

# Vision 20/20

*“Have you never read in the Scriptures: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes”?”  
(Matthew 21:42 ESV)*

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”  
(Acts 1:8 ESV)*

*“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”  
(Matthew 25:13 ESV)*

## **The Good Shepherd**

**October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

**Ezekiel 34:1-24**

**John 10:1-18**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning church! I want to invite you to open your Bibles this morning to Ezekiel 34:1-24; that’s on page 722 in your pew Bibles. While you find that let me explain why you are going there. This is the 4<sup>th</sup> week in our Mission and Vision series and as you have heard me say a number of times now what we DO as a church is rooted in and related to who we ARE as a church – and of course, who WE ARE as a church is very much related to WHO JESUS IS AS OUR LORD AND SAVIOR. In John’s recording of the Great Commission Jesus said:

“As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” (John 20:21 ESV)

So who Jesus WAS in his incarnation is intended to be determinative for who and how we are as the church and so today we are looking at one of the most important threads in the Bible with respect to the identity and mission of Jesus – and by extension – the identity and mission of the church.

We are going to be looking at the theme of “The Good Shepherd” and to really understand that we have to go all the way back to Ezekiel 34 where God rebuked and rejected THE BAD

SHEPHERDS – the BAD LEADERS within the covenant community. So hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 1 and proceeding through verse 6.

The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup>“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? <sup>3</sup>You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; <sup>6</sup>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.” (Ezekiel 34:1–6 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord – thanks be to God!

So in this prophecy, which was given while Israel was in exile in Babylon, God says that he has rejected the leadership of Israel. He has rejected the kings and the nobles and the priests and the prophets. They are MOST TO BLAME for the terrible situation that Israel found itself in. The sheep themselves – the people – were also to blame – he says that in verses 17-21 – but the leaders were MOST TO BLAME and so God is rejecting them. Here is why:

He is rejecting them first of all because:

### **The Bad Shepherds:**

#### **1. They fed themselves instead of the sheep**

You can see that in verse 2.

Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? (Ezekiel 34:2 ESV)

Leaders in the covenant community are supposed to feed and lead and build up – but these guys are abusing and consuming and tearing down. Jesus addressed this in his day. He talked about the leaders in the Jewish community who:

“devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.” (Mark 12:40 ESV)

Listen friends – hear me on this. There have always been people operating within the covenant community – who attempt to prey on the vulnerable – particularly old ladies. In today’s terms these are the folks who say on their television programs: “Oh sister, if you send me just \$1000 – just a SEED SISTER - I will pray for you right now and open up the windows of heaven and rain down on you blessings 1000 fold!”

Thanks be to God - such charlatans will receive the greater condemnation. Let’s be on our guard against such people.

Secondly these bad leaders in Ezekiel 34:

## **2. They cared nothing for the weak, the sick and the injured**

You see that in verse 4:

The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up (Ezekiel 34:4 ESV)

The bad shepherds wanted to associate with the strong and the healthy and the successful because that would make them look good and that would give them access to resources that could be leveraged for their own selfish ends and purposes.

But that’s not leadership in the house of the Lord – and that’s not leadership in a broken world. In a broken world leaders needs to have a particular interest – not an exclusive interest – but a particular interest in the weak, the sick and the injured.

But these folks didn't have that.

And these folks didn't seek out the lost and the strayed.

### **3. They did not seek out the lost and the strayed**

It says that in verse 4 as well –

“the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought” (Ezekiel 34:4 ESV)

We often think of Old Testament Israel as practicing a rather uniform religion – but that couldn't be further from the truth. Just think back to the stories about Elijah. In his day most of the people were no longer worshipping Yahweh – they were worshipping Asherah and Baal - the gods of the Canaanites. So Elijah arranged a contest between the true God and these false gods that they were going after. He said to the people:

“How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.” (1 Kings 18:21 ESV)

So Elijah at least was seeking out the strays and the lost – he was engaged in the battle for souls! But most of his contemporaries – most of the other leaders in his day were not. They were busy looking after their own interests and they left the people of God to wander about and perish on their own - and that's why God rejected them.

And then lastly, in terms of the bad shepherds:

### **4. They were not gentle with the sheep under their care**

We see that at the end of verse 4:

“with force and harshness you have ruled them.” (Ezekiel 34:4 ESV)

Note this well, brothers and sisters, you cannot be a leader in God’s house unless you know how to lead WITHOUT resorting to force and harshness.

We see this in the New Testament too. In the qualifications for elders and pastors Paul says:

“an overseer must be above reproach ... able to teach, not a drunkard, **not violent** but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.” (1 Timothy 3:2–3 ESV)

So in the New Testament too we are looking for leaders who can move and motivate people without brutalizing them. Leadership in the Kingdom of God is firm, it’s urgent – but never violent.

But these leaders didn’t get that and therefore they are rejected by God. We see that in verse 10:

Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them. (Ezekiel 34:10 ESV)

So – God declares that he has rejected the leadership class in Israel – but then right alongside of that he promises to provide the people with something far better. He says in verse 15:

“I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD.” (Ezekiel 34:15 ESV)

Are you hearing that? GOD HIMSELF will come and shepherd his people. That’s marvelous! That’s an incredible promise!

But then look quickly at verse 23; there God says:

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. (Ezekiel 34:23 ESV)

Well wait a second! Which is it? Will GOD be the Good Shepherd or will David? Now, we assume that he means “a son of David” because David himself was long dead by the time that

Ezekiel gave this prophecy – but either way, the question remains: Who will be our leader? Will it be a SON OF DAVID or will it be GOD HIMSELF? That tension isn't ever resolved in the Old Testament. God seemed to be saying something here that didn't make a great deal of sense – until Jesus.

Turn in your Bibles now to John 10 – that's on page 896 in the pew Bibles. Listen to what Jesus says:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber.<sup>2</sup> But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.<sup>3</sup> To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.<sup>4</sup> When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.<sup>5</sup> A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.”<sup>6</sup> This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.<sup>7</sup> So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.<sup>8</sup> All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them.<sup>9</sup> I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.<sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.<sup>11</sup> I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.<sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,<sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.<sup>16</sup> And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.<sup>17</sup> For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again.<sup>18</sup> No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.” (John 10:1–18 ESV)

We'll have to move very quickly here if we are going to be able to get into some of the implications of this for us as a church, but I want to make sure that we've understood what Jesus is saying here. He is saying, first of all that he has come to the sheep precisely as anticipated – he says that in verses 1-3.

## The Good Shepherd:

### 1. Comes to the sheep precisely as anticipated

He says that he came to the door and was recognized by the gatekeeper.

Now I suppose it would be helpful to understand a little bit about actual shepherding back in 1<sup>st</sup> century Israel. Most sheep in those days were kept at night in large, common pens. There might be 6,7 or 10 different flocks in the pen at night belonging to various families in the village. Thus the shepherd would come up the path to the gate leading to the pen. He would be recognized by the guard who had been hired to watch over the entire pen at night.

By way of contrast, a person who wishing to harm the sheep or steal the sheep would likely try to climb over the fence – they certainly wouldn't walk right up the path.

So Jesus is saying – I have come – walking up the path that was carved out by the Scriptures.

And the Gate Keeper recognized me when I arrived at the door. John the Baptist pointed at me and said:

This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' (John 1:30 ESV)

This is the one we've been waiting for! This is the one I've been telling you to expect.

So Jesus came walking straight up the path and he was warmly greeted by the Gate Keeper.

Secondly, we notice here that Jesus, the Good Shepherd:

### 2. Calls his sheep by name

Again – a little bit of background is helpful here. Shepherds in those days used particular sounds and whistles to lead their sheep. The shepherd would go into the common pen and whistle or make

certain noises that his sheep would recognize and thus they would assemble and follow him out through the gate.

That's what Jesus comes to do.

Listen, friends, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is God's Dog Whistle – or to stick with our metaphor – it is God's Sheep Whistle. It has been perfectly designed and intentionally pitched so that it will be heard and recognized by every single person that he has ordained for eternal life.

That's why the same message can go out over a crowd and some hear it and some don't.

That's why the Bible says things like:

And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and **as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.** (Acts 13:48 ESV)

The Word of God went out GENERALLY OVER THE CROWD – and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed!

That's what I mean by a sheep whistle!

Jesus is calling his sheep – and they know his voice! They are awakened! They get up – and they follow him all the way down the path that leads to eternal life.

And it is also the path that leads to abundant life – that's the next thing we see in the text. The Good Shepherd gives the sheep abundant life.

### **3. Gives the sheep abundant life**

We see that in verse 10.

It is GOOD to be a sheep under the care of the Good Shepherd.



His sheep are happy, fat, well fed and well-watered. They are putting down roots and growing up strong - they look like they are being well led – because they are.

And they are also being well protected – we see that in verses 11-13.

#### **4. Protects the sheep from that which would destroy them**

When a wolf comes the hired hand runs away – but the Good Shepherd stands and fights for his sheep! He puts his life on the line! Like David fought with the bear and the lion so our Shepherd fights with anything that would seek to destroy us.

He feeds us, he leads us, he defends us, and he gathers us into one united flock – that is the 5<sup>th</sup> thing and the last thing we will notice here.

#### **5. Gathers the sheep into one united flock**

We see that in verse 16:

I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. (John 10:16 ESV)

In John 10 Jesus is speaking to Jewish people. By his preaching he was drawing out from the Jewish people a remnant of true believers. We must never forget that the first generation of believers was almost exclusively Jewish. The ground flood of this Spiritual House is made up almost exclusively of Jewish stones.

But the plan was always to bring in more stones – or more sheep – to stick with the metaphor – from every tribe, tongue and nation on planet earth.

That's what we are seeing here! The Gospel of Jesus Christ calls us, awakens us and connects us into a whole new tribe and identity. We are no longer Jews or Greeks. We are no longer Romans

or Americans or Canadians – if we are in Christ then we have a new identity. We are sons and daughters of the Living God.

That is what the Good Shepherd DOES – and that is WHO JESUS IS – and that has MASSIVE IMPLICATIONS for us as a gathered church. Remember Jesus said:

“As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” (John 20:21 ESV)

The way he came into the world is supposed to guide and determine how we go out into the world and so I want to spend our last few minutes together thinking through how this imagery ought to guide, inform and even constrain us as a church.

### **Implications For Us As A Church:**

For the sake of time let me just point out the 4 most OBVIOUS implications for us as a church.

If we are going to be a Good Shepherd kind of church then obviously we need to be FEEDING people with the Bread of eternal life.

#### **1. Let’s feed people with the Bread of Life**

Right? Nothing could be more obvious than that. Jesus said:

“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” (John 6:35 ESV)

So we need to be feeding people Jesus!

He needs to be the ultimate point of every story that we tell and every song that we sing – amen church?

This is not going to be the tell me your opinion church.

This is not going to be the “how can we sound more like Oprah” church.

This is going to be the GIVE ME MORE JESUS CHURCH. Amen?

This is going to be the church where we worship the Christ of Scripture. The one the Old Testament anticipates and the New Testament explicates. That is going to be our steady diet. Feed us that or feed us nothing. Are you with me there?

Amen.

And then secondly if we are going to be a Good Shepherd kind of church we need to care about the weak and the broken.

## **2. Let’s care about the weak and the broken**

The bad shepherds didn’t do that but the Good Shepherd did – so which example are we going to follow?

Listen, friends, there is no such thing as a church that targets the healthy, the rich and the upwardly mobile. Now, I’m not saying that there aren’t so called churches doing that very thing – I am just saying that no true church – no church that is truly following JESUS CHRIST is doing that.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd – as the Father sent him into the world – SO he has sent us into the world.

“Do as you saw me do” – Jesus says.

So, brothers and sisters, what did we see him do?

Matthew 9:36 says:

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. (Matthew 9:36 ESV)

Jesus cared about people who were harassed and helpless. D.A. Carson says that these words describe people who are “bullied, oppressed; and in the face of such problems they are “helpless”, unable to rescue themselves or escape their tormentors.”<sup>1</sup>

Who does that sound like?

It sounds like a lot of people in the City of Orillia.

People who have been abused and pushed down by so many people and who are now helpless before their oppressors – helpless before the power of drugs and the lure of mind numbing intoxication. People who feel unable to get up and try again. People who don’t know which way to turn.

Jesus had compassion on those people – and so we need to have compassion on those people.

We need to be patient and merciful. We need to factor in the abuse and the neglect and the dysfunction. We need to allow for one step forward and three steps back – because that’s what it means to have compassion on the weak and the broken.

And that’s what it means to be a Good Shepherd church.

And then thirdly, it means seeking out the lost and the straying.

### **3. Let’s seek out the lost and the straying**

It means being like Elijah in that sense. It means doing as Jesus did. It means walking through this city blowing your sheep whistle. It means understanding that not all will come – but it means

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<sup>1</sup> D.A. Carson, *Matthew Chapters 1 Through 12* in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 235.

getting the Gospel out there so that those who have been appointed to eternal life will wake up and stand up and step out and begin to follow Jesus.

And it means going after the strays - those who have heard and stirred but then have become distracted.

It means getting in their face too and **BLOWING YOUR WHISTLE ONCE AGAIN.**

Remember – 1 step forward, 3 steps back.

Sheep get lost from time to time – so we've got to go and whistle for them once again.

And I think lastly it means that we need to be a church that is **MAXIMALLY COMMITTED** to protecting and defending our little ones.

#### **4. Let's protect and defend our little ones**

Jesus said that he would die to protect us from that which would destroy us. Two dangers in particular are highlighted in the text. Jesus says in verse 10:

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. (John 10:10 ESV)

So – we have an enemy. The devil wants to kill us. He wants to steal our kids. He wants to possess our souls for all eternity – but Jesus won a great victory on the cross. He defeated the devil's scheme and pulled the rug out from under him and knocked the sword right out of his hand.

Thanks be to God!

A second enemy is referred to in the text – it is the enemy of sin. Jesus says that he had to lay down his life to protect the sheep. He was referring obviously to the cross – upon which he gave up his life for our sins. The Apostle Paul says that very thing in 1 Corinthians 15. He says:

“Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3  
ESV)

So the Good Shepherd fought a great battle for us and for our salvation. He gave his life to defeat the devil and to free us from our sins.

Therefore to be a Good Shepherd church is to fight that battle again and again and again on behalf of our little ones – our new believers and our children and grandchildren.

We have to commend Christ – and we have to fight ENEMIES! Our kids – our little ones have ENEMIES – do you know that church?

There is a devil that wants to lure them off the path and murder them in the woods.

There is a lust in the flesh – a virus – that would grow in the dark and consume them and kill them from the inside.

Do you know that church?

And there are wolves in sheep’s clothing that would infiltrate the flock and carry off our little ones while we sleep.

Do you know that church?

Then let us ARISE! Let us AWAKE! And let us defend and protect those that God has entrusted to our care.

Let’s pray over them! Let’s watch and identify threats. Let’s teach and lead and tend and correct as necessary. Let’s use the rod and the staff and the sling and the sword that we were given.

Because souls are at stake – and because that what it means to be a Good Shepherd Church – and because this is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God. Let’s pray together.