**The Good Shepherd**

Jesus proclaimed, “I am the Good Shepherd” (John 10:11). He was emphasizing the legitimacy of His leadership of the people of God in contrast to the “robbers and thieves” who had come before Him and the “hired hands” who were not truly committed to the welfare of the sheep who had been entrusted to them. But Jesus’ proclamation conveyed deeper meaning than simply the application of a parable. God had promised through the prophets to send The Good Shepherd, and Jesus was the fulfillment of that promise.

The shepherds of Ezekiel’s day were the leaders and prophets and priests who should have been leading the people in the ways of righteousness. Instead, they were misleading them, selfishly lining their own pockets and demonstrating a total disregard for the spiritual wellbeing of the sheep for whom they were responsible (Ezekiel 34:1-10). It was in that context that God promised to remove the wicked shepherds, gather His scattered flock and give them a real Shepherd.

“Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them; I the LORD have spoken” (Ezekiel 34:23-24). Of course, God was not talking about raising David from the dead, He is referring to the Son of David, Messiah.

It was God’s plan all along for the Good Shepherd to be a suffering shepherd. “’Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, and against the man, My Associate,’ declares the LORD of hosts. ‘Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered’” (Zechariah 13:7). In fact, Jesus applied this prophecy to Himself in Matthew 26:31.

The shepherds of the people of Jesus’ day (the Jewish leaders) were no better than the shepherds of Ezekiel’s day. They were hypocritical, immoral, dishonest and as rebellious as their forefathers. Just as He had promised, God gathered together His scattered flock, but this time, the people of God included men and women from every nation under heaven. Now, those who are Abraham’s descendants are those who belong to Christ (Galatians 3:29). Christians are spiritual Israel and Jesus is our Good Shepherd.

We desperately need the Good Shepherd. We need One willing to lay down His life for us. We need One who is able and willing to lead us in the right paths. We need One who loves us and will provide for our needs and protect us. We need a Shepherd who has experienced all the trials and temptations of this life and can sympathize with our infirmities. We need One who can comfort us when we are hurting. We need One who is always with us, ready to advocate and intercede on our behalf. We need One whose shed blood can cleanse us from all sin so we can be reconciled with the Father. We need Jesus.

Jesus didn’t say, “I am a good shepherd.” He is The Good Shepherd. “There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

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