

Main Idea: By calling Himself *the gate* in John 10:7-10, Jesus is helping us think about two subjects.

I. By calling Himself the gate, Jesus is teaching us about His identity (7-8).

- A. Who is the gate?
- B. Who are the thieves?
- C. Who are the sheep?
 - 1. They listen to Jesus.
 - 2. They don't listen to the thieves.

II. By calling Himself the gate, Jesus is offering us an invitation (9-10).

- A. Jesus gives.
 - 1. He offers salvation.
 - 2. He offers security.
 - 3. He offers sustenance.
- B. The thief takes.

Make It Personal: Jesus' claim has tremendous implications for us.

- A. We may experience joy.
 - 1. The life which the world offers doesn't satisfy.
 - 2. Jesus offers *life* that is abundant!
- B. We must enter the gate.
 - 1. I must repent.
 - 2. I must believe.

The Bottom Line: There is only one gate. On which side are you standing?

Growing up I loved to go back to the woods on our farm. The sixty acres of hardwoods and grassy fields provided wonderful shade and pasture for the cattle and horses. It was also a dream world of opportunity for a young boy. There were trails to hike, a creek to explore, wild raspberries to enjoy, and more.

When you were done in the woods, there was one final task you had to accomplish. It was the last thing you did before you left the pasture and headed for the house. If you forgot, you'd have a not-so-good situation on your hands shortly. You had to *close the gate*.

A gate is very important. What does it do? A gate is a means of access. A gate prevents animals that are supposed to be in the pasture from leaving and also stops animals that are *not* supposed to be in the pasture from entering. In short, gates keep things out. And gates let things in.

Which is what makes Jesus' claim in John 10:7 so intriguing. In John 10:7 the Lord Jesus made a claim that He repeated in verse 9. He said, “I am the gate.” Why did Jesus call Himself “the gate” (KJV and ESV say ‘door’)? What did He mean by that statement? Who needs a gate? Apparently, we do, for Jesus would not have come to earth to become *the gate* unless we needed a gate.

But why? Why do we need a gate? And why did Jesus say He was *the gate*? And what are we supposed to do with this gate?

I want you to know that these four words, “I am the gate,” communicate life-changing truth to us, and we're going to find out what it is this morning. By calling Himself *the gate* in John 10:7-10, Jesus wants us think about two critical subjects. First, He's teaching us about His identity—that's verses 7-8. And second, He's offering us an invitation—that's verses 9-10.

** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is intended to prompt continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ This message grows out of a series on The Good Shepherd preached at WBC in 2003.

I. By calling Himself the gate, Jesus is teaching us about His identity (7-8).

Last week, we began our journey through John 10, and listened to Jesus announce that He is the Good Shepherd. I mentioned at the time that Jesus never intended this to be some quaint illustration to entertain us. Actually, this teaching about the Good Shepherd occurred in a context of controversy. We mustn't forget that, or we'll miss the point of today's text.

The controversy had to do with what happened back in John 9. There Jesus healed a blind beggar on the Sabbath, an act which should have thrilled everyone, but instead ruffled the feathers of the religious establishment. The Pharisees eventually excommunicated the healed man and attacked Jesus.

Keep in mind. These Pharisees were considered to be the spiritual leaders of Israel, the Bible men. If you wanted to understand God's Word, you went to the Pharisees. If you wanted to get right with God, you asked the Pharisees to show you how. They were the good guys. They were God's guys. They were the shepherds of Israel.

In that context Jesus told a little story in 10:1-5. He described a scene that His hearers could easily imagine. He talked about a sheep pen, a shepherd, some sheep, and a thief. He said the man that doesn't enter the pen by the gate but by climbing over the back wall is a thief. And He said that the shepherd doesn't climb over the wall, but uses the gate. And when he calls his sheep, they recognize his voice and come to him. But those same sheep will never follow a stranger, but will run away from him because they don't recognize his voice.

That was Jesus' story. And according to verse 6, it went right over His hearers' heads.

So Jesus continued in verse 7. Notice the connective word "therefore" [KJV "then"]. "Therefore Jesus said again [since they missed the point the first time]." And here's what He said in verses 7-8, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them."

If there was controversy in the air prior to this moment, things were really tense now. Jesus made a contrast, and in so doing He called attention to the truth of His identity.

There are three objects in Jesus' story we need to identify. There's the gate, the thieves, and the sheep. The first object is easy to identify.

A. Who is the gate? Jesus said, "I am the gate."

It's a fascinating study to go through John's gospel and investigate all of the "I Am" claims Jesus made. For instance, Jesus announced in John 6:35, "I am the Bread of Life." In John 8:12 He said, "I am the Light of the world." In John 11:25 He announced, "I am the resurrection and the life." He didn't merely say, "I give bread," or "I show the light," or "I offer you resurrection and life." He said, "I *am* the bread of life. I *am* the light of the world. I *am* the resurrection and the life."

Later He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," in John 14:6. And in John 15:5 He said, "I am the Vine." And in John 8:58 He simply revealed Himself as the "I Am," a clear claim to deity.

Now here in John 10, we hear Him use two images to reveal His identity. *I am the gate of the sheep* (7). And, *I am the Good Shepherd of the sheep* (which we'll consider next week in verse 11).

Why does Jesus call Himself the “gate”/“door”? John 1:51 portrays Jesus as a ladder connecting earth and heaven. In Revelation 3:20, Jesus is said to be standing at the door knocking. Here He says He IS the door. What does He mean?

It's a shepherding metaphor. Jesus' listeners knew all about shepherds and sheepfolds, but since we don't, it's easy for us to miss the connection. Jesus' isn't talking about a door to a house. He's talking about a door or gate to a sheepfold.

I read the story as told by Sir George Adam Smith about a man who traveled to Israel, “He was one day traveling with a guide, and came across a shepherd and his sheep. He fell into conversation with him. The man showed him the fold into which the sheep were led at night. It consisted of four walls, with a way in. Sir George said to him, 'That is where they go at night?' 'Yes,' said the shepherd, 'and when they are in they are perfectly safe.' 'But there is no door,' said Sir George. 'I am the door,' said the shepherd. He was not a Christian man. He was not speaking in the language of the New Testament. He was speaking from an Arab shepherd's standpoint. Sir George looked at him and said, 'What do you mean by the door?' Said the shepherd, 'When the light has gone, and all the sheep are inside, I lie in that 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.’”²

When Jesus announced, "I am the door," He didn't have in mind a 7' slab of wood with a door knob on it. It's a shepherd analogy, and He's using it to reveal something about His identity.

Remember the setting. The religious leaders just excommunicated a man, but Jesus defied their authority and received him. They threw the beggar out of the synagogue, but Jesus accepted him into His fold. What gave Him the right to contradict their actions? His identity did. He is the gate. More about that in a moment.

For now, a second question...

B. Who are the thieves? Jesus said in verse 8, “All who ever came before Me were thieves and robbers.” Who would that be? Jesus certainly isn't talking about the Old Testament prophets who "came before Him." They were godly men who sought the good of the people, even at great personal cost.

So who did Jesus have in mind when He mentioned these "thieves"? The Greek text (as reflected in the KJV) uses the verb "are" ["All that ever came before me *are* thieves and robbers"] which indicates these thieves were still around. In fact, they were right in front of Jesus. He's talking about the present religious leaders of Israel. Jesus called them "thieves and robbers." Strong words? For sure.

What would warrant such a stinging indictment of Israel's shepherds? Simply this. They didn't love the sheep. They exploited them. They used the people under their care for their own agenda.

As you scan the gospel record, the evidence comes in against the majority of the religious rulers in Israel. They were covetous (Luke 16:14). They took advantage of poor widows (Mark 12:40). They turned the temple into a den of thieves (Matt 21:13). And in the end, they plotted to kill Jesus so that Rome would not take away their privileges (John 11:49-53).³

They promoted themselves as shepherds, but in reality they were *thieves*.

² Morris, p. 507.

³ Wiersbe, p. 329.

By the way, please be aware that the thieves are still around. In the name of religion, impostors are still fleecing the sheep to line their own pockets. We'll talk more about that in a moment, too. But now, a third question.

C. Who are the sheep? Jesus said, "I am the gate *for the sheep.*" Who's He talking about? Who are *the sheep*?

The Gospel of John answers that question from a couple of perspectives, one is God's perspective, the other is man's. Or we might say, one is the Shepherd's perspective, the other is the sheep's.

First, from God's perspective, the sheep are those who belong to the Shepherd. And why do they belong to the Shepherd? Because God the Father chose them and gave them as a gift to His precious Son. "All that the Father gives me will come to me," said Jesus in John 6:37.

These chosen people are not worthy of being chosen, for they are undeserving sinners, and they would never come to Jesus if the Father hadn't chosen them. "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him," said Jesus in John 6:44.

It's not merit that's the basis of this choice, but the grace and mercy of the Father. And of the Son, too. Jesus said that these sheep are a people known to Him. "I know my sheep," He said in John 10:14. And He knows them personally and intimately, so much so that He lived His perfect life and went to the cross with them in mind. Jesus said in John 10:11, "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep," and in John 10:15, "I lay down my life for the sheep."

Think about that statement. Jesus didn't say He died merely to make salvation possible. He died to make it actual. He had a people in mind when He died. He calls them His sheep. And He lay down His life for the good of, for the salvation of these sheep.

Later in John 17 Jesus talked about these precious sheep in His prayer to His Father. Here's what He said, "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life *to all those you have given him...* I have revealed you *to those whom you gave me* out of the world. They were yours; *you gave them to me* and they have obeyed your word (John 17:1-2, 6)."

So when Jesus talks about *sheep*, He's talking about the people that His Father chose from eternity past and gave to Him. And He's talking about the people for whom He would give His life as a ransom payment on Calvary's cross.

But there's another perspective in John's gospel. We've just seen it from God's perspective. The other is man's perspective, or we might say the sheep's perspective.

How do you tell if someone is a sheep? Yes, they're chosen by the Father and died for by the Son. But we don't know the people that are on the mind of God the Father and His Son. So from man's perspective, how do you identify a sheep? Jesus gives us two identifiers in our passage.

1. *They listen to Him, to Jesus.* That's what Jesus said about the sheep back in verse 4, "His sheep follow him because they know his voice." I mentioned last time that a near Eastern shepherd doesn't drive the sheep. He leads them. So with Jesus.

In verse 27 Jesus gives a practical litmus test for Christians. He said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." So true sheep are those who listen to Jesus. Jesus is their shepherd and they *listen* to His voice.

Did you listen to Him this week? As you made decisions day by day did you seek His will and favor, His counsel and help? You say, "Where do I hear His voice?" In His

Word, the Bible. Is the voice of the Shepherd as offered through His Word what guides you?

Here's a second identification mark of sheep.

2. *They don't listen to the thieves.* Ponder verse 8 again, "But the sheep did not listen to them (i.e. the thieves)." Is Jesus saying that thieves don't dupe some people? No. It happens. The danger is ever present, but the point is this. True sheep don't listen to and give their allegiance to strange voices because there's already a voice they love and cherish.

A few years ago, I took our dog, Blackie, for a ride out to Scioto Hills camp. I tied her to a post and went inside the dining room. Later, Gary told me he had gone over to the dog, spoke to her, and reached out his hand to pet her. She growled and even snapped at him! She didn't recognize his voice.

I grew up near several farmers who had cattle. One scene always used to amaze me. I'd watch the farmer walk over to the gate that led to the pasture. There wouldn't be a cow in sight. Then he'd bellow out this strange sound, "Sic-calve, sic-calve." And all of a sudden, out of nowhere, over the hillside a cow would come running. Then another. Finally the whole herd of cattle would be at the barn to eat. All because of the farmer's voice.

So it is for the Christian. True sheep respond to the voice of The Shepherd. They know His identity. There's a special relationship between Jesus and those who truly know Him. He's the gate to them.

Which brings us to a second critical subject. If you'll notice, Jesus repeats His claim in verse 9, "I am the gate." The first time He identifies Himself. The second time He extends an invitation.

II. By calling Himself the gate, Jesus is offering us an invitation (9-10).

Here's the invitation in John 10:9-10, "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

Don't miss the strong contrast in verses 9-10. There's a big difference between what Jesus does and what the thief does. What does our Savior do? In a word...

A. Jesus gives. And what does Jesus want to give us? I had a college professor, Dr. J.F. Prewitt, that called John 10:9 "the most comprehensive verse on salvation in the Bible." He pointed out that this one verse teaches the *simplicity* that is in the gospel ("I am the door"), the *exclusiveness* that is in the gospel ("by Me"), the *inclusiveness* that is in the gospel ("if any man"), the *condition* of the gospel ("enter in"), the *security* of the gospel ("he shall be saved and shall go in and out"), and the *satisfaction* that is in the gospel ("and find pasture").

Yes, Jesus gives. In His invitation, He offers us three benefits.

1. *He offers salvation.* The KJV reads, "If any man enter in, he shall be saved." The word "saved" means "delivered safe and sound." The word was used to say that a person had recovered from severe illness, come through a bad storm, survived a war, or was acquitted at court.⁴

Please don't miss those two little words, "through Me". Becoming a Christian is a person to Person matter. It's also an exclusive matter. We're not saved because we're

⁴ Wiersbe, p. 329.

good enough. We're not saved because we are born to saved parents. We're saved through Him. There is no other way.

God's Word says, "Through Him we have access to the Father (Eph 2:18)." "He is the new and living way (Heb 10:20)." "Turn to Me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other (Isa 45:22)."

We have heard the joyful sound. Jesus saves! Jesus saves! It's true. Jesus offers salvation. But there's more.

2. *He offers security.* "He will come in and go out." That phrase is a Jewish way of describing a life that is absolutely secure and safe. Some of you will remember the "good old days" when a person didn't bother to lock the front door of the house, and you could "go in and out" without fear. The phrase meant you felt safe and secure.

The Psalmist says in Psalm 121:8 [KJV], "The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore." Listen. If you know Jesus Christ, you are secure. You don't make yourself secure. He offers security. When He saves us, He promises to keep us (see John 10:28-29). But there's more!

3. *He offers sustenance.* We see this in the final words of verse 9, "And find pasture." If a sheep is to be healthy, it must have a healthy diet. Our Savior takes care of that as well. "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters (Ps 23:1-2)."

Please listen to Jesus' invitation today. He offers salvation, security, and sustenance. What a great Savior! He gives.

You say, "What other alternative is there?" There's the one Jesus calls "the thief."

B. The thief takes. Notice verse 10, "'The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.'" Jesus' offer is threefold. The thief's activity is likewise threefold. He steals, kills, and destroys. Jesus gives. The thief does just the opposite. He takes.

It breaks my heart when I hear people say, "Oh, I don't go to church any more. I had a bad experience and haven't been back." Listen. There are thieves out there. There are church leaders who fleece their flocks, who beat their sheep. But Jesus isn't like that! He offers life. If you've been burned in the past, don't run from the One Who alone can offer salvation, security, and sustenance. Run to Him! He's the Door to life, the Gate to real living.

You say, "I don't understand something. Why is Jesus so vivid in His warning about the thief? Just who is a thief?" Don't miss this. *A thief is anybody who claims to offer another way to God.* And such people are out there, my friend.

I need to say something about Jesus' invitation that won't settle very well in our day and age of tolerance. If Jesus' claim is true, then all roads *don't* lead to heaven. He says that we must go through Him to experience life eternal. He is *the gate*.

Granted, this could never happen, but if Jesus came to earth and preached the message of John 10 on prime time TV, He would be crucified. Why? Because His invitation is very exclusive. *By ME, He says, you shall be saved.*

Now, let's make it personal.

Make It Personal: Jesus' claim has tremendous implications for us.

I want you to notice Jesus' final words in our text. He said, "I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full." By saying that Jesus lays before us two incredible implications.

A. We may experience joy. It was for this very reason that Jesus Christ came to the world 2,000 years ago. Feel the wonder of His staggering announcement at the end of verse 10 [KJV], "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." What an offer! Jesus came that you and I might have life--and not just any old life, but abundant life!

1. *The life which the world offers doesn't satisfy.* I buy a computer today. I've got to have a faster one tomorrow. The car I dream about today brings me nightmares tomorrow when the transmission flops. The house I scrape for today doesn't satisfy when my neighbor builds a bigger one. On it goes. The life the world offers doesn't satisfy.

But listen to Jesus' offer.

2. *Jesus offers life that is abundant!* He came to this earth, lived a perfect life, went to the cross, shed His blood to pay for our sins, died in our place, and rose again. And why? That we might have life! You can't beat this offer—life that is both abundant and eternal! He invites us to enjoy life in Him.

Tragically, some refuse His offer. Phillip Keller is a man who grew up in East Africa, surrounded by simple native herders. Later he himself became a sheep rancher for about eight years, followed by some time as a lay-pastor of a church. He is well known as an author who portrays spiritual truths by drawing upon his vivid shepherding experiences. In one of his books, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, Keller talks about "fence crawlers," so called carnal Christians who want the best of both worlds:

"I once owned an ewe whose conduct exactly typified this sort of person. She was one of the most attractive sheep that ever belonged to me. Her body was beautifully proportioned. She had a strong constitution and an excellent coat of wool. Her head was clean, alert, well-set with bright eyes. She bore sturdy lambs that matured rapidly.

"But in spite of all these attractive attributes she had one pronounced fault. She was restless--discontented--a fence crawler. So much so that I came to call her 'Mrs. Gad-about.' This one ewe produced more problems for me than almost all the rest of the flock combined.

"No matter what field or pasture the sheep were in, she would search all along the fences or shoreline (we lived by the sea) looking for a loophole she could crawl through and start to feed on the other side.

"It was not that she lacked pasturage. My fields were my joy and delight. No sheep in the district had better grazing.

"With 'Mrs. Gad-about' it was an ingrained habit. She was simply never contented with things as they were. Often when she had forced her way through some such spot in the fence or found a way around the end of the wire at low tide on the beaches, she would end up feeding on bare, brown, burned-up pasturage of a most inferior sort. But she never learned her lesson and continued to fence crawl time after time.

"Now it would have been bad enough if she was the only one who did this. It was a sufficient problem to find her and bring her back. But the further point was that she taught her lambs the same tricks. They simply followed her example and soon were as skilled at escaping as their mother.

"Even worse, however, was the example she set the other sheep. In a short time she began to lead others through the same holes and over the same dangerous paths down by the sea.

"After putting up with her perverseness for a summer I finally came to the conclusion that to save the rest of the flock from becoming unsettled, she would have to go. I could not allow one obstinate, discontented ewe to ruin the whole ranch operation.

"It was a difficult decision to make, for I loved her in the same way I loved the rest. Her strength and beauty and alertness were a delight to the eye. But one morning I took the killing knife in hand and butchered her. Her career of fence crawling was cut short. It was the only solution to the dilemma.

"She was a sheep, who in spite of all that I had done to give her the very best care, still wanted something else."⁵

Sobering words, aren't they? Hear them again. *In spite of all that I had done to give her the very best care, she still wanted something else.*

I saw that look in a man's eye recently. I offered him the life that Jesus came to give, life that's truly life, but I could see he had his sight set on something else.

My friend, are you content with Jesus, or do you want something else? Jesus said, "I am the gate." The implications of His claim couldn't be clearer. The first is that we may experience joy in life that is abundant. The offer is real. But to experience it we must deal with a second implication.

B. We must enter the gate. When you think about it, there's something very exclusive about a gate or a door. You're either on one side or the other. If you go through it, you're on the inside. If you don't, you remain on the outside.

There is no more important question in all of life for all of us than this. What are we going to do with the gate, Jesus Christ? Jesus' invitation is clear. He invites us to enter the gate. How do we do that?

To enter the gate, God calls us to take two very specific steps.

1. *I must repent.* Acts 17:30 says that God commands all people everywhere to repent. Paul said this about the message he preached in Acts 26:20, "I preached that they should repent and turn to God." To repent means to change one's mind, to do a 180 turn in life. God calls us to repent of our sins. To enter through the door, I must repent. There's a second step.

2. *I must believe.* Not generic belief, but a specific kind of belief. The kind Romans 10:9 identifies, "That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."

And so I ask you. Have you ever entered the Gate? Have you said to Jesus, "I want to leave my life of sin. I believe You are the way, the truth, and the life, Jesus. From now on, I put my trust in You. I give my allegiance to You. I want to follow You."? If you have never done that, why not today? Jesus is the Gate.

But this isn't merely how you get saved. This is how you live as a saved person. You keep going through the gate, through Jesus. That's what Jesus said, "He will come in and go out and find pasture." You come to Jesus for salvation, but you also come to Jesus for everything else in life, for He is your daily joy.

Here's the bottom line, my friend. *There is only one gate.* Which means the question is this. *On which side are you standing?* What have you done, and what are you presently doing with the One who said He is The Gate?

⁵ Philip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, pp. 32-34.