

I AM the Door **John 10:7-10**

I know that many of you love the Bible for many reasons. One of those reasons is that it often brings to the fore, for the reader, what is instinctively familiar. And the Spirit has provided in this manner as a means of understanding the things of God in clearer ways. The wine at Cana's wedding, the bread beside the Sea of Galilee, salt and light, cloaks and rust, birds and lilies are all visual aids given for our sake. The passage just read fits in this bevy of emblematic examples. True, most of us aren't living the farm life, and more specifically, birthing lambs or shearing the ewes who bore them. The ovine¹ world is likely not in your wheelhouse of experiences—nor in mine. Yet, the reader can easily envision the down-to-earth pedagogy of the Lord Jesus.

And there's little doubt that the context into which Jesus was born, and into which Jesus taught, knew much about animal husbandry. In fact, God's people—whether the countryside farmer or the priest serving during the time of the OT prophets—lived in that world since Genesis 4:2: “*Now Abel was a keeper of sheep...*” It was their world, and it had been so for thousands of years. To labor the point, living among domesticated animals of various kinds, which served many purposes, was a significant part of their cultural heritage. If probed, we would all have our own contexts—creatures, circumstances, and connections—which have contributed to our particular roots. In some sense, many of those things have helped to ground us, making us, to some degree, who we are.

But the developments of the modern world have put us to sleep with regard to what has helped give our lives a particular shape. Paul Kingsnorth, in his book *Against the Machine*, contends that we are living in an age of “mass uprooting”—a kind of churning turmoil where panting after the next thing is shaping us more than we realize.² And this longing for the thrill of the next thing has caused in us a dismissive indifference toward what and who has shaped us, for good or ill. He writes,

“We could simply call this process modernity...a process of uprooting us from nature, culture, and God...in which we have been on course to become, since at least the Industrial Revolution, mere cogs in a giant mechanism...Even if you are living where your forefathers have lived for generations, you can bet that the smartphone you gave your child will unmoor them more effectively than any bulldozer could...We reach for toxic imitations of our lost roots, but they can never replace the real thing...Meanwhile, the Machine pushes on, relentlessly.”³

Though I'm making it sound like this is something new on the world's scene, and perhaps Kingsnorth too, this is not a new problem. Asherah poles and smartphones have more in common than we think. Tools, systems, and ideas that offer ease and amusement have long mixed with our hearts to poison to our most sacred roots. And brothers and sisters, our roots are indeed sacred. What God began in the garden to be completed on the Day of Christ Jesus is a beautiful root system so vast and glorious that asking to be untangled from it is unthinkable! Yet we're not immune to blindness to the things undermining our gospel rootedness and what is potentially shaping us in

¹ Just learned this week last week, from a Jeopardy episode!

² Paul Kingsnorth, *Against the Machine*, 18.

³ Kingsnorth, 19.

ways that are contrary to Christ. Why? In part because they present themselves not as enemies, but as life's amenities.

But, to John's Gospel, sometimes the underminers and their voices meet us head on. That's true in our text's context today. And using familiar images, Jesus declared to His people—and to the Pharisaical **gang** nearby—a foundation stone of rootedness for the true sheepfold of God.

I. The exclusivity Jesus declares

There is a slight shift from verses 1-5 to what we see unfolding in our passage this morning, verses 7-10. In the former, Jesus is the shepherd who goes through the door. In the latter, He identifies Himself as the **door** itself. Next week, in our bible study groups, you'll consider the shepherding aspects of Christ. But we'll not leave the farmstead this morning.

When we read any of the I AM statements of Jesus, none can escape the narrowness of His claims. By "exclusivity" I mean limited to one, set apart, not shared with any other. Just as God meant to convey in Exodus—in the very face of the hissing powerful and before all the oppressed weak—God is one of one. There are no real "gods" in the sense of beings who rival the God of scripture. He—and He alone—is God. From the foundational Shema of Deuteronomy 6 to the barrage of claims by Isaiah in chapters 43-46, God is LORD alone and has no rivals. All the I AM sayings are intrinsically this way.

Exclusivity may be a bad word in our day, but a foundation stone of our faith—of our lives, of our very rescue from what we deserve due to our sin—is found in these divine claims coming from the lips of Jesus Christ. To part of the crowd in attendance, ***I am the door*** was healing balm—directions of relief for a centuries' long terminal disease. But to other high-browed, proud illumines present, it was an offensive lightning bolt strike that engendered fear and, eventually, murderous hate.

No surprises on that front. And Jesus doesn't grant any wiggle room—either to the false men of the cloth who are present, or to the more gentle sensitivities of our own day. You've heard them—those who display a more gracious latitude to what constitutes entryway into God's favor. Jesus speaks with the double surety, ***Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door.***⁴ Interestingly, and I think in a helpful way, the Psalmist exercises the same image in Psalm 118, beginning in verse 19, "*Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD. [20] This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it. [21] I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. [22] The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. [23] This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.*" In our 1 Peter study last year, we noticed Peter applying verse 22. The rejection of the stone by the builders is the rejection of Christ by His opponents. It's not a stretch, then, to see Jesus as *the gate* in verse 20. He gives His righteousness to a people who have entered by Him, Yahweh, the gate-door, by faith.

What does a **door** communicate? Again, most fundamentally it conveys an exclusivity. Jesus is here speaking of false shepherd-leaders who are essentially functioning as lowlifes—those who care little about God's people. And they are within earshot. Yet, they weren't catching Jesus' drift,

⁴ Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 290.

according to verse 6. So, Jesus switches images from Him being the *shepherd* to Him being the *door* through which His sheep and His undershepherds have proper access.

He knows the way, but He's also the way itself. There is no other. He is the proper entry into God's kingdom. Only through Jesus can God be reached and communion with. This door—consisting of Christ's perfect Person and His perfect work of creating access to God—is solitary. There are no other admittance points. It excludes all others who might assert another way to know God, another way to experience God, or another way to be accepted by God. The claim couldn't be clearer.

There are other religions, philosophies, and ideas that give the aroma of something fresh and nourishing, but there's only one Bread who satisfies. And there are other powers and persuasions in this world which hold open doors with high promises, but there's only one *door*. All the I AM statements are more than echoes of Exodus 3; they are the same voice, with the same authority, same power, same glory, same nature, same purpose, the same LORD, Emmanuel, stating precisely who He is.

Exuding pharaonic pheromones, these Pharisees believe a few falsehoods about themselves. Their religious pyramid schemes aren't hidden from Jesus.

II. The intruders Jesus depicts

Jesus doesn't pull any punches. ⁸ *All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them.* The contrast between Jesus and whoever these malcontents are, as we will see unfold, is sharp. We shouldn't think that Jesus means the likes of Abraham, Moses, David, Hannah, Deborah, or any others who closed their eyes for the last time in faith. However, Leon Morris states that the phrase *all who came before Me* has a comprehensiveness to it, which would have included the "Jewish hierarchy of His day."⁵ Laboring for an outward righteousness, the religious leaders hearing this message of exclusivity with mercy believe their way is the right way, the saving way. They trust that they've arrived at placating and pleasing the Father. Leaning into their historical roots, their present devotedness, and their ability to persuade others to do the same, their arrogance has veiled their eyes to the way of God standing before them.

But alongside this, Jesus is concerned with how their arrogant blindness affects others. The idea of *thieves* here is bound up in the word John uses, *kleptēs*. It's where we get our word for *kleptomaniac*, or one whose pattern of life is theft and theft by way of craftiness or stealth.⁶ The other descriptor, a *robber*, is not too interested in hoodwinking others. He commandeers by sheer force.

So, what are those, to whom Jesus referred, stealing or robbing? Well, He rarely speaks in a silo. Jesus is likely drawing from texts such as Ezekiel 34, especially considering the sheep imagery here. We read there, beginning in verse 1, "*The word of the LORD came to me: [2] 'Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? [3] You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter*

⁵ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 506.

⁶ James Boice, *The Gospel of John*: Vol. 3, 743.

the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. [4] The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. [5] So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts..." Thus, Jesus has in mind false shepherds, or even messianic pretenders, who instead of feeding the sheep what they need to live, take from them to enhance their own lives. Further, they are slaughtering the sheep, those who fundamentally are God's treasured possession.⁷ They are, in essence, thieving God by cunning and robbing God by blatant aggression. It's in these ways that these religious leaders subverted and would continue to subvert the true God's message and messenger by seeking to bury—literally—this root of Jesse. And for three days—a miniscule speck of time in the vast scope of eternity—they will revel.

But Jesus announces His own successful work inside of those who have taken up their crosses to follow Him. ***All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them.*** Sheep will not follow unfamiliar voices, as has been the case in the shepherding world for as long as sheep have been around. It's grounding, really. On one hand, that we're following Jesus at all and not false voices who are sly and aggressive is a mercy impossible to overprize. Having been given ears to hear and follow Christ is a means of Him guarding us and keeping us. The voices of unbelief, pleasure, indifference never pause in calling out for our allegiance. But by the Spirit we hear and follow our Savior and King. Let that draw you to Him with praise and gratitude. On the other hand, though we may be terribly dismayed when people leave or betray Jesus and His church, or when false voices prevail, we should expect it. Sometimes, with a well-executed heist, ***thieves and robbers*** are successful, as they, verse 10, ***kill and steal and destroy***. Jesus aids our expectations and He stokes our thanksgivings of His guardianship.

III. The grace Jesus discloses

⁹ I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved...

A. Salvation through this door

Jesus now openly asserts what the angel promised to his father Joseph, "[Mary] will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."⁸ The idea of ***saved*** here is "a comprehensive term for the whole process whereby men are delivered from the consequences of their sin and brought into the blessing of God."⁹ Jesus here offers the precursor to Romans 8:3. God, "by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh." I imagine Peter worshiping as he wrote how this holy condemnation played out, "[Jesus] bore our sins, in His body, on the tree."¹⁰ At the cross, Jesus atoned for our sin, every one of them. We came into this world under sin's dominion and curse. Jesus came into this world under His Father's dominion and blessing to deal a death blow to sin's wages and sin's effects. This is the good news of great joy for all peoples: That peace between God and man has

⁷ Deuteronomy 14:2, 1 Peter 2:9

⁸ Matthew 1:21

⁹ Morris, 508.

¹⁰ 1 Peter 2:24

been established solely through the blood of the cross of Christ.¹¹ And more than an assertion, there is here an invitation, *if anyone enters!*

So then, hear the word of Jesus, and believe Him, *if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved.* Your sin and my sin are worthy of justice, yes, but through this *door* God has the kind of effusive grace that can justify the chief of sinners. Your sin has enslaved you in its service, but through this *door* is the full asking price paid for your redemption. Your sin has estranged you from God and others, but through this *door* there is a place in God's family—adoption as sons and daughters. Your sin has warped your judgment of right and wrong, bogging you down in its muck and mire, but through this *door* is a change of direction and desires called sanctification. Your burdens attached to sin have rendered you hopeless, but through this *door* is the hope of glory that produces a life brimming over with significance and joys unspeakable. This *door* delivers from every enemy, in every age, in every corner of the globe. This *door* is no abstraction. It is a Person, *the* Person in whom all the lines of salvation meet.¹²

It's precisely why He came down into our world. Isaac Ambrose, four hundred years ago, addressed the divine acumen in sending Jesus to save. He wrote, "Oh, wisdom of God [in the incarnation]! Man's nature can suffer death, but not overcome it; the divine nature can overcome death—and all things—but cannot suffer it. And hence...Jesus Christ: O muse on this...that Jesus was carrying on the work of salvation in His arrival at Bethlehem."¹³

B. Provisions through this door

⁹ *If anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.* I grew up near a maximum-security prison in Lake County, two hours north of here. Living there for 18 years one might imagine the fear of a little boy whose mom tells him that he can't go out to play because some bad men had escaped from a place where bad men lived. That happened at least once that I can remember. My mother's message was that my safety was in jeopardy; that peace in our community had been upended. I couldn't go out and come in freely because of the threat. And it's through this *door* that all who enter find such refuge, a refuge of the most significant kind. Wolves of the world still ravage the church, taking life after life. But if we've entered this door, there are spiritual sureties that no thief, wolf, or crowned snake can touch. *The body they may kill, God's truth abideth still.* This is the security and depth of safety that Jesus the *door* offers, "*The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.*"¹⁴

Yet, *will go in and out and find pasture* also means that believers will find a sufficiency of all that is needed. As in Jesus' day and in many shepherding contexts of our own day, the shepherd would lead his sheep *out* into the green pastures and still waters by day. When they had their fill, he then brought them back *in* under his watch care by night.

Do we not gladly taste these things as those who have walked by faith through this *door* of plenty? If Christ sits on your heart's throne, do you not, end of verse 10, *have life, and have it abundantly?*

¹¹ Colossians 1:20

¹² Ralph Robinson, *Christ All, And In All*, 348-349.

¹³ Isaac Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, 198-225.

¹⁴ Psalm 121:8

The riches of His grace are immeasurable.¹⁵ According to God's riches in Christ, every need is supplied.¹⁶

Ceaseless, lapping waves of rescuing love are ours in the Lord Jesus. They come in the form of absolute security and an abundant supply of what we need, all at His disposal. Everything necessary for life and godliness are through this *door* and this *door* alone.

Conclusion

See with me from the middle of verse 10 those two words which give rise to the occasions for our celebrations this time of year: *I came*. Our passage today has filled in some of the purposes of Christ's condescension, namely that He came to be the lone entryway of God's saving mercies. God sent His only Son into the world that we *may have life*, and that everlastingly.

Come, let us adore this *door*, who plunged willingly and purposely from heaven to earth, who "sunk Himself into our flesh"¹⁷ to give us Himself—the Savior we needed and the Friend who nourishes us for a lifetime.

He saves and He keeps.

At the most fundamental level of life, what more do any of us need?

¹⁵ Ephesians 2:7

¹⁶ Philippians 4:19

¹⁷ Martin Luther, as quoted in John Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold*, 356.