

John 10:7-13      Mercenaries for Christ. What's Wrong With that Picture?

JOH 10:7 Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. 8 All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. 11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. 13 The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

As we continue our study in this section of Scripture we see Jesus further explaining the role of a shepherd in Israel and how the present leaders of that nation, the Pharisees, the scribes and teachers of the law, had by-and-large, shown themselves to be false shepherds, as shown in the first two verses of chapter 10.

JOH 10:1-2 "I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. 2 The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep.

This was directed right at the leaders in Israel and was meant as a rebuke by Jesus. These leaders were not concerned for the spiritual welfare of the nation of Israel, they were only concerned with their own welfare, and in the process had lost the truth of what it meant to have a relationship with the living God.

A shepherd leads the sheep into green pastures to feed. A shepherd protects the flock from the wolves. These false shepherds in Israel were starving the sheep of God. They were not leading them to the One spoken of in the Scriptures. And instead of protecting Israel from the wolves, they showed themselves to be thieves and robbers of God's glory.

In contrast Jesus is the supreme example of what a shepherd of the sheep does for the flock of God.

JOH 10:3-4 The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them

out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.

All the shepherds of God's flock, His church today, can only effectively lead and feed the flock of Christ as they in turn follow their Great Shepherd. In this way, the flock can feel secure in following after the under shepherd of Christ.

But as Jesus shared this with the Pharisees they simply did not understand that our Lord was speaking about their sin in neglecting the sheep and in turn being a detriment to the nation of Israel instead of being a blessing.

In fact, our Lord points this out in language that cannot be any clearer in the gospel of Matthew.

MAT 23:15, 27-28 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are. 27 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. 28 In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

This is hardly the resume of a genuine shepherd whose only desire is to bless the sheep and make sure they find rest for their souls. These supposed shepherds of Israel, found in the Pharisees and teachers of the law, were leading the sheep over the cliff while they stood by and watched without concern.

And the way they were doing it was by keeping them from entering into the presence of God as they took away the truth of the Messiah found in the Scriptures. This is what we read in the gospel of Luke.

LUK 11:52 "Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering."

But since these Pharisees didn't understand what our Lord meant by such language Jesus continues with another illustration back in our text.

JOH 10:7 Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep."

What is interesting here is that Jesus has just got through illustrating for these Pharisees how He is the shepherd of the sheep who calls His own by name and they follow Him.

Here in verse seven He describes Himself as the gate or door for the sheep. Some have raised the question as to how Jesus can use two entirely different illustrations of Himself in the same context.

Well, the fact of the matter is that Jesus refers to Himself in a variety of ways in the gospels to drive home the point of His mission as He was sent by the Father to redeem sinful men.

He calls Himself the vine in John 15:5. He identifies Himself as the bread of life in John 6:35. When speaking to the woman at the well in John chapter four He explains how He is the living water.

Interestingly enough, we see the most explicit example of this as Jesus not only teaches about Himself using different illustrations, but actually shows Himself to have different functions as our Mediator and Savior.

HEB 7:26-27 Such a high priest meets our need - one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.  
27 Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.

What the writer of Hebrews is saying is that not only is Jesus a high priest before the Father, in that He brings a sacrifice before the throne of God on behalf of His people, He is the actual sacrifice which is brought before the Father to atone for our sins.

And so, it's not out of the character of Jesus to refer to Himself as a variety of things relating to His mediatorial office. And so, He is the Great Shepherd of the sheep, and He is also the gate or door which leads to life.

By the way, when Jesus refers to Himself as the gate or door for the sheep, He is stating a fact relating to Israel's future. Up to this point the Jews have been steeped in Judaism as the life of all Jews was defined by the Law of Moses.

As the door or gate Jesus is pointing out that He is the One who will lead Israel out of the Old Covenant into the New, never to go back to the law which is on the other side of the door.

This is why some commentators believe that when Jesus refers to Himself as the door for the sheep here in verse seven He is not restricting Himself to the illustration He uses in verse one where He uses the imagery of the door to the sheep pen which houses the sheep.

In other words, though Jesus alludes to leading the sheep out of the sheep pen in verse three, He in no way will lead them back to the sheep pen, which in this case is the place where the Jews were bound up under the law.

Jesus came to set the captives free, not to bind them again to laws that deal with, do not touch, do not taste, which by the way these Pharisees were doing. This is another reason they could not be considered true shepherds of Israel since they were not willing to lead the sheep out from under the law and into the presence of the Great Shepherd who is Jesus Himself, standing right in front of them.

JOH 10:8 All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them.

Here Jesus uses the word “all” in a way to drive home the point that most of the shepherds of Israel from the beginning fall into this category of thieves and robbers. But it is also obvious that the word “all” cannot be used in a strict way since there were shepherds of Israel who did not fall into this category.

As A.W. Pink points out in his commentary, “Moses, Joshua, David, the prophets, Nehemiah and others who might be mentioned, certainly could not be included within this classification.”

But the point Jesus was making was well suited for His present audience found in these Pharisees.

JOH 10:8 All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them.

Now, the last part of this verse is interesting in that it says, “but the sheep did not listen to them.”

Well, one could make the argument that most of Israel did in fact listen to these thieves and robbers. So, what does this statement, “but the sheep did not listen to them,” mean?

Keep in mind that when Jesus speaks of His sheep, the sheep who listen to His voice and who ultimately follow Him, they are the

ones who have placed their faith in Him. And so, these sheep would be true believers, both Old Testament and New Testament saints.

When Paul was speaking of the nation of Israel, he points out all of the blessings God gave them, along with the privileges of receiving His revelations, but then Paul is quick to show how simply belonging to the physical line of Abraham didn't make a Jew part of spiritual Israel, which was that part of Israel which might be considered the believing remnant.

ROM 9:4-8 ... Theirs [the Jews] is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. 5 Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen. 6 It is not as though God's word had failed. ***For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. 7 Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children.*** On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." 8 ***In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.***

And what are we told about Abraham and the relationship he had with God?

GAL 3:6-11 Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." 7 Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. 8 The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." 9 So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. 10 All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." 11 Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith."

The ones who did not listen to the leaders who led Israel astray, are the ones who are considered Christ's sheep. Why? Because, like Abraham, they believed God and it was credited to them as righteousness; that is the righteousness of Christ put to their account.

And that's the only reason you and I in Christ are considered to be His sheep; sheep by the way who need to be listening to and following the Lord Jesus, thus proving ourselves to be His sheep.

JOH 10:9 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.

Here again, Jesus repeats Himself for these Pharisees to stress how He is the only One who can be considered the true Shepherd of Israel. And it is here that He equates the gate with salvation, which is why we know that He cannot be talking about being the gate to the sheep pen at this point; the sheep pen being the place where Israel is led out of their bondage to the law.

So, why does Jesus say that His sheep will come in and go out, and find pasture," if He's not talking about a sheep pen?

The reason is that being the door or gate which leads to salvation Jesus is speaking about coming in and going out in the sense that He has set us free to be wherever the Lord leads. The idea of finding pasture cannot include the concept of being penned in, which is where Israel was under the law.

Finding pasture was always in the context of being led out of the sheep pen. And this is precisely what David understood about the Shepherd of Israel whose only desire was to feed and give life to Israel.

PSA 23:1-6 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, 3 he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 4 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. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. 6 Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

That's what our Great Shepherd does for us, and that is the example for all the shepherds of God's flock today; to lead the flock of Christ out into His presence as we feed them with His word; as we encourage them in the fellowship of the saints; as we bring them before the throne of God in worship as we gather together as His sheep.

This is why I said last week, that unless we are connected to a local body that is teaching and promoting the truth of the whole counsel of God's word, we're like sheep who are attempting to be fed and watered in a desert.

This is the point Paul was making when writing to the Romans that God is the one who has united us to each other in the local church setting, for a specific reason.

1CO 12:24-27 ..... But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. 27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

We are part of the body of Christ first and foremost as Christ has brought us into the flock through the agency of the Holy Spirit, as He has opened our eyes to the truth of the gospel, as He has taken our hearts of stone and replaced them with hearts of flesh that beat for Christ, as we take the gift of faith and utilize it as we embrace our Lord and Savior.

Our entrance into the church didn't take place upon signing a "membership role" in a local body, but when Christ sought us out and brought us into the fold. Finding a place where believers can gather and express their gratitude and thanks for this free gift of eternal life and grow in the Kingdom of God should be the natural expression of that new life.

Just be careful where you plop yourself because it may not be in green pastures and quiet waters, but tumultuous places where the unsuspecting are "tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;" **Ephesians 4:14**

Jesus identifies such places and leaders.

JOH 10:10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Here again, Jesus contrasts the false shepherds of Israel and His role as the Great Shepherd who comes to give life eternal.

Notice too, that Jesus adds, that we may have it in full, or as some of your translations put, have it abundantly.

There is a sense in which this abundant life is revealed in our lives today in Christ. But it is an abundant life which is found in parallel to our desire to grow in this life by faith and obedience.

In other words, we will never experience this aspect of the abundant life in Christ if we're not willing to take advantage of the means our Lord has provided for us, which again is found in our desire to sit under the word, fellowshiping with each other, coming together to worship our great God.

This is why Paul prayed the way he did when he closed a section of his letter to the Ephesians.

EPH 3:16-19 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Paul was saying that this full measure of the fullness of God, or as John puts it, the abundant life, is one which we must seek after in one sense.

COL 3:1-3 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

By the way, the word Paul uses in this passage in Colossians for set, as "set your hearts on things above," is the Greek word *zeteo* and it means to seek in order to find; to strive after.

Striving after something is not passive. It's active and that's the attitude in which we should desire to grow in Christ. And as we do we will experience the abundant life, which may not be devoid of trials and tribulations, but as we read earlier in Psalm 23, when we do walk in the valley of the shadow of death our Great Shepherd will be there with us as His rod and staff comfort us and guide us.

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

This is the reason we follow our Great Shepherd. Number one, He is the good Shepherd. He only has our best interest in mind. And

number two, His best interest for us is to lead us out of the bondage of sin, which is why He has laid His life down for us.

ISA 53:6-7 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

This is the love our Lord has for us, and it is this love we must continually look to as we consider the cost of being purchased and redeemed by the blood of the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world.

This is why we must dwell on the cross. This is why Jesus says, concerning the Lord's Supper, which represents His life being given for us, "Do this in remembrance of Me."

In other words, 'don't ever forget what I did for you.' 'And when you dwell on this, return the love I gave to you by giving it to each other and the world as you live and speak the truth of Christ in love.'

This what Paul told the Ephesians.

EPH 5:1-2 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

The Great Shepherd loves us, but the hired hand does not love the sheep.

JOH 10:12-13 The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. 13 The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

This was a rebuke from Jesus aimed directly at these Pharisees whose only interest was self and what they could gain from being leaders in Israel; be that prestige, power, or wealth.

There are shepherds among God's flock today who only serve the sheep if they're given prestige, power or paid a wage. I might add that there is nothing wrong with a shepherd of God's flock receiving a wage.

1CO 9:13-14 Don't you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? 14 In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.

And Jesus in the gospel of Luke says, that “the laborer is worthy of his hire.” (Luk.10:7). But that’s much different from being a hireling, or hired hand.

There are pastors in this city who are making six figure incomes. And unfortunately, some of them would not serve the body of Christ unless they were making such incomes. Now, I’m not against anyone making a good income in whatever he or she does, but to serve the body of Christ takes more than simply an attitude of doing it as one who is hired to do a job.

A number of years back I was unwittingly interviewed by a local church here in town for the position of being their pastor. I say unwittingly because at the time I was simply going to share with their board how each of our churches might benefit each other.

One of the members of their board came to our church and led me to believe that they wanted to become united with us with me as their pastor.

And so, I met with their board, about ten men in number. And they began to ask me questions about different issues, from homosexuality to adultery.

I answered each question according to God’s word. After a few of these types of questions they began to get this puzzled look on their faces as if I was giving the wrong answers.

It was obvious that there was something wrong. Finally, someone asked me why I was there. I told them that I thought I was there on the invitation of one their board members to discuss a merger with me as their pastor.

They said no, we’re interviewing for Pastors and that they had another one in the wings to be interviewed next. After some discussion with these men I finally said that this procedure more represented a board meeting at a large corporation than a church looking for a shepherd, at which time I encouraged them to spend more time on their knees in their search than going through a laundry list of things they wanted in a Pastor who would add large numbers to their church.

That remark went over well.

The hired hand will be prone to flee the truth when the church wants their ears tickled. The hired hand will water down the gospel because it might offend someone. The hired hand will not teach the whole counsel of God's word because it takes too much effort.

And what I have found to be true is that the hired hand will take it upon himself to grow the church instead of letting the Holy Spirit grow it up in accordance with the word of God in Christ's way and time.

I can't tell you how many church growth programs and seminars I've been invited to over the years. And almost without exception each of the programs deals more with gathering demographic information and plotting out two year, five year and ten year programs to get more people in the church.

Few if any of these church growth programs ever mention faithfully teaching and preaching the whole counsel of God's word and praying with the saints that God's will might be done in that local body.

But a hireling doesn't need to worry about such details because in most cases they've got the whole thing figured out to where the Holy Spirit and His ways only get in the way. Such people abandon the flock in reality when this attitude is taken.

JOH 10:13 The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

Whatever we do for Christ, whatever gifts we have, whatever plans we employ they must all be done for the sheep in the flock in which we've been placed first and foremost.

If we love the sheep, if we love each other, then we will serve each other and then in turn love the world with the truth.

JOH 15:17 This is my command: Love each other.

1PE 4:8-10 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. 9 Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. 10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

We need to serve each other, and we need to serve the lost with the truth. Let me end with this encouragement from the writer of Hebrews.

HEB 13:20-21 May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, 21 equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.