JOHN 10:7-10 JESUS, THE GREAT I AM: I AM THE DOOR

"Jesus again said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. 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."

he Master was compelled to explain Himself to the crowd gathered around Him. He had presented a "figure of speech"—a *paroimía*— which they did not understand. The term Jesus used is close to the concept of a parable; it is a cryptic saying that requires further explanation. What the Master had said was, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers" [John 10:1-5]. Though the crowd understood shepherding, they were unable to make the spiritual connection; hence, the need for the Master to explain His reference.

For us who have the advantage of the Word of God in printed form, the words of the Master make perfect sense. We are generally comfortable asserting that we understand His reference. However, there are many who do not understand. For their sake, it is beneficial to consider again the Master's words and how they apply to us in this day. I present to you Jesus, the door of the sheep.

A BRIEF PRIMER IN SHEPHERDING — As I stated in the introduction, Jesus' audience would have understood the reference to shepherding. Israel, in the days our Master walked the land, was an agronomical society; shepherds were common in the land. Throughout the Old Testament are found repeated instances where the kings of Israel are referred to as shepherds of God's people. When David was invited to assume the reign over Israel, the elders of the tribes said, "In times past, when Saul was king over us, it was you who led out and brought in Israel. And the LORD said to you, 'You shall be shepherd of My people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel' [2 SAMUEL 5:2; see also 2 CHRONICLES 11:2].

Of David, the Psalmist Asaph has written:

"[The LORD] chose David His servant and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the ewes He brought him to shepherd Jacob His people, Israel His inheritance.

With upright heart he shepherded them and guided them with his skilful hand."

PSALM 78:70-72

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible, English Standard Version**, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

When Micaiah prophesied the death of Ahab, his disturbing prophecy was, "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And the LORD said, 'These have no master; let each return to his home in peace'" [1 Kings 22:17; 2 Chronicles 18:16]. When God condemns the kings of Israel through Ezekiel, He lodges the complaint, "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord God: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.

"Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: As I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them" [EZEKIEL 34:2-10].

Of course, God, through His prophets and Psalmist, referred to Himself as the Shepherd of Israel. Each of us have heard and loved the Shepherd's Psalm, which begins with the comforting words, "The LORD is my shepherd" [PSALM 23:1a]. However, less generally recognised are such references as ISAIAH 40:10, 11.

"Behold, the Lord GoD comes with might,
and His arm rules for Him;
behold, His reward is with Him,
and His recompense before Him.

He will tend His flock like a shepherd;
He will gather the lambs in His arms;
He will carry them in His bosom,
and gently lead those that are with young."

Jeremiah, speaking on behalf of the Living God, writes:

"Hear the Word of the LORD, O nations,
and declare it in the coastlands far away;
say, 'He who scattered Israel will gather him,
and will keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock.'
For the Lord has ransomed Jacob
and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him."

[JEREMIAH 31:10, 11]

The multiple references give us an appreciation of the generalised understanding of the people listening to the Master when he referred to shepherding. Shepherds were common; and everyone would have witnessed shepherds at some point tending their flocks. Moreover, since God identifies Himself as the shepherd of the people, the Saviour's reference to Himself as the Good Shepherd [John 10:14] takes on added significance, as we shall see in a future message.

In our text, Jesus identifies Himself as "the door of the sheep." Though we are familiar with the words, the reference may be obscure to us, but it would have been understood by those listening to the Master. Before night fell in the desert where the sheep grazed, the shepherd would construct an enclosure for the flock to ensure the safety of the animals for the night. Danger abounded in the desert—wild animals and brigands were about, and should a sheep wander during the night, she could fall off the steep cliffs that dot the region.

The enclosure that the shepherd would build for his sheep would back up against a cliff face or be at the end of a canyon; these enclosures would have waist-high stone walls topped with thorn bushes. The sheepfold would have one opening to serve as an entrance and an exit. The shepherd would either close this opening with thorn bushes after the sheep had entered the fold, or he would himself serve as sentry in the opening. The sole purpose of the sheepfold was safety for the flock. Without the enclosure to keep them secure, the sheep could be scattered or they would wander away and imperil themselves.

On one occasion when G. Campbell Morgan was traveling across the Atlantic on a steamer, he noticed that among the passengers was Sir George Adam Smith, perhaps the most famous Old Testament scholar at that time. Morgan, a justly noted preacher of the Gospel, and Smith, the great Old Testament scholar, had many opportunities for discussions during the voyage. Morgan said that among the tales Sir George told of the East was this one:

Smith 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 asked him, "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 man; he was not speaking in the language of the New Testament. He was speaking from the 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 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."2

Focus on the fact that the shepherd would become the door. No sheep could get into the fold unless the shepherd permitted it to do so. Predators and brigands would be required to deal with the shepherd before they could harm the sheep once they were in the enclosure that the shepherd built. Once safely inside, no sheep could exit the fold because the shepherd was the door. Entrance and egress were only permitted by the shepherd, for he was the door.

OUTSIDE THE FOLD — Without question, the enclosure assumed by the question can be identified as the assembly of the redeemed. It is the Family of God. Without making the analogy so strict that we exclude all other references, it is a statement by the Master that those who are His are known to Him and that they are kept safe within the relationship into which they have entered by faith. For the moment, we want to look at those who are outside of the enclosure, for these are described in unflattering terms.

 $^{^2}$ G. Campbell Morgan, The Gospel According to John (Revell, Westwood, NJ, n.d.) 177

Page 4

Confusion arises when people fail to distinguish between the sheepfold described in the first five verses of the chapter and that described here in the text. Look at those initial verses. Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers" [JOHN 10:1-5].

In order to understand what Jesus is saying, think back to the ninth chapter of the book. Jesus had healed a man born blind, only to have the kindness shown to that man disparaged by the Pharisees. Ultimately, these religious leaders became so irritated at the man's defence of Jesus that they threw him out of the synagogue—he would no longer be permitted to worship! Whenever John wishes to indicate a transition (either geographically or chronologically) in the text, he says something like, "The next day" [e.g. John 1:43], or "On the third day" [e.g. John 2:1], or "After this" [e.g. John 3:22], or "As He passed by" [e.g. John 9:1]. However, as this chapter begins there is no indication of a transition. Thus, the teaching that is provided here is related to the incident that preceded. In other words, the incident of the blind man and the response of the religious leaders to Jesus' miracle are in view as the Master delivered this figure of speech.

In these opening verses of the tenth chapter, the sheepfold apparently represents Judaism. Those who heard the Saviour's voice and responded to Him were those of His own who responded from within Israel to His message, such as the man born blind.³ This becomes evident when you notice that the Master speaks of leading out His sheep [John 10:3] and of bringing out His own [John 10:4]. The Savour does not lead those who belong to Him out of the Family of God. In the text, however, Jesus speaks of His sheep entering the sheepfold.

So, two separate concepts are presented in order to present two diverse truths. In verses 1 through 5, Jesus is speaking of a large sheepfold that was situated in a central location where several flocks would be corralled and held. There, a gatekeeper would watch the flocks, and each shepherd was responsible to call his own sheep to lead them out to pasturage. However, in our text, He speaks of the temporary sheepfold built in the wilderness by the shepherd. So, there are two separate figures of speech and two separate thoughts presented. Do not confuse the two separate thoughts, as that will lead you into an errant understanding of Jesus' words.

In the text for today, Jesus is no longer focused on the situation that then prevailed in Israel, as He was in the opening verses of the chapter; rather, He is now focused on the situation that we might generally speak of as the Faith. He is speaking of entering into life, and the application is broadened so that His words now have immediate application to people in this Church Age and to our situation in this day. Thus, the translation before us, and especially the preposition used, lends itself to two interpretations. Does Jesus mean that those who now attempt to enter the fold are thieves and robbers; or does He mean that those who preceded Him were thieves and robbers? In light of the information we are provided, it becomes obvious that Jesus initially identified the false shepherds of Israel (the Pharisees) as thieves and robbers.

If you conclude that because His reference has a primary reference to the religious leaders of that day there is no value for us today, you are in serious error. The Master did use a figure of speech, which while it was difficult to understand when first spoken, nevertheless provides a general truth that has immediate application to the people of God in this day.

³ For a further exposition of this point, see James Montgomery Boice, **The Gospel of John: An Expositional Commentary** (Baker, Grand Rapids, MI 2005) 736

Notice the strong language that the Master uses: "All who came before Me are thieves and robbers... The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy" [John 10:8a, 10a]. Undoubtedly, this is strong language. Notice the sweep of His words, for He references "all." Those who do not enter the sheepfold by the gate are "thieves and robbers." I am not simply conflating the two terms out of convenience or to support a theory when I caution that the Master is condemning those who have no living relationship to Him as thieves and robbers when they seek to exercise leadership over the people of God.

Jesus had identified the Pharisees as "blind guides" on an earlier occasion. The disciples were concerned that He had offended these religious leaders, and He startled them by warning, "Every plant that My Heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit" [MATTHEW 15:13, 14]. Because a person is religious does not mean that he is a follower of truth or that he possesses integrity. Because an individual can read Hebrew and Greek and split a theological hair fourteen different ways without whetting his knife does not mean that she belongs to the Family of God. Many who wear clerical garb are working for an end other than the glory of God.

I have spoken at times past of a man who represents precisely such a religious phoney. When I first began preaching the Gospel, I would speak in a prison farm each Sunday afternoon. I would ride my Suzuki forty-five miles to that appointment following worship services each Sunday morning and hold a service in the prison. On each fifth Sunday of each quarter, a Methodist preacher would come to present a religious pep talk to the prisoners. I don't know how I would otherwise describe what he did, as he did not preach. He would play some songs on his guitar and tell the prisoners that they were good people. Perhaps they had made a mistake, but if they tried, they could be better people.

One frigid Sunday in November, I rode my motorcycle down to Kaufman thinking that I was scheduled to preach; however, Roland came that Sunday to present his service of praise and worship. I chose to remain, partly out of courtesy and partly because it gave me opportunity to assess the man and his message. It was a very humanistic service, designed to make these miserable men and women feel good about themselves without demanding much of them.

Following the thirty-minute service, I struck up a conversation with Roland. He sat in his car with the heater running, and I stood outside in the cold as rain fell on me. As we talked, he asked if I considered myself to be one of those "fundamentalists." I confessed that he indeed had me pegged; however, his question afforded me opportunity to inquire of his own beliefs.

He admitted that he did not believe the Bible to be inspired, except in the same sense that Shakespeare was inspired. Obviously, he did not hold the Bible to be inerrant or infallible—it was just another book in his estimate. He did not believe that Jesus was God. He thought Jesus might be a good man, possibly even a great teacher, but he was unwilling to accept that Jesus was God. He did not even believe there was such a thing as salvation. According to his theology, there was a spark of goodness in every person; and God would, he believed, ultimately accept everybody just as they were. The gospel according to Roland presented no heaven, and hell was simply a description of the unhappiness a person might experience in this present life. In all, it was a most dismal presentation of unbelief.

"Why did you enter the ministry," I inquired?

His answer left me dismayed and frankly disgusted me. He chose to become a minister, "Because it is easy work and ensures that I enjoy a lot of respect."

"Not if you're a Baptist preacher," I responded.

I had one last question of this religious fraud. "When you were ordained," I questioned, "you took vows before a bishop of the Methodist Church. You testified that you held the Bible sufficient for all things required for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and that it is unique and authoritative. How could you have taken such a vow and now deny all that you said before the bishop at that time."

The truth-challenged preacher replied, "I took my vows with mental reservations." He was a nice man; but he was a charlatan. He was deceitful, and he was a liar. Tragically, he was an ordained minister within a major denomination, appointed to a three-point charge over people who sought to honour the Lord God. He was hindering the cause of Christ and leading the people of God into error. Certainly, I hope that he moved toward faith in the Living Son of God; but I have little reason to believe that he ever embraced Christ as Lord or accepted the Word as authoritative and truthful. Were this man the exception in modern church

life, the situation would be tragic enough. However, I fear that he is representative of a common condition that has infected many of the clergy in this day.

Jesus is obviously aware, even concerned, that "thieves and robbers" climbing over the fence will attempt to injure the flock. Though the thieves and robbers are debarred from taking

fence will attempt to injure the flock. Though the thieves and robbers are debarred from taking the flock out of the safe enclosure, they can nevertheless harm the flock. Throughout the entire pericope, and not only in the immediate verses before us at this time, is the understanding that sheep will not follow a stranger because they "do not know the voice of strangers" [John 10:4]. Sheep do follow the shepherd of the sheep, because they "know his voice" [John 10:4].

In fact, sheep have an obligation to know the voice of the Master and to follow that voice. Later, during his exchange with these religious leaders, Jesus testified, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" [John 10:27]. Those who are of the Master's flock are responsible to recognise His voice, for His words will ring with divine truth. That truth scintillates with the Spirit that dwells in Christ's people, and when it is declared it will resonate as authentic in their hearts. On the other hand, thieves and robbers, though they may mingle with the flock, will not recognise the voice of the Master, nor will the sheep heed what they say.

This is a hard saying because it raises an uncomfortable issue for modern Christians. Undoubtedly, each Christian has witnessed religious impostors that exude charisma, and gather a following from among the professed people of God. These religious phoneys are adept at leading members of the flock astray. We marvel at the ability of such frauds to cause erstwhile followers of the Good Shepherd to willingly stray from the fold and into barren deserts.

As Christians, we do live in a modern desert; multiple voices clamour for a hearing there. In this environment, we might well ask whose voice or which shepherd should the flock follow? It is astounding to think of the multiplication of "spiritual guides" that have arisen to direct people in their quest for answers. New Age healers, seers, false teachers and false prophets each find an audience; and among the most fertile grounds for recruitment for such counterfeits are the evangelical churches of our day. Even among the churches of our Saviour, many of the flock appear more comfortable following the voice of friends or family than the voice of the Shepherd. Sheep are more likely to act to preserve personal comfort, than to obey the voice of the Master.

There is but one certain means to avoid disaster, and that is to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd. That voice is heard through reading the Word, through testing the spirits to verify that they speak the truth according to what we have received in the Book. Of course, this places upon each of us the responsibility to know the Word and to apply the Word in our lives; for that Word is the voice of the Living Saviour. It will keep us from sin and from disaster.

ENTERING THE FOLD — In the brief moments remaining, we must turn our attention to the flock. Who is inside the fold? Clearly, there are within the enclosure sheep that are sought by thieves and robbers. They have entered through the Gate so that they will be safe, and so that they may "go in and out and find pasture." How did those within the fold get in?

First of all, the answers to these questions will lead us to see Christianity as a very narrow religion possessing a very broad appeal. The Faith of Christ is narrow in that there is one door. Jesus said, "I am the door of the sheep." There is only one way to enter the fold. Understanding the nature of the pen that Jesus described, it would have been meaningless to have multiple doors. Often, unthinking people, even some who are religious leaders, will imagine that there are multiple ways to God. However, Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" [John 14:6].

Jesus did not merely show us the way to God; He presented Himself as the only way to the Father. Jesus did not discover truth; He is the truth. Jesus does not simply tell us about life; He is the life. This is a vital truth, for it reminds us that those who imagine there are other ways to God are at best ignorant of truth, and their very claim exposes them as liars. That Jesus is the door is a vital truth, for it enables us to understand what is said in other portions of the Word. The author of the Letter to Hebrew Christians speaks of Jesus as "the new and living way" to God [Hebrews 10:20]. Paul says of Jesus that "through Him we ... have access ... to the Father" [EPHESIANS 2:18].

If I tell you to be good or to do what is right, you can rightly question whether I know what I am saying. You know quite well that though you may have the desire to do good, you haven't the power to be good. However, if I point you to Christ as the means of being made pure in the sight of the Father, you will know that I am pointing you to the only One who can save. He meets you where you are, accepts you as you confess faith in Him, and by His power transforms your life, making you acceptable to the Living God. If I impress you with my wisdom, I have done you a disservice. If I point you to the wisdom of Christ the Lord, I have directed you to the fount of all wisdom; Christ is only truth that can satisfy the yearning of the human heart. If I encourage you to enjoy life, reflection compels the sorrowful admission that despite diligent searching and in spite of exhausting yourself pursuing pleasure, there is no lasting satisfaction. However, if I tell you that in Christ you can find lasting satisfaction and enjoy abundant life, you will know that I am speaking the truth, for within the life of each individual is a void that can be filled only by the presence of the Living Saviour. Though the "thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy," the Saviour came that those who enter into life through Him "may have life and have it abundantly" [John 10:10].

The Christian Faith is exclusive. There is no room for any of us to think that we can please God through our own efforts, or to imagine that we can be good enough to make ourselves acceptable to God—we cannot. There is but one way into the presence of the Father, and that is through the Son. According to what Jesus taught in our text, there is only one door that leads into the sheepfold, and that is Christ the Lord.

The corresponding truth is one that is broad, for He said, "If anyone enters by Me." "Anyone" embraces all humanity. No one is invited to the Saviour on the basis of race or culture; neither is anyone excluded by birth or occupation. The life that is offered in Christ the Lord is not restricted by any condition or status—neither birth, education, social position, wealth, achievements, reputation nor anything else excludes you from life in the Son of God. The Master invites all who are willing to come into the safety of His sheepfold.

The call of the Gospel is extended to each one who is willing to accept it. This is evident from the well-known verse that declares, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" [John 3:16]. This promise is repeated throughout the Word of God. "Whoever believes in [the Son of God] is not condemned" [John 3:18]. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life" [John 3:36].

It is true that God is sovereign, and Jesus Himself testified, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" [John 6:44]. However, His sovereignty does not contradict what is now stated, for "God shows no partiality" [ACTS 10:34]. It is actually a comforting truth that no person ever sought God. Long before anyone sought the Lord, God was drawing that one. However, God does not discriminate on the basis of human distinction. Do you find yourself drawn to consider the Saviour? Then believe that He will receive you; come to Him believing that He has provided a way for you to come to life through the sacrifice of His own body. There is no reason for anyone to imagine that they are excluded from grace, for if you are conscious of your need and you are willing to receive the gift of life, God stands prepared to accept you. Jesus said, "If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on My own authority" [John 7:17].

Jesus presented Himself as the Door for His sheep. Though you may struggle with this, He nevertheless extends an invitation to each person—and that includes you. Dr. Boice relates a story of how one woman came to life when she understood this truth. He writes, "A number of years ago a woman sat in a pew in the Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, which I now serve as pastor. At the time, the pastor was Donald Grey Barnhouse. He was talking about the cross and of the need to believe on the Christ who died upon it. The woman I am talking about was not a Christian. She had been raised in a religious home and had heard about Jesus. She had heard about the cross. But she did not understand these things and therefore obviously had never actually trusted in Jesus for her salvation. In order to make clear that for salvation only belief in Jesus Christ is necessary Barnhouse said, 'Imagine that the cross has a door in it. All you are asked to do is to go through. On one side, the side facing you, there is written an invitation: "Whosoever will, may come." You stand there with your sin upon you and wonder if you should enter or not. Finally you do, and as you do the burden of your sin drops away. You are safe and free. Joyfully you then turn around and see written on the backside of the cross, through which you have now entered, the words "Chosen in him before the foundation of the world." Barnhouse then invited those who were listening to enter.

"The woman later said that this was the first time in her life that she had really understood what it meant to be a Christian and that in understanding it, she had believed. She believed right there—in that church at that moment. She entered the door. Moreover, the rest of her life bore witness to the fact that a great change had occurred and that she was God's child." Boice concludes the story with these words, "I am certain of the facts of this story because that woman was my mother.",4

Jesus says that those who enter in "will be *saved*." Moreover, they will be *safe*—they may go in and out without fear that they may be excluded at some future time or that they are trapped. They will also be *satisfied*, for they shall find pasture. This is the offer found in the Shepherd's Psalm—rest in green pastures, still waters to quench the thirst, restoration of the soul, walking in paths of righteousness. It is true, then, all the days of his life, "goodness and mercy shall follow" the sheep of God. Think of what is offered in the Saviour—salvation, safety, satisfaction. This is the offer of God to each person.

⁴ Boice, op. cit., 744

The offer of life is extended to each person with these words, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." That promise concludes with a triumphant invitation from the Father, "Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved" [ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13].

It is my sincere prayer that each one who hears these words has believed. If you have yet to believe, know that "now is the day of salvation" [2 CORINTHIANS 6:2b]. Believe the message that God has provided His own Son as a sacrifice because of your sin; confess Jesus as Master over your life. Call on the Name of the Lord and be saved. Enter into the sheepfold through the Door. Do it now. Amen.