

## “The Risen Jesus is Gathering God’s Sheep”

Ezekiel 34:23

April 26, 2020

SERMON 1910

by Michael David Henson

The sermon text is from Ezekiel 34:23, “And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd.”

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

**First**, in the beginning of Ezekiel 34, **the Lord God is extremely angry at the way that God’s Old Testament shepherds had treated His sheep.** God says,

“Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? <sup>3</sup>You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock. <sup>4</sup>The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them.”

**Second**, with verse 10, right before today’s Old Testament reading begins, **God declares what He is going to do to those bad shepherds.** He is going to punish them and take away their office. He said:

“Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hand; I will cause them to cease feeding the sheep, and the shepherds shall feed themselves no more; for I will deliver My flock from their mouths, that they may no longer be food for them.”

**Third**, in today’s Old Testament reading, Ezekiel prophesies how **Jesus, God Himself, is going to fill the Office of Good Shepherd.** As Good Shepherd, Jesus is going to provide for the well-being of God’s sheep, which are the believers in His New Testament Church. **Jesus Christ is going to find them, gather them, and feed them.** Our God is graciously concerned about His believers and their well-being. More than that He wishes to protect them and provide for them. He wills to save them and bless them. At the end of chapter 34 God says,

“Thus they shall know that I, the Lord their God, am with them, and they, the house of Israel, are My people.... <sup>31</sup>You are My flock, the flock of My pasture; you are men, and I am your God” (34:30-31).

**Today’s sermon** is going to highlight the two things for which we will pray in today’s collect. We will ask that God would grant us **“perpetual gladness”** and make us **“partakers of eternal joys.”**

In the stuff of this world, I have learned not to set my expectations too high. After all, we don’t live in the garden of Eden. None of us really expect for everything to go well. In fact, I probably would consider 50% a bit too high.

--I don’t really expect to sleep through the night and then wake up completely refreshed. I’m happy if I don’t wake up yawning.

--Similarly, personal health and/or freedom from pain is definitely on a sliding scale of relative enjoyment for most people. And older you get, you definitely grade on a curve.

--I don't ever expect that I will get done everything on my to-do list. If the top three are completed, I've had a stellar of a good day.

--Even on my day off, the fun things that I plan on doing, don't always go well. My ability to play golf may make for a quite aggravating morning on the course. Then there is the bad bounce or bad luck which can ruin your score. The weather may not even allow me to golf. Finally, a day off usually involves mowing the lawn, fixing the broken faucet, and paying the bills. I don't really expect to have 24 hours of fun.

Maybe you can see why I'm quite surprised that we pray, not for gladness, but perpetual gladness. We pray not for joy, but eternal joys. **These petitions seem quite beyond the pale of things.** Is it even possible to have perpetual gladness and eternal joys?

Today's collect acknowledges that we live in a "fallen world." When Adam and Eve disobeyed the Word of God and sinned, the entire world was infected. The ground would bring forth thorns. Man's body would die and return to the dust. But worse than all that, man's original righteousness was infected by sin. Mankind is no longer able to fear, love and trust in God above all things. We are all spiritually dead.

With the children Cain and Abel, we began to see that there would be those humans who would reject the Creator's help and would persecute those who trusted in God for the gift of salvation. Cain killed Abel and then refused to confess it. God always works through His Word to create sorrow over sin and faith in the Savior. However, when Adam preached the Word, Cain complained about his punishment and left the church behind. It wasn't until their child, Seth, that we had another godly believer.

I guess it shouldn't surprise us when we learn that **those, who were entrusted with the office of shepherd in the Old Testament, misused their office.** The shepherds were the Israelite kings, prophets, and priests. Instead of feeding the sheep, the kings fed upon the sheep for their own benefit. Instead of the prophets protecting the gathered sheepfold, they neglected their care so that the sheep were scattered and become food for the wolf. The priests and high priests used their office to gorge themselves at the expense of the sheep.

Before we go any further down the rabbit hole, let me quite confidently state that **God is good!** And furthermore, let me declare that **God desires for us to have both perpetual gladness and eternal joys. At every step of the way God has only done what is right and good. He has always put our protection and benefit first.**

--Have we forgotten that when God created the world in six days, we know that it was very good. He desired for us to live in paradise!

--When man fell into sin, God provided a promise of salvation through the male offspring of the woman. Through faith in the Messiah, God desired for us to live with Him eternally.

--God called Abraham out of idolatry and made from him a godly nation. God gave that nation shepherds to protect her from their enemies, to provide the teaching which would give them salvation.

--When they had been enslaved by the Egyptians, God brought His people out of bondage. Were they thankful? No, they grumbled and complained, and did not listen to God.

--Our loving God was looking after His people when He sent them shepherds to watch over His sheep. But now we see that those shepherds were not doing their job. When Jesus God's Son arrived, King Herod sought to kill Him. The priests rejected Jesus and turned Him over to the Romans for execution. The Pharisees preached works-righteousness, and considered Jesus a false preacher.

**Today's lesson to learn is two-fold. 1. We are but man. 2. Only with God, do we receive perpetual gladness and eternal joys.** When every one of man's attempts have failed, it was God who accomplished our salvation. It was God who rescued us.

--The Epistles says that "Christ... Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed."

--In the Gospel, Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd.... I lay down My life for the sheep."

--In the Old Testament, the Prophet Ezekiel foretold that **our good God would do it Himself.** "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. <sup>15</sup>I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down" (v.14-15).

And Jesus did do it Himself. The collect says that God "by the humiliation of His {Your} Son raised up the fallen world." The suffering and death of Jesus Christ did not frustrate the plan of God, instead it fulfilled the plan of God. The rejection of God's Son took away our sins. Our good God knew exactly what He was doing when He sent us our Good Shepherd. When He "bore our sins in His own body on the tree," Jesus delivered us from the danger of everlasting death.

Through faith in Jesus, we are made to lie down in green pastures. What does that mean? It means that our conscience is at peace with God. The terror of death is overcome by the provisions of the Good Shepherd. The Epistle says that we who believe in the sacrifice of the Risen Christ, have God as the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls.

**We do have perpetual gladness.** This gladness is the knowledge that I am saved. Sin can't take away my gladness, because I'm forgiven. Death can't take away my gladness, I will rise from the dead. Suffering can't damper the gladness that I am Jesus' little lamb. Through faith in Christ, **We need to be taught to set our expectations much higher.** The Scriptures say, "This is the day the Lord has made, I will rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps 118). With God's work on our behalf, we will never be disappointed.

With Jesus as My good Shepherd, I will fear no evil. More than that, "goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life." If our heavenly Father can turn the rejection of His Son into eternal life, then it doesn't matter what comes against me this day. All things will work out for the good. I'm definitely not going to sweat the little stuff. My God has not left my salvation up to chance. He said, "I, Myself" will do it for their salvation. And He has done it. "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over" (v.5)

The Epistle says that we who have Jesus Christ as our Savior, are now, in faith, to use Jesus as our example. Our Savior trusted His Father and “committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.” In the midst of our suffering, we are not to despair, nor should we lose our perpetual joy. We are to willingly take up whatever cross we are to endure and trusting in God, know that God working out all things according to His plan.

And why do we not lose perpetual gladness in this fallen world? Because our Risen Christ has defeated death and made us “partakers of eternal joys.” “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever” (v.6) The Venite which is from Psalm 95 says, “For he is our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand.” The Te Deum says, “We therefore pray you to help your servants, whom you have redeemed with your precious blood. Make them to be numbered with saints in glory everlasting.”

My fellow sheep, set your expectations high, for Christ your Good Shepherd is surely giving out perpetual gladness and eternal joys.

Collect for Misericordias Domini

Merciful Father, who by the humiliation of Your Son raised up the fallen world, grant to Your faithful people perpetual gladness, and make those whom You have delivered from the danger of everlasting death to be partakers of eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Ezekiel 34:1-16

Chapter 34

1And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 2“Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God to the shepherds: “Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? 3“You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock. 4“The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them. 5“So they were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered. 6“My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and on every high hill; yes, My flock was scattered over the whole face of the earth, and no one was seeking or searching for them.”

7“Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: 8“as I live,” says the Lord God, “surely because My flock became a prey, and My flock became food for every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, nor did My shepherds search for My flock, but the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock”— 9“therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the Lord! 10“Thus says the Lord God: “Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hand; I will cause them to cease feeding the sheep, and the shepherds shall feed themselves no more; for I will deliver My flock from their mouths, that they may no longer be food for them.”

11“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.”

1 Peter 2:21-25

21For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

22 “Who committed no sin,  
Nor was deceit found in His mouth”;

23who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. 25For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

John 10:11-16

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.