



## Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

Minister: Rev Dr André J Groenewald

8 Manse Court, East Calder, Livingston, EH53 0HF

Tel: 01506 884585, Mob: 075 888 458 14, email: groenstes@yahoo.com

[www.knec4jesus.org.uk](http://www.knec4jesus.org.uk)



**25<sup>th</sup> April 2010**

**Sermon            Rev Dr André J Groenewald**

**Reading           Ezekiel 34:1-31**

**The text verses for the sermon are 11 & 12:**

*<sup>11</sup> “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. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness.*

Currently our news is dominated by the upcoming elections and all we see and hear are the promises of our leaders. But many people do not feel very comfortable with the current leadership. It is as if people are again looking with hope to a new leader that will come and change the bad into something good.

Well, you know what, this is exactly also the context of our reading. Ezekiel was a prophet who had to represent God in a very unstable time in the history of the Judean people. In those days they referred to their kings and leaders as shepherds. In our reading the shepherds, the kings of Judea, were only looking after themselves and not the flock of God. In the year 597 BC King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon captured Jerusalem taking many of the leading citizens of Jerusalem as hostages to Babylon, among whom was Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi. They were resettled at a place called Tel Abib (which means ‘mound of the flood’) on the river Chebar, one of the stream canals of the Euphrates River southeast of Babylon, near the ancient city of Nippur. It was here that Ezekiel received his call as a prophet of the Lord approximately in 593 BC.

Ezekiel did not have a very easy task as a prophet of God. Once he was called he was so overwhelmed that the only thing he did was to sit for seven days. He had to do strange things like eating a book roll as a symbol of God's action. From the time of his call and until the final fall of Jerusalem in 586/7 BC, he was a virtual recluse in his house and afflicted with fits of dumbness and immobility. When his wife suddenly died, he was also not allowed to show his grief in any way. He had to go on as if nothing had happened because her sudden death was a symbol of the sudden destruction of God's temple in Jerusalem. His contemporaries viewed him as somewhat of an eccentric. It was only in retrospect that his true greatness was recognized and his words were preserved for posterity.

In our reading we can almost hear his passion as he speaks on God's behalf. He is telling the exiles in Babylon that it all happened because the shepherds of Judea, the King and his leaders, did not bother to listen to God and take care of his sheep. After Josiah the last kings of Judah were all corrupt. They led the nation to spiritual and political ruin. The condemnation against these shepherds is in vv. 1–6:

- they did not seek to meet the needs of the people but only used the people for their own selfish ends;
- they did not take special care of those in need, the helpless members of society;
- they met weakness and injury with callous cruelty;
- the people wandered from the Lord and became prey to idolatry and immorality because of a lack of positive moral or spiritual leadership.

But now the Lord God will act. He will remove the corrupt shepherds and become their one and only TRUE shepherd. It was not unusual for the people to think of God as their shepherd. He will feed them with the greenest pastures, and will quench their thirst with the most peaceful and cleanest streams of water. He will bless them and take care of them. They must put their trust in Him alone. He is the only one who is in charge

of their lives. As a faithful shepherd he will look after all their needs. He promises them a covenant of peace. The large number of “I wills” in 34:10–29 suggests God’s determination personally to be involved in the lives and destinies of his people. There will be showers at the right season that produce bountiful crops. The people will dwell in security and freedom. There will be no famine or threats from enemies. The people will know that God, their Shepherd, is with them and that Israel, his flock, is his people.

God will also appoint his servant David to be his representative on earth. The use of “my servant David” represents the hope of a future resurrection of the golden age of Israel. David was characterized as a man after God’s own heart. God will in future appoint a new leader for them like David who will tend His flock as His shepherd and be a prince among them.

I think the message was quite clear to everyone who heard it the first time: The leaders of the world have feet of clay. They are not trustworthy. Therefore the people of Judah need to look at God for His leadership. They must travel with Him and rely on His words of promise. He is the Good Shepherd that knows them by heart! He will give them a new future.

I think this is also a timely message for us all. We have so much more evidence than the exiles in Babylon of what God really can do.

I mean to say, they did not know in 587 BC that God would indeed free them and allow them to go back to Judea. They did not know that God will come to earth and show in Jesus Christ what a Good Shepherd really does. God showed In Jesus Christ our new covenant of peace. We can indeed lie down in green pastures because we receive all that we need, redemption, and spiritual guidance through his Holy Spirit. He reached out to you and me while we were wandering like lost sheep in the hills of darkness and despair. He healed us from all the wounds sin caused us. He gave us a new future of hope.

In this time we live in maybe we must focus again on God and what He requires from us.

- If you are appointed as a leader in society, you must tend to his flock as best as you can.
- If you are a church elder, you must tend to your sheep in your district as best you can.
- If you are a member of the congregation, you must look out for all the lost sheep and tell them about the Good Shepherd.
- If you are sitting in this church this morning and are experience feelings of being lost and lonely, if you are feeling as if you have lost your way, the Good Shepherd is here and He is inviting you to his table to be fed and nourished again through his presence and spiritual food.
- If you are sitting in this church and you feel as if your sins and your past are too much to bear any longer – bring it to the Good Shepherd. He has already wiped away all your sins and transgressions. He is saying to you this morning: you are forgiven!

Maybe we must change our outlook and focus again on God and remember that our leaders are appointed by God. If they do not look after his sheep, God promises to hold them accountable, remove them from tending the flock, and rescue his flock from their mouths! Maybe we must stop trusting the worldly leaders and look to God as our Shepherd for His guidance. Maybe we must stop investing all our time and money in the things that do not really matter and give it to our Good Shepherd. Yes maybe this is the time that we focus again on God's sovereignty and power.

Today we are celebrating the Lord's Supper not as scattered sheep without a leader. No we celebrate it because He is in charge - always and ever feeding and looking after his precious sheep!

Amen

## **A Prayer of Adoration**

*Based on Psalm 23*

Lord, you are our shepherd, we shall not be in want.

You make us lie down in green pastures,  
you lead us beside quiet waters,  
you restore our souls.

You guide us in paths of righteousness for your name's sake.  
Even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
we will fear no evil, for you are with us;  
your rod and your staff, they comfort us.

You prepare a table before us  
in the presence of our enemies.

You anoint our heads with oil; our cup overflows.

Surely goodness and love will follow us  
all the days of our life,  
and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

**Amen**