

Jan. 17, 2010 "I Am the Gate" John 10:1-10

"I tell you the truth, the man 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 man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. 3 The watchman 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. 5 But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." 6 Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them.

7 Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. 8 All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Context is always extremely important in Bible study! Here's the problem. John's gospel shows the animosity of the religious leaders towards Jesus. They are biased and prejudiced against Him. They will do anything to oppose and thwart Him. At the root of their problem is their unbelief that Jesus is indeed, the great "I AM" (or God). Specifically, the context for this story comes from the previous chapter. A man who had been blind all of his life had been healed by Jesus. Rather than being amazed at the miracle or celebrating with him, the Pharisees were outraged. It was always something with them. If he healed someone, it was on the wrong day. If he healed someone, then it was by the power of the devil. If he forgave someone, he was breaking the Law of Moses. We see in the response to the blind man in chapter 9, the incredible spiritual abuse of the Pharisees. The Pharisees did not care about this man. Instead, they mistreated the guy. Like lawyers questioning a witness, they kept grilling and harassing him. But, the blind man stood his ground. He even taunted his accusers with an inflammatory question: *"Do you want to become his disciples, too?"*

Their spiritual incompetence was not an isolated event. Jeremiah had struggled with it, too. He wrote (50:6): ***"My people have been lost sheep; their shepherds have led them astray and caused them to roam on the mountains. They wandered over mountain and hill and forgot their own resting place.***

The Cultural/Historical Setting Jesus opened His sermon with a familiar illustration (vs 1-6) that every listener in his day would understand. To those of us raised in the city, this is a major disconnect.

A pen was the place where a shepherd would put his sheep down for the night. The typical setting was bordered by rocks. We think of barbed wire – but they used rocks. It had one opening where the sheep could get in and go out. The shepherd guarded the flock at night by lying across the opening. Several flocks might shelter together in the same pen. When the shepherds came in the morning, they'd call their sheep, and their sheep would recognize their master's voice and follow him.

The genuine shepherd used the ordinary process of appearing at the door where the gatekeeper recognized him. Thieves or robbers did not come through that door, but tried to climb over the wall to enter the fold through another route. Sheep are not intelligent animals. However, the sheep recognize the voice of their shepherd and their ears perk up at the sound of his voice. They can discern the true shepherd from an imposter. The sheep wouldn't follow the thief or the robber - they must steal the sheep.

From this story, Jesus makes two "I AM" sayings. Today, we'll look at "I AM the **Gate.**" (Next week is "I AM the Good Shepherd.")

Jesus came to the nation of Israel. In talking with a Gentile woman who was concerned about her daughter, He said: "**I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.**" (Matthew 15:24) Later, of course, the Gospel is going to go the Gentiles, and Paul becomes the primary spokesman for this message.

He had great love and concern for the people. **When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.** (Matthew 9:36)

Since the people did not understand His symbolic language, Jesus followed the illustration with an application (John 10:7-10). Twice He said, "I am the Door." The way to get into the pen is through Him – and the way to get out is through Him. If you are inside the pen, you are "saved." If you are outside the pen, you are lost, exposed, or in grave danger. If you want to be saved from the dangers that exist, you must get into the pen. There's only one way in. Jesus is the doorkeeper. To enter His flock you come through Him. He is the Door of salvation. If you come in through Him, He will not only save you from danger, but will help you find pasture. This image was very real to that culture.

When He says that all who come before Him "are thieves and robbers" (not "were") it's clear that He was talking about the Pharisees. Again, look at the context. Chapter 9 leads directly into Chapter 10. These were not true shepherds. They did not love the sheep, but instead exploited them and abused them. The beggar was a good example of what the "thieves and robbers" could do to a person. If you've seen The White Witch in "The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe," you get a good picture of how thieves lie, cheat, steal, and kill. As she deceived Edmund with her "Turkish delight," so these religious leaders were false shepherds who were fleecing the flock. The Pharisees coveted (Luke 16:14), took advantage of the poor widows (Mark 12:40), turned God's temple into a den of thieves (Matthew 21:13), and plotted to kill Jesus so that Rome would not take away their privileges (John 11:49-53). They missed the spirit of love, grace, compassion and kindness for the sheep. The True Shepherd came to save the sheep, but the false shepherds take advantage of the sheep and exploit them. They were indeed, thieves and robbers.

Application:

1.) We are **sheepish**. It's a bit humbling to compare ourselves with sheep, as they are not brilliant animals! Charlie Ryser, while pastoring in Sharon, OK., got the opportunity to shear a sheep. From that personal experience he said: "Sheep are stupid/nearsighted." Isaiah 53:6 "**We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.**"

2.) **Jesus is THE gate** that leads to **Salvation**. Acts 4:12 "**Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.**" This is about having a personal relationship with Him.

We have "gates" in our world, too. Gated communities, Car alarms. Caller ID. ATM's & Computers ask for passwords. They are set up to protect us from those who intend harm. Those who try to steal from us are climbing over the barriers. When we go through "the Door," we receive life and we are protected/saved. As we go "in and out," we enjoy abundant life in the rich pastures of the Lord. His sheep enjoy fullness and freedom. Jesus not only gave His life for us, but He gives His life to us right now!

The Sheep & the shepherd really know each other. It's about relationship (the Prodigal Son – the Elder brother didn't want a relationship with the dad).

3.) The "**thief**" can also be anything which pulls us away from God. In this context it is false leaders and the system of legalism. But the thief can also be outward sin. Last week we talked about one such person, the woman caught in adultery. The thief comes to rob us of life. It comes to take us from God. A thief can be an avoidance of community. It

can also be the devil. This must be foundational - God is good – we must believe that and trust in Him. He wants us to be saved for eternity. We must maintain our relationship with Him.

4.) **Listening – and the sheep listen to his voice.** We must hear what God is saying to us. *“He who ears to hear, let him hear.”* Salvation is far more than just a one-time event – it’s an ongoing relationship. It’s about recovery. The sheep need to learn to trust that voice. I

Specifically, how do we listen to God? We have a variety of ways in which we can hear from God:

***Prayer and fasting (“quiet time”).**

***Corporate Worship.**

***Reading the Bible. Daily Bible Reading and Prayer Journal**

***Study (Tradition).**

***Community** – not in isolation or solitary confinement.

Dr. Atul Gawande’s book, The Checklist, is a very interesting read, for those of you who like to follow my recommendations. He was on NPR this week & in an interview he described what happens to prisoners when they are in solitary confinement for 23/24 hours a day. After a couple of months, you begin to simply slow down. You lose your ability to initiate behavior, organize yourself around any kind of purpose. You can begin to hallucinate. You start pacing back and forth for hours at a time. Then your thinking pattern begins to break down. There is irrational anger, obsessing on single points, and what ultimately can develop as outright psychosis. A Prison official he spoke with told him that putting people into solitary confinement produces more mental illness and violence.

You’re in worship service today. That’s a good start. But where do I go from here? I’d suggest two very simple things: Get a guide. Read with us and pray every day. Find a **community**. This can be hard, as you’ll probably feel awkward at first. Most people will tell you then tend to be shy, not outgoing.

What Jesus is saying here reminds me of Deuteronomy 30:19-20 ***This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.***