



'I Am the Door of the Sheep'

In John 10:1-5 Jesus spoke a parable which is not easy to interpret. Some see the sheepfold as the world. For others, it is the church, and for others, heaven. In one interpretation the sheep are all mankind, in another only the Jews. All would agree that the shepherd is Jesus. But who is the porter? Who are the thieves? And how can Jesus be both the shepherd and the door of the sheepfold at the same time? However, if we remember the context and also that it is the message that controls the sheep-farming symbols, not vice versa, we won't go far wrong.

The people did not understand when Jesus spoke of the false and true shepherd in 10:1-5. So he then plainly took some of the concepts associated with the keeping of sheep and applied them to himself. And he says in v 7: *"I am the door of the sheep."* Now in Palestine there were two kinds of sheepfolds. The first was a large and well-structured enclosure, usually found in towns and villages, having an entrance with a gate or door and guarded by a keeper who opened or closed it when the shepherds came for or brought back their sheep. It was this kind of communal fold Jesus alluded to in 10:1-6. The other kind was roughly structured – nothing more than a circle of rocks in a mountain pasture – into which the sheep could be driven at night. There was no door, just a two foot gap which functioned as an entrance, across which the shepherd would place his body in order to keep his sheep in and wild animals out.

This is the kind of sheepfold that Jesus was thinking about when he said, "I am the door of the sheep." So what truths did Jesus seek to convey in this saying?

1. A Door Effects Entry

Jesus calls Himself the door (or gate) only here. The expression "of the sheep" simply means he is the door by which the sheep enter. And he says that he is 'the' door – not 'a' door. There is an exclusiveness about the door. Jesus was not suggesting that there are several doors to salvation and that he is but one. We are not to think of many ways of coming to God. Jesus is saying that he is the one way, the door by which all the sheep enter – the sole way to God. We deserve to die for our own sin, both physically and spiritually. We deserve to be separated from God. But Jesus died in our place. He who was sinless accepted the guilt of our sin and died for us. No one else could do it, but he could and did.

Thus, he literally became the door by which sinful people can approach God the Father. In Hebrews 10:20 he is called a new and living way. Paul wrote, *"through him we ... have access ... to the Father."* (Eph 2:18) So there is only one door, according to Christ's image; and Christ himself is the door. I know that today people do not like to hear this. They want to subscribe to popular thought – that all paths, all faiths, all religions, lead to God and heaven and eternal life. But Jesus is the only gate of salvation. Only he can save a guilty sinner. There is no other way. There is no other gate. There is no other salvation.

But the mere presence of a door does not guarantee that it will be used. Thus Jesus also says here if any man enter in, he shall be saved. Any man! This door is available for the use of any person – regardless of who he or she is or where he or she comes from. So there is no reason why you (whoever you are) may not come into Christ's fold. The context of this parable was the healing of the man blind from birth. Having been healed by the Lord, he stood in defence of him and as a result was excommunicated by the Jewish religious leaders. But despite being despised and ostracised by others, he was sought out and accepted by Christ. (9:34-38) So can you. But you must enter in. You must come to Jesus. You must believe on him – trust him to receive you in order that you may be saved (10:9). John does not use the verb to save very often (six times in all). And he uses it to denote much the same as eternal life (the two are linked in 3:16-17). Thus Jesus

is effectively saying here that the only way to eternal life is through him. So the question is, Have you entered through this door? Have you come to him in order to be saved?

2. A Door Ensures Safety

Jesus promises that anyone who enters in through him will be safe. The shepherd lay down in the doorway principally to guard and not to sleep. The sheep of Christ have many enemies, summarised as *"the world, the flesh and the devil"*. Usually, they approach with such stealth that the sheep will not hear them. The good thing for them is that their Shepherd is always aware of the approach of the enemies and of their tactics.

Furthermore, safety is the essential point of the sheep going in and out. Jesus is not talking about people obtaining and then losing – entering and then leaving – salvation. When we close and lock our doors at night we do so to secure our homes and those within them. But to be able to come in and go out unmolested was the Jewish way of describing a life that was absolutely secure and safe. Where a man could go in and out without fear, it meant that his country was at peace, that the forces of law and order were supreme, and that he enjoyed a perfect security for his life. (cf Num 27:17, Deut 28:6, 1 Kings 3:7, Ps 121:8) And so once we obtain salvation through Christ, a new sense of safety and of security enters into life.

Our life is in the hands and care of our gracious God and Saviour. Thus there is safety and security in being a Christian, in being part of the household of faith, in living within the sheepfold of Jesus. The Lord promises that they that enter through the door *"shall be saved"* – from the penalty and power of sin, from the self-life and Satan, from fear, from ignorance, from helplessness, from weakness. Every day we are confronted by 'enemies' that are stronger than us and who seek to attack us, and without Christ we will be conquered. But as the Door Jesus defends us and keeps us safe. For to get at us, Satan and the other enemies of the church have to cross over Jesus. And, they can't possibly be successful. So don't fear! Don't be afraid! Take courage! Take heart! For Jesus is the gate to the sheep-fold. And against him Satan and sin can never prevail.

3. A Door Extends Opportunity

Jesus continues and find pasture. (10:9) Palestine is a barren land for the most part, and good pasture was not easy to find. Consequently, to be assured of good pasture was a wonderful thing. It spoke of prosperity and contentment, of health and happiness. It was in this sense that David wrote of the care of the Lord as his Shepherd in Psalm 23. And Paul could say to the Philippians, *"But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."* (Phil 4:19)

So just as a sheep finds all its needs met when it is securely in the care of the shepherd, so the sinner will find all the nourishment his soul needs when he enters life eternal through Jesus. And this life is wonderful. Jesus speaks of believers having it *"abundantly."* There is nothing cramped and limiting about the life Christ gives. Jesus came that men might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. (10:10) This phrase means to have a surplus, a super-abundance of a thing. So to be a follower of Jesus, to know who he is and what he means, is to have a superabundance of life. When we come to Christ we begin to live in the joy of the Lord and the power of the Holy Spirit. There is grace to help in every time of need and a joy that comes from constant fellowship with the Lord which far outweighs life's inconveniences.

Conclusion

So when Jesus said I am the Door he was teaching us that there is only one means of receiving eternal life, only one source of knowledge of God, only one fount of spiritual nourishment, only one basis for spiritual security – Jesus alone. When Adam sinned against God, he was sent out of the Garden and shut off from God's special presence and his abundant blessings (Gen 3:23-24). Christ is the door – the only door – back to that presence and abundance.

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