

Pentwater Bible Church

Ezekiel Message 71
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Wolf in Sheep's Clothing – Artist Unknown

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Pentwater Bible Church

The Book of Ezekiel Message Seventy-One

THE SHEPHERDS DID NOT FEED THE SHEEP

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Ezekiel 34:1-6

¹And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, ²Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, even to the shepherds, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: Woe unto the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the sheep? ³Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill the fatlings; but ye feed not the sheep. ⁴The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought back that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with rigor have ye ruled over them. ⁵And they were scattered, because there was no shepherd; and they became food to all the beasts of the field, and were scattered. ⁶My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my sheep were scattered upon all the face of the earth; and there was none that did search or seek after them (ASV, 1901).

THE SHEPHERDS OF ISRAEL

Ezekiel 34:1-2

¹And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, ²Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, even to the shepherds, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: Woe unto the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the sheep (ASV, 1901)?

The kings and princes who ruled over the nation Israel and had authority over the people had become evil and self serving instead of doing God's work ministering to the people

God is using a familiar illustration of the shepherd and his sheep to describe the leaders and the people of the Nation Israel. The Bible frequently uses this terminology to refer to the spiritual leaders with responsibility over a group of people (Psalm 78:70-72; Isaiah 44:28; 63:11; Jeremiah 23:1-4; 25:34-38). Their primary role was to guard the nation like a shepherd would his flock. King David recognized that the Lord is our Shepherd. Every society, for its own safeguard and prosperity, needs a well-ordered and recognized leadership. God chose elders, priests, kings and prophets to connect Him to the people in ancient Israel and in New Testament times as well (Proverbs 8:15; Romans 13:1). Even though there are earthly shepherds to carry out the Lord's will in leading God is and does remain our Supreme Shepherd. King David recognized this.

Psalm 23:1-6

¹The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. ²He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside still waters. ³He restoreth my soul: He guideth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. ⁴Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. ⁵Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou hast anointed my head with oil; My cup runneth over. ⁶Surely goodness and lovingkindness shall follow me all the days of my life; And I shall dwell in the house of Jehovah for ever (KJV).

David categorized in reflection the many benefits of the Lord as our Shepherd and a gracious host. The Lord protected him in life's dangers and God's persistent living protection enabled him to enjoy a secure communion with Him all the days of his life. The Lord prophesied His future earthly appearance as the Messiah of Israel as a Shepherd (Isaiah 40:11).

When He appeared in time and space as the Lord Jesus He called Himself the Good Shepherd while describing the bad shepherd as a thief and a robber.

John 10:1-16

¹ "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. ² But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. ⁵ Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." ⁶ Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them.

⁷ Then Jesus said to them again, "Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who ever came before Me[a] are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. ⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

¹¹ "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. ¹² But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. ¹³ The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. ¹⁵ As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. ¹⁶ And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd (NKJ).

CHARACTERISTICS AND RESULTS OF EVIL SHEPHERDS

Ezekiel 34:3-6

³Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill the fatlings; but ye feed not the sheep. ⁴The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought back that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with rigor have ye ruled over them. ⁵And they were scattered, because there was no shepherd; and they became food to all the beasts of the field, and were scattered. ⁶My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my sheep were scattered upon all the face of the earth; and there was none that did search or seek after them (ASV, 1901).

These appointed leaders did not serve the flock as the Good Shepherd desired. They were using the offices that they held to achieve personal gain. At the expense of the common people Israel's leaders were becoming wealthy. Their view of the people was simply as a source of wealth rather than fulfilling their obligation to the Lord Who had entrusted to them the administration of His love and caring in an organized and systematic manner. Instead of taking their God given role seriously they ruled with harshness and brutality. They did not strengthen those who were diseased, they failed to adequately heal and care for the sick, and they did not care for the lost, both physically and spiritually. They should have nurtured the people and brought them to God in a positive genuine relationship through the truth of Scripture.

Another error in their flagrant disregard for the people was failing to watch over them as a genuine caring shepherd would care for the sheep that wandered from the safety of the flock. Jesus characterized the appropriate action of a good shepherd.

Matthew 18:12

"What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying (NASB)?"

Sheep will wander, it is one of their characteristics. The caring shepherd will make sure, in so far as he can, that they are not going off in a direction that will harm them. These leaders were so self serving that if they did notice that the people of Israel had left the flock in terms of spiritual purity and physical safety they failed to provide any oversight.

When the sheep became scattered they are vulnerable to predatory wild animals. The leaders have a serious responsibility to continue to guard over the flock by insuring primarily spiritual truth and safety. When the leaders abandon truth for personal gain of any sort they are placing their flocks in danger. Since the mid 1800's many of the spiritual leaders of the Church have been abrogating their spiritual responsibility to care for their flocks. When the message of truth is corrupted and is inadequately conveyed the flock is in danger of losing their eternal salvation.

Once a person leaves their acceptance of the authority of Scripture spiritual truth is lost and they no longer have the safeguard of other protective doctrines.

Because they begin denying or arguing over some of the fundamentals of the faith, they cause many to leave. Church after church and denominations have split over denials of the Trinity, the incarnation and the Second Coming.

The roots of this began in Europe, particularly with German Rationalism where the inerrancy of the Scripture was denied with the development of Biblical Criticism and particularly with the documentary hypothesis. One Julius Wellhausen developed this concept. He insisted that human reason only, not the Bible, could be trusted. He presented the idea that the Bible, far from being God's Word was just a collection of human documents. These destructive denials of fundamental truth of the Bible caused the church leaders quoted everything but the Bible and preached everything but the gospel. Religious liberalism led to the calamities that came upon Europe such as Communism, Nazism, fascism, promulgation of the occult and other *diseased ideas* have been promoted by the absence of a spiritual core made of divine life and spiritual blessing. Wellhausen and his liberalism destroyed the spiritual life in Europe and nearly succeeded in the spiritual destruction of the United States." Today less than 1% of the population of Europe is made up of Evangelical Christians.

Lest you think that men are not able to negatively influence others to keep them out of The Kingdom listen to what the Lord Jesus had to say to the Pharisees:

Matthew 23:13

But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in [yourselves], neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.

TRUTH MUST NEVER BE SACRIFICED FOR PEACE. IT NEVER WORKS!

In more recent times the false shepherds have led many into a whole new phase. The old phase can be characterized as destructive denials. The new phase claims to affirm the fundamentals of the faith, but they have made a paradigm shift in that the Bible is no longer the final authority in determining divine truth, but experience is equally valid. In actual practice the experience takes priority over Scripture. If the Bible contradicts the practice then the practice is justified as a "new move of the Spirit" and, therefore, what the text of the Scripture actually says can be contradicted by a new experience. This is a far more spiritual way of denying the truth of God and, therefore, far more deceptive. The Holy Spirit will never move in a manner that is contrary to Scripture.

THE NEW EVANGELICALISM OR THE EMERGING CHURCH

This is perhaps the most insidious of all the apostasies. It is characterized by catering to the desires of the people. Instead of being inculcated with God's Word and having our personal world view and behavior be patterned after God's Word, The New Evangelicalism gives the people what they want. One NT passage clearly predicts this reversal of worship of God to worshipping man.

Romans 1:25

Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen (KJV).

The idea with this new wave of apostasy is to soft-sell the Bible and salvation. It is not attempting to save anybody from the fires of Hell but from an aimless and meaningless life here on earth. Our experiences and quality of life here are more important than the total service to God and the blessed assurance that He will soon come to lift us out of this sinful decaying world. Salvation is given lip service and evangelism with real confrontation is thought to be too divisive. This apostasy does not want to upset anybody. There is never any mention of Hell and the outcome of an unsaved life. They may say that they believe strongly but, their actions differ sharply from what they say.

Usually their Bible teaching is characterized by an over emphasis on application. This of course is the middle of the road approach. They avoid doctrine as too divisive.

Paul warned us that the end times would be characterized as a departure from sound doctrine and a departure from the truth.

II Timothy 4:3-4

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away [their] ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

With the divisiveness they believe that they will lose members of their congregation and therefore funds. They are concerned with money and man-made approaches to self-help. A total dependence on God for their resources is abandoned for “sound business” practices or “fundamental marketing techniques.” Total reliance on God by elders through prayer and patience is exchanged for parliamentary procedure and schemes for man made self-advancement and career goals. The pastor is considered as a CEO, not the teacher of God’s Word. Mission statements and strategic plans are formulated to accommodate personal plans. The Bible is subordinated to man’s desires.

The thought of prophecy is anathema to the New Evangelical for they say it causes division. This division of course is between those non-literal Bible expositors and the literal Biblical expositors. Some have characterized the New Evangelical as being seduced by the world spirit of this present age.

You can see it in the leaders who are popularized. Usually they have a high degree of prominence in the government or sports and their testimonies are sought after for paid speaking engagements and book endorsements.

You will never see a Sunday school teacher or poor inner city pastor held up by them as pillars of the faith. Christ went to the lowest members of society to bring the truth to the world. He did not go to the popular and prominent.

This is a spirit of disobedience and a mood of compromise. It is a rejection of many of the negative aspects of New Testament Christianity. It is an attitude of positivism. They would rather be diplomats not fighters, positive rather than militant, infiltrators rather than separatists. They would not be restricted by a separationist mentality. The New Evangelical would rather pursue dialog, intellectualism, and appeasement than Biblical Militantism. Psychology is fast becoming their guide.

The use of psychology is rapidly becoming the norm in Christian Schools and churches.

Our culture has become deeply and extensively psychological. The weakness and carnality of the church in recent decades has allowed this psychological mind-set of the world to flow into the church. This process has brought about a redefining of many foundational matters of the Christian faith. The correct understanding that man's condition is sin and God's remedy is His saving and transforming grace (Romans 5:12, 17). Psychology offer remedies outside the Bible. It is clear from the passages in Ezekiel that man (sheep) tended to stray from God to follow his own self-willed path (Isaiah 53:6). We need to deny ourselves, take up His cross, and follow Christ (Luke 9:23). Psychology teaches that man must esteem himself, affirm himself, and actualize himself. All of this new thinking is coming from psychological theory, which is primarily a philosophy of life. We are strongly warned in the word of the Lord not to be guided by the philosophy of the world.

Colossians 2:8

"Beware lest anyone take you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ" (KJV).

NEXT MESSAGE: THE ISRAELI SHEPHERD DID NOT FEED THE SHEEP CONTINUED

Please call or e-mail with any questions or comments

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