

Zech 11
The Shepherd of God's flock
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Last week we were looking at two kinds of shepherds,
bad shepherds and a good shepherd.

And we could see clearly from Zechariah's prophecy
that the only fulfilment of the good shepherd is the Lord Jesus.

This week we are still on shepherds.

The difference is that this week we are looking back.

This is a look at Israel's history.

In Israel's history you have the choice of two styles of shepherd again.

You have God as the good shepherd.

And you have the human shepherds who are bad shepherds.

It's somewhat depressing to read

because of the relentless focus

on the people rejecting God as their shepherd,

and as a consequence God leaving them

to the tender mercies of the human shepherds.

What I'm going to do

is explain what the passage is saying about Israel's history

and show how Jesus reverses all the bad things that happened to Israel.

Our passage comes in three scenes.

Scene 1: verses 4-9.

Basically what we have is God quitting his job.

11:9 "I will not be your shepherd."

So we are talking about the period of time that led up to the exile.

Zechariah is looking back more than 70 years

at the events that led to Israel being taken to Babylon.

And he doesn't explain it in terms of the Babylonian army.

He doesn't even explain it as being a consequences of Israel's sin.

Of course both of those were absolutely part of the story.

But like all things,

this is first and foremost about God.

The exile came because God quit his job as shepherd of his people.

11:4 "This is what my God says:

"Shepherd the flock marked for slaughter.""

The flock is the people of Israel.

Who has marked them for slaughter?

God has.

11:5 "Their buyers slaughter them and go unpunished."

Who would normally punish those who oppress God's people?

God would.

11:5 "Those who sell them say,

'Praise the Lord, I am rich!'

Their own shepherds do not spare them."

The leaders of Israel,

the people who are meant to look after God's people,
are just selling them off.

And when they exploit God's people,

they attribute their wealth to God's blessing.

That's a disgusting perversion that we even see today.

The televangelists fleece the flock,

and talk about how God has showered them with blessing.

But when their leaders are taking them to the cleaners,

how does God view it?

11:6 "For I will no longer have pity on the people of this land,"
declares the Lord.

God stopped having pity on his people

and he allowed their leaders to exploit them.

When neighbouring countries and their own king turned on them,
who did it?

11:6 "For I will give everyone into the hands of their neighbours
and their king."

God gave them over.

What would you normally expect God to do
when his people are in trouble?

He's a saving God, a rescuing God, right?

11:6 "They will devastate the land,

and I will not rescue anyone from their hands."
 He's not a saving God this time.
 He's a let you stew in your own juice God.

God quitting his job is a terrible, terrible judgement on his people.
 If God just leaves things to their own devices,
 it doesn't hum along happily.
 No. Everything becomes utterly rotten.
 Leave a an esky of meat out in the sun for a couple of days.
 It doesn't go happily on its own devices.
 It goes putrid.
 And that is how things go when God quits his job.

I'm sure many of us who have had a job
 have thought to ourselves,
 "This place would never survive if I left."
 And then when we do leave,
 surprise, surprise they actually manage without us.
 But it's not that way with God.
 When God quits, the wheels fall off.

Why would God quit his job?
 11:8 "The flock detested me,
 and I grew weary of them and said,
 "I will not be your shepherd.
 Let the dying die, and the perishing perish.
 Let those who are left eat one another's flesh.""
 Why would God quit his job?
 The flock detested me.
 They didn't want God as their shepherd any more.
 God we don't want you.
 So God says, "I'm sick of working hard where I'm not wanted.
 Have it your own way.
 Find out what happens when I'm not here."

Well that's all pretty depressing.
 And it's not hard to see parallels in our own society.
 A society that knew God and is intentionally turning away
 and saying 'God we don't want you anymore.'
 Be careful what you wish for.
 He may just give you what you ask for.

But as I said at the start,
 the judgements are reversed in Jesus.
 The judgement on Israel is
 that God removed his shepherding from among them.
 11:8 "In one month I got rid of the three shepherds."
 The three shepherds of Israel were the prophet, the priest and the king.
 Those were the offices that were to tend God's people
 to look after their welfare.
 In one month,
 the temple was destroyed and the priests killed or taken into exile;
 King Zedekiah was taken into exile
 and his sons and officials were killed;
 and the prophetic voice of Jeremiah the prophet was lost to the people.
 Prophet, priest and king gone.
 But Jesus reverses that.
 Jesus is the perfect prophet who speaks God's word to the people.
 Jesus is the great high priest who makes sacrifice for our sins.
 Jesus is the king of kings who rules over the whole earth.

Scene 2 is the two staffs.
 Zechariah had two staffs that he named Favour and Union.
 And he broke them.
 11:10 "Then I took my staff called Favour and I broke it,
 revoking the covenant I had made with the nations."
 11:14 "Then I took my second staff called union,
 breaking the family bond between Judah and Israel."
 This is God saying the covenant is at an end.
 The promises made first to Abraham

and reiterated to his son and grandson,
then reiterated to Moses, then reiterated to David,
it's over.

At an end.

And along with that,
gone is the relationship
between the northern tribes and the southern tribes.
The great hope of God's people
was that the terrible split between the 10 tribes in the north
and the two tribes in the south could be mended.
Not going to happen.
The staff named Union is broken.

But Jesus reverses the curse.
At the last supper Jesus said,
Lk 22:20 "This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
which is poured out for you."
The old covenant might be broken
because the flock detested their shepherd.
But God has made a new covenant.
God's favour is once again available.
The new covenant makes forgiveness of sins available
to all who call on the name of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus doesn't only remake the staff called Favour.
He also remakes the staff called Union.
John 10:16 "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen.
I must bring them also.
They too will listen to my voice,
and there shall be one flock and one shepherd."
This is actually a greater fulfilment than Israel hoped for.
They wanted their to be one flock
comprising the northern and southern tribes.
Jesus is making one flock of Jews and Gentiles.
His staff called union is the union of one people throughout humanity.

The church is God's people from every tribe and people and nation.
 I think the grandeur of that vision doesn't really hit you
 until you stand amongst a really diverse crowd
 and sing God's praises together.
 For me, that was Gafcon 2018.
 People from 50 nations.
 Singing, praying, praising God together.
 Such unity with people I'd never met before.
 When we prayed in small groups,
 we could instantly sense that our hearts were in tune with one another.
 Jesus unites God's people together.
 The broken staff of union has been remade.

Scene three: the thirty pieces of silver.
 Shepherds don't work for free.
 You have to pay them to look after your sheep.
 And so God as the shepherd of Israel
 asks the people who have rejected him as shepherd for his pay.
 11:12 "If you think it best,
 give me my pay;
 but if not keep it."
 You can imagine the situation.
 You've done a job.
 The people you've done the job for have rejected your work.
 But you've put time and effort in.
 Are they actually going to respect you enough to pay you for your work
 even though they have rejected you?
 Or to put it another way,
 "How much does Israel value God's shepherding of the nation?"
 11:12 "So they paid me 30 pieces of silver."
 30 pieces of silver was the amount prescribed in the Law
 for the life of a slave.
 Israel valued their God about as much as they valued a slave.
 If you were God,
 how would that make you feel?

11:13 "And the Lord said to me,

"Throw it to the potter"-

the handsome price at which they valued me.

So I took the thirty pieces of silver

and threw them to the potter at the house of the Lord."

When it says 'the handsome price' that's dripping with sarcasm, right?

Of course God thinks his love and care for the nation

is worth more than 30 pieces of silver.

But if that's what they want to value me at,

then give it to the potter,

I don't want it.

You can't hear the phrase 30 pieces of silver

without having your mind drawn to Judas

and the amount the chief priests paid him to betray Jesus.

What did Judas value Jesus' loving leadership of his disciples at?

30 pieces of silver.

For the price of a slave,

Judas was prepared to betray his creator.

For loose change,

Judas was prepared to give away

the one who made the blind see and the lame walk.

But Jesus turns it all around.

God was offended at Israel's rejection of him

and gave them what they deserved.

They reject him as shepherd,

they get exactly the shepherds they deserve.

But it all turns around in Jesus.

In Jesus we get the Good Shepherd.

The Shepherd we could never deserve.

The one who lays down his life for the flock.

The people of Israel valued God's shepherding at the price of a slave.

Jesus came in the form of a slave.

He said, "For even the Son of man did not come to be served,

but to serve,
and give his life as a ransom for many."

And for we who follow him,
what Jesus offers is the most precious thing.
Obtaining the kingdom of heaven
is like a man who sold all he had to gain the most precious pearl.
Obtaining the kingdom of heaven
is a like a man who found treasure buried in a field,
and so he sold everything he had to buy that field,
so that when he dug it up,
the treasure would be his.
Those are stories that Jesus told
about how his followers will value the kingdom of heaven.
Certainly not 30 pieces of silver.
Certainly not loose change.
But something so precious we would leave everything we have to get it.

So what do we have in Zechariah 11?

Scene 1.

We have God quitting as shepherd of the flock.
The flock detested him
and so God was just not prepared
to do the job of looking after them anymore.
And so he removed the three institutions
he had established to spiritually care for his people.
No more prophet.
No more priest.
No more king.

Scene 2.

We have the breaking of the staffs favour and union.
God telling his people that his covenant with them is no more.
They broke it, not him.
But God is announcing to them
that no longer can they expect to be in his favour.

In the book of Exodus he said to them,
19:5 "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant,
then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession."

The message is, sorry folks,
you broke the covenant.

No longer can you expect to be my treasured possession.

Scene 3.

We have God rejecting the insulting payment that was offered to him
for his services as the shepherd of his people.

And in each matter, the Lord Jesus reverses the curse.

Jesus is our prophet, priest and king.

He is the Good Shepherd who takes care of the flock.

Jesus is the one who establishes a new covenant.

In him we find forgiveness.

And in him, the union between Judah and Israel that was hoped for
becomes a union between peoples of every tribe and tongue.

Just like the people of Israel valued God's shepherding
at the price of a slave,

so Jesus was valued at 30 pieces of silver.

And yet instead of turning around

and giving us the shepherds we deserved,

he gave us the Good Shepherd who gives his life for the flock.

We praise God for his kindness to us in Jesus.