

St. Paul: On The Same page for 11.23.14 Pentecost Last a

Day One: Ezekiel 34:11-16

"For thus says the Lord

GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. ¹²As 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.

God's Church needs better leadership. Have you ever said that? I have, and I'm a leader in the church!

Ezekiel is writing late in the Old Testament, long after God sent Moses to lead his people out of slavery, after God sent the judges to rescue them, after he sent the prophets to call them to repentance, even after he has destroyed the northern 10 tribes and sent the rest into exile in Babylon. God has sent a *lot* of messengers.

Now, God says that he himself will go in search of his sheep. Not a king. Not a prophet. Not a missionary. All of these were insufficient. God

says that the shepherds he sent to care for his sheep were unfaithful.

"Because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, therefore you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord..." (vs.8) God says that he, himself, would come for the sheep and he would place "David" over them (vs.23) as their only shepherd.

This is already 400 years after King David, but Jesus, David's descendant, would introduce himself as the Good Shepherd. "I, I myself will search..." God said. And this is what he did.

The Church needs new leadership. It does not need a great pastor or professor. It needs the Good Shepherd. He himself has come to seek out his sheep, to find them and rescue them from all the places where they have been scattered.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you came personally for me. Don't let me be impersonal, distant and cold, toward you. Warm my heart, breathe life into my worship, fill me with love for you, my Shepherd. Amen.*

Day Two: Ezekiel 34:20-24

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.*

²⁰ *"Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them: Behold, I, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. ²¹Because you push with side and shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad, ²²I will rescue my flock...*

Our Old Testament reading continues. Not only will God himself come to seek his lost sheep, but he will rescue them from danger. And it is not just wolves and storms that threaten the flock.

God says that it is also sheep that hurt his beloved sheep. It is sheep against sheep!

In nature shows on television it is often pointed out that the weak members of the flock or herd get less food. They may even be pushed out and left behind to become food for predators.

The weakest members of society were being pushed out among God's people. God blessed their nation with good

crops and herds, with all that they needed to live and prosper, but those who were strong did not share their gifts as God commanded them.

Could that be true among us also? Do we each seek only our own good – and trust that the government will help those who are weaker than we are?

Governments can give food or money or clothing to people in need. But they cannot give love. And this is why God commanded us to share his gifts ourselves, from one sheep to another, acknowledging that we owe our blessings to the Giver of all good things.

We are more than animals. And God loves the weak and the strong alike, and desires us to care for, nurture, and provide for those who are weaker than ourselves. But if we won't (as we often do not)... he will. He will come and show love to his flock. The ultimate picture of God's promise is in Jesus.

Prayer: *Father, forgive me for my calloused heart. I have grown cold to the cries of the needy. Warm my heart, and let me be the messenger of your mercy. Amen.*

Day Three: 1 Cor. 15:20-28

²⁰*But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.* ²¹*For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.* ²²*For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.*

We call it “poetic justice” when a person gets exactly what is coming to him. We say, “What goes around, comes around.” And we love the circular symmetry. We want everyone to get what they deserve.

Is that really such a good thing? We may want those who are cruel to suffer the effects of their cruelty, but are we willing to suffer the consequences of our self-centeredness, our greed, our withholding of compassion, our ignoring of the needy?

Maybe that makes this “poetic injustice.” Instead of getting what we deserve, the consequence of our sin is placed on someone else.

The first Adam sinned and we all suffer because of the brokenness that came from sin. But the second Adam, Jesus, took our punishment on himself.

When your life seems messed up, remember this. God has arranged your life just right, so that all your sins have fallen on the only one who could bear them. You can look back over the entire history of your life and review the long story of your self-absorption. Day after day, and year after year, you have served yourself, pitied yourself, desired more for yourself, and blessed others more as an after-thought, loving only those who have loved you.

But in response to all of this there has always been One who has loved you first – who has served you first – who has given to you first – who has sacrificed all for you. And through that One you have what you surely could never provide for yourself. You have resurrection from death – rescue from the consequences of sin – and restoration to oneness with him.

Life isn’t fair. If it were, we’d be in trouble. Instead, Jesus has paid all the price for you.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you brought life. Fill me with the joy and courage that comes from knowing you. Amen.*

Day Four: Matthew 25:31-46

...³⁴Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'³⁵For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' ...⁴⁰And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

These verses seem to be saying that God will let us into heaven if we have been good. Is Jesus teaching that we will be saved by works we do? No. God's word is very plain that we cannot earn or deserve eternal life, but we are saved only as a gift from God.

However, as James reminds us in his letter, our works, all of the things that we do, are the way that our faith becomes visible.

If someone is looking at you now, how can they tell that you are alive? When we were children we sometimes tried to "play dead." We lay on the ground and tried to breathe very shallowly, and

not to move a muscle. But it was really hard! If you are alive, then pretty soon you will have to move. You simply can't help it. Movement and breath come along with life!

And if you have faith? How can people see the condition of your spirit? How can they tell if your spirit is alive because God has awakened you to faith in Jesus?

Those who are spiritually alive may not all do great works of love, but their faith in Jesus means that they cannot forever lie still. And what will the fruit of their faith look like?

Just as Jesus in his great power served us in our weakness, so those who live in him will see the weak and recognize them as people whom Jesus loves. And they will serve. Like Jesus, they will lower themselves in order to lift others up.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I have been sleeping. While people have suffered around me, I have been idle. Send me your Spirit so that I may radiate life and share your blessing with the weak, the sick, the poor, the imprisoned. Teach me to be like you. Amen.*