

The Good Shepherd and the Poor in Spirit

Zech 11:4-14 (text)

6 December 2020, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 16:30

(Put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

Intro

- Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,
- On the Christian calendar, we are in the time of advent!
- *Advent* means *coming* – specifically the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ!
- Now, although you & I (and many Christians today) are eagerly waiting for the *second* coming of our Lord Jesus – especially, the more we see a world in turmoil – we are also remembering the *first* advent/coming of our Lord; yes, His coming of 2,000 years ago, when our gracious & compassionate God worked salvation for His loved ones through the human birth, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, His Son!
- And, at that time, when God’s Old-Covenant people suffered great hardship and oppression, they absolutely longed for the advent/coming of their long-promised Messiah/Christ!
- But, to be honest, that was not the first/only time God’s people were longing for the Saviour’s advent/coming!
- No, already in the days of Zechariah – about five-hundred years before Christ was born in Bethlehem – God’s people were oppressed, and so, already *then*, they were keenly desiring the advent/coming of a saviour!
- And although our text (Zech 11) does not call this saviour by the name “Messiah,” it does use the title “Shepherd” for him – and he was a *good* shepherd!
- Who was this shepherd?
- Well, it was Zechariah whom God had called to take up the office of shepherd over a troubled & troublesome flock!
- You see, our text is part of an important prophetic word¹ which God gave to His people of about 500 BC!

¹ Cf. Zech 9:1 for the beginning of this prophetic oracle/utterance/burden. The Hebrew root of this word, really describes a *burden*, - a burden (a serious matter) that is laid upon those whose ears the oracle is meant for. Cf.

- However, as with so many Old-Testament prophecies, also this one has had more than one fulfilment! Yes, this prophecy regarding Zechariah (a good shepherd of God's people) came to its ultimate and stunning fulfilment in the life & work of THE Good Shepherd, our Lord Jesus Christ!
- So, what is the main message of our text?
- My brother & sister, through our text, God calls you and me to, *just like the poor in spirit of our text*, receive in awe the Good Shepherd – yes, to not reject Him as the majority of His people did!
- And I pray that you & I *will* stand in awe of God as we see how He sovereignly steered events in such a way that this prophecy – first fulfilled in Zechariah – blossomed in the life & ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ!
- So, as you hear this prophecy explained, please see two pictures: Zechariah the good shepherd and Jesus Christ THE Good Shepherd!
- Well, we'd like to expound our text by way of three points...
 - The Good Shepherd Sent
 - The Good Shepherd Rejected
 - The Poor in Spirit Knew

The Good Shepherd Sent

- Verse 4 tells us that God commanded Zechariah to be a good shepherd – yes, God sent Zechariah to go tend a flock that were abused – firstly, by *buyers & sellers*; and secondly, by *bad shepherds*.
- Who were these?
- Let's start with the *flock* – who were they?
- Well, they were God's people in Zechariah's day! They were (as v. 4 says) like a flock doomed to the slaughter! Yes, because this flock (God's people) rejected Him, He was now ready to send them to the slaughter, i.e. to reject them! They were a troublesome people!

STOLZ, F. 1979. נִשְׁמָה ns' aufheben, tragen. (In: Jenni, E. & Westermann, C. 1979. Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament. Band II. München : Chr. Kaiser Verlag. p.116).

- Secondly, who (as v.5 says) were the *buyers & sellers* of the flock?
- Well, in Zechariah’s days, they were several *empires* which, as it were, “bought & sold” God’s people. At the time of Zechariah, it was the *Persian Empire* which “bought & sold” God’s people. But before the Persians, it was the Babylonians. And before the Babylonians, it was the Assyrians. Of course, after Zechariah’s time, more “buyers & sellers” (more empires) would oppress God’s flock – these would be the Greeks and, finally, the Romans at the time of Christ!
- So, these empires were all “buyers & sellers” of God’s “flock” – i.e. His people! And they couldn’t care less about the welfare of God’s people! All they wanted, was to get money out them – to enrich themselves at the expense of God’s people! And that’s why we hear them shout out in glee (in v.5), “***Praise the Lord, I have become rich!***”
- But then, there was a third group of people! The last part of v. 5 calls them “*Shepherds,*” they were bad shepherds of God’s people!
- Why? Well, because if it was not enough that foreign empires (yes, “buyers & sellers”) sucked every “dollar & cent” out of God’s people, now even their own Jewish rulers – i.e. their priests who were supposed to shepherd them with care & love – did their job only out of self-interest!
- And so, God’s flock/people had been troubled by “buyers and sellers” (oppressing empires) and “bad shepherds” (their own priests). On top of that, this same flock/people had become troublesome and rejected their God! That’s why God says (in v.6) that He would no longer have pity on this flock (on these inhabitants of the land). He would cause their oppressors to strike their land, and He would not deliver them from this disaster!²

² Cf. Zech 11:6 6 “*For I will no longer have pity on the inhabitants of the land,*” declares the Lord; “*but behold, I will cause the men to fall, each into another’s power and into the power of his king; and they will strike the land, and I will not deliver them from their power*” (NASB).

- But then God, nevertheless, in great compassion/mercy, gave this troubled & troublesome flock a last chance! That’s why He sent them a good shepherd – the prophet Zechariah!
- And, as this good shepherd, in great obedience, takes up office to do this difficult job, this is what he says (v.7), “***So I pastured the flock marked for slaughter, particularly the oppressed of the flock...***”
- My brother & sister, did you hear the words ***particularly the oppressed of the flock!***?
- Well, the word “oppressed” (of the flock) is the same as the words “poor in spirit,” when our Lord said in His Sermon on the Mount, “***Blessed are the poor in spirit...***”³
- So, in saying, “***I pastured the flock marked for slaughter, particularly the oppressed of the flock,*** Zechariah, the good shepherd, revealed that he was of the same spirit/Spirit as our Lord Jesus Christ who, five-hundred years after Zechariah, would come as THE Good Shepherd, and fulfil our text by loving *the poor in spirit!*
- Now, with what kind of heart does good shepherd, Zechariah, take up his office?
- Well, the names of his two staffs reveals this good shepherd’s intention/attitude/heart! He says (in the last part of v.7), “***Then I took two staffs and called one Favour and the other Union, and I pastured the flock.***”
- Why did he call his first staff “Favour”?
- Well, because, with this guiding-and-protecting staff, the good shepherd symbolised the LORD’s gracious favour towards His loved ones in that flock!
- And why did Zechariah call his second staff “Union”?
- Well, because that’s a symbol of the good shepherd’s desire that all God’s people (the whole flock) would live in *unity* – a unity

³ Indeed, where Jesus says (in Mt 5:5), “Blessed are the poor in spirit (the meek) for they will inherit the earth,” the Greek word for “poor in spirit” is *prō-ys* (πραῦς). Now, of course, in saying “Blessed are the poor in spirit for they will inherit the earth,” Jesus is quoting from Ps 37:11 which says, “But the meek (poor in spirit) shall inherit the earth.” And, if one now looks up the Hebrew word for “meek (poor in spirit)” in Ps 37:11, one sees it’s from the word ‘ōnī (אָנִי) “poor, afflicted, humble” – the same word as in our Text (in Zech 11:7). If one then looks up Ps 37:11 (or 36:11 in the Septuagint) in the Greek text of the Septuagint to see how the Greek has rendered the Hebrew ‘ōnī (אָנִי), one sees that the same word as in Mt 5:5 is used, i.e. *pra-uus* (πραῦς), i.e. οἱ δὲ *πραεῖς* κληρονομήσουσιν γῆν...

which could only come if each individual “sheep” in God’s “flock” would in great humility submit him/herself to the Lord!

- Well, that was point 1: “The Good Shepherd Sent!”
- Here is point 2...

The Good Shepherd Rejected

- Verse 8 tells us that the good shepherd had success: in one month (30 days) He got rid of 3 shepherds.
- Now, the numbers in this verse are to be taken symbolically: in 30 days (a complete time = 3x10) the Good Shepherd had shifted the people’s hearts from 3 bad shepherds to himself. Yes, within a complete number of days, the good shepherd got rid of a complete number of selfish Jewish leaders!
- Up to this point in the story we could say: the flock’s doom (their state of ready-for-the-slaughter) had all to do with their selfish rulers; it was not *their* fault.
- Yet, from this point forward, it becomes clear that the flock (at least the majority of them) is also to blame for their bad state!
- You see, now something bad happens: verse 8 tells us the flock (now, that’s *not* the whole flock, yet the majority/bulk of the flock) started to feel a loathing⁴ for the Good Shepherd. They rejected Him.
- Well, what’s new? The majority of God’s covenant people (Ancient Israel) had always treated God’s good shepherds with contempt! (Remember our Lord’s parable of the wicked tenants of the vineyard).⁵
- Now look what the Good Shepherd says after He, too, got weary of the flock:
- ***“I will not be your shepherd. Let the dying die, and let the perishing perish. Let those who are left eat one another’s flesh.”***
(v.9)

⁴ בָּהֵל S⁹⁷³ TWOT^{228, 229} GK¹⁰⁴¹] **vb. feel loathing** (cf. Syriac **ܒܗܝܠ** (*bhil*) (so in lexx.) *nauseated* (cf. Gei²⁷⁹); Nö^{xvii} (1897),¹⁸⁸ disproves Syriac **ܒܗܝܠ** (*bhil*), and adopts the view of Gei²⁷⁰ (בָּהֵל euphem. for a √ II. בעל = *loathe*, c. בָּ, assumed (Thes Buhl) for Je 3:14; 31:32; v. infr. on p. 127a). NSyr. **ܒܗܝܠ** (*baḥel*) *envy* cf. Stoddard^{Gram. 12, 57}) Pf. 3 fs. **בָּהֵלָה** Zc 11:8 **כִּי בִּי וְגַם נִפְשֵׁם בִּי נִפְשֵׁי בָהֵם** *felt a loathing* against me (Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (p. 103). Oxford: Clarendon Press).

⁵ Mt 21:33-41

- Well, it's not as if the *Good Shepherd* is the one causing them to perish & eat one another up! No, the disaster which is going to befall the flock is the natural result of them having rejected their Good Shepherd!⁶
- What happens next?
- Well, now the Good Shepherd decided to break the first sceptre He had chosen – the one called “favour” (cf. v 11), it is not as if it is *He* who is prompting the flock's disaster; no, He is merely confirming that they, themselves, have broken the wonderfully protective “favour” of the Good Shepherd which they had!
- But, hang on! Within this flock (this people of God) there are still those whom the Good Shepherd loves. Did He not reveal that He particularly favoured/loved the oppressed (afflicted) of the flock (the poor in spirit)?⁷ What about them?
- Well, more about them later on!
- Now, something very striking happened!
- Before the Good Shepherd broke the 2nd sceptre, He granted the flock another chance to think well on their decision of rejecting Him. So, He puts this thought-provoking question to them: ***“If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it”*** (v 12).
- And indeed, the flock decided to give Him something!
- But, my brother & sister, look what they did!
- According to v12b they gave Him thirty pieces of silver!
- Now, there's something very significant about this! You see, the Jewish law-book prescribed that if someone else's slave died while working for you, then, as compensation, you should pay thirty pieces of silver to that slave's master.⁸

⁶ Note well: of major importance is the fact alluded to by Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). [*Commentary on the Old Testament*](#) (Vol. 10, pp. 591–597). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson. Keil says that the main verbs in this verse are not jussives but simply imperfects. This is a major point for the exegesis and interpretation of this verse, for it means that unlike all translations above (NIV & Afrikaans) and also unlike KJV, Amplified Version and NAS, we should not translate ‘let the dying die ... let the perishing perish ... let eat...’ but rather ‘the dying will die ... the perishing will perish ... they will eat ...’ which means that the person speaking here (the good shepherd as rep of Yahweh) is not expressing his heart's desire, but a fact – i.e. because they have rejected Him, it is a fact that they would die.

⁷ Remember v.7b *So I pastured the flock marked for slaughter, particularly the oppressed of the flock.*

⁸ Ex 21:32 *If the bull gores a male or female slave, the owner must pay thirty shekels of silver to the master of the slave, and the bull must be stoned.*

- Well, no wonder the Good Shepherd was grieved!
- They should have given Him hearts filled with repentance, faith, obedience & love – really (if you think of it) these are the only true wages any human being can give to the Good Shepherd (and, yes, to God)!
- But look what they’ve done: By paying Him thirty silver pieces it’s as if they were saying, “You were no better than a worthless slave to us!”
- As the commentator says, they would have done better by giving Him *nothing*, rather than *this* amount!⁹
- Well so far, point 2: “The Good Shepherd Rejected.”
- Here is the last point...

The Poor in Spirit Knew!

- Look! Here (in v.13) is the LORD’s (Yahweh’s) reaction to the despicable price at which the majority of the flock rejected His good shepherd! Says He: ***“Throw it to the potter”—the handsome price at which they priced me!***¹⁰
- My brother & sister, the words ***“Throw it to the potter!”*** had a double meaning (it was a pun):
 - if taken *literally*, it means to throw the thirty silver pieces to someone who works with ceramics (earthen ware).
 - Yet, taken as a common Hebrew saying of that time, it means “chuck it to the birds!” – i.e. “throw it in the rubbish!”
- My brother & sister, look what the Good Shepherd now does with the thirty pieces! Verse13: ***So, I took the thirty shekels of silver and threw them to the potter in the house of the Lord.***
- He threw them into the *temple*! Why the temple?
- Well, so that he could have this contemptuous price before the face of God that “God might call His people to account for it.”¹¹

⁹ ‘By paying thirty shekels, they therefore gave him to understand that they did not estimate his service higher than the labour of a purchased slave. To offer such wages was in fact “more offensive than direct refusal!” (Keil, *ibid*).

¹⁰ NIV

¹¹ Keil, (*ibid*)

- But, my brother & sister, look, for what's coming now is truly awe-inspiring!
- You see, the expression 'throw it to the potter' not only expresses contempt, neither was it just a pun! No, God cared for it that even this contemptuous expression was fulfilled to the last letter. You see, here are the words of Mt 27:3-5.

When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. ⁴ "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood."

"What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility."

*⁵ So Judas threw the money into the temple... (See? Just like Zechariah, the good shepherd, had done). **Then he went away and hanged himself.***

- Now, please hear what happens next with these thirty silver pieces...

*Mt 27:6-10: **The chief priests picked up the coins and said, "It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money."** ⁷ So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners. ⁸ That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day. ⁹ Then what was spoken by Jeremiah¹² the prophet was fulfilled: "They took the thirty silver coins, the price set on him by the people of Israel, ¹⁰ and they used them to buy the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me."*

¹² Now, please don't think that when Matthew says, "Jeremiah," that he has made a mistake – as if he should have said, "Zechariah." No, Matthew did not make a mistake here! He did not confuse the names of Jeremiah and Zechariah. What Matthew did here is: he combined the information from Zechariah 11 with that of Jeremiah 19. You see, Jer 19 shows many resemblances with Mt 27, e.g. Judah & Jerusalem have shed innocent blood (Jer 19:4 & Mt 27:4); Chief priests and elders are mentioned prominently (Jer 19:1 & Mt 27:3,6,7); A potter is mentioned (Jer 19:1, 11; Mt 27:7, 10). Tophet, i.e. the Valley of Hinnom (the very valley where according to tradition, the Potter's Field was located) has its name changed to "the Valley of Slaughter," which is about the same as "the Field of Blood" (Jer 19:6 & Mt 27:8, cf. Acts 1:19). And this valley becomes a well-known "burial place" (Jer 19:11 & Mt 27:7). For all this information (and more), please cf. HENDRIKSEN, W. 2004. Exposition of the Gospel according to Matthew (In: Hendriksen, W. ed. New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Books. p.947-948)

- See, my brother & sister, the thirty pieces of silver literally went to the *potter*! As one commentator has put it:
*“...by this very fact not only was the prophecy almost literally fulfilled; but, so far as the sense (meaning) is concerned, it was so exactly fulfilled, that everyone could see that the same God who had spoken through the prophet, had by the secret operation of His omnipotent power, ... so arranged the matter that Judas threw the money into the temple, to bring it before the face of God as blood-money, and to call down the vengeance of God upon the nation, and that the high priest, by purchasing the potter’s field for this money, perpetuated the memorial of the sin committed against their Messiah. ... ”*¹³
- Wow! What great God whose sovereign hand is here so clearly seen in the steering of history and the fulfilling of prophecy!
- But, here’s now a question:
- What happened to the oppressed of the flock ... the afflicted ... the remnant of God’s people ... or in the words of the NT – the “poor in spirit,” the ones about whom the Good Shepherd said He particularly loved pasturing them? What happened to them?
- Well, v 11 reveals: ***the afflicted of the flock who were watching me knew/realised it was the word of the LORD***
- My brother & sister, the poor in spirit, the humble-hearted knew the Good Shepherd’s rejection was the word/will of God; it was all within His planning.¹⁴
- How did the poor in spirit know this?
- Well, in Jn 10:14 we read ***I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me!***
- So, how did the poor in spirit know that their Good Shepherd was to be rejected?

¹³ Keil (ibid)

¹⁴ Also cf. Is 53:6 & 10 ***All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all... ¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days...*** (Emphasis mine)

- They knew it, because they knew Him! (*I know my sheep & my sheep know me!*)
- Here's a question: Do you/I know the Good Shepherd?
- You know, God's Old-Covenant people were longing and praying for His advent/coming!
- But, sadly, the majority of that flock was not poor in spirit! They were haughty in spirit! So, they missed Him when He came the first time – they rejected Him!
- Will you & be ready for Him when He comes again!?
- Verse 11 in our text continues saying that the poor in spirit *were watching* the Good Shepherd! They were in tune with Him! They loved Him! They fully understood He was the Good Shepherd and that He had to lay down His life for them (Jn 10:11)¹⁵ – that His death was their atonement; would bring them peace with God!
- And those who rejected the Good Shepherd? Well, v.9 became true for them! They got indeed destroyed!
- You see, was not this prophecy, in shock & horror, fulfilled in the year 70 AD when Rome sacked Jerusalem and deported many Jews!? So, for 2000 years, the Jews had no land of their own.
- My brother & sister, I pray that, having heard this prophecy and seen its fulfilment (to the letter), you will not be like the majority of the flock who rejected the Good Shepherd!¹⁶
- Instead, I pray that you will be among the poor in spirit (the humble-hearted), who knew the Good Shepherd's voice and were closely watching Him, and then knew that all He did (and all that happened to Him) was the will of God!
- This is the only way you'll be ready for His second/final advent!

AMEN (2616 words excluding footnotes)

¹⁵ *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*

¹⁶ Cf. Jn 1:11 *He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him*