Jesus in the Prophets – Ezekiel

1. Introduction

a. Last time we considered the promise of a New Covenant in Jeremiah and saw that this promise was also given through Moses and Ezekiel.

Jer.31:33 *[33] But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord:* ***I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts****. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

Deut.30:6 *And the Lord your God will* ***circumcise your heart*** *and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.*

Ezek.36:26-27 *And I will give you a* ***new heart****, and a* ***new spirit*** *I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. [27] And I will put my Spirit within you, and* ***cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules****.*

b. This was a promise that God would actually provide a way for the heart of man to be changed by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit enabling us to walk according to his ways and live in relationship with him. This glorious promise is the source of all hope and was only possible through the blood of Christ which makes us righteous before God.

c. Ezekiel, like Jeremiah, prophesised to the Jewish people at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile into Babylon. Ezekiel was a young priest in training when he was taken off into exile during the first Babylonian attack. Five years into exile, we find him sitting on the bank of an irrigation canal near the Israelite refugee camp outside of Babylon.

d. It's here on his 30th birthday, the year he would have been installed as a priest, that he receives his prophetic commission from God. It isn't the kind of romanticized missionary calling we tend to envision. Not only will he not get to carry out his priestly duties in the temple (something he would have waited his whole life for), but he will have to act as a mouthpiece of Yahweh, warning Israel of impending doom. He, like Jeremiah, is to preach judgment against the Israelite exiles, predicting the fall of Jerusalem and their beloved temple.

e. As with Isaiah and Jeremiah, he also brings a message of hope which is revealed in Jesus. Many of those promises are repeated in the other prophets i.e. a new covenant, a righteous King of the house of David, the final battle and an eternal Kingdom of peace. However, there is a passage in Ezekiel which reveals another characteristic of Jesus which he himself was very likely referring to in John 10.

2. The Good Shepherd

a. In John 10 Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd. Jesus' claim to this title is not casual by any means. In fact, Jesus' claim to be the Good Shepherd has a meaning that is both deep and wide.

John 10:11-18 *I am the good shepherd.* ***The good shepherd*** *lays down his life for the sheep. [12] He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. [13] He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. [14]* ***I am the good***

***shepherd**. I know my own and my own know me, [15] just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. [16] And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. [17] For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may 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 I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."*

b. Although the title, Good Shepherd, is only found in the New Testament, Jesus was intentionally reaching into the Old Testament with his words. When Jesus claimed to be the good shepherd, he was speaking to the Pharisees who claimed to know the scriptures. They would be familiar with the prophecy in Ezekiel 34 about shepherds and sheep.

c. This prophecy is regarding shepherds that were overseers for the people of God, and another shepherd that was to come later. The shepherd to come later was the Messiah that Israel was waiting for. When Jesus declares "I am the good shepherd" he was declaring he was the Messiah promised in Ezekiel.

***Ezek.34:1-2, 7-10** The word of the LORD came to me: [2] "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 feed the sheep? .... "Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: [8] As I live, declares the Lord God, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, [9] therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: [10] Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.*

d. By calling himself the good shepherd, Jesus was serving this prophecy to the Pharisees. He was identifying them as those who were seeking their own good rather than that of the people for whom they had been given care. He was warning them that their God was against them and that he was going to take back his sheep into his own care.

e. The prophecy in Ezekiel 34 not only removed the wicked overseers but established a new rule.

Ezek.34:11-16** "For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, **I myself** will search for my sheep and will seek them out. [12] As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will **I seek** out my sheep, and **I will rescue** them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. [13] And **I will bring them out** from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And **I will feed them** on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. [14] **I will feed them** with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. [15] **I myself** will be the shepherd of my sheep, and **I myself** will make them lie down, declares the Lord God. [16] **I will seek the

***lost**, and **I will bring back** the strayed, and **I will bind up** the injured, and **I will strengthen** the weak, and the fat and the strong **I will destroy**. **I will feed them** in justice.*

f. By calling himself the good shepherd, Jesus was establishing himself as the Saviour and new leader of Israel. The one promised in Ezekiel and what a glorious promise. The statement "I, I Myself": is emphatical in the Hebrew and makes it abundantly clear that this shepherd would be Yahweh himself. When Jesus declared himself as this shepherd it was also a statement of his divine nature, demonstrating that he is God.

g. This picture of the shepherd searching out his sheep is a remarkable foreshadowing of the parable of the lost sheep which Jesus clearly based on this passage. As we saw when we looked at the parables many of those stories were intended to point the people back to the promises they had already received.

h. Spurgeon in considering this passage wrote:

*"Who is this that says, 'I will'? When a man says, 'I will,' it is often braggart impudence; but when God says, 'I will' and 'you shall,' such words are expressive alike of **sovereign determination** and **irresistible power."***

i. God will not let his people be led by shepherds who do not care for their flock and seek their own good. He will intervene. God promised to come down among His own **scattered sheep** to seek them and care for them. In the greatest sense, this was wonderfully fulfilled in the work of Jesus Christ.

3. The Shepherd of Israel

a. However, first and foremost this was a promise to the people of Israel. Ezekiel 34 begins with God's accusations against the shepherds of Israel who served themselves at the expense of the sheep. Ezekiel chooses this "shepherd/sheep" metaphor to explain the relationship between Israel's kings and God's people.

b. Historically, the monarchy in every period up to the exile had been corrupt and idolatrous (with a few exceptions like Hezekiah and Josiah). They misused their divinely delegated power to get rich and comfortable while neglecting and abusing those whom God cared about most—the orphan, the widow, the hurting, and oppressed. Hence his condemnation in verse 4

***Ezek.34:4** 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, and with force and harshness you have ruled them.*

c. Therefore, Yahweh was against them and intended to remove these shepherd-like wolves to restore his divine kingship and care for his people

***Ezek.34:10** Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.*

d. In verses 11-16 Ezekiel paints beautiful imagery of Yahweh reinstating himself as Israel's shepherd-king. Israel's kings had failed, but Yahweh would not. He promises to undo all the damage inflicted upon Israel by bringing them back from the

uttermost parts of the earth into a land filled with plenty. The repetitive language in verse 16 emphasizes the divine action that would accompany full restoration:

*"**I will** seek the lost, and **I will** bring back the strayed, and **I will** bind up the injured, and **I will** strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong **I will** destroy**. I will** feed them in justice."*

e. The Lord will one day "search for…seek out" and gather the people of Israel from all the places He has scattered them and bring them back to the Promised Land, where He will care for them and make them prosper. He will do for them what their failed shepherds refused to do.

f. Although the people did return to their land after 70 years very little changed and therefore it is clear that this prophesy was not fulfilled at the return from exile. If we consider Jesus' statement to the Pharisees in John 10 it is clear that this prophecy began to be fulfilled with the coming of Jesus as the shepherd who dwelt among his people. Certainly during his ministry, he *sought the lost, bound up the injured and strengthened the weak*.

g. However, there is also a clear future promise in verses 12&13.

… and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. [13] And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land

h. God will eventually take over the nation of Israel when Jesus comes to rule from Jerusalem. He will bring the Israelites back to their homeland and he will take care of them and make them prosper. He will revive His people and destroy their enemies. Ezekiel's message was a message of hope for the Israelites, and it is still a message of hope today. God is still following this plan and he will remain faithful to His promises to restore them.

4. Our Great Shepherd

a. Ezekiel 34 declared God's love for and future plans for the Jewish people. But to all of us, God has spoken of His love and care for each of us individually. Whatever our need, sorrow during these days, trouble tomorrow, God cares for us like a shepherd, and in His justice will execute judgment. Every one of us will have to face the living God.

b. When Jesus came amongst us he declared the coming of the Kingdom of God and the beginning of his rule as King. This King is our Good Shepherd who, according to Ezekiel 34, came not only to rescue the weak, bind up the broken-hearted, vindicate the oppressed, and feed his flock with his very own body but also with divine authority to judge Israel's rulers for their neglect of the flock. No wonder they claimed he was demon possessed and wanted to kill him!

c. The apostle Peter affirmed the fulfilment of the divine human rule in Jesus during one of the most important sermons ever preached on the day of Pentecost. He clearly identifies Jesus as the promised shepherd-king from the house of David.

***Acts 2:36** Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."*

d. He came to gather his flock and rule over them in righteousness, truth, and justice. The New Testament portrait of Jesus is saturated with imagery of Ezekiel's shepherd-king. King Jesus has finally come to reign over his people.

e. The imagery of sheep and shepherds helps us to enter into the heart of God for his people and the determination and compassion of Jesus to be our shepherd. We are sheep, we were created with the need for a shepherd. No matter how mature we become in the faith we will never outgrow our sheep-like need of a Shepherd.

f. Peter describes our new birth like this:

1 Peter 2:24-25 *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.* ***25*** *For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

g. We were straying like sheep in a world of unbelief, but in the new birth, we awaken and return to the Shepherd of our souls. Our soul was made to have a Shepherd. Salvation means returning to the Shepherd of our soul. That's what it means to be a Christian: We are sheep, and we have a faithful Shepherd of our souls.

h. Then one day—perhaps soon—Jesus Christ will come a second time. And Peter describes it like this:

1 Peter 5:4 *And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory*

i. When Jesus comes, he will come as a Shepherd. To be sure, he will be more than a Shepherd when he comes. He will be the King of kings (Revelation 17:14; 19:16); he will be a warrior (Revelation 19:11); he will be a servant (Luke 12:37); he will be a Bridegroom (Matthew 25:5); he will be a friend (John 15:13); he will be God over all blessed forever (Romans 9:5). But he will always be a Shepherd.

j. And in the age to come Revelation 7:16-17 says that Jesus will still be our Shepherd.

Rev. 7:16-17 *They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.* ***17*** *For the Lamb in the midst of the throne* ***will be their shepherd****, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."*

k. This is the way it was meant to be. We will always be sheep. We will always need a Shepherd. And Jesus will always be our Great Shepherd. No matter what we endure in this life we have a good shepherd who will seek us out, feed us and bring justice for us.