THE NEW SHOFAR

A time will come when instead of shepherds feeding the sheep, the church will have clowns entertaining the goats — Charles Spurgeon

The Shepherd

The Thief Who Came to Kill, Steal, and Destroy

This verse from John 10 is very well known among Christians and even non-believers. Many people often misquote this passage, replacing the word "thief" with "devil." However, according to the context of the chapter, Jesus was not necessarily referring to the devil as the thief in the parable. This raises a question in our minds: Who then was the thief?

When Jesus spoke these words, the Son of God addressed an issue that was already a problem at that time: the greed of the religious leaders and the neglect of their sheep. The parable specifically highlighted the condition of the Jews, who were under the guidance of far too many toxic leaders—some of whom were little more than exploiters—leaving their sheep vulnerable to various forms of attack.

In the parable, Jesus introduced four important figures:

The sheep – They represent the people of God. At that moment, Jesus was speaking directly to the Jews, but He pointed out that there would be other sheep in a different pen, and that they would all - Jews and Gentiles - be gathered into one flock (John 10:6).

The thief or robber – In the first verse, Jesus says, "Anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber." So, who is the thief? It is anyone who does not enter by the gate and uses other means to enter the sheepfold. Jesus said that He is the only gate leading to salvation. Therefore, we understand that the thief's central goal is to infiltrate the flock by any way except through the gate.

The hired hand or mercenary – Jesus uses the figure of the hired hand to illustrate those who perform their duties for self-serving motives. The hired hand is not the shepherd to whom the sheep belong. In fact, he does not care about the sheep and fears for his own life (John 10:13). Just as they counted their benefits, they also counted their efforts. In a dangerous situation, they would abandon the sheep, leaving them at the mercy of the wolf.

The Good Shepherd – Jesus is the Good Shepherd, the sheep know His voice, and He lays down His life for them. The hired hand is not willing to sacrifice his life for the sheep, but the Good Shepherd is. Jesus voluntarily laid down His life out of love, not out of obligation. By calling Himself the Good Shepherd, He pointed to the effectiveness of His actions.

Jesus presented Himself as the only way to salvation, the sole access point. He also showed Himself as the only one capable of laying down His life for the sheep. He revealed Himself as the only one able to shepherd, guide, and gather all His sheep safely. All of this was done under the Father's authority. Despite speaking through a parable, the Jews did not understand what Jesus was trying to say (John 10:6). They had been deluded into thinking they were the ones called by God and yet their ways were the ways of fallible hubris driven men. They proved to be obstacles to God’s people finding sustenance, hope and life.

Just as the Word of God is compared to a sharp sword, the Jews were divided, and some even called Jesus insane. Truly, *the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are*

perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18). Even after Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, many still sought to gain access to the sheepfold by other means and continued to believe that the legacy of Jesus was madness. As the Apostle Paul stated in 1 Cor 1:22-24: *Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God*.

How does the thief steal, kill, and destroy?

The thief's intention when breaking into a place is simply to take whatever he can. A thief does not consider the consequences, whether something will be destroyed or if someone might lose their life for him to get what he wants to steal. Similarly, false prophets and irresponsible teachers do not consider the weight of their words. They speak with the aim of taking what they can from the sheep, without entering through the gate or pointing to it. The recklessness of their actions can lead the sheep to destruction and spiritual death.

Jesus clearly warned us about this: For false messiahs and false prophets will appear, He taught and perform signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. Religious leaders were using God's house to serve their own interests. Anyone who opposed or confronted them with the truth was persecuted. This is what happened to Jesus. He was pursued by the religious leaders until they managed to condemn Him. They tried in every way to take His life so they could continue managing their own interests.

We know it was necessary for the good shepherd to lay down His life for the sheep. Jesus made it clear: *No one takes it from me, but I lay it*. Christ was victorious on the cross, and through Him we gain salvation, but the thief continues to act in the same way even today: *But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them - bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping* (2 Peter 2:1-3).

False shepherds are identified by the fruit of their character. In Galatians 5:21-22, Paul describes the fruit of the Spirit as *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness.* False shepherds will lack these fruits and be characterised instead by *fornication, impurity, licentiousness, [20] idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, [21] envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these*. This is where our spiritual discernment comes in, a discernment honed by our engagement with the Word of God, our willingness to imitate Christ and walk in his ways, following his teachings and sharing life with fellow believers as a part of His Body the Church. But it should not be taken lightly as they are not always obvious. Jesus warned us that they will come in sheep's clothing, while inwardly they are ravaging wolves capable of ripping our community to bits and destroying it. That is what is at stake here, and we all need to understand that *such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery, they deceive the minds of naive people* (Romans 16). And how do we know they are not serving our Lord Christ? Check the fruits! All of them!