

John 10:1-11

## The Good Shepherd and the Thieves



Who could ever forget those appalling images of the suffering sheep involved in the live sheep trade between Australia and the Middle-East.

The scenes of the sickly, frightened, exhausted sheep crammed into overcrowded pens.

It was a national shame.

The thought of each sheep suffering from thirst and heat exhaustion and covered in the urine and manure of the sheep above them was just heart rending.

Perhaps the most disturbing scenes were those which depicted the brutal manhandling of those poor defenceless creatures as they were literally thrown off the ship into waiting trucks.

I must confess that I felt a deep-seated anger towards those callous workers and wished that somehow they could receive some kind of retribution for their actions.

Perhaps it was the kind of thing Jesus had in mind in John 10:1-10 when he made reference to those who decimate God's people.

Those strangers, thieves and robbers who come to steal, kill and destroy.

Thieves were common in our Lord's time. They would slice a hole in the back of a traveller's tent and make off with his goods.

Robbers weren't so delicate; they simply brutalized their victims on some wayward road; leaving them for dead. (The Good Samaritan.)

Who were these thieves of whom Jesus spoke?

John indicates that Jesus was probably referring to the Scribes and the Pharisees. The religious leaders who were out to kill him.

They were Israel's leadership, but as we read the gospels we discover quite early that they didn't really care about the people either.

They were in it for themselves.

However I think it would be fair to say that they represent anyone and anything that would seek to draw us away from the Good Shepherd and the safety of being in his fold.

In Ezekiel 34:1-10 we come across some very strong words of judgement for anyone or anything that fits this category.

The thief/robber is the one who sneaks in by the back way. His way is not the way of the one who said of himself, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the father except through me"

The thief/robber is that one who preaches any other gospel that contradicts the truth that we see expounded in Ephesians 2:8-10.

As one modern song states:

"Only by grace can we enter.

Only by grace can we stand.

Not by our human endeavours.

Not by the work of our hands."

Any message that contradicts this message of grace and mercy is a thief sent from hell.

So often things and people can lead us astray because they appear to offer greener pastures. Sadly that promise is an illusion and a lie.

There is only one way to find that place where the grass is truly greener; that's by following Jesus the Good Shepherd.

Those who follow him take time to recognise his voice.

The more time they spend with him the more easily do they recognise his leading and guiding.

The shepherds in Jesus day knew each of their flock by name, as we would know our pet cat or dog.

The shepherd could call an individual sheep and it would leave wherever it was and run to him.

Do you recognize the voice of the Good Shepherd in your life? Do you run to him when he calls you away from danger?

Or is your priority in other pursuits that have the potential to drown out his voice?

Good shepherds cared for their sheep. To illustrate allow me to play a short clip from the movie "Babe".

Babe is a good example of the good shepherd image. The sheep came to know and trust Babe because they knew she genuinely cared about them.

Babe took time to learn their language and understand their ways.

In Jesus we have a Good Shepherd who even gives his life for the sheep.

Read Ezekiel 34:11-16a.

I love that closing scene from Babe where babe leads the sheep around the obstacle course at the show-grounds.

What a great picture of how Jesus gentle leads us.

No matter what obstacle come into your life Jesus can lead you through even the most dangerous minefield.

That's Jesus!

Before we close let me make a few brief comments about the other images in this text.

The sheepfold is that place where God's people gather and find security and safety – the Christian family gathered together as church and in church.

If we are outside of this weekly gathering of God's people we may run the risk of finding ourselves wandering the Good Shepherds leading and protection.

Jesus is the shepherd but he is also the door of the sheep fold in this story.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer celebrated his last Easter in a Nazi prison cell. He commented that,

One becomes aware that the door is the only way out of one's imprisonment. Moreover, that a prison door can only be opened from the outside.

Jesus is the only way out of our own imprisonment; whatever that might be for you. And he is the means by which is procured.