

NEWS AND VIEWS
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**“Southern Baptists with the Full
Gospel for the Whole World”**

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The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.
(John 10:10)

Reading this scripture lately set my mind in motion to begin thinking about thieves. As a boy I learned the Ten Commandments in a Sunday School class. Looking back so far into my history I am amazed today how much I remember about the teaching I received. Some teachers would have their students memorize and recite these ancient laws. But our teacher did not emphasize the memory work. His focus was to help us understand the reason why God said what He said. When we got to the one about stealing, I remember his answer to one of our questions, “*Why does God say ‘Thou shalt not steal’?*” He told us that God said not to steal because God is not a thief. It is the first lesson that I can remember about the purpose of God’s word...to transform us into the image of Christ...to make us like Jesus. He was not, and is not, a thief.

Have you ever had something stolen from you? The emotions of being a victim of lawlessness can manifest themselves in all kinds of ways. Fear, bewilderment, anger, sadness, helplessness, and hopelessness are only a few. Some of the most painful emotions come when we realize that we have been robbed of our peace. One day God helped me see that I had been a thief all of my life. I had stolen time away from my family and wasted it in ungodly endeavors. I had furthered an agenda of a self-serving lifestyle and sought the praise and approval of other people. In short, I had sought to set myself up as an object of worship and wanted the glory that is due to a deity. I had robbed God of His glory when I denied that I needed Him and His influence to lead my life. When we live as though God does not matter we rob ourselves of the blessing of God Himself. To realize that I had the nature of a thief was a painful experience of conviction. I have often remembered the Sunday School teacher’s words...*God was not a thief*. Here’s some thoughts I’ve been thinking about thieves.

I. THIEVES ARE TAKERS. GOD IS A GIVER. The contrast is blatant in this passage. Everything that a thief is concerned with deals with loss. Everything God brings is a gift. Ephesians 4:28 says, *He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.* When is a thief not a thief? When he stops taking and starts giving. When we give to others we are most like God.

II. THIEVES CREATE VICTIMS. GOD CREATES VICTORS. A thief does not care about the victim. He only thinks of self. But God transforms victims into victors. The cross was all about victims. But the empty tomb trumpets victory. Jesus was not there. He is risen.

III. THIEVES DESTROY PEACE OF MIND. GOD BUILDS A PEACEFUL MIND. Being the target of a thief violates our sense of security. God’s word can transform a human being by the renewal of the mind. Godly thoughts precede godly actions. Being in the center of God’s will brings about the peace of God.

IV. THIEVES ARE CLOSER TO GOD THAN THEY THINK. When Jesus was crucified between two thieves, the thieves or the world could not ignore Him. Neither can we. He who knew no sin, the ultimate Giver, became sin so we can become the righteousness of Christ. He became a thief like us so we can be restored like Him. One thief was set free to live and one remained a dying thief. So what will be your reality?

This Resurrection season, ask yourself the question...*Am I still a thief...or can I take my pardoned place as a citizen of the Kingdom?*

Blessings to you,
Pastor Sam