

4/20/2008

Sermon – “I Am the Gate”
Pastor Mary Scheer, Brewster Baptist Church

John 10:1-10

Well, today is my last time preaching before I deploy on May 7th. I'm going to be celebrating both Mother's Day and my birthday in the first week I'm overseas. I have written an article for the May Beacon on what I'll be doing when I get there and I hope you get a chance to read it. Our sermon topic this week is particularly striking as I head to a country where Christianity is forbidden.

Today we're looking at John 10 where Jesus says, "I Am the Gate." This text is one of the most important texts for Christians to understand.

There is a lot of different ideas out there about how to come to God and what you have to do to get to heaven.

In this text Jesus identifies those who belong to God as his sheep and himself as the good shepherd. Sheep are vulnerable animals. They don't have any natural defenses of their own. For them there is safety in numbers. Sheep have a flock mentality, preferring to hang out in groups and sometimes follow one another into trouble.

It all started with one self-destructive leap. Shepherds eating breakfast outside a small town in Turkey, were surprised to see a lone sheep jump off of a nearby cliff and fall to its death. They were stunned, however, when the rest of the nearly 1,500 sheep in the herd followed, each leaping off of the same cliff. When it was all over, the local (Aksam) newspaper reported that "450 of the sheep perished in a billowy, white pile" (those that jumped from the middle and end of the herd were saved as the pile became higher and the fall more cushioned).

The estimated loss to the families of Gevas tops \$100,000—an extremely significant amount of money in a country where the average person earns about \$2,700 annually. "There's nothing we can do. They're all wasted," said a member of one of the 26 families whose sheep were grazing together in the herd.

Sam O'Neal, St. Charles, Illinois; sources: "450 Sheep Jump to Their Deaths in Turkey", washingtonpost.com (7-8-05); "Sheep in Mass 'Ewe-icide,'" The Sun Online (7-8-05)

In the absence of the shepherd, (in this case the shepherds were eating breakfast outside of town), the sheep wondered in the wrong direction and it cost them their lives. Sheep don't pick their own direction; the Good Shepherd leads them to safe pastures.

Many of the biblical shepherds came from villages along the edge of the Zin wilderness. It's good sheep country with rolling hills surrounded by large, broad valleys. These shepherds farmed around their villages and then took their sheep onto nearby land that could not be farmed.

Shepherding was difficult for both settled and nomadic shepherds. They faced burning sun and cold winds. Regardless of the conditions, they were responsible for the care of their sheep. Bears, lions, wolves, and leopards lived in wilderness areas. At night, shepherds put their flocks either in a sheepfold under a house, in a nearby pen, or an enclosure in the wilderness. On occasion, the shepherd laid across the opening of the sheepfold, acting as a gate to protect the sheep and prevent them from straying.

It was most likely this image that Jesus was referring to when He described Himself as the gate or door to the sheepfold. (*Follow the Rabbi*)

SCRIPTURE: John 10:1-10 “I assure you, anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold, rather than going through the **gate**, must surely be a thief and a robber! For a shepherd enters through the **gate**.

The gatekeeper opens the **gate** for him, and the sheep hear his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they recognize his voice. They won't follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don't recognize his voice.”

Those who heard Jesus use this illustration didn't understand what he meant, so he explained it to them. “I assure you, **I am the gate** for the sheep,” he said. “All others who came before me were thieves and robbers.

But the true sheep did not listen to them. Yes, **I am the gate**. Those who come in through me will be saved. Wherever they go, they will find green pastures. The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give life in all its fullness.

The word gate is used 5 times in this one passage.

- Thieves and Robbers avoid the gate
- The shepherd goes through the gate
- The gatekeeper recognizes the shepherd and opens the gate.
- Jesus says, “I am the gate for the sheep.
- Jesus says, “Yes, I am the gate.

The gate has two purposes, 1) to give the Shepherd and the sheep access and 2) to provide security for the sheep.

The **gate is the only valid access** to the sheep. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd. If someone does not enter the right way, but sneaks around the gate, they are a **thief and a robber**, and their purpose is to destroy the sheep.

There have been plenty of fake shepherds out there. They look like shepherds, they sound like shepherds but they are thieves and robbers who try to gain access to the sheep for their own purposes. They sneak in another way when they preach a message that's different from the good news of the Gospel, which proclaims Jesus as Lord and Savior. And we can recognize them by the message they preach. (Galatians 1:6-9)

Consider the different sects and cults out there that have been so destructive. Recently we've heard the stories about the, “Yearn for Zion” Compound, in Eldora do, TX. From which 416 children were taken earlier this month. From all appearances they were not preaching the good news of the gospel or the teachings of Christ. Reports from those on the inside such as Flora Jessop indicate that they were not allowed to come and go

freely and had to cut off their relationships with their friends and families outside the group.

This contradicts the idea of the gate Jesus talks about providing access safely in and out of the sheepfold, because the gate allows sheep to come in and go out.

Contrast this with the Good Shepherd, Jesus who said he came to give life and life more abundantly. He leads the sheep to safe pasture.

The **gate offers security** to the sheep.

Most of us are familiar with the security gates at an airport and what you have to do get through, but once on the inside you have access to the offerings inside such as restaurants, shops and ultimately your plane.

The image of a secure gate reminds me of the gates I pass through when I go to work on the military base. I go through two different gates to get to my work location. The base evaluates and posts one of five threat levels known as the Force Protection Condition. They take several steps to increase security at the gates such as stickers on our car, ID cards, barricades, armed guards and such, and we routinely receive training in passing through safely.

I remember my first time going through the gate at the base when I was going to an interview with the Colonel about joining the Guard. Unaware of the proper procedures, I followed in a line of cars up through a set of barricades. I followed behind the car in front of me and as he pulled forward through the barricades to the check point, so did I, right behind him. Now, you are supposed to stop at the barricade and wait to be waved forward, while they check one car at a time. But I skipped the barricade and followed close behind the other vehicle. All of a sudden there were two very animated armed soldiers in my window angrily asking me what was wrong with me and whether I was late for something that I was in such a hurry. Looking at my watch, I naively said, "no, I'm actually making good time about 15 minutes early." Well, needless to say, that didn't go over well and it never happened again.

The sheep pen was usually a stone enclosure around ten feet high with an opening at one end. The gate to the sheepfold is a secure entry point.

When there is only one flock in the pen, the shepherd guards the door and will actually lay down across the threshold and become the gate.

When there is more than one flock in the fold, a gatekeeper or "watchman" guards the door and he recognizes the shepherd and opens the gate.

The shepherd would lead the sheep in the sheep pen at night and in the morning call them out to pasture. Each flock would only respond to their own shepherd's voice. The sheep hear his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them

out. He walks ahead of them, and they follow him. They won't follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don't recognize his voice."

While a cattle herder drives cattle from behind, sheep are led from the front. You have to coerce cattle to move them, but to move sheep, you talk to them.

I know this is true. Several years ago in Illinois, when I was preparing a sermon on the Good Shepherd, I went to visit a local sheep farm. The Sheep farmer gave me some feed for the sheep and took me out to the pasture where they were grazing and let me in. But I couldn't get close to the sheep, as I walked toward them they ran away. I called to them using the words he told me to say but they ignored me. I sprinkled feed on the ground around me, but nothing worked. When he came to see how I was doing, the sheep all ran to him and surrounded him in a big bunch. He called and whistled to those who were far off and they ran straight for him. They would only come toward me if he was standing right next to me. I wanted to get a picture of me feeding the sheep and it was quite a trick for him to get them around me and get out of the shot because as soon as he moved away from me, so did they. The pictures I was able to get have been in my office since that day as a reminder to me that as sheep we know the Good Shepherds voice. We may not hear it audibly with our ears, but we do with our spiritual ears.

Jesus said, "I assure you, I am the gate for the sheep," yes, I am the gate. *The (New American Standard Version; King James Bible; World English Bible and others translate the word Gate here as Door.*

He said, "Those who come in through me will be saved. Wherever they go, they will find green pastures."

The gate (or door) is a symbol of salvation. This text contradicts the idea that some have that all religions and all roads of faith lead to God. The music artist (Singer Sheryl Crow) is quoted as saying that she believes in God, she believes in Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed and all those that were enlightened... (New York Post, September 2005. Preachingtoday.com)

SCRIPTURE: Lk. 13:22-25 "Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" He said to them, "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.' "But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.'

SCRIPTURE: Mt. 7:13-14 Jesus says, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.

Jesus uses the images of the door and the gate, to illustrate that he is the only way to salvation.

In John 14:6, he said, "No one comes to the father except through the son."

Now, that statement can be controversial. I have talked with folks who think it's rigid, narrow, offensive thinking to say that Jesus is the only way. There are many different beliefs and religions that claim to be the truth. But if they are not centered on the message of Jesus as Lord and Savior, he says they are not the truth.

Jesus plainly says that he the only open door to the Father.

This was something new. The door has not always been opened as it is now. In the beginning before sin there was no need for a door, Adam and Eve walked and talked freely with God in the Garden of Eden.

The access humans once with God changed after the fall. After that God banned Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden and blocked the entrance with Angels with a flaming sword so they couldn't get back in. (Gen. 3:23-24)

According to Gn. 6:3, and 1 Pet. 3:20, when Noah was 480 years old God informed him that he was going to destroy humans from the earth

but would allow a period of grace for 120 years, during which time Noah was to build an ARK, in which he would save his immediate family and a selection of animals (Gn. 6:13–22). It was probably during this period that Noah preached, and anyone who believed his message could freely enter the Ark and be saved.

They didn't have to do anything except believe. But there was no repentance, and the FLOOD came and destroyed all but Noah, his family. After Noah had assembled his family and the animals through the door of the Ark, "The Lord himself shut them in." and the door was closed. (Gn. 7:7; 16; 1 Pet. 3:20).

Then night before the Israelites left Egypt, as God instructed, they sprinkled the blood of a lamb over their doors so when the destroyer came near it would see the blood and pass over them. When the destroyer came for the first born they simply had to be inside the right door to be saved. (Ex.12:7-23; Deut. 11:20; Heb. 11:28)

What's interesting is that Jesus is both the lamb that was slain for the sins of the world and the door way of salvation for all who would believe.

When the apostle John was caught up into heaven in Rev. 4:1 it says, "After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven" (Rev. 4:1)

Gates and doors are important elements in the Bible. Symbolizing access, protection and salvation

In 1963, the year I was born, NBC television, ran a new show called, "Let's Make A Deal." Contestants could win prizes concealed behind 1 of 3 doors. People were fascinated by the possibilities that awaited them behind those three doors. They could

pick the right door and win wonderful prizes or the wrong door and win something not so wonderful. It was a gamble. But for years people took it. They flocked to the show in hopes of having the chance to pick the right door and win big.

Life is full of choices and doors. Choosing the right doors in life is important. Unlike the game show, we don't have to guess and hope we picked the right door. We don't have to wonder which way to go, or what to do. Jesus says, listen for my voice, look for my leading.

To the weak, to the timid, to the fearful, to the guilty, to those who are worn out and tired, he calls us all...come to me you who are weary and I will give you rest, to all of us sinners he says, my grace is sufficient for you. To those who have been abused or abandoned he says you are wanted and safe with me. I will never leave you or forsake you. If you have been confused or lost your way, if you have wandered and knocked on doors with empty promises, come, come to me and I will give you abundant life. To the faithful who have persevered, to all who will come, from the side streets, from the highways, down the mountainsides, across the rivers and through the meadows, come to me, for I Am the Gate! And all who enter through me will find peace that only I can give, the joy of true acceptance, the comfort of assurance and salvation for your soul!

LETS PRAY:

Dear Lord, Thank you for your words of promise. Sometimes the things that are so easy are the hardest to do. Thank you for this illustration that shows us the ways you care for us, the way you call to us and that you don't just call us hey sheep, but you know us each intimately, calling us by name, and even though we don't hear you audibly, our spirits hear and respond. Thank you for being the gate that protects us from the threat of thieves and robbers who try to steal people away with a different message, who selfishly work for their own gain, robbing the sheep of the truth. Thank you for showing us that you are the gate, the image of the open door that gives us access to the Father and eternal salvation. I pray for those who are still looking for the right door, and for those who have found it but are standing in front of it unsure unsure, help them to see clearly and to take the next step. May every gate and open door we see remind us of your words of promise and the grace they offer. In Jesus Name. Amen.