

I AM the Gate/Door

1/7 I AM Series

John 10:1-10

02 21 2010 Sam Jones Memorial UMC

When God commissioned **Moses** to deliver the Israelites out of Egypt, the prophet asked, “*Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?*”

God answered, “*I AM WHO I AM! This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM’ has sent me to you.*” (Exodus 3:13-14)

For the English majors among us, “**I am**” is the first person singular present tense form of the verb “to be.” The conjugation of the verb into the present, past, and future tenses results in the statements: “I am,” “I was,” and “I will be.” The declaration describes the God who is and was and will be. Our Lord is the great “I AM.”

During his public ministry, Jesus referred to himself by the same title of “I am,” but he also added more descriptive details. In John’s Gospel, there are **seven “I am” statements** by the Lord. Jesus said: “I AM:

- The gate/door
- The light of the world
- The bread of life
- The way, the truth, and the life
- The true vine
- The good shepherd
- The resurrection and the life.

During the next seven weeks, we will examine each of these titles for Jesus. Together we will discover what it means to serve the God who is the great “I AM.”

Introduction

In John 10, Jesus described himself as “*the good shepherd.*” This is a familiar image of God in Scripture. David began Psalms 23 with the declaration: “*The Lord is my shepherd.*” In his preaching and teaching, Jesus described some of the attributes of a shepherd caring for his sheep.

Then in John 10:7, Jesus went on to say: “*I tell you the truth, I am the **GATE** for the sheep.*” (NIV, NRSV) However, other versions translate Jesus’ words to say, “*I am the **DOOR** for the sheep.*” (RSV, NEV) I AM . . . the gate . . . the door. Both titles reveal insights into our relationship with God.

I. I AM the Gate

Jesus said, “*I AM the gate.*” The statement certainly makes sense within the context of the passage. The Lord had been describing how a shepherd cares for his sheep. He leads the flock through the gate and into the sheepfold. Gates are designed to keep the bad things out and the good things in.

A. Gates keep the bad out

First, gates are designed to keep the **bad things out**. They join with walls or fences to form a protective barrier around the flock. Sometimes we forget how important such protection can be.

Tommy is a friend of mine who grew up on a small farm near Calhoun, Georgia. His father was a good man, but Jay was more than a bit particular and peculiar when it came to gates and fences. Whenever they drove through the fields, it was Tommy's job to jump out of the truck, open the **gate**, and then close it again. Anyone who has ever been around farms knows the importance of closing gates behind them.

Jay also believed in strong **fences**. Tommy recalled countless days sweating in the scorching heat or shivering in the frigid cold while they strung barbwire. The posts had to be firmly planted and perfectly level. Then they stretched the fence piano wire tight. Whenever Tommy would complain about the laborious attention to detail, his father would say, "Some day you'll be glad that you did such a good job." His son filed these comments under the heading of "*Stupid Things My Father Said to Me!*"

Until one day Tommy was taking a shortcut through a pasture. His father had forgotten to share with his son some critical information: Jay had moved **THE BULL** to a new field that morning—the same field that Tommy was now crossing! The bull was one ton of bad attitude on the hoof. He possessed sweeping horns and sharp hooves; and he greatly resented anyone trespassing on his territory.

About halfway across the field, Tommy felt the ground begin trembling beneath his feet. He glanced over his shoulder and saw **THE BULL** charging towards him at a full gallop. Now Tommy possessed a six foot body compressed into a five foot five inch frame. To say the least, he had never been fleet of foot—at least up to that point in his life. However, apparently he had never had the proper motivation before! After one look, Tommy began running like an Olympic sprinter for his life. He reached the fence a few feet in front of the bull and miraculously levitated over the barbed wire.

As he gasped for his breath on the far side of safety, he stared at the huge bull on the other side. Then he looked at the fence with its firmly planted poles and tightly stretched wire. He finally understood his father's words, and he **WAS** glad that he had done such a good job on the fence. Of course, he never told his father so!

1 Peter 5:8 warns: "*Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*" Evil stalks our lives in this fallen world. However, Jesus is the gate—he offers protection against the evil forces that seek to harm us.

In his discussion about this passage, William Barclay described two types of sheepfolds used in the Middle East. When the flocks were gathered together in the village, they shared a common pen with a permanent wall and sturdy gate. In the fields, however, the pens were more primitive affairs with four walls and open to the air. Many of the sheepfolds did not even have a gate. Instead, the shepherd would sleep the opening. The shepherd literally formed the gate with his body, protecting the flock with his life.

1 John 4:4 assures us: "*You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.*" One of the great affirmations of faith of Christianity is found in Romans 8. Paul wrote:

“If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord!” (Romans 8: 31-32, 37-39)

B. Gates keep the good in

Gates keep the bad things out; and they also keep the **good things in**. Jesus said: *“I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” (John 10:9-10)*

Jesus Christ is our gateway to salvation—a right relationship with God. Matthew says that we become citizens of *“the Kingdom of Heaven.”* Mark and Luke describe the same reality as *“the Kingdom of God.”* John’s Gospel talks about **“eternal life.”**

In Christ, we are new creations—the old has passed away and the new has come. God grants us the gift of eternal life—both in the future and the present. Eternal life certainly describes how we will spend eternity with God in heaven. However, the new reality begins here on earth. We enjoy the *“first-fruits”* of the resurrection here and now.

Jesus said *“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full”* in the present. This *“abundant life”* is our birthright as God’s children. The Lord of life gives life to life. We are filled with meaning, purpose, fulfillment, peace, understanding, acceptance, companionship, and every other good gift from heaven.

Joy is the attitude and aptitude of God’s people. Paul wrote to the Philippians, *“Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I will say, rejoice!”*

II. I AM the Door

When I was planning the “I AM” sermon series, the title this sermon kept changing. The first title was “I AM the Door.” In fact, the logo for the series has this title. I had all sorts of wonderful imagery about doorways.

However, I typically preach from *The New International Version*; and when I looked at the passage, I discovered it actually translated Jesus’ words as *“I am the gate.”* So I changed the sermon title. Then I did more research and found that other Bible versions translate the verse as *“I am the door for the sheep.”* Granted, most sheep I know use gates rather than doors—the cloven hooves make doorknobs a real challenge! However, the image of Jesus Christ as *“the door”* gives additional insight into the passage.

Doors represent different realities in life. They separate one world from another. An open door is mysterious—one never knows what awaits on the other side.

Jesus Christ is THE door. Through Christ, we experience new realities. The Spirit leads us into God’s Kingdom where all things are possible. We discover that each door in life is another facet of eternal life.

Almost ten years ago Bishop Lindsey David appointed me to Sam Jones. I moved to Cartersville in June 20000 with only two car **keys** on my key ring. For a few days between churches, I experienced a wondrous freedom from the normal responsibilities of life. Freedom was a light pocket with no concern for what awaited behind locked doors.

The feeling did not last. On “Move Day,” I began accumulating keys that represented the various responsibilities of life. I’m up to two key rings and ten keys now—9 of the keys represent church, home, vehicles, and padlocks. I also have 1 mystery key that goes to who knows what; but as soon as I throw it away, I will encounter the lock that it opens!

A world without keys seems enticing. We all occasionally dream of a carefree life devoid of responsibility and obligation. Imagine a land without clocks, appointments, deadlines, and obligations. Stress, worry, and anxiety would be things of the past. Paradise is pictured as a place where we have nowhere to go, nothing to do, and no one to please.

While we might all occasionally enjoy a vacation from our responsibilities, it is our obligations that make us who we are. My identity, purpose, and worth are informed by who I am in relation to others. What ties me down also frees me up. The keys on my ring are the keys to life itself.

A house key welcomes me home to a spouse and children who are reminders of what is truly important. We can be guilty of taking our loved ones for granted; but they are the very ones who grant us the gifts of perspective and balance. Our family knows us best and loves us anyway. The ties that bind keep us anchored in the real world.

Office keys are a symbol of my vocation. Unfortunately, we normally speak only of clergy as being “called by God” to ministry. However, the Lord can sanctify our places of employment. Jobs are not holy, people are holy. We can work for God’s kingdom in a wide variety of settings.

Car keys take me to places where I minister and am ministered to in turn. God is certainly inside our congregations, but the Lord is also at work outside the churches’ walls. Ministry often means discovering where God is already at work and joining others there. Just like Abraham in the Old Testament, we are blessed to be a blessing to others.

And that mystery key that I’m not sure about? It is a reminder that God always has something new in store for us behind doors not yet open. Life is an adventure with no road map. We do not always know where we are going, but we walk by faith in the footsteps of our Lord. Our Savior entrusts to our hands the keys to God’s kingdom.

III. Lenten Journey

Those who know me understand that I like to do things in an orderly and logical manner. So when I began planning this series, my natural tendency was to do the seven “I AM” statements of Jesus in the order they appear in John’s gospel. After great internal debate, I finally convinced myself to rearrange the order so that we could begin with John

10 today. I think the metaphors of gates and doors are apt images as we enter into the season of Lent.

Lent is the forty day season (excluding Sundays) prior to Easter. Traditionally, this is a somber and reflective time in the church calendar as Christians remember Christ's sacrifice upon the cross. The color purple of the paraments is a call to remorse and repentance.

Ash Wednesday this past week marked the beginning of Lent. During the service, ministers mark believers' foreheads in the sign of the cross. Traditionally, ashes from the previous year's Palm Sunday fronds are used. Since Old Testament times, God's people have observed penitential times with "sackcloth and ashes."

During the imposition of the cross with ashes, the minister typically says, *"Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return. Repent and believe in the gospel."* The ashes and words serve as reminders of humanity's mortality and sinfulness. However, the sign of the cross recognizes God's gifts of eternal life and forgiveness.

During Lent, many believers "**give up**" something as a reminder of Christ's sacrifice. Oftentimes, people approach this spiritual discipline like a self-improvement project. We "give up" soft drinks, chocolate, desserts, or caffeine. There's nothing wrong with this; however, I would encourage you to dig deeper. What words, actions, or attitudes do you need to give up for Christ? If you're brave enough, ask a family member or friend what you might sacrifice.

I also suggest you pair "giving up" with "**taking up.**" Jesus told his disciples to *"Take up your cross and follow me."* During Lent, we have the opportunity to "take up" a spiritual discipline or charitable cause in imitation of God's love.

Conclusion

Guided prayer time:

- Gates
- Doors
- Lenten disciplines.

Amen.

Closing Hymn

(Before the benediction)

Oftentimes we use various images, banners, and other objects to illustrate the theme of the day. The worship team discussed having a door or gate as a visual representation of today's Scripture lesson.

However, midweek it occurred to me that we already have an illustration of John 10 here today. We entered through these doorways into this place of worship. For the past hour, we have stood on holy ground, praising our Creator, Savior, and Sustainer. Now we depart through these same doors to the world beyond.

May each doorway you enter and exit this week be a concrete reminder of God's Word. Jesus Christ said: "*I am the gate . . . I am the door.*" Go into the new reality that the Lord has waiting on the far side.