Ezekiel 34:11-24
Trinity 25, November 22, 2026
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`For thus says the Lord GOD: "Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. [12] "As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day. [13] "And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land; I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country. [14] "I will feed them in good pasture, and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. [15] "I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down," says the Lord GOD. [16] "I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment." [17] `And as for you, O My flock, thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I shall judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats. [18] "Is it too little for you to have eaten up the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the residue of your pasture-- and to have drunk of the clear waters, that you must foul the residue with your feet? [19] "And as for My flock, they eat what you have trampled with your feet, and they drink what you have fouled with your feet." [20] `Therefore thus says the Lord GOD to them: "Behold, I Myself will judge between the fat and the lean sheep. [21] "Because you have pushed with side and shoulder, butted all the weak ones with your horns, and scattered them abroad, [22] "therefore I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. [23] "I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them-- My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. [24] "And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken.

It's rarely a surprise to us when scandals are uncovered and dominate the news cycle. We've grown accustomed to people in power abusing their positions of authority. Whether it be politicians, or hedge fund managers, or college coaches—when we find out that certain powerful individuals were using their power for their own pleasure and the abuse of others, it's very *sad* but it's not at all shocking. Because all mankind is sinful; all mankind is corrupt! And power just seems to exacerbate that corruption, giving more avenues for our sinful abuse. This truth goes hand-in-hand with the old adage, "Might makes right." The person who determines right and wrong, the person whose will is done, that's usually the person who has the most power, the most might.

God warned the children of Israel about these truths when they began asking Him to give them a king like the rest of the nations of the world had. God *warned* them that a king would send their sons to war, he'd take their daughters as his servants, he'd take a tenth of their flocks, a tenth of their harvest—they wouldn't be his *people* as much as they'd be his slaves! And yet, the people responded, ***"There shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations…"*** (1 Samuel 8:19-20)

God gave them a king as they requested, and for the next 500 years, Israel was *ruled* by kings, and you probably already know how that turned out for them. And if you can't remember what those kings were like, Ezekiel reminds us in the verses leading up to our sermon text: ***"Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. 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. So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts." (Ezekiel 34:3-5) The Kings of Israel were, in general, evil kings, only interested in serving themselves, and sadly, even the priests and spiritual leaders acted the same. So many of those who had been appointed to positions of power had *abused* it and had adopted the mindset of "*my* might makes right."

In that last verse which I just read, it said that the sheep had been scattered and become food for the wild beasts. And that's picturing the situation the Israelites found themselves in. The people that Ezekiel is preaching to here, in our text, were no longer in their own land, no longer had their own king, even. By this time, they were living in captivity under the rule of Babylon. It's in this context that Ezekiel speaks, preaching to a people who had been abused by their leaders, preaching to a people who *were* now being held prisoner—and he's also preaching to you and me. And his message is simple. In the words of our theme: **Rejoice! For *Christ's* "Might Makes Right"**

Ezekiel uses vivid sheep imagery in our text, but it's not the quaint, peaceful image of sheep grazing in a field. Rather, Ezekiel describes sheep who take the *good* water and eat the *good* grass and then trample in it afterwards before any other sheep can enjoy them; or rams headbutting others with their horns so they can plow through the crowd. He paints a picture of oppression, of people with the idea of "might makes right" ruling over the weak.

And we are surrounded by just that in our sinful world. Just as a husband mistreats his wife, or a wife ridicules her husband, or a bully torments his classmates, or a powerful nation imposes its will on smaller nations—the whole world, which *is* oppressed and under the imprisonment of the devil, *also* oppresses everyone it can at any opportunity.

And as *Christians* living in this sinful world, we might feel that oppression as well, especially in a country that seeks to silence the teachings of God's Word more and more each day. But *before* we pull out our victim cards and start feeling sorry for ourselves, thinking, "*THOSE* people are the oppressors! And we're the ones being trampled and scattered. We're the ones getting the leftovers!"—consider who the Lord addresses in verse 17: ***"As for YOU my flock…"*** All of those illustrations of sheep oppression which follow include you. We are included in the oppressors. Us! Because we have eaten up the good pasture, because *we* have pushed through with the shoulder.

It may be in smaller ways, but you and I are both guilty of oppressing one another. Maybe it's simply in rushing to get somewhere ahead of someone else, so that you're there first, or so that you get the best choice. Or maybe it's simply not stopping to think about what's best for someone else, not going to the greatest lengths you can to make sure you're doing what's in the greatest spiritual and physical interests of those around you, and instead thinking of yourself first. Or maybe it's in arguing your own opinions and refusing to listen to anyone else until others are forced to agree, because you won't have it any other way and everyone *has* to agree that <u>you</u> are correct. These and many other examples that we could come up with show that we are like those fat sheep and rams, trampling the good water, pushing one another around. We are shoving our way through the crowd, crying out, "*My* might makes right." *Meanwhile*, God says to us, ***"I will destroy the fat and the strong sheep."***

So, Ezekiel paints this picture of sheep and shepherds, but there's nothing pleasant about it. The

shepherds are killing and eating the sheep, the sheep are not just jostling but shoving one another and stomping in each other's water. And that's where this imagery *might* have ended, sad and hopeless, and we, lumped in with the rest, resigned to the slaughter.

But when the situation seems most hopeless, out comes this ray of hope. God speaks through Ezekiel to reassure us that He's coming not *only* to judge and destroy, but *also* to insert Himself into this picture. If you skim through our text, there's about 20 times where God shows how *He Himself* is going to do something about all this oppression. Just skimming through the text, ***"I myself will search for my sheep. . . I will seek out my sheep. . . I will rescue them. . . I will bring them out. . . I will feed them. . . I myself will be the shepherd. . . I myself will make them lie down. . . I will bring back the strayed"***—it goes on and on. In a few places, He literally says in Hebrew, *"Behold ME!"* Basically, *"Watch what I'M going to do!"*

And we are *able* to watch. We can see how He accomplishes all these promises in the person of Jesus Christ. Notice what's going on here: this is God talking; Jehovah God is telling us that He would come down and be our Shepherd, that He Himself would be the one to get His hands dirty. But then in v. 23-24, God says that He would appoint His servant *David* to be this shepherd. And it almost sounds like He's changed His mind and though better of doing the dirty work Himself, but that's not it. This isn't *King* David that God's referring to here. In fact, by the time this prophecy is given to Ezekiel, King David has already been dead for about 500 years. No, this servant *"David," the* Shepherd of God's people, would be *Jesus*—David's Son yet David's Lord, the one who was born in the city of David because He was of David's family.

So, God's not suddenly backing out of the picture. Instead, He's saying, *"If you want something done right, you gotta do it yourself. I will come down, and I myself will stand in the midst of my sheep, and I will be their shepherd."* He's talking about Jesus, the Son of God, true God Himself. This Shepherd is Jesus—at whose death the earth shook, the sun darkened, the temple veil tore in two. He came with the *full* power of God to show you how *God's* might can truly make everything right.

Looking at that first chunk of our text again, God says over and over what *He* was going to do, and not once does it say what the *sheep* are expected to do. He doesn't say, *"I will be their shepherd, I will find them, I will feed them, and they <u>better be good little sheep and not wander away anymore!"</u>* Even when the sheep wander, He says even then that He will *still* seek the lost and bring back the strays. Jesus' point is that He would do *everything* to bring us, His flock, to the perfect pastures of heaven. If He had left any part up to us, if there was even one tiny requirement left on our end that *we* had to fulfill in order to earn heaven, then we'd be the fat sheep headbutting our way through the crowd in a desperate charge for hell.

So, Jesus flexed His power. He used *His* might to make right. In one moment, on the cross, He righted all of our wrongs, taking them *totally* away. In one swift stroke, He crushed death and the devil, so that we would no longer be held in captivity to them. And one by one, He sought out and found you and me, the lost and straying sheep, to bring us back to His flock, where he would feed us with His body and blood, where He would cause us to drink deeply of His Word and live.

He did *not* look down on you the sinner, He did *not* see the sinful, selfish actions of His flock and just turn His nose up at us. Instead, He had pity on you. He said, *"Behold me! Watch this!"* And then He

stretched out His arms and breathed His last. And He rejoiced that He was able to do this. And He refused to stop until every single sin was paid for, until every enemy was defeated. And He *still* refuses to stop until He has found every single lost and straying sheep, so that He can bring them too into His fold, that we all might be the sheep of *His* pasture.

So, the world uses this idea of "might makes right" as an excuse to sin. So many in power today use that power to abuse others in the pursuit of their own gain. But Christ Jesus came with all power and might, and He did not use any of it for *His* own gain, but only to gain *heaven for you*. From His position of total power and strength, He *allowed* Himself to be abused and oppressed, so that through His might He could really make right.

Through His might, He forgave you, He made everything alright between you and God. There's nothing left for you to do, because in *this* flock, our Good Shepherd has already done it all. That means that when God comes again and judges between sheep and sheep, there's no question about where you will end up. Afterall, God declares, ***"I will save my flock. . . I, the Lord, have spoken!"*** Thanks be to God, in Jesus' saving name. Amen.

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7) Amen.