

“The Search is On”—Ezekiel 34:11-12

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “The Search is On”, is Ezekiel 34:11-12 → *For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I Myself will search for My sheep and will seek them out. 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.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

How would you picture your relationship with the LORD? Some may picture it as a friendship where “conversation” with the LORD happens constantly and a sense of His presence permeates every moment of life. This picture conjures up the promise of Jesus in His Great Commission: *Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age* (cf. Matthew 28:20). While there is a personal aspect to your relationship with the LORD, Jesus’ teaching is primarily described as His presence in the midst of “y’all,” His believers gathered in His name (cf. Matthew 18:20). Speaking of Jesus’ teaching, He used pictures of our relationship with Him over the past few weeks describing us as His bride and He as our groom (cf. Matthew 25:1-13) as well as He as our master and we His stewards (cf.

Matthew 25:14-30). One of the most beloved pictures of our relationship with the LORD is that described in our text—He as our shepherd and we as His sheep.

This picture is confessed by many Christians in the familiar words of Psalm 23:1 → *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want*. It goes on to confess His providing and protecting care for us all the days of our lives with the confidence that *we shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever*. Our text also pictures the LORD as a Shepherd Who is on the search for His sheep with the desire to make Psalm 23 a reality in their lives! Why is the search on for His sheep?

According to verse 12 of our text He desires to *rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness*. In the immediate context of Ezekiel's day His people, *the sheep of His pasture* (cf. Psalm 100:3), had been scattered into others places, many of whom ran to Egypt for protection, some living in the rocks and ravines of the desert to seek shelter and others taken into exile to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar in about 586 BC. They were scattered in this way for two reasons.

In Ezekiel 34 the LORD describes His care for His people over and against the care of the human leaders or “shepherds” of Judah. These “shepherds” consisted of both the civil and religious leaders of the people. Yahweh condemned them for taking advantage of His “sheep”

for their own physical indulgences and leading them away from obedience to His Word. This left His people spiritually “scattered,” unprotected from spiritual attack and led astray to false concepts of their relationship with Him expressed in disobedience and idolatry. (cf. Ezekiel 34:2-10)

In the midst of such condemnation of these “shepherds” Yahweh made it clear that the sheep were also responsible for straying from Him. The prophets constantly called God’s sheep to account for their disobedience and rebellion as recorded in Ezekiel 18. Stating that *the soul who sins shall die* (cf. Ezekiel 18:4,20), verses 31-32 tells us: *Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die? . . . For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live.* Beginning with Adam & Eve, sin caused separation from God and so people will try to run and hide from Him or . . . stand up to Him in smug arrogance like stubborn and stupid sheep.

The situation is no different today. Many claiming to be *the sheep of His pasture* are straying off into teachings and ideals which go against His Word and will. Many are living in direct, open disobedience to His Word with unrepentance. Many chose to reject the proclamation of God’s written Word because it goes against their own thinking and selfish desires. It also happens when His people give the impression that

they want nothing to do with God except if it's convenient for them. You can try to run and hide from Him with excuses for avoiding worship, preaching and His sacraments but He will continue to search you out.

Yahweh has always been on the search for sinners so He can make it possible for them to live in a perfect relationship with Himself. Throughout the promises of searching and caring for His sheep given in Ezekiel 34 fifteen times He says, *I will . . .* It has to be His doing because the sheep are so lost. Thus, His promise in our text: *Behold, I, I Myself will search for My sheep and will seek them out. 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.*** He then continues to describe His affectionate care for them as He gathers them together, restores them to their own land, feeds them in good pastures, strengthens the weak and heals the sick. (cf. Ezekiel 34:12-16)

So, how will He do this? In Ezekiel 34:23-24 He says how: *I will set up over them one Shepherd, My servant David, and He shall feed them . . . and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David shall be prince among them.* About 400+ years earlier God had given the promise to King David that *His house and . . . kingdom would be made sure forever before Him and his throne . . . established forever.* (cf. 2 Samuel 7:16) This happened as Yahweh took on human flesh, being born of Mary, with Joseph and Mary being of the

*house and lineage of David.* (cf. Luke 2:4)

Yahweh took on human flesh in the Person of Jesus and worked out your salvation through His obedient life, sacrificial death and resurrection **to restore your relationship with Himself!** Jesus' describing His relationship with us as *the good shepherd Who lays down His life for the sheep* (cf. John 10:11) was in keeping with His mission stated in Luke 19:10 → *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.* He will seek those who are lost, scattered, broken and sick in their sin and need to be restored to life again. That's you and me.

God is still on the search through the guidance of His Holy Spirit. When you fall into the temptation to believe the myths and false ideals of the world the Holy Spirit convicts you of sin so you repent and hear the absolution of your Good Shepherd: "You are forgiven." When you find yourself running from God, trying to hide from Him in guilt because of your sin, the Holy Spirit is searching you out, calling you back in humble repentance so you can hear the absolution of your Good Shepherd: "You are forgiven." When you think the Bible is a matter of one's own interpretation only to reinforce your own sinful self-righteousness, the Holy Spirit is searching you out, calling you to humble repentance so you can hear the absolution of your Good Shepherd: "You are forgiven."

In Christ Jesus God has given us the Good Shepherd Who seeks us

out by leading and feeding us with His Word. Jesus' words in John 10:14-16 harken back to this promise from Ezekiel 34 → *I am the good shepherd. I know My own and My own know Me, just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. 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.* As God's sheep led by your Good Shepherd, Jesus, you don't try to hide from Him. It's impossible. Beside, He knows where to search for you! Rather, you feed on His written Word with His flock around its preaching and the sacraments. In this way He strengthens you to live the abundant life in confession and absolution, repentance and faith, good works, prayer, praise and giving thanks! Amen.

*Now may the God of peace  
Who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus,  
the great shepherd of the sheep,  
by the blood of the eternal covenant,  
equip you with everything good that you may do His will,  
working in us that which is pleasing in His sight,  
through Jesus Christ, to Whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

(Hebrews 13:20-21)

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