I. 11:4-17 The Good Shepherd and the Flock!

This passage continues the Shepherding theme that began in chapter 9, built steam in chapter 10, and now culminates in chapter eleven.

Every human organization rises and falls on the quality of its leadership. Nations rise and fall on their heads of State. If the CEO is effective, corporations prosper. If he or she is ineffective they go bankrupt. Coaches make or break Athletic teams.

In the same way, the godliness, power, and influence of the Church rises and falls on the drive, example, and gifts of its leaders.

Leadership is God's gift to his people.

In this passage God commands Zechariah to act out a prophecy.

The main point is simple: God gives his people the leadership they deserve.

This prophecy is a drama. It has three scenes. In the 1st God commands the prophet to shepherd an unruly people. In the 2nd scene the prophet obeys. In the 3rd and last scene the prophet becomes the shepherd God’s people deserve.

**A. SCENE ONE: COMMAND TO ZECHARIAH, SHEPHERD MY FLOCK**

(Zec 11:4-6) 4 Thus said the Lord my God: “Become shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter. 5 Those who buy them slaughter them and go unpunished, and those who sell them say, ’Blessed be the Lord, I have become rich,’ and their own shepherds have no pity on them. 6 For I will no longer have pity on the inhabitants of this land, declares the Lord. Behold, I will cause each of them to fall into the hand of his neighbor, and each into the hand of his king, and they shall crush the land, and I will deliver none from their hand.”

To understand this prophecy we need to understand that it looks backward. It is a re-enactment of Israel’s experience. “Re-enactment” is a common word today. For example grown men go out on Saturday afternoons to “re-enact” Civil War battles. That is what is going on her.

In verse 4 God commands Zechariah to Shepherd a flock “doomed to slaughter.” He will preside over their slaughter not because he is a bad shepherd, nor because he doesn’t care about them, but because that is what they deserve.
The flock in mind is the people of God under the kings of Israel and Judah over a 500 year period—from David to Babylon. They deserve judgment because they have degenerated into lawlessness. Note verse 6b. “I will cause each of them to fall into the hand of his neighbor, and each into the hand of his king, and they shall crush the land, and I will deliver none from their hand.”

They are being judged because they have rejected their true Shepherd, YHWH. The prophet, Zechariah, is commanded to represent him. This takes us to scene two.

**B. SCENE TWO: ZECHARIAH OBEYS THE COMMAND (7-14)**

Zechariah obeys the command in verse 4 “Become Shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter.” Again, he represents, YHWH, the ultimate Shepherd who constantly cares for his sheep.

1. **The Shepherd protects the flock**

   (Zech 11:7-8a) So I became the shepherd of the flock doomed to be slaughtered by the sheep traders. And I took two staffs, one I named Favor, the other I named Union. And I tended the sheep. 8 In one month I destroyed the three shepherds.

   The prophet takes two staffs named “Favor” and “Union.” Staffs were the tools of Shepherds. They used them to care for their sheep. God is and was the Shepherd of his people. These staves represent the blessedness of covenant relationship with God. The first staff, “favor,” represents God’s covenant mercies toward Israel.

   The second staff, “Union,” represents the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.

   Zechariah plays the part of an effective shepherd. We know that because he destroys three enemy shepherds, men who did not care for the flock, men who only wanted to use the flock. The identity of these three shepherds is unknown.

   That is how YHWH related to his flock, Israel. He protected Israel. For example, He saved them from Egypt. He saved them from the Amalekites. He brought them into the land of Canaan and drove out their enemies.

   He would have done even more, but there was a problem.
2. The flock detests the Shepherd

8b But I became impatient with them, and they also detested me.

Despite the Shepherds kindness, grace, and goodness, we learn the shocking news that the flock actually “detests” him. The good shepherd (God) has protected them. He has destroyed the three evil Shepherds. But, despite this, Israel “detests’ him. Now the Shepherd has become impatient with the flock.

This described Israel’s relationship with God. Despite the fact that God did them nothing but good, they “detested him.” They turned to the many false gods—Baal, Ashtoreth, Astarte, Milcom, etc. Why? These gods gave them what they really wanted—freedom to pursue their lusts.

3. The Shepherd rejects the Flock

God’s reaction was not pleasant. He judged them by giving them up to the leadership they deserved. He gave them up to the ultimate evil Shepherd, Babylon. That is the point of this passage. Eventually God gives us the leadership we deserve.

9 So I said, “I will not be your shepherd. What is to die, let it die. What is to be destroyed, let it be destroyed. And let those who are left devour the flesh of one another.” 10 And I took my staff Favor, and I broke it, annulling the covenant that I had made with all the peoples. 11 So it was annulled on that day, and the sheep traders, who were watching me, knew that it was the word of the Lord.

This passage is about judgment. God is angry. His people detest him. They have chosen false gods. So, he breaks the staff, “favor,” which represented his covenant with Israel and Judah. Vs 9b describes what happens when we reject God for another shepherd. “What is to die let it die. What is to be destroyed, let it be destroyed, and let those who are left devour the flesh of one another.”

God’s covenant relationship of love and care is broken, sundered. God is no longer the Shepherd of Israel. He has withdrawn from them. He no longer protects them.

Death and destruction are the ultimate consequence. Verse 9b refers to the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, “devoured the flesh of one another.” The law threatened that cannibalism would ultimately overtake the Jews if they failed to obey God’s covenant. During the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem the
hunger was so severe that the people actually came under the sway of this curse.

4. The flock tries to pay off the Shepherd

The flock detests the Shepherd. He is leaving. He has broken his covenant with them. They are glad, but they feel guilty. So, they try to pay him for his services.

12 Then I said to them, “If it seems good to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them.” And they weighed out as my wages thirty pieces of silver. 13 Then the Lord said to me, “Throw it to the potter”—the lordly price at which I was priced by them. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord, to the potter. 14 Then I broke my second staff Union, annulling the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.

The flock offers him thirty pieces of silver. It is a month’s wages—a large sum of money in 520 B.C., but the Shepherd refuses it. He throws it to the potter in the House of the Lord. How can he accept payment from people who, according to verse 8, “detest” him? He cannot. He will not be bought.

Then the Shepherd breaks the second staff, “Union.” It represents the bond of brotherhood between Judah and Israel. This actually happened 125 years before Jerusalem’s siege by Babylon. The moral is clear. The unity of God’s people is always a function of their union with God. Since their relationship with God was broken when the staff “Favor” was broken, their relationship with each other has now also unraveled.

C. Scene Three: Zechariah Acts Out What Israel Deserves

15 “Then the Lord said to me, “Take once more the equipment of a foolish shepherd. 16 For behold, I am raising up in the land a shepherd who does not care for those being destroyed, or seek the young or heal the maimed or nourish the healthy, but devours the flesh of the fat ones, tearing off even their hoofs. 17 “Woe to my worthless shepherd, who deserts the flock! May the sword strike his arm and his right eye! Let his arm be wholly withered, his right eye utterly blinded!”

God gives his people the leadership they deserve. That is the theme of today’s passage. In scene one God commanded Zechariah to shepherd an unworthy people. In scene two the prophet obeys, and there is nothing but conflict. He acts out the relationship between YHWH and his covenant people—a
God gives his people the leadership they deserve

relationship which ended in the disaster of Babylonian captivity, the destruction of the temple, and the burning of the holy city.

As Babylon was preparing to destroy the city the prophet Jeremiah proclaimed this word from God. “Surrender to Babylon and all will go well with you. YHWH has sent Nebuchadnezzar. He is God’s servant. Don’t resist him. Surrender and he will treat you well.” But, God had broken the staff “favor.” That meant judgment. And the judgment was the removal of effective leadership from his people. The leaders of God’s people (Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiakin, and Zedekiah) were stone deaf to God’s voice. God’s leaders were worthless shepherds. There was no one to lead, and so disaster came to God’s people.

Verse 15 God brings Zechariah back to the initial command given in verse 4… “Take once more the equipment of a foolish shepherd.” God’s people are rebellious. They deserve a “foolish shepherd,” one who will use and abuse them. As we have seen, this shepherd is past, but the principle also applies to the future. This text looks back to Nebuchadnezzar’s reign. It also probably looks forward to the future reign of the Greeks and Romans that will dominate Judah and Galilee in the next few centuries.

But it is not just political leadership that God has in view. Most importantly this text points to the absence of spiritual leadership. Think of modern Europe, what was once the womb of the Reformation, the heartland of Christianity. It is now a spiritual wasteland. In the 19th century God gave Germany, Scotland, and England up to the influence of men like Schleiermacher (1768-1834), the father of modern liberalism, and the results have been spiritual devastation.

Two important points follow. Bad leadership comes from God. Verse 16 reads, “For behold, I am raising up in a the land a shepherd who does not care for those being destroyed, or seek the young or heal the maimed or nourish the healthy, but devours the flesh of the fat ones, tearing off even their hoofs.” God is sovereign over leadership. That does not mean that we are robots. Nor does it excuse bad leaders from responsibility. Verse 17 is explicit. Evil shepherds, even those raised up by God, are fully responsible for their behavior. “Woe to my worthless shepherd, who deserts the flock! May the sword strike his arm and his right eye! Let his arm be wholly withered, his right eye utterly blinded!”
The church gets the leadership she deserves. Our nation gets the leadership it deserves. God judges those who refuse to submit to the Good Shepherd. He judges them by giving them bad shepherds.

**D. APPLICATION: JOIN THE GOOD SHEPHERD’S FLOCK...**

1. **In this life we generally get the leadership we deserve**

   There are some exceptions. Sometimes God shows mercy and gives good leadership to unfaithful people, but the principle holds solid. When we get better than we deserve, it is all grace.

   - We get the president we deserve.
   - We get the congress we deserve.
   - We get the governors we deserve.
   - We get the spiritual leaders we deserve.

   Notice: God gives leadership, yet each leader is fully responsible for his actions.

   Application: Pray that God would send out labors into his harvest. Pray with humility confessing sin and weakness.

2. **In eternity, Unbelievers Get the Leadership they deserve.**

   Hell is a place of perfect justice. Everyone in Hell gets what they deserve. All of God’s threats and warnings about leadership culminate in Hell. The Bible describes Satan as a King ruling over a kingdom.

   Revelation 9:11 — They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon [destruction], and in Greek he is called Apollyon [destroyer].

   Hell is a kingdom, and Satan is its king. His leadership is what we all deserve, and what we will all get forever unless we turn and repent.

   Application: Repent and believe the Good News. Don’t spend eternity in misery.

3. **In eternity, Christians get the leadership they don’t**
God gives his people the leadership they deserve

deserve. They get grace.

The point of Zechariah 11 is that we get the shepherding we deserve. But, if you are a Christian, you get the leadership you don’t deserve. Christ is your Shepherd for eternity. This has become possible at God’s expense.

Two things happened to make you worthy of his leadership. When you believed God imputed Christ’s righteousness to you. When you believed all of your sins were imputed to Christ and punished. This double imputation made you worthy, in God’s sight, of the best shepherding care possible. Zechariah’s prophecy points to all of this.

Look with me again at verse 13.

“Then the LORD said to me, “Throw it to the potter”—the lordly price at which I was priced by them. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD, to the potter.

The Gospel of Matthew tells us that Verse 13 is a direct reference to the Good Shepherd who, 500 years after Zechariah, entered our fallen world to die for his sheep. This Shepherd died to reconcile a rebellious flock to God. It was the flock’s welfare at the Shepherd’s expense, the exact opposite of what the flock deserves.

Like Zechariah, the people of Israel detested this Shepherd. In fact, they hated him. Their detestation was so intense that they crucified him. All of this took place at the hands of a traitor, Judas, who sold the Good Shepherd to the Pharisees. The Pharisees were leadership that the Jews deserved. The price on Christ’s head was thirty pieces of silver. That was the value Judas, and the Jewish people, put on the Good Shepherd’s life—the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

However, stricken by conscience, Judas attempted to return the silver. Here is how Matthew records the transaction.

Matthew 27:6–10 —But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, “It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money.” 7 So they took counsel and bought with them the potter’s field as a burial place for strangers. 8 Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. 9 Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah [Zechariah], saying, “And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, 10 and they gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord directed me.”
So the New Testament writers saw Zechariah 11:13 as a direct reference to the Messiah. Jesus is the leader we don’t deserve.

In closing I want to briefly look at two differences between the OT Shepherd and Jesus who replaced him.

**First**, instead of being the One purchased, Jesus became the purchaser. He purchases his flock.

*Jesus bought the flock that detested him.*

He paid for them with his very life. He purchased them with his own blood. In other words, the Good Shepherd became a ransom payment to purchase a flock from the Father’s wrath despite the fact that the flock hated him. He purchased them to transform their hatred into love, to turn their suspicion into trust, and change their spite into admiration. In other words, Jesus would not let Israel pay him for his services. Instead, he paid to purchase his enemies, those who owed him for his services.

The Good Shepherd came that we might have abundant life.

*John 10:10–11* — 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.

*1 Peter 1:18* — “You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ.”

Christ is the Good Shepherd. Three times John 10 tells us that the Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. Remember, he does this for sheep that “detest” him.

*John 10:14–15* — 14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and **I lay down my life for the sheep.**

*John 10:17–18* — 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 I have received from my Father.”

Unlike the Jews, we get the shepherding we don’t deserve.
Second, there is a second difference between the Shepherd Zechariah portrayed and Christ. Zechariah’s shepherd didn’t “know” his flock. Jesus knows his sheep by name.

This has big time implications. It means you know you belong to the Good Shepherd because you hear his voice. You follow him wherever he goes.

Many trust in easy believism—cheap grace in Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s words. Entrance into Christ’s flock doesn't work that way. Although entrance into the sheepfold can't be purchased, it will cost you’re your entire life. Salvation is free in the sense that you can’t possibly earn it, but it is costly. God requires all that we have.

You can’t tell that you are a part of his flock because you “asked Jesus into your heart.” You can’t tell that you are a member of his flock because you go to church on Sunday. You can’t tell that you are a member of his flock because you grew up in a Christian family. You can’t tell that you are a member of his flock because you practice the spiritual disciplines of prayer and Bible study. The Pharisees were better at these than any of us.

John 10:3–4—The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. “

14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,

27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

In summary, this passage begs the question: Who will be your Shepherd? God judges those who serve another Shepherd. He judges them with bad leadership. Each of us deserves bad leadership, but God is gracious. That means he does not give us what we deserve. He sent us the Good Shepherd. He came to lay down his life for his Sheep. He died to make us worthy of good leadership. He sent his Son to be that leadership.

Are you part of his flock?

We enter the sheepfold by believing and repenting. We don’t enter by performing.
E. HOME GROUP STUDY QUESTIONS

Read Zechariah 11:4-17. What does it tell us about leadership?

The main idea in this passage is that we get the leadership that we deserve. How did pastor Bill get this idea out of this passage?

Why did God break the staffs “union” and “favor?” What did these two staffs stand for?

If leadership is a gift, how should we respond to our concerns about leadership in the church, in Washington, in the family, or at work?

What is the most important thing we can do to motivate God to give us quality leadership?

Ultimately, we get the leadership we deserve. How does this play out in Hell? What do you think the leadership in Hell is like? How does the gospel affect this principle in Heaven? What is the leadership in Heaven like?