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People Spot Missile: Ezekiel 34

I strive to read a chapter in the Old Testament and a chapter in the New Testament each day. I had been wading through Ezekiel and came to chapter 34. I have read it before but my reaction was woweee!!!! Let me share some thoughts.

My suggestion is to read Ezekiel 34 substituting Pastor for the word shepherd. He begins with a condemnation. “Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves.” Is it possible that there are pastors who are only interested in their own welfare with little or no concern for the well-being of others or of the Church they serve? Ezekiel says, “You eat the curds, clothe yourself in the wool and slaughter the choice animals but do not take care of the flock.” Pastors sometimes accept a salary but do not take of the tasks they are hired to do

According to Ezekiel the task of the Shepherd is to care for the flock. What does that include?

“Strengthen the weak.” This means we are to care for those that can’t care for themselves. We also are to help them grow stronger spiritually so with God’s help they can walk on their own.

“Heal the sick.” We are to provide ministry for those who are ill. How do we do that? We visit them in the hospital and at home. We pray for them and nurture them back to health. Sometimes the disease results in the ultimate healing. Then we provide care to those who mourn.

“Bind up the injured.” I’m sure this is a reference to the sheep that have been accidentally hurt. We can apply that to the church as well. However, is it possible that the injured are damaged Christians? There are Christians who have been deeply hurt in a dysfunctional church and in need of tender loving care.

“Bring back the strays.” This is obviously a reference to absentee care. Life is so complicated these days. Time flies so fast. It is so easy to lose track of the people who have strayed away from the church. In my travels across the American church, I have had literally dozens of people come to me and say they left a church and there was not a single contact or effort to get them to return.

“Search for the lost.” This is something most pre-existing churches seldom do. Yet down through the years, it has been the cornerstone of the church. Jesus said, “The Son of Man came

to seek and to save what was lost.” The words of Jesus, in Luke 19:10, could easily be a modern mission statement for a church.

Ezekiel also tells us what happens when Shepherds don’t care for the flock. “So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they scattered they became food for wild animals. My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth and no one searched or looked for them.”

Over the years I have watched as churches were split or simply dissipated through neglect. It is ugly when a church goes from 200 to 40 in attendance over a short period of years.

God says, “I myself will search for my sheep and look after them.” The Lord loves His people and will care. He will search out pastors who indeed are willing to shepherd the sheep.

Ezekiel also gives a warning to the sheep. “Must my flock eat what you have trampled and drink what you have muddied?” “Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away.” Do people in churches bully the people they don’t like until they can’t take it anymore and leave? The answer to the question is yes! The challenge is to encourage people in the church to mature as Christians and to behave as Christians

Assuming the Pareto principle applies here, and life really does break down into 80% and 20% segments, then what does that say here? I believe the 80% of the problem is pastors who are ineffective, incompetent, or dysfunctional. Even Ezekiel addresses the shepherds first. The parishioners who are misbehaving are 20%. Yes, there are problem people in churches. They are sometimes called clergy killers.

It is clear that Ezekiel is speaking about the care of people. The sheep are an analogy. Ezekiel concludes the chapter by saying, “You my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, are people. And I am your God declares the Sovereign Lord.”

A Thought: The tragedy of the American Church is that we stopped being fishers of men and have become keepers of aquariums. Anonymous

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