

Jesus: Defender, Prosecutor, and Judge

Introduction

John 9:35-10:30

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For some of you, the title of this lesson may be of comfort; for others, this title may cause you to tremble. This is as it should be. There is much to consider in this title. For Christ's sheep, there is comfort knowing that Jesus is your Shepherd and defender. But for those devoted to corrupt systems and its leaders, the Lord himself is your prosecutor and judge. I did not say only that he will be someday, but he is your prosecutor and judge even now (John 3:16-21). Worldly success can numb you to this reality, but it cannot save you. Simply being a member of a large, popular church is no refuge for the Lord's attending to you for your part in propagating a false system and your devotion to its degenerate leaders. I beg you to hear and apply what this lesson, and those lessons that follow, have to say to you.

Degenerate Shepherds and those Who Follow Them

The image of Jesus as our good Shepherd does not come to us as an isolated text, but as the fulfillment of prophecies found in both Jeremiah and Ezekiel. There the LORD promises he will one day judge the abuse and neglect visited upon his sheep by the false shepherds of Israel. In chapter 10 of John's Gospel, we discover that day has come, though it is also a Day yet to come. The Pharisees are heirs of the false shepherds of ancient Israel, and Jesus is about to visit judgment upon them. While the people hold the Pharisees in high regard, Jesus exposes them instead as "thieves and robbers . . . strangers and hired hands" who care nothing for the sheep.

It is important to note that John 10 begins as a continuation of the encounter with the Pharisees in John 9:35. But if we are going to grasp and apply the lessons of our text, we must first understand the greater context found in the prophets.

During the time of Jeremiah, the state of pastoral care had so declined that the sheep of the LORD were "scattered and destroyed" (Jeremiah 23:1). In response, God promised that he would "attend" to those evil shepherds who failed to attend to his sheep. And a day was coming in which he would provide his people righteous shepherds, "who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing' declares the LORD" (Jeremiah

23:4). The Lord, says Jeremiah, will “raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will called: “The LORD is our righteousness” (23:5-6).

Ezekiel also calls out those shepherds who feed themselves and neglect the hungry sheep. They do not strengthen the weak nor do they heal the sick, or bind up the injured; they have not brought back those who stray nor sought out the lost, says the prophet. What is more, they have ruled over the sheep with force and harshness — the sheep became food for wild beasts — they were scattered “over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them” (Ezekiel 34:1-6).

Does any of this sound familiar? It should.

Personally, I am astounded at the parallels between the evil done by the false shepherds of Israel and so many of today’s leaders. To say the state of pastoral care in the evangelical churches today is low is a gross understatement. The business and entertainment model of ministry has produced professional speakers and celebrity leaders ripe with selfish ambition and dreams of success, while all the while, God’s sheep go hungry. Therefore, just as in the prophets, God declares today as he did then, he is against those shepherds, and says, “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” (34:7-10). That “Day” is near. Let’s read that section from Ezekiel.

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 (Ezekiel 34:11-16).

Here we discover that God himself will one day care for his sheep. He himself will provide what the false shepherds of Israel have failed miserably to provide. This is the historic and prophetic backdrop of Jesus as the good Shepherd. God, the incarnate Son, has come to care for his sheep. And God has come also to prosecute and judge the false shepherds of Israel. So, it is my purpose here to help you see that Christ as your good Shepherd, defender and your advocate against the modern thieves and robbers, strangers and hirelings, masquerading as shepherds.

As the Shepherd So Also the Sheep

Now, there is another aspect of this prosecution and judgement that we must consider because it comes to us within the prophecy of Ezekiel, and that is this equally astonishing evil: the judgment of those sheep who abuse other sheep. Let's look at that text, Ezekiel 34, again.

¹⁷“As for you, my flock, thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and male goats. ¹⁸Is 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? ¹⁹And 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. ²¹Because you push with side and shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad, ²²I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep. ²³And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken (Ezekiel 34:17-24).

Here, the LORD promises to judges not only the false shepherds, but those among the sheep who mimic the abusive patterns of the false shepherds and so treat fellow sheep. These sheep eat and drink their fill and then cause conditions which leave other sheep hungry and thirsty. They even commit physical abuse toward other sheep. Like the false shepherds, they scatter their fellow sheep and make them prey for wild beasts. *Now this is the scene:* Degenerate false shepherds and the sheep who mimic them. And the LORD promises to rescue his sheep from *both* false shepherds and the sheep who imitate their behavior.

Consider carefully what is being said here. For not only are there false shepherds from whom the LORD will rescue his own sheep, there are also sheep who follow the false shepherds and mimic

their abusive behavior toward other sheep. What is this but a prophecy against degenerate pastors and those who love and follow them? The judgment has already begun, the wrath of God already abides and does not sleep, and the Day of the Lord, the consummation of all things, is also near (see II Thessalonians 1:3-12; Jude 14; Revelation 6:11; 11:18;14:13; Hebrews 10:19-31).

Do we think that everyone who is presently within an apostate church organization is upset with being there? The fact is, there are some genuine Christians who have grown accustomed to the abusive, exploitive environment, and they like it there. There are untold numbers of genuine Christians who have become as Paul later describe the Galatians, that is, “Bewitched” (Galatians 3:1). They have heard the truth, they have experienced the work of the Spirit, they are truly saved, but bewitched by false teaching. They are entranced by the false teachers into no longer believing the truth, as evidenced by the way they mimic the behavior of the false teachers and abuse fellow believers.

Degenerate leaders and the people who love and follow them; most are goats, but there are also genuine sheep among them as well. And the Lord says twice, “I judge between sheep and sheep” (Ezekiel 34:17, 22). The principle here is that people imitate their leaders. And even corrupt, abusive leaders will find followers, and those followers will behave in similar fashion as those they follow.

So, in the next few lessons, we will examine these things more closely. Why? Because we must be clear as to how to come out and instead follow our good Shepherd. Let me say this clearly: the time is short. The Day of the Lord is nearer than you can imagine. And you want to know are among Christ’s sheep when it comes. This is why this study is so important. Many will be caught unawares. Many will hear on that day, “I never knew you; depart from me, you who work lawlessness” (Matthew 7:23). I plead with you, don’t be named among those who hear those dreadful words from the mouth of Jesus.

What we want, indeed, what we desperately need, is to have strong assurance of our status as Christ’s sheep. And the surest evidence that we are his sheep, is that we are like him. Just as the wayward sheep imitate the false shepherds, so also, we will know our standing with Jesus as our

good and only Shepherd, because we share his character and walk in the Spirit even as he did (I John 2:6).

In the next lesson, we will begin this new part of our journey through this text, as we discover Jesus as our defender, as well as the prosecutor and judge of those false shepherds whose sheep fold out from which you are called. **AMEN.**

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