

## The True Shepherd King

### 1. Intro & Context

- Dealing today with the topic of leadership
  - Looking at what bad leadership looks like
  - Also looking at good leadership looks like and what that means for us
- We are in a section of Old Testament history where God's people have been deported > forced to leave Jerusalem and taken to Babylon
- It's called the exile > it took place in 597BC
- The Israelites had been two-timing God with the idols from the surrounding nations > and God's patience with his people had finally run out
- So God chose the Babylonians under King Nebuchadnezzar to come in and scoop up 10,000 Israelites and take them east to Babylon
- Amongst the exiles was a young man Ezekiel whom God was using to be his mouth piece to the exiles in Babylon and bring his word to them
- He's foretold the exiles that God is not going to rescue Jerusalem from the Babylonians ... but that Jerusalem is going to be besieged and most of her inhabitants would die
- Seven years later, all that Ezekiel had been saying has come to fruition when we read last week in 33:21
  - "A man who had escaped from Jerusalem came to me and said, "The city has fallen!"
- And now that judgment has fallen > God can begin the process of restoration
  - And the starting point of that restoration is going to be with the leadership of God's people

### 2. Crime of the Shepherd-Kings (1-10)

- We see right at the start of Ch 34 God condemning the leaders of Israel
  - *"Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?"*
- Here he uses the metaphor of sheep and shepherd
  - God's people are the sheep and Israel's leaders are the shepherds

- If you are like me, you will read this word 'shepherd' and you will probably think 'pastoral leaders'
  - But when the Bible talks about shepherds, it's not just talking about pastoral leaders
  - It's not just talking about priests and clergy
  - But when Ezekiel spoke and said, 'Woe to the shepherds', he primarily means 'Woe to the kings'
  - As you look back through the OT ... there are two people who are metaphorically referred to as a shepherd
    - One is God
    - The other are the kings of Israel
    - It was the kings of Israel who were the shepherds because they were the ones who had to
      - lead the people > protect them > be a godly & faithful example to them > point them to God
  
- So when Ezekiel says "Woe to you shepherds" ... he is in effect saying "Woe to you kings"
  
- For the centuries leading up to the exile in Babylon ... the kings of Israel had failed to do this
  - With the exception of David, Hezekiah and Josiah ... each of their reigns is summarised like this in the book of 1 & 2 Kings
    - "Such and such a king ... *did evil in the eyes of the LORD and did not turn away from any of the sins of his fathers*"
    - They continually led the people into idolatry, injustice and social disorder
    - They did the exact opposite of what they were meant to do as Israel's shepherds
  
- In v1-6 ... we see the accusations that God is making against the Shepherd-Kings of Israel
  - Only take care of themselves
  - Haven't taken care of the flock
  - Fed themselves and clothed themselves with the best of everything
  - But neglected the sheep > even the needy > broken, hungry, sick, weak
  - Haven't searched for the lost sheep
  - Let them be scattered and wander away

- This is bad leadership by Israel's kings
- Because their motivation is self interest
  - They're only interested in looking after themselves and not the people / sheep
- This is the heart of bad leadership
  - Becoming a leader to fatten yourself ... rather than becoming a leader to shepherd the sheep
  - Using the flock to fatten yourself
  - Selfishness - wanting to **be** served rather than wanting **to** serve
- **Illustration – Mugabe / Pope's of Middle Ages**
- Popes of 1400-1500's notoriously immoral
  - Mistresses > illegitimate children
  - Orgies, comedic plays and lavish parties
  - All while living in the papal palace while crime and poverty reigned in the city
- Today we see men like President Mugabe in Zimbabwe, making sure that he lives in palatial comfort while his people suffering hugely
- If you combine those two images, you have a sense of why God is condemning the shepherd-kings of Israel
  
- And for their failure to take care of God's sheep, we see in v7-10 God was going to hold them accountable
  - For all they have done and
  - For all they have failed to do as shepherds
  - God says in v10
    - *I am against the shepherds and*
    - *I will hold them accountable for my flock*
    - *I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves*
  
- God sees his people need rescuing
- They are being led astray by self-seeking, self-serving leaders who ignore their responsibilities and exploit their position for their own gain
- And so God says he is against them and will remove them
  
- **Application**
- This is such an insightful metaphor for us to understand ourselves and our world

- As a human race we are sheep
  - We are sheep in the sense that we need people to lead us
  - We want people to lead us
  - Even if there are no designated leaders ... people turn to the person who acts like a leader
  
- See this all the time > right through life
  - Playground
    - some kid will take the lead and decide what game they're going to play today
    - Or they'll put their hand up to be the person to pick teams
  - We choose captains and coaches to lead our sporting teams
  - You watch Survivor ... within 12hrs of being on the island, the tribe will inevitably recognise someone on the team as the leader as they begin to build their shelter
  
- God knows we are sheep and we need people to lead us ... and so he has put order and authority into our world to take care of that
- Given us
  - Parents to lead children
  - Husbands to lead families
  - Bosses to lead workers
  - Civil leaders and governments to lead nations
- Leadership is a good and necessary part of the society God has created
- Because the reality is ... without good leadership in our world ... the world would be in chaos
  
- For Israel ... they were facing a crisis of leadership
  - They had God appointed human leaders ... but they were failing to do their job
  - They were failing to lead and take care of the people as they should
  
- And we are no different
  - We also are facing a leadership crisis
  - We always have
  
- Think about some of the leadership failures we've seen in our country
  - Politics > all the time
    - Bronwyn Bishop > resigned over chopper-gate
  - Police

- Corruption in Queensland in 70's & 80's saw Joh-Bjelke Peterson charged with corruption and numerous government and police officials sent to jail
- Business
  - Christopher Skase > CEO of Quintex media group > siphoning off millions of dollars to personal bank accounts overseas
- Sport
  - Melbourne Storm > systematically cheated the salary cap in
- Churches
  - Senior clergy in Catholic and Anglican Churches accused of covering up sexual abuse by priests under their authority
- As a result, we have great mistrust of our shepherds and those in authority
  - We're cynical of our leaders
  - We're skeptical about their motives and what they are doing behind the scenes
- Part of the reason is because we see our leaders are flawed
  - We see they're not perfect
  - We see their moral failures
  - We see their professional misjudgments and we don't like that
- You might say ... not all leaders are corrupt or failures
- No ... but even our good leaders are flawed
  - John F Kennedy
  - Richard Nixon
  - Paul Keating
  - John Howard
  - Kevin Rudd
- All did good things as leaders ... but they all have / had have their failings
- So we have this crisis of leadership
  - We need good leaders for our own good and for the good of society
  - But our leaders are
    - at best flawed and imperfect
    - at worst, corrupt and dishonest

### **3. Gift of the True Shepherd-King (11-31)**

- In the leadership crisis of Ezekiel's day, God said he was going to provide a solution

- He was going to resolve this leadership issue
- The way he was going to do that was that God himself was going to come and be their shepherd-king
  - God was going to come and fulfill that leadership vacuum they were experiencing
  - *v11-12 "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.*
- In v12-31 he says how he is going to do what the shepherd-kings of Israel failed to do
  - I will search for them and rescue them from where they have been scattered among the nations
  - I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak
  - I will look after them and protect them from wild animals
  - I will lead them to good pastures & bless them abundantly
  - I will make a covenant of peace with them
- Nineteen times in these verses God says "I will"
  - Because God himself is going to do what the flawed and imperfect leaders were failing to do
- But then in v23 ... God's plan to shepherd his people become clearer as he is going to do that through one shepherd – "my servant David"
  - David would be the one who was going to rescue them and lead them and tend them and take care of them
- Who is David?
  - David was the great king of Israel who ruled over God's people about 1000BC
  - Before he was anointed king, he was a shepherd > literally a shepherd > he looked after his father's sheep
  - But God had other plans for David and had him anointed to be the shepherd-king of Israel
    - Reason God chose David is because David was "a man after God's own heart"
    - In other words ... he was a good shepherd-king
    - He was a shepherd himself, but he was also a godly leader
      - He was a man who led the people in God's ways
      - He was a spiritual leader of the people
      - He protected the sheep of Israel

- He brought them peace from their enemies
  - But David is dead > his reign was 400 years prior to Ezekiel
- So what these verses are saying here is there will come a shepherd-king LIKE David who is God, and
  - Doesn't live off his sheep and look after himself,
  - but will be a shepherd king who lives FOR his sheep
  - a shepherd king cares for those who labour and are heavy laden
  - Who cares for the weak and broken
  - Who seeks and saves the lost
- The reality of a shepherd-king who is God really only makes sense when we read in the NT in John 10 when Jesus says
  - "I am the good shepherd"
  - Notice he doesn't say I am A good shepherd
  - But that I am THE good shepherd
- Jesus claim to be the good shepherd was a massive claim
- Of course what he's claiming about himself in that statement is that he's the divine Shepherd-King of Ezekiel 34
  - He's saying "I am God come to solve your human leadership crisis"
- Jesus is the ultimate leader
  - For he is a like a shepherd who cares for his sheep and knows them by name
  - But he is also a king who rules with total power and authority
  - He's not a dictatorial tyrant
  - Nor is he a toothless teddy-bear
  - He's the ultimate shepherd-king we sheep need to follow
- With that in mind we can look to Jesus to fulfill what God promised he would do as the True Shepherd-King
- First of all, Jesus says he will search for and gather his people
  - The people who have wandered away from God
  - The people who feel their distance from God
- Like a good shepherd who leaves the 99 sheep to go and find the one who has strayed, Jesus says he came to "seek and to save what was lost." (Luke 19:10)
  - And he's not just looking for one little ethnic group or a particular social class

- He's gathering people from all the nations, all social classes, all backgrounds
- He will seek them out and save them
  
- Secondly like the shepherd-king of Ezekiel 34, Jesus He tends and feeds His flock v14 says
  - *"I will tend them in a good pasture... and they will lie down in good grazing land and they will feed in a rich pasture. I myself will tend my sheep."*
  
- Jesus will look after His people
  - He knows what you are going through
  - He knows what's on this week for you
  - He knows what is going on in the home
  - He knows what is going on in the diary
  - He knows what is going on in the medical issues
  - He knows every issue that is going on in your life, and
  
- And He knows how to look after you
- He knows how to repair the damage between you and God, and so He is able to repair so much of the damage which is in your life
  - He is able to help you with relationships
  - He is able to help you with trouble
  - He is able to help you in your grief
  - He is able to give you the resources for tomorrow and for next month and for next year
  
- And the last thing is there in v25 is he will make a covenant of peace with you
  - The word for peace there in v25 is the Hebrew word – Shalom
  - Shalom means much more than just the absence of strife
  - It's the concept of peace, happiness, wholeness and fulness in this life
  
- It's knowing that in Christ ...
  - There is peace > peace with God and within ourselves
  - There is freedom from slavery > to sin and our idols
  - There is security and safety and nothing to fear or be afraid of
  - There is life to the full



- It's all well and good to say all this about Jesus ... and say he is the True Shepherd-King who is the ultimate leader
  - But what's going to stop us being skeptical of him like we are skeptical of our other leaders
  - How are we not going to be cynical about his leadership
  - What's it going to take for us to trust him
- Like all leaders ... we want to see their credentials ... we want to see the runs they have on the board before we trust them and follow them
  
- In Jesus we know we are following the ultimate leader ... because
  - Unlike bad leaders in our world
  - Unlike our flawed leaders ...
  - We know Jesus is a leader worth following because he has the ultimate servant heart
- The shepherd-kings of Israel were self-motivated
  - Self-serving, self-interested
  
- But Jesus was the complete opposite
  - He said in Mark 10 he *"didn't come to be served, but to serve and give my life as a ransom for many"*
  
- You see Jesus motive?
  - Not interested in serving himself > he's not motivated look after himself
  - He didn't come so that teams and employees and people would serve him
  - He came to serve your interests > he was motivated to look after you
  
- And it wasn't just a talk either > not just a lot of hot air
- He showed how serious he was about that by dying as a ransom for many
- How many leaders do you know who are willing to do that?
  
- In John 10 when Jesus, *"I am the good Shepherd"* he goes on to say *"and I lay down my life for my sheep"*
  
- Being a shepherd in the ANE is a completely different reality to taking of care of sheep today
  - Because in ancient times there were loads of wild animals around
  - Didn't have protective fences > didn't have a nice homestead to sleep in at night > didn't have 22 gauge shot-gun to protect you

- The shepherd slept out in the wild with the sheep and he was their protector
- You're the shepherd, out in the wild, wild animals around ... and so do know what you've got there? It's a wolverine buffet!
  - There's all this wonderful lamb ready for eating
  - All these predators
  - And there is just you as the shepherd between them and the sheep
- And that's why - Jesus says - that's you know that I am your true shepherd
  - I'm not like the hired hand
  - For the hired hand ... looking after the sheep is just a job
  - He's just in it for the wages he earns
    - As soon as it gets dangerous, or fails to serve his interest
    - When he hears the wolves coming, he hears the wolves snarling ... he's outta there
    - But not me
- Think about this spiritually
- When Jesus went to the cross... and he quotes Ps 22:1 > *My God My God why have you forsaken me ...*
  - And as you read Ps 22 it's all about animals around him wanting to take him
  - Bulls, and dogs and lions > and they open their mouths and they want to take him
- What's that about?
- Do you know how often sin and Satan are portrayed in the Bible as wild animals?
  - In 1 Peter 5:8 "*Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*"
    - Satan is like a roaring lion wanting to devour you and I
  - In the OT, when God comes to Cain after he has killed his brother Abel
    - And doesn't just say "You sinned"
    - He says "Sin is crouching at the door, it desires to have you,"
  - Sin and Satan are like a predator ...
    - It desires to pounce on you / to have you

- It desires to ruin you
- How?
  - Sin corrodes your life and your guilt stalks you
  - It will find you out
  - Eventually your sin, and your guilt and your shame will come home to roost
- We have all sinned ... and the Bible says that sin is a predator waiting to bring you down in this life and in the life to come
- Here in John 10 ... Jesus is saying he is the Shepherd-king you and I need to rescue us from that
  - No other shepherd can come between you and your sin
  - No other shepherd can come between the sin and the evil things you have done in your life that that will eventually destroy you, but me
    - No parent can do that for you
    - No minister can do that for you
    - No politician > no army officer > no CEO can do that for you
    - No-one can do that for you > only I can and only I have says Jesus
- I went to the cross and lay down my life for you
- And all the things that should have come down on you for your sin
  - All the justice for your sin
  - All the judgment that should have come down on you ... has come down on me
- As the True Shepherd King ... Jesus is saying
  - "I am great shepherd ... because when the wolves came after you ... they got me"
- Can you trust a shepherd like that?
- There's **no-one** you can trust like you should be trusting him because no-one can do that
  - There's no shepherd who serves like that
  - There's no shepherd who lays down their life for you like that
  - There's no one who can save and protect you like that
  - There's no one you can trust like that ... no-one else!
    - Because no-one can do that for you
- He is the ultimate shepherd because he has the ultimate servant heart
- And if Jesus is the ultimate Shepherd who we can trust

- Then he is the ultimate shepherd we can obey
  - For he is not just the good shepherd ... but he is also the King of kings
  - As the King of kings ... that means he has all power and authority over this world, over every earthly leader and over you and I
- As the Shepherd-King we can totally trust ... that means we can and ought to follow him, listen to his voice and submit to his calling

#### **4. Conclusion**

- Because when it comes to our worldly leaders
  - Some are corrupt, self-serving and only interested in themselves
  - Others are good but flawed and will constantly let you down
- But there is one leader who is perfect and will never let you down
  - He seeks out lost and brings them home
  - He cares for his flock
  - He brings peace that lasts for eternity
- Therefore is he one worth following
- We know that he's a leader we can trust with all our hearts
  - For he *"didn't come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many"*
  - *For he is the good Shepherd and he lays down his life for his sheep*
- And so in Christ we have a leader we can follow and obey
- Because in Christ we have a leader we can trust

#### **PRAY**