

Grace, mercy and peace are yours in abundance through faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

¹¹ “For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. ¹² As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. ¹³ I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. ¹⁴ I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. ¹⁶ I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.

²³ I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. ²⁴ I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken. **This is God’s Word.**

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

As we come to the end of another church year it is fitting that we concentrate on Jesus, our Savior and King. During the times of the Old Testament, kings would often lead their army into battle. Jesus as our king, went into battle for us but he didn’t need an army. He was powerful enough to defeat our enemy Satan – crushing the head of the ancient serpent.

But this battle was far different from any other battle in location and strategy. It took place on the cross and Christ defeated Satan by taking our place on the cross and paying our penalty for our sins. And now Christ Jesus is not only our king who rules in our hearts through his Word but also our Savior who shepherds us as the sheep of his flock.

As we consider the words of Ezekiel today, let’s see **“Christ the King as our Good Shepherd”** and note how, **“He searches for his straying sheep,” “How he feeds his sheep,”** and **“How he is the Promised Savior – the Son of David.”**

I. Our Good Shepherd searches for his straying sheep. You might wonder what caused them to stray in the first place? The church leaders had failed to be faithful shepherds of the flock. They weren’t listening to God so why should they expect the people to follow God’s word? They had taken a path away from God and were leading the people in the same direction. The people were still going through the motions of worship but their hearts were far from God. They were starving spiritually and in danger of spiritual death.

Ezekiel talks about the flock being scattered on the day of clouds and darkness. Probably a reference to the day God’s people were hauled off to exile in Babylon – certainly a dark day for the people of Judah. But the day that Jerusalem was destroyed along with the temple was also a day of darkness. The people had placed their faith in this holy city and in this grand temple built by Solomon as God’s dwelling place. When the temple was destroyed many people were in

despair because the object of their faith was all wrong – it was on the temple building and not on God

But as Ezekiel mentions the day of darkness and clouds and the scattering of the flock, he also reassures the people by reminding them that God, their shepherd, will rescue them. And we have examples of that, even in exile. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were thrown into a fiery furnace yet because they remained faithful to God; God preserved them and rescued them. Daniel remained faithful to God even when he was thrown into the lion's den, and God sent an angel to protect him. I'm sure there might be other examples not recorded in scripture. Even though many of the people had abandoned God, he had not abandoned them. Through his messenger Ezekiel, God is giving them hope – the promise that he will rescue them.

God promised, **“I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land.”** First God will bring them back from exile and settle them in the land he promised to their forefathers. Then God assures them, **“I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.”** He will treat them with mercy and bring them healing for their spiritual wounds and strengthen their faith through his Word. But along with the promise of rescue God also reminds them that he is perfect and just. Those that still reject him will feel his wrath and judgment rather than the fulfillment of his promises.

As we look to apply this to ourselves, we have to admit that there have been some days of clouds and darkness in our lives too. Maybe it has been a personal tragedy – an unexpected death, an injury or an illness or a combination of troubles and challenges. Maybe it has been difficulties with children or grandchildren. Maybe you had counted on a job or a promotion or a bonus and things didn't turn out the way you expected.

Maybe your day of clouds and darkness have come in the form of being disappointed by a friend or someone close to you. Sometimes we cause our own problems and sometimes our problems come as a result of living in an imperfect world – it doesn't make any difference, those tough days and disappointing days are still there – they still affect us.

But just as our Good Shepherd promised to rescue the people of Judah, he promises to gather us back to him and rescue us too. He comes to us through his Word with his promise that even though things are bad, he'll help us through them. He'll give us strength and help us to persevere through our problems. He'll lift us up and work things out for our good according to his plans. All he asks is that we turn to him and that we trust in him and that we be patient as he rescues us and unfolds his plans for our future and as he nurtures us through his Word.

II. God promised his people, “I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel.” These words remind us of Psalm 23 were our Good Shepherd promises to lead us to lush green pastures and to let us lie down next

to still waters. The good pastures Ezekiel refers to is a place full of spiritual food – where God’s Word and promises are proclaimed. A place like our church – God’s house.

Here the spiritual food fills us up and gives us hope through God’s promises. That spiritual food brings us peace through forgiveness. The Apostle Paul said he could be content in all circumstances because of his faith in his Savior – our shepherd/king.

We want our lives to be full and rich and satisfying. Next week we will celebrate Thanksgiving and yet, it might be hard to make a list what we are thankful for. So often we focus on the material things – the things we can see – and we certainly are thankful for the material blessings God showers upon us but don’t forget to thank God for the spiritual gifts he has given us. Thank Jesus for being your Savior. Don’t forget to thank Jesus for being your Good Shepherd who watches over you, protects you, and provides for your needs; spiritually and physically. Never forget that without your Good Shepherd you would be lost and scattered forever.

III. As we consider the last verses of this portion of scripture, we have an advantage in that we know our Good Shepherd is Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. But the people in exile only knew a promised Messiah was coming some day. Ezekiel helps identify him with these words, **“I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. ²⁴I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken.”**

King David had been dead for almost 400 years when Ezekiel wrote these words, and so the people knew he couldn’t be referring to David directly. This had to be a descendant of David – a prophecy reminding them that God would preserve the line of David, because through his line the Savior would come. It would be another 500 years before this prophecy was fulfilled but this encouraged the people by reminding them of God’s promises.

This prophecy of Ezekiel would be fulfilled short term as God brought his people out of exile and returned them to the promised land. We see the longterm fulfillment as we note how Jesus came to save us and look forward to when he will come again. Then he will come as our Savior King to take all those who believe and trust in home to his heavenly kingdom.

We often think of Jesus as our Savior but only rarely do we refer to him as our King. But he is our King. He rules in our hearts and he rules the world for the benefit of his people – for our benefit. We can’t always see his hand as he rules, but we can trust that it is there and that he is in control. As our king we are reminded of his power and mercy. His power to suffer for the sins of the world and his mercy in wanting to take our place on the cross.

As we end the church year we want to praise and thank our God for being our Savior King and let him rule in our hearts today and every day through his Word. Amen.