

We Are the One Percent

The word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.”

Ezekiel 34:1-6

As is my habit during communion, I pour over a passage—usually Isaiah or Psalms—of messianic import. My preliminary thoughts on this passage took me down a familiar path recounting the kings of Israel in their failure to follow God, in the importance of leadership to teach God’s ways and live by them, and in our need for such leadership in the church. The kingdom of God is about God’s reign on this earth. When Israel called upon Samuel for a king, she rejected God’s theocracy and opted for a monarchy with its economic and social stability. Are times really so different from those of so long ago? We quickly embrace personal wellbeing over deference to God’s will. How can we ever be in the kingdom of God if God is truly not our king?

My thoughts then wandered to the recent Wall Street uprising and the plight of the ninety-nine percent. How often has the one percent profited by taking advantage of the ninety-nine percent? The movement pushed back against this aged-old custom and called for change. Even recent events in my own life has seen management taking advantage of the recent economic decline to take away simple niceties simply because they can. However, God did not allow me to linger in self-pity for the meaning of these Ezekiel’s words suddenly burst forth along a new line of deliberation, “We are the one percent!” The idea stunned me at first, yet in Christ, I am a part of the one percent.

In Christ, we are the privileged, the chosen and, most importantly, his shepherds to this world. I realized how God had shepherded me all my life and how he call me to pass on these lessons to others who are in need of the Good Shepherd. Our riches do not come from silver or gold but from an enriched life that enriches others. Genuine living cannot wait upon favorable conditions before one enjoys life. We must choose to live in whatever moment we have been given. More importantly, I must examine what kind of shepherd I am. What harsh edges must I shave off of my mannerisms? What am I feeding my sheep? How am I oppressing those under me? Am I treating those under me the way I would want to be treated?

Then I thought more of what a shepherd does and what kind of shepherd God has been to me. I looked once more at Psalm 23. Through hard times God has never left me in want. He has made lie down in green pastures even when I could not see how green it was. He has led me to still waters even though many around me raged like white waters. He has restored my soul time and time again. He has taken me down the path of righteousness and guarded my heart in more ways than I can count. Is this not the essence of the gospel that we preach? Death and evil cannot touch lives focused on God working in us. *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever”* (Psalm 23:4-6).

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