



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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April 25, 2010
4th Sunday of Easter
[Ezekiel 34:25-31](#)
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Ezekiel 34:25-31](#)
Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 23](#)
Second Lesson: [Revelation 7:9-17](#)
Gospel Lesson: [John 10:22-30](#)

See What it Means to Have God as Shepherd

See what is absent
See what is present

When is the last time you were sleeping in the desert or in the forest and were worried about wild beasts devouring you? Was it last night? The night before? It probably hasn't happened to you very often. When have you been worried about the nations trampling through and overtaking you and enslaving you and overpowering you? Probably not that often either.

If you think about the words I just read to you and who they were intended for, you can see the picture that the Holy Spirit is painting for the people of Ezekiel's day. I think as you consider what it meant for them to see God as their Good Shepherd who was going to take care of them, you can also begin to apply it to us and see what a beautiful picture this paints for you and me even though these aren't our immediate fears. We still live with fears.

We live with the fear of things that threaten our income, right? Isn't that what he was talking about when he was talking about the land producing its crops and no more famine? We live in fear of the heartache that comes at losing loved ones. Isn't that what he was talking about when he was talking about the nations tramping through and destroying people?

The picture fits their setting, but the promises fit us as well. These promises focus upon what it means to have God as our Good Shepherd. It tells us, as he paints this picture, we can look into the picture and see what's not there. Then we also see what is there. We see this incredible great promise that our God has for us.

In the chapter leading up to what I just read to you, God had started out speaking through Ezekiel first of all to give a verbal spanking to the people that were supposed to be the shepherds of his flock, the shepherds of the house of Israel, the kings, the priests, the teachers of the Law; how they had failed them and how they were next to useless is about what he says. They were leading the people away from his promises and to their own teaching and to their own words and doing things for their own good to enrich themselves instead of enriching the people spiritually. So he says, "You know what? Enough is enough. I've had enough of you guys. I'm going to come and I'm going to send someone to be my shepherd. You know what I'm going to do? I'm going to send David. David will be the shepherd of my people. David himself will come and

be your shepherd.” That probably was a surprise to the people that Ezekiel was writing to since David had died 400 years earlier.

So he must have been talking about the son of David, right? The descendant of David that was promised to be the Messiah. The Messiah would come and he says, “When I send the Messiah, I, as God, will be the Shepherd of my people. I’m not going to rely on you guys anymore because you aren’t dependable. I, myself, will shepherd them in my peace. I will establish peace between me and them and I will take care of them like a shepherd takes care of sheep.” It’s a beautiful picture that we all know from Scripture. We just sang it in Psalm 23 this morning. We sang it in a hymn. It’s a beautiful picture, and that is what God is painting here. “I’m going to take care of my people in such a way that when I establish this covenant of peace, the things that threaten them will be gone.” He lists wars. He lists famines. He lists the threat of wild beasts. He lists all these different threats to their safety. He is saying they will live in safety.

Think for a moment...do you think any of these things ever happened even after God said this through Ezekiel? The nations still came through. Famines still came. Crops still failed. So that must mean that God doesn’t keep his promises, right?

Certainly they would have been tempted to think so when they read these words and then looked around in their lives. Certainly we are tempted to think so when we look around in our lives and we see the heartache that comes into our lives because of the sin in the world that we live in, right? So does God keep his promises or not? That’s one of Satan’s greatest temptations, isn’t it?

The picture that God paints for us is not really a picture of this world, is it? Where there is nothing but safety and security and God lives among his people in his full glory...that’s not a picture of this world. That’s a picture of what we read in our Second Lesson, what we read from Revelation, isn’t it? The people gathered around the throne. The lamb there at the center is their Shepherd. Where there is no more threat. Where there is no more heartache. Where there are no more reasons to cry because God has wiped every tear away from our eyes.

This is the promise God has made to us...he is our Good Shepherd and he has established peace for us that is not just in this world but that is eternal. He tells us our sins are forgiven and we are united to him. He promises he won’t let things come into our lives that are more than we can handle in this world. But he never says they won’t come. In fact, he’s pretty clear in Scripture that there is going to be difficulty coming. But he tells us that he is our Good Shepherd that will sustain us through these things. He paints this picture of all these things that aren’t there. The heartache, the difficulty, the threats, the worries, the anxiety, the pit in the bottom of your stomach as you face whatever it is that is threatening you this day...he says in heaven that won’t be there. He says, “As the sheep of my flock, keep your eyes set on heaven. Live as aliens and strangers here knowing that this is what awaits you.” This is what we looked at in Hebrews this morning about persevering, keeping your eyes on the goal. This is what God says waits for us. This is grand and this is glorious. This is God’s promise to us in Christ.

Our challenge is, when we can't see it in the here and now, to continue to focus on it as God continues to shepherd us until he takes us to heaven. That's our challenge. As sinful human beings, we want to tell God, "No, you really should give us heaven on earth. You should really make it so that we don't have any of these difficulties or these problems. You should do all these things that you promised you were going to do for us right here and right now."

Think about it...if God kept everything from harming us in the here and now, what would happen to us? One of the first things I'm sure we would be tempted to do is throw our shoulder out of its socket patting ourselves on our back for what a good job we are doing at making sure our life is going well, right? When things go well, we tend to credit ourselves, don't we? If there aren't these things that trouble us or worry us in the here and now, we are going to quickly set our sights only on the here and now and say, "This is a grand and glorious world. How wonderful this is." And pretty soon God drifts off some place and we forget that he is the giver of all good blessings and we focus only on what we can see.

So God allows these difficulties into our lives in the here and now so that he can shepherd us and strengthen us and purify our faith and refine our faith and lead us closer to him. He uses these things to keep our eyes focused on the eternal prize because you and I are just not that bright. We are no different than that animal that has that carrot held on a stick out in front of him that keeps his eyes focused on that and goes one step after another and never quite gets to it. If this world didn't have things that drive us into our Father's arms for help and strength and protection, we would just keep plodding along and wouldn't find our way into those arms because we are sinners.

Embrace the things that discipline us as evidence that our good Heavenly Father will shepherd us. He will keep his promises. We don't really have to doubt that, do we? All we have to do is go back to the cross and the empty tomb. If God loved us enough to do that, he loves us enough to help us through the difficulty we now face. If he loved us enough to be perfect in our place and then die with all of our sins piled on his shoulders, now he is going to desert us because we have some difficulty? That's foolishness. But that's what Satan would have you believe.

Focus on what you know to be absolutely true. God has a glorious home waiting for you in heaven. God will use the difficulties of this lifetime to bring you closer to him. And God will assure you that he loves you, through his Word, through the water and the Word in our Baptism, and through the wine and the wafer and the Word that is there in the Lord's Supper. He says to us, "Use every one of your senses to be absolutely convinced that I am the Good Shepherd that loves you perfectly and will help you through all the garbage you endure in this lifetime until you get to that place that is perfection, which is heaven." It's ours. We have it now...we just have it imperfectly.

So keep your eyes on the prize and walk close, listening to your Shepherd's voice.