



The Shepherd's Protection, Part 1

Selected Scriptures

We are in a final message on the short series on shepherding and it's just a, just given the briefest outline on the chief duties of pastoral ministry. And as I've said to you before, I'm kind of teaching my own job description to you to show you from God's Word what pastors are responsible to do. This is job description for pastors, elders, shepherds, overseers, bishops, if you want to use that word, that's the word for overseer, Bishop.

But so far in this series, we've talked about the shepherd's instruction and the shepherd's exhortation. That's the previous weeks, today the topic is the shepherd's protection. The shepherd's protection. This is how the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Good Shepherd, John 10:11 and verse 14 as well, he is also the chief shepherd of the sheep, 1 Peter 5:4.

This is how Jesus Christ uses, us under shepherds, his elders, his pastors. He uses them to protect his church. And why

would his church need protection? Well, a lot of ways to answer that question, but just in view of our topic, when shepherds do their job, when they provide sound instruction from God's Word, when they exhort people to forsake their sins and walk in righteousness, well, that draws fire from the enemy.

God uses the faithful shepherding in the instruction and exhortation to unify a church, to grow the body strong, to make it effective and fruitful and Satan don't like that. The enemy does not like an effective church and so he opposes it and he has, he's very wiley; finds many different ways to attack. We understand though the attack come, though it comes through people, though it comes through trouble from people, whether it's the culture around us, or people who rise up within us, or whatever the issue is, false doctrine, people who, who, teach that, and past that, or bad lifestyles; whatever it is, we understand because the Bible tells us this, that our struggle is not ultimately against flesh and blood.

The persecution, and struggle, and suffering, and, and, pressure comes with a face. We have to look beyond the face. It's not the face that's the issue. There is a spiritual battle going on behind the scenes, and it's a very real battle. It's against demonic spiritual forces that are too much for us. I

mean, we being flesh and blood, we are no match for the angelic realm and the demonic realm. But our God is with us. That's why we, he tells us, "take up the full armor of God. It's so we can resist in the evil day." It's so that we can stand firm.

We know how to fight this battle. We know how to fight the battle because of the instruction that's given to us through the local church, because of the exhortation we received through the Shepherd's ministry. We know to put on the full armor of God. We know what it is, we know how to do it. We know how to fight the battle. So what brings the battle is the very thing that strengthens us to fight the battle. I love how God uses the one to do the other all the time.

Before we get into our outline, as I've kind of done through this series, I just want to start by laying out my thesis statement. Also for this, I've done it with the instruction of the shepherds, with the exhortation of the shepherds. Now I'm going to do it with the protection of the shepherds. Here's the thesis statement we'll follow: Shepherds protect the flock of God from the harmful influence of stumbling blocks. Stumbling blocks, that is, those who cause people to sin in doctrine or in practice.

Shepherds protect the flock of God from the harmful influence of stumbling blocks, that is, those who cause people to sin in doctrine or in practice. That's our thesis statement. We're going to work through an outline, as we've done, and as we work through this outline on the shepherd's duty to protect the flock, I want to start first with the consequences of not protecting the flock. Here's what's at stake. Here's the consequences of an unprotected flock. And after that, we're going to focus in our second point, focus the lens on those who are in need of protection. And then thirdly, finally, we'll see how it is that shepherds protect the flock, what tools they use, what structures are in place in order to protect the flock of God.

So point one, let's talk about what happens, number one, when pastors don't protect. Just write that down in your outline if you want to number one, when pastors don't protect. And turn in your Bibles for this point, to Ezekiel chapter 34. Ezekiel chapter 34, this is where God indicts Israel's shepherds. He names their sin, pronounces judgment on them, and points to the restoration of the good shepherding to come to his flock in Jesus Christ. Ezekiel 34, the indictment on Israel's shepherds, their failure, which points to the restoration of true

shepherding, good shepherding in the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

We'll start with Ezekiel 34:1 to 6. "Then the word of Yahweh came to me, saying, Son of Man, prophecy against the shepherds of Israel, prophecy and say to those shepherds, thus says, Lord Yahweh, woe, shepherds of Israel who've been shepherding themselves. Should not the shepherd shepherd the flock? But you eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool. You sacrifice the fat sheep without shepherding the flock.

"Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, and the diseased you've not healed, and the broken you've not bound up. The scattered you have not brought back, nor have you searched for the lost. But with strength and with severity you've dominated them. They were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and then became food for every beast of the field and were scattered. My flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill. My flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth, and there was no one to seek or search for them."

Lest we misconstrue the imagery here, misconstrue the text, you need to understand this is a kind of an extended metaphor, using shepherds and sheep, to kind of refer to Israel's leaders and then those who follow the leaders. This is

condemning Israel's leadership, because it's devolved into false shepherds. Shepherds that brutalize the sheep, don't care for the sheep at all. That's not a shepherd. So they're false. They're shepherds in name only.

But in condemning the shepherds in this text, we want to understand the members of the flock are not all innocent. Okay, so we're not looking at bad evil shepherds and innocent victims, sheep. There is a victim thing set up here, but notice, "my flock was scattered" in verse, in verse 6, "my flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill." That is an allusion to the idolatry that was taking place among the sheep of Israel, worshiping and sacrificing under every tree and on every hill, every high hill.

You know, do you see in the list of the kings, in kings and Chronicles, this, this king was kings of Judah. This king was, was righteous, followed the ways of David, but he had this against him, he didn't do away with the high places. The high places where the people would go and sacrifice and do their own thing and conduct their own worship. So we want to understand that the, the, members of the flock, it's a mixed flock and it becomes a more mixed flock, the more faithless and unfaithful the shepherds are.

Remember, in Israel, both people and priests, leaders, followers were guilty of vile idolatry. It's portrayed here. We'll see it even further in Ezekiel 34. The sheep are not, all the sheep are not all just innocent victims. The sheep are sinners too. That's why they need shepherds over them. But they need true shepherds, not false shepherds.

They need true shepherds to lovingly corral them and correct them and guide and direct them into green pastures and buy still waters. These leaders have not done that. They're too busy trying to profit from their position, using the goods of the flock to advantage themselves. They fleece the flock, the, whether that means overtly taking money and, and, improving their own financial position, or it could even mean just gaining respect and esteem; being, being, treated with deference by people as they walk through the city, holding positions and prominence, places of respect in the community.

Many people don't care about the money. In fact, they use the money to get those very things to be respected and flattered by men. So while the shepherds are tending to themselves, these sheep are sickly, diseased, broken. All those are images to portray people who are in bondage to sin, dominated by sin, sick with sin, diseased with sin. It's, it's, the sin is affecting

all the systems of their body. They're having a systemic shutdown in their body leading to eventual spiritual death. So as a result, the sheep, because they're sick, they're sin addled, they're scattered, divided, separated, they're not together and as a unit, they're not together in a safe flock. They're wandering apart, isolated from each other in ones and twos and threes, going here, going there and distanced from the flock; they're lost, unsafe, and prey for wolves.

Look at verses 7 to 8, "Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of Yahweh: 'As I live,' declares the Lord Yahweh, 'surely, because My flock has become a plunder. My flock has even become food for all the beasts of the field for lack of a shepherd, and My shepherds did not seek for My flock, but rather the shepherds shepherded themselves and did not shepherd My flock.'"

Spiritually speaking, sheep left to themselves without a diligent shepherd instructing them, reproofing, rebuking, exhorting them, correcting them, they are plunder. They're food for the hireling of the flock, the one pretending to be a pastor. They are prey for all absolute wolves. They're beasts of the field. They're victims of disease. They, they bring upon themselves self-inflicted wounds that bring injury to their hearts, their souls. They have lifelong consequences from that.

Again, all this metaphor for spiritual danger, the consequences of people left to themselves, uncorrected but merely affirmed, placated, flattered, but not truly confronted or cared for. Left to themselves, they can't escape the snare of sin. They can't get rid of the alluring tastes of an unhealthy diet. They can't turn away from the enticement of deceptive voices calling to them, wooing them, bringing, bringing, them into dangerous places. They can't turn away from the looking at the bad example and bad advice of unqualified men and unqualified shepherds.

All of us are sheep like this. You under shepherds, your pastors and elders, we too need to discern and listen to good voices, good shepherds before us. We do. We, we don't, we don't freewheel it, think we're independent voices. We trust good and godly faithful shepherds and pastors, who've come before us. We stand on their shoulders. We learn from their, their writings. We learn from their testimony and their example.

We're sheep ourselves, every single one of us, we need to understand, are sheep in danger of being led astray. It's for good reason that our God characterizes us as sheep. We need help. We're prone to wander like lost sheep. The Psalmist who

wrote Psalm 119:176; 176 verses on the word of God, on the love of God, of the Word, 176 verses.

In the final verse, he confesses this, in humility and in truth, he says after writing so much excellent poetry on the Word of God and the God of the Word, and extolling him and his power and his care and his love, and how much he wants to follow after him, he says this in the very last verse, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant." Are we any better than that Psalmist? Are any of us pastors, elders, leaders, any better than the psalmist? We are not.

We can survey both testaments of Scripture and see how Jeremiah in the Old Testament pronounces woes on unfaithful shepherds and false prophets of Israel. Jesus in his time has pronounced woes on the scribes and the Pharisees. We've studied through that in Luke's Gospel. But we can survey both testaments of Scripture and see that God reserves a special judgment for any man who would take up the mantle of leadership, but is not qualified to be there. How dare he do that?

Why is God reserving serious special judgment for false shepherds, those who are unqualified, ungifted, not called? Because unqualified leadership has the appearance of faithfulness, has the appearance in the title of leadership. He

offers, his very presence offers refuge and protection, promises spiritual provision. But sheep who flee to that voice, and that man, and that title, they find that man to be a crumbling wall, not fortified, not strong, not protective.

They find him to be a fruitless tree, having nothing. But like the fig tree that Jesus cursed, representing Israel's leadership, nothing but leaves, no fruit, no sustenance. It finds them to be coming to those kind of false titular shepherds; shepherds in name only, find them to be waterless springs bringing parched lives and souls, no life-giving water.

For sheep who follow false shepherds, it leaves a lasting mark and so God says starting in verse 9, "Therefore you shepherds hear the word of Yahweh, 'Thus says the Lord Yahweh, "Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will seek My flock from their hand and make them cease from shepherding the flock. And so the shepherds will not shepherd themselves anymore, but I will deliver My flock from their mouth.'" The picture there is wolves eating the flock.

"'I'll deliver My flock from their mouth so that they will not be food for them.' For thus says the Lord Yahweh, 'Behold, I Myself will seek My sheep and care for them. As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his sheep which are

spread out, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a' " cloud, "'cloudy and gloomy day.' "

Skip down to verse 14. He says, "I'll shepherd them," in a, "in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down on good grazing ground and be shepherded in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I will shepherd My flock. I will make them lie down," declares the Lord Yahweh. "I'll search for the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken, strengthen the sick; but the fat and strong I will destroy. I will shepherd them with judgment."

There are obviously eschatological tones, prophecies, promises set in that section, but skip down to verse 23, because I want to draw your attention to where God identifies his appointed shepherd who will care for his sheep. Verse 23, "Then I will establish over them one shepherd," just one, "My servant David, and he will shepherd them; he will shepherd them himself and will be their shepherd. And I, Yahweh will be their God, and My servant David will be Prince among them; I, Yahweh have spoken." What a comfort. And we've seen that come to pass on the pages of Scripture.

For us, that prediction, that promise is past tense. We look back and see the Lord Jesus Christ, who's the Good Shepherd, the great Shepherd, and we say fulfilled. Jeremiah 23, also another woe against Israel's shepherds. We see that Christ there is pictured as sending out under shepherds to do his bidding.

So there's one shepherd, the Son of David, Jesus the Christ, but he employs under shepherds underneath his rule. He puts them into service to tend his sheep. He says in Jeremiah 23, "I will also raise up shepherds over them, and they will shepherd them, and they will not be afraid any longer," nor, "nor be terrified, nor will any be left unattended."

So the fulfillment of God's promises to give his people true shepherds, that starts with Jesus. He calls, sends his apostles out to do the shepherding work and that continues to this day, as he calls and sends shepherds into local churches; the pastors, the elders to tend his lambs, shepherd his sheep, instructing them, exhorting them, so that they protect the flock of God. That's how this works.

Now the failure of, of these false shepherds to do their duty, to fulfill their responsibility to protect the flock, this leaves the flock vulnerable to beasts of the field, so ravenous

wolves who will eat them, but also any other predator that seeks an easy meal. But there is another danger that God identifies here in Ezekiel 34, which is another consequence of not protecting the flock.

Go back to verse 17, Yahweh says this, again, this is in his monologue here, "As for you, My flock, thus says Lord Yahweh, "Behold I will judge between one sheep and another." Think about the Matthew 25 sheep and goats separation. Okay, all those goats appear to be in the same flock, and then Yahweh comes in, in Christ to execute judgment, and he separates the sheep from the goats, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. This is that. "'Behold, I will judge between one sheep and another, between the Rams and the male goats. Is it too slight a thing for you that you should be shepherded in good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pastures? Or that you should drink of the clear waters, that you must foul the rest with your feet?

"As for My flock, they must be shepherded on what you tread down with your feet and drink what you foul with your feet!" Therefore, thus says Lord Yahweh to them, "Behold, I, even I will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you push with side and with shoulder, and," thrust all, "thrust at

all the sickly with your horns until you've scattered them abroad, therefore, I will save My flock, and they will no longer be plunder; and I will judge between one sheep and another."

An unprotected flock, because of shepherding failure becomes an abusive flock dominated by the rich, powerful, selfish, those indifferent to the weak and the needy. Abuses arise as male goats butt the ewes and the little lambs. The fat sheep shove the lean sheep aside and push them aside with their powerful shoulders and hit them with their horns, in order to take more and more for themselves.

This is a picture again of people wealthy, powerful, proud, self-centered. When they enter into the flock, they expect preferential treatment. They get preferential treatment out in the world because of their wealth and their power. They expect it here. They consume time and attention. They make demands while giving nothing. With critical spirits, they're ever ready to complain. They're never humbling themselves, confessing their sins, repenting. They devour and suck resources dry. They always demand more.

This metaphor is so apropos for the congregation of Israel in the days of Moses, in the days of the prophets; we see that. It's so apropos for the people of Galilee and Judea in the days

of Jesus and his Apostles. This has happened again, and again, and again throughout history. False shepherds infiltrating the early church, their teaching, lifestyles, influencing the church, reproducing more of their kind within the church, and turning the church into an abusive setting, an abusive environment.

And folks, it's happening in our own day too, as false believers grow in numbers because of the proliferation of false gospels, sub-Christian gospels. Many people just saying I love Jesus; Jesus saved me from my sins. But there is no heart change, no fruit. They continue on in the fruit of the flesh wearing a nice face, but their hearts are not changed. They grow in numbers in a church, gain influence in churches, turn church after a church into these abusive flocks, and when the abuse absolutely metastasizes, and destroys, and kills that body, they move on to another flock and repeat the process. So it is an important duty of pastors, elders, to watch out for false sheep, the proud and arrogant, the self-centered and the greedy, those who may at first appear to belong to the flock, but in due time their true character becomes manifest. And when it becomes manifest, something must be done.

When the pastor confronts the proud male goats, the fat sheep, they whine and they bleat, they bite the hand that's offered to help, they stir up trouble among the rest of the sheep, and they consume an inordinate degree of time, and energy, and attention, but they do not care at all. There's a telltale sign that they do not belong there, that they are up to no good. That is a shepherding duty, is to protect who becomes a shepherd, in order that there may be faithful shepherds who love the flock, who fear God, and see their duty, and then protect the fold, protect the church from these kinds of influences.

With that in mind, I'd like you to turn to Matthew 18. As we consider a second point and think about who it is that pastors must protect. Let's consider the, the true victims of these shepherding crimes. What happens when pastors fail to protect and who is hurt by that? Number two: Who pastors must protect? Matthew 18. Most of us are reasonably familiar, I think, with the section of Matthew 18 in which Jesus commands us to practice corrective church discipline. Matthew 18:15 and following, 15 to 20 really is the section.

In a healthy church, we understand the church discipline is going on all the time and it's going on all the time in a very positive sense called formative church discipline. Formative

church discipline is just, in the sense of making disciples and continue to teach, and instruct, and exhort toward godliness and helping people, put the, put the truth into practice, helping them to grow in the wisdom in the application, the truth. That's just formative church discipline. It doesn't feel any negative or corrective, because we all want to grow in holiness. So that's forming us. It's shaping us. We do that together, making disciples, helping one another grow.

Also though, there are times when we get crossways with the one talking to us about the truth, could be a friend or could be a family member, could be someone in leadership, as well, who corrects a, a sin issue, corrects a lack of wisdom, a foolishness or whatever. And then we don't see it the same way we get crosswise. We gotta resolve that conflict, right? That's called corrective discipline to deal with any unrepentant sin in the body. And that's what Matthew 18:15 to 20 is all about.

What we can sometimes fail to realize is Matthew 18:15 to 20 is embedded firmly in Matthew 18, which is a, a broader context. So the context for corrective discipline actually starts back in the first verse which is really about the protecting power of Jesus and concern of Jesus to protect his sheep from stumbling blocks. Take a look at the first six verses

here, "At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, 'who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?'" Now, this is shortly after the Transfiguration or Transfiguration where Peter, James, and John see Christ in power in his kingdom glory on the mountain.

They're there with Moses and Elijah who also appear there, and they're talking with Jesus about his eventual ascension into heaven from Jerusalem. So these three have really learned a lot. They've been exposed to a lot. Jesus remands them to silence until after his resurrection. But you know, being, you being you and me being me, you know that, as they walked among the other men, walked among the Twelve, they're like, we got to see that and you didn't. It creates a little bit of competition, one upmanship among the disciples.

So the disciples came to Jesus and said, who then is the greatest of the kingdom of heaven? You know what Peter, James, and John are thinking? Jesus is going to look at us and say, that's you guys. He didn't do that. Verse 2 says, "He called a child to himself and set this child before them and said, 'truly, I say to you, unless you're converted and become like little children, you'll never enter the kingdom of heaven.'"

What is that to say? It's to say that children who especially in this society were never viewed by anybody, as having anything to offer. All they are is just food machines. They're costly. They, they can't even plow a field. I mean, what's a little child going to do? He doesn't have anything to offer. All he does is take up my time.

It's not until that kid gets out of that kind of young stage, past the time when he might be crippled by disease or, or, or die. The infant mortality rate was very high. Child mortality rate very high in these times. And so get past that time and get him to actually, him or her to do something in the field or in the home and become productive and then he becomes a contributing members, member of society. Before that, nothing to contribute.

Jesus says unless you become like a little child, realizing that with your spiritual situation you have nothing to contribute to your salvation. You're utterly dependent like a little child. A little child may know it or may not. We all know it though, become like that. Verse 4, "Whoever therefore will humble himself as this child. He is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, and whoever receives one such child in my name receives me. But whoever causes one of these little ones who

believe in me to stumble, it is better for him that I heavy a millstone be hung around his neck, and that he'd be drowned in the depth of the sea."

Wow, I can't imagine a worse way to die. I've gone down into depths of the ocean before with a weight belt and my ears unable to clear and that is really really painful. A heavy millstone that was used for crushing grain moved around by a donkey or an oxen. This massive upper millstone fastened around somebody's neck and then cast into the depth of the sea would cause the victim to descend at such a rate he could not clear his ears, no matter how hard he tries, he tries, he causes eardrums to burst leading to all the atmosphere after atmosphere of crushing pressure, come, to come into the inner ear, inner ear causing severe pain, adding excruciating pain on the way to a terrifying death by drowning, and suffocation, and maybe even crushing because of the depth and the pressure. Wow, that is really, really strong language from our Lord.

When he says, I don't want any of my little ones to stumble. You know what? He really means it; any of these little ones who believe in him. Talking about true believers here, not the false sheep, not the fat sheep, not the goats. True believers. Jesus is very serious in this warning about his

concern to see them protected. Look at Matthew 18:7 to 9, "Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks!" Man, there are a lot of stumbling blocks out there.

Woe to them, "for it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; nevertheless, woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes! And if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it's better to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet, be cast into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out, throw it from you. Better for you to enter life with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast into the fiery hell."

Notice the context of cutting off any an offending hand or an offending foot or tearing out an offending eye. Notice that it's different here than in, maybe, Matthew 5:29. In Matthew 5:29, the context there is about battling a lust. So do whatever you can to avoid being tripped up by your own lust. Just take extreme measures. I mean, he's not literally talking about it mutilating yourself. He's just talking about take whatever measures you can to deal with your sin. That's not the context here. The context here is about avoiding, at very great cost, even if it means searing pain, crippling lifelong disability. Do

whatever it takes so you don't become a cause of stumbling for any other true believer.

Now back to our thesis statement at the beginning. Shepherds protect the flock of God from the harmful influence of stumbling blocks. Many stumbling blocks in the world, many that the shepherds need to be watching out for. Those who cause people to sin in doctrine or in their practice. If your hand causes stumbling by what you do, by what you practice, by what your hands are involved in. If your feet cause stumbling by where they go, what you mobilize them to pursue and cause stumbling. If your eye, by what your eye desires, by what it seeks, by what it takes in, this is a call to self-watch, isn't it? So that you don't run afoul of the great shepherd of the sheep.

It is a lie of our present age that you can do sin and it doesn't affect anybody else. Jesus is exposing the lie. And I think it's no accident that in Matthew 5, he's talking about your lust and doing whatever it takes to deal with your lust. Take care of it internally first. Make sure it's gone because if you don't and that lust continues to brew and to grow and to leaven your whole life, you know what happens in Matthew 18? You start becoming a stumbling block to other people.

Be sure your sin will find you out. It does come out. There is no such thing as private sin. It's all going to affect somebody. That's what Jesus is saying here, calling us to self-watch, so that we don't run, so we don't run crossways with the Good Shepherd of the sheep. He's serious about this. So causing one of these little ones who belonged to Jesus to stumble because you persuaded them to believe some false doctrine or tolerate it and follow some sinful practice; just ask you a series of questions and think about this.

Can giving someone a bad book? Oh, like Jesus calling, pointing them to some edgy podcast, turning them on to some entertaining but heretical television series like The Chosen? Can that cause stumbling? Can tolerating sin, overlooking bad doctrine, or worse, by toying with it, entertaining doubts, encouraging people to doubt, question God, challenge God, be angry at God, dialoguing with error, flirting with weird doctrines, can that cause a sheep to stumble?

Can harboring resentment and bitterness in your heart, excusing a heart of anger, nursing your hurts and offenses, can that seep out of a poisoned heart and inject poison into others and cause them to stumble? Can your behavior, lifestyle preferences, priorities, pastimes, what you allow, what you

indulge in so-called liberty issues, can that cause one of these little ones to stumble? Can sharing gossip, spreading slander, sharing false reports with others, can this cause a believer to stumble, doubt or become confused? What about sowing discord, causing disunity, division, sowing doubt in godly leadership, can that cause stumbling? Jesus says don't you do it, don't dare.

It's only those who fear the Lord who care about this. Those with no fear of God that governs their heart, they scoff at this warning. They think you're making too much out of it. Let's keep reading. Jesus says in verse 10, "see that you do not despise," any of these little ones, "one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven."

As the angels are dialed in by looking at the fear of God and knowing their own duty to protect these little ones, they get it. Verse 11, probably not in the text. It's put into brackets in some passages here, but "[for the Son of Man has come to seek and save that which is lost.]" And then he goes on.

And that verse does fit here, even if it was added by copyist. He says, "What do you think? If a man has one hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the

ninety-nine on the mountains and go search for the one that is straying? And if it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than the ninety-nine which have not gone astray."

Well, "in this way, it is not the will of your Father who's in heaven that one of these little ones perish." In light of what we read earlier from Ezekiel 34, I, I know you see the connection between this and Ezekiel 34. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, who Ezekiel 34:16, he does the will of the Father. He says, "I'm going to seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick. He is the Good Shepherd who will care for his little ones and protect them and those who cause his little ones to stumble. The fat and the strong I will destroy. I'll feed them with judgement."

Beloved, I want you to understand this is the thinking that frames our shepherding. This is what frames our thinking as shepherds. This is what drives our concern. And it's not that any of us pastors or elders here are fearful of being cast into a fiery hell. We obviously want to avoid such a fate at all costs. But the stronger motivation for us, it's not craving fear. It is a God-given spirit generated love for God and his flock.

We love the Lord Jesus Christ, and so when, when he takes special attention for people like this, man, we love what he loves. We want to do what he does, want to be part of that process of protection. Oh, but we also love these little ones, these sheep, those who are prey, those who are prone to wander. We understand that; we're just men of flesh like everybody else.

So we get it; if we want to help. Folks, you just need to understand God has given us the love of Christ in our hearts for all of you, for the flock of God, for believers young and old, rich and poor, wise and foolish. By the Holy Spirit we've become partaker of the love of Christ, and we really do care to see his people, his true sheep, his little ones cared for, and tended, and well fed, and well watered, safe and sound, that they can grow up healthy, strong, and bring glory to God.