

Pastor Kris Litman-Koon

Date: 26 November 2023

Lesson: Christ the King Sunday | Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

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<sup>11</sup>Thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. <sup>12</sup>As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. <sup>13</sup>I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the watercourses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. <sup>14</sup>I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. <sup>15</sup>I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. <sup>16</sup>I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice.

<sup>20</sup>Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them: I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. <sup>21</sup>Because you pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide, <sup>22</sup>I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged; and I will judge between sheep and sheep.

<sup>23</sup>I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. <sup>24</sup>And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken.

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A gentle breeze rolls over me, rocking me gently into consciousness, like a parent waking a drowsy child. I stretch my limbs while filling my lungs with air... hold it... then relax. My body's sensations tell me that I am lying prone, on sandy soil. The smells tell me that I'm in unfamiliar territory. I begin to blink my eyes to see... once again... my tiny avian friend approaching me on the ground with its little skips. Now within inches of my face, she tilts her black and white feathered head to look me square in the eye. "**Chick-a-dee-dee-dee-dee-dee,**" she says to me. I smile and I begin to sit myself up. There is a small concrete building next to me, so I lean my back against it.

Looking out, I see a beautiful land. In the distance, it is mostly desert with scatterings of small trees and grasses. Closer to me, however, is a small farm. It is a field composed of precise rows of bushes. My small friend flies itself to my knee, and together we gaze upon the landscape.

I take note that the unfamiliar smells are not just from this foreign desert and this vegetation, but also from something burning. As that realization strikes me, I see a human figure emerge from a small ridge that lies just past the farm. I recognize him as John, my exuberant Kenyan friend who has joined me on these previous visions. The little Chickadee bird on my knee spots John as well. She turns to look at me, pauses, then says, "**Chick-a-dee-dee-dee,**" as if seeking my permission. With a smirk on my face, I give her a nod of my head. She then takes off through a row of the bushes, flying directly past John. I see him smile as she passes him. Placing my hands against the ground and the wall behind me, I hoist myself onto my feet. I shake the dust off myself as I begin my journey into the field. Soon enough, I am within feet of John. We pause our steps for a moment in order to get a good look at each other. We both smile, laugh, and make those final steps to embrace. "**Brother Kris,**" he says. "**It is great to see you.**"

"John, it is so good to see you again." Upon finishing our hug, we take a step back. I tell him "This past year has flown by." "**Time's flow is a beautiful thing,**" he says to me. I take a moment to look at these rows that surround us. "What is this bush that is being cultivated, John?" "**That is the jojoba bush, Brother Kris.**" I had heard of it before, but I had never seen this bush in person. "Jojoba oil is used for healing wounds, correct?" John nods his head. I continue, "It's native to Arizona and the southwest. Is that where we are, John?" "**No,**" John says. With a bit of disheartenment, he continues, "**We are in Israel.**" I turn to look again at the building with the concrete facade where I had been seated. I now see some bullet holes in it. Some scorch marks, too. Beyond this building I see various pillars of smoke rising into the air. "John, this is a vision that I don't want to see." "**Neither do I, Brother Kris.**" He gently grabs my upper arm, directing me to follow him back toward the building. "**But we cannot ignore this,**" he says to me.

As we make our way out of the field, I have a fuller view of this vision. Bullet shells littering the ground. Blood streaked across walls. John and I step into the street to see what has taken place

here. The exteriors of all the homes are left in rubble. We walk further, and we notice bodies. I have to turn away from the scene. Upon my turning, before me now is the charred remains of a building. I lift my head to take in the whole thing. All that remains inside of this house are ashes, and the realization hits me that this was someone's final shelter before the flames took over. "Give me a name, John."

**"This community is Kibbutz Be'eri. At least 130 people died here."**

"No, John. Give me the name of a victim... in there," as I motion to the building in front of us. We look at the burned building together. John clears his throat, and then he says, **"Leil Hetzroni and her twin brother Yanai Hetzroni. They were 12."** We stand there staring at the building. A full minute must pass. "Why, John? Why?" He doesn't answer as we both continue staring. "Why, John? Why give me *this* vision?" He is silent. "Why did these attacks happen? Why is war so complex? Why are thousands upon thousands dying in this war, John? Children and civilians with nowhere to flee to. Why can't peace be achieved? Why during war do the common people suffer so much?" He says nothing. So I turn to glare at him. "You've had all the answers before, John. Do you have nothing to say to me? No wise insights to share? Fine. I can handle it. But at least say something to the ashes of Leil and Yanai!"

He continues facing the building, but I see now that he is shedding tears as he quietly says to Leil and Yanai, **"You bear the image of God."** We stand there silently. After a moment, John says, **"God weeps, too, Brother Kris. God weeps, too."** "I believe that, John. I really do. I sometimes forget that, though, when I *also* really want God to just clean up our mess, or to somehow prevent us from making the mess in the first place."

**"Someone, as you say, to swoop in and save the day, eh?"**

"Yes. That would let me off the hook." **"Off the hook from doing what, Brother Kris?"**

I think it through for a moment. "If superheroes were around to save the day, then normal people like me wouldn't have to do the work of pursuing justice, of caring for others, and of standing up to bullies who are filled with hate."

"**I see,**" says John. "Sometimes the hardest part of being a Christian is accepting a message that says we should anticipate our king's arrival in the end to set things straight. I would appreciate it more if that king set things straight now." We both continue to look at the building where Leil and Yanai died. "I guess it is up to normal people like me to do it," I say. "**To an extent, Brother Kris, but you are not alone. Others are with you, and God is with you.**" "But sometimes it feels as though God is sitting on the sidelines, waiting until the final seconds of the game to put on the helmet and finally go on the field to make the big play."

"**Brother Kris, very few of your passages describe God's kingship as a powerful victor in the end. Far more passages describe God as the one who wipes away tears and who heals wounds.**" Still looking at the ashes, I respond, "Is it God's nature to weep with us and bear wounds with us?" "**Yes, Brother Kris, and only when God has wiped away all our tears will God's own tears be wiped away.**"

"Leil and Yanai," I say, addressing them in this burned building "may your memories be a blessing." John and I then begin walking back toward the jojoba field. "The people grow these plants in order to produce oil that heals wounds." I state matter-of-factly. "**Yes, they do.**" We continue our strides into the rows of bushes. "John, I'll always wish that we would have an oil that is able to heal every wound out there. Or prevent wounds from occurring in the first place. I'll always wish that." "**Me too,**" he says, "**but that is wishing for a superhero in a bottle.**" "I guess we will have to be the ones who do what we can to heal, to care, and to work against harbingers of hate." "**Yes, and God's reign as King is revealed in that work,**" John says to me.

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