

I AM the Door of the Sheep

John 10:7-10

Preached by Minister Jason Tarn at HCC on June 17, 2012

Introduction

- ❖ Anyone who takes the time to read the Bible will eventually come across difficult passages that they'll find troubling. You'll find two types in Scripture.
 - There are those passages that are difficult because their meaning is hard to interpret. Perhaps certain words in the original language are obscure or the passage contains cultural idioms too far removed for us to grasp. So they're difficult to understand.
 - **But then there are those passages we call difficult – not because we don't understand them – but because what they plainly say is difficult to accept or hard to swallow.** They rub us the wrong way. They lead to theological conclusions that make us uncomfortable. That's why they're difficult.

- ❖ That would be the case for this morning's passage. **Here in John 10:7 Jesus uses a figure of speech where he calls himself a door.** *"Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep."*
 - Granted, sometimes metaphors can be difficult to interpret, but, as we'll see, Jesus' meaning in calling himself *"the door of the sheep"* is not complicated. It's pretty straightforward. **But it's the theological implication of what he said that many are going to find difficult, that is, to accept.** Let me draw it out for you.

- ❖ By claiming, *"I am the door of the sheep"*, **Jesus is implying that if you want to access the sheepfold of God and to experience the abundant life enjoyed by God's sheep, then you must enter by him.** In other words, to get into the fold, to enter the kingdom of heaven, to join the body of Christ, to be adopted into the family of God – choose your metaphor – you have to go through the door. You must enter by Jesus.

- ❖ Like I said, this is difficult. **We're talking about the exclusive claim of the Christian faith that salvation is found in Christ and Christ alone.** We already touched upon this last week when we looked at Jesus's declaration, *"I am the light of the world"* (Jn. 8:12). Not just the light of one nation or the light for one religion.
 - No, he's the only light available for the entire world. In a few weeks we'll have to return to this theme again when he says in **John 14:6**, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

- ❖ This is a hard pill to swallow. This is probably one of the most (if not *the* most) unpopular aspect of Christianity and a huge stumbling block from many outside the faith. **In fact, it's actually a stumbling block for a majority of American Christians.**
 - In a 2008 survey, conducted by the *Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life*¹, **it was determined that 52% of all American Christians think at least some non-Christian faiths can lead to eternal life.**

¹ <http://www.pewforum.org/Many-Americans-Say-Other-Faiths-Can-Lead-to-Eternal-Life.aspx#1>

- That means that over half of Christians in our country do not agree with John 10:7. They don't think you have to enter by Jesus in order to access the sheepfold of God. Perhaps he is a door, but they don't think he is *the* door. I guess they don't know Jesus said this OR don't believe he meant what he said.
- ❖ *Well what about you? Do you think Jesus is the door or just a door? I can understand if you're rubbing shoulders with Muslims in the workplace or Buddhists in the classroom, if your kid plays with a Hindu friend across the street, then these life experiences can certainly lead you to question the exclusiveness of your faith.*
 - *Do I really believe Christianity is the one true faith? Do I really believe my non-Christian friends have to enter by Jesus to access God and his salvation? Do I really believe they're lost without him? These are tough questions we need to work through.*
- ❖ This morning I want to divide the message into two sections. First, I want to explore further this claim of exclusivity out of Jesus' own mouth. Second, I want us to consider the blessings available to those who do recognize Jesus as the only door and willingly enter through him.

Jesus is the Only Door

- ❖ So let's begin by considering the exclusivity in Jesus' claim. I plan to demonstrate that our passage is exhorting us to **1) Enter God's sheepfold by Jesus since He is the only door.**
 - Let me first set the context. This discourse follows on the heels of what took place in chapter 9 where Jesus healed a man born blind on the Sabbath, leading to another confrontation with the religious leaders of his day. The Pharisees were incredulous towards this miraculous sign and ended up expelling the man from the synagogue.
- ❖ **The whole point is that those who were expected to be spiritual leaders for the people were demonstrating that they were in fact *not* good shepherds but rather thieves and robbers.** So in chapter 10, Jesus responds with a metaphor in vv1-5, where he identifies himself as the rightful shepherd who enters by the door of the sheepfold, unlike thieves and robbers who climb in by other ways.
 - His emphasis is on his personal knowledge of his sheep and how they know his voice and come when he calls. The blind man of chapter 9 is one of those sheep who recognized his shepherd's voice and followed when called (9:38).
 - But now in v7, the metaphor slightly changes. "*So Jesus again said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.'*"
- ❖ **So here Jesus is no longer the shepherd who goes through the door to get his sheep. Rather he is the door.** The focus shifts from Jesus as the rightful spiritual leader of God's people to Jesus as the very means by which we enter God's fold to enjoy the safety and sustenance found there within.
 - Now what we have here in v7 (and also in v9) is Jesus' third "I AM" statement in John's Gospel. As we've been saying, each instance is a self-disclosure of Jesus' unique identity as the Son of God, as being one in nature with Yahweh God.

- ❖ As well, each predicate that follows his declaration of “I AM” further defines his identity and mission. This is clearly stated in v9, *“I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved.”* **So Jesus is on a mission to save, and he is claiming to be the door you have to enter by in order to be saved, to be part of God’s sheepfold.**
 - Yes, the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life (Mt. 7:14). There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

- ❖ But there will always be those who object to such claims of exclusivity. **They’ll argue that heaven has many doors by which you can enter and many roads to lead your there.** Christians go through Christ, but people of other faiths can enter through other doors (other saviors) because in the end no one religion has a monopoly on truth. The truth, they say, is greater than any one religion.
 - **A popular way to illustrate this idea is the story of the three blind men and the elephant.** It usually goes like this: Three blind men are holding on to three different parts of the same elephant and describing to each other what they are touching. The one holding the elephant’s trunk claims, *“This creature we are touching is long and snake-like.”* But the one holding the elephant’s leg says, *“No, this creature is stumpy and thick like a tree trunk.”* But the one holding the elephant’s tail protests, *“No, this creature is thin and wispy like a mop.”*
 - **And the point is that all three blind men were partly right based on their perspective but none of them have a complete grasp of the truth.** None of them could see the big picture – that it was really an elephant. So it’s argued that Christians can’t claim to see the actual elephant. They only see part of it.

- ❖ Now this might surprise you but we actually agree with the basic premise that we’re blind. **We agree all of us are blind to spiritual reality.** We blame it on sin. Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, atheists, agnostics – we’re all blind. But even so, we still believe that saving knowledge about God, eternal life, heaven, and the door to get there can be known.
 - *How is that?* **Because we believe the elephant can talk.** We believe in an elephant who speaks, and Christians are those who can hear his voice. We don’t believe we’re somehow born with better eyes. We were born blind just like everyone else. **But Christians do believe we hear and know the voice of Jesus when he speaks, just as sheep hear and know the voice of their own shepherd.**

- ❖ So while other blind men continue to argue over what they’re holding onto, the Christian is the blind man who says, *“Look fellas, I know what it is we’re holding. Not because I have better eyes. Not because I’m smarter. Not because I’m more righteous. But because the creature spoke. I can’t explain it but somehow I can hear his voice. Can you hear it too? He says his name is Jesus. He says he is the door and anyone who enters by him will be saved.”* That’s all a Christian claims to be.

- ❖ Notice Jesus says “*if anyone enters by me, he will be saved.*” If anyone? Anyone can enter? That’s strange. That doesn’t sound exclusive at all. In fact, that sounds like the very opposite of being exclusive. You see, **the Christian faith is exclusive** only in the sense that the means of salvation exclusively requires a conscious faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ.
 - **But it is totally inclusive** in the sense that anyone – regardless of your gender, your ethnicity, your nationality, your social status, what religion you grew up with, what you look like, how broken you are, how messed up your life is – anyone can come to Jesus, enter by him through faith, and be saved. Christianity is a very inclusive faith.

- ❖ **The world thinks that believing in Jesus as the only door to eternal life will make Christians arrogant and elitist.** And to the extent that we are, we ought to repent. But the fault is not found in our conviction that Jesus is the only door. The fault is in our sinful hearts. We take a good truth and misapply it, which leads to arrogance and elitism.
 - **But the conviction itself that Jesus is the only door, when applied rightly, actually gives you a huge heart and an inclusive, universal concern for the salvation of all kinds of lost people.** You want to share Jesus with all kinds of people different than yourself because you believe there is no other door by which they can be saved.
 - Far from making you elitist, this conviction makes you global-minded and inclusive in your outlook. Because you’re convinced there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

Enter and Rest in Eternal Security

- ❖ Like I said in the beginning, this is an easy passage to understand but a difficult one to accept. That’s why I thank God for the fact that so many of us here have heard the shepherd’s voice and have entered by the door. I thank him that so many share in the conviction that Jesus is the only door and therefore share in a universal concern for all kinds of lost people.
 - **What I’d like to do in the remainder of our time is to glory in the spiritual blessings we’ve received now that we’ve enter the sheepfold through Jesus.** And in so doing, I pray those of you still outside the fold will be persuaded to enter by the same door.

- ❖ Let me highlight two blessings in our text. First, our passage encourages us to **2) Enter God’s sheepfold by Jesus and rest in eternal security.** In other words, we’re exhorted to come into the fold by way of Jesus to experience the security enjoyed by all of his sheep.

- ❖ There are dangers outside the fold. Jesus alludes to some in **v8**. “*All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them*”. **So there were others who came before Jesus who claimed to be the door to God’s sheepfold, but they turned out to be false doors.** They turned out to be thieves and robbers intent on harming and not saving.
 - Commentators suggest Jesus was referring to messianic impostors who came before him promising the Jews freedom from foreign occupation but instead led them into bloody conflict and further oppression.

- But in context of John’s Gospel, Jesus probably had in mind the Pharisees, whose earlier treatment of the blind man demonstrated a perversion of godly leadership. And since they were not good shepherds or true doors, the real sheep did not listen to them. They were waiting for the voice of another.

- ❖ Look at v9, *“I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.”* That phrase *“go in and out”* is a Semitic expression that describes all the activities of life. The idea is that wherever the shepherd leads us, no matter what we’re doing, we the sheep are under his guard and protection.
 - Now there is a strong connection between v9 and **Numbers 27:16-17**. There Moses is about to die and the people are about to cross over into the Promise Land, so Moses asks the Lord for a successor. *“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.”*

- ❖ And in the next verse, the LORD identifies Joshua as that shepherd. He will lead and protect God’s sheep. And interestingly enough, the name Joshua is the Hebrew equivalent for Jesus (a Greek name). **So with these connections, it is safe to say that Joshua served as a type pointing to the True and Better Shepherd** who would one day come and lead God’s people out and bring them back in. This Good Shepherd will guard and protect his sheep in every activity of life until they reach the Promise Land.
 - Now you might be noticing that Jesus is starting to mix metaphors. **In these verses, Jesus is both the shepherd who rescues his sheep, and he is the door they go through to find safety and shelter.**

- ❖ **The famous OT scholar Sir George Adam Smith told a story that helps us understand how these two metaphors come together in one person.** One day he was traveling in the Middle East and came across a shepherd and his sheep. He started a conversation with the man, who showed him the fold into which the sheep were led at night. It consisted of four walls with only one way in. Sir George asked the man, *“That is where they go at night?”*
 - *“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 was not a Christian, so he wasn’t trying to quote Jesus. He was speaking from perspective of an Arab shepherd. Sir George asked him, *“What do you mean you are the door?”*
 - And the shepherd answered, *“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.”*

- ❖ That’s it. That’s what Jesus is saying. No wolf, no thief, no enemy will be able to snatch us away from the fold. If they want to get at us, they have to go through Jesus first. He is, for us, both the shepherd and the door.

- Listen to what he says in **chapter 10:27-29**, *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.”*

- ❖ **If you are one of his sheep, Jesus is saying you have been given eternal life, and you will never perish.** That is an amazing promise! We will never perish! But I want to make sure no one walks away with misconstrued understanding of what Jesus means by ‘never perishing’.
 - **Because it doesn’t mean you’ll be impervious to harm.** It’s not a guarantee of physical comfort and safety for the rest of your life. Jesus’ sheep have been persecuted and killed since the beginning. *So what does ‘never perishing’ mean?*
 - There is this great passage in **Luke 21:16-18** where Jesus is talking to his disciples and warns them of future persecution. *“You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But not a hair of your head will perish.”*

- ❖ *“Some of you will be put to death But not a hair of your head will perish.”* That makes no sense at all until you realize that **when Jesus says you won’t perish, he means you still might be killed but you can be sure you won’t suffer eternal, spiritual harm.** You’ve been saved, so you won’t be – you can’t be – snatched out of his hands.
 - Believers can enjoy the eternal security of knowing that no matter what danger, what harm, what trouble may come – you will not perish in the sense of falling away from Jesus permanently or being lured by false shepherds or snatched away by wolves.
 - *No power of hell no scheme of man / Can ever pluck me from His hand / Till he returns or calls me home / Here in the power of Christ I’ll stand.*

- ❖ **And beyond personal assurance and comfort, this truth should also embolden sheep when they go out into the world.** In a sense, every Sunday we go into the fold and gather, but on the other six days of the week, we are out and scattered about the city.
 - May the confidence we gain from the eternal security we have in Christ embolden us to accept the necessary risks and dangers of sharing his gospel, to embrace the necessary awkwardness that often results when we invite our lost family and friends to enter by Jesus. May we be emboldened to go and inclusively reach all kinds of lost people to the ends of the world. No matter what happens, you will not perish.

Enter and Graze on Eternal Life

- ❖ So the first blessing of entering the sheepfold is the safety and security found when we’re in the fold or sent out of it on mission. The second blessing relates to the quality of life to be experienced as God’s sheep. It’s marked by joy that is both eternal and abundant in nature. We see this in **vv9-10**. Here we are encouraged to **3) Enter God’s sheepfold by Jesus to graze on eternal life.**

- *“If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”*

- ❖ So Jesus makes it clear that his mission was to come and rescue his sheep and give them life. Now in John’s Gospel, this word for “*life*” (*zoe*) always refers to eternal life. Jesus is not talking about coming to give us a prosperous life, a comfortable life, a safe life.
 - No, he came that his sheep might have eternal life and have it abundantly. He said anyone who enters by him will be saved – from thieves on one hand so there is an earthly dimension to it – but mainly he’s talking about being saved from sin, from condemnation, from eternal death, from hell. This is the spiritual dimension.
 - **Four times in this chapter Jesus speaks of laying down his life for his sheep** (10:11, 15, 17, 18). That’s because the trajectory of the Gospel points to the cross, to Jesus’ death and resurrection. By laying down his life, he secures life for his sheep everlasting life, resurrection life, life made for heaven.

- ❖ **But at the same time, I don’t want us to overlook or downplay the earthly dimension of this new life he gives his sheep.** This eternal life is not something you have to wait till heaven before you can experience it. The modifier ‘eternal’ doesn’t just describe the length of this life. It’s also describing the quality.
 - **The point is that Jesus came to give us not just everlasting life but life at its best, life at its fullest.** I picture plump, flourishing sheep in Jesus’ fold. The kind that shall not want. The kind that are made to lie down in green pastures to feed and graze to their delight. And our Good Shepherd has prepared a table before us in the presence of our enemies. He anoints our heads with oil. Our cups overflow in abundance.

- ❖ **Brother sheep, sister sheep, are you experiencing this kind of life within the sheepfold of God?** Or did you think it could not be enjoyed until you get to heaven? Perhaps you’ve been settling for a sparse, joyless Christian life – far from the kind that Jesus spoke of.
 - Now we’ve already spoken at length about the dangers of an over-realized eschatology, of assuming that all the joys and blessings of eternal life can be (and should be) experienced right now in this present age. No, much of it will still have to wait until the age to come.
 - But we also learned from Jesus’ first miraculous sign, where he turned water into wine, that the very reason for his coming was to transform sparse, joyless lives and to cause them to overflow with never-ending, vintage joy – the highest quality joy this life can hold.

- ❖ **So as you wait for the fullness of your salvation to come, may you experience the joy of your Shepherd, the joy of life in the sheepfold, in the here and now.** And as he leads you out from here – as you go out to pasture – may you be convicted and emboldened to implore all kinds of lost people – all the way to the ends of the earth – to share in the abundance of your joy by coming back with you to the fold and entering by the same Door.