

September 1
Ezekiel 33-36

Today we begin to see a shift in the book of Ezekiel. In the first half of the book Ezekiel is looking forward, speaking prophetically, about the fall of Jerusalem at the hands of Babylon. By chapter 33, Jerusalem has fallen and we begin to see Ezekiel shift from speaking of the fall of Jerusalem to the restoration that God would bring to Jerusalem and his people. This shift in theme is consistent throughout the rest of the book. Chapters 1-32 were about the coming fall of Jerusalem. Chapters 33-48 concern themselves with the restoration of God's people.

In each of today's chapters, God tells Ezekiel about his observations and there is a theme that is consistent throughout. The theme is simply this: What you do matters, not merely what you say you believe.

In the 33rd chapter God tells Ezekiel that people would be hearers of the word but would not be doers of the word. They would go to Ezekiel and hear his words much the same way that we, today, would go to a concert to see our favorite musician. While we enjoy the show, it has no real impact on our lives. God was saying that while they *hear* God's word, their lives do not respond favorably to it.

God continues his observation in chapter 34 when he addresses the "shepherds" of Israel. Throughout scripture God often refers to those in a position of leadership over a people as "shepherds" and God often refers to himself as a Shepherd (Ps 23). Shepherds must care for their sheep throughout the entirety of the life of the sheep. Unlike the parent child relationship, where a son may outgrow the need for his father's provision, protection and instruction- sheep never outgrow their need for their shepherd.

Without their shepherds sheep often wander into danger. They are unable to find good, uncontaminated food and water without help. Additionally, they are easy prey for wild animals looking for a snack. Without the shepherd the sheep is practically helpless.

God rebukes the shepherds because they failed to care for the sheep he put under their care. In fact, rather than providing for the sheep, they exploited the sheep for their own benefit. God seems to take issue with two issues:

- 1) They failed to care for the broken, the hurting, and the sick. (Ez 34:4)
- 2) They failed to seek out those who were lost or had wandered away. (Ez 34:4).

God is furious with these leaders. Because they were unwilling to care for the people God says he will remove them from positions of leadership and he himself would be the Good Shepherd who would care for the sheep. He would search for the lost and He would bind

the injured (Ez 34:16). This should remind us of Jesus' words in Luke 19:10 where he says "the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost."

In fact, in this chapter we see a not so subtle allusion to the coming Messiah, Jesus. In 34:20-24 God says that he would place one shepherd over his sheep. He calls this shepherd, this Good Shepherd, "my servant David." Jesus himself calls himself the Good Shepherd (Jn 10) and is himself a son of David, literally of the line of David.

Moving on from here God addresses the sheep themselves. God observes that they are greedy and ruthlessly self-serving, physically trampling on the provisions they are afforded and not making room or allowances for those who are weaker. (34:17-20).

But God does not limit his rebukes to Israel, but includes foreign nations as well. Here God addresses the nation of Edom as a representative of all foreign nations. Edom had acted on an "ancient hostility" that was birthed hundreds of years before when Jacob swindled his brother Esau out of his birthright, the blessing from his father Abraham. (See Genesis).

The Edomites were descendants of Esau and the Israelites were descendants of Jacob. This "ancient hostility" never dissipated and when Assyria and Babylon came calling on Israel and Judah, the Edomites cheered on their destruction. God is here saying that he is observant of not merely what individual leaders and people do, but what nations do as well.

What we believe is important. But what you do either confirms or denies what you say you believe. It is not merely what we say or say we believe, but what we DO.

Here lies the problem. The Israelites did live in a way that was congruent with the character of The LORD God. It is because their hearts were "stone" and not "flesh". They were hard hearted and repeatedly failed honor God, who repeatedly displayed his faithfulness to them. And here, again he displays his steadfast love toward his unfaithful people.

He changes their heart from one of stone to a heart of flesh. It is a miracle that takes place. God himself had to intervene and "remove your heart of stone...and put a new heart and a new spirit in you;..."

This is key to understanding not only this passage, but the Christian life. The way to walk in a way that honors God is about a miracle and not technique. It about God intervening because apart from him, we are just like the Israelites. We have stone hearts. Ephesians 2 says that we were DEAD and were made ALIVE by Christ. This is the same miracle.

God is concerned with what you DO. But apart from a miracle from God, we will by nature and choice, fail to honor him and thus have a life of joy and fulfillment.

Application: Today, as you leave this

- 1) Consider and examine your life. Are your beliefs (or stated beliefs) congruent with your lifestyle? How do you spend your time, talent, treasure? Is it consistent with your stated beliefs?
- 2) The way we interact with those whom we have oversight over is important to God. Parents over children, ministry leaders over those whom we serve, employers over employees. How are you shepherding your family or team?
- 3) We are all sheep under the Good Shepherd, Jesus. How do we treat one another? Are you constantly looking out for yourself, or are you looking for the weak and helping them feed on the good pasture and drink from the living water?

What you do matters to God. Ask God for the miracle of making your heart tender toward his will and desires for your life.

If you find that this has been an area of failure for you, see 1 John 2:1-2. Repent and ask the Good Shepherd for help in changing what you do and to make your beliefs and lifestyle congruent.