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In these difficult days, as the headlines bring constant news of the forces of Satan being hard at work in many ways and places, it is important that the faithful sheep of Christ's flock remember Who is Who round here. How we see God's authority coming through so strongly right back in Ezekiel Chapter 34! - when His people were at a low ebb, in exile, with hopelessness all around them. The Lord's response is wonderful - a series of "I wills" and "They shalls", which we can now briefly follow through.

Concerning first the shepherds, the leaders of the people: "I will require my flock at their hand, and cause (the shepherds) to cease feeding from the flock I will deliver the flock from their mouth" (34.10, AV). The message?: leaders matter! Parents, teachers, pastors, bishops, politicians, monarchs, presidents, generals, admirals, media moguls, chief executives, union bosses: the conduct of leaders, in whatever capacity, has a huge effect on the people in their charge, and all leaders are accountable to the Lord God for their conduct. What a difference it would make if today's leaders took that fact seriously.

Then the Lord turns to the flock. "I will deliver my flock from their mouth (10b) I will both search my sheep, and seek them out (11) I will deliver them out of all the places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day (12). And I will bring them out and gather them and bring them to their own land, and feed them in a good pasture There shall they lie in a good fold, in a fat pasture they shall feed I will cause them to lie down (13-15) I will seek that which was lost ... and bring again and will bind up and will strengthen but I will destroy the fat and the strong, I will feed them with judgement" (16) - (and that judgement includes the people themselves (17-22)).

Then, "I will set up one shepherd over them (23) And I the Lord will be their God (24) I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land, and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods (25) I will make them, and the places round about my hill, a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season there shall be showers of blessing (26) And the tree shall yield her fruit, and the earth.... her increase, and they shall be safe in their land, and shall know that I am the Lord (27) they shall no more be a prey, neither shall the beast devour them, they shall dwell safely, none shall make them afraid (28). I will raise up for them a plant of renown, they shall no more be consumed with hunger in the land, neither bear the shame of the heathen any more. Thus shall they know that I the Lord

their God am with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are my people ye my flock I am your God" (29-31).

Quite a list! Now these words were to the Jews, and we have seen since those times several partial fulfilments of these gracious "I wills" and "They shalls". But as we always find in Scripture, such promises have several fulfilments, and the ultimate fulfilment of these words is yet to come: the era of real peace, real plenty, real blessing, in their real land, for God's chosen people, in the millennial reign of Christ. We must never fall into the popular trap of thinking that God has finished with the Jews, and that all such Ezekiel-type promises now only apply to the Church (see especially Romans Chapters 9-11 on this).

But these words do of course now also apply to the Church - spiritually. By God's grace the members of the New Covenant, based on faith in Jesus Christ alone, are heaven-focussed in terms of God's tender promises: "here we have no abiding city our citizenship is in heaven" (Hebrews 13.14 / Philippians 4.20). Ironically, that heaven-focus makes us that much more concerned with the state of this world and its people right now.

So as we hear the often-bleak headlines, we never cease to give thanks to Almighty God, for so many reasons. He knows what He is doing. In Christ Jesus all shall be well, and, in the only ways that really matter, they are also well - right now. Thanks be to God indeed.

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