

A Tale of Two Shepherds

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[0 : 0 0] series in James chapter 1. We're now going back to Zechariah, which we were working through before the summer. It's a difficult bit of the Bible to get through, but at St. Silas we're committed to believing the Bible is the whole Word of God. Every bit of the Bible is God's Word to us.

It's all useful, and so we want to look at the Bible, not just the bits that we like best, but look at the whole Bible and learn from God's voice in that. It's also worth saying, I've said this before, but the second half of Zechariah, even though it's difficult, is the most quoted part of the whole Old Testament by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as they wrote the Gospels to explain why Jesus died. So if we want to understand better why Jesus died for us so that we know him better, we need Zechariah. So let's pray. Let's ask for God's help. Heavenly Father, thank you for your Word, written by prophets long ago, but written for us as Christians today.

We pray for our time together now. Help us to fix our eyes on you, and we pray that your Word will not just be for our heads this morning, but will sink into our hearts as well, that you will change us and fashion us to be the people you made us and redeemed us to be. In Jesus' name. Amen.

So our theme this morning in the passage is leadership, and we know today, don't we, the impact of a good leader. It's been a great summer already for Andy Murray, and he's playing later for a gold medal today.

He won Wimbledon for the second time earlier in the summer, and there's lots of interest, isn't there, in the media, about his relationships with his coaches. And he had a female coach, which lots of people thought was sort of strange and unusual, Amelie Maresmo, and then they parted company earlier this year, and they said they hadn't fallen out, but she said actually they couldn't really work together anymore, and it was all a bit strange. Then he moved on to Lendl, and he had this sort of big argument with Lendl in the middle of the Wimbledon final. I don't know whether you saw this, but Lendl seemed to get up and go for a toilet break while Murray was in a tie break.

[2 : 1 9] And as sometimes Murray does, he sort of shouted a lot of, you know, fruity language at his team because Lendl had gone missing in the middle of the tie break. But then Murray won the title, and it was all wonderful and emotional, and even Lendl said that he shed tears of joy as Murray picked up the trophy, which you can't actually tell from that picture. But apparently he was very happy about what had happened. And so you're left thinking, well, is it because of this change of coach, the leader, or is it because of Andy Murray's talent, or is it a bit of both?

We've had a bit of that again in the Olympics, Adam Peaty with this amazing world record-breaking breaststroke. But he is from Derby, and his coach, Mel Marshall, was herself an Olympian, and she faced real disappointment in the Olympics and has been talking to the media about how that spurred her on to try and coach Adam Peaty to the level that he's at now. That's when things are going well under a good leader. Sometimes you get a situation where things go very badly, and you're wondering, do we blame the person, or do we blame their leadership? And that's happened with the Olympics with Russia and the doping scandal. Some people are saying, you've got to blame the athletes. You've got athletes saying, we're training, and we're being told all the time to take extra nutrition supplements, and they're just handed to us. We don't know what we're taking.

And if there's systematic doping of athletes, sometimes the athletes aren't actually aware of it. And you're left wondering, well, who is at fault here? Is it the leadership? Is it the athletes themselves? It's the same in life. When things go right or when things go wrong, who takes the credit? Who takes the blame? And in Zechariah, we're thinking about the problem of leadership among God's people. If you look at chapter 10, verse 3, because we're looking at chapters 10 and 11 today. Chapter 10, verse 3, the Lord says very strong words. He says, my anger burns against the shepherds, and I will punish the leaders. And shepherds is a Bible metaphor. It's a Bible word for leaders among God's people. The leaders in Zechariah's time were good.

So he's not talking about them. He's looking ahead, the Lord, to what will come after Zechariah. Zechariah's looking to the future, including our time, at the leaders of God's people who will greatly displease the Lord God. So this morning, we're going to see, there was a handout you might have when you came in, why we need a good shepherd, how we treat a good shepherd, and then thirdly, two responses from God. So first of all, why we need a good shepherd. And that's what we see in chapter 10. Verse 3 started very badly with that anger of the Lord, but it continues with this stunning promise, verse 3. My anger burns against the shepherds, and I will punish the leaders.

For the Lord Almighty will care for his flock, the people of Judah. And the Lord is saying there, he will be the shepherd of his people. For the rest of the chapter then, he spells out what the result of that will be for his people, and it's amazing. But to understand it, we have to remember, the Zechariah is very unusual writing. It's what's called apocalyptic. It's not as though we look and we think of every precise detail and try and track it through. It's more like Zechariah has put up a huge cinema screen, and he's just throwing up images on it to help us feel things about the future that God has in store. And two things that make Zechariah tricky, one is that he collapses history. So he looks ahead at what's going to happen, and he talks about it as though it's all happening at the same time. So when he talks about the shepherds, sometimes he's talking about Jesus, sometimes he's talking about leaders of the church. Sometimes he's talking about Jesus coming again, but he collapses it together.

[6 : 26] And another tricky thing is that Zechariah uses the past to talk about the future. So an example of that is he talks about the exodus in verse 11. I don't know whether you could just have a look down at verse 11, where he says, it's over the page there, they will pass through the sea of trouble.

The surging sea will be subdued, and all the depths of the Nile will dry up. Well, he's describing there something that happened in God's people's history, that they were in Egypt, and they were brought out of Egypt and out of slavery. But he's using it to describe the future. Did you see how he used it? Not that they'll literally pass through the sea, they'll pass through the sea of trouble.

Whatever problems God's people have, God will bring them out of those problems. So God is using those images to paint a picture of the future through Zechariah. It's a bit like if you just imagine you were asked to describe your perfect Christmas for somebody, so that they could try and create for you your perfect Christmas. Well, you might look back at Christmases you've really enjoyed in the past, and kind of piece them all together. Describe the excitement you had when you were a child about getting a present. Describe some of the fun you've had on Christmas Eve, going out with friends. They weren't in the same year, but you might club them together to describe this epic Christmas that you long to have. And you might even describe it in ways that weren't really true in the past. Like you might say, and it's just, it was snowing the whole time. Because you know, that would make Christmas really special, even if it's not what you've experienced. But when you throw those things together, you give a feeling of a future Christmas that would be special. And that's the kind of way that Zechariah describes what God is going to do. And it's all about the future with God as the shepherd. Let's just take a few of the images. The first one is that God's people are victorious in verse 6. He says in verse 6, I will strengthen Judah and save the tribes of Joseph. I will restore them because I have compassion on them. He describes this victory. And that's great to know if you're feeling that you're struggling this morning. Are you struggling with sin this morning as a Christian?

Are you struggling with life this morning? Are you struggling with failure in your life? For God says, because I will be your shepherd, one day you will be strong and safe and the struggle will be over. And next, with the Lord as your shepherd, your past is put behind you. Look at that at the end of verse 6. They will be as though I had not rejected them. For I am the Lord their God and I will answer them. That is so precious for the people at the time, you see, because they rejected God and they'd been sent into exile from the promised land. They'd experienced the judgment of God and they were scarred from it. It was horrific. They'd been besieged till they starved and then the survivors were taken away and they were scarred from the experience. And God says here, because I will be your shepherd, your scars will be healed. It will be as though all of that never happened to you. You will be restored as though you've never sinned and as though nobody had ever sinned against you. And that's such precious news for us this morning. Perhaps just ask yourself, do you feel scarred in any way? Do you experience problems in your life today because of things that have happened to you in the past? Do you live with the problems of past sin that you've committed? Or do you live with the scars of other people having sinned against you? Even just the scars from living in a world that is blighted by sin and suffering. Well then hear the promise of God to you this morning in verse 6.

Because I'll be your shepherd, I will restore you because I have compassion on you. You will be as though I'd never rejected you. All the baggage will be lifted from you. All the damage will be undone.

[10:58] And he goes on. We might feel being a Christian in Scotland as though we are part of a really eccentric minority. But God assures us that one day there will be a great gathering of God's people from every nation. In verse 8 he says, surely I will redeem them. They will be as numerous as before. In verse 10 at the end there he says, there will not be room enough for them. There's going to be a housing crisis in heaven. Not really. But just there'll be so many people it will be overwhelming.

It will be buzzing with people who've turned to Jesus Christ just like you have if you're a Christian here. And the highlight of these promises is God himself. If you look at the end of verse 7 that's very clear. He says of the people, their children will see it and be joyful. Their hearts will rejoice in the Lord. That's where our true joy is found today and will be found ultimately in the future.

It will be in knowing God and being with him. And friends, the whole Bible really is about these promises. It's about how God will fulfill them. They come first in Genesis 12 and the whole Bible is about how God is committed to keeping them. We start enjoying them the day you turn back to God and become a Christian. But we're all waiting in hope for their true final fulfillment. And what we're seeing here is that God will bring them about by coming to be the shepherd for his people.

500 years later, Jesus was born. Jesus lived. Jesus told that he is the good shepherd being promised here. And so the challenge for us really is will we let him be our shepherd? Because this isn't a sentimental picture. You know like the romantic pictures you have of Jesus as a shepherd and he's like holding a lamb and caring for it and giving it a stroke. No, shepherds have authority. They have a rod and a staff and they use them to keep the sheep in line. Shepherds are there to keep sheep safe.

By using their authority and discipline. In the same way, we need to show that we trust the Lord to be our shepherd and keep these promises by letting him rule our lives.

[13 : 24] So having heard why we need a good shepherd, these amazing promises, secondly, let's look at how we treat a good shepherd. In Zechariah 11 that Morag read for us, he gets told to do some acting and through the acting, God has a lesson for us. Have a look at verse 4.

This is what the Lord my God says. Shepherd the flock marked for slaughter. Thereby are slaughtered them and go unpunished. Those who sell them say, praise the Lord, I am rich.

Their own shepherds do not spare them. See the compassion of God there? He sees the ways people are being treated by their leaders who are exploiting them and he wants to sort it out by sending a good shepherd, a leader for them.

So he, as Zechariah, represents God but he also represents a godly leader for God's people. Someone who will lead them right under God. Like a leader for the church today who's willing to teach and lead faithfully so that God can shepherd his people through that leader.

And Zechariah starts really well. He gives the people what they need. If you have a look at verse 7. So I shepherded the flock marked for slaughter, particularly the oppressed of the flock.

[14 : 39] Then I took two staffs and called one favor and the other union. And I shepherded the flock. So he's leading God's people. And it's interesting, isn't it, what the staffs are called.

So what unites God's people and what brings the blessing of God to God's people is that we sit under God's authority as our shepherd. We let him rule us by his word and we obey him.

That's what brings favor and union. And Zechariah gets rid of the bad leaders who are around. It sounds great. But then comes this great shock in verse 8. You'd have thought this would be what everybody wanted.

But look at verse 8. The flock detested me. And the result is a sickening picture. 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. They get rid of Zechariah as their shepherd.

[15 : 41] And they're left so the dying aren't rescued. They just die. Imagine the desperation of these sheep. They resort to cannibalism because they're so hungry in the picture of what's going on with God's people.

He breaks the staffs in verse 10. Then I took my staff called favor and broke it, revoking the covenant I've made with all the nations.

And in verse 14, the other staff is smashed and the people are divided. See what God's doing there. He's giving the people over to what they want. They don't want him to be their shepherd.

So they reject the leader. He says, fine, have what you want. And he withdraws his goodness from them. And it is a horrible thing. So God explains here, he warns us, one of the reasons why people can end up in such poor spiritual health.

They might grumble against God and say, well, God's not looking after me. But the truth is, it might be that they've rejected him. And the same could be true of any of us today.

[16 : 45] I used to work as a lawyer. And if something went wrong in the law firm I was in, because your time was charged out in these six-minute slots that were very valuable to the company, if something went wrong with your computer, you could immediately phone IT on 2000.

And it was sorted out straight away. I really miss IT help desk. And one day, my keyboard started making this bizarre bleeping noise. It was really weird.

I was trying to work, beep, beep, beep, coming from the keyboard. It wasn't working. So I dialed 2000. An IT help desk, the lady picked up. What's wrong? There's something wrong with my keyboard. I'm really busy. I've got a deadline. Can't you help me?

It needs fixing. I said to her, can't you hear it? And the girl on the help desk said, why do you think it's making that noise? Very clever, you see. And I said, I did spill a drink over it a few minutes ago.

See, I had to admit. Because I was hoping I wouldn't have to say that to her. See, I was complaining about my situation. But the problem was me. I was the problem.

[17 : 48] And it can be a bit like that in our walk with the Lord. I just wonder, I mean, if you feel, if you go through times in life where you feel you're disappointed with God. That you feel he's not caring for you in the way that you thought he would.

Perhaps you feel dissatisfied as a Christian. You don't feel content as a Christian. Please don't mishear me. There could be many reasons for that.

There could be all kinds of reasons. And it might be that it's not your fault at all. The Bible is very real about the ways that the world can be confusing for us in our walk with God.

But when we feel like that, one of the things we need to ask ourselves is, am I really letting God be my shepherd? Is Jesus really in charge of my life?

Does his word in the Bible override my feelings? When he challenges me, am I accepting it? Am I really trusting him?

[18 : 48] Because what we see happen to Zechariah, as God plays out this parable with Zechariah, is that he was a good shepherd. And if only they'd stuck with him, it would have gone fine.

And they detested him and got rid of him. The flock detested me. So that's how we treat a good shepherd. Thirdly, how does God respond? That's our final point this morning.

Two responses from God. And God responds in these two ways. The first one is that he gives people the shepherds we deserve. There's a catastrophic judgment in verse 15.

Again, it's Zechariah acting. Have a look at what he does in verse 15. Then the Lord said to me, Take again the equipment of a foolish shepherd. For I am going to raise up a shepherd over the land, who will not care for the lost, or seek the young, or heal the injured, or feed the healthy, but will eat the meat of the choice sheep, tearing off their hooves.

It's an awful picture, isn't it? But just a picture of what happens to any of us, any of us spiritually, when we stop submitting to Jesus as our good shepherd. And this picture sheds light on something that's going on all over the church today.

[20 : 06] Jesus is the chief shepherd, but one of the words the Bible uses for leaders in the church, in the local church, is that they're shepherds, under the chief shepherd. And their role is to lead God's people, under God, on God's behalf.

Now how do they do that? Well the Bible tells leaders how to lead the church. Primarily they do it by teaching faithfully. So the Apostle Paul describes his leadership of the church in Colossians 1 like this.

Christ is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. So that's what we should want from our church leaders, that they proclaim Christ and they admonish and teach us.

Admonish is correction. In 2 Timothy 4, Paul passes this on to the next generation. He says, in verse 2, preach the word. Be prepared in season and out of season.

Correct, rebuke and encourage with great patience and careful instruction for the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. What do we want from our church leader?

[21 : 17] We want them to proclaim Christ, to teach, even when it means correcting us, and to teach the Bible faithfully. It's how you should judge my ministry here.

Not by my taste in music, not by the quality of my jokes. I do know some good jokes, but not by that. But by my life, and my trying to live for God, and by my teaching.

Am I teaching the Bible faithfully, even when it's unpopular, even when it corrects us and challenges us? It's pretty simple, that instruction, but one of the great mysteries to me for a long time as a Christian was, why does God let his churches today be led by such bad shepherds?

We see lots of churches around us, I know this sounds harsh, but we see lots of churches around us where you can look at the minister, you can look at the pastors, you can look at the bishops, and you can see that they don't teach God's word faithfully.

They deny that a judgment day is coming, even though Jesus was very clear about that. They deny that we need a rescuer, because of the way we've treated God, you never hear that from them.

[22 : 28] They deny that Jesus has come wonderfully, to save us from our sins, by dying on the cross. Why does God let that happen? Why does he let his churches be led like that?

Well, the answer in Zechariah 11 is that sometimes you get the shepherd that you deserve. that if we don't want living for Jesus to be challenging, it's not going to be hard to find a church where we'll be told God always agrees with us, where we'll be affirmed in all our moral choices, where we'll never be told anything politically incorrect or anything offensive, and where spiritually we will starve.

The sheep are starving. They're bleating in agony. So we just need to ask ourselves, are we really willing to listen to Jesus? For all of our praying, all of our singing to him, it's great to sing, it's a great thing, maybe even all our speaking about him to others, I'm a Christian, are we really listening to him when he challenges you about your speech and what you say, about your bank balance, about your time, about your sex life, about your marriage?

Because that's God's first response. They detest him and the shepherd he put over them, so he gives them the shepherds they deserve. But there's another response from God that we come to next.

God sends the shepherd who pays the price. Something extraordinary happens to Zechariah when they reject him as their shepherd. Look with me at verse 12 to see what happened to him.

[24 : 08] I told them, if you think it best, give me my pay, but if not, keep it. So they paid me 30 pieces of silver and the Lord said to me, throw it to the potter, the handsome price at which they valued me.

So I took the 30 pieces of silver and threw them to the potter at the house of the Lord. So they pay off their leader for 30 pieces of silver and the money is thrown into the temple to the potter as a picture of judgment.

Well then, Jesus comes and I'm just going to turn to Matthew 26. You can turn to it in your Bible or the words will come up on the screen as well.

Matthew chapter 26. 500 years later, verse 14. Then one of the 12, the one called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and asked, what are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?

So they counted out for him 30 pieces of silver. From then on, Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over. We go on to verse 5 of the next chapter. So Judas threw the money into the temple and left.

[25 : 25] Then he went away and hanged himself. The chief priests picked up the coins and said, it's against the law to put this into the treasury since it is blood money. So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners.

That is why it's being called the field of blood to this day. Now Matthew mentions Jeremiah here because there's another prophecy being fulfilled at the same time. But look at Zechariah being fulfilled here. Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled.

They took the 30 pieces of silver, the price set on him by the people of Israel, and they used them to buy the potter's field as the Lord had commanded me.

What happens to Zechariah is just a pattern of the rejection of God's chosen shepherd. Just as with Zechariah, it's the same price to get rid of Jesus and the money is thrown into the temple and it ends up with the potter.

It shows us that God was completely in control as his son was handed over. The Lord knows his chosen shepherd will be rejected, but do you see what's going on?

[26 : 31] God is using that rejection that he knew would happen to save his people. If you look back at Zechariah chapter 10 verse 8, God looks at his people and he sees that they are in trouble.

Their trouble is entirely of their own making. It's because they rejected him. And yet he is moved by his love for his people. And in chapter 10 verse 8 he says, Surely I will redeem them.

Redemption is the language of the slave market. It's what you use to buy a slave, his freedom. And as Jesus fulfills this prophecy, 500 years later, we learn what the redemption price was.

30 pieces of silver was the price on the head of God's son as his safety was traded in by a traitor. And so for God to redeem us, that's what it cost him.

That when God the Father saw you spiritually lost, he said, Surely I will redeem him. Surely I will redeem her. But he knew that the cost would be to watch his only son shattered and beaten, his body torn, and his heart broken, to pay the price for what we've done wrong.

[27 : 43] I wonder, what do you think Jesus thought when he was doing his quiet times and he read his Bible and he got to Zechariah 11? And he looked at the people around him and he looked ahead at you and me who were still to come and he knew it was only by his wounds that we could be healed.

It is a big deal to let somebody else rule your life, to come under their authority as your shepherd, to follow them whatever their cost, whatever they ask you to do, to be willing to do that is a big deal.

But will we not gladly submit our lives to this shepherd who used our rejection of him to die for us, to redeem us, so that our past is put behind us, our scars are healed, and we are free to serve him.

Let's pray together. Father God, we praise you for your promises to us that you resolved through Zechariah to redeem your people, to put their past completely behind them, to give them victory.

And we marvel that you would make those promises by your grace, knowing they could only be fulfilled if your only son, our good shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, would lay down his life for his sheep.

[29 : 05] Father, we recognize that every day it is a spiritual battle to let you rule as our shepherd. To submit to your loving care is also to submit to your sovereign will.

And so we pray that your spirit will be at work in our hearts, that you will give us such a greater vision of the Lord Jesus and his love for us that our desires within us change and we gladly submit ourselves to you and your word.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.