

The LORD Is There

Session 11. I Myself Will Shepherd Them

The shepherds failed the flock, so the Owner of the flock took the job himself.

What We Found

Ezekiel 34 opens with a firing. Israel's shepherds, her kings and leaders, fed themselves on the flock: they took the fat and the wool but never strengthened the weak, healed the sick, bound up the injured, brought back the strayed, or sought the lost, and the flock scattered into exile. God's verdict lands in verse 10: the sheep were always his, and he will require them at the shepherds' hand.

Then comes the takeover. In verses 11 to 16 God makes a dozen first person promises that answer the shepherds' failures point for point: I will search, seek, rescue, gather, feed, bind up, strengthen. He does not reform the system; he takes the job. 'I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep.' And we found where that promise goes: centuries later Jesus takes this chapter onto his own lips, calling himself the Good Shepherd of one flock, coming to seek and to save the lost, and sitting in judgment between sheep and sheep. Ezekiel says the shepherd who does those things is God himself. Jesus knew exactly what he was claiming.

The chapter holds one more surprise: alongside 'I myself will shepherd', God promises 'one shepherd, my servant David', though David had been dead for nearly four centuries. Both promises come true in one person: a son of David who is God come in person, who then hands the shepherd's work on to those he sends, measured forever by his own standard. The chapter closes with a covenant of peace and the words the whole book has been reaching for: you are my sheep, and I am your God. One question is still open, though. The flock is now safe. But how do the sheep themselves change on the inside? The book has not answered that yet.

Voices of the Church

St. Augustine, d. 430

Preaching an entire sermon on this very chapter, St. Augustine turns Ezekiel's indictment on the clergy of his own day, himself included: bad shepherds feed themselves on the flock, taking the milk and the wool, the honor and the support, while neglecting the sheep. But he will not let the flock despair over its pastors. Christ, the one true Shepherd, never stops feeding his sheep, and the sheep who cling to him are never left at the mercy of hirelings.

Sermon 46, On the Shepherds. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. For anyone wounded by the Church's shepherds: a Doctor of the Church read this chapter the same way, aimed it at his own office, and found the same hope in it.

St. Gregory the Great, d. 604

St. Gregory teaches, in substance, that the care of souls is the art of arts, and that no wound in the Church cuts deeper than a shepherd who holds the office while living contrary to it, because people take their permission from what they see honored. This is why he insists that no one should dare to shepherd who has not first learned to be shepherded, and why the shepherd must love the flock more than the comforts of the office.

Pastoral Rule, Book I. Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. Ezekiel 34 is not anti-shepherd; it takes the office so seriously that failure in it is the gravest failure there is. Gregory, a pope, agreed.

St. John Paul II, d. 2005

In Pastores Dabo Vobis, whose very title is God's promise 'I will give you shepherds', St. John Paul II teaches that the priest is configured to Christ the Head and Shepherd of the Church, so that Christ's own pastoral charity, the total gift of self for the flock, becomes the inner form of the priest's whole life. The measure of every shepherd in the Church is the Shepherd who laid down his life.

Pastores Dabo Vobis (1992). Summary of his teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. *Pastores Dabo Vobis* presses that ordained shepherds must be formed in the image of Christ the Good Shepherd. That is one part of the Church's answer to bad shepherding, alongside accountability, justice, and the protection of the vulnerable.

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Pray Psalm 23 slowly one evening this week with Ezekiel 34:11-16 open beside it, matching the promises line by line. Let 'I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep' be said to you, not just about Israel.
2. Do one concrete act of shepherding for someone in your care this week: not a sentiment, an act. Feed, strengthen, check on, or go find one person, and decide who before you leave tonight.
3. If you have been hurt or angered by a shepherd of the Church, bring it to God in prayer this week using verse 10 honestly: he sees it, he names it, he judges it, and the sheep were always his. If you are able, consider bringing it to confession or to a trusted priest; the Catechism says the confessor's ministry IS the Good Shepherd seeking the lost sheep (CCC 1465).
4. Fat sheep check: name one place where your strength, your confidence, your seniority, your platform, costs somebody weaker. Do one thing this week to clear the water instead of muddying it.

Scripture Memory

Ezekiel 34:15

"I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord GOD."

Ezekiel 34:15

Go Further in the Catechism

- **CCC 754.** the Church as flock, God its foretold shepherd, Christ its gate and Good Shepherd
- **CCC 896.** the Good Shepherd as model and form of the bishop's office
- **CCC 553.** Peter's shepherding office, feed my sheep
- **CCC 1465.** the confessor fulfills the ministry of the Good Shepherd seeking the lost sheep

Before next session. Read Ezekiel 36:16-38 before we meet again. And bring your curiosity: the sealed guesses you wrote back in session 1 are opened next session.