

¹¹For this is what the LORD God says. Here I am. I myself will seek the welfare of my flock and carefully search for them. ¹²As a shepherd searches for his flock when his sheep that were with him have been scattered, so I will search for 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 soil. I will shepherd them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys, and in all the settlements of the land. ¹⁴I will lead them into 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. 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 with justice.

²³Then I will raise up over them one shepherd, and he will tend them. My servant David 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. (EHV)

Theme: Our King is our Shepherd

1. He rules over us.
2. He gave up his life for us.

Many people are infatuated with royalty; kings and queens grab our attention. Girls dream of being princesses and dress up like them. People talk about what they would do if they were a king, even for a day. How many movies and books are made about kings and queens? It always amazes me how many tune into a royal wedding, even though it takes place in the middle of the night in a distant land and the people involved are, for the most part, figure heads, who will never have any real power. Why is it that we like kings, and we want to be kings? Because they rule their countries, they live big lavish palaces, and everyone knows who they are—in other words, they are popular, powerful, and rich.

What about shepherds? Most people don't really care about shepherds; they aren't too many books written about them or movies based on their lives. They were grunts, laborers, who spent their days protecting, feeding, watering, and shearing their sheep. They stayed up through the night, traveled through valleys and up mountains far away from home simply to find good grazing ground for their flock. It was hard grueling work. In many ways, they are the exact opposite of Kings—they aren't rich, powerful, or popular. And yet, it's interesting that from the time of David, kings liked to be referred to as shepherds. But why shepherds?

Because a king sat on his magnificent throne in his lavish palace, far away from the people of his country. As part of the royal family, they had always lived in the palace, all they knew was extravagance; they did not know first-hand what it was like to live in their country and so they couldn't relate to their people. Like when a career politician refers to himself as a "man of the people" kings wanted to be known at times as shepherds. Being a shepherd meant that you were humble, you worked hard, you cared about your people, and understood their way of life. It meant that you didn't consider yourself high and mighty and better than everyone else, whose problems were beneath you.

But let's face it—this was all for show; it was propaganda at its finest. Kings weren't men of the people and they never would be. Except Christ—he is both a king and a shepherd; for he rules over us and he gave up his life for us sheep.

In the first part of Ezekiel 34, the Lord attacks the so-called shepherds of Israel. These weren't just the kings of the people—but their spiritual leaders, which included prophets, priests, kings, and others. Instead of leading God's sheep closer to the Lord and his Word, they were lazy and careless—refusing to feed the sheep and to go searching for those who were lost. And not only that, but they themselves led the sheep astray, allowing and even promoting the worship of false gods, offering sacrifices to idols, and, in general, ignoring the Word of the Lord.

But the sheep weren't innocent either. They wandered away from the truth, first by ignoring the Word of God and then forgetting it all together. They eagerly worshiped false gods and foolishly joined in the wicked practices of the nations around them. They trampled on the good pasture and the clear waters provided for them by the Lord, despising his love for them and the blessings he gave them.

And so, what did the Lord do? He allowed wolves to come into their lives, he allowed countries to overtake and destroy them. First, the northern nation of Israel was destroyed and the people taken away by Assyrians; they never returned to the Promised Land and are lost to history.

By the time our text for today takes place, the nation of Babylon had completely destroyed the southern nation of Judah, including Jerusalem. Ezekiel along with tens of thousands of others were taken into exile, forced to live as foreigners hundreds of miles away from the Promised Land. The people of God were like sheep against a wolf—essentially helpless against their enemies.

We have the tendency at times to look at God as a vengeful God who has a long list of rules and expectations of us, and demands that we obey these laws perfectly, which is impossible for us. And then, because we don't and can't do what he demands he threatens to punish us—not with a slap on the wrist, but with never-ending pain and torment in the dungeon of hell. And because God is a vengeful God, that is why he sent the Jews into exile—and why we have troubles and hardships in our lives.

Or maybe we have trouble and hardships in our lives, not necessarily because God is a vengeful God, but because God simply doesn't care about us or understand us. After all he is God—perfect, almighty, eternal—we aren't. We have sicknesses, diseases, we suffer through pain—both physical and emotional. Loved ones die, we face our own deaths at one point or another, we could go on and on. How could God possibly know us; how could he possibly understand what it's like to be us and to live on this world so corrupted by sin?

And so what do we do? We whine and we complain when things aren't going our way. When our lives, even our entire year, doesn't go as we want them to go, then we accuse God of not loving us, not caring about us, or understanding us—he's just God high up in heaven.

Of course, we know that the Lord isn't a vengeful God, but a loving God, a God of grace and mercy. He isn't some sort of aloof King, a hard-to-reach God who doesn't want to be bothered with our little insignificant problems, but a God who cares about us, urges us to pray to him, and to cast all our anxieties on him. Plus he knows, he knows all things, as the omniscient Lord, from whom nothing is hidden, he knows everything, and he understands what it's like being us and what it's like living in this sinful world as one of his children.

And his knowledge isn't just some sort of head knowledge—you know that the sort of knowledge you can gain about reading a book on World War II, but never fully understanding it because you've never fought in a battle before. No, his knowledge is a first-hand knowledge. And his first-hand knowledge shows us how much our Almighty God loves and cares about us.

He knows because—Jesus! He is the Almighty, eternal God who created this world with just his word; and he became one of us. He gave up his eternal glory and the full use of this divine power and knowledge, and lived in a womb for nine months before he was born of a virgin. And he was like us in every way. He was born as a helpless baby, he had to learn how to walk and talk. He got hungry, tired, and thirsty. He wept at the death of his friend Lazarus, he was mocked and ridiculed. He was let down by those closest to him, betrayed by one of his followers, and rejected by his own people. He knew sorrow and was acquainted with grief. Jesus was like us in everyway—except he was without sin. He wasn't born with a sinful nature like the rest of us, he always obeyed God's will. And so Jesus completely understands who we are and what it is like living in this world. And in fact, he understands us better than we understand ourselves because he knows what's in each and everyone of our hearts and is able to comprehend all of us and everything in view of the history of all the world.

And so Jesus is both God and man. And he is both a king and a shepherd. He is a King, the ruler over his entire creation who will come on the last day to judge the living and the dead. But he is also a shepherd, a man of the people, lowly and humble, who gave up his life for his sheep. And by his sacrifice on the cross, he made us to be like him so that we would dwell in his house forever!

And he is also the shepherd Ezekiel prophesied about. In verses 23 and 24 we read, **I will raise up over them one shepherd, and he will tend them. My servant David will tend them, and he will be their shepherd. I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David will be the prince among them.** Ezekiel was given this prophecy about 400 years or so after the time of David. This prophecy obviously wasn't about great King David coming back from the dead to rule over God's people. No, this prophecy was about great King David's greater Son, the Son of God and Son of Man, Jesus who was born of David's descendent, Mary. Here God is saying that Jesus will be a shepherd for his people—and of course, we know all the New Testament Passages, like John 10, that fulfill this prophecy, **I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.**

And so we look at what this shepherd did for his people. Again, they were taken away into exile—they had to suffer the consequences of their sins and they were ripped from their homes and forced to live as foreigners in a land not their own—scattered throughout the Babylonian, and later Persian, kingdoms. But God promises his people a shepherd who will lead them back to their own land, so the Promised Land of Canaan, **As a shepherd searches for his flock when his sheep that were with him have been scattered, so I will search for my flock and rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own soil. I will shepherd them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys, and in all the settlements of the land.**

God had not forgotten his people; he wasn't a vengeful God full of hate, but a loving and caring God who watched over his people, protected them, cared for them, and led them back home to the lush land of Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey, promised to them and their descendants.

In the same way our Shepherd-King watches over us. He does not forget us or make us fend for ourselves in this sin-filled world. But he cares for us, provides for us, and protects us from all harm and danger—even from the attacks of the devil, a wolf in sheep's clothing. He leads us to quiet waters and green pastures of his gospel, he restores our souls by living a perfect life for us, laying down that life by going to the cross, and by his resurrection from the dead. He leads us to live in his house forever through faith in him!

Like the Israelites in exile, we deserve whatever comes to us because of our sin; we ought to suffer forever. But in love God sent his people a shepherd who led them back home. And in

love God sent his one and only Son to take us to his heavenly home when he comes on the Last Day.

What picture do you like more of Christ—a mighty King, or a loving shepherd? He's both. He isn't an aloof King who doesn't know or care about us; nor is he a powerless shepherd. But he is our King who watches over us, protects us, and will come again; and he is our loving shepherd who cares and provides for us. Our Savior is both God and man, King and Shepherd, which means that we his sheep will dwell in his kingdom forever! Amen.