

The Faithful Shepherd

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[0 : 00] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church and it's my joy to bring God's word to you today. Special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here.

And we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community. And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced there's no one so good they don't need God's grace and no one so bad they can't have it. Which is why we come back week after week. And as Jim mentioned, we do the same things over and over. We sing praises. We study God's word because we believe he has something to say to everyone.

We are now in the second week of Advent. And you'll remember that Advent comes from the Latin word, which means to come or to arrive. And so during the season of Advent, we take a special focus on Jesus coming or arriving to the earth.

And of course, we do two things. Remember, we celebrate what's happened in the past. Jesus has already come. So we sing songs like joy to the world. We don't just celebrate what's come in the past. However, we look forward to and we long for what's going to come in the future.

[1 : 07] So we sing longing songs as well, like, oh, come, oh, come, Emmanuel. And when we do that, we are really doing what we do in all of the Christian life throughout all the year, which is that we celebrate what God's done in the past.

We look forward to what he will do in the future. And that allows us to wait and live faithfully now in the present. And so it's for the season of Advent that we are in the book of Zechariah.

I invite you to turn there with me now. We're in Zechariah chapter 11. You can find it in your worship guide or in your Bible or on your phone. And you'll remember that the book of Zechariah tells us what comes from a man named Zechariah who was a prophet to the nation of Israel during the sixth century.

The book of Zechariah is a collection of his prophecies. And he prophesied to the nation of Israel after their return from exile in Babylon. Remember, they'd been exiled to the nation of Babylon. And then in 539, Persia defeats Babylon. And in 538, they're allowed to return. And so it's at that time that Zechariah is prophesying to them. And just like if there was a collection of sermons from a preacher, there would be a variety of topics.

[2 : 15] So a collection of prophecies, there's going to be a variety of topics as well. So the book of Zechariah covers a variety of things. In chapters 9 through 13, the chapters we're looking at this month, it's going to tell us about the coming kingdom of God or the future kingdom of God.

And you'll remember last week, we looked at the coming king. We had this question from chapter 9, this command to rejoice. And we asked, how can we obey this hard command?

How is it that we can actually rejoice? We saw that we rejoice because Jesus comes as a king on a donkey. And so that tells us that he's a humble king. It also tells us he's a peaceful king.

And so remember, we can be excited. We rejoice looking forward to him coming back with our noses pressed up to the glass. This week, we're going to see not Jesus as our coming king, but Jesus as our coming shepherd.

We're not looking at his worldwide rule, but instead his care and concern for us, his pursuit of us in the face of opposition, including opposition from us ourselves. As we come to Advent, sometimes I think of it in this way.

[3 : 22] You know, there's, when you are watching the TV, right, you see a variety of advertisements that show up over and over again. And so you might see an advertisement the first time and you think, man, that's really funny. You might laugh at it.

And then you see it the second time. And then you see it the third time. The fourth and the fifth time. You're probably not laughing at it as much anymore, right? At this point, it's old.

You're waiting for it to get over. If we're honest, some of us might feel that way about Christmas. We might feel that way about Advent. While it was exciting at one time, now it comes over and over and over again.

We've heard the same things before. We've sung the same songs before. This is old. What if, however, we had Advent less as a commercial that repeated over and over and more like a glass of water?

We drink it every day, right? You don't get tired of it. You don't think, man, it's been a lot of, just a lot of weeks I've been drinking water. No, you need it.

[4 : 22] It's what gives you life. It's what keeps you alive. It's something that you come back to over and over again. And my hope for us, as we go through the book of Zechariah and as we walk through Advent together, that we would see the good news of Jesus, less like a commercial that repeats that we become numb to, and more like the glass of water that we need every single day.

And so it's for that reason that we asked the question last week, why do we rejoice? And in some ways, we'll keep asking that question, even though the command is not in this passage. We saw how Jesus is our king, gives us joy, gives us something to look forward to and to long for.

And now we're going to do the same thing with Jesus as our shepherd. And so we're going to read now Zechariah chapter 11, starting at verse 4. And remember, as we come to this, that this is God's word.

And God tells us that his word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, which means that God has not left us to stumble alone in the dark, but instead he's given us his word to show us the way to go.

And so that's why we read now, starting at verse 4. Thus said the Lord my God, Become shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter. Those who buy them slaughter them and go unpunished.

[5 : 34] And those who sell them say, Blessed be the Lord. I have become rich, and their own shepherds have no pity on them. For I will no longer have pity on the inhabitants of this land, declares the Lord.

Behold, I will cause each of them to fall into the hand of his neighbor, and each into the hand of his king. And they shall crush the land, and I will deliver none from their hand.

Verse 7. So I became the shepherd of the flock doomed to be slaughtered by the sheep traders.

And I took two staffs. One I named Favor, the other I named Union.

And I tended the sheep. In one month I destroyed the three shepherds. But I became impatient with them, and they also detested me. So I said, I will not be your shepherd.

What is to die, let it die. What is to be destroyed, let it be destroyed. And let those who are left devour the flesh of one another. And I took my staff, Favor, and I broke it, annulling the covenant that I had made with all the peoples.

[6 : 37] So it was annulled on that day, and the sheep traders who were watching me knew that it was the word of the Lord. Verse 12. Then I said to them, If it seems good to you, give me my wages.

But if not, keep them. And they weighed out as my wages thirty pieces of silver. Then the Lord said to me, Throw it to the potter, the lordly price at which I was priced by them.

So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord to the potter. Then I broke my second staff union, annulling the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.

Verse 15. Then the Lord said to me, Take once more the equipment of a foolish shepherd. For behold, I am raising up in the land a shepherd who does not care for those being destroyed, or seek the young, or heal the maimed, or nourish the healthy, but devours the flesh of the fat ones, tearing off even their hooves.

Woe to my worthless shepherd who deserts the flock. May the sword strike his arm and his right eye. Let his arm be wholly withered, his right eye utterly blinded.

[7 : 49] I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we thank you again that you have spoken to us, and you've done it in words that we can understand, not in a foreign language.

And Father, we ask that you would do that now this morning, that you would speak to us, and we ask that you would stir up our hearts, that we would hear the good news about Jesus.

As our shepherd who has come and who is to come, and it would not wash over us and find us numb, but instead it would cause us to rejoice and to look forward to you, when you will make all things right.

We ask these things grateful that we don't have to earn them, but we can ask them in Jesus' name. Amen. If you are anything like my family, you have a repertoire of Christmas movies that you watch every season, over and over, and you probably have a top two or three.

So in my family there's a variety. We have to watch Muppets Christmas Carol every year. Another one that has to be watched every year, and this is maybe my dad's favorite, or one of his favorites, and that's The Grinch Who Stole Christmas.

[9 : 06] Of course, you're familiar with the story of the green monster who tries to steal Christmas from the Who's down in Whoville. And if you know it, you know it's written by a man named Dr. Seuss. Of course, Dr. Seuss has written other stories as well, not just The Grinch Who Stole Christmas, but also books like this, Horton Hears a Who.

Of course, Horton Hears a Who has that famous line, a person's a person, no matter how small. Dr. Seuss, however, did not just write nice stories. He actually meant many of his stories to have a political message to them.

And so Horton Hears a Who, for example, it's been taken now by the pro-life movement, but at the time he wrote it in response to the way the United States had treated the country of Japan, both during World War II and after.

There's one political message. Of course, Dr. Seuss also wrote another book called Yertle the Turtle. And if you're familiar with this, you know that Yertle is a turtle who longs for more power. So he's not satisfied just to rule over the pond. He wants a bigger throne, so he makes all the other turtles pile on top of each other so he can get up as high as he can.

[10 : 14] Of course, he's crushing all of them down. Do you know the story? You know our great hero, Mack the Turtle, comes in to save the day. He valiantly burps while he's on the pile of turtles, causing them all to tumble down.

What is Yertle the Turtle about? Well, it's not about turtles. It's actually about the rise of Hitler in Germany. So we learn something from Dr. Seuss, right? We have these stories. They're allegories. They're meant to make a separate point. It's a story, and it tells us something that's actually true about the real world. We are looking at the same thing this morning.

Zechariah, as a prophet, is going to tell us a story that also reveals something true about the world. It's going to be a story not about the destruction of a small universe like in Horton Hears a Who, nor is it going to be a story about turtles grasping for power.

Instead, it's going to be a story about sheep and shepherds. And in this story, the sheep are going to represent the nation of Israel. We're going to see a variety of shepherds throughout this story.

[11 : 20] And so this is also, it's also an allegory. It's a story about sheep and shepherds that tell us something that's true about the world. And so we're going to jump right in. In verse four, we find out that God has given Zechariah this task of playing out this story, the story of the sheep and the shepherd.

And he tells Zechariah to play out, to act out this role, become the shepherd of the flock, doomed to slaughter. So Zechariah is going to play the part of a shepherd. That is his role in the story.

And we find out this flock, the nation of Israel, is doomed to destruction. And we're quickly told a couple of reasons why they're doomed to be destroyed. First, the shepherds that are over them are interested in using them rather than serving them.

And we see that in verse five. They are meant for slaughter and they're used for wealth. These people who are over them say, blessed be the Lord, I have become rich.

And their own shepherds have no pity on them. In other words, the people who are meant to care for the nation of Israel are using those under them to profit and to gain. They don't care how hurt the sheep may become.

[12 : 28] They don't care whether the sheep are healthy. All they care about is whether they're making money. They are the opposite of the good shepherd that we're told about near the end of this passage.

Remember, we're told in verse 16 about a good shepherd. The good shepherd cares for those being destroyed. It seeks the young. It heals the maim. It nourishes the healthy. These shepherds are doing the opposite of that.

And so they're doomed to destruction because their leaders are terrible. They're doomed to destruction, however, for another reason. Verse 6, they're going to fall into the hands of their neighbors.

So not only are the rulers out for gain, those who are being ruled, the neighbors are not caring for each other in the ways that they should. Now there's a variety of suggestions about what this play is representing here.

Some people suggest that it's about foreign and political alliances that the rulers during the nation of Israel are undertaking. Some people think it's about everyday greed and oppression, just the taxes that these rulers are putting on their people.

[13:35] The understanding here, however, regardless of what the exact sin is, this is Israel before the exile. Before God's people are exiled to Babylon, first the northern kingdom in 722 and then the southern kingdom in 586, they are known for rejecting God as their shepherd and they do it by exploiting one another rather than caring for one another.

And so God tells them in verse 6, this is why his judgment is coming. I will cause each of them to fall into the hand of his neighbor and each into the hand of his king and they shall crush the land and I will deliver none from their hand.

In other words, this world is filled with bad shepherds. The nation of Israel had bad shepherds over them.

They had people who were meant to care for them who used them instead. Not only is this true specifically of the nation of Israel, we know it's true of the world in general.

There are shepherds who look to gain from their sheep rather than to serve them. Remember we talked last week about this problem that we've seen during the coronavirus crisis. People in varieties of places, rulers have decided there are rules that apply to people under them.

[14:50] Those rules just don't apply to them. There are rulers who've seen this crisis is a time to gain for themselves rather than to serve from their people. And so we see first of all here that God comes with judgment on bad shepherds.

Here it's specifically Israel and her shepherds, the ones that are taking advantage of her. And we know that since God's bringing justice, remember last week from chapter nine, he's the king of righteousness, he is bringing judgment in general on all bad shepherds.

And so for that reason, Zachariah continues this play. He does what he's told. God's given us a preview of what's going to happen. I'm gonna make you a shepherd of the sheep. They're doomed to slaughter. Verse seven, Zachariah actually does it.

So he goes to become the shepherd of the sheep. And he takes two staffs. This again is verse seven. One named favor, the other named union. And he tells us there in those staffs, this was the tool of the shepherd that he'd use to care for the sheep.

What was supposed to characterize a good shepherd? Favor, this could also be translated as graciousness. This was God's attitude towards his people. One of grace is how we talk about it now, that God doesn't give us what we deserve.

[16:02] And union, that there's this sense of unity among his people, that they're bound together. They're working towards one mission, looking out for each other rather than looking to destroy each other.

So the opposite of the evil shepherds, right? He has these two staffs here to represent the kind of rule that he's supposed to have. But these people reject him, the sheep that he's supposed to be caring after.

And so we see in verses eight and nine, the bad shepherds are taken down. But verse nine, Zechariah decides he's not going to be shepherd anymore.

They became impatient with him, verse eight, or he became impatient with them, verse eight. The end of verse eight, they also detested me. So the good shepherd is rejected. And we see the consequences of the rejection of the good shepherd because these two staffs, favor and union are broken.

So we see that in verses 10 and 14. Verse 10, favor is broken, annulling the covenant that I have made with all the peoples. This is a reference to the fact that God allows his people to go into exile.

[17:12] There's bad shepherds. God's judgment is coming for it. His covenant is broken because of it. Broken, not in an ultimate final sense, but broken in the sense that his people experience the punishment that was promised if they didn't keep.

The commands given to them in the covenant. And then we see in verse 14, the unity staff is broken. And we're told that this represents the bond between Judah and the north, and Israel, or Israel, the north, Judah, and the south.

This is referring to the split in the kingdom of Israel, the nation of Israel, between the northern and the southern kingdom in 930 BC. In other words, God brings his judgment on his people because they will not keep his covenant.

Now, that might seem like a lot of explanation and a lot of dates. Remember the point, first of all, was that we live in a world filled with bad shepherds. The second point is a little bit counterintuitive. Of course, we know that we live in a world with bad shepherds. Of course, we know that rulers are out for their own interests and not ours. That is something we can all get behind, right?

[18 : 15] The second point is a little bit harder to get behind. The world is not only filled with bad shepherds, the world also rejects good shepherds.

The world is not only filled with bad shepherds, the world rejects good shepherds just like Israel rejected God.

And so that's the rub of this passage, right? We can all cheer and get behind the idea that there are bad rulers in the world. The problem is there are also bad sheep. We would think that if there was a perfect ruler, we would cheer and celebrate.

Describing this passage, one person says this, it is often assumed that if a country were to find a ruler totally dedicated to the good of his people, who would rid the land of injustice and encourage all that makes for harmony, peace and happiness would prevail.

One insight of this prophet, meaning Zechariah, is that such a ruler would not only not be welcomed, but he would be positively hated and rejected.

[19 : 32] Of course, we're told the same thing about Jesus in the book of Isaiah. We're told he's one who is deeply despised. And so it's confirming for us to hear that there are bad shepherds.

It's also convicting and challenging to hear that good shepherds in this world are hated and despised. Both things are true. And so that highlights a principle for us that we see more and more in this world, which is that we are tempted to blame our leaders for all of our problems.

Problem with that is that politics is downstream of culture. And so our leaders reflect us as much as they rule us. Do you have a narcissistic ruler?

I'll show you a narcissistic country. Do you have a ruler who lies? I'll show you a country that hates the truth.

As much as we hate to admit it, people get the rulers they deserve. Whether you are a Democrat or a Republican, we can probably all agree that politicians are getting worse and worse.

[20 : 46] Why? Bible would remind us because we are getting worse and worse. It's not just that we have bad shepherds in this world.

It's that we also hate good shepherds. It's one thing to talk about how much we long for justice until a leader tells us something we don't want to hear.

It's easy to talk about how much we want people in need to be cared for until that means we have to lose something.

Good leaders are often not loved, but rejected. That's what we see here in this passage. God was ruling his people as the best shepherd they could ever have, and yet they rejected him.

And so that's where we see what happens next in this story. God's people have rejected him, the good shepherd. Verse 15, he tells Zechariah, okay, you're going to play one more shepherd.

[21 : 53] Remember I told you the sheep are the nation of Israel? We're going to have multiple shepherds. We have the good shepherd. We have the shepherds who are selfish. Now we're going to have this foolish shepherd, verse 15. And this shepherd is going to devour the flesh of the fat ones, tearing off even their hooves.

In other words, this shepherd is going to destroy the sheep rather than care for the sheep. And so that brings us back to our question, right?

Why are we rejoicing in Jesus as shepherd? Why is it that it's this passage of Zechariah that we're looking at? Well, you remember last week I told you we're looking at the four passages from the book of Zechariah that are quoted in the New Testament.

And the one portion I have not talked about yet is the portion that is quoted, which is when Zechariah goes to get his wages. He tells the people, verse 12, if it seems good to you, give me my wages, but if not, keep them.

In other words, he's a shepherd. He's turned in his two weeks notice. Tells them you can pay me if you want. You don't have to. You have not loved the shepherding that I've done.

[23 : 00] You have not wanted to listen to the messages that I've delivered. And so they give him 30 pieces of silver, verse 12. And then God tells him, throw it in to the house of the Lord.

In other words, to the temple. Give it to the potter. Now there's all kinds of theories about what's going on here. Why is he throwing this into the house of the potter? Is he condemning the temple somehow?

Is he giving them just enough metal to create a false idol that they can worship? Is he throwing them their money to say, that's all you care about? We don't know for sure.

What we do know is that this passage is quoted by the writer of the Gospel of Matthew as a fulfillment. In Matthew chapter 27, verse 9, remember Judas has betrayed Jesus.

He's paid 30 pieces of silver, and it's used to buy the potter's field. And Matthew tells us this is to fulfill what was written by the prophet Jeremiah.

[23 : 59] You might wonder, why is it the prophet Jeremiah if we're reading Zechariah? Well, both of them discuss a potter. And as we understand, it was typical to quote the lesser known of the prophets, the one who had a more obscure quotation.

What's given in the book of Matthew is actually closer to what we see here in Zechariah. And so we would have known this is a quote from Jeremiah, also from Zechariah. And we're told it's a fulfillment of what we see in this passage.

So what is going on? What is the connection between Judas giving money, his money being used to buy a potter's field, and this money being thrown to the place of the potter in the temple in the Old Testament?

When Matthew tells us that this prophecy has been fulfilled, he is not telling us that it's fulfilled in the sense of a prediction. What he is telling us is that it has been fulfilled in the sense of a pattern.

It's not fulfilled in the sense of a prediction. It's fulfilled in the sense of a pattern. In other words, it's not a coincidence that Judas rejected Jesus and 30 pieces of silver were given to a potter.

[25 : 10] Because remember, back in Zechariah, there was a shepherd that was also rejected, and there was also 30 pieces of silver that were given to a potter. In other words, the reason for the money is not the point.

The point is that the pattern continues. Matthew is drawing a connection for us between this rejected shepherd, or God's people head into judgment, and Jesus, the rejected shepherd. Both are clear instances of God's people rejecting the good and perfect shepherd. Not only do we have a world with bad shepherds, we have a world that hates good shepherds.

They hated this shepherd in Zechariah chapter 11, and they hated Jesus, the good shepherd, in Matthew chapter 27. However, in Jesus, the ending of the story changes.

So the silver stays the same. The ending's not the same. Here, God hands his people over to a foreign leader.

[26 : 17] Remember, we have this foolish shepherd in verse 15 and 16. With Jesus, however, instead of handing his people over to a foreign nation, he allows himself to be handed over to foreigners.

Jesus fulfills the pattern, and he also breaks it. The rejected shepherd in Zechariah 11 hands the sheep over to judgment.

When Jesus becomes the rejected shepherd, he takes the judgment. The rejected shepherd in Zechariah 11 hands the sheep over to judgment. The rejected shepherd in Matthew 27 receives the judgment.

Jesus is the great and greater shepherd. Jesus' shepherding is to cause us joy because while normally we get the leaders we deserve, in Jesus Christ, we get the leader we don't deserve. We normally have leaders that reflect us, both for good and for ill. In Jesus, we have a leader who does not reflect us. He is righteous where we're sinful.

[27 : 35] He's obedient where we're disobedient. And by the way, he wasn't just rejected by Judas, right? It's Judas who betrays Jesus who leads to the 30 pieces of silver.

But remember, Peter, whose book we were just in, 2 Peter, he also rejects Jesus. The disciples fall asleep when they're supposed to be awake with Jesus. And so Jesus is not just deserted by Judas at the end of his life.

He's deserted by everyone. And he does it for rebellious sheep. And so why do we rejoice? Why is it good news that Jesus is our shepherd?

Because we get a leader better than the one we deserve. When Jesus comes to earth, remember we talked about how he had a true body and a reasonable soul. He's fully human. He reflects us in that sense.

However, he does not reflect us in our sin. Instead, he takes our sin on himself. And so we have a great and greater shepherd. For us, it is not a choice, as we talked about last week, between Jesus and nothing.

[28 : 47] It's a choice between Jesus and other shepherds. We will be shepherded by someone. If we are not shepherded by the good shepherd, we will be shepherded by ourselves.

We'll be shepherded by politicians. We'll be shepherded by the media. We'll be shepherded by technology. We will be shepherded by advertisers and marketers. It is not a choice between Jesus and freedom, but as we see in Zechariah chapter 11, a choice between Jesus and slavery.

And the good news is this. Jesus did not come for easy, compliant sheep. Jesus came for us. Jesus did not come for easy, compliant sheep. He came for us. And so we rejoice in Jesus as the good shepherd, because while the shepherd in Zechariah 11 releases the sheep to foreign powers, the shepherd who is Jesus releases himself to foreign powers.

While the shepherd in Zechariah 11 allows the sheep to be punished, the shepherd that is Jesus allows himself to be punished. And so we see in Zechariah chapter 11, a pointing forward to the true and good shepherd.

[30 : 09] Remember John chapter 10, verse 11. Jesus says this, I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. And he could have added this, sheep who are stinky and difficult and rebellious.

We see that carried forward even more when Jesus tells us a story in Matthew chapter 18. He tells us the parable of the lost sheep. And he says this, what do you think?

If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the 99 on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the 99 that never went astray.

Jesus is a shepherd who seeks after his lost and rebellious and runaway sheep. He is the good shepherd from John chapter 10.

And he's the shepherd who runs after his sheep from Matthew chapter 18. And so we get the leaders that we deserve, except that Jesus breaks the rule.

[31 : 21] In Jesus, we got a leader that we didn't deserve. And so we rejoice, not just in Jesus as our king, but Jesus as our shepherd, because he is the one who pursues the people who oppose him.

He is the one who pursues us. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for the stories that you give us in your word, putting them into a form that we can understand and grasp and imagine. We thank you that we have a better fate and a better future than the sheep in this passage because we have our great and greatest king, Jesus. We ask that you would use that truth to soften and stir up our hearts during Advent, that we would be moved, no matter what our circumstances are, in our perspective, that we would praise you, knowing that no matter what happens in this world, you will not lose us because you are the shepherd who goes after the one and leaves the 99.

We ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.