

**August 2, 2009**  
**LIFE TO THE FULLEST!**  
**JOHN 10: 1 - 15**  
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There is a phenomenon that sometimes occurs among men and perhaps some women that can radically change the way they act and behave. I am sure that most of you have heard of it. It is called mid-life crisis.

It is a situation in which a number of men and women find themselves as they approach their mid-thirties and on into their fifties. It begins with the realization that they are getting older and that in all probability they will never fulfil the hopes and dreams and ambitions they had when they started out. So often their jobs seem like a dead-end and they want to escape from it; their families seem burdensome, and they want to get out from under that responsibility; and their physical appearance is deteriorating and they want to reverse the whole process. So what does a person in that situation do?

- Some resort to **alcohol**. Did you know that alcoholism increases 50% among people in the forty to sixty age bracket compared to those in their thirties.
- Some become **morose and depressed**. It has been claimed that depression is beginning to rival schizophrenia as the nation's #1 mental health problem.
- Some people opt for **a new life style** - they retire early; or they engage in an affair. Have you noticed how many American politicians have recently been in the news because of infidelity and marriage breakdown?
- Some seek to change their **image**. They buy a nifty sports car. They join a health spa in the hope of losing weight; they deck themselves out in a new wardrobe - you know, the shirt open to the mid-drift and the gold chain. Or they dye their hair. The feeling is that if women can do it, so too can the men. We no longer believe in that particular word from the book of Proverbs: **The glory of young men is their strength, grey hair is the splendour of the old.**

What is the point I am making? People - men and women in mid-life certainly...but it isn't restricted to them - everyone wants to experience life in all its fullness. Each of us wants to participate in all that God has created for us and enjoy all that God has created for us.

I am thrilled that Bruce assigned the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of John for me to preach from, because from it emerges one of Scripture's greatest texts. Look with me at the 10<sup>th</sup> verse of the tenth chapter of John's Gospel.

**[10] The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it more abundantly.**

Let me make a couple of comments before I launch into an exposition of this text.

The particular text that is our focus is often treated like a piece of citrus fruit - we peel away the first part of it, chuck it away and proceed to enjoy what's left. **I am come that they may have life, and have it more abundantly.** That is the part that we know and quote. We rarely hear the first part quoted. **The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.** This morning I propose to deal with the whole text:

**The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it more abundantly.**

Someone once remarked that a text without the context is a pretext. Jesus in this passage is talking about sheep and the shepherd.

And of course, it is in these verses that Jesus makes two of the seven "I am" statements that are found in John's gospel. In this passage Jesus says:

**[9] I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.**

**[11] I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.**

Sandwiched in between these two significant statements is our text which, you might say, constitutes Jesus' Mission Statement. Summed up in this verse is the "why" of Christmas, Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Why did Jesus Christ come into our world? Why the incarnation? Why the cross? Here we have it summed up in his own words: **I have come that they may have life, and have it more abundantly.**

Listen to the words of our text again: **The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it more abundantly.**

### 1. THE FIRST THING I WOULD HAVE YOU NOTE IS THAT A CONTRAST IS MADE

A contrast is made between the thief and Jesus Christ.

When Jesus refers to the thief, he is not referring to the burglarizing of a private home, but rather the invasion, by either man or beast of the sheep fold. Now it seems to me that just as flocks of sheep were victimized by prowling marauders, so too there are thieves that break into our lives, and as Jesus says, they steal and kill and destroy. What are some of these thieves?

a] Disease does it. Science has so much in recent years to eradicate disease and alleviate human suffering - and yet people still get cancer and diabetes and heart disease. Every day I read the Lethbridge Herald's obituaries. Thankfully most of the names I don't recognize. I haven't found my own name there yet! But you know, hardly a day goes by without some reference to someone's courageous battle with cancer. Disease is a thief that robs and kills and destroys.

b] Time is a thief, and how it affects all of us. It robs us of our looks, it causes all kinds of pressure, it goes too quickly, it frustrates our plans, it takes our friends and loved ones.

**Time like an ever rolling stream  
Bears all its sons away:  
They fly forgotten, as a dream  
Dies at the opening day**

And many of us look back down the corridors of the years - and we see nothing but waste - One of the prophets described it as, "The years the locust have eaten." and we say with one of Shakespeare's characters: **I wasted time, and now time doth waste me.**

c] Satan is a thief that robs life of meaning and joy and purpose - at least that is the way he is described in the parable of the sower and the seed.

**Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and**

**takes away the word that was sown in them.**

And you have experienced this and so have I - He robs us of opportunities, of good intentions, of the vows we make and the resolutions we formulate.

**Almost persuaded, now to believe,  
Almost persuaded, Christ to receive.  
Seems now some soul to say,  
Go Spirit, go thy way  
Some more convenient day,  
On Thee I'll call.**

Thieves, all of them - thieves that break into our lives and rob it of purpose and meaning and fulfilment. Thieves that take!

Now notice the contrast between what the thief does and what Christ offers:

**The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it more abundantly.**

The thief comes to take...but Christ comes to give.

But do you know what has happened? Do you realise what many people have done? Their roles have been reversed! Satan is perceived as the one who offers life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. He is the one who ostensibly fills life with fun and interest and gusto. A role reversal!

Have you ever watched those beer commercials on TV? There is nothing but fun and laughter and excitement. Those commercials - often amusing and entertaining commercials never display the lives that are destroyed, the marriages that are wrecked. I've experienced it first hand. My father was an alcoholic. I can well remember not being able to invite my friend's home just in case my Dad might be drunk. The good news for me was that through AA he was sober the last 15 years of his life.

A few years ago the song writer asked in one of his songs why it was that the devil had all the good music. Satan is portrayed as the one who gives...

And Jesus Christ is all too often perceived as the thief - the one who has come to take. So often people feel that if they surrender their lives to Christ, that

1. He will make excessive demands that will make our lives drab and dreary
2. that He will spoil what fun and excitement life has
3. That he will ruin the plans we've made for our lives or change the priorities we have. Why! He may even send some of us to the mission field!

The poet Swineburne reflected this view when he wrote:

**Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean, and the whole earth has grown grey with Thy breath!**

Let me say on the basis of experience and personal observation and on the authority of the Bible - **It simply isn't so! It isn't telling it like it is.**

**The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it more abundantly.**

**2. HAVING LOOKED AT THE CONTRAST THAT IS MADE, LET'S LOOK FOR A MOMENT AT THE PURPOSE THAT IS STATED.**

**I have come that they may have life, and have it more abundantly.** Here in capsule form is one of the clearest statements of why Jesus Christ came into the world. In some ways it supplements another statement that Jesus made concerning the purpose of his advent: **The Son of Man is come to seek and save that which is lost.** [Luke 19:10] In other words, Jesus came to save the lost and give meaningful life to the saved.

Perhaps two of the most important questions any person can ask are these:

1. If I am lost, why should I remain lost if Jesus came to save me?
2. If I am saved, am I experiencing and enjoying the abundant life that Jesus came to give.

A writer and Bible expositor I have come to appreciate over the years, Graham Scroggie, expressed it so eloquently.

**All Christians have eternal life; not all Christians have abundant life. There can be life without health; there can be movement without progress; there may be war, but defeat. We may serve but never succeed. We may try but never triumph, and the difference all along the line is the difference between possessing life and experiencing life more abundant. This abundant life is simply the fullness of life in Jesus Christ made possible by His death and resurrection, and made real by the incoming of His Spirit. That is the abundant life.**

**The trouble with so many of us is that we are on the right side of Easter but the wrong side of Pentecost; the right side of pardon, but the wrong side of power; the right side of forgiveness, but the wrong side of fellowship; out of Egypt but we've never gotten into Canaan.**

Does that describe any of us here this morning?

If I am a Christian, am I experiencing and enjoying the abundant life that Jesus came to give. That is the question with which I challenge both myself and you who know and serve Jesus Christ.

The other challenge I would make are to those who for one reason or another have never entered the gate - and have never really met and entrusted themselves to the Good Shepherd.

**I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. That person will come in and go out and find pasture.**

**I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.**

Take that step and enter the gate; meet the good shepherd and become one of His. It is an invitation to life in all its fullness! And as we shortly gather around the Communion Table, as we focus for a few moments on the

elements before us - the bread representing His body and the cup representing His Sacrifice - remember the Good Shepherd and exactly what he has done for you and what he offers to you.