

I AM THE DOOR

John 10:6-9

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“I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture” (Jn. 10:9).

In the parable of the Good Shepherd (Jn. 10:1-5), Jesus spoke of the true shepherd who comes to the door, gains entry, and calls his own sheep by name. This parable is so familiar to Christians that it is hard for us to imagine anyone failing to grasp its meaning. But John says that when Jesus first spoke this “figure of speech,” his hearers “did not understand what he was saying to them” (Jn. 10:6).

Jesus responded with another figure of speech in which he made clear the reference to himself: “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep” (Jn. 10:7). This answer reminds us that all Christian truth finds its ultimate meaning in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Whatever we may be talking about – whether it is a Christian perspective on world events, interpersonal relations, or personal problems – the real point should always be related to Jesus’ coming and his saving plans for people and the world.

This was Jesus’ constant example. When his hearers wondered about his teaching, Jesus answered with reference to himself – “I am” – and to the blessings he gives to anyone who believes – “he will.” In these two expressions is found the entirety of the Christian gospel.

THE DOOR OF THE SHEEP

There were two kinds of sheepfolds in ancient Palestine, and Jesus refers to both in this chapter. In the parable, Jesus made use of the more durable structure in the towns: a high-walled sheep pen

with a paid guard, into which all the shepherds would bring their flocks. But now he refers to the more rustic sheepfolds out in the fields. These were smaller and less substantial, and were used for the sheep's safety at night. The key feature of these sheep pens was that they did not have a door, only an open space in the wall of piled rocks. After bringing in his sheep, the shepherd would lay his own body across that space so that as he slept in the entry he became the door.

The great Old Testament scholar Sir George Adam Smith was once traveling through Palestine when he came across a shepherd and his sheep. During their conversation, the shepherd showed him the fold into which he led his sheep at night. It consisted of four walls, with one open space. Sir George asked the shepherd if that opening was how the sheep got in. "Yes," said the shepherd, "and when they are in there, they are perfectly safe." "But there is no door," said Sir George. "I am the door," said the shepherd. He explained, "When the light has gone, and all the sheep are inside, I lie in the open space, and no sheep ever goes out but across my body, and no wolf comes in unless he crosses my body; I am the door."¹

This was Jesus' meaning when he spoke these same words. Unlike the large town sheepfold that he mentioned earlier, which symbolized Judaism, from which Jesus drew out his sheep, this sheepfold stands for his own flock – his Church. The way in is through his body, which he offered for our sins on the cross. Jesus is the door of the sheep, and those who enter are safe for eternity.

This is the third "I am" statement Jesus makes in the Gospel of John. There are seven in all, presenting a mini-Christology all of their own. The first was "I am the bread of life," to which Jesus added, "whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (Jn. 6:35). Next, he taught, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (Jn. 8:12). Later in this chapter, Jesus will say, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (Jn. 10:11). Before John's Gospel is finished, he will have added, "I am the resurrection and the life" (Jn. 11:25), "I am the way, the truth

¹ Cited from R. Kent Hughes, *John: That You May Believe* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 1999), 267.

and the life” (Jn. 14:6), and “I am the true vine” (Jn. 15:1). If we can understand the meaning of these sayings, we will have grasped the very heart of the Christian faith. And if we receive them in personal faith, we will have gained Jesus as our own great “I am” in salvation.

With each of the seven “I am’s,” Jesus’ meaning is clear. Here, the point is that one may enter salvation only through faith in him. There was only one entryway into the sheepfold; likewise, faith in Jesus is the only way to enter God’s salvation.

This is an important point to affirm because so many people, including some who call themselves Christians, deny that Jesus is the only way of salvation. Liberals maintain that while we may believe in Jesus, it would be intolerant to deny salvation by other ways. This is why the teaching of Christ as the only Savior is Christianity’s gravest offense in our relativistic age. Even some sentimental evangelicals have denied the necessity of faith in Jesus. They argue that God will accept anyone who is sincere in whatever he believes. But what matters most is what Jesus and the Bible say. Jesus says here, “I am *the* door of the sheep” (Jn. 10:7). He is not one of many doors, but the one and only door to salvation. This is something Jesus emphasizes all through John’s Gospel. Earlier, he insisted, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him” (Jn. 3:36). If God’s wrath remains on anyone who rejects Jesus, then faith in Jesus is the one way to escape God’s just condemnation.

People who object that God has provided only one way of salvation show that they do not recognize the reality of their need. A man dying of thirst in the desert does not complain to stumble upon only one watery oasis. A man dying of cancer does not object that there is only one person who donates the bone marrow that saves his life. And a sinner, realizing the otherwise unavoidable prospect of unremitting corruption in this life and wrathful judgment in the life to come, does not object that the Son of God lovingly bore for us the hell our sin deserves. Such a person does not complain, “Why must my soul be saved in only this way?”

This makes the point that the unbeliever’s true objection to Jesus is really an objection to God’s verdict on sin. Unbelievers refuse to confess their guilt. They demand another way – any other way – that

grants a salvation that is to their own glory instead of to God's. Such people delight to insist that many roads lead to God, which is true. But only one of those roads leads to his forgiving grace instead of God's judgment. When it comes to salvation, Jesus insists, "I am the door."

Moreover, it is clear from Jesus' teaching in John's Gospel that this door may be entered only by faith alone. This is what Jesus demanded of the blind man he had cured in John 9: "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" (Jn. 9:35). "Lord, I believe," he answered (Jn. 9:38). This is why John wrote his Gospel: "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (Jn. 20:31).

But notice that Jesus says that he is a door, not a wall. We do not climb a ladder of achievements or scale a height to enter in. Indeed, Jesus says that those who try to enter this way do not belong. There are always religious figures who falsely claim that salvation comes on the basis of our achievements for God and others. But Jesus insists that such false teachers, like the Pharisees he was denouncing, "are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them" (Jn. 10:8). The true sheep listen to Jesus, who is a door and not a wall.

Nor is a Jesus a ticket booth, so that one may enter by paying money, doing good deeds or performing religious rituals. Jesus is not a long, winding passageway, so that one must complete a life-long quest or follow a path laid out by worldly priests with the hope of someday arriving into God's favor. Jesus is the door, and those who enter by simple faith are immediately received into everlasting life.

IF ANYONE!

So if Jesus is the door, who are the people who may enter through faith in him? According to Jesus, the answer is *anyone*. He said: "I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved" (Jn. 10:9).

This shows that while Jesus presents only one way of salvation, that one way is open to absolutely everyone. Jesus does not say, "I am the door. If someone has a good reputation, or comes from the right

family, or leads a fairly decent life he may enter by me and be saved.” Not at all! He says, “If anyone enters by me, he will be saved.”

Some will see this as a contradiction of the Bible’s doctrine of election, or predestination. In John 6:37, Jesus said, “All that the Father gives me will come to me.” This means that all who believe come to Christ because they were chosen by the Father and were given to his Son for salvation. Jesus affirms this teaching later in John 10. Speaking of the eternal security of his sheep, he comments that “my Father... has given them to me” (Jn. 10:29). From these and many other clear passages in the Bible, we know that, as Paul writes of believers, God “chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4).

But if this is true, how can we teach that anyone may enter God’s fold through faith in Jesus? The answer is that the gospel is genuinely and freely offered to any and all. In the same verse where Jesus says, “All that the Father gives me will come to me,” he immediately adds, “whoever comes to me I will never cast out” (Jn. 6:37).

Is this a contradiction? The answer is no, because the two teachings present the gospel from two perspectives, one from the side of the divine decree and the other from the side of man’s opportunity.

The famous Bible expositor James Montgomery Boice tells of a woman who came to faith in Christ during a sermon preached by Donald Grey Barnhouse that dealt with these matters. Although the woman was raised in a Christian home, she was kept from coming to Christ by worries that she was not one of the elect. Barnhouse helped her by putting it this way: “Imagine that the cross has a door in it. All you are asked to do is to go through. On one side, the side facing you, there is written an invitation: ‘Whosoever will, may come.’ You stand there with your sin upon you and wonder if you should enter or not. Finally you do, and as you do the burden of your sin drops away. You are safe and free. Joyfully you then turn around and see written on the backside of the cross, through which you have now entered, the words ‘Chosen in him before the foundation of the world.’” At this, Barnhouse invited those hearing to accept God’s invitation to enter through faith in Christ and thus to find that they were secure in God’s sovereign and eternal plan.

At this point, the woman came to Jesus through faith and entered into eternal life. For the rest of her life she would say that it was understanding how a sovereign God freely offers salvation to sinners that enabled her to believe. Boice was able to relate this story with confidence since the woman was his mother.²

The same should be true for you. Do not exhaust your mind wondering where you stand in God's eternal plan. Instead, act upon the invitation God has presented to you, sealed in the blood of his own Son. "I am the door," Jesus says. "If anyone enters by me, he will be saved" (Jn. 10:9).

Anyone means *anyone*. It meant the Jewish people who cried out for Jesus' crucifixion and mocked him on the cross, but to whom Peter preached the gospel so that many were saved. It means the quiet person who has never committed notorious sins but realizes that his heart has regularly broken God's holy law. It means the person who has lived mainly for himself, using others and taking advantage of opportunities to sin. It means those who have dabbled with religion and toyed with the church but have never made a true commitment. It means you who are broken by the hardship of life but recognize in Jesus a Savior sent from God. It means those who have mocked God and reviled religion, but hear the shepherd's voice calling in their heart. "If anyone enters by me, he will be saved," Jesus offers you. If you are ever to be saved it must be through faith in Christ, and there will never be a better time to enter through Christ than right now.

"I AM... HE WILL"

Jesus is the good shepherd, and his sheep enter his fold through faith in him. But what does it mean to enter Jesus' flock? He explains with three promises: "He will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture" (Jn. 10:9).

First, those who enter through Christ will be *saved*. The Bible presents many examples and illustrations that help us to understand how entering into Christ brings salvation.

² James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 3:744-745.

One is Noah's ark. God sent a great flood to destroy the earth and the entire wicked human race. The only exception was Noah and his family, since Noah trusted in God. God commanded Noah to build an ark, and when the rains began to fall Noah entered in. This flood prefigured the final judgment, in which every person will stand before God and answer for his or her sins (see Rev. 20:11-15). Only those who have entered into salvation through faith in Christ will be saved to escape God's holy wrath.

Another example is the cities of refuge established by God in the time of Moses. If an Israelite unintentionally killed a man, he would have to flee to escape the judgment of the man's family. But God had established cities of refuge, and those who entered into these places were promised freedom from punishment. Likewise, we may flee into Christ and escape the vengeance of God's justice against our sins.

Charles Spurgeon relates the story of some travelers on the Russian plains who were pursued by wolves. Their horses were rushing forward madly, with the savage beasts hot on their heels. They barely made it to some huts into which the travelers all rushed. Immediately, they could hear the wolves crashing against the sides and leaping on the roof, howling and thrashing, but they could not get in. Spurgeon writes, "Now, when a man is in Christ, he can hear, as it were, the devils howling like wolves, all fierce and hungry for him; and his own sins, like wolves, are seeking to drag him down to destruction. But he has got in to Christ, and that is such a shelter that all the devils in the world, if they were to come at once, could not [dislodge] a single beam of that eternal refuge."³

This answers the great question of life. One may escape tax collectors by fleeing the country. One may escape a bad reputation by leaving town. One may escape a harsh boss by changing jobs. But how can anyone escape the unyielding justice of a holy God in his wrath against our sins? Jesus answers: "I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved." Jesus saves us by having fulfilled God's law on our behalf and by dying as the Lamb of God to pay for the sins of his sheep. Through faith in his cross, we enter into a

³ Charles H. Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 63 vols. (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Press, 1969), 58:69.

salvation that is made eternally secure by the precious blood of Christ.

The second blessing is made clear by the illustration of the door in the sheepfold. When the sheep entered in and the shepherd laid his body across the doorway, they were protected from every intruder.

Likewise, those who enter in by Christ will not only be saved but they will also be *safe*. This is the point of Jesus' saying that the sheep "will go in and out" (Jn. 10:9). This means that they will constantly live under the protection offered by their good shepherd.

Jesus was referring to an ancient prophecy by Moses. Shortly before his death, Moses said, "Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be as sheep that have no shepherd" (Num. 27:16-17). The point is that God would provide a Messiah through whom God's people would always have a shepherd to guide and protect them.

Sheep are the most helpless animals on the face of the earth, with no means of defending themselves. This depicts our spiritual vulnerability in a world of sin and evil. But those who enter in through Christ will not be left unguarded against spiritual attacks and the condemnation of sin, but are forever safe under his shepherding care. As Jesus goes on to say, "They will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand" (Jn. 10:28).

Lastly, the true sheep who answer Christ's call and enter in by him, will "find pasture" (Jn. 10:9). This means that believers in Jesus will not only be *saved* and be *safe*, but they will also be *satisfied*.

Do you fear that by committing yourself to Jesus you will lose all the joy of living? Do you think that while gaining the life to come you will lose the pleasures of this present life? If so, I would ask you to consider if people in this world are really happy. You may know people who are committed to seeking pleasure through sinful and self-serving lifestyles. Are they really happy? Does their satiation produce satisfaction? And are sin's pleasures making you happy and satisfied? Speaking of worldly pleasures, Jesus once said, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again" (Jn. 4:13). Then he

added, “But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (Jn. 4:14).

The truth is, as Leon Morris put it, “The Christian life is an exuberant affair, full of the joy of the Lord and the power of the Holy Spirit.”⁴ Can you imagine a life in which God’s power is working in your heart for blessings? Can you deny what a joy it would be to grow in faith, hope, and love (1 Cor. 13:13). Does not your spirit revel in the thought of having communion with God? What Jesus offers is very different than what the world offers, and what Jesus offers is the very best. His sheep “will go in and out and find pasture,” he says. “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (Jn. 10:9-10).

If you have never come to Christ, these blessings of salvation, safety, and satisfaction provide every reason to enter in through simple faith. And if you are a believer, do you realize these blessings that are yours through Jesus? Do you have the peace of knowing that your soul is safe for all time, that death can only bring you into greater pleasure, and that whatever your present trials Christ is with you to help, strengthen, and bless? If you know this, is it transforming your experience, so that your faith is bearing fruit in a harvest of worship and rejoicing? Every Christian has every reason to rejoice all the time, because he is saved, he is safe forever, and by feeding in the pastures of God’s Word his heart will be satisfied.

WHAT A DOOR IS FOR

When Jesus said, “I am the door,” he offered us entry through faith into the greatest life and the greatest destiny. But this great opportunity can be wasted if it is misused. A door is not there for you merely to look in and watch as others are blessed. A door is not there only to be admired. It may be possible to use a doorstep as a place to sit down. But none of these things is what a door is for.

Are you allowing yourself merely to watch the blessings of God in other peoples’ lives? Do you merely admire the obvious excellence

⁴ Leon Morris, *Reflections on the Gospel of John* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986), 375.

of Jesus, without committing yourself to him? Have you come to his church merely to loiter but not to enter in? If so, then you will have wasted the greatest opportunity anyone could ever offer. For when Jesus said, "I am the door," he meant for you to enter that door by trusting in him. Have you done that? Will you do that now? If you enter in through him, you will be saved, your eternal destiny will be safe and secure, and as you feed on God's blessing as one of his own beloved flock, your soul will find eternal satisfaction.