

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

**[Introduction]**

How does it feel when someone else does your job for you?

I know for me personally; the answer depends on how good of a job they would do.

I tend to approach projects and problems from a detailed systems engineering perspective. Combined with my Air Force leadership training, I also like to take charge in order to enforce all of those details. Some people might even call me a bit of a perfectionist.

However, there have been many times when I was sent to the sidelines and I had to watch someone else do what I considered to be “my” job.

As I watch from the sidelines, it is always a humbling experience to realize how deficient my own efforts have been and how proficient the hands of an expert can be.

**[Text]**

In our old testament text today Ezekiel portrays just such an experience of the leaders of Israel being sidelined.

Ezekiel was to be a priest in Jerusalem about 5 years before the temple and Jerusalem, itself, was destroyed in 587 BC. However, his training to be a priest was interrupted by his exile to Babylon before he could actually assume his priestly responsibilities.

Instead, God called him to be a prophet in exile. Ezekiel begins chapter 34, with God telling him to prophecy against the shepherds of Israel. In essence, God is explaining to them why they have been sidelined. Why they failed at keeping God’s flock from becoming prey to the world. And why they failed at keeping God’s flock from being scattered.

What must it have felt like to be the leaders of Israel? To know that God was so disappointed in your job performance that he, himself, would come down to do it for you.

In our text, it says, “Behold, I, **I myself** will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them.” (Eze 34:11–12).

God had to do the job of the shepherds of Israel, because they had failed miserably.

It is striking to think about what this image contains. It paints a picture of Yahweh the Lord of Heaven and Earth. The King of all creation, stepping down and doing the work of a filthy stinking herder. Of God putting on the role of one of the lowest positions in society.

Although God is the King of creation, He isn't ruling over them like a king.

A king would rule from his throne room and order people around.

A king would worry about feeding himself.

A king would rule with force and a harsh hand.

However, God emphasizes that he won't rule from a far. And He won't feed himself, instead, he will feed the people. Plus, He won't rule forcefully or harshly.

Instead, God says, “**I myself** will be the shepherd of my sheep, and **I myself** will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak...I will feed them in justice” (Eze 34:15–16).

As the shepherds of Israel watched from the sidelines, it must have been a humbling experience to realize how deficient their own efforts had been and how proficient the hands of the expert God are.

### [Application]

But what does all of this have to do with us? How does this apply to our lives today? We aren't a group of ancient Israelites recently sent into exile. We aren't separated from the promised land of Israel. In fact, we don't even have anything to do with the promised land. This prophecy is two and half millennia old, what does that have to do with us?

This prophecy?... This prophecy has to do with us, because this prophecy is acting sacramentally. It is as real now as when it was first uttered. It is for our lives today.

You see we are the failing shepherds. We try to lead ourselves to rich pastures and we only succeed in scattering ourselves to the wild world. We lack the faith and trust in God to do the job for us, so we boldly set out with our self-help guidebooks and our YouTube tutorials and end up only more lost than when we started.

What's worse, is that after we have failed in saving ourselves, we chalk it up to lack of effort and we simply try harder the next time.

We amateurly believe that we can impact our own salvation.

We think to ourselves:

“I'll be nice to the driver who just cut me off, because that will get me closer to God.”

“I can study God's Word on my own at home and don't need to go to Worship.”

“I know more about science than God's Word.”

“I am my own savior.”

Imagine that you are one of the sheep in Ezekiel's prophecy.

After a long day of grazing among the grassy hills at the foot of the mountains, you realize that you have gotten separated from the flock. You don't know where everyone else is. You look up and notice the lush mountain above you. It looks like your home, so you start heading in that direction.

Your path takes you along the side of a slope and the footing becomes precarious. Undeterred you climb higher, only to suddenly slip and fall down the slope. You bounce and crash as you tumble. Eventually you find yourself stopped along the edge of a dark and rocky ravine.

In frustration and relief, you reprimand yourself for being so careless and you slowly get up, to edge away from the ravine. However, as soon as you take one step uphill the dirt gives way and you fall head over tail into the rocky ravine. This time you hit your head on the way down and everything fades to blackness and despair.

You wake up, expecting to find your broken body painfully sprawled among the rocks. Instead, you find yourself lying down in a rich and lush green pasture at the top of the mountain. Your injuries have been bound up and you find yourself strengthened. Then Jesus, your shepherd, picks you up and carries you on his shoulders to join the rest of the flock.

God is the expert at salvation. God does the job of seeking us out and rescuing us. He takes the time and effort to come down to us. “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14). He is “Immanuel (which means, God with us)” (Mt 1:23).

You might not have anything to do with the promised land, but the promises of God still have everything to do with you.

God promises that He will rescue His flock (Eze 34:22). You are part of God's flock. By your baptism God declared you to be His. Salvation is yours and you are no longer to be prey to the world.

What's more, God ensures this salvation by setting up over you, his servant David (who is the Christ) as the "one shepherd" (Eze 34:23).

The "one shepherd" feeds us through his word and sacraments. Jesus strengthens us through the Lord's Supper and through hearing the word of God as it is read and preached.

The Holy Spirit works in our hearts to strengthen our trust in God's promises. And to enliven our faith in the Kingdom of God.

Jesus forgives our sins and binds up our wounds. He restores us to his flock when we wander away.

As Ezekiel records for us "I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken" (Eze 34:23–24).

As we watch from the sidelines, it is a humbling experience to realize how deficient our own efforts have been and how proficient the hands of the expert God are.

### [*Conclusion*]

God has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. God comes down to earth and does all the work. This is his good and gracious will.

God's expert work is that He seeks us out. He forgives our lack of faith and trust and overcomes our failed rescue attempts. He rescues us. He bandages up our injuries. He strengthens the weak. He feeds us his word. Thy will be done.

He is our God and Jesus is a prince among us. Amen.

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"Now may the God of peace... equip you with everything good that you may do his will, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." (Heb 13:20-21)

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