

Ezekiel 34:11-12, 23 **“This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. ¹² As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. ²³ I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd.”**

Dear Followers of our Loving and Powerful Shepherd-King,

A shipwreck survivor washed up on an uninhabited island. He prayed that God would rescue him, but no one came. He did manage to build a small shelter of driftwood to protect himself from the elements. But then the wind blew sparks from his campfire toward the hut and it went up in flames. Filled with frustration, he cried out, “Lord, how could you do this to me?”

Later that evening he was startled to see a ship coming straight toward him. As rescuers came ashore, he asked them, “How did you know I was here?” Can you guess what their answer was? *“We saw your smoke signal.”*

So the burned shelter brought about his rescue. How true that often we, too, see trials only as burdens when in reality God uses them for our benefit. We are reminded of this Bible passage written by God through Paul, who went through no small amount of suffering himself: ***“In all things God works for the good of those who love him”*** (Rom 8:28).

Ezekiel speaks about these truths on Christ the King weekend by reminding us that **God’s Sheep Safely Graze**. (1) ***Because he is our Shepherd-King***, (2) ***Because he wants us safely home***.

1

Prophet Ezekiel was a contemporary of Daniel. Both had been part of the Israelite exile in Babylon (606-536 B.C.). One of the reasons the Babylonian Captivity ultimately happened was because of the many irresponsible Jewish spiritual leaders who had been misleading Israel with false teachings and had lived lives filled with greed and injustice.

But God promised that the day would come when a wonderful Shepherd-King would rescue them and bring them home. He says, ***“I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them...and be their shepherd.”*** Now, at the time of Ezekiel, King David had been dead for 400 years. Therefore, obviously this is not talking about the original King David, but rather the arrival of someone else! This is a prophecy about David’s *descendant* who would be like David -- both a shepherd and a king: the Lord Jesus Christ.

Did you notice all the loving things the Shepherd-King said he would do for his sheep? ***“I will search for them...look after them...rescue them...gather them...pasture them...bring back the strays ...bind up the injured,*** etc.” In a world where church leaders are big on spouting and touting their own opinions and platitudes rather than simply and plainly sharing God’s truthful Word, the proper spiritual care of God’s flock falls far short! Jesus told his Church to ***“teach everything he commanded us,”*** (Mt. 28), not things that happen to be popular and trendy at the moment in our society and culture.

I read about an Israeli tour guide speaking about some of the local customs to a group of tourists. He said, “Here in the Middle East the shepherds walk in front of the sheep and lead the way. In many other places shepherds walk behind the sheep and drive them with sticks.” When the bus arrived at its destination, one of the first things the tourists saw was a man walking behind and driving several sheep down a lane. One tourist said to the guide with surprise, “I thought you said that in this land shepherds lead the sheep, not drive them.” The guide replied, “That man is not the shepherd. That’s the butcher!”

In Ezekiel's day spiritual leaders were butchers driving God's sheep to their destruction. But this new, promised Shepherd-King was different! Jesus leads the flock with his gentle, loving voice to safe, green pastures. He rules us as King with kindness and deep concern for what is best for us, not himself. That unselfish love is seen in its greatest way by what he was willing to do to rescue us: give his life on an awful cross and suffer hell as complete payment for our sins so we could live with him forever.

2

Getting us home safely is what our Shepherd-King is all about. Like sheep, we need direction. Like sheep, we need to be protected from straying off the path and wandering into the wolf's den. Jesus provides that direction and protection by giving us his voice in written form. Every day his voice is available to us as a ***"lamp for our feet and a light for our path"*** (Ps. 119:105) and as our source of strength by the Holy Spirit. Here's a brief story/illustration from a recent online WELS devotion. (You can get these helpful devotions daily just by asking them to be sent to you via email at wels.net.)

The little girl stood at the edge of the dock, afraid to jump. From the water, Dad coaxed with open arms, "Jump. I'll catch you." But her little legs only stiffened. "What if you can't catch me, Daddy? Or what if you can't swim with me in your arms?" And that's when Mom told the girl to look to her right. There, tied to the end of the pier, was a life preserver. "You see this? I'll stay here and I'll throw you this life preserver if you need it." With that added confidence, the little girl jumped. And every time she got to the end of the pier the rest of the vacation, she glanced over her shoulder to see that life preserver, knowing there was something that could save her, something that could pull her in.

Here is the life-application that accompanied that illustration:

God doesn't promise a life free from trouble. He doesn't promise a life free from evil. But he promises to be there on the pier with the life-saving message of his Word. No matter how deep the trouble is, no matter how much we thrash around in the murky waters of evil, our Savior stands with his feet firmly planted, ready to pull you out.

There are plenty of uncertainties and scary things in our world -- and they seem to keep multiplying daily. Jesus told us that as the end of the world draws nearer the times will become more challenging and frightful. We will need to follow our Shepherd-King and his voice more closely than ever! This is no time to quit worshiping or stop watching online services and take a break from the Lord. This is no time to neglect reading our Bibles. The devil wants us to think that we all know better than God and that we have all the answers and we can forge ahead through life just fine on our own. How wrong he is -- and if we're honest, we'll admit it!

God promised through Ezekiel that he would bring his people home some day. He did it for his Old Testament people when the Medo-Persians, under King Cyrus, defeated the Babylonians and allowed the Jews to return to Israel and Jerusalem once again. And the Lord will do it again when our Shepherd-King brings all his flock, scattered through time and throughout the world, to the heavenly Jerusalem where we will live with him in joy eternally.

Amen.