

**Rob Mathis
Rose Hill Church
Sermon
8.11.19**

Prayer: Blessed Lord,who caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, our guidance, our strength, our direction, our enlightenment and our understanding; Grant us so to hear them,read them, mark them in our hearts, in our minds, and yes, in our Bibles, and so hear your voice and follow your direction, so that we may learn, and inwardly digest your leading and guiding andthat we may embrace and ever hold fastthe blessed hope of everlasting life,which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ. AMEN.

As I speak with you today, I am reminded of an exchange Billy Graham had with a young man early in his crusade ministry, and, with this being my first preaching opportunity here at Rose Hill Church, I am indeed hoping that you all will, in fact, be more willing to hear me out than this youngster was Dr. Graham;

As the story goes, Billy Graham found himself in a small Midwestern town, preparing for the first night of an early crusade. After getting things in order for the evening meeting there, he was wandering around the town looking for a post office so he could mail a letter to his dear wife Ruth. With no immediate success Dr. Graham found a young boy playing in a yard. He asked the lad to give him directions to the post office. After getting those directions, Dr. Graham invited the boy to his Crusade that evening. “You can hear me telling everyone how to get to heaven,” Dr. Graham said earnestly. The response tickled the budding evangelist; “Sir, I don’t think I’ll be going tonight. You don’t even know how to get to the post office.”

The Thief, the Shepherd and His Sheep

John 10:1-4 New International Version (NIV)

10 “Anyone 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 one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The

gatekeeper 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.**

Let's break down into just a few primary points what our Lord is saying in this passage:

- **First, Verse one talks about a robber or thief. So we have to ask ourselves, “Who might that be?” We don't have to look far to see another reference to someone terrible and threatening;**
- **Let's look at John 10:10; “The thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy”**
- **The first part of verse 12 shows the person hired to care for the sheep running off when he sees the wolf coming...**
- **Verse 12, part two, talks of a wolf attacking and scattering the flock.**

What or who is this thief? This wolf? This scatterer of the flock?

In Ancient Greek, the language the New Testament writers originally wrote their books and letters in; the word for thief is Kleptes; it does mean a thief, but also a thief that is sneaky or does so as an imposter. In other words, this thief often gets in amongst the sheep through trickery and deceit. This thief is not jumping up and down yelling, “here I am! I’m in the pen, naw ne naw ne naw!! No, this thief looks like the real McCoy, like one of the sheep. But let’s look at the characteristics of this imposter;

This thief, this bad guy as we used to call them in law enforcement, comes into the sheep pen for three very specific reasons, as we see in John 10:10; He comes to steal, to kill and to destroy;

- **First, we would expect this thief to steal so check that off; but wait! Remember he does so with stealth...he is sneaky, he is an imposter, and the sheep often do not even know the thief is amongst them!**

- **Second, he kills; oh, but wait, the word for kill here is not murder! It is *thuo*. Thuo in Ancient Greek means “to sacrifice”.**
- **So the thief sneaks in, unnoticed, and is hanging out looking like a sheep, or maybe like the shepherd... certainly not anyone for us to worry about right? And he comes in to kill? What? Sheep would of course stir up a big ruckus if the thief started killing off the weak ones! But something more is going on; the thief is doing some more pretending. He is sacrificing; in other words, he, or she, is doing holy stuff; playing the part; but he is an imposter. And this imposter stuff is when it gets really bad! For this thief is leading the sheep astray!**
- **Third, when the thief has everybody lulled into complacency, thinking they are being and doing what is right, even though the True Shepherd isn't there, this woman or man seems pretty good. Unorthodox? Maybe, but they look so good! They sound so good!**

They are such a good speaker! So charismatic!

Articulate! And look, they are building a new building!

**Or growing our church in big numbers! It must be god
for there to be such growth and success right?**

What is the third characteristic? He comes to Destroy!

**What is going on here? Why would a thief sneak over
the wall, or get into the sheep pen? Doesn't he just
want to grab a sheep and go? Oh, not according to
what Jesus is saying. He is telling us that this thief is
much more wicked and his tactics much more subtle
and much more dangerous. What the Scriptures are
telling us is deeper than simply having an enemy; this
thief is a deceiver. He is getting in some other, more
secretive or deceptive way. And then he is stealing, and
then he is sacrificing (in other words, looking like he
belongs on the 'inside'; and then, thirdly, Jesus says**

**this thief comes to destroy. The word in Greek is
(Apolluo) 'to destroy'**

This destroy is everything you can imagine and more; the thief is coming in for the coup de grace; it means not only to cause a loss or even a death, but to literally destroy the object of its wrath; it is most often associated with words of violence and strife. It is not pretty.

If we stop right here what are we left with? A big scary mess right? The thief, the bad guy, the wolf, oh no! He is out there and he is scary and we are vulnerable!

But nowhere in our Old or New Testament does our God leave us hopeless, helpless or without His Light! Reviewing these first four verses we realize that Jesus is with His sheep.

Somewhere Jesus explains that He is the actual gate to get into the sheep pen and He is the shepherd, not a hireling, not one

who does not care! He, by virtue of His shed blood on the cross, has become for us The Great Shepherd. And the Great Shepherd is not afraid nor is He reluctant to come into our stinky sheep pens, to be with us in all our mess, and to call us by name, to be with us and lead us out of the sheep pens of life;

The Good Shepherd calls each sheep by name, they recognize His voice, for it is at once mightier than the crashing of many storm-driven waves on the sea, yet as gentle and forbearing as a dove cooing over her new chicks. And His sheep follow His voice, His direction, His guidance. And they are taken out of the pen, lead to water, to fresh pasture, to open meadows; these pastures are new, renewed and renewable, for our Good Shepherd promises to feed us, care for us, and when we stray He promises to go and retrieve that one who has strayed!

So what is our response here?

Well, as I see it we really only have two;

- **We can hang out in the sheep pens, kind of half-baked and half-heartedly doing whatever bored sheep do. We can allow ourselves to be lulled into a deep complacency...just the stinky sheep's life for me...oh well.**
- **Or we can wake up and smell the sheep pen! We can awaken from our slumber if we are slumbering along. We can ask the Great Shepherd, the One Who loves us most, to draw near to us, to reinvigorate us, to reveal Himself to us in new and different ways! Ask God to speak to you. To lead you out to new pastures! New fields where there are new and fresh waters to cool our parched tongues!**
- **Phillip Keller, the author of "A Shepherd looks at Psalm 23", says sheep are notoriously lazy, creatures of old habits, even ones that don't work well! They will follow the same trail until it becomes an absolutely unwalkable rut. They will overgraze a place until it literally will not yield nutrition enough for the flock, then they will soil their eating places and watering holes, yes, to the point of**

absolutely destroying their entire range. And finally, they will, if not rescued by a shepherd, die of disease and parasites that they themselves fostered into their grazing places.

But, as I mentioned, there is great hope for those of us who choose to turn toward God, not away, to seek Him first, not last, who cry out and beckon the Great Shepherd to shepherd us.

Lloyd Ogilvie, former Chaplain of the US Senate and Pastor of Hollywood Presbyterian Church tells of being in the Middle East and watching a group of shepherds walk a large flock down a hillside one evening. As they got nearer each man called to his sheep and out of this huge mass the sheep moved to follow the voice they knew. They then led them into their pen and with a fire near the doorway settled down, literally sleeping in front of the opening. This my friends, is Jesus; He is that Shepherd who knows us by name, calls it sweetly to us, and beckons us to come, follow Him, as He so longs to lead us beside quiet waters, and to restore our soul!

Closing Prayer:

Benediction:

The LORD bless you and keep you: The LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you: The LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. (Numbers 6:24-26 RSV)