

The Rejected Shepherd

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Preacher: Donald Smith

[0 : 00] Sometimes taking things for granted can end up going wrong.! I once knew a guy, I'm not even going to pretend that, the guy was me.

! When you preach places, you occasionally get paid in checks, particularly a few years ago,! they give you a check at the end of the day.

And that was all well and good. And in my wisdom on my desk, I had a small pile of checks that were kind of getting added to every few weeks as I preached in different places.

In my mind, that was job done. The money was there, it was mine, I had it, all was well.

In my infinite wisdom, which sometimes isn't quite so infinite, I left it there for a little longer than I should have, assuming, taking for granted, right, that that money belonged to me.

[1 : 08] And after a long time, when the pile of checks, it wasn't that big a pile of checks, right, don't get too excited. But after the pile of checks had collected a little too much dust, I decided it was finally time to cash in at the bank.

And it was at the bank teller's booth that I discovered checks have a use-by date. We can't accept these.

I had a pile of money that I thought belonged to me sitting on the table for a long, long time. But because I just assumed it was mine, I never acted on it or did anything about it at all, there came a day when I lost it all.

The blessings that I assumed belonged to me were all of a sudden worthless because I had just assumed, taken it for granted. I'd heard about it, I'd received it, someone had given it to me.

What else do I really need to do with it? For the last few chapters of Zechariah, God's prophet has been pointing his audience towards a glorious future, a rich future.

[2 : 21] Not in terms of finances, it's not a big pile of checks, but it is rich in terms of blessing, isn't it? There's been an abundance of blessing promised at a restored Zion, a king back in the throne of God's kingdom, a reunited people.

It's all been good news. And in chapter 12 to 14, there is more good news to come. Salvation and purification await.

But the sandwiched between these pictures of a glorious future, these wonderful blessings waiting for God's people, is chapter 11.

Perhaps you picked up from the reading, even if you didn't follow along with all the details, this chapter is not quite so full of hope and eager expectation, is it?

It strikes a much more somber note. But this chapter, I think it's here to warn God's people not to take this glorious future for granted.

[3 : 26] Just because it's going to be yours. It's that there is something you have to do.

Like cashing in checks, that thing is very straightforward, but so very, very important. I idly assume that these blessings will be yours and the future will not be beautiful.

It will, in fact, be very, very bleak. In the midst of a lot of hope, chapter 11 here, I think, stands as a warning of the importance of grasping that hope with both hands and never letting go.

We've got three points this evening, really just walking through what we see in this passage. And the hope is that we will hear the warning, hear it loud and clear, so that we would be assured that all that we have heard either side of this chapter, and all we will hear in the weeks to come, really and truly is ours to look forward to so long as we listen to the warning of chapter 11.

Three points, and the first of which takes us through verse 1 to 6, where we see a flock doomed to slaughter. Chapter 11 begins on what sounds like maybe kind of a familiar note.

[4 : 53] A couple of chapters back, you remember Ben was preaching on chapter 9 a couple of weeks ago. We saw the promise of justice being brought against Damascus, Tyre, Ashkelon.

At the beginning of chapter 11, we begin with Lebanon. And maybe we think we just have more of the same here. More just judgment on those who have set themselves against God and his people. But as we listen through verses 1 to 3, that the sound of coming judgment gets closer and closer to home. It begins in Lebanon, then Bashan.

But then by verse 3, it is the thickets of the Jordan that are ruined. But back in chapter 9, we had a kind of great sweep moving north to south, passing by God's people.

Here we have something similar. We're moving north to south. But this isn't happening way off in the east. This is happening right above God's people. From north down towards them.

[6 : 04] It is similar to chapter 9, but with an uncomfortable twist. It's like hearing the sound of thunder rumbling gently in the distance.

But with every flash of lightning, the rumble arrives a little sooner and grows a little louder. So that by the end of verse 3, the wailing is right on the doorstep of Judah.

And the question is, are we about to face this same judgment?

The judgment that two chapters ago was going to deliver God's people, is that now going to come and destroy God's people? We hope the answer would be a kind of straightforward no.

But it's not quite as simple as that. Verse 1 to 3, as I look into the horizon, seeing the clouds kind of darkening, the storm approaching. Verse 4 to 6, our gaze is drawn much closer to home.

[7 : 21] Now we're in the fields around Jerusalem. Sometimes what's kind of included in your job description and what you're asked to do when you get to work are two very different things, aren't they? And you think, how did I end up here?

Wouldn't surprise me if Zechariah felt something similar to that here in chapter 11. As God's prophet, his duty was to go and proclaim God's word to his people.

But here today, in Zechariah chapter 11, the prophet's not stepping into the pulpit. He's getting into his shepherd gear and heading out for pasture.

He still has a message to proclaim. But this message is being acted out as much as it is being proclaimed. And it's being acted out amongst shepherds and their sheep.

Maybe helpful here just to step in a little to their shoes to kind of understand the imagery going on here. I imagine for us, right, when we think shepherd, what we're picturing, aren't we, is someone out in their croft, probably on the west coast of Scotland, wandering the hills.

[8 : 35] And today, when you picture a king, you think something very different, don't you? There's a man sitting in his palace on a throne with a crown on his head. Two very different things for us.

But in ancient Israel, indeed right across the kind of ancient Middle East, shepherd was a royal title. Of course, there were actual shepherds who kept actual sheep, but they did not hesitate to apply that same title to those who ruled over the nation.

Because they were the people responsible for providing for and protecting. Provision and protection. That is what the rulers did, just as the shepherds did.

And so by getting on his kind of shepherd garments here, Zechariah here is acting out something in these verses amongst sheep and shepherds to teach an essential lesson to God's people about them and those they chose to rule over them.

About their rulers, who they chose to follow. And what that means for the impending judgment darkening the horizon. Two important things we learn in verse 5 and 6.

[9 : 59] But first in verse 5, right, is the existence of bad shepherds. Of really bad shepherds. Rulers who see their people as just an avenue for personal gain.

Extortionists. People who want to squeeze those they're supposed to care of. Squeeze everything out of them that they can possibly get. We know, don't we, that that is true politically.

Those people exist. Rulers who use their authority for personal gain. We don't need convinced of that, do we, in 2026. More dangerously, though, it is true spiritually.

There are those who do not seek the goods of their own flock. That was true for them then.

It is true for us now. People who claim to lead well, but do not care about the well-being of those under them and seek only what will bring personal profits.

[10 : 57] Whether material or otherwise. And they might well think they're doing the Lord's work. But they are not. It's a staggering thing you see there, isn't it? Verse 5. Blessed be the Lord. I have become rich.

They are praising God for what they perceive Him to be doing. While they are doing exactly the opposite of what He has called them to do. There are bad shepherds.

That is what we learn in verse 5. Shepherds who have no pity on their flock. We might well expect, mightn't we, a contrast to that in verse 6.

Verse 5. Shepherds who have no pity on their flock. Verse 6. But God will have pity on their flock, right? Verse 6. I will not pity them either.

What is going on there? What we know, what we've seen, isn't it, in the last couple of chapters of Zechariah, is that God is just.

[12:05] He does not judge those who do not deserve judgment. For all the truly kind of terrible failings of the bad shepherds, verse 6 teaches us that the sheep are still responsible for their wanderings.

Joe mentioned one classic film this morning. Although I must confess I've never actually watched The Prince of Egypt. I don't know if that's allowed. I've not seen The Prince of Egypt.

But I have seen Chicken Run. Yes, and most of you have too. That is good news. It's classic, isn't it? Classic Christmas TV nowadays.

If you're not familiar with Chicken Run, think a kind of avian version of Wallace and Gromit. If you're not familiar with Wallace and Gromit, that's on you. Mrs. Tweedy. She is not a good shepherd.

I mean, she's not a shepherd. She is not a good farmer, is she? She is in the chicken business purely for personal profit. Her flock live in a coop disquietingly similar to a prisoner of war camp.

[13:15] She is a verse 5 shepherd. How can I squeeze them for profit? She learns that pies are more profitable than eggs.

So out go the egg boxes, and along comes the pie machine. And fatter chickens are more profitable than skinny chickens. So out come the chicken feeds.

So if you remember, I'm not familiar with Chicken Run, what happens when the chicken feed comes out? What do the chickens do? The chickens doomed to slaughter.

They start gobbling it up, don't they? There's a pie machine in the barn. There's some obviously selfish farmers at work. But as soon as the chicken feed is piled up in front of them, they are wanting more.

They're not complicit on the level of farmers, but they are ensuring their own demise by gladly getting behind the bad shepherd schemes.

[14:17] We are on board with this. That is verse 6. The flock doomed to slaughter.

Well, they are being led there by bad shepherds. But they are also going there by themselves. I'm not sure how many times the prophet Zechariah has been compared with ginger from Chicken Run. But like the chickens, the people in Jerusalem in Zechariah's day, and the people in Bonacord today need someone to come and tip over the feeding trough.

And warn us. Give us a moment to step back and think about where this particular path is leading down, should we choose to follow it.

That is where Zechariah 11 goes from here. A warning of what will one day happen if the doomed flock follows bad shepherds.

[15:26] Because by nature, that is what we do. Prone to wonder. A flock doomed to slaughter.

That without intervention, will gladly follow the path not to blessing but destruction. And we constantly need warned, guarded, against that path.

Lest our straying feet take us back on it once more. We are always in danger. Of following bad shepherds. Of straying onto a dangerous path.

At risk of gladly gobbling up the chicken feed being fed to us by shepherds that want nothing for us. And everything for themselves. That is where we will go unless.

Unless. We heed the warning. Of the one who has come to tell us where that path leads. That is what Zechariah does in verses 7 to 14.

[16:35] Our second point this morning. The good shepherd rejected. It is an illustration of his warning. Sometimes I spend ages in the week trying to come up with distinctly average illustrations for sermon points.

Helpfully, Zechariah puts it on a plate here. He is living out the illustration of God's point. Let's just kind of familiarize ourselves with the image.

And then think about what this is teaching us. In verse 7 there, you see that Zechariah becomes the shepherd. Remember, that is an illustration of a leader, a king, a ruler of God's people.

That is what he is portraying in his kind of shepherd outfit. And as part of his shepherding gear, he takes two staves. One he calls favor.

The other he calls union. And then he gets shepherding. He tended the flock. He cared for them. Unlike the other shepherds, here is a shepherd who cares for the welfare of his sheep.
[17 : 42] He is not in it for personal gain. He really is there to protect and provide for them. So much so that he defends the sheep. Not only from potential dangers out there, but from the worthless shepherds within the fold.

Verse 8. In one month I destroyed the three shepherds. We have no idea who they were, what they are referring to. But they were clearly bad news for the sheep.
He has come to set free this flock from the shepherds that are leading them to mortal danger. But how does the flock in this illustration respond?

I became impatient with them and they also detested me. They detested him. Here are sheep that do not like the good shepherds.

They are stubborn and rebellious. We've heard something like that, haven't we, over the last few weeks in Exodus. A people saved from brutal taskmasters.

[18 : 52] Now pining for the good old days of slavery when they got some cucumber on their sandwiches. Right?

Being deliberately ignorant. Blinding themselves to the vicious intent of their previous shepherds. Frustrated with the work of their saviour. We've seen that tendency in God's people in Exodus. This Zechariah is giving a similar warning now. What do we learn from that? God's people always need this warning, don't they?

The Exodus generation, we're not a kind of particularly bad bunch. They have the same hearts that we do. Prone to wonder, Lord, we feel it.

Prone to long for the freedom of slavery to sin. These sheep go further, right?

[19 : 59] Their wondering doesn't cease. So that here they willfully reject the good shepherds.

They want things to go back the way they were. What happens, though, when the good shepherd is rejected by his sheep?

Verse 9. 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. The good shepherd will be done with sheep who refuse it.

Favor snapped. But perhaps we think maybe some blessing still remains. Zechariah's still got one staff left, doesn't he?

[21 : 23] Union's still intact. After being rejected by the sheep, Zechariah asked the remaining shepherds to give him his wages, if it seems good to them. Right, the question really is, what do you think of my work?

The sheep have rejected me, but what do you think of it? My work to set these sheep free from terrible shepherds, to protect and to provide for them.

A month of hard labor, all done for their sake, none of it for my gain. What do you think of it? Do you deem it good? Do you think of it?

They're ready to give him something. Okay, that's them saying they want his work to be done.

We're ready to give you your wages so that you'll stop working here. Thirty pieces of silver is what they think of the shepherding he's done.

As good as worth. It's like asking your boss for the paycheck at the end of the month, and they bring out the bag of coppers. Paid off with pennies.

[22 : 48] Go away and do not come back. So Zechariah takes his second staff, union, and breaks that in half too.

A shepherd rejected. Union and favor broken. It's a vivid picture, isn't it? But what's the point of it all?

What is the message behind the illustration? Favor and union. Those two staffs represent, I think, what we have seen over the last few chapters.

That the blessings of God held before a weary people. An encouragement. They were saying, keep on struggling on in the present because look at this glorious future that is before you.

But favor, a restored city of God. Union, a reunited people. Gathered from far and wide. The shepherd gathering his sheep from afar.

[23 : 59] That was the hope held out in chapter 10. Here we learn that that hope is not guaranteed. It is conditional.

On not following these kinds of shepherds. And not being these kind of sheep. Because this kind of sheep and shepherd will have those blessings broken before them. If you want to enjoy the blessings God holds before you in this world, don't follow bad shepherds. Don't reject the good shepherds. You don't need to be too familiar with the Gospels to see Jesus, I think, all over this passage. The one who would call himself the good shepherd. Amongst many hired hands. Who do not really care for his sheep. But one who came to his own. But his own people did not receive him.

[25 : 16] One whose life was valued at 30 pieces of silver. 30 pieces of silver that would be thrown away. One who went up against the bad shepherds of his day.

The scribes and the Pharisees leading astray a people who were gladly following their footsteps. Jesus went up against them. Not as an illustration. But as the reality that this illustration is pointing forward to.

Fraser read some of that confrontation for us in Matthew chapter 21. The tenants that the bad shepherds were rejecting the messengers.

Like Zechariah. But they would go on even to reject the sun. They played this out. Not as an act. But for real. They really did reject the messengers. They really did reject the sun. But you don't have to have been there in Jerusalem.

[26 : 21] Amongst the Pharisees condemning Jesus to death. To reject him as your shepherds. Just because you are not there then.

Does not mean you are still not listening to the warnings of his messengers. The prophets God sent. Before he then sent his son. You do not have to be handing over 30 pieces of silver. To have the same heart that is ready to pay for Jesus to leave you alone. Even amongst the people of God. Within the visible church.

There will be those who want the blessing. Without following the shepherds. That is who Jesus was speaking to in Matthew 21.

After sending his servants, his messengers, his prophets. Finally. The owner sent his son to them saying. They will respect my son. But when the tenants saw the son.

[27 : 26] They said to themselves. This is the heir. Come. Let us kill him. And have his inheritance. Give us the blessing. Get rid of the son. We do not want to follow your shepherd. We just want the benefits.

Before such people. The Lord breaks his favor. Snaps his union. And says. The blessings which are for some.

Are not for you. There is a condition. Reject the good shepherd.

And the good shepherd. Will reject you. And you will be left. Not on your own. But with a wicked and worthless shepherd.

[28 : 22] Who will lead you to slaughter. Our third and final point this evening. The worthless shepherd installed. Zechariah sent back out as a shepherd again in verse 15.

But this time a very different one. Verse 15. Take once more. The equipment of a foolish shepherd. One who does not care for those being destroyed.

One who does not provide or protect. Be that shepherd. Because that is the kind of shepherd they will receive. If. They reject the good shepherd.

Then the people will be judged. And in particular. The worthless shepherd. Will be judged.

Who fails to lead them. That there is. There is a particularly terrifying judgment. Waiting for those who lead people away from the good shepherds.

[29 : 28] That their judgment will be. Even more severe. Do not dare.

Do not dare. Do not dare to lead people away from Jesus. The end that awaits such people is too terrifying to comprehend.

Whatever depths of pain you can imagine. It will be infinitely greater. Worthless shepherds.

Fearfully judged. Fearfully judged. Worthless shepherds. Fearfully judged.

But the somber note of this passage. Is that. So too. Will straying sheep. Who choose to follow. Worthless shepherds. What we began this chapter.

By hearing the thunderclap. Kind of growing louder and louder. The thick clouds. Darkening the horizon. That the question. Is God's judgment coming among us?

[30 : 34] The answer. To you and me here this evening. Is yes. If you reject God's shepherd king. If you want his blessings. But reject his rule over your life. This is the fate that awaits you. A fearful but entirely just judgment.

That is what is waiting in your future. But it does not need to. The people in Zechariah's day. Are not being condemned. To this judgment. They are being warned. About what could lay before them.

Should they respond wrongly. To the good shepherds. The judgment is being forewarned. So that. That. That. It would be.

[31 : 37] Avoided. That is the point of this passage. Do all that you can. To avoid this.

And all that you can. Is following the good shepherd. The application this evening. Is very. Very simple. Hear the warning.

Follow the good shepherd. Follow Jesus Christ. And every promised blessing. Will be yours. Favor and union.

Will remain in front of you. Not snapped. But whole. Goodness and mercy. Will follow you. All of your days. The good shepherd.

Will lay down his life. For you. If you follow him. He will bring. Your wandering footsteps. Back in his way.

[32 : 39] He will lead you. In paths of righteousness. His rod and staff. Will comfort you. And he will. He will. Lead you home. That is the blessing.

That awaits you. Should you follow him. Him. That there. There are many. Other voices. In this world. That will seek. To lead you astray. False shepherds.

And higher hands. Hired hands. But they lead. Only to death. And destruction. They doom. Their flocks. To slaughter. You will. Hear their voice.

Online. At work. At school. At uni. You will hear them. Where you expect. To hear them. And where you don't expect. To hear them. Sometimes they'll look like. Worthless shepherds. Sometimes they may appear.

To be good shepherds. But if they are pointing you. Anywhere. Other than Jesus. Run away. Run away. Do not listen.

[33 : 39] Do not listen. Do not follow. No matter how wise they might sound. How intelligent they might be. How kind they might seem.

No matter how sincere they are. Any shepherd that takes you away from Jesus. Is one to run from. Lest the rumbles of thunder. Come crashing into your very own soul. There will be. There are some of you here this evening.

Who are still rejecting him. There's not an innocent matter.

It is life or death. But follow the good shepherd. Listen to his voice.

[34 : 43] Be guided by his word. Have your life be ruled by him. Not some of it. All of it. Trust him as your provider.

And all the amazing blessings. That surround this chapter. They will be yours forevermore. It is a somber and sobering chapter.

But it's needed. Isn't it? Lest we take for granted. What lies either side. Lest the blessings.

Of chapters 7 to 10. And 12 to 14. Be like a pile of checks on our desk. That we think. That's mine. I have it. Should we not follow the good shepherd.

It will all be taken away. But the point of chapter 11. Is that it does not need to be that way. Do not be like these sheep.

[35 : 47] Do not follow these shepherds. Run to Jesus. He will never let you go. He will never let you go.

There will be moments. There will be days. Where we wonder a little. But it's where we began this book of Zechariah. Isn't it? Return to him. Return to the Lord of hosts.

And he will return to us. When we follow Jesus. Even if there are moments where we stray a little. He will always come and find his sheep. And lead them home. So I beg you this evening.

Particularly those of you who have not yet given your life to Jesus. Follow him. You need to do it. Lest you too.

Face a fearful judgment. Let us pray that every one of us here this evening. Would follow him all of our days. Let's pray.

[36 : 52] That we do that both now and always. Before we sing to our shepherd and king. Father we thank you.

That in your goodness. And your wisdom. That from your love. You give warning to us. Lord we know that you would be just to say nothing.

And let us wander far away. But in your goodness and your grace. Lord you give us passages like these. To show us the danger. That lies ahead.

When we follow any other shepherd than the Lord Jesus Christ. Lord we thank you for this warning. We thank you even more so for the good shepherd.

For the good shepherd who was rejected by his own. But nevertheless lay down his life. Lord we pray that we. Each and every one of us here this evening.

[37 : 53] Would hear his voice. Would follow him. All of our days. Lord for any here who are not following. We pray that you would.

Draw them to yourself. Make known to them. That the danger of the path they are on. That they might come and follow Jesus. We pray for any here. Who are perhaps wondering.

Straying a little from the path that they were once on. In your grace bring them back. For those who are living faithfully. Lord help them. To continue on that path.

By your grace. That we might now and always. Follow the good shepherd. As he leads us home. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Amen.