

# Sunday September 12, 2021

## Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church

### Welcome & Prayer (Ross L)

Welcome to church today. I'm Ross and I'll be leading our service. If this is your first time visiting Charlestown Presbyterian Church, we're glad you're here. If you're a regular part of our church family, it's good to be together, online, even though not physically, to spend time worshipping God and learning more about what He'd want us to know. We've been looking at the Old Testament book of Ezekiel over the last few weeks and we've seen how God used Ezekiel, in some fairly bizarre ways, to remind the Israelites of His sovereignty, of people's sinfulness and of inescapable judgement.

The bible often uses the idea of a shepherd and his sheep and God uses it again today as we look at Ezekiel 34. Most Australians have some knowledge of sheep. Those dim-witted creatures that stand ignorantly as a mob, in front of your car as you move slowly down a country road, or blindly scatter and follow one another, for no apparent reason, as one takes off across a paddock. They certainly need someone to look after them. Ezekiel says that God's people were like sheep, scattered because there was no shepherd, wandering over all the mountains and on every high hill, and no one searched or looked for them. And, even when a shepherd did appear, there was no guarantee that the shepherd was any good.

However, Ezekiel tells us, there is hope. God promises to search for His sheep and look after them. Remember that, as we come to praise and worship today. In the midst of personal and public struggles, God says: You are my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, and I am your God. Let's come to God in prayer:

*We lift our eyes to see your glory. We open our hearts to receive your love. We engage our minds to understand your truths. We offer our songs to praise your name. Father we come to you today wanting to acknowledge who you are. You are sovereign, king and our shepherd. We know that we have wandered away from you. Forgive us. We know that we have ignored you Forgive us We know that we have rejected the relationship you want with us Forgive us And yet you still seek us out, wanting to care for us and love us. Bring us back to you, help us to rely on you. As we come to worship today, quieten our hearts. Take away the burdens that we bring and restore us so that we can concentrate on you. As the deer pants for streams of water, so our soul pants for You. We hunger for You, Father, and we long to come and meet with You, here, today. In Jesus name Amen*

### Song – Come people of the risen King

[\(5\) Come People of the Risen King \(with lyrics\) - Keith & Kristyn Getty - YouTube](#)

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|---|--|
| <p>1. Come, people of the Risen King,<br/>Who delight to bring Him praise;<br/>Come all and tune your hearts to sing<br/>To the Morning Star of grace.<br/>From the shifting shadows of the earth<br/>We will lift our eyes to Him,<br/>Where steady arms of mercy reach<br/>To gather children in.</p> | <p>3. Come, young and old from every land -<br/>Men and women of the faith;<br/>Come, those with full or empty hands -<br/>Find the riches of His grace.<br/>Over all the world, His people sing -<br/>Shore to shore we hear them call<br/>The Truth that cries through every age:<br/>"Our God is all in all"!</p> |
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*Rejoice, Rejoice! Let every tongue rejoice!  
One heart, one voice; O Church of Christ, rejoice!*

2. Come, those whose joy is morning sun,  
 And those weeping through the night;  
 Come, those who tell of battles won,  
 And those struggling in the fight.  
 For His perfect love will never change,  
 And His mercies never cease,  
 But follow us through all our days  
 With the certain hope of peace.

## Bible Reading – Ezekiel 33:1-14 (NIV)

*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: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?’ <sup>3</sup>You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. <sup>4</sup>You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. <sup>5</sup>So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. <sup>6</sup>My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them. <sup>7</sup>“Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: <sup>8</sup>As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, because my flock lacks a shepherd and so has been plundered and has become food for all the wild animals, and because my shepherds did not search for my flock but cared for themselves rather than for my flock, <sup>9</sup>therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: <sup>10</sup>This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them.*

*<sup>11</sup>“For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. <sup>16</sup>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.*

## Announcements for 12<sup>th</sup> September

**Focus for the month – Family Prayer.** Through September, we are encouraging families or couples to pray together on a regular basis. Is that something that you would normally do? Is that something that you could begin to do? With families spending more meals together due to the lockdown this might be a perfect chance to try to do something that set us (and our children) up for many years to come. So why not plan to do something today?

**COVID Regulations.** How are you going with the lock down? Last week John Brogden from Lifeline recommended that we all try and find regular routines during this lockdown period, that we remain well connected with others and that we reach out for help if we need it, even if it just to talk about things with others. Surely we as a Church can do all these things, can't we? Keep the regular time on Sundays for worship and develop regular times to spend time with God in reading the Bible and prayer. Stay well connected with those in our small group or with those we would regularly talk to at church. And don't try

and cope with things on your own, there are plenty of people you could speak to, Jo, a minister or elder, a Church friend) just to get something off your chest. This is not the time for us as a Church to step back but to step forward.

**Keeping in Touch.** How are you going with keeping in touch with others from our Church. Some people are really well connected and will have plenty of contact while others haven't established good links with in the Church as yet. It would be great to make sure that everyone gets at least some contact each week. See Stephen if you would like to reach out to at least one other.

#### **Christmas Boxes for Operation Christmas Child**

This year we have 2 options: **Option 1.** Transfer \$20 per box to church account. (\$10 for postage and \$10 to have box filled) BSB 062 829, Number 1019 4850 Reference: OCC and you name (name is optional). Leila Fells from OCC will fill boxes on your behalf.

**Option 2.** Collect boxes from church, fill it yourself and return it to church. This option will only be available if we are able to meet at church. Sunday 11th October will be the final date for boxes to be returned and for transfer of money. If you have any questions please contact Kathryn O'Callaghan on 0424428722.

**Facebook/Video Services.** If you have enjoyed a sermon or service why not post a response? Or tell us what you liked about it. The more we interact in this way, the more we encourage those who are working hard for each other and the way the Facebook algorithm works, the wider the video is distributed to others.

## **Song – The glory of the cross**

[The Glory of the Cross • Official Lyric Video on Vimeo](#)

VERSE 1      What wisdom once devised the plan where all our sin and pride  
Was placed upon the perfect Lamb who suffered, bled, and died?  
The wisdom of a Sovereign God whose greatness will be shown  
When those who crucified Your Son rejoice around Your throne

CHORUS      *And, oh, the glory of the cross that You would send Your Son for us  
I gladly count my life as loss that I might come to know  
The glory of, the glory of the cross*

VERSE 2      What righteousness was there revealed that sets the guilty free  
That justifies ungodly men and calls the filthy clean?  
A righteousness that proved to all Your justice has been met  
And holy wrath is satisfied through one atoning death

VERSE 3      What mercy now has been proclaimed for those who would believe  
A love incomprehensible our minds could not conceive?  
A mercy that forgives my sin then makes me like Your Son  
And now I'm loved forevermore because of what You've done

## **Family Matters (Stephen T).**

Our focus for the month of September is prayer and specifically family prayer. We are encouraging everyone to think how they might pray more regularly with their spouse, their kids, their grandkids.

And this morning I want to give you ONE tip that might help begin the process. And ONE way that you can then move it forward. So here's the tip, start with a one sentence prayer.

Many of us don't regularly pray out loud in front of others. We are conscious we will say the wrong thing. We might stumble over our words or get a mind blank. We don't want to model the wrong thing to others. So, why not start with a one sentence prayer?

This is how it works. After a meal together ask each person to pray just one sentence to God. "Thank you, Lord that you just gave me a wonderful meal." "Sorry when I let you down today." "Please be with grandma and keep her safe." "Lord help me to have an opportunity to tell my friend Mike about Jesus."

It doesn't have to be long. Or complex. Just what is on your heart. A one sentence prayer can get the ball rolling. It can build our confidence. We can normally get one sentence out without too much trouble. And it shows the family that they can all pray. And it also means you pray for different things, because kids pray for different things and in different ways to adults. So we are now praying for a wider set of things than before.

So that's the tip, one sentence prayers. Now the way to extend this. There is a simple way of structuring your prayers around the word **ACTS** (**A**doration, **C**onfession, **T**hanksgiving & **S**upplication). So, when your family is used to saying one sentence prayers, then teach them that there are four (at least) types of prayers.

- **Adoration.** Praise God for who he is. "Lord, we praise you that you are always right & true."
- **Confession.** Asking for forgiveness. "Jesus please forgive me for losing my temper"
- **Thanksgiving.** Thank God for what he gives. "Father thank you for my Kids Church teacher"
- **Supplication.** Asking God for help. "Lord God be with me in my exams tomorrow"

So now each of our family can have the chance to say four one sentence prayers. And we are teaching each other the various aspects of prayer. This may not be where we end but what not give this a go, it could well be where we start with family prayer time. Why not give it a go this week and see how it goes?

## Pastoral Prayer (Jo B)

*Our dear God and Heavenly Father, we pray that all we say and do may serve to glorify you, recognising that bringing You glory should be our chief end and main purpose. Thank You that You are glorious and worthy of our praise, because of Your wisdom, Your power, Your faithfulness, Your holiness, Your justice, Your omniscience and every other attribute. Help us to magnify You even in the midst of our troubles and worries, and to thank You for Your many blessings, so that we keep our concerns in the right perspective.*

*Lord, we pray for the people of Walaha, Vanuatu, according to the needs they have identified and asked us to pray for. We ask that You would help them to continue to raise the needed funds for the church roof, and that the development plans at the school may continue, especially the water tanks that have been commenced already. We ask that the funds they seek for the renovations of their cooperative might be made available to them, and that above all, that through the witness of their church members, the Holy Spirit might prompt the members of their community to turn to You and seek Your righteousness.*

*Father, we think of those in NZ affected by the recent supermarket terrorist attack, and pray for comfort and healing for those who were injured. We ask that Your Holy Spirit might humble and convict an independent and secular people, and we ask too that You would raise up Christian leaders from among the Maori people. We pray for every NZ Christian to proclaim their faith boldly and winsomely.*

*We think of Scott Morrison, our PM, and acknowledge amongst all the criticism he is receiving that it must be a challenging job. We thank You for His faith, and ask that he would continue to look to You for strength and wisdom and guidance. Please encourage him in his work, and help him to be aware of the undergirding of the prayer support of fellow believers.*

*Our Father, we know that the impact of Covid is profound, in terms of those who have the illness, but also for its impact on those dealing with it in the health sector, and its wider effects on the livelihoods, finances, family functioning and mental wellbeing of our community. We pray for those who are not coping with the lockdowns and its restrictions, and whose businesses and livelihoods are affected by the lockdowns, and ask that our freedoms may soon be able to be restored. We pray for wisdom for those making decisions about how and when this should be done. We think of our wider Presbyterian church as well as all the other churches in our nation, and ask that we would places of welcome for every person as well as caring for the vulnerable among us. Give wisdom and direction to those making these decisions.*

*We continue to uphold all of our HSC students: Heath Brown, Peter Hyslop, Wyeth Scott, James Hakwa, Yvette Chesterfield, Will Homer, Coel Mulready, Maddy Hearn and Phoebe Baldwin. Please strengthen them during these uncertain times, and give them Your peace that passes all understanding. We ask that this may be a time that their love and trust for You deepens.*

*Father, we thank you for the faithful service of our ministers Stephen and Jon on our behalf. We pray that You would continue to give them strength, wisdom and endurance as they negotiate the complex issues that our church faces at this time. Thank you for their flexibility and willingness to adapt. We ask that each one of us would look out for other church folk at this time and be alert to the issues they are facing. Help us to pray and assist them in practical ways.*

*Thank You that Your door is always open to us to bring our needs and concerns, and thank You that You answer our prayers in the way You know is best for our good and Your glory. We pray all of these things in Jesus' name, the Name above every other name, Amen.*

## **Bible Reading – Ezekiel 34:17-31 (NIV)**

<sup>17</sup> “As for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will judge between one sheep and another, and between rams and goats. <sup>18</sup> Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? <sup>19</sup> Must my flock feed on what you have trampled and drink what you have muddied with your feet? <sup>20</sup> “Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says to them: See, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. <sup>21</sup> Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away, <sup>22</sup> I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered. I will judge between one sheep and another.

<sup>23</sup> I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. <sup>24</sup> I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the Lord have spoken. <sup>25</sup> “I will make a covenant of peace with them and rid the land of savage beasts so that they may live in the wilderness and sleep in the forests in safety. <sup>26</sup> I will make them and the places surrounding my hill a blessing. <sup>[a]</sup> I will send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessing. <sup>27</sup> The trees will yield their fruit and the ground will yield its crops; the people will be secure in their land. They will know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke and rescue them from the hands of those who enslaved them. <sup>28</sup> They will no longer be plundered by the nations, nor will wild animals devour them. They will live in safety & no one will make them afraid. <sup>29</sup> I will provide for them a land renowned for its crops, and they will no longer be victims of famine in the land or bear the scorn of the nations. <sup>30</sup> Then they will know that I, the LORD their God, am with them and that they, the Israelites, are my people, declares the Sovereign LORD. <sup>31</sup> You are my sheep, the sheep of my pasture & I am your God, declares the Sovereign LORD

## Sermon – Spiritual Abuse (Stephen T) <https://youtu.be/2jKnmBDox1c>

A few weeks ago I found myself recuperating from an ACL reconstruction and with plenty of time on my hands. And it just so happened that during those two weeks I read a book and started listening to a podcast on Spiritual Abuse. Spiritual Abuse according to one definition happens “*when a leader with spiritual authority uses that authority to coerce, control or exploit a follower, thus causing spiritual wounds*”.

Slide 2

Now I think we have to admit that unfortunately this has been a major problem for the Church. There are many people who have been devastated by being on the receiving end of spiritual abuse in their local congregation. In my 25 years plus of ministry I have sat with maybe a hundred people who have come to the Church that I have been ministering at looking for a safe haven after having their faith in others, their faith in the Church and sometimes their faith in God completely smashed because of spiritual abuse.

And it comes in many forms. The most obvious is physical or sexual abuse from a trusted pastor, priest or minister. Then there is manipulation, exploitation, censorship of decision making, secrecy, coercive control, unjustified obedience to a leader, isolation, punishment, all from within a Church, the list goes on and on. And so does the pain. And these Christians limp out of an abusive relationship within their Church and look for another where they can process what has just happened and find a way to get their lives back together.

I remember one incident in a previous Church where a middle-aged lady told me she just needed to sit and recover in a Church where there was no conflict. “Don’t ask me to do anything, don’t have any expectations from me, I have had enough of being forced to dance to a Church leaders tune. I have been hurt by their harsh words & controlling nature. I hated how they used the words of the Bible as weapons. I don’t even know if I believe in God anymore, for how could he allow this to happen to me one of his sheep? I just need to heal”

Slide 3

What does God want to say to the victims of spiritual abuse? What does God want to say to the Church that allows spiritual abuse to occur within its four walls? Well Ezekiel 34 is God’s word to that situation. In it the Lord says he sees the bad behavior of the leaders of God’s people (the shepherds) as well as the bad behavior of the people themselves (the sheep) and he promises to rescue them from their spiritual abuse. He will be their shepherd, their good shepherd. He will clear away the difficulties and the obstacles that are before us and He will lead his sheep, his people to a place of peace and security.

Now let’s get the context right, for this passage is part of a bigger message given to God’s people through the prophet Ezekiel. And Ezekiel has been telling the people of Israel, God’s chosen people that they are going to come under God’s judgement because they have turned away from serving Him & given themselves to created things rather than the creator.

Slide 4

And that judgement means they will not just be deported out of the land of Israel but Jerusalem itself, the city of God will be completely and utterly destroyed. As well as that the Temple, the symbol of God’s presence amongst them, will be decimated. And the whole of the book has been about that and at the end of chapter 33 we see that what Ezekiel predicted would happen, has happened. Jerusalem is raised to the ground.

So Ezekiel has knocked down the house, dug up its foundations and there it is lying in tatters. But now hope replaces judgement. And so, from this passage on, the tone changes as God rebuilds the household of God & gives them hope. And the first things the Lord will do is get rid of the old shepherds & replace them with a good shepherd. So, let’s take a look

Slide 5

## 1. Bad Shepherds (verses 1-10)

*"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: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?' <sup>3</sup> You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. Slide 6 <sup>4</sup> You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. <sup>5</sup> So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered, they became food for all the wild animals."*

The picture here is that the nation of Israel, God's chosen people are like a flock of sheep. Not a pride of lions, strong and powerful. Not a muster of peacocks, beautiful and attractive. Not a mensa of brainiacs, smart and intelligent. But a flock of sheep. Animals that are dumb and defenseless and need a shepherd, a good shepherd to keep them safe and secure.

Slide 7

But the problem is their shepherds, their leaders, their kings, their politicians, their heads of families were not caring for the sheep but caring for themselves, not feeding the sheep well but fattening themselves. They were fleecing the sheep, exploiting them. Abusing them.

Now how were they doing that? Firstly, they were acting selfishly. They thought the flock was there for them, to provide for and enrich them. They wanted all the benefits of having a flock of sheep, the wool, the meat, without any of the care, without any of the work. So, they focused on their own needs and wants and neglected the needs & wants of the sheep.

Now that is not just Israel's problem. Rulers throughout the world have siphoned money out of government into Swiss bank accounts. And to our shame, the Church has often fallen for the same trap. Leaders have feathered their own nest and forgotten to care for their sheep.

Slide 8

And what is the result of this lack of pastoral care? The sheep are scattered. Sheep are in danger without a shepherd and they are extremely vulnerable if they are own their own. They can be attacked by the wildlife around them looked for a roast dinner. They can be stolen by thieves. And being scattered they can't draw upon the strength of others & they no longer have the protection of their shepherd. The sheep are vulnerable & defenseless.

Slide 9

Can you imagine organizing a baby sitter for your kids only to come back and find out that your children were out walking around the neighbourhood? And that before they had scattered they had been beaten by the one who was employed to protect them? That's what had been happening to God's people. Selfish, scattered but still subject to God.

Slide 10

Five times the Lord says through Ezekiel that this flock was my sheep. For they aren't the possession of their leaders, their parents, their politicians and their priests, they were God's very own. So these leaders are still subject to the Lord. <sup>9</sup> *"Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: <sup>10</sup> This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for **my flock**. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue **my flock** from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them."*

God may have given Israel their leaders but he still makes them accountable for their actions and he is determined not to give up on them. So he replaces the bad shepherds with

Slide 11

## 2. A Good Shepherd (verses 11-16)

So yes, these sheep need to be rescued from their very own shepherd but who is going to replace the bad shepherds? We often complain about the leaders of our nation or state and want to get rid of them but

then we look at the alternative and we think they are probably no better. Its better the devil you know, isn't it? We don't want to jump out of the frying pan and land right into the fire, do we? Verse 11

<sup>11</sup> *“For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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. Slide 12 <sup>14</sup> I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land.... <sup>15</sup> I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. <sup>16</sup> 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.”*

God Himself comes to the rescue. Notice how often the word “I” is used. I will look after my sheep. I will rescue them. I will pasture them. I will search for the lost. I will bind up the injured. I will shepherd the flock with justice. God Himself will take on this responsibility. The Lord will provide for his sheep's every need.

For friends, each sheep matters to the Lord. He knows and cares for them individually. For he made them in the first place. And he has committed himself to them. He is determined to ensure that justice and righteousness prevails. That is why he will be our rescuer, our nurse, our protector, our provider and our guide. But when does God take the reins of the wheel?

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Well some 50 years later he brings them back to the land of Israel but they are still ruled by foreign kings. But then some 500 years later, the good shepherd puts on human flesh, slipped on a pair of sandals and walked this earth and what did he see? He looked at the crowds, harassed and helpless and he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he leads them and he feeds them and he protects them and he seeks out the lost. And he says to them.

Slide 14

John 10, *“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me & I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice and there shall be one flock & one shepherd... My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life & they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.”*

Slide 15

You get it? Jesus fulfills the promises of Ezekiel 34. He is the one who will search for and find the lost sheep, the lost coin, even the lost son. Jesus will find the sheep that are scattered and bring them all together. He will fulfil the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. For his sheep will lack nothing. He will lead them to green pastures, to quiet waters, he will restore their soul.

Yes, there is spiritual abuse out there but the Lord will take decisive action, actually he has taken decisive action. Which means that if we are his sheep, we need to listen to his voice. We need to follow him as he calls us by name. We need to ignore the competing voices in this world and just follow Him. He will have our back. He will care for his flock. He will help us and heal us, no matter what has happened to us.

The Lord has provided for us in a wonderful, wonderful way. No matter what has happened in the past, no matter how badly others have treated you> Here is God's offer of safety and security. In him. In him alone. Come to him. Listen to him. Follow him. But the problems in the flock are not just what the shepherds have done to us, they also include what the sheep have done to each other. Bad shepherds, a good shepherd & thirdly



### 3. Bad Sheep (verse 17-22)

<sup>17</sup> *“As for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will judge between one sheep and another, and between rams and goats. <sup>18</sup> Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet?”*

You see the problems within the flock are not just the problem of bad leadership. Sure, that might be the starting point. Yes, the culture begins from the top. But the sheep also have responsibilities. The sheep also have a part to play. They can't just blame others for sometimes they are the root of the problem themselves.

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For within the flock themselves there is also a selfishness. An emphasis on Me. We want to have the best feed and if that means trampling on the rest to get there so be it. We want the crystal-clear water all to ourselves and if that means stirring up the mud and dirtying the waters for everyone else, that is just the price that has to be paid. It is about my wants and my family wants. And so, anyone who gets in the way of these wants is fair game.

You see amongst the flock, there are the fat sheep and the lean sheep. The haves and the have nots. Those in the loop and those outside of the loop. And so often it is our fellow sheep, our fellow Christians that cause us the most trouble. The ones who should be loving us, sacrificing for us, just don't do that. And we should be loving those in need around us, caring for the lonely. Befriending the outcast. Engaging with those who are coming into our midst. Rather than just feathering our own nest and thinking just about me and my family.

Slide 18

And so God says to Ezekiel I will not just judge the bad leaders, I will also come against the bad sheep. <sup>22</sup> *“I will judge between one sheep & another. I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken.”*

Remember Jesus parable of the sheep and the goats? The Lord on the last day will see if we have cared for the sick, if we visited those in prison, if we fed the hungry, if we clothed the stranger. For the people around us are not just another brick in the wall, they are people made in the image of God. How we treat them is an indication of how we would treat Jesus.

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### 4. Bad shepherds, good shepherd, bad sheep and lastly **Blessed Sheep (verses 24-31)**

You see God's plan is not just to protect his sheep but to give them his richest blessings.

<sup>25</sup> *“I will make a covenant of peace with them and rid the land of savage beasts so that they may live in the wilderness and sleep in the forests in safety. <sup>26</sup> I will make them and the places surrounding my hill a blessing. I will send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessing ... <sup>28</sup> They will no longer be plundered by the nations, nor will wild animals devour them. They will live in safety, and no one will make them afraid.”*

What a golden age of peace and prosperity is awaiting the people of God, the sheep of God's pasture. God gives them a covenant of peace. An agreement, a binding agreement where God promises to deliver peace to his people. But he will not just bring them peace, he will be their peace, for he is the prince of peace. And we will expand on that idea next week when we hear that he will give us His Spirit and write his law on our hearts.

Slide 20

Peace and Protection. Protection from wild animals. Now we don't have too much trouble with wild animals here in Australia. Yes, the occasional deadly spider or snake or shark but most of the really wild animals are safely kept in zoos. But God will set up a shield of protection and he will make sure that there is plenty of provisions.

We have just come through many years of drought and it was particularly tough for those on the land. But there was always food in the supermarkets and water available to buy. Many people in the developing world are struck by drought and quite simply they don't survive because there are no fall-back options. But God promises to provide for his people and to give them a place of their own. A home not just among the gum trees but where they can know God and be known by God. A land that will give them what they need.

And over this land is not a king but a prince. A word that Ezekiel will come back to in chapter 44. A leader like King David, who will not fleece them but feed them. So, we get this amazing picture of peace, protection, provision & place all under the gaze of a good prince. The Hebrew word that best describes it is Shalom. Shalom. Whereas sin brings death, scatters and exploits. God here brings life, gathers, nurtures and protects.

Slide 21

Remember a few years ago Scott Morrison said in parliament, how good is coal? Well how good is God's promise? Given to God's people in Ezekiel's time and yet still available to us today through Jesus who in the book of Hebrews 13:20 is called 'the great shepherd of the sheep and in 1 Peter 2:25 is described as 'the shepherd and overseer of your souls.'

So how does this work today? In the words of commentator Iain Dugald "The change to be wrought ... is not so much a change in the nature of the office as in the nature of the occupant. God's solution to a history of bad shepherds is not to replace shepherding with a better system but to replace the bad shepherds with a good shepherd."

The good shepherd Jesus. Who doesn't create a megaflock. Instead, he picked 12 disciples and lived with them in such a way as to change their lives. He ate with them, slept with them, he sweated with them and sat with them, he laughed with them and cried with them. He pastored them. Yes he ministered to a large group of people around him and he dined with tax collectors and sinners. But Jesus models for his fellowship shepherd leadership.

Slide 22

And then he appoints pastors and elders as his under-shepherds. And hear the echoes of Ezekiel 34 in the words of Peter to his fellow leaders. *"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them – not because you must but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gains but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you but being examples of the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away."*

You see God's doesn't replace the shepherd with a CEO or a board of directors he points us to Jesus as our shepherd and he appoints elders and pastors to be his helpers as he shepherds his flock, the Church. And on the last day they will have to give an account to Jesus on how they cared for the flock. If justice is not done here and now it will be then.

Slide 23

Which means if you have been spiritually abused by a Church or a leader, you should find peace and protection and provision and a place to call home with Jesus and his people. And that is what we as a Church should strive to be. A place where the love of Jesus is freely available. A place where others are cared for. Not scattered all over the town but gathered together in worship and fellowship. That's the sort of place that God is calling us to create. And that is the sort of Church you and I have to cultivate.

But one last thing. If you have been spiritually abused elsewhere and you have come to us and found a place where you can grow, you have not come here to rest but to heal. Too many come in and switch off. Take it all in. And months or years later they leave us having been protected but never being made whole. Instead, if you come to heal, listen, learn, believe and trust again, then you will, over time be equipped to serve. To serve our Saviour. To follow His call. To listen to his voice. And to care for the rest of his flock.

Slide 24

For God's plans for his sheep are not just to get fat but to be part of his flock. To be known by him. To be known as his. And to point all they can to the one where there is true peace, true protection, true provision and a true place to call home. For according to Revelation 7:17 *"For the lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."* How good will that be?

## Song – 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm

[\(5\) The Lord's My Shepherd \(Tune: Crimond - 5vv\) \[with lyrics for congregations\] - YouTube](#)

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|--|--|
| <p>1. The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want;<br/>He makes me down to lie<br/>In pastures green; He leadeth me<br/>The quiet waters by.</p>           | <p>4. My table Thou hast furnished me<br/>In presence of my foes;<br/>My head Thou dost with oil anoint,<br/>And my cup overflows.</p>   |
| <p>2. My soul He doth restore again,<br/>And me to walk doth make<br/>Within the paths of righteousness,<br/>E'en for His own name's sake.</p>       | <p>5. Goodness and mercy all my life<br/>Shall surely follow me;<br/>And in God's house forevermore,<br/>My dwelling place shall be.</p> |
| <p>3. Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale,<br/>Yet will I fear no ill;<br/>For Thou art with me, and Thy rod<br/>And staff my comfort still.</p> |  |

## Benediction

*"For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. <sup>12</sup> 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... <sup>15</sup> I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. <sup>16</sup> 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. (Ezek 34:11-16)*

## Morning Tea

There is no physical morning tea allowed at the moment but why not give someone a call instead? Who might your ring now? Maybe the person you are hoping to keep in touch with?