

PostExilicProphets 21-11-17b

Let's resume our study now. We're looking at Zechariah chapter 11 in particular, and the judgment on the shepherds who are doing harm and injustice to God's people. We went back to Ezekiel chapter 34 to see these shepherds and their crimes.

We started in the end of chapter 33 and looked at the people who make noise about being interested in the word of God and hearing the prophet Ezekiel, but they don't do anything with what they hear. So what we find is, as we saw last week and we're seeing again this week, the flock of God is made up of two kinds of people. I'm tempted to say those with guns and those who dig, but that's not the two kinds.

The two kinds are those who are hearers of the word and not doers, and those who both hear and heed. The people of God get the word. It is available.

It's what they do with it that separates them into two groups. The introduction at the end of Ezekiel chapter 33 that tells us about these people who are hearers and not doers, a theme, obviously, to which James will return in the New Testament. When these false and self-interested shepherds take charge in Israel and the flock is abused, these people are experiencing a deserved suffering.

You get the kind of shepherd that fits the kind of sheep that you are. If you're a faithless sheep, you get shepherded by a faithless individual. You follow a bad shepherd and suffer the consequences.

But in that group, there will also be those remnant believers, those people of God who, in spite of everything, are faithful. We mentioned them at the end of the first session. You think about Caleb and Joshua.

You think about the faithful in the captivity, such as Ezekiel. You think about Daniel and his three friends who nevertheless suffered being taken captive, being castrated, and under the charge of the chief of the eunuchs who spent their lives serving in captivity, who nevertheless were in a position to reflect the glory of God by their faith. There's a reason.

Everybody remember Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. There's a reason people remember the story of the lion's den. And it is that in times of hardship and adversity, persecution, oppression, vilification, and attack by jealous enemies, these people remained faithful.

Rahab the harlot, surrounded by family, friends, and a city of faithless and condemned people, chose to trust the God of Israel, chose to trust representatives of that God who came to her house and were hidden. And in her faith, she ends up being in the direct line of Jesus Christ. She is David's great-grandmother.

Ruth the Moabitess, leaving her people, following Naomi back to the land of Israel. And she too

ends up in the line of Christ, the line of David. Yet hardship on all sides.

Being widowed is no fun. Being in a land of starvation and famine, having to work hard to subsist is no fun. Hardship, oppression, persecution is no fun.

But it is the greater reality of the plan and purpose of God, His promises that if we endure, we will reign with Him. It's hard to remember, but that's our task. So these faithless shepherds, back to Ezekiel 34 and back to Zechariah chapter 11, they harm good people as well as bad.

The whole flock suffers. And you can't draw conclusions about past decisions, past priorities, past actions, good or bad, based on current experiences. There are evil people who do not seem to be punished.

Why do the wicked prosper? It's a question, Old Testament and new. Why is it that righteous people seem to suffer adversity and hardship? And not everyone does at the same time, to the same extent, to the same level, for the same reasons, in the same areas. It's widely various.

And we tend to think in very basic cause and effect terms. If I'm suffering, I must have done something wrong. Well, if we're suffering, we might have done something wrong but of the seven reasons why people suffer, only one of them is for discipline.

The others are for different reasons. Generally, you can categorize all of the others under fulfilling God's plan and purpose, which encompasses enabling us to grow in grace and knowledge of the Savior, to be thoroughly equipped for every good work by being forced to apply the word of God that we have learned, to put it into practice, to rely on it, to exhibit our faith, to reflect the glory of God, to shine His lights in the midst of crookedness and perversity so that others can see Christ, can see the power of God, can see the glory of God, and be drawn to Him through our example, to ask a question for the reason of the hope that is in us. Nobody's gonna see your hope if you're never in adversity.

I don't need to hope if I'm laying on a bed of roses and sipping a mint julep and having a high old time. We have hope in adversity. We look forward to the fulfillment of God's promises when things look dark, when we are experiencing genuine suffering.

This is what tests us for the purpose of approval. Dokimazo is the Greek word. Test it to show that it's made of good stuff.

Refining the precious metal to remove impurities. The more times you heat gold or silver, the more impurities can rise to the surface and be scooped away so that what is left is more and more perfect, higher and higher quality. You can't get quality gold if you don't melt it, which happily, this is like a professional segue here, brings me back to our passage in Zechariah, because we're going to be getting down to these 30 pieces of silver and where they are thrown and who gets them.

And that's a real fascinating study. But before we leave Ezekiel, in case you lost your place, you

can turn back there. We have these three trees.

And I promised before we saw the cedar and we saw the oaks of Bashan. These are up in the north. And this is where fire is going to break out and burn all down both sides of the Jordan River and arrive down in the vicinity of Jerusalem.

But in the middle of those two, at the beginning of this chapter, we saw that the cypresses should wail because the cedar has fallen and the mighty trees are ruined. So the cypresses should wail and the oaks of Bashan should wail as the thick forest comes down and the sound of wailing shepherds. Interesting because shepherds don't typically lead their flocks into the woods.

You can read Psalm 23 and you never get in the woods. You can be in a shadowy valley. You can be in green pastures and besides still waters.

It doesn't say the Lord is my shepherd and he uses his stick to send me into the woods. So why are these shepherds wailing? Well, their glory is in ruins and the picture shifts. These trees represent these shepherds.

So what would inform our understanding of this? Well, remember when we went back to Ezekiel chapter 34, verse eight, 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. Therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God, behold, I am against the shepherds and I will require my flock at their hand.

In the same way that God allows time to pass when we are in hardship to demonstrate our faith, God allows evil to take the bit in its teeth, to run for a time and to demonstrate what it is. You wouldn't know how evil these shepherds are until you see what they do to the flock. The suffering of the flock is not only something that God is going to recompense and whatever, remember what Jesus said to his disciples, whatever you've left behind or lost in this life, you're gonna have a hundredfold in the life to come.

God will take care of his sheep, but they have become a means of demonstrating just how deep, how strong, and how vile the evil is in the shepherds. There are people who say, you know, there can't be a God because if he's a good God, he would never let children be abused. He would never let somebody go murder somebody else.

He would never let bad things happen to good people. This is proof there is no God, certainly not a good God, because if he's powerful enough to stop evil and he doesn't then he's boorish and insensitive. If he's too weak to stop it, then he's not really God and he shouldn't be worshiped.

And you know, they follow this logic. Too short-sighted to realize that God allows evil to express itself and to create victims to demonstrate the extent of what evil will do. If God stopped every

crime before it happens, how would we know how vile evil is? If God protected us from every bad thing that ever happens, where would be faith? Where would be growth? Where would be learning to use the resources that God has given us to think our way through adversity, to think our way through problems, to assess and evaluate and look at things in the light of our biblical goals and values and priorities, to learn to look to the Holy Spirit for truth and light and guidance, to lead us in paths of righteousness, to bear fruit, because our soil has been well plowed and our rocks have been hammered to dust by the hammer of the word of God.

It's a process of improvement. It is a process of learning and growing in grace. And it comes at the price of experience.

And you can't get there with good experience. As I have said innumerable times, this is why we don't just step into a rocket and go straight to heaven at the point that we believe in Jesus. Why does God leave us here after salvation? If the point is to get saved and we're saved, well, let's go, let's hit the heavenly realms.

Why does God leave us here? How are we going to be inoculated? How are we going to be vaccinated? How are we going to be able to identify evil at a distance and reject it and eschew it and avoid it and never participate in it unless we are exposed to it? The human immune system is a beautiful picture of why Christians suffer, why we experience what evil can do, whether it is the evil within us or the evil around us, or the evil that's inherent in the system, the world, the flesh, the devil, we experience all of them. And as we grow, and this is one of the purposes of growth, we think, well, everybody will be happy over there. All I've got to do is just kind of cling to my Bible and hang on until death or the rapture.

And then it's all going to be glory and golden streets and gates of pearl and angel singing and manna. And it'll all be wonderful. We are here to learn how to live in the eternal future with free will.

God's angels have free will. They had it before human history. They had it before the earth was created and they've had it ever since.

Gabriel and Michael have free will. Why do they not choose? Why do the unfallen angels not choose to join Satan and his crew? The ones who chose against God and rejected God. Why do they not choose the same way? Did God say, well, no more of this free will choosing.

Look how that turned out. I lost a third of my angels exercising their free choice. I'm just going to shut down that capability.

Nonsense. Why do the unfallen angels not fall? Because they have seen and experienced up close and personal not only the fall of their fellow angels, but the things that they observe on this earth, watching, longing to look into what's going on here. They see the effect.

They see the result. They see that disconnecting from the life of God inevitably leads to death. That there is no life separate from God.

There is no righteousness. There is no truth. There is no meaning and purpose without being directly related to God in a positive way.

Recipients of his grace and his faithfulness and his benefits, his power, his presence. That is the path of life and peace. Anything else deciding that we can go it alone and go our own way.

I will be like God. I will be like the most high. I will make the decisions.

I will choose the path. I can do as good a job as God. I'm just gonna disconnect from him.

I don't like the way he operates. I don't like, I just chafe under his strictures and his principles and his ordinances and his commands. And why can't I just do what I wanna do? I want to please myself.

It's the self-interested, self-satisfied me first life. And you see it all around us today. It's me, myself and I, my identity, my chosen pronouns, my color, my culture, my ambitions, my self-identification.

I am my own God. I'm the unholy Trinity of me, myself and I. Well, it's as old as Satan's fall. It is as old as the lie that he tried to tell Eve in the garden, you can be just like God.

You don't need Adam. You don't need God. Eat this fruit.

You'll be independent. You'll be wise. You can go your own way.

Fatal. The only way we can avoid that trap is to see its results, to experience its pain and its suffering at firsthand. And knowing that, it's just like when I was a child and all of you, when you were a child, you had some experience of pain.

Did you ever stick a piece of flatware into a socket in the wall, a plug? You know, that's why they came up with those plastic guards because there were so many of us that were curious about what was inside there and jammed something metal in and got shocked. Did you ever try to get the base of a broken light bulb out of a socket and not realize that the switch was on and get shocked and knock off the ladder? I've heard that this has happened to people. I am one of them.

And I can promise you, I never ever get on a ladder and mess with a broken light bulb unless I go shut off the breaker. I don't trust the switch. The switch was off when I got blasted off the ladder and woke up on the floor, the switch was off.

But it was a badly wired light fixture. It's down at your house. Wired in the 19, well, it was wired in the 1950s and there were no, it's two wire wiring, there's no ground.

So I say that to say, experience is a wonderful teacher and there are things that once we experience them, we will never do that again. We're cured, I'm over it. That's not happening to me a second time.

That is a lot of what this life is about is learning the consequences of straying from God and his plan and his purpose, failing to appreciate him, to love him, to want to live, to please him and to serve him. Any other path is death. And why would you do that? Only because you just can't shake self-interest.

I want what I want. And if God doesn't give it to me, then I'll go try to find it my own way, my own how. And it's fatal.

There's a way that seems right, but the ends are the ways of death. So people in the flock are of two kinds, either respond or react. The same shepherds are going to be devouring and fleecing and abusing and scattering the flock.

Some of those sheep are going to be redeemed. They are going to be collected. They are going to be gathered by the good shepherd.

They are going to be brought into a fold where they are fed and cared for and comforted, healed and blessed. They all suffered the same judgment. Look at the Assyrian attack on Northern Israel.

There were some good believers in Northern Israel. It doesn't say that they were miraculously spared from the invasion and were not taken into captivity. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, they were not spared from the invasion of the Babylonians.

They were taken captive. They lost everything, lost their families, lost their future, lost their ability to procreate and were taken captive. Suffered the same judgment as many of their fellow princes in Judah.

But those four have a different outcome because they never lost their faith in God. They never lost that view that this is an opportunity to glorify the God of my fathers, the God of my salvation. Though he slay me, I will trust him.

Those are the people that God is searching for. That's who we should be in Christ. We've got so many advantages that weren't available in Old Testament days.

Look how much more of the word of God we have. Look how many more examples, exhortations, such as what we're seeing in Zechariah and in Ezekiel. Back to our trees.

You can see in verse 11 of chapter 34 of Ezekiel, Ezekiel 34, 11, thus says the Lord God, indeed I myself will search for my sheep and seek them out. Isn't this great? These people suffered at the hands of faithless and self-interested shepherds. God's not gonna send a better shepherd.

God's gonna come himself personally. I myself will search my sheep and seek them out 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.

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. 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. I will feed my flock and I will make them lie down says the Lord God. 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.

As for you, oh my flock, thus says the Lord God, behold, I shall judge between sheep and sheep. See what we're observing in Zachariah now? Why a pronouncement of blessing and restoration and a pronouncement of judgment can be made on the same flock. I will judge between sheep and sheep and between rams and goats.

Is it too little for you to have eaten up the good pasture that you must tread down with your feet the residue of your pasture, to have drunk of the clear waters that you must foul the residue with your feet? As for my flock, they eat what you have trampled with your feet and they drink what you have fouled with your feet. I cannot read this without thinking of some of the poor quality preaching and teaching of the word of God that goes on today. And it should be the prayer of everybody who endeavors to do what we're doing tonight, to try to ascertain the truth, to understand it, to hear it and to do it, that this not be us.

Verse 20, thus says the Lord God to them, I myself will judge between the fat and the lean sheep. Because you have pushed with side and shoulder, butted all the weak ones with your horns and scattered them abroad, therefore I will save my flock and they shall no longer be a prey. I will judge between sheep and sheep.

I will establish one shepherd over them and he shall feed them, my servant David. There is no better shepherd. He shall feed them and be their shepherd.

And I the Lord will be their God and my servant David, a prince among them. I the Lord have spoken." Now, if you're a sheep, even if you had a reasonably good shepherd, who would you really love to be your shepherd? These people get David as their shepherd because they endured and persevered under awful shepherds. But they waited, they were faithful.

They didn't start doing what the other sheep did. They didn't get self-interested and make themselves fat and sassy and pursuing their own interest and their own good and their own plan and purpose. They were patient.

They waited for the deliverance of God and they are going to be privileged. They're gonna be blessed. They're going to have prosperity unknown in previous times.

David himself is going to be their spiritual shepherd. And this is going to occur through David's greater son. I will make a covenant of peace with them, verse 25, cause wild beasts to cease

from the land.

They will dwell safely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. There will be no wolves. There will be no predators that creep out of the wooded areas.

I will make them and the places all around my hill a blessing. What is God's hill? This is Mount Zion. This is Jerusalem.

I will cause showers to come down in their season. There shall be showers of blessing. Then the trees of the field shall yield their fruit and the earth shall yield her increase.

They shall be safe in their land and they shall know that I am the Lord when I have broken the bands of their yoke and delivered them from the hand of those who enslave them. They shall no longer be a prey for the nations nor shall beasts of the land devour them, but they shall dwell safely. No one shall make them afraid.

Notice enemies, foreign and domestic. The nations, foreign enemies. Those in the land, domestic enemies.

I will raise up for them a garden of renown and they shall no longer be consumed with hunger in the land nor bear the shame of the Gentiles anymore. Thus shall they know that I, the Lord their God, am with them and they, the house of Israel, are my people, says the Lord God. You are my flock, the flock of my pasture.

You are men and I am your God, says the Lord God." What a wonderful promise. And of course it pertains in spiritual form just as much to us as it does to Old Testament Israel. Now, as far as the trees go, Ezekiel is also our key.

Flip back a couple of pages to Ezekiel chapter 31. Ezekiel chapter 31. You remember how Zechariah's prophecy has harked back to Egypt and harked back to Assyria and has elevated our perspective to give us the sweep of history.

God's dealing with his people from the very beginning. Chapter 31 of Ezekiel, it came to pass in the 11th year and the third month on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came to me saying, "'Son of man, say to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and to his multitude, whom are you like in your greatness?' Indeed, Assyria was a cedar in Lebanon with fine branches that shaded the forest and of high stature, and its top was among the thick boughs. The waters made it grow.

Underground waters gave it height with their rivers running around the place where it was planted, and sent out rivulets to all the trees of the field. Therefore, its height was exalted above all the trees of the field. Its boughs were multiplied, and its branches became long because of the abundance of water as it sent them out.

All the birds of the heavens made their nests in its boughs." Remember that? Jesus talking about the kingdom of heaven being like a mustard seed that starts out small, but becomes a

tree, and all the birds of the air nest on its branches. "In its shadow, great nations made their home. In its shadow, great nations made their home.

Thus, it was beautiful in greatness and length of its branches because its roots reached to abundant waters. The cedars in the garden of God could not hide it. The fir trees were not like its boughs, and the chestnut trees were not like its branches.

No tree in the garden of God was like it in beauty. I made it beautiful with a multitude of branches so that all the trees of Eden envied it that were in the garden of God." Anytime you see these garden of God references in Ezekiel and in Isaiah, you were in Eden, the garden of God, Ezekiel 28. You were in Eden.

This is Lucifer. This is harking back to prehistoric times. Therefore, verse 10, "Thus says the Lord God, because you have increase in height, and it set its top among the thick boughs, and its heart was lifted up in its height." Notice the pride of Satan.

Pride is the original sin. Those who become false shepherds, self-interest, self-reliance, selfishness, pleasing self at the expense of others. This is pride.

"Its heart was lifted up in its height. Therefore, I will deliver it into the hand of the mighty one of the nations, and he shall surely deal with it. I have driven it out for its wickedness, and aliens, the most terrible of the nations, have cut it down and left it.

Its branches have fallen on the mountains, and in all the valleys, its boughs lie broken by all the rivers of the land, and all the peoples of the earth have gone from under its shadow and left it. On its ruin will remain all the birds of the heavens, and all the beasts of the field will come to its branches, so that no trees by the waters may ever again exalt themselves for their height, nor set their tops among the thick boughs, that no tree which drinks water may ever be high enough to reach up to them, for they have all been delivered to death to the depths of the earth, among the children of men who go down to the pit. Thus says the Lord God, in the day when it went down to, this is translated hell, this is Sheol, I caused mourning.

I covered the deep because of it. I restrained its rivers, and the great waters were held back. I caused Lebanon to mourn for it, and all the trees of the field wilted because of it.

I made the nations shake at the sound of its fall. When I cast it down to Sheol, together with those who descend into the pit, and all the trees of Eden, the choice and best of Lebanon, all the drink water were comforted in the depths of the earth, were basically put to rest in the depths of the earth. They also went down to Sheol with it, with those slain by the sword, those who were strong-armed dwelt in its shadows among the nation.

To which of the trees in Eden will you then be likened in glory and greatness? Yet you shall be brought down with the trees of Eden to the depths of the earth. You shall lie in the midst of the uncircumcised with those slain by the sword. This is Pharaoh and all his multitude, says the Lord God." And we saw this when we went through Ezekiel.

At various points, there are these pieces of satanic history, of Luciferace, Luciferian history, are reflected in the lens of these kings of the nations, whether it's the Pharaoh of Egypt, whether it's the Assyrians, whether it is Babylon, whether it's the King of Tyre, whoever it may be, these are reflections and facets that go back to the original sin and the author of the first lie and the father of all liars and those who try to perpetrate their power. So what's the big idea here? As we conclude for tonight, what are we seeing here in Zechariah? This only makes sense to the people who have returned from the captivity, who paid attention to the word of God that was delivered to them in the time of hardship. They've come out of captivity.

They have returned to the land. Haggai and Zechariah are in Judah and Jerusalem prophesying to people who are no longer oppressed. They're no longer under the thumb of the Persians.

Their families and their clans and their tribes are no longer in the Babylonian captivity or certainly not the Assyrians from hundreds of years before. They're back in the land. But did you learn the lesson of hardship? Did you learn the lesson of heeding the word of God in times of duress so that whether there is duress or not, that is what distinguishes a faithful sheep, one who is waiting for the good shepherd.

And even that good shepherd is not without his time of suffering, without giving his life for the sheep. Love is sacrificial. Love is beneficial.

If we do Romans 12, one and two and offer ourselves a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable, what happens to a sacrifice at the altar? The sacrifice is slain. We die to self. We relinquish claims that put us first and God second.

We do this in the power of God's spirit, in the light and the presence of God's word. This is where the ability to deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow the Lord Jesus Christ comes from. He died for us, literally, physically.

We can die to self. We can die to our selfish ambitions. Heed the example of these faithless shepherds and these fat sheep, who at the expense of others and in their own interest, muddied the water, made it difficult for others to feed and to drink.

That's what happens when we are faithless as believers. It's not just us. It's not just our judgment.

We bring hardship on others. We take food out of the mouths of others. We muddy the water for others.

And they're trying to follow and they're trying to be faithful and we're making it harder. We don't just affect ourselves. Our faithfulness can produce blessing by association.

Our faithlessness can produce cursing by association. God can turn cursing to blessing, but I would much rather not be, these things must come, but woe to him by whom they come. Oh my goodness.

Well, this brings us now to the 30 pieces of silver and the house of the potter. You talk about woe to him by whom these things come. And you think about Judas and the 30 pieces.

Well, that's a fascinating study in itself. And that's what we'll look at next week. Let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the wonderful way that even your Old Testament word illuminates truth and life for us who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, who are related to you through him, who represent him on this earth as his body. We pray that as we reflect on what we have seen in your word that it will be impressed on our hearts, that your spirit will drive the seed deep into our soil where it can germinate and sprout and produce not just 30 fold, not just 60 fold, but a hundred fold and enable us to truly be overcomers, to be those who by faith and patience inherit the promises. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.