

TAKE TIME OUT - Pastoral Retreat

Sunday Scriptures: 22nd November 2020 Revd Janice Morgan

Ezekiel 34:11-24 *An oracle concerning Israel's leaders or shepherds*

¹¹For thus says the Lord God: I Myself will search for My sheep, and will seek them out. ¹²As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out My sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. ¹³I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the watercourses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. ¹⁴I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵I Myself will be the Shepherd of My sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. ¹⁶I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice. ¹⁷As for you, My flock, thus says the Lord God; I shall judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats: ¹⁸Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, but you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture? When you drink of clear water, must you foul the rest with your feet? ¹⁹And must My sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet, and drink what you have fouled with your feet? ²⁰Therefore, says the Lord God to them: I Myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. ²¹Because you pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide, ²²I will save My flock, and they will no longer be ravaged; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. ²³I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them; he shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴And I, the Lord, will be their God, and My servant David shall be prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken.

Reflection:

My calling has continually led me to read the Word of God in its proper context. Therefore, I am always concerned when verses are missing or used in isolation or, worse still, employed to promote someone's personal agenda. The lectionary for this Sunday's Old Testament Scripture, sadly, omits vs 17-19. These verses are vital to understanding who God is referring to, and which is which, as far as receiving God's blessing or His judgement. Hence, I have included the whole passage in context above for deeper understanding.

Ezekiel is delivering revelation of God's will, "Thus says the Lord God" and not his own personal view. Therefore, we must first remind ourselves why God refers to David as an example of His choice of leader or shepherd. It was not for his strength, stature, wealth, status, academic qualification or intellectual prowess that David was chosen. He was the youngest, smallest, weakest son; a boy shepherd spending most of his time alone watching over the family's livestock. God chose David simply because of the condition of his heart. This is an encouraging fact of God's character to all who believe because His character does not change over time. God still chooses and anoints His people according to the condition of their heart, by which He also judges and disciplines. What's more, God does not pull any punches with those who should know better, in this case, those given power and authority in positions of leadership among His people. For those called into such positions this Scripture is very challenging indeed!

God first declares that He will 'search for His sheep' from 'among their scattered sheep'. Shepherds of old, before fenced off fields, would send their sheep out to pasture together. This would benefit them all, more eyes to watch for danger, more hands to keep the sheep

from wandering off and getting into trouble. However, when it was time to gather the sheep back into the fold they needed to be separated back into their respective flocks, according to whom they belonged. This is what God means when He repeats that He will, “judge between sheep and sheep” and “between rams and goats”. Although it is clear that all these ‘sheep’ belong to God, it is just as clear that not all of them are good! God points out the discrepancies between His sheep. Some are lost, strayed, injured, weak, or lean, while others are fat and strong. God also points out the reason for such stark contrasts between His people, namely, the condition of the ‘lean’ sheep has been brought about by the abuse of the ‘fat’ sheep (v21). Authority and power can be used for good or ill and there are many ways, both overt and covert, to corrupt its use for abuse.

Consider the following examples: A police officer charged with upholding the law; someone the people look to for protection and are obliged to obey. But what if that police officer abuses their authority to charge someone without cause or treat them cruelly because of personal prejudice? What about a financial advisor charged with giving sound and wise advice; someone the people trust to exercise honesty and integrity. But what if that financial advisor knowingly gives false advice in order to benefit their own pocket and engage with insider dealing? These are just two illustrations of contemporary events all too familiar in the news. Even doing nothing or ‘turning a blind eye’ is an abuse of the knowledge of God and authority He has given His people to spread the love of God and ‘good news’ of the gospel (see the Good Samaritan [Luke 10:30-37](#)). Positions of authority bear a burden of responsibility. Their status wields a great deal of power, if only because of the assumption that their position makes them honest and trustworthy. Sadly, we know only too well that human beings are flawed! This is why God’s judgement is upon our heart, out of which everything we think, do and say comes. You could say our heart contains the Truth of who we are and God knows its True condition. David was not perfect but his heart knew when he was wrong; his inner conscience told him that God was always watching. This made him turn around and repent before God of his wrongdoing because he could not bear to be separated from God’s presence. This too is encouraging because God always forgave David when he confessed in genuine repentance, so too He forgives us in the same way.

By using David’s example God makes it clear that He is not speaking to the innocent who have been misled, bullied, deprived or forced away from the fold for one reason or another. This is a declaration of Truth through His prophet, Ezekiel, exposing the abusers that live among His people, which today is the Church of Christ. God clearly confronts them with what they have been doing; feeding themselves with the best and trampling over the rest so that what’s left is no good to anyone. God’s Word is the ‘good pasture’ for His sheep, but what substance does it contain if bits are denied, rejected, compromised or somehow reasoned away until any nutritional value is lost? Jesus Christ is the ‘water of life’ for God’s sheep, but how can anyone’s thirst be quenched if the Truth of His birth, life, death, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension are denied, rejected, compromised or somehow reasoned away until any means of refreshment has dried up? Those whose hearts are right with God will receive all the benefits listed in this prophesy: good rich pasture, healing, strength, deliverance, and pure living water. However, as always, there is also a warning contained in God’s Word: those whose hearts are not right with God will be destroyed and made to swallow justice (v16).

I believe that we are seeing signs of the last days, which means that Christ is about to return. I believe that God’s Word, spoken through Ezekiel is applicable to the Body of Christ today, which means we are in urgent need of repentance. Heaven’s alarm clock is ringing

relentlessly, calling the people of God to 'wake up!' Today is 'Christ the King' Sunday, but what kind of kingdom currently bears His coat of arms? Are His subjects the beacon of hope and sanctuary Jesus expects? Into what kind of pasture are the current shepherds leading God's sheep? God expects His people to honour and obey all His ordinances and Jesus will gather only those who stand in faith, unafraid to live and witness without fear or favour! Those called of God are expected to reveal Truth, serve justice and restore righteousness. May the Holy Spirit lead us in our service to see Christ's Kingdom come! **Amen!**

Hymn/Song: Blind Lead the Blind based on: [Luke 6:39](#); [Psalm 119:105](#)

CD: For the Sake of the Call **Track 6:** by Steven Curtis Chapman & Geoff Moore

There's a teacher in a school room
Somewhere on the edge of town
Telling innocent little children what we used to be
They look and listen without a question
They see the pictures passed around
Making facts out of a theory and they all believe
As the lost lead the way
Another heart is led astray

Chorus:...

These are the days when the blind lead the blind

And there's one narrow way out of here

So pray that the light of the world will keep your eyes clear

'cause it's a dangerous place here where the blind lead the blind

There's a preacher in a nice church
Anchored in the heart of town
People flock to hear his eloquent delivery
He talks of Jesus how He can please us
But the cross cannot be found
Making theory out of facts until they're all deceived
And the lost lead the way
And more hearts are led astray

Chorus:...

This is a dangerous time
And the Truth can be hard to find
So let His Word light your way
And guard every step you take

Chorus:...

Poem: GOD's PROPHETIC WORD ©Janice Morgan 2015-July

The Word of God is prophetic in nature
It tells the story of human adventure
The journey of life with God at the helm
Leads to a place in the heavenly realm
Where secrets are kept by the Spirit of God
Awaiting the time when a spiritual prod
Is needed to show the next step on the road

Or give wisdom to shake off the hurt of the goad
The strength to hold on when the way becomes rough
Is found in the Word of the Lord; that's enough
To recognise signs and predictions of wonders
And keep all God's children from making great blunders
God's way to our future is now plain to see
Believe in God's Word; what He says it will be!

Prayer:

If this be the time for a spiritual prod, then Father God wake us up!
If this be the time to take the next step, then Christ the King please lead the way.
If this be the time for prophecy fulfilled, then Holy Spirit inspire us to Truth.
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, may Your people be
blessed with discernment and strength of faith to stand True. **Amen!**
