



John 10:1-10  
I Am  
The Gate

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Today we continue this series we're in looking at the "I am" statements of Jesus'. Today's and next Sunday's go closely together, as they're both connected to sheep. This morning we're looking primarily at Jesus' statement that he is "the gate" or oftentimes it's translated as "the door." Next week we'll look at Jesus as "the Good Shepherd."

**How many of you would say you're familiar with sheep – how to raise them, care for them, shear them, how many species of them there are, typical lifespan, and so forth?** Like you, I am not an expert on sheep. I did learn this week that there are over 200 species of sheep, and a typical life span is 10-12 years, but some live as long as 20. But, I've never owned a sheep. I do own a wool coat, and a wool sweater or two. But I'm pretty sure that doesn't make me a sheep expert. So the immediate context of the metaphor that Jesus gives in today's passage is a little fuzzy for some of us. But Jesus isn't trying to fleece us...or pull the wool over our eyes. So we don't need to approach this sheepishly...or if this feels a little foreign to us we don't have to feel baaaaad . 😊 (Yes, I came up with those myself.)

The context for Jesus' statement is that he has just healed a blind man, and as a result of doing that, some Pharisees begin to verbally challenge him, much like we saw last week. **They're so concerned with doing things as they always have, that they end up missing the point of the transformational work that Jesus is doing in their midst.** They miss the full life that Jesus is offering even right here.

But their objections lead to a conversation, which we just read, where Jesus uses a ranching analogy to illustrate who he is. The conversation has two parts. The first part ends in verse 6, when John relates for us that "Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them" (John 10:6). We'll start briefly with those first 6 verses.

Now in that day there were two different kinds of sheep pens. One was in, or very near, the village or town, and was kind of a communal sheep pen.

Several shepherds would put their sheep in together. When a shepherd came to get his sheep and take them out to pasture, the gatekeeper, who also acted as guard, would open the gate, and the shepherd would call his sheep. Then the shepherd would lead them out to graze. That's the kind of sheep pen being described here – kind of a communal sheep pen with a real door.

And Jesus is using this metaphor to talk about himself as the one who leads the flock, with the flock being those people who know him and belong to him. Anyone who comes in by some way other than the gate is a thief and a bandit – they don't have good intentions. But the shepherd leads the flock and keeps them safe. And Jesus is that person, and he leads and cares for the people, or the flock, that belong to him. He continues this analogy as the shepherd a bit later, and we'll look at it in more detail next week.

But, the folks he's talking to don't follow what he's trying to communicate. And admittedly, up until this point, Jesus hadn't said in any way how this related to him or anyone else. But as we see in verses 7-10, that changes very quickly.

Now, given this initial teaching, we would expect Jesus to talk about being the shepherd in his explanation of it. But, as often happens when we're in a relationship with Jesus, he surprises us. And so: **Jesus begins explaining the teaching by telling them that he is the gate.**

And here, I would suggest to you that Jesus has in mind the second kind of sheep pen that they used in that day. The first one was in town and used by several shepherds, and the sheep only follow the voice of their shepherd. This second sheep pen was out in the pastureland. It was away from town, and typically used by just one shepherd at a time. And in this kind of a sheep pen the shepherd was the gate. When the sheep were brought in for the night, the shepherd would literally lie down across the opening and sleep there. The shepherd, therefore, was the gate keeping the sheep safe inside, as well as the deterrent to anyone with bad intentions. So while to us it's a surprise that Jesus would talk about being a gate when we're expecting an explanation of his role as shepherd, to his listeners it made perfect sense because being the gate was part of a shepherd's job. And this particular metaphor of Jesus as the gate is so important that he explains it on its own.

And what happens when we pass through this gate? Jesus says in verse 9, **“I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture” (John 10:9).**

Jesus Christ is the gate that saves us...through whom we come into a place of protection and leads to the eternal pasture land of the Kingdom of God. If you want eternal peace, if you want eternal rest, if you want to know God and partake of his kingdom goodness both here and now and for eternity, Jesus Christ is the gate by which we must enter.

Now, many people – not all, but many – who are disciples of Jesus Christ and profess faith in him really rest in this “saving.” And boy, do we need that, for sure. **There is no doubt that we need to hear the good news of the forgiveness for our sins that Jesus Christ offers to us.** And he offers it to you today, if you would like to know his forgiveness, mercy, and love in your life. That's a door you can walk through today, into the safety of Jesus Christ.

But sometimes for some of us who have followed Jesus for a time, it's almost like we treat Jesus as a fire-insurance policy, or a bulletproof vest. And that's how we often speak of Jesus to others, too. The problem with treating Jesus like that is that you don't *really* want to have to use those things. No one buys a fire insurance policy for their home and says, “I hope I have a house fire so I can use this!” No way! No police officer puts on a bullet-proof vest and says, “Man, I sure hope someone shoots me today so I can test this baby out!” But sometimes we treat Jesus exactly that way: He's there if we need him, to save us from whatever danger we're facing in this life and after death, but we're not sure we want to fully engage with him right now. But Jesus doesn't give that option.

**Rather than going through the gate of Jesus Christ only “if needed,” Jesus is saying that we *need* to go through this gate - period.** “Whoever enters through me will be saved,” he says. In the Greek, “through me” is emphatic. It's the key to the statement. Going through the gate of Jesus Christ isn't something we do in case of emergency. We go through the gate of Jesus Christ because it's the only right way to go. Jesus is saying that he is the gate, and the only gate, to salvation. There aren't other gates.

Now, as I said, that's a message that we need to hear and to respond to. If that were all that Jesus had to offer, then that would be great. But there's more, because: **Jesus not only saves us *from* something, he saves us *for* something, "that they [we] may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10).** Sometimes this is translated as "abundant life" which really conveys the depth of this word. This is an overflowing abundance...beyond what you could ever ask for or imagine. This is so contrary to how many people see Jesus. Many skeptics see Jesus as the stealer of the fun life, the happy life. But that's not what Jesus says he's come to do. He's actually here to give us abundant life. He may define that a little differently than we are inclined to...so there's some growth on our part that needs to happen. But Jesus is clear that he offers abundant life, and everything else that claims to do that is actually a thief and a robber.

Now, for most people, a fire insurance policy or bulletproof vest doesn't really lead to abundant life in and of themselves. Those things aren't marketed as the keys to a full life – "Buy our policy and you'll have abundant life." That's not the messaging. Jesus offers a life with meaning, purpose, direction, value, joy and more. So, rather than treating Jesus as a fire insurance policy, let's receive him into our lives as the one who offers us full life, as the one who provides pasture for us wherever we go. Abundant life, here and now is what Jesus offers.

And who doesn't want abundant life!?! Life in relationship with Jesus Christ is life as God intended it - for eternity, but also *today*. I mean, if Jesus only offered abundant life in the hereafter...that would be nice and all, but we need good news here and now. As I heard someone say a couple weeks ago when talking about the Millennial generation, and their general attitude toward Jesus...one person in that generation made this statement that kind of summarizes what many Millennials believe: **"If what Jesus offers is only something we can experience after we die, then it isn't really good news."** But Jesus is saying that we *can* experience life to the full here and now. So if you want abundance in your life, if you want to find green pastures anywhere you go, then pass through the gate of Jesus Christ. Only there will you or I find abundant life that we're searching for.

The question I would ask you this morning is this: **Do you have abundant life?** And I would suggest to you that abundant life is defined as experiencing on a regular basis the fruit of the spirit as Paul catalogs for us in Galatians: **Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).** Notice that none of these things have to do with our home, our possessions, our jobs, our bank account, how our golf game is going, or whether Robinson Cano is on the field or suspended for 80 games. In fact, most of that stuff causes us great stress! And yet those are the exact places so many people seek to find abundant life. “If I just have more/bigger/better \_\_\_\_\_, I’ll feel satisfied, full, all set...” But it’s an illusion.

Instead, having a “Full life” has everything to do with our relationship with God through faith in Jesus, and His Spirit that resides in us, and living as God calls us to. Solomon (Old Testament) had all the wealth anyone could ever hope for, but he came to the conclusion that it was all meaningless. Or look at Jesus himself: if abundant life were defined as material wealth and possessions, than Jesus is the biggest fraud who ever lived, because in terms of worldly abundance: he was essentially a homeless, itinerant teacher. Jesus means for us to experience something deeper and fuller than the things of this world. And when the Holy Spirit resides in us, and we can say with complete honesty that the fruit of the Spirit define our experience of life, then we’re living life in the abundance that Jesus offers. In short: **Abundant life has everything to do with knowing, loving, and trusting Jesus Christ.**

When we pass through that gate of Jesus Christ, we can experience this life he offers. Sadly, there are many Christians who have passed through that gate, but they don’t experience abundant life like this because we treat Jesus like that fire insurance policy or that bulletproof vest. And the reason is that many of us don’t trust Jesus when he says, “I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will *come in and go out and find pasture...I have come that they may have abundant life.*” Let me repeat part of that, “...[they will] come in and go out and find pasture...I have come that they may have abundant life.”

“They will come in and go out.” **You see, what many of us Christians tend**

**to do is to come in through the gate, and then set up shop and live a comfortable life right there.** We get comfortable in the fact that Jesus saves us from our sins...we jump through a few religious hoops like attending church occasionally...we might go to Sunday School on occasion or give a few dollars to make ourselves feel good...but we forget that he's also saved us *for* abundant life, to live completely abandoned for him.

Jesus has so much more to offer us than many of us experience in our lives. He wants us to live an abundant life. **And we experience that abundance when we trust in him. When we get out of the sheep pen of comfort and trust that Jesus will provide.** Jesus Christ will take care of us wherever we go, even outside the safety of the sheep pen. Do we trust him for that? Or are we just coasting in to eternity on his coattails, and never trusting him for anything more?

In their devotional book, "Spending Time With You" Dennis and Barbara Rainey tell the story<sup>1</sup> of a man "who carefully saved up all his money until he was finally able to go on a beautiful cruise ship. It was all he could do just to save enough to buy his ticket. Thinking he wouldn't have enough money to buy meals in the ship's fine dining room, he decided to take along some cheese and crackers for food.

"For several days he sat in his cabin, watching the stewards go by with cars full of luscious lobster, prime rib, fresh fruits and vegetables. Finally, he couldn't stand it any longer. He reached out and grabbed one of the stewards by the arm and begged him for a plate of food. 'Please, help me. I'll go to work, I'll scrub the deck. I'll do anything to get something to eat. My cheese and crackers are turning stale, and I'm starving to death.'

"'But sir,' the steward replied, 'don't you know? Your food comes with your ticket.'"

Too many of us Christians live like that man. We nibble on cheese and crackers, living on just a percentage of the abundance of what Jesus offers. We settle for that, instead of the steak and potatoes. Or crab legs, or cage-free, organic-grain fed chicken, or maybe you're a fruit and veggies person.

Pick your food metaphor! The point is: **We never experience the abundant life that Jesus Christ offers us, because we don't think it's for us, or we don't trust/know that it's included in what he offers us.** We trust that he's saved us *from* our sins, but we don't trust equally as well that he's saved us *for* abundant life, to experience the fruit of the Spirit, *here and now*. Jesus wants us to be coming in and going out, trusting that we'll find pasture wherever we go, trusting in his provision, following his lead into a full life.

So, two concluding thoughts. **First, if the gate of Jesus Christ is one gate in life that you haven't stepped through before, then I invite you this morning to step through that gate today.** You may have tried a lot of other gates that claimed to save you...but only Jesus really does that. And it doesn't matter if you hear "Laurel" or "Yanny"<sup>ii</sup> – all people are given this opportunity. He's the only one who gave his life so that you and I might be able to stand before our Holy Creator with confidence, and enter into His presence. **Second: Let's live into what he saves us for today: Abundant life.** We can come in and go out, finding pasture and full life wherever we go, through both giving and receiving God's grace, love, encouragement, compassion, reconciliation, and more as the fruit of the Spirit is more and more evident in our lives. It all begins with a relationship with your heavenly Father through faith in Jesus Christ, and then following as the Spirit leads us. So let's ditch the insurance policy and the bulletproof vest mentality toward Jesus, because he's not something to have but only use in an emergency. He's offering us abundant life starting today. I pray that each of us would come and go through the gate, living life to the full, filled by God's Spirit here and now...because abundant life is waiting for us...we get the full meal plan with the ticket that Jesus offers and paid for, and it's all ours through faith in Him. Let's Pray...Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Rainey, Dennis and Barbara. *Spending Time With You*. Devotional for January 22 "The Bland Illusion." I'm also indebted to that day's devotional for their insight about the fruit of the spirit and it's relationship to abundant life.

<sup>ii</sup> This was all the rage this week: An audio clip where different people heard two different things – either "Laurel" or "Yanny." It's pretty bizarre. Try it here: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/yanny-or-laurel-what-do-you-hear-audio-clip-debate/>