

The Saving Shepherd Ezekiel 34

The mess of sin

Remember the Yazidis, whose territory in Northern Iraq was overrun by Isis in 2014

As they fled they knew fear, thirst and hunger

Thinking on their experience will bring you a little closer to what has befallen the population of Judah through multiple Babylonian campaigns

Terror, dislocation and hunger

And now the survivors of the various deportations are in Babylon

Homesick - Living in a different climate – on the hot plains of Babylon, not the mountains of Judah, eating different food, at the bottom of the economic ladder,

Grieving - The exiled Israelites had lost so much, had shed so many tears.

A despised minority - ruled by 'the most ruthless of nations', their loyalty always suspect,

We have not known what they have known, not been a conquered people taken from our homes and families

But as you hear God speak to the exiles, speak to them of His commitment to act, recognise that what has befallen them is terrible

And their grief was for more than themselves personally.

Israel's very existence as a nation, a people with a continuing distinct identity, was under threat.

They had lost all that distinguished them as a people – their land, the worship of their God at his temple, their capital with all its cultural record and history gone, their own government

Could they, would they, survive, or would this be the end of all that they had known, the complete loss of their identity.

Their identity as the people of the LORD, the God who had rescued their forefathers from Egypt and given them the land.

And as soon as you ask that question you realise there is another dimension to this great tragedy.

Israel are the LORD's people, and the exile generation just part of a much bigger story that started with Abraham, started with Adam

The LORD had made a promise to their ancestor Abraham

Genesis 12:² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

And He had Entered into covenant, a solemn agreement and commitment, with Abraham and his descendants

Genesis 17:⁴ "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. ⁵ No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. ⁶ I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. ⁷ And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. ⁸ And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."

It was this commitment which was expressed in the creation of Israel as a nation through the LORD's rescue of them from Egypt, His entering into covenant with them at Sinai, His giving them the good land.

The LORD's commitment to them shaped their history, gave them their identity

And these promises to Abraham and his offspring had been elaborated in his dealings with them through the prophets, elaborated to include all the nations

Isaiah 2 The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

² *It shall come to pass in the latter days
that the mountain of the house of the LORD
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,*

*and shall be lifted up above the hills;
 and all the nations shall flow to it,
³ and many peoples shall come, and say:
 "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
 to the house of the God of Jacob,
 that he may teach us his ways
 and that we may walk in his paths."
 For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
 and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
⁴ He shall judge between the nations,
 and shall decide disputes for many peoples;
 and they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
 and their spears into pruning hooks;
 nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
 neither shall they learn war anymore.*

Is 42:1-6, 49:5-6 – to the servant who would rescue Israel [Amos 9:11-12, Hosea 1:8-12]

*Isaiah 49:⁵ And now the LORD says,
 he who formed me from the womb to be his servant,
 to bring Jacob back to him;
 and that Israel might be gathered to him—
 for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD,
 and my God has become my strength—
⁶ he says:
 "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
 to raise up the tribes of Jacob
 and to bring back the preserved of Israel;
 I will make you as a light for the nations,
 that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."*

Israel were the bearers off, the means of achieving, His purpose for the world, for It was through Abraham and his descendants, Israel, that the LORD, the creator of heaven and earth had chosen to respond to Adam's sin and its consequences.

What has befallen Israel is then not just a cause of great individual grief and suffering, not just a threat to their existence as a nation. It appears to be a threat to the LORD doing all that He has promised,

To His achieving His purposes of blessing for the world, for creation

To Him being the LORD of heaven and earth,

A denial of Him being the God He says He is

So how had the Israelites come to their miserable state?

How had this challenge to the LORD – to His fulfilling His promises and achieving His purpose, arisen?

And what will their God, the LORD, do about it?

And what does that mean for Israel and for us?

Is there comfort for the sad, hope for the dispossessed, for the losers in history?

Firstly, How did things get so bad? How did the people come to suffer so much?

How did it get this bad?

Failed leadership vv. 1-10

Earlier in the book Ezekiel has spoken of the sin of all the people. Here in vv. 2-6, as he speaks of Israel as sheep and their kings as shepherds, he focuses on the actions of those kings and the effect it has had on the sheep, on the people.

That picture of the nation as a flock of sheep, and their rulers as shepherds was a common and familiar way of referring to the relationship of a people and their king not just in Israel, but in the surrounding nations

And while it is not so familiar to us, it is one we can still grasp – the shepherd being the person who has responsibility for the care of the sheep, to feed them and keep them safe, and the sheep the people entrusted to his care.

Ezekiel 34: The word of the LORD came to me: ² “Son of man, prophesy against shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus

says the Lord God: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the the sheep? ³ You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep.

The LORD addresses the shepherds, but He doesn't point to this wrong decision or that, this bad alliance or that neglect of provision.

He focuses on the attitude of the shepherds v. 2

They have acted selfishly, thinking the flock was there for them, to provide for and enrich them

They wanted all the benefits of having a flock of sheep – the wool, the meat, without any of the care, any of the work

They just focused on their own wants and neglected the sheep

And they were lazy, uncaring

They did not treat them as if each one mattered. The sheep were not valuable to them

⁴ The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them.

Because of their selfishness and neglect

. ⁵ So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; ⁶ they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.

The people were scattered, left defenceless, placed in mortal danger, with no one to bring them back and protect them.

Israel had come to their terrible situation because of a failure of their kings, their rulers – because they acted with gross self interest and indifference to the sheep

And they had forgotten what the LORD makes clear in vv. 5-6. The flock was the LORD's – they are 'My sheep'. But these kings acted as if the flock was their own, and they had the right to use and abuse it as they willed

It is a terrible thing when a people, or a Christian church, has leadership who are just in it for themselves, who forget that the LORD is King and they will give account to Him.

But Israel is the LORD's flock. They matter to Him, and so the LORD pronounces his judgment on these lazy, selfish shepherds

Because they have been selfish exploiters of those in their care, and because they have not done their job, and because as a consequence the sheep have suffered so much and been lost

⁷ "Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: ⁸ As I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, ⁹ therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: ¹⁰ Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.

They are v. 10 finished

I am against you. In refusing to be God's servants they have become His enemies

I will require – there will be a reckoning for their treatment of the sheep

He will put a stop to their exploitation of the flock

The LORD will act to save the flock, judging their oppressors and rescuing them from these internal predators

How had Israel come to their miserable state – scattered and defenceless, teetering on the brink of extinction

How had the fulfillment of the LORD's promises had been put in doubt

By the sin of the shepherds

But not just the leadership vv. 17-22

But what we see as we read on is that it is not just the sin of the rulers

We all like to blame and complain about our leaders when things go wrong, to focus entirely on their shortcomings – a bit of that about now

But the rot of selfishness is in the flock as well – vv. 18-19, 21

¹⁷ *“As for you, my flock, thus says the Lord God: Behold, I judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and male goats. ¹⁸ Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture; and to drink of clear water, that you must muddy the rest of the water with your feet? ¹⁹ And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet, and drink what you have muddied with your feet?*

²⁰ *“Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them: Behold, I, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. ²¹ Because you push with side and shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad, ²² I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey.*

The strong selfishly deprive the weak of the enjoyment of what is provided for all

Because of the oppression and greed in the flock nothing is left for the weak and needy

The behaviour of some spoils life for all

Israel’s problems are not just the result of the selfish sinful hearts of their rulers

The flock, the Israelites, act with that same selfish sinfulness

And the strong here are not alone, not the exceptions – they are just the ones with the opportunity to express the selfishness that is in the heart of us all, the desire that we should get our own way, be able to make life good and comfortable for ourselves at the expense of others, use while others lose

The rot of selfishness, of self love, is in all our hearts – and as I read of how the strong want to take it all and leave nothing that is usable for the rest, I couldn’t help but think of how we want all the best and latest consumer goods cheaply, at the cost of others working in sweatshops and living in factory dormitories, lives we would not want for ourselves and our children

It's a cliché to say sin causes misery

But it is true

True for Israel, true for the Yazidis

True for us

When for example Paul gives a list of sinful behaviours in Romans 1:29-31 speaking of people as

Romans 1: ²⁹ They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

These are not just words, but behaviours and attitudes that impoverish and wound, that destroy trust, pit one person against another, can rob us of peace even in our own homes

When you see sin in the shepherds, in the flock, in ourselves you wonder how can the good God ever succeed in bringing blessing?

He had a good shot with Israel – defeated their enemies, gave them good laws and structures, sent them prophets and others to teach His law

But in Babylon it looks more and more like a failed experiment, frustrated by our addiction to sin

What will become of His promises?

What will become of His reputation, which He has associated with this sinful people?

The LORD answers in vv. 11-24

God's Commitment vv. 11-24

I hope verses as you heard it read verses 11-24 sent a tingle up your spine.

Here you have the clear and definite commitment of the living, almighty, God, His commitment to save His people, to save a sinful people.

Did you notice all the 'I's

I myself

Let me read it again stressing God's commitment, because that is what should hit you between the eyes here. This is something the LORD will do, the LORD alone, by Himself

*Ezekiel 34:*¹¹ "For thus says the Lord God: Behold, **I, I myself** will search for **my** sheep and will seek them out.¹² 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 from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness.¹³ And **I will bring** them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And **I will feed** them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country.¹⁴ **I will feed** them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel.¹⁵ **I myself** will be the shepherd of **my** sheep, and **I myself** will make them lie down, declares the Lord God.¹⁶ **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, and the fat and the strong **I will destroy**. **I will feed** them in justice.

This is a boots and all commitment, the Word of the God whose word brought the world into being.

The LORD will be what human leaders failed to be. He will shepherd His flock v. 15 – I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep

He will reverse the effects of their sinful selfishness

He will v. 12 search for them, rescue them, bring them, gather them, feed them

He will v. 13 bring the exiles back to the land, the mountain heights of Israel

And look at v. 16 – the very opposite of the neglect of the shepherds in v. 4

¹⁶ **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, and the fat and the strong **I will destroy**. **I will feed** them in justice.

Each sheep matters to Him

He knows and cares for them individually

And He will ensure His flock is one where justice and righteousness prevail.

Ezekiel 34: ¹⁷ “As for you, my flock, thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and male goats. ¹⁸ Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture; and to drink of clear water, that you must muddy the rest of the water with your feet? ¹⁹ And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet, and drink what you have muddied with your feet?

²⁰ “Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them: Behold, I, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. ²¹ Because you push with side and shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad, ²² I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep.

This commitment to justice, expanded in vv. 17-22, to ruling His people in righteousness, to judging between sheep and sheep, to v. 22 rescue His flock from internal and external exploiters and destroyers, tells you that when the Lord gathers His flock

It won't be more of the same. He is promising more, new life for the flock.

This is a big commitment, one that transcends the re-establishment of Israel in the land after the exile

And as part of gathering His flock He will restore a true human ruler over them.

²³ And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴ And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken.

There is a lot to unpack here

Notice, for starters, that it is the LORD who establishes this David, not David who establishes the LORD's rule.

His power and authority will come from God

This David is Not self appointed, not chosen by the people.

And the LORD says there will be just One shepherd – singular – for His people. In Himself he will end the division between the northern and southern kingdoms, there will only be one flock

And because he is one, his rule won't be marked by the inconsistency of the succession of historic kings, and being one it is implied this rule will be eternal

And the LORD names this one shepherd my servant David

Not David come to life again, a kind of King Arthur figure waiting to be awakened.

No, one who will embody David's line, in whom God will keep His promise to David in 2 Sam 7 of establishing the throne of His kingdom forever.

2 Sam. 7:¹³ He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

And this king will rule as My servant – in contrast to the self-seeking kings who came before he rules by faithfully doing the LORD's will

And he is here described as a prince, while being called a king in 37:24, to stress that the LORD is the true King. The LORD is the shepherd of Israel, He is the one who rescues His people

This prince is both over and among His people – He has authority but He is also close to His people, one who will symbolise both the LORD's presence and rule amongst His people.

This is a big commitment.

A shepherd king from David who will be greater than David.

A rescue that will recreate the people in justice and righteousness

What will that look like for the LORD's rescued people?

What will it look like to live under the rule of this David?

How good it is to belong to God's flock vv. 23-31

Ezekiel 34:²⁵ "I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild beasts from the land, so that they may dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods.

Being rescued by the LORD, being shepherded by this David can be summed up in one word – shalom, peace

I will make with them a covenant of peace

I will make – this is something God does. There is no ‘if ... then’ here. God has made it depend entirely on Himself

A covenant of peace. What will characterise their relationship from then on is peace, peace with God

And what follows is a description of that peace, of shalom

There will be freedom of conflict in all relationships. Being at peace with God they will know peace in relating to each other and creation

Positively peace is wholeness, harmony, fulfillment

²⁶ And I will make them and the places all around my hill a blessing, and I will send down the showers in their season; they shall be showers of blessing. ²⁷ And the trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield its increase, and they shall be secure in their land. And they shall know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke, and deliver them from the hand of those who enslaved them. ²⁸ They shall no more be a prey to the nations, nor shall the beasts of the land devour them. They shall dwell securely, and none shall make them afraid.

For a people in want it is the blessing of abundance vv. 26-27

For a people in fear it is security v. 28 *They shall dwell securely, and none shall make them afraid.*

For a people oppressed – it is deliverance v. 27b

For a people dispossessed – it is coming to dwell in their own land. They will be secure in their land v. 27

For a people under judgment it is a reversal of judgment – no longer is God against them

²⁹ And I will provide for them renowned plantations so that they shall no more be consumed with hunger in the land, and no longer suffer the reproach of the nations. ³⁰ And they shall know that I am the LORD their God with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, declares the Lord God. ³¹ And you

are my sheep, human sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, declares the Lord God.”

And the climax of this peace is a renewal of the covenant relationship, where God v. 30 is again present among them, the final reversal of the tragedy of 586 BC. Recalling the words of Leviticus 26:11-12

Leviticus 26:¹¹ I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. ¹² And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.

Where the chief blessing of the covenant will be God walking amongst His people, their God, and they His people

God says here

³⁰ *And they shall know that I am the LORD their God **with them**, and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, declares the Lord God.*

What they could not come to enjoy by their own efforts the LORD commits Himself to bring about

And God makes it clear at the end – he really is speaking of them and to them, this sinful Israel

³¹ *And you are my sheep, human sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, declares the Lord God.”*

Good to belong to this people whose shepherd is the LORD and His prince David

We are not in exile

But this peace is what we want and need

To live free from fear, free from want, free from anxiety about what tomorrow will bring

To be free from fear of judgement because God has brought us to enjoy peace with Himself

To be able to live in the presence of God – where there is no grief, or pain, or mourning or tears, where there will be no death

This is the peace God commits Himself to achieve for His people

He alone – it is a gracious gift to a sinful, burdened, people

The LORD spoke those words to Israel almost two and a half thousand years ago.

Has He kept His promise?

And can we share in this peace promised to Israel.

We can belong to God's flock. Luke 15:1-7, John 10:1-30; Psalm 23; Revelation 7:14-17

Yes, and Yes

These promises always looked beyond the LORD bringing the Israelites back to Judea as He did after 70 years of exile.

He had spoken of the judging and removal of sin from amongst His people

He had spoken of one ruler, whose reign was eternal

He had spoken of bringing peace to sinners, perfect peace

And He had said that He Himself would do it, that He Himself would rescue His people

Back in Jerusalem, still living under foreign rulers, with no king of David's line, the people still looked for the fulfilment of this promise

And then the LORD sent His Son, the LORD Jesus

The one who before His birth was announced as Immanuel, God with us [Matt. 1:23]

The one to whom the LORD God would give

Luke 1:³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

The throne of His father David, and who would rule over God's people forever.

And Jesus in John 10 taught that He was the One this passage spoke of, the One through whom God would keep His promise, establish His rule, bring that reign of peace

Listen to Him

John 10: ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. ¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,

In contrast to all others, He is the good shepherd.

He brings life, and that life is the life of shalom. It is life without death, the life of the new age, the age to come, life that is abundant – rich and never exhausted

The good shepherd who cares for, who loves His sheep, laying down His life for them – to protect them, to keep them, to gather them to Himself, to bring them that peace

He will gather the flock, and be the one shepherd of all God's people

John 10: ¹⁶ And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

And He is that shepherd as He does the Father's will in laying down His life for the sheep, and taking it up again

John 10: ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge [command] I have received from my Father."

Unsurprisingly, Jesus talking to Jews who knew their Old Testament of Himself as the good shepherd who would give life to and gather the LORD's people provoked opposition.

John 10: ²⁰ Many of them said, "He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?"

But Jesus in response did not back down. In fact he intensified His claim to be the one, the only one, who could fulfill the prophecy of Ezekiel. He said

John 10:²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

He said that He gives His people eternal life, makes them eternally secure – and that He is one with the Father, that in gathering and giving life to His sheep, giving eternal peace to them, He is God at work, doing what God has said He would do.

That was a claim that could get you killed, and in the end – it did.

In their rejection of God come amongst them they killed Jesus on the cross. But here we see what was always true.

People's sinful rebellion against God does not threaten the fulfilment of God's good promises to give life to His people. It only serves the fulfilment of God's purpose and promise.

That death the LORD Jesus died dealt with the sin of His people. It became the source of our peace with God, eternal peace. We are reconciled through His blood writes Paul. The barrier to peace with God, our sin and the punishment it deserves, is removed as Christ on the cross endures the law's just judgment on our sin in our place. Those who trust in Him need never fear God will be against them, never fear God's judgment.

Romans 5:10; Colossians 1:19-22

Romans 5:¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

Colossians 1:²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,

His laying down His life on the cross to take it up again at the resurrection established His eternal reign. He is the one King who rules over God's people forever, rules over all. He has all authority and can always protect and keep His people.

And it is through His being lifted up on the cross that He starts to gather all God's scattered people.

John 12: ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." ³³ He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

God keeps His word.

He brings peace to a sinful people, as He promised. He did it, He alone

And in bringing peace to sinful Israel, in keeping His word to them

He makes it possible for you and I to share in the life and peace He brings.

The death that deals with Israel's sin deals with ours. It was for the world God in love gave His Son so that whoever now believes in Him can have eternal life
John 3:16

You and I can belong to the flock of God, be Jesus' sheep as we listen to His voice, as we hear and respond to His call to trust Him, to believe in Him, and to follow Him

If you are not yet a believer hear that.

Our sin, your sin, messes life up – it brings misery, and in the end death.

But the gracious God is offering you life and peace if you will turn back to Him, if you will believe in Jesus – that HE is the Son sent from the Father to save, that His death was God's provision for your peace, and that He reigns now forever

Confess your rebellion, your sin to Him, and ask Him to forgive you, to receive you into His people

And if you are already a believer, Do you see again how good our God is.

Where our sin brings death, scatters, exploits, destroys

He commits Himself, Himself alone – to bring life, to gather, to nurture, to protect

And He does it

Does it through sending His Son to die for sinners

He keeps His Word, an undeviating faithfulness

You can rely wholly on Him

He is the God He says He is, the LORD of heaven and earth, the One who has life in Himself, almighty

You can rely on Him

He is gracious and loves His people – he seeks the lost, binds up the wounded, strengthens the weak

And now as then – whether it was in the destruction of Jerusalem, or the death of Jesus - People’s sinful rebellion against God does not threaten the fulfilment of God’s good promises to give life to His people. It only serves the fulfilment of God’s purpose and promise.

We need to hear that, for we have not yet come to the fullness of all God has promised.

We have peace with God now, but we still live in a world in rebellion against its Creator, and we still live in the bodies we have from Adam.

In this world we suffer because we are His sheep, His flock.

As Paul says

Romans 8: ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written,

***“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”***

But knowing our God’s faithfulness and might in keeping His word through the death of Jesus

Knowing His determination to save His people – I myself He says

Knowing His graciousness and love in bringing us peace, and being assured of that because Christ has dealt with all our sin

We can also say with Paul

³⁷ *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.* ³⁸ *For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,* ³⁹ *nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

And we can face life each day saying

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want

See our sin – awful

But it will not derail God’s plans and purposes, including His plans and purposes for us, believers in Jesus – for He has made their fulfilment depends on Him

See again how good our God is

How good it is to belong to His flock, to have the LORD, Jesus as your shepherd

Have confidence in Him – in all the circumstances of your life

Whether that is stressed out from working from home, or stressed by having no work

Whether it is feeling worn down, burdened by the constant focus on Covid numbers

Dismayed by not being able to see your friends, feeling like you are treading water and you are getting tired

Anxious for others

Have confidence in Him, the God who says I myself will rescue my people

v. 16 ¹⁶ *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*

And who does because He loves, loves enough to send His Son to be our good shepherd

And give Him thanks and praise