

SECURITY COMES FROM GOD
17TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

EZEK 34:11-24
SEPT 11, '16

¹¹ "For thus says the LORD God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and 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 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.

¹⁷ "As for you, my flock, thus says the LORD God: Behold, I judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and male goats. ¹⁸ Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture; and to drink of clear water, that you must muddy the rest of the water with your feet? ¹⁹ And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet, and drink what you have muddied with your feet?

²⁰ "Therefore, thus says the LORD God to them: Behold, I, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. ²¹ Because you push with side and shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad, ²² I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep. ²³ And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴ And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken.

Today we resume Bible classes for children and adults.

Theme of readings is similar to VBS, just few weeks ago.

We learned how the Lord is our shepherd who
gathers, provides for and rescues us.

We learned that we are like sheep who follow their shepherd
because they recognize his voice.

This means sheep must be used to hearing his voice.

This is what happens when we regularly study his word.

We need to keep on hearing that voice through whole life.

Text reminds us we need to listen for that voice
not only for every day guidance

but because there come times when we need to be rescued.
Then especially we need to know and listen for
the voice of Jesus in God's word.

WE NEED DELIVERANCE FROM DAYS OF DARKNESS
GOD SUPPLIES SECURITY AND STRENGTH
THE GOOD SHEPHERD SEEKS AND SAVES US

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

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Ezekiel is referring to a particular dark day for people of Israel,
Day when clouds of smoke billowed from whole country
including capital city of Jerusalem and even temple.
as Babylonians from present day Iraq attacked them.
He personally remembered feeling God had left them
even before people of Israel were taken from homeland
and scattered as refugees.

Today is known as "Patriot's Day," anniversary of tragic attacks
known as "9/11", dark days in our own country's history.

Clouds from that day still hang over us & affect our lives.
The memory can make us feel anxious
and feel need for comfort and hope.

Ezekiel & other prophets had pointed out that Israel's fall came
came not just because they had enemies but because of
failures of leaders, both political & spiritual.

They had become corrupt and self serving.

The powerful got what they wanted
and left a muddy mess for the rest.

Ezekiel said they were shepherds who didn't care for sheep.

Even the priests just went through the motions.

As a result, the people themselves went astray
because they had muddied the waters.

It was hard to see issues clearly. People were confused about what was right and wrong, true and false
So they did whatever they felt, which was selfish & immoral and if they worshipped at all worshipped a variety of gods just to hedge their bets because they felt so hopeless.
Today too waters are muddied, especially spiritually & morally.
Those who should be guide don't go by clear Bible teaching.
Many people don't care what Bible says at all.
As a result their concept of what is right is focused on a self centered notion of their own rights.
As people wander like sheep in search of own personal truth behavior & even identity is based on impulsive feelings.
The resulting immorality, including sexual immorality weakens the family and so weakens society as a whole and is a major factor in abuse, poverty and disease.
What can we do, rely on political leaders to solve problems?
Like Ezekiel, we have seen enough corruption at high levels to remind us not to rely on human leaders for ultimate help.
Both they & we must acknowledge that they have their position only by the permission of God and are responsible to him.
Sometimes the rich and powerful get what they want by trampling on the needs of the rest.
In these dark days, we need the Lord to rescue gather us.

GOD SUPPLIES SECURITY AND STRENGTH

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.

Ezekiel is accurately predicting that God will bring Israel back from Babylonian exile to the mountains of Israel. They will again live in inhabited places with fertile lands. They will again have descendant of David as their leader.

But this also does not last that long. The good days will dry up.
The reference to grazing on the mountain heights
pictures how, when lower pastures dry up in hot seasons
good pasture can still be found up in the mountains.
So also, when the things we commonly rely on fail us
God himself is our mountain heights.
We are not exactly sheep living on grass, but what we need
is comfort when threatened, guidance when confused,
refreshment when weary, hope when despairing.
Where do we find reliable security in day of clouds & darkness?
where do we find strength to do what is needed & right?
Military and industrial might are not the ultimate answer,
partly because more than ever our enemies & problems
are not in a particular place or thing you can see
but our challenges are ideologies, ideas.
More & more, as Paul recognized, our struggle is not against
flesh and blood but spiritual forces in heavenly places.
Only God can give us sure help and the way he does it is
through his word which remains more solid than mountains
and as clear as a mountain stream.
Here there is comfort, as we see how God understands us
and assures us he is with us.
In God's word of law is guidance as the God who made us
and gave us life tells us how it is to be lived.
We must admit with Paul in today's epistle reading that
we ourselves are among those who deserve
punishment when God brings justice,
but he declares us righteous instead.
In God's word of gospel is refreshment when we fail & are tired
as God gives us the forgiveness of sins.
Here there is hope no matter what as God promises
eternal salvation and everlasting life with him.
This is why God continually calls and gathers us
to feed on his word in worship and Bible study,
not just to nibble and run off again but to fill up on it,
chew on it and make it part of us.
Ezekiel's picture of being fed also points us to
what God does for us in the Lord's Supper
Here God gathers us together and by Jesus' own words
gives us forgiveness, hope and strength
by giving us Jesus own body and blood.

This is the ultimate source

THE GOOD SHEPHERD SEEKS AND SAVES US

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²³ And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴ And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken.

Basically, Ezekiel is saying God will make Israel great again,
as in days of King David.

How is he going to do this? by raising David from the dead?
Well, sort of.

When Peter preached at Pentecost on the Psalm in which
David said he would not stay dead,
he said David was speaking prophetically about the one
who was within him, so to speak, his descendant, Jesus.

This is obviously who Ezekiel is talking about when he quotes
God saying, "I, I myself" will come and search for my sheep.

When Jesus describes a shepherd searching for his sheep
& says, "I am good shepherd." He identifies himself as God.

This is how God saves us. He comes to us in person.

v. 12 says, he is among his sheep that have been scattered.
Jesus was born & lived in midst of people
in political, social & religious turmoil.

He showed his power to help those who were suffering.
He went seeking, forgiving & restoring the lost & forgotten.
His clear teaching cut through religious speculation
and moral confusion.

He submitted to government authority even while he lived
under a higher authority
& brought people into a kingdom that is not of this world.
God used both religious & government authority for his purpose
as Jesus suffered and died innocently to pay for our sins.
He came to connect himself with us, our suffering & our sins,
so that when he was raised again we might be connected
to him, his glory and holiness, through faith.

Jesus is the one shepherd who has done this
in order to rescue us all and gather us all into one flock
which he is bringing to a joyful celebration in heaven.
Our text ends with the words, "I am the Lord, I have spoken."
God himself does this for us & he does it through his word.
This is why again today we gather around his word,
because we have heard his word, to listen to his word
and to believe it and so to receive what God gives us.

WE NEED DELIVERANCE FROM DAYS OF DARKNESS

We continue to live in dark days of threats and confusion.

GOD SUPPLIES SECURITY AND STRENGTH

he gives comfort, guidance, restoration and hope in his word
as no one and nothing else can.

because THE GOOD SHEPHERD SEEKS AND SAVES US

God himself has come to be with us where we are
as Jesus suffers in our place to save us
and bring us together into his kingdom now and forever.