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I AM the Door of the Sheep

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Series: The Mind of Christ



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I AM the Door of the Sheep

Television has been around for a long time. A l-o-n-g time. While it is true that Cain didn't get his idea to kill Abel from watching "Law and Order", and while the chariot races were probably not televised by RBC (The Roman Broadcasting Company), in its pure state, television has always existed; because in essence, what television does, is to take thoughts or experiences and make them visual. A TV show simply takes what happens in life and portrays it in such a way that you can actually see it happening.

The human brain, then, was the first television set. In it, God designed a solid-state processor (though in most of our cases, there seem to be a few loose transistors), and He designed it in such a way that *even with our eyes closed*, we can actually visualize events and experiences *as though they were happening*. We do that when we dream. We do that when someone describes something to us. I'll give you an example. Use your imagination. I'm going to describe something to you. I want you to picture a beautiful mountain with a snow-capped tip, a hillside covered with majestic trees, a crystal clear river winding through those trees down to a beautiful mountain lake at the bottom. Picture cattle grazing by the lake. Imagine a cool mountain breeze, gently tugging at the leaves of the trees. Visualize, if you will, soft white clouds overhead, tenderly outlined by the rays of the morning sun. If you listen carefully, you can hear the sounds of the wind rushing through the trees. Do you see it? A beautiful bird just landed in that tree to your left. Look at the color of its wings; they are bright red. Look at the squirrel go scurrying up the tree to your right. There's something in its mouth; do you see it?

Well, enough of that. But if the TV set God designed in your brain isn't totally malfunctioning, you just came back from a trip to the mountains. You never moved an inch, but you were transported in varying degrees, depending on the sensitivity of your imagination, and on *whether or not you had ever seen a mountain stream*, to a time and place totally different from where

I AM the Door of the Sheep

you really are. That's television. It's built into the human brain, and its waves enter the brain through any of the senses. Smell a fresh donut, and you can all but see it; you can all but taste it. See a picture of dog howling, and you can all but hear it. Read a story about a snowstorm, and you all but begin to freeze.

God's television set is there for a reason. It is there so that you and I can see, hear, smell, or touch things in the physical world, and *instantly* make the spiritual switch, our minds being transported to another realm, our hearts opened to reality and truth. That is why Jesus taught in parables. He drew word pictures; and those pictures immediately brought visual images to the minds of His hearers—images that could then be used to identify spiritual principles.

That is what this study is all about. And today we begin a look at one of those word pictures that Jesus drew on the sands of the human mind in order to develop an image that, when processed, would allow His hearers to actually visualize the nature of God and the purpose of His coming to earth. It is found in John, chapter ten. And it was especially vivid to His hearers, the Jews, because the image He was drawing was so familiar to them.

The passage begins like this:

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.

But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.

Jesus used this illustration [parable], but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them.

(John 10:1-6 NKJV)

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

The story begins in verse one. Or does it? Well, it really couldn't begin in verse one, because verse one begins "Verily, verily, I say unto you", and this phrase is never used in John's gospel to

I AM the Door of the Sheep

usher in a new thought, but only as a continuation of something that has gone before. In this case, it is the continuation of the conversation which arose out of the healing of the blind man in chapter nine.

The Pharisees were attempting to explain away the miracle by exclaiming in verse 24 that Jesus was a sinner; and by stating in verse 29 that *though God did speak through Moses, they had no idea who this fellow Jesus was*. So here was a real confrontation. These “blind guides” (the Pharisees) were trying to pass themselves off as God’s representatives, thus putting Jesus in the category of being an impostor.

So the stage was set for a major spiritual battle. The issue was, in essence, who was to be God’s representative on planet earth—this legalistic body of religious hypocrites? Or the Living Son of God who came to earth to die for the sins of men? The Pharisees had clearly disputed Jesus’ claims to *be God* and had written Him off as a blasphemous troublemaker who, at best, was an unknown trying to muscle His way into the Jewish superstructure by claiming to be something He was not. They were fearful of His power, but they were threatened by his following.

The disciples were caught in the middle of all this. They were awed by their Master’s miracles but somewhat taken back by His rejection by the spiritual authorities. And so Jesus decided to use this incident as a backdrop to explain, not only *who He was*, but also to define the Kingdom of God. Once more, He decided to teach by using a story. Then He asked those who “had ears to hear” to make the spiritual switch. He reached back into His book of illustrations and came up with the one most suited for the occasion, because His Father had designed it to be so from the beginning of time. He decided to talk about sheep and shepherds.

And so you have the story behind the story. The reason for the illustration was the incident. The reason for the incident was the ever-heightening tension between the Jewish hierarchy and the King of the Kingdom. Enter the story of the Good Shepherd.

THE STORY ITSELF

The story itself, as we read a few moments ago, appears to be nothing more than a brief summation of the care and keeping of sheep and the role and responsibilities of shepherds and their assistants. It might be found with a subheading in

I AM the Door of the Sheep

an encyclopedia of animal behavior, entitled “sheep/shepherd relationships”. On the surface it seemed to be a simple, almost unnecessary explanation of things that these men who had been raised in Israel had always taken for granted. So there might be a temptation to totally ignore what Jesus was saying. In fact, these guys didn’t even know what the Master was driving at. He had to stop and explain in detail each portion of the illustration. Use your spiritual imagination now, and pretend you are walking along, listening to Jesus, hanging on His every word for some profoundly deep spiritual gem or theological rule of thumb, and suddenly He turns around, asks you to pay close attention to what He’s about to say, and then comes up with *this* story. To bring it more into the practical realm, let’s read it one more time, this time paraphrased, and just imagine hearing it from Jesus in the setting just described. Jesus speaks:

“Anyone refusing to walk through the gate into a sheepfold, who sneaks over the wall, must surely be a thief!

For a shepherd comes through the gate.

The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice and come to him; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

He walks ahead of them; and they follow him, for they recognize his voice.

They won’t follow a stranger, but will run from him, for they don’t recognize his voice.”

Those who heard Jesus use this illustration didn’t understand what he meant, (John 10:1-6 TLB)

Now I will have to admit to you, that on the surface it *does* sound a bit like an excerpt out of a children’s story book. It hardly sounds like something of such depth that God would come to earth, call a group of guys together, tell them to listen carefully, and then weave this tale. But you see, the profundity of the gospel lies in its utter simplicity. The mystery of the gospel, meanwhile, lies in the fact that only those with “ears to hear” can understand anything so simple. Man does not naturally comprehend simplicity.

Our whole objective in life is to make the simple complicated so we can solve it. If you don’t believe it, you read some of today’s educational materials or religious teaching materials and see what complicated names and definitions man has given to relatively

I AM the Door of the Sheep

simple truths in order to make them complicated. God's way is utter simplicity. Man's way is utter confusion. Jesus' disciples weren't yet tuned into the simple gospel and thus couldn't make the "spiritual switch". All they heard was a first-grade story about a herd of sheep, a faithful shepherd, and some big, bad mean guys who were trying to climb over the wall and steal those nice sheep. You can almost hear Peter whisper, "Gimme a break, Lord, we're not kids in Sunday school. We're your disciples. Come on with the heavy theology...enough of this story-time stuff."

THE CAST OF CHARACTERS

Jesus understood that they had a veil over their eyes, so He proceeded, as always, to explain what it was he had just said. And as He did in nearly every case, He outlined a cast of characters so the disciples would understand *what it was* He was talking about. One interesting note: nearly every time Jesus used a parable or illustration and then filled the screen with the credits, or the cast, it was nearly always the same. In almost every case, Jesus Himself was one of the characters.

Usually, either the Father or the Holy Spirit or both were found in the story, and virtually always, Satan was involved. The reason is simple—Jesus didn't come to earth to bring about political or religious transformation. He came to establish a kingdom within the hearts of men. And there were really only two or three characters in the spirit realm worth mentioning: the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Angels on the one hand; Satan and his demonic host on the other. So in every parable, these characters surfaced as primary in the story line. He thought that perhaps, given enough repetition, we might eventually get the picture.

Well, here is the cast of this story:

The sheep	The thief or robber
The Shepherd	The stranger
The gatekeeper	The other sheep

As we go along, we will see Jesus identify each of these characters, plus a highly unlikely one that we will address later. For now we simply list them so we can separate their roles as we proceed.

THE EXPLANATION OF THE STORY

Now begins the explanation. Jesus finishes telling this very simple tale and finds Himself looking into totally perplexed faces. Verse six clearly states, “Those who heard Jesus’ illustration didn’t understand what He meant.” “They did not understand what He was talking about” reads the Amplified New Testament.

This team of theological geniuses to whom He was about to commit the task of changing the world, stood there, scratched their heads and looked at one another as though the Master had just talked to them in English or some other hitherto unknown tongue. The expression on their faces would have led to one of those “how many disciples does it take to put in a light bulb” jokes. (You know, one to put it in; eleven to turn the ladder.) It was like an Abbott and Costello movie, and this was the “who’s on first” routine. They not only didn’t get the picture, they didn’t even get the sound.

So the patient Master sat down and explained what He meant. What He said opened the door of the human heart to a series of truths so profound that even today, 2,000 years later, the most educated minds of the day bow in humble adoration at the depth that emerges out of this simple story. For the next few lessons we will examine this story and its meaning in detail. Today we begin where Jesus began, with an explanation of the door to the sheepfold; and we will find to our amazement that the “door” is a person.

THE DOOR TO THE SHEEPFOLD

The door plays a big part in this story. Normally, you wouldn’t expect that a seemingly inanimate object that simply serves as an opening for sheep to come in and out would hardly be the kind of topic to make big news. But *what it represented* forced it to the forefront of this illustration. Let’s examine the three statements made about the door:

- 1- He that enters not by the door is a thief or robber.
(verse 1)
- 2- He that enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.
(verse 2)
- 3- Jesus said *I am the door*. (verses 7, 9)

I AM the Door of the Sheep

Here are three statements, then, the first two of which hardly seemed destined for page one of “The Jerusalem Times”. The third, however, once properly understood, is news...big news.

There was more than one kind of sheepfold in Jesus’ day. In the villages and towns, there were communal sheepfolds where all the village flocks were sheltered when they returned home at night. These folds were protected by a strong door of which only the guardian of the door had a key. But when the sheep were out on the hills in the warm season, and they could not return at night to the village, they were collected into sheep-folds, which were just open spaces enclosed by a wall with only one opening. The shepherd would lie across this opening while he and the sheep slept. The sheep could not get in or go out unless they actually passed over the shepherd’s body. Likewise, no enemy could get in and attack the sheep without doing the same.

In the most literal sense, the shepherd *became the door*. There was no access to the sheepfold *except through Him*. Jesus said: “I AM the I AM. And I AM is the door.” There are two incredibly vital principles involved, and you have to be able to visualize *both kinds of sheepfolds* in order to grasp them both.

The first is the concept of exclusive salvation. The village sheepfold portrays this truth. It is a picture of a limited access to safety. There would only be one way to get in. Jesus finalized this concept in chapter fourteen with these words:

Jesus said to him, “I AM (is) the way, the truth, and the life.
No one comes to the Father except through Me.
(John 14:6)

We will get to the second principle in the weeks to come. It is the concept of eternal security. It is portrayed by the country sheepfold. While the first says there would be only one way in; the second says there would be no way out. More about that later.

The issue of limited access to God is a crucial one. It immediately not only further accentuated the conflict between Jesus and the Jewish authorities, it finalized it. There would be no room for negotiation. Jesus had not only represented Himself to be a way to God, He had affirmed Himself as *the only way to God*. The lines were drawn. No Jew, not even a Pharisee, could stand in the presence of the Father unless they came *through the Son*.

I AM the Door of the Sheep

It means no well-meaning Mormon, or a member of any other cult which represents Jesus to be less than He is, can ever see the Father. It isn't of consequence how humble he is, how religious he is, how zealous he is. He can't enter the sheepfold except by way of the Shepherd. No man can come to the Father but by Him.

It means no follower of Buddha or Allah or any other false prophet will ever see God. It doesn't matter if they are a High Priest, Low Priest, or No Priest. It means no member of any Christian church who has never come to Christ on God's terms, that is, by way of the cross, will ever see God. They can be deacon, deaconess, pastor or priest. It really doesn't matter *who they are or what they are*. All that matters is whether or not they have entered by way of The Door. And Jesus *is The Door*. He isn't the one who points to the door; *He is The Door*.

You either come *through* Him, or you don't come at all. *Not to Him*, through Him. The difference is vital. You can come *to Him* by simply learning all there is to know *about* Him and acknowledging His existence, even acknowledging His existence as God. But unless and until you come *through Him*, that is, until you give Him the title to your life and agree that *He alone is your access to God*, you're on the outside of the sheepfold. And my friend, you can stand outside the sheepfold all day long and admire the shepherd and even fellowship with the sheep; but *until you enter in by way of The Door*, you're not in.

To try to enter in *any other way* makes you a thief or a robber. A thief is subtle; a robber is dangerous; but both are criminals. And both are lost. You say, "but what a *narrow* gospel". You weren't the first to say that. Jesus said it first...

"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.

Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

(Matthew 7:13,14 NKJV)

That's God's own definition of His Gospel. It is narrow, restricted by conviction, limited by absolutes...and *because of that*, not too many will choose to enter that way. On the other hand, the gate that leads to an eternal hell is broad; it is convenient; it is easy to enter...and *because of that*, many, many,

I AM the Door of the Sheep

people will make that choice. But the passage makes it clear that *it is a choice*. You can enter either gate. You can follow the crowd to hell...or you can follow Christ to life eternal.

You say, "But what about the Jew? Surely God has a different plan for them!" Who do you think Jesus was talking to when He made this statement? Yes, the Jews are God's chosen people, but when they, as His people, rejected His Son, the Gospel became a *universal Gospel*. Whosoever will may come. Now there is no difference—Jew or Gentile, slave or freeman; all must come through the same gate—the gate to the sheepfold.

I am a Jew. All Jew. I was born a Jew. But until the day that I invited the Lord Jesus Christ to come into my heart and forgive my sins and transform my life, *I was a lost Jew*. I had no peace, no hope, no personal relationship with the Living God. I had not entered in by the New and Living Way. I was not a child of God.

And if you have never given your life to Jesus Christ, the same thing is true of you. Male or female, Jew or Gentile, religious or non-religious, you are outside the fold; you have not entered by way of The Door; you are *not a Christian*. You may be Christianized, but you are not regenerated. And living in America and belonging to a Christian church does not make you a Christian any more than eating pizza makes you an Italian. To be an Italian, you must either be born an Italian, or become a naturalized citizen by doing so *on their terms*, not yours.

To become a child of God, you must come to understand that God does not accept you *or reject you* based upon anything you have done. You were born in sin, and you began to sin the moment you became old enough to make your own decisions. A Holy God cannot coexist with sin. So the moment you sinned, you separated yourself from His Presence; you alienated yourself from his Glory. You became *lost*. You may or may not like that term. Either way, it describes the condition of one who is not saved.

Once you understand that you are lost, you have to decide to be saved. It is a choice. It is not something *that just happens* because you feel attracted to a church where a lot of people seem to know God personally. Salvation is not the result of environment, but of choice. And that choice involves more than a casual assent to the claims of Christ to be God; it requires what is

I AM the Door of the Sheep

known as repentance—a deliberate decision to turn from one god to another. Until you give your heart to Christ, you serve Satan. Maybe not consciously, maybe not deliberately, but realistically you do. Jesus had to say to the unbelieving Jews:

You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. (John 8:44a NKJV)

Nothing you do can earn your way back to God. You are hopelessly lost unless *He does something*. But He did. He sent His only Son to pay the price, to die in your place, so that *simply by receiving Him; by allowing Him to enter your life personally, making you new from the inside out*, you can have eternal life...a totally new quality of life, a totally new kind of life...that has no end.

Anything short of that is not salvation. It need not be a “Damascus road” experience like Paul had; it may only be a quiet, confident relinquishing of the reins of your life to Christ. But “Except a man be born again, *He cannot see the Kingdom of God.*”

Have *you* been born again? Has there ever been a time when you consciously accepted God’s gift of salvation, and *personally invited Jesus Christ to come and live your life for you?*

If you haven’t or *if you’re not sure*, you may be a thief or a robber. You may be consciously or unconsciously trying to enter the sheepfold without passing through the door. You cannot. Satan may be whispering to you, “But look at all you’ve done for God; look at how active you’ve been in church life; look at how moral you’ve been.”

Jesus answered that question:

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.

Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’

And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you...’

(Matthew 7:21-23 NKJV)

Jesus defined what it meant to do the Father’s will in John 6:40:

I AM the Door of the Sheep

This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. (NKJV)

In the Name of the Living God, I beseech you to examine your heart this day and determine whether or not you have ever entered the sheepfold by way of The Door. Have you been born again? If there is *any doubt*, you can open your heart this moment and invite the Lord Jesus Christ to cleanse you, forgive you, redeem you, and deliver you from the penalty of sin forever. You can become a Christian.

What church you join is your business. But what Kingdom you belong to is God's business. And He cares. He cared enough to send His only begotten Son to pay the price to save you. And today He stands at the opening of the sheepfold whispering in love...

I AM the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved... (John 10:9 NKJV)

The "anyone" is you.

The "today" is now.

And the "decision" is yours.

If you are here this morning or listening to the recording, and you have made that choice—the most beautiful choice that any man or woman can make—tell somebody about it immediately, and let them share in your joy.

For those of you who are here this morning who are Christians, I would remind you in closing, that if the enemy has sold you the lie that your friends and associates who have never experience the new birth, who've never personally received Christ, could be in heaven some day because they are so good, so moral, so religious or so neat, you have missed your call to the great commission.

I remind you one last time: God's love is universal, God's invitation is inclusive, "whosoever will may come," but, God's way is exclusive, you must come through the door. The door is Jesus, the password is cross, the issue is sin and the answer is always the same—you must be born again. By God's grace may you leave this place today with absolutely no doubt.

I AM the Door of the Sheep

A Prayer of Faith

Dear Lord Jesus,

I am a sinner. I acknowledge my sins, and that those sins have separated me from a holy God.

I acknowledge that I am lost and on my way to an eternal hell.

I realize that you died on that cross to save me from my sins. And this moment, I bow in your presence and ask you to do that. Please come into my heart; cleanse me of my sins, and take over my life.

Nothing I can do will save me. You have done it all. By your grace, please save me now.

Thank you, Lord, for saving my soul. Thank you that you now live in my heart. From this moment on, I'm yours.

Amen.

A place to acknowledge what you have done:

My name is _____.

On this date, _____ I asked Jesus Christ to come into my life. I asked to enter the sheepfold through The Living Door, and He welcomed me with open arms, forgave my sins, and promised me eternal life.

Whenever I begin to doubt, I will look at this prayer, remember this moment, and thank God that I have been redeemed.

Signed _____

We close with this:

I AM the Door of the Sheep

WOULDN'T IT BE NICE?

“Wouldn't it be nice,” the inquirer asked,
“If there were more than one way to God?
Wouldn't it be great if Muslims and Mormons
Could travel their own private style?”

“Wouldn't it be great?” the average man cries,
If there weren't such a thing as sin?
Why not let every man decide
How he would to Heaven go in?”

No, Beloved, it wouldn't be nice
For there would be no way.
No one would ever know for sure
Until came judgment day.

And a God who did not simply
Choose for a man to know
Would paralyze sinful man in fear
Of where his soul would go.

A God of love and justice
Who to man's best resides
Has only to allow one way—
God's way, man's presence may confine.

So He made the way, He became the way.
And He made it pitifully clear,
If any man would come that way
He would never have cause to fear.

Wouldn't it be nice if God had made
An alternate way to His heart?
Oh, Beloved, no, no, no!
He did the better part.

He paid the price to set you free,
A price you can't ignore.
Any one can come to God
But all must come through the door.

There is no other way, my friend,
You must be free of sin,
The door is open and you can come
But you must be born again.

I AM the Door of the Sheep

Let us pray:

Our gracious God,

Thank You that You made it so simple. Thank You that You made it so limited. In the natural mind we fight it. We would like it to be more complex, and we would certainly like it to be broader. But that is because Your ways are higher than our ways, and Your thoughts are higher than our thoughts, even as the heavens are higher than the earth.

This way we can know and this way it is equal for everyone. There are questions we can't answer, Father, but we thank You that You can.

But above all, Father, we want to remind ourselves this morning that the only place to be is in the sheepfold. And the only way to get there is by the door. By Your grace may we enter in and never forget it.

In Jesus, the beautiful Shepherd's name,

Amen

A Challenge to Further Study

1- Imagine that you are following Jesus as He begins His dissertation on the sheepfold. What questions would you have asked had you been given the opportunity?

2- Find the significance of the following phrases and find other verses that correspond to these thoughts:

- a- "The Door"
- b- "thief"
- c- "robber"
- d- "His Voice"
- e- "by name"
- f- "leadeth them out"
- g- "He goeth before them"
- h- "the voice of strangers"
- i- "they understood not"

I AM the Door of the Sheep

A Challenge to Further Application

1- What was the battle that was shaping up in Jesus' ministry as He began to explain this parable? Why was His taking the role of "The Door" so crucial? Why is it so crucial to you? To those with whom you share your faith?

Put this story in your own words (paraphrase it). Use, if need be, a setting more familiar than a sheepfold. How would you use that story to teach others who Jesus is?

3- If Jesus were "a door" instead of "The Door", this story would be easier for other religious groups to accept. What is there about Jesus that makes any other explanation impossible?

A Challenge to Scripture Memory

Memorize John 10:7

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