

**SHOWERS OF BLESSING**  
**Ezekiel 34:26**

**Dr. Howard Batson**  
**First Baptist Church**  
**Amarillo, Texas**  
**November 11, 2018**

Our stewardship theme this year comes from Ezekiel 34:26.

"And I will call showers to come down in their season; they will be showers of blessing."

God is telling ancient Israel that He will restore them, bless them, and provide them with showers of His favor.

God also showers us with His blessings, doesn't He? What do you have, what good gift have you received that was not provided by the hand of God?

Sometimes we think that we are self-sufficient. We live under the ruse of being "self-made" people. "I worked hard. I studied hard. I saved a long time." But who gave you the wisdom, the wit, the skill, the strength, the health, the know-how, the determination, and the good fortune of being where you are today?

James, the brother of Jesus, tells us "Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow" (James 1:16-17).

Whatever you've received that you can call "good" is a gift from God. God treats us as He did the ancient Israelites in their hope of restoration. "There shall be showers of blessing."

Let's look at the first ten verses.

**I. Bad Shepherds (vs. 1-10)**

In both the Old Testament and other ancient Near Eastern writings, rulers – kings – are designated as shepherds (Isaiah 44:28, Jeremiah 2:8; 10:21; 23:1-6; 25:34-38; Micah 5:4; Zechariah 11:4-17). In the second millennium, Babylonian king Hammurabi describes himself as "the shepherd who brings salvation and whose staff is righteous." The Lord Himself made the declaration to David, "You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler" (2 Samuel 5:10). Both Moses and David received their call to leadership while they were actually serving as shepherds of a flock – Moses watching the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, and David watching the flock of his own father, Jesse.

Yes, the ancient kings were to be busy shepherding the flock, but they had failed. They were not good leaders, good kings. Rather than caring for their sheep, these shepherds had exploited the

people who were under their care. They were fleecing the sheep and fattening themselves at the expense of the sheep. Look at Ezekiel 34:2-3.

The kings, moreover, showed none of the pastoral qualities that were required of them in caring for the weak and defenseless members of the community (v. 4). They didn't heal the sick sheep. They didn't bind up the broken sheep. They didn't even look after the lost sheep, but let them go astray. And they actually allowed the flock to be scattered all over the earth. In verses 5-6, the word "scattered" occurs three times.

Look at verse 5. "They were scattered for lack of a shepherd."

The kings had been bad shepherds. Therefore, God says He is against the shepherds. They will not be allowed to rule anymore. The flock will be taken out of their care, and they will be removed as shepherds (v. 10).

Of the forty-three kings that ancient Israel had from 1051 B.C. to 586 B.C., only David, Hezekiah, and Josiah were solidly, consistently loyal to God in their leadership of the nation. Eight or nine of the other forty did some good, but the majority were bad shepherds.

## **II. The Good Shepherd (vs. 11-18)**

In verses 11-18, we learn about God as the good shepherd, as opposed to these selfish shepherds who cared for themselves rather than the sheep.

Look at verse 11

Thus says the Lord God, "Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out."

The kings had allowed the people of Israel to be scattered. They had not sought them, or healed them, or cared for them. God says, "I'll search for them. I'll look for my people." We learn that God will find the stray sheep. He will rescue the lost. He will feed and tend to the whole flock, giving particular attention to the weak and the ailing members.

I love verse 12

As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day.

God will search for the wanderer, the sheep that is lost.

No doubt Jesus had heard these words, knew them well, when in Luke 15:4-7, He said, "What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

God will search for the lost sheep because He is a good shepherd.

And God is going to provide for them. Notice the God who gives good gifts. "I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams" (v. 13). "I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel" (v. 14).

Not only grazing, it sounds like Psalm 23. He leads them to rest (v. 15).

In verse 16, he summarizes it so well. "I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick."

God as shepherd is an image that is as old as the Bible itself (Genesis 49:24). And perhaps best known in the declaration of David, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside still waters; He restores my soul.... And even when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me."

God is a shepherd who cares for us.

In verses 11-16, did you notice all the first-person pronouns? "I." God says, He Himself, "I."

Look at verse 11: "I Myself will search for My sheep."

Verse 12: "I will care for My sheep and will deliver them."

Verse 13: "I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land." (Now we are seeing that God is returning ancient Israel from exile to the Promised Land.)

Verse 14: "I will feed them in a good pasture."

Verse 15: "I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest."

Verse 16: "I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick."

I. I. I. God Himself, first-person pronoun, will be the shepherd of His people because the selfish leaders have failed. Rather than being givers, the kings were takers. They looked for chances to exploit those around them for their own gain.

### **III. Bad Sheep (vs. 17-22)**

Not only do we have bad shepherds, now we have some bad sheep.

God, in fact, will judge the bad sheep like He judged the bad shepherds. "I will judge between one sheep and another," He says in verse 17.

The Lord Himself opposed those who were greedy for unjust gain. Those who took advantage of the weak. Like a shepherd who must judge between sheep to be bred, sold, or butchered, the Lord will judge between people who need His care and those who deserve His judgment.

If the shepherds represent the ancient kings who were greedy and abusive, then the bad sheep in the flock represent the bullies, the merchant classes who took advantage of the weak and the poor. The distinctions here are between the fat and the lean, the strong and the weak (v. 20). Ezekiel is saying that the powerful and prosperous citizens who had been greedily taking all the good things in the land for themselves and denying the benefits to the fellow Israelites were going to be judged by the shepherd himself (v. 19). The flock will be purified not only of its bad leaders, but of its bad members as well.

God notices greed. God watches materialism. God knows when we snatch and hoard, confiscate and cover. When our hearts are stingy and our hands are not generous.

#### **IV. The Messiah as Shepherd (vs. 23-24)**

"Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them; I the Lord have spoken" (v. 23-24).

What a powerful word. The coming shepherd will be called "my servant David." He was one from the line of David who was the fulfillment of the promise made in 2 Samuel 16, where it is said that God would establish an everlasting throne of David.

The text moves past God being the shepherd. Now God is God, but there is a prince – one whom God Himself plans to install to act as shepherd of His people.

Oh, it's not David himself, for this prince is going to shepherd forever. He is an idealized David. Had Isaiah the prophet not said the same thing in 11:1 – "Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse" (Jesse is David's dad) "and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him." And when He arrives, "the wolf will dwell with the lamb and the leopard will lie down with the young goat..." (Isaiah 11:1-2; 6).

Jeremiah likewise saw the day when David, or one like him – one from his root, would rule again.

Jeremiah 23:5

"Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; and He will reign as king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely; and this is His name by which He will be called, 'The Lord our righteousness.'"

Ezekiel knew the Christ would come from David. Isaiah foretold it. Jeremiah proclaimed it. And even the writers of the Gospels knew it, too. For when they tell us about the lineage of Jesus, it is as if they are shouting, "Don't forget, Jesus is a descendant of David."

Matthew tells us, "Don't forget Jesse had a son named David, the king," and Solomon was born to David, and brings us all the way down to Christ, following the line of David.

And Luke, when he gives us the genealogy of Jesus in Luke 3. He goes all the way back to Adam with his genealogy, but in the middle, he tells us the "Son of David."

Who is this shepherd? In John 10:11, Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd."

Jesus is tough, and yet tender, with his flock. He protects us, His sheep, against dangers and knows each one by name. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd, and I know My own, and My own know Me." And the good shepherd, He tells us in John 10, lays down His life for His sheep.

## **V. Showers of Blessing (v. 26)**

The new age with the new shepherd brings a new covenant, a covenant identified with fertility and productivity for those who dwell in it. The showers will come in their season, showers of blessing. And now, in place of famine, plague, drought, and the sword, they will see peace and prosperity. And they will know their God brings blessing and not a curse, for they are His people.

Like a second Eden, this description of showers of blessing. Restoration from what was lost through the fall in Genesis 3. But at the center of it all is an unbreakable bond between God and His people. "I will bless them." Showers at the right season which will produce the right crops and will give the people security and freedom.

Back to where we started. What showers of blessing do you have which were not rained upon you by God?

Next Sunday ends our season of stewardship. It doesn't end stewardship, I hope, but it ends our emphasis. You were mailed a commitment card which asks you and your family to think and pray about how you will share the blessings God has given to you by being obedient and being a blessing to God's church.

Ezekiel 34 reminds us that God is the giver of all good gifts. He is the one who showers the blessings. But it also reminds us where greed takes us and how the God of generosity in no way condones the greediness of bad shepherds or sheep.

Back in England, in the New Market Church where Charles Spurgeon first served as pastor, there was an old gentleman known as Father Sewell. One day, a meeting on behalf of world missions was being held. Father Sewell was delayed and only came in at the end of the meeting. Charles Spurgeon said, "Our brother who has just come in will, I am sure, close the meeting by offering prayer for God's blessing on the proceedings of the evening." Sewell stood up, but, instead of praying, he began looking for his wallet, patting down his pockets.

"I'm afraid my brother didn't understand me," said Spurgeon. "Friend Sewell, I did not ask you to give, but to pray."

To which the bluff old saint replied, "Yes, yes. But I could not pray until I had given. It would be hypocrisy to ask a blessing on that which I did not think worth giving to."

This church is your church. These ministries – today, we've seen just a portion of the International ministries – are your ministries. You cannot ask God to bless that which you have not given to.

What good gift do you have that God did not give to you?

A preacher tells the story of taking his two little girls to McDonald's. It was a dinner date with Daddy. They got their usual "Happy Meals," and the daddy, trying to eat better, just got a sandwich and a drink – skipping the fries. The blessing was given. The eating commenced.

About half way through, the dad said he reached out to get a couple of fries from one of his girls. You know the old rule, don't you? If you don't order it and you just eat it off of someone else's plate, you don't have to count the calories. Right? He was trying to be good; he didn't order fries. But in a moment of weakness, he reached over to get a couple of fries from his oldest daughter.

"No, Daddy. These are MY fries," she said possessively, defensively, selfishly.

Being discouraged by the first daughter, he reached over to fetch a fry from the second daughter's Happy Meal and received the same rebuke. "No, Daddy. These are MY fries."

He pondered. "Don't they realize I'm the one who bought those fries for them? Don't they realize that if I wanted to, I could – with my physical strength – take all of their fries away from them and eat them all? I'm 210; they are about 80 pounds together. Don't they know that I have enough money in my wallet that I could go up to the counter and fill this whole tray with a mound of fries, if I wanted? Can't they see the only reason they have fries in the first place is because of me?"

When God asks us to give back, to remember Him, to honor Him by bringing the whole tithe into the storehouse – the house of worship, the church – do we remember who is the giver of all good gifts?

Every one of us is going to go out of this world broke, flat broke. Warren Buffet – he can't take it with him. He'll be broke. Bill Gates?? Penniless at the funeral. Mark Cuban? Nothing at the end. Howie Batson? Just the same – not a crying dime.

For you see, at some point our bodies break down. Our minds fail. And no matter how large the bank account, no matter how many credit cards we have, sooner or later, we're bankrupt.

What if we lived life differently than most of our Western neighbors? What if we didn't, like the bad shepherds in Ezekiel 34, take and hoard and deny? What if we saw our life as a life of giving? What if we made our life one long gift to God? To His church? To others?

And why not? Don't we know who gave us all the fries? That we're just stewards? That God entrusts us with a certain amount of money, places it in our hands to see if we'll manage it for His kingdom? And, at death, we pass it on for someone else to steward.

When we give, it allows us to take the focus off finances and put it back where it belongs – on the goodness we do with what God entrusts to us.

And it's not just money that we steward. It's our money. It's our time. It's our talents. It's being a steward of all that God has given to us.

About this time in a sermon like this, somebody says, "Oh, but tithing is the Old Testament." You want to talk about the New Testament? The gold medal giver in the New Testament is not the one who keeps ninety percent, but, rather, a widow who gives a two mites is praised by Jesus because she gave not ten percent but all she had to the house of worship. And the failed giver in the New Testament is a rich, young ruler of whom Jesus requires everything. The New Testament does not loosen up God's expectations for your giving. If it does anything, it heightens them. Grace always exceeds the law. The law says "Do not murder." Grace says, "Do not be angry." The law says, "Do not commit adultery," and grace adds, "Do not lust."

The ten percent only reminds us that God is the owner of all – the whole hundred percent. The ninety percent that we continue to use still must be used in His grace, His goodness, remembering that He is the giver of all good gifts.

What are you doing with the good gifts, the showers of blessing that God has given to you? Do you return to God His portion, or do you look up and shout, "No! Mine!," like a child hoarding greasy French fries? Do you honor Him? Do you strengthen your church? Is your life about missions and ministry?

There will be showers of blessing. Just don't ever forget who brings the rain.