

All Heresy is Local - When Your Pastor Turns Out to Be a Hireling



("The Bad Shepherd" by Pieter Bruegel II)

He who is a hired hand 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. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. - John 10: 12-13 (ESV)

I have written extensively of the damage wrought by the purpose driven church model, espoused by Rick Warren and followed by the vast majority

of churches in this country. We have also seen recently this business style carnality has started to infect the world as just this week Singapore's largest church saw its pastor convicted of misappropriating 50 million dollars of church funds. We see the prosperity heresy filling up swaths of the African, Australian, and South American continents as well. What gets lost however in the discussions of television star mega pastors is the impact on every day Christians. People who genuinely go to church to seek and serve God only to discover at the end that they never really had a pastor. They only had a hireling.

Because that is what the purpose driven, seeker-friendly models of church growth encourage. Church growth guru Andy Stanley is on record as saying that we should do away with using the term shepherd because it is no longer "culturally relevant." So glad that Andy feels he knows better than God but what he really meant to say is he no longer feels it is spiritually relevant. The model God always intended and wrote about specifically in His Word is the shepherd model. He is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep. Immediately following that declaration in Scripture are our key verses for today. God clearly delineating that not everyone who stands behind the pulpit is from God. When we realize that narrow is the way and few are those who find it we must conclude that the majority of people standing in the pulpit today probably are not there from God. That is to say, they are not shepherds. Now a shepherd's job has many facets but from a biblical perspective this analogy entails three primary functions and to truly be an under-shepherd of Christ our pastor must embody all three:

- 1) They must care for the well being of the sheep
- 2) They must ensure that none wander off
- 3) They must protect them from predators

The primary function on a day to day basis is for the shepherd to care for the well being of his sheep. As the worldly shepherd feeds his sheep with worldly nourishment so the spiritual shepherd must feed his sheep with spiritual nourishment. Only the Gospel satisfies. Only the Gospel helps us to grow into spiritual maturity. Only the Gospel is solid food.

About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers,

you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. - Hebrews 5: 11-14 (ESV)

Look around churchianity today and what do you see beloved? A church that is not only dull of hearing but apparently outright deaf. Not only that but reveling in their deafness. They are taught that discernment is based upon how they feel as opposed to what Scripture says. Forget solid food because they are stuck on milk and in many cases, spoiled milk. The hireling does not care about the health of the sheep and in fact it is in the best interests of business to keep them from maturing. That is because mature sheep read the Bible for themselves and start to act like Bereans. They start to ask questions instead of blindly accepting whatever the hireling says. I have mentioned before but it bears repeating that just this year we had one mega-pastor call people who wanted to go deeper in the Word "jackasses" during a sermon. Another compared them to the excrement in the body of Christ. In order to sell the new world mysticism that is being passed off as the Holy Spirit, they first must make a mockery of using the Word properly. It has become chic to refer to people who want to stand with Scripture as "legalists" or "religious." Beloved there is nothing mature about rolling around on the ground, seeing glory clouds, or having some clairvoyant "lay their hands on you" and pretend it is prophesying.

The shepherd also must ensure that none of the sheep entrusted to him wander off. This flies entirely in the face of the purpose driven CEO/vision casting pastor model. There is a term in the Purpose Driven Church book called "blessed subtraction." Warren teaches young pastors the opposite principle of the shepherd. He says that not everyone who leaves your church is a bad thing. When Mark Driscoll was abusing the sheep at Mars Hill Church in Seattle he often referred to blessed subtraction as he was an adherent of Warren theology. He famously referred to those who disagreed with his vision as the "pile of dead bodies behind the Mars Hill bus", which of course he was driving. We must remember that the hireling does not care about the sheep. He does not ensure they are well taken care of so why would he care if some wander off? He not only leaves the pen door open but in many cases he guides the sheep that might know too much or question his authority out the door. He gets paid one way or the other.

I have seen this over and over again locally where I live. I have heard a pastor actually preach that if you had a problem with another person in the church then you needed to leave. The truly telling thing was when he preached a sermon on the 99 and the 1 just two weeks later! He could not make the obvious spiritual connection because he was not a shepherd but a hireling. The word was a tool leveraged to his own end and not the Word of the living God. I have seen local pastors use the most unbiblical methods to control their sheep. Covenant agreements, tithe monitoring, and stealing memberships. The worst though is the spiritual bullying. The removal of people from ministries they worked very hard and dutifully in for perceived offenses that are often absurd. Threatening the sheep. Speaking about the sheep from the pulpit. Airing out private matters publicly. Using a false authority paradigm to bully the very people he is entrusted to tend to. The hireling does not care though if ten leave as long as he convince another 15 to take their place. That's the model. That's a success because it is a net gain of five bodies. What about the ten who are so horribly wounded? What about the ten who may never go to another church again? May never trust another pastor again? The hireling does not care. Just mop up the blood and move onto the next paycheck. I know many people who have never returned to church because of what a hireling has done to them. This goes beyond "church hurt." This is a betrayal of trust on a spiritual level. We must realize the reality of these hurts and that until people can see the hirelings for what they are that hurt may never heal. I have seen it metastasize to the point that they hate the very bride of Christ. This is serious business beloved.

Lastly, the shepherd must protect the sheep from predators. The most common predator of sheep are wolves. The Bible makes it very clear who wolves are. They are false teachers. They are people who make merchandise of the sheep of the Lord. They preach for shameful gain. In most cases the hirelings themselves are false teachers as well. Look at what the key verses teach us. These men do not own the sheep. They have nothing invested in them personally. If one sheepfold dries up just pull up stakes and move onto another sheepfold. Maybe locally or maybe in another state. They see the wolves coming but they do not care. They leave the sheep defenseless and flee. It is interesting how the verses phrase what the wolves do. They snatch them and then scatter them. That is exactly how I have seen the local devastation of Christians sitting under the hireling. They end up scattered. They no longer have direction. They were snatched from the sheep pen. Snatched in the jaws of a wolf that was allowed by a hireling. Sadly, we often forget who really holds us

My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. - John 10: 29 (ESV)

I have seen the wounds it leaves. I have tried to help bind them. There are things I want us to remember when we discover that our pastor is really a hireling. The first lesson is that we do not serve man - we serve God.

Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. - Ephesians 6: 5-8 (ESV)

Sometimes we read these verses and think they only apply to slaves; forgetting that we are bondservants to Christ. But look how we are to approach our servitude! Not by the way of eye-service. Not as people-pleasers. We are to do the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord. Hallelujah! When we actually understand who we are in Christ and who we serve there is no wound that man can inflict that He cannot heal.

The second lesson is that we are to learn from it. We are not meant to merely experience pain and hurt but learn from it. God collects our tears in His bottle the Psalmist tells us. He saves our pain yet we try to follow the worldly advice of learning to cope with it. God does not want you living with it! Learn from it and move on.

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. - Romans 16: 17 (KJV)

There is a lot of talk these days from false teachers pretending that those who call them out are causing division. Unbiblical nonsense! This verse clearly explains that it is false doctrine and those espousing it that cause the division. It is the wolf and the hireling that cause division. This verse instructs us to do two things. Mark them and avoid them! We mark them because we now know what they really are and avoid them so we do not make the same mistakes. In other words, learn from what happened beloved.

The third lesson we need to remember is that no one gets away with anything. Vengeance is always the Lord's. Sometimes I am amazed at quickly we forget that God sees everything. Deep down into the blackest parts of our perpetually wicked hearts. No one gets away with anything beloved. We serve an infinitely just God. Think about these words from Jesus:

I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." - Matthew 12: 36-37 (ESV)

If God will hold us to account for every careless word do we really think He will not do the same for careless and egregious acts against His sheep? Remember, no matter what the Andy Stanley's of the world think, Jesus is the Good Shepherd! They are all His sheep first! You will answer for leaving the pen door open hireling! You will answer for pushing the sheep away and allowing them to wander off. You will answer for the spiritual bullying and every drop of blood you shed from the sheep of the Lord. You will answer for what you taught them and what you allowed them to be taught. There is a reason why the Bible says that those who labor in preaching and teaching will be held to a higher standard. Wounded sheep should take some solace in this:

Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. - Acts 20: 26-27 (ESV)

This is the Apostle Paul saying goodbye to the elders at Ephesus and the inference cannot be clearer. When you choose to not feed your flock correctly you are not declaring the whole counsel of God. When you allow wolves to come in and tear them apart, you are denying them the whole counsel of God. Their blood will be upon you hireling.

The betrayal and pain is real. I often lament the day I realized that not everyone who is in church is there for Jesus and that extends to the leadership. They are just men too. But we serve God not man. We are called to learn from our experiences so we might heal and help others. Lastly, we are to take refuge in the truth that God will hold everyone to account. Remember beloved that the hireling is not of Christ. They do not know Him or else they would fear Him. That is the very beginning of Godly wisdom. The people who stand before Him on the last day saying "Lord Lord" are

very real. They will have spent this life thinking they were serving God but never even really knowing Him. That is an eternally sad prospect beloved. When your pastor turns out to be a hireling just remember that they will answer; as we all will one day.

Reverend Anthony Wade - October 26, 2015