Ezekiel 34: 23-24 Then I will raise up over them one Shepherd, and he will tend them, my servant David. He will tend them, and he will be their shepherd. I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David will be the Prince among them. I, the Lord, have spoken.

Today we are involved in the last Sunday of the Church year. Typically, in the days of my youth these last Sundays of the church year had these long fancy “Latin” names, and I remember envying the Pastors because not only could they pronounce those fancy words, but if you asked them they could tell you what they meant. Today we simply name the last four Sunday as: Reformation, Last Judgement, Saints Triumphant and Christ the King Sunday.

We managed to be together for Reformation Sunday and then we got interrupted. I am grateful to be back and give thanks to our God and Lord for his grace and love during the past two weeks or so of illness and recovery. I will tell you, to come back and be a part of Christ the King Sunday…what an awesome blessing. For this Sunday, of all the “non-festival” Sundays, is one that most singularly focuses on the joy and marvel of what our faith is about.

As I began thinking about this Sunday and the possible sermon I would write, I got very blessed. Across my social media page came a post concerning faith. I want you to listen to what it says. Listen closely and then we will discuss the message. It is titled “Hope.”

*For Christians, hope is ultimately hope in Christ. The hope that he really is what for centuries we have been claiming he is. The hope that despite the fact that sin and death still rule the world, he somehow conquered them. The hope that in him and through him all of us stand a chance of somehow conquering them too. The hope that at some unforeseeable time and in some unimaginable way he will return with healing in his wings.”*

What do you think? Do you think these are wise and wonderful words full of faith? I can tell you that the author is an author of numerous books and a Presbyterian minister. In other words, a modern day preacher. I will also tell you that another short paragraph was in the quote, a short paragraph that praised the Apostle Paul for not mincing the truth of Jesus. It did nothing to change my opinion of the paragraph that I quoted. While most people would read it and just gush over what is said, as if it were wisdom and marvel itself, I read it, and just about gagged!

It wasn’t because he spoke of hope. At the beginning I assumed that by hope he meant exactly what God’s Word says hope is: “a sure and certain confidence.” So yes, our sure and certain confidence is in Christ. But after that, I feel this man abandoned and deserted hope and what Jesus truly is about. Take his next line: *“The hope that he really is what for centuries we have been claiming he is.”* Seriously, you are not sure Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world, the fulfiller of all of God’s Word? You don’t grasp that our claim of Christ the King is based on God’s Word and its absolute truth and marvel? You see, with this sentence he actually abandons the definition of hope in the Biblical sense and resorts to speaking of hope in the world’s sense of “a pious and intense wish.” You, hope Christ is what He is claimed to be? I am appalled.

The next line. *“The hope that despite the fact that sin and death still rule the world, he somehow conquered them.”* That’s exactly the way Jesus told us it would be. Did this guy not hear the lesson of our Epistle reading? There we were exactly told: **“Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has done away with every other ruler and every other authority and power. For he must reign ‘until he has put all his enemies under his feet.’ Death is the last enemy to be done away with.”** Jesus made it clear he rules and reigns in heaven in exact accord with God’s eternal plan. And then to suggest that our hope is that “somehow” Christ conquered sin and death. What does he think Jesus did, sold peanuts! This one statement makes a mockery of the cross, the atoning sacrifice, and the very hell Jesus suffered for the entire world.

Then that next statement just irks me all the more. I am most disturbed by it because in truth it is the epitome of what has happened to modern Christianity and I will say that if you believe what this guy suggests, you have abandoned Christ and salvation. He wrote: “*The hope that in him and through him all of us stand a chance of somehow conquering them too.”* Do you see the utter godlessness? Christ conquered sin and death for me and all people. I don’t have to guess. I don’t have to hope I stand a chance. I don’t have to do some extra work. I don’t have to chip in and help or be extra “good” to maybe earn heaven. Jesus did it all! That is the point of the resurrection. It doesn’t rely on me or any ability of mine, it relies on the resurrection, the complete and utter fulfillment of God’s promises so that we would never doubt or never have to worry “have I done enough?” I am the victor in Christ! Heaven is my home because of Jesus and what He did. Simply put. and the heart of our faith, Christ is the King, now and always! Let’s just continue to speak of Jesus through the words of our text. Yep, our theme: CHRIST THE KING!

What a joy and privilege to preach on the words before us. Please note that Ezekiel was one of many exiles hauled off to Babylon as punishment from the Lord for centuries, yes centuries of godlessness from his people. It wasn’t just the people. The rulers and religious leadership had also abandon God’s promises and truths and had turned a Jewish faith, meant to teach God’s love and grace, into a work righteous, self-exalting religion that had trouble finding God even when he was among them. Ezekiel was God’s prophet. At first he was in the land of Judah, preaching that Jerusalem and the Temple were going to be utterly destroyed. Then after the destruction he was right about, Ezekiel ended up in exile where he had opportunity to preach God’s grace and love to a people God promises to restore. And the cool thing about these promises is that not only were they promises of going back to the homeland, and being a nation again, a necessary requirement because the Christ, the Savior would come from the Jewish people and be born in the land of Abraham. These are really prophecies of God’s saving grace and love for the whole world, promises of eternal life and salvation.

I think you probably noticed such statements like: **“So I will examine my flock and rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness.”** With such words as these we confront the problem of every human: sin. Sin that destroys and scatters. Sin that brings dark days, struggles, turmoil, disaster and the like. It is when we give in to sin, when we determine that God and what he has to say doesn’t count now or ever that the true nature of sin shows itself. And our world suffers for it. The Babylonian Captivity, just like the slavery of Egypt and the Exodus, are mini histories of sin and God’s deliverance. And how is this deliverance accomplished? Well, I can tell you quite clearly that it is not the sheep that will bring it about or even have an impact on it. We are scattered, lost in trespass and sin, we need rescue and saving for sure.

And that is what this text highlights. Just go back and reread these words. Reread and hear where all the action is. The action starts when God says, **“I myself will seek.”** Those words alone should excite us. God is going to take action. God is going to be the cause of all that is promised here. Then listen to this string of action words from God: **“I will rescue, bring them out, gather them, shepherd them, pasture them, seek the lost, bring back the strays, bind up the injured, strengthen the weak, shepherd them in justice, I will judge, I will save, I will raise up over them one Shepherd, and I the Lord, will be their God.”** Dear people, if you walk away from this text only knowing that one of the clear lessons is that the Lord and the Lord alone is going to be the source of salvation and rescue, then we have accomplished our goal. In the plans and promises of God it is not what we will do or even hope to do that will be the difference. It is what the Lord will, and eventually does do. In other words, our entire hope, our sure and certain confidence, is that the Lord God will rescue and save us, all according to his plan and purpose.

That plan and purpose is pointed to in the words: **“Then I will raise up over them one Shepherd, and he will tend them, my servant David. He will tend them, and he will be their shepherd. I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David will be the Prince among them. I, the Lord, have spoken.”** Yes, make no mistake, here are words about the coming Savior Jesus and the marvel and wonder that Jesus is.

In my life, I have learned that I just can’t stop talking about Jesus as our Savior, as the very Son of God who came to make the atoning sacrifice for our sins. I will tell you it took me a long time to grasp this awe and wonder of Jesus and I will never tire of telling it the way it is. God, in accord with his promises, yes, even in accord with the words of Ezekiel, promised to send that One Shepherd, that one shepherd who is a descendant of David and who would be Prince among his people. There is only one who fits that calling: our Lord Jesus Christ.

What did Jesus come to do? To be God? Seriously, He was God from the beginning. He came to be our Savior. He came to take on human form and substance so that he might live and die under the law of God, thus serving and fulfilling what God had promised. Remember that string of words: **“I will rescue, bring them out, gather them, shepherd them, pasture them, seek the lost, bring back the strays, bind up the injured, strengthen the weak, and shepherd them in justice, I will judge, I will save, I will raise up over them one Shepherd, and I the Lord, will be their God.”** Jesus fulfills these words. He is God, the Son of God who came to make sure all of these things happened. He did that in a unique way that the world still has trouble grasping.

And what is the world’s problem? It no longer believes Jesus suffered and died on the cross to atone for sin. The world doesn’t believe in one of the darkest hours of human history, and how God’s Son took on sin, death and the devil for our sake. Does that sink in? Jesus took the punishment of eternal hell for all of mankind on the cross. Yes, paid for every sin so we don’t have to. The world no longer believes that Jesus actually and physically rose from the dead. To them this is just a myth that developed. Why such a myth developed they can never explain. Why people took a Jewish guy killed by Romans, and who according to them, stayed dead, why develop this lying myth of Jesus a Savior? For fame? It cost them their lives to preach Jesus. Because another religion was needed? Seriously the Roman world was filled with religions and gods galore, why another? I know, the early Christians felt there were too many people and so they started a religion that got its members killed for the next 400 years! Brilliant!

Dear People, Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world from sin. Once Jesus rose from the dead, he gave ample and unshakeable proof to the people that He had come back to life. Those people proclaimed Jesus, the Christ the Savior of the world. And so it has been. This same Jesus, in fulfillment of God’s Word ascended into heaven and we are told, sits and rules over all things until it is time for him to return again. When he returns, every person, dead or alive, will know that Jesus Christ is Lord and King of all.

There it is. Either you believe what God’s Word clearly says of Jesus or you do not. If you are not going to believe it, if you are going to chop it and clip it and change it, so that it fits what you want, well, just stop. Stop pretending Jesus is your Savior and your King. Just come right out and say, “Hey, I really think all this Jesus stuff is just stupid and hurtful to the world.” Me, Jesus is my Savior. He atoned for my sins and the sins of all who would believe and trust in him as Lord and King. The message of Jesus is, “I love you, I offer you eternal salvation. If you don’t want that fine, but I offer it to you free and certain. Hear and believe in my love and gift to you.” I do, Jesus, I do believe! Amen.