



Strange Hirelings

Having been called out of the traditional institutional Church, in the sense of salary, position, title, and membership, and into the simple relational understanding of Church, I have often been drawn to ponder Jesus' teaching in John 10, on His place as our Shepherd. I'm not saying I have rejected the traditional Church, or my brethren located there. Not at all! It is just that I no longer seek my significance in that approach to Church, and believe He has shown me many significant concerns of His heart for it.

Senior Pastors in traditional Churches, while they "say" they are just "under shepherds," to the Chief Shepherd, by the time their leadership is fully manifest and the tally is added up, they have often unintentionally actually usurped His place of Chief Shepherd, or at least required of Him that He share that roll with them. Thus it becomes "their" Church... "their people," and "their" vision for the Church.

In the last few years literally millions of people, worldwide, have heard an inner voice of the Lord leading them out of environments where Jesus is marginalized and the pastors have been maximized. He is gathering His sheep back to Himself.

So, I returned again to John 10, to feed at the well of Jesus' leadership, and I saw some things I found fascinating, and so I'm sharing them with you. That's what I do, and who I am. I see my leadership these days as one called to "see," "feed," and "encourage."

I will make some insertions in the text and then I'll explain why I did.

John 10:1 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a ¹thief and a robber.

John 10:2 But he who enters by the door is the ²shepherd of the sheep.

John 10:3 To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

John 10:4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

John 10:5 A ³stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."

John 10:6 This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

John 10:7 So Jesus **AGAIN** said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.

John 10:8 All who came before me are ¹thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them.

John 10:9 ²I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

John 10:10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have

life and have it abundantly.

John 10:11 I am the **good shepherd**. The **good shepherd** lays down his life for the sheep.

John 10:12 He who is a **hired hand (stranger)** and not a **shepherd**, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.

John 10:13 He flees because he is a **hired hand (stranger)** and cares nothing for the sheep.

John 10:14 **I am the good shepherd**. I know my own and my own know me,

John 10:15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

John 10:16 And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

In verses 1-5 Jesus talks of three leadership roles:

1. Thief & Robber.
2. Shepherd.
3. Stranger.

According to verses 6 & 7 Jesus can tell the people didn't get His metaphor, and very unusual to Jesus' style, He takes another run at it. Generally Jesus, when detecting that the people didn't get what He was saying, left them in their confusion and just moved on, but not this time. Why not? Could it be that the story was just so immediately important to their lives that He knew He must make one more attempt at getting them to understand what He was saying? After all, one of His central teaching themes was that the Pharisees had stolen God's flock from Him and were leading them to become two-fold sons of Hell. Obviously this concerned Him greatly, as it should, and as it should in every generation of the Church. Sadly, it hasn't often enough...

Now watch these three roles appear again, but note that role three is the same as the role 3 mentioned above, but it is apparently the point where they lost Him in His first attempt, and which prompted Him to retell the story, so they would be certain not to miss the nature and role of this character. Here they are AGAIN in verse 7-16

1. Thief & Robber. (Nothing new here - in terms of designation)
2. Shepherd. (Nothing new here - in terms of designation)
3. Hireling. (The use of John's word "AGAIN" tells me this character is the same as the "Stranger" of verse 5. Very interesting...)

What is this role? That of "Strange Hirelings."

In verse 5 the sheep relate to this "Stranger" in two ways.

1. They won't follow him for long. I.e. they awaken to his lack of leadership and refuse to follow him.
2. They run away from him. I.e. there comes a time when they realize he is feeding them bad food, his leadership is leading them away from the Chief Shepherd, and they just

know, if they are ever to be fed again, they are going to have to run away from him.

In verse 7-16 Jesus further defines the nature of this Stranger, and tells us several important things about him:

1. Vs. 12 He doesn't own the sheep. He acts like he does... He thinks he does... But, in reality he doesn't, and apparently the sheep finally wake up to this and run away from him. We'll visit this again.
2. Vs. 12 The term "Hireling," tells us some important things. First, he has a different motivation towards the sheep than does the Chief Shepherd. He's "after" something...I.e. a wage, I.e. something "for him." We'll come back to this.
3. Vs. 12 He doesn't have the same love and care for the sheep as does the Chief Shepherd. When danger to his goals come he proves he lacks true leadership and does things that desert the best interests of the sheep, in favor of serving his personal needs and desires. We'll come back to this too.
4. Vs. 13 He deserts the best interests of the flock because "he cares nothing for the sheep." Ouch! That's a hard word. We'll visit this again too.

Now let's take up these three indictments of the "Strange Hireling":

1. Jesus makes it so wonderfully clear, that no matter how leaders view their role in the body of Christ, they **MUST NEVER** view it as **OWNERSHIP!** Leaders don't own the flocks. They aren't "in charge," as if it were their responsibility to act like owners of the flock. They lead, not "boss." They don't make decisions in behalf of the flock like an owner would make for his business. They don't have this prerogative. When they act this way it shows they know nothing about true New Testament leadership.

If you find yourself relating to a leader that acts like he owns the flock, and doesn't respect your opinions, desires, and concerns, it is time to pack up your tent and run away. For you to think they will value your concerns, and diminish their sense of ownership is to buck up against their security and significance, and until they see "In Christ," how wrong their leadership is, they will never respect your concerns.

Leaders don't have the right to control what goes on in the gathering and in the personal lives of the flock. They don't set the agenda for the meetings, set the doctrine, decide what will be taught in gathering. It is not theirs to do this. This belongs exclusively to the Chief Shepherd, and wise sheep will recognize this and make moves to protect themselves and their families from this.

2. Those who fail to comprehend true leadership, look at their roles as a means to obtain something that will enhance their security and significance. It might be money, power, prestige, or fame, but it is something, and that something is deadly to their leadership and hurtful to the flock.

Leadership must **NEVER** be about obtaining something for the leader. Leadership is all about serving the Chief Shepherd, remembering the flock belongs to Him, and faithfully caring for the needs of the flock, trusting that whatever the Shepherd desires for him will come to him when he handles his leadership in this manner.

If we could dissect the way many traditional pastors handle their authority, and excise their “motivational” center for “why” they do what they do; because the traditional system is, by nature, a usurpation of Jesus’ role, we would find all kinds of inner motivations to obtain things for themselves that rob Jesus of His rightful role and ownership of the flock. This is just as true for the “nice guy - gentle” pastors, as for the brutal and insensitive ones.

The very moment a “title of respect” is given to the leader, whether it is “Pastor,” or “Reverend,” or “Bishop,” or “Elder,” in that moment we are setting that leader up to receive something that will set in motion a string of “ownership” moves that will often take Jesus’ body away from Him, and damage that leader’s leadership. Titles are “wages,” special treatment is “wages.” Clergy salary is “wages.” (I’m not saying that teaching/apostolic workers aren’t to be paid, or receive wages/salary, but I’m saying they are not to be given a set salary by a congregation, as a hired clergy wage. Gifts, blessings, support - YES! - hired clergy status - NO!), a special parking space is a “wage.” Seated on the platform, in front of the people, with the right to speak when he wants to, and what he wants to, and for as long as he wants to, without any interruption or censure from a passive body, is a huge “wage,” and is a precedent the apostles never set. The right to “tell” people what they can and can’t do in the Church, is a “wage.” These types of wages are forbidden to the leader, as they slowly but surely take Jesus’ sheep away from Him.

3. He runs away from his true responsibility as an under shepherd, because he really doesn’t have the sheep’s best interest in mind, but his own. He doesn’t singly “care” about the sheep, as much as he “cares” about his own interests. Each of his moves towards Church ownership reveal a lack of true care for the flock. He may tell them and himself that all he does he does because he cares for the flock, but in reality, at a deeper motivational level, he is unwilling to admit that his actions are less from true care for them, and more from true care for himself.

I’ll never forget working under one such leader type, when the presence of God swept into the congregation in the most amazing and sovereign move I’ve ever witnessed. People literally were unable to stand upright in the presence of God. Without anyone attempting to whip up an emotional frenzy, suddenly, with no prior notice, Jesus would manifest His glory in ways that were so intense we simply knew we must not stand upright, but needed to bow in His presence. The Holy Spirit, knowing the tendency of “ownership” oriented Senior Pastors, brought forth a word that this was His doing, He owned this move, and man was to step aside and let Him lead this. True to form, some people (big big tithers) became nervous by some of the manifestations, and told the pastor that unless he settled things down they were “out of there.” Not wanting to allow even them to steal his ownership, he refused to give them “exactly” what they wanted, but he did make some “hat tipping” modifications, so as to appease them (I.e. dishonor Jesus’ headship) and yet maintain his control of things. He told the congregation it was his job to “shepherd the renewal,” and as such he was going to stop some things and permit others. The dishonor this brought to the move of God, and grieving it brought to the Spirit and people, was almost palpable. He didn’t care...not even a tiny amount. After all...it was “his job.” He was just manifesting his ownership of God’s flock, handling things the way he felt he should. End result...God left... Why? Because it became evident to the Lord that His ownership was not recognized there, and the Senior Pastor cared more about his ownership of things than he did of God’s sovereign authority and glory. Do I think he understood the wrong he was doing, and did it anyway? Absolutely not! I’m convinced what he was doing he believed to be the will

of God for his ministry. It's just that a wrong understanding of leadership will tend to lead to abuses, somewhere along the line.

In all of this we see Strange Hireling activity, and the sum of it is that it robs Jesus of His glory and rightful ownership of His flock. Absolutely nothing about human leadership requires it to steal these things from Him. It is His flock, His agenda, His program, His control, His honor, His desires. Any kind of leadership that even hints at taking these things away from Him begin to reveal false motivations in the leaders, and those leaders need either to step away from their leadership or experience their flocks stepping away from them.

Sad to say, I've watched two congregations go through just this "fleeing," and in both cases the Lord had me warn the shepherds it was coming because of their failure here. In one case, I was on staff of a 4000 member congregation, as an elder and bible college teacher, and the Lord asked me to warn the Senior Pastor that his actions were going to lead seventy five percent of the congregation to flee. In reality it hit that mark, within a five year period, and as the new Senior Pastor took over, after this Senior Pastor retired, another eighth or the congregation left. In the case of another Church we went on staff with, the Church was about 1500 in membership and when the glory of God was driven away, by this Senior Pastor's actions, I was led to go to him privately and tell him he would lose seventy five percent of his congregation for his arrogance. He completely rejected the warning and told me he could financially survive even if he only had 250 members. The congregation went down to 350 people in a three year period. So far as I know he never repented.

So what does this all tell us? It tells us Jesus is jealous for His flock, and if it takes speaking to His sheep to flee places of leadership failure He will do it. All over the world He is doing exactly this. In the US alone some 50,000,000 have left, and more each day. Where are they going? Some have sadly dropped out, don't gather with any believers, and are just plain sick of all the political garbage that takes place in Churches. They've had it! Rarely a week goes by that I don't meet folks who were formally Church goers, and now they don't gather anywhere. Others, reacting in passionate hunger for more of Jesus, have returned to simple relational forms of gathering, and are relearning what being the Church looks like from Jesus' perspective and leadership. For them the journey and all the pain of it are worth every scar and sorrow. To find more of Jesus, and find that He is well able to lead His sheep, has been the most exquisite discovery of their entire lives. Jesus is the consummate leader. He knows where the greenest grass grows and the clearest waters are found.

So, if you find yourself under a leader or leaders who are obviously of the Strange Hireling type, you may well find the Spirit of Jesus leading you to flee. If so, do your best to discover his timing and method, and follow Him wherever He leads. You will ultimately be very glad you did.