

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*The Good Shepherd.*"

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's Gospel verse-by-verse and we find ourselves in the middle of one of the most familiar accounts in Scripture: "The Feeding of the 20,000." I told you this is a more appropriate title since Jesus fed 5,000 men, which means He probably fed around 20,000 people.

We're going to cover **Luke 9:14** and **15** and there's some strong shepherd imagery in those verses. I want to make sure you see it, so we're going to begin with some verses in Ezekiel that make it clear. This passage contains a strong prophecy about Jesus being the Shepherd of His people.

Since some people might not be familiar with the Book of Ezekiel, let me briefly give you the context...

Ezekiel was one of the Jews taken into Babylon along with Daniel and his friends. Although they were in different parts of the kingdom and probably never met, they were still contemporaries. This means they served as prophets at the same time.

The Jews were at a very low point when they were in Babylon, and here's why...

There were three things they thought would never take place:

1. First, they thought Jerusalem would never be conquered. It's God's city. It's Zion.
2. Second, they thought the temple would never be destroyed. The temple is where God's presence dwelt on earth; it was His house. God doesn't let His house get destroyed.
3. Third, the Jews thought they would never be removed from the land of Israel. This is where God wanted them to live. It was the land God gave to them; that's why it was called The Promised Land.

But the Promised Land is also called the Holy Land, and because of the Jews unholiness something happened...

The Babylonians came and:

- Conquered Jerusalem...
- Destroyed the temple...
- Took the Jews out of the land to Babylon.

Can you guess how the Jews were feeling at that time? Very discouraged!

- They thought God was done w/ them.
- They thought He was done caring for them.

Let me say it like this: they thought He was done shepherding them.

Then at this really low point God had Ezekiel deliver this message to the Jews that He would care for them as a shepherd cares for his sheep.

But before God does that, He first commands Ezekiel to prophesy against the evil shepherds that helped put the Jews in this mess. One of the main reasons the Jews found themselves in Babylon is there were false prophets telling them:

- Jerusalem will never be conquered...
- The temple will never be destroyed...
- God will never let you be removed from the land.

These terrible shepherds are described in verses 1 through 6. Look at **verse 1**...

1 The word of the LORD came to me: 2 “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep?

Religious leaders are often called shepherds.

- For example, in the church, pastors or elders are called shepherds. The word “pastor” comes from the Latin and means, “shepherd.”
- In the Old Testament the priests and prophets were called shepherds.

These shepherds were supposed to be strong, caring leaders who protected the flocks. Instead, they committed a number of sins and Ezekiel lists them. Look at **verse 3**...

3 You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep.

This verse contains their sins of commission. They’re the sins they committed against the sheep themselves.

They put their interests above the interests of the people. They took care of themselves and made sure they had plenty of food and clothing, but they didn’t do the same for the flock. It says they:

- **Clothed themselves with wool** which means they would’ve gotten the wool from the sheep and then used it to make garments for themselves.
- **Slaughtered the fattest ones** which means they butchered the sheep to feed themselves. If you look at the end of **verse 10** God says **I will rescue my sheep FROM THEIR MOUTHS, THAT THEY** (the people; the sheep) **MAY NOT BE FOOD FOR THEM.**

These evil shepherds saw the flock – or people – as a source to exploit and take advantage of for their own gain.

There’s physical application to all this, but the most important application is spiritual...

When it says they didn’t **feed the sheep** it means they didn’t teach the people, which was the most important job of spiritual shepherds.

Look at their second group of sins in **verse 4**...

4 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.

This verse contains their sins of omission. These are their sins from failing to do what they were supposed to do.

They didn't:

- **Strengthen the weak...**
- **Heal the sick...**
- **Bind up the injured...**
- **Bring back the strayed...**
- **Seek the lost...**

Making it worse they **ruled with force and harshness**. They were cruel and heavy-handed.

Look what happened to the people as a result...

5 So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; 6 they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.

They didn't protect the flock from danger. It was so bad for the people, that not only did they not have food b/c the shepherds weren't feeding them, it actually says they **BECAME food for all the wild beasts**.

Let me get your attention so I can explain what this is saying...

At the beginning of Daniel's ministry in Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar had a dream of a huge statue. The different materials of the statue – gold, silver, bronze, and iron – represented different nations: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome.

- Nebuchadnezzar saw the nations this way, b/c this is how they looked to him. He was a worldly king so the nations looked majestic and glorious, b/c from an earthly perspective they were.
- God gave Daniel a vision of the same nations and how did they look to him? Like **wild beasts**. This reveals how God viewed these same nations: terribly violent, cruel, and ravenous.

Earlier I told you Daniel and Ezekiel were contemporaries...

- Daniel was in Babylon sharing his vision of these wild beasts.
- At the same time Ezekiel was in Babylon sharing his prophecies about the Jews being **food** for these **wild beasts**.

That's what happened. These are the nations that fed on the Jews until Jesus' day. Rome was the fourth beast feasting on the Jews.

And just so you can follow the imagery in the verses, if people were chased by **wild beasts** what would they do? They run. They **scatter**. The words **were scattered** are repeated three times in two verses. God really wants us to know His people ended up being **scattered** b/c the shepherds didn't protect them.

This had already happened in Ezekiel and Daniel's day:

- The Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom of Israel and took them into captivity.
- The Babylonians conquered Judah and took the southern kingdom into exile.
- It continued like this into Jesus day. The Romans were over the Jews, and in 70AD they destroyed Jerusalem and what happened? Like the verse says they were **scattered over all the face of the earth**.

Verses 7 through 10 discuss the judgment on these evil shepherds. We're going to skip to **verse 11** where God prophesies of a Shepherd He'll provide for His people. I want to do something a little different. Before we look at the verses verse-by-verse I want to skim through them pretty quickly inviting you to look for something...

- I want you to notice the repetition of the words **I...I will...I Myself**.
- I want you to notice God is the One doing this...

Then I'll explain the application after...

Eze 34:11 "For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I MYSELF WILL SEARCH FOR MY SHEEP and [I] WILL SEEK THEM OUT. 12 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. 13 And I WILL BRING THEM OUT from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I WILL FEED THEM on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. 14 I WILL FEED THEM with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. 15 (notice this one in particular...) I MYSELF WILL BE THE SHEPHERD OF MY SHEEP, and I MYSELF WILL MAKE THEM LIE DOWN, declares the Lord God. 16 I WILL SEEK THE LOST, and I WILL BRING BACK THE STRAYED, and I WILL BIND UP THE INJURED, and I WILL STRENGTHEN THE WEAK, and the fat and the strong I WILL DESTROY. I WILL FEED THEM in justice.

You can't help but notice the personal intervention of the Lord Himself, and this brings us to Lesson 1...

LESSON 1: GOD BECAME THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

Shepherd is one of the most well-known titles for Christ:

- **Heb 13:20 Our Lord Jesus, THE GREAT SHEPHERD OF THE SHEEP**

- **1 Pet 2:25** You were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the SHEPHERD...OF YOUR SOULS.
- **1 Pet 5:4** calls Jesus **the Chief Shepherd.**
- **John 10:11** Jesus said, **“I am the good shepherd.”**

These verses don't describe God sending some other shepherd to...

- Search for the sheep...
- Seek them out...
- Rescue them...
- Feed them...
- Shepherd them...
- Make them lie down...

This is what the Lord Himself does!

The question is, when did God do this? He did this when He became a Man in the Person of Jesus Christ. You can't get more personal intervention than God coming down from heaven itself and planting Himself in the middle of the affairs of men.

Listen to this verse...

Psa 80:1a Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock.

It sounds like this could be an earthly, human shepherd, but then the rest of the verse...

1b You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth.

We aren't talking about a human shepherd. We're talking about the Shepherd who sits in heaven surrounded by angels, and then came from heaven to earth and took on flesh.

Ezekiel describes this Shepherd. Look at **verse 11**...

Eze 34:11 “For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. 12a As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep,

This begins the great contrast between Jesus – the Good Shepherd – and the evil shepherds. Earlier it said the evil shepherds wouldn't search for the sheep or seek them out. Jesus is the opposite of them and this brings us to Lesson 2...

LESSON 2: THE GOOD SHEPHERD (PART 1) SEEKS THE SHEEP.

As the Good Shepherd Jesus searches after His lost sheep:

- Here's part of a parable He told about Himself: **Luke 15:4 “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open**

country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? 5 And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

- **Luke 19:10** The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.
- Jesus sent out the Twelve Apostles: **Matt 10:6** [He said to them], “Go to **THE LOST SHEEP OF THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL.**”

The rest of **verse 12** reveals another characteristic of the Good Shepherd...

Eze 34:12b and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness.

It says **I will rescue them**, which means God is going to save them. If you look at **verse 22** it says **I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey.** The ESV says **rescue**, but many other translations say **save**, and even if you look in the ESV there’s probably a footnote letting you know it’s the word **save**.

And this brings us to the next part of Lesson 2...

LESSON 2: THE GOOD SHEPHERD (PART II) SAVES THE SHEEP.

There are a number of parallels between Ezekiel’s day and Jesus’ day:

- There were religious leaders in Ezekiel’s day who were terrible shepherds...and there were religious leaders in Jesus’ day who were terrible shepherds.
- The Jews were disobedient and rebellious in Ezekiel’s day...and they were disobedient and rebellious in Jesus’ day.

The important similarity between Ezekiel’s day and Jesus’ day that I want you to know is God still wanted to save them...regardless of how disobediently or rebelliously they acted.

You see that throughout God’s history with His people:

- Whether it’s the Old Testament...
- Whether it’s the New Testament...
- Or whether it’s our day...

God is merciful and He seeks after lost sinners to save them.

Follow me on this next point...

- Jesus saved His people when He died on the cross. That’s when He truly rescued them.
- The verse says He’s going to save them **on a day of clouds and thick darkness.**

I’ll say this loosely, b/c I can’t say for sure this is the case, but this could be referring to the darkness when Jesus was on the cross...

Matt 27:45 Now from the sixth hour (which is noon) there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour (this is 3PM). So during the brightest and sunniest part of the day when the Lord saved His people, He provided **thick darkness.**

Going to be like tomorrow's eclipse! It would be cool if that darkness in the middle of the day reminded people of Christ's death on the cross.

Look at **verse 13** to see the next thing the Good Shepherd does for His people...

Eze 34:13 And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. 14 I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. 15 I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. 16 I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.

One of the most important responsibilities of a shepherd is taking care of the needs of the sheep. You see how Jesus is the exact opposite of the terrible shepherds. He does everything they don't do:

- He strengthened people. **Matt 12:20 a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench,**
- He healed the sick.
- He bound up the injured

But there's one thing the Good Shepherd does that's mentioned more than anything else. 13 times it says He feeds the sheep. You don't have to be a shepherd to know the importance of this part of the job...and this brings us to the next part of Lesson 2...

LESSON 2: THE GOOD SHEPHERD (PART III) FEEDS THE SHEEP.

If you briefly look back at **verses 13** and **14**, three times it prophesies that the Good Shepherd will feed the sheep **on the mountains of Israel...**

13 And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I WILL FEED THEM ON THE MOUNTAINS OF ISRAEL, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. 14 I will feed them with good pasture, and ON THE MOUNTAIN HEIGHTS OF ISRAEL shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on THE MOUNTAINS OF ISRAEL.

Ezekiel delivered this prophecy from Babylon. That's where most of the Jews were.

But in these verses, **THREE TIMES**, it says the Jews will be fed in Israel:

- Any idea when these verses were fulfilled?
- Can anyone think of a time a Good Shepherd fed the Jews on the mountains of Israel?

Let's turn to **Luke 9**. We'll back up to **verse 10** to get the context...

Luke 9:10 On their return the apostles told him all that they had done (this means all they had done when they were sent out). **And he took them and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida.**

The Apostles returned from their missionary trip exhausted. Jesus wanted to take them to a private place so they could rest.

Luke 9:11 When the crowds learned it, they followed him, and He welcomed them and spoke to them of the kingdom of God and cured those who had need of healing.

Let me remind you of something from **Eze 34**...twice it discussed the absence of a shepherd for the people:

- **Eze 34:5 They were scattered, BECAUSE THERE WAS NO SHEPHERD, and they became food for all the wild beasts...**
- **Eze 34:6 My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, WITH NONE TO SEARCH OR SEEK FOR THEM.**

In Ezekiel's day the religious leaders were so bad, it's like the people didn't have shepherds at all. The same was true in Jesus' day. Most of the religious leaders were so terrible it's like the Jews didn't have shepherds at all.

And this is what actually led to the miraculous feeding on the mountain. The parallel account in **Mark 6:34** says...

Mark 6:34 When [Jesus] went ashore he saw a great crowd, and had compassion on them, because THEY WERE LIKE SHEEP WITHOUT A SHEPHERD.

The whole situation took place b/c Jesus saw a bunch of people w/o shepherd and He wanted to be their Shepherd!

But guess who didn't see it that way? The Apostles!

Look at **verse 12**...

Luke 9:12 Now the day began to wear away, and the twelve came and said to him, "Send the crowd away to go into the surrounding villages and countryside to find lodging and get provisions, for we are here in a desolate place."

We talked about this verse last week. It was a low point for the Apostles:

- They had been with Jesus long enough to know this wasn't His way of doing things. In **Matt 11:28** He said, **“COME TO ME, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”**
 - Jesus welcomed people.
 - This is what Good Shepherds do.
- Bad shepherds – like the Apostles were acting like at this moment – say, *“Send the flock away. Get the sheep out of here. Let them fend for themselves. They'll be okay.”*

So look what Jesus said in **verse 13**...

Luke 9:13 But he said to them, “You give them something to eat.” They said, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.”

Jesus wanted to see all these lost sheep fed, but the Apostles thought they couldn't do it.

Now let me pause and explain something...

The idea of Jesus being a shepherd is so endearing that many of the most well-known pictures of Him show Him as a shepherd:

- This is interesting when you consider there's no record of Him actually ever shepherding any sheep.
- If people wanted pictures that were more accurate, they should have Him doing some woodworking since He was a carpenter.

There are different times in the Gospels that Jesus figuratively looked like a shepherd:

- He was kind to people the way a shepherd would be kind to a flock...
- He taught the people, or fed them spiritually, the way a shepherd feeds his flock...
- He healed people, the way a shepherd would bandage up or heal injured sheep....

But since Jesus was never a literal shepherd at any time in His life, there's no time you see Him doing actual shepherd activities.

But if you want to see one time in Jesus' life:

- When He most looks like an actual shepherd...
- And when the people most look like actual sheep...

It's in these next two verses!

Look at **verse 14**...

14 For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, “Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each.” 15 And they did so, and had them all sit down.

This is a clear fulfillment of **Ezekiel 34**. This is where Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, fed the sheep on the mountains of Israel like it was prophesied!

Additionally, the way Jesus had them sit down carries the imagery of a Shepherd taking his sheep to a place to rest and eat. **Eze 34:14** said **they SHALL LIE DOWN in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. 15 I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I MYSELF WILL MAKE THEM LIE DOWN,** declares the **Lord GOD.**

Shepherds find good safe places for their sheep to eat and rest, and that's what Jesus did here.

The most familiar passage in Scripture discussing Jesus being a shepherd is **Psa 23.** Listen to the way it begins...

Psa 23:1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me LIE DOWN IN GREEN PASTURES.

Although there's no mention in Luke's Gospel of Jesus having the people sit down **in green pastures** listen to the way it's described in two of the parallel accounts:

- **Mark 5:39 He commanded them all to sit down in groups ON THE GREEN GRASS.**
- **John 6:10a** Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now **THERE WAS MUCH GRASS IN THE PLACE.**

Jesus led these thousands of people to this green grass and this is where He had them sit, and this is where He fed them.

The account is laced with imagery that makes Jesus look like a Shepherd, but the one thing that most clearly distinguishes a Good Shepherd from a bad shepherd isn't mentioned in these verses. Jesus described the way you identify a Good Shepherd...

John 10:11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

And this brings us to our last lesson...

LESSON 2: THE GOOD SHEPHERD (PART IV) LAYS DOWN HIS LIFE FOR THE SHEEP

Anyone can look like a good shepherd until danger strikes. At that moment it becomes clear who the Good Shepherd is and who is the **hired hand.**

Let me briefly share an OT account that looks forward to Jesus as the Good Shepherd protecting His sheep...

King David was one of the strongest pictures or types of Christ in Scripture:

- They were both born in Bethlehem...

- They were both rejected by their brethren...
- They were both anointed...Christ means Anointed...
- They both became kings...

And they were both shepherds who were willing to lay their lives down for the sheep!

When Goliath was taunting the Israelites, David wanted to go fight him. Saul wouldn't let him b/c of his age, so listen to the way David convinced him...

1 Sam 17:34 David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, 35 I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. 36 Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God. 37 The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and the LORD be with you!"

These verses are about David, but since David serves as a type of Christ they prefigure the way Jesus as the true and greater David would protect His flock:

- David defeated lions, bears, and Goliath.
- But Jesus had the greater victories over sin, death, and the devil.

I've told you before that types always break down, and that's the case with David too:

- David was willing to lay down his life for his sheep.
- But Jesus really did lay down His life for His sheep.

My hope for you this week is that you will keep your heart and eyes set on Christ, your Good Shepherd. Remember Him during your days:

- He laid down His life for you, but He is alive now.
- He's willing to hear you, guide you, feed you, and give you rest.

If you have questions about anything I've shared this morning or you'd like prayer for anything, Pastor Doug and I – as your earthly shepherds – will be up front after service and we would consider it a privilege to speak with you.

Let's pray.