

The Rev. Michael J. Bridge  
Sermon- Ezekiel 34:11-20  
Sunday, November 26, 2017

### Much to be thankful for

1. As we are just past Thanksgiving, we have all been given an opportunity to think about what we are thankful for. Something we may not realize is that Thanksgiving is a distinctly Christian holiday. While many get caught up in the culture wars and whether or not business say Merry Christmas or Happy Holidays, we miss that *everybody* refers to Thanksgiving by name. It hasn't been changed for political correctness.
2. This is important because it gives us an opportunity to talk about our God and the Christian faith. Thanksgiving was founded by Christians in America who thought it was important that we thank our Sovereign Creator. It is inherently Christian. When we celebrate Thanksgiving, the point is to give thanks to a person. Who is that person? It isn't about giving thanks to the government. It isn't about giving thanks to our parents or our families. We are giving thanks to God.
  - a. When we have family members who aren't believers but celebrate Thanksgiving, like almost all people in this country do, it wouldn't be wrong for us to ask who it is they are giving thanks to, and, more importantly, who it is that we are intended to give thanks to on this holiday.
3. I know that I have a lot to thank God for. I have the greatest wife, amazing kids, and an incredible church family. I really don't need anything else. And yet, my life is full of things- relationships, opportunities, experiences, and blessings that are beyond anything I deserve or could have ever asked for. I try to make the act of thanksgiving a part of my daily prayer life because I am keenly aware of how much I have to thank God for.
  - a. I suspect that many, if not most of you are the same.

### Thankful that the Lord seeks out his sheep

1. As we turn to our passage from the OT, Ezekiel 34, it strikes me as a fitting chapter of reading for Thanksgiving. There are two primary things which I find incredible and worthy of thanksgiving to God for.
2. While our passage for today begins at verse 11, the words of God here start in verse 1. God proclaims to the shepherds- the religious leaders of Israel- that they have abandoned his sheep, failed to feed them, failed to protect them, and have left them to wild beasts. It is in light of all of that that we come to verse 11 and following.
3. Here, God informs the shepherds that he himself will be the shepherd of his people. He will feed them. He will teach them. He will protect them. He says that he will seek out his lost sheep on his own.
4. This is something to be tremendously thankful for. Within the context of the meaning from Ezekiel to Israel is the fact that God will fulfill the role that his shepherds, those tasked with tending his sheep, have failed to fulfill themselves. God will not see his people go without his word, his sheep go without being cared for.
5. Taking that and pointing it at the NT, and to us, this points directly to Jesus, the Good Shepherd, which is talked about at length in John 10:1-18. Of particular note in that passage is that Jesus refers to himself as a Shepherd who goes to seek out his flock, a flock that knows his voice. And then he says, "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.” (John 10:14-16)

- a. Jesus points out that there are others of his flock that he must bring also, who will listen to his voice. Those others are the Gentiles. Jesus was speaking in the context of Israel and speaking to Jews, and he was telling them that he would also seek out and bring back to himself sheep from outside of Israel.
6. As we think about being thankful that God doesn't let his sheep be abandoned, then, we should be thankful that his Son actively seeks out and brings into the flock all that are his. He will lose none, and he goes on to say that he lays down his life as the Good Shepherd for the good of his sheep.
  - a. How can we have anything to more thankful for than that? He seeks us. He finds us. He heals us. He restores us. Then he dies for us so that we can be reconciled to our heavenly Father.

### Thankful that the Lord punishes the unfaithful shepherds

1. There is something else that I find in Ezekiel 34 to be thankful for. The remainder of our reading, and the verses following continue with God saying that he will bring judgment on those who have, as he says, fattened themselves at the expense of his sheep. Those who have failed in their call and duty to care for, feed, and tend the sheep will find themselves judged and punished for their dereliction of duty.
2. Why is that something to be thankful for? As we look around, we see that we are under attack from outside the Church. Sadly, we are equally, if not more so, fighting a battle from within the Church as many churches have abandoned the gospel and either teach some form of political action/social justice, or they turn the bible into a self-help book with the heart of the gospel being that we can have all the health, wealth, and earthly success that we desire right now through God.
  - a. These are grievous offenses, far worse than the non-believer speaking against God. These are people who purport to speak for God yet deny the truth of his word and twist it to their own ends. They are shepherds who have abandoned God's sheep. I am thankful that God will not let any of his sheep perish, and I am thankful that he will not let the unfaithful shepherd go unpunished.
  - b. All of this is combined with the hope that we have because of our Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep so that we can find reconciliation with God. There is so much to be thankful for, not the least of which is that our God has a good plan that will not be thwarted by our unfaithfulness because he loves us too much to allow that.