if you're okay." We just got off the train. We had to jump because there wasn't even a platform. The man who had said he would help us didn't and couldn't. As the train started to pull out, he looked out the window, and there we were, my teaching companion and I, one suitcase, one guitar, and one very small hope. The train left, and I will always remember his face looking out the window and thinking, "He could do nothing for us, and there he goes." Thankfully, God protected our lives. You see, there are false shepherds; there are hired hands; there are people to whom you'll be tempted to contract out the care of your soul, who will not do as the Lord will do.

Jesus says: "I am the good shepherd. I lay down My life for the sheep, giving everything for you." Jesus says in John 10:14:

"I am the good Shepherd; I know My sheep and My sheep know Me."

"I know them," Jesus says, and goes on to say in John 10:16, that as this great Shepherd:

"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."

If you have a study Bible, most study Bibles will have a little note next to John 10:16, and it will connect you back to Ezekiel 34, for the phrase "one shepherd, one flock" occurs only there and here in John. We are to link these passages together: false shepherds whom God judges and then promises to Shepherd us Himself, and the Lord Jesus Christ who stands on the stage of history and says, "I am this Shepherd. I am the Shepherd who stands at the gate bringing the sheep in, caring for them, binding their wounds, refreshing those who are tired, healing the sick, bringing back the wanderer, and searching for the perishing."

Jesus Christ comes to us this morning with a staggering offer to be your Shepherd. If you're here this morning and you are shepherdless, then I want to offer you Christ as your Shepherd. If you are here this morning and your life is cluttered up with false shepherds and hired hands, let them go and cling to Christ, the Good Shepherd who gives His all for us. If you are here this morning and Christ is your Shepherd, I want to apply Christ's shepherding in a concrete way. The pattern of shepherding is set by God and exemplified by Christ. I want to challenge you in the spheres of your authority or leadership, as a boss, as a student leader, as a friend. This passage was deeply challenging to me this week as a pastor. The job description of leadership is here. Listen to it again. Notice the people around you that God has put in your care, and



strengthen those who are tired; those who are sick, treat their sickness; those injured, bind up the dislocated limb; those who are wandering, bring back; and those who are absolutely lost, go and search for. This is the job description of a parent, a grandparent, a teacher, a friend, a pastor, to emulate and follow the great example set by Jesus Himself.

The banner for this week is of Christ, the Good Shepherd. Christ the good Shepherd is in the gate, and the sheep are safely gathered. They don't have that panicked look; it's kind of that excited sheep look. The shepherd is here, lying in the gate. There's nothing to fear. The shepherd is here, all fear is

gone. Jesus is this good Shepherd, laying down His life for you and for me. As you embrace Him as your Shepherd and seek to emulate His shepherding in your life, then you will join that great set of testimonies throughout Scripture and even to the present day:

The testimony of Jacob who said, "The God before whom my fathers walked, the God who has been my Shepherd all my life, may He bless you."

The testimony of David that "The Lord is my Shepherd and I will lack nothing."

The testimony of Asaph in Psalm 80, "Oh, Shepherd of Israel, You lead us like a flock, You are enthroned. Shine forth upon us."

The testimony of Isaiah who said, "He will tend His flock like a Shepherd. He will gather the lambs in His arm, He will carry them gently in His bosom, and gently lead those who were with young."

The testimony of Peter who said, "You were straying like sheep, but have returned to the Shepherd of your soul."

The testimony of John in Revelation 7, "The Lamb is in the midst of the throne, and He will be their Shepherd, and He will guide them to springs of living water, and God Himself will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Jesus says: "I am the Good Shepherd. I know My own; My own know Me. I am the good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep." He is the good Shepherd who goes in pursuit of the lost sheep and brings them in.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus Christ, we pause underneath Your shepherding rod. We come to You, those who are tired, weary, sick, injured, wandering, and lost completely. We come to You and ask You to be our Shepherd. Lord, would You shepherd us and be our guide forever? Father, banish the false shepherds from our lives, those who are offering to lead and guide us and yet do not have our interest in view. Set us free from such as these, and Lord, I pray that You would bless us to imitate Your shepherding in the spheres of our influence as parents or grandparents, teachers, leaders, friends, students, classmates, that we would follow Your pattern, Lord, that we would not let one who is lost go unsearched for; that we would not let one who is wandering off stray; that we would not allow one whose bones are broken to be unset; that we would not allow those who need basic care to not receive it; and that we would not allow those who are tired or weary to go unstrengthened. Bless us, great Shepherd of Israel, Shepherd of our souls, we pray. We give You full control, and we ask that You would lead us. We give You praise and thanks.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.