

SUNDAY, MARCH 07, 2010

## Sunday, March 7, 2010: Jesus, the Door

Jesus: The Door  
John 10: 1 – 10.

### I. Introduction.

Do you have a “guilty pleasure?” A guilty pleasure is something that you enjoy doing, but feel a little guilty about. I’m not talking about sinful behavior. I’m talking about embarrassing behavior. Maybe, you like to listen to music from the 1980’s—there is a lot of music from the 80’s that is truly embarrassing. Or, maybe when no one else is around, you listen to the Jonas Brothers. Or perhaps, you like to watch American Idol or The Bachelor...But you don’t want anyone to find out, because you would be embarrassed. People might criticize your TV preferences.

I have some guilty pleasures, but I am not going to confess to all of them. I’ll just tell you about one. I like to read “Dear Abby” in the newspaper. I usually read the headlines, the obituaries, the police report, Dear Abby and the comics before I read the rest of the newspaper.

I don’t always agree with the advice Dear Abby gives out. In fact, I agree with her less and less as I get older. But, I have to admit her free advice is worth every penny of its cost.

On Thursday (March 4, 2010), Dear Abby printed her readers’ responses to a man who was criticized for holding the door open for a woman. The man thought he was being courteous. The woman thought he was being chauvinistic. I suppose it could be taken as an offensive gesture, if a man honestly thinks a woman is incapable of opening a door. This is something I try to do for men and women alike. Anytime I arrive at a door at the same time as another person (man or woman), I usually hold the door and let them enter before me. I think of it as polite...Not demeaning to another person.

Evidently the man was asking for Dear Abby’s advice about what he should have said. I’m sure you can relate. You can’t think of the right thing to say at the moment. But, a couple of days later you come up with the perfect thing to say.

One reader wrote about what her teenage son said. The teenager held the door for a woman. The woman said, “Listen, Sonny, I can handle the door myself.” The teenager replied, “I will excuse your rudeness if you will excuse my courtesy.”

Another reader suggested this reply: “I was taught that it is respectful to open a door for a lady. I apologize for having misjudged you.”

Another suggestion is to say, “I didn’t open the door because you are a lady. I opened the door because I am a gentleman.”

My favorite response was, “It’s not because you are a woman. It’s because of your AGE.”

When I think about doors, I think there are two types of doors. First, there are doors that are designed to keep people out. Second, there are doors that are designed to let people in.

Doors that keep people out are usually foreboding and intimidating. Like a huge wooden door with iron hinges, which might be found on a medieval castle. Or a wrought iron gate with padlocks, something designed to scare away burglars.

Doors that let people in are attractive and inviting. Hopefully this describes the doors of our church—attractive and inviting.

Which of these doors do you think Jesus was talking about in John 10? We must make a decision, because it will affect the way we read and interpret what Jesus said about himself...

### **Read John 10: 1 – 10.**

Jesus is the door. So, what kind of door is Jesus?

There are some doors that are labeled, “CLOSED!” “KEEP OUT!” “DO NOT ENTER!” “NO ADMITTANCE!” or even “WRONG WAY!” Does that capture what Jesus is saying about himself?

There are other doors that say, “Open,” “Entrance,” “Welcome,” “Come on in,” or even “Home Sweet Home.” Does that capture what Jesus is saying about himself?

Before Jesus told us he is the door, he told us a story. This is an allegorical story which contains a deeper, spiritual meaning. It’s not simply a story about sheep and shepherds.

Jesus described a typical first century scene. Most families kept sheep for food, clothing and for religious purposes. They didn’t need help to understand the story itself. But, they did need help to understand the spiritual significance.

A sheep fold in ancient Palestine was what we would call a sheep pen. Sometimes a sheep fold was connected to a house as a kind of courtyard. The wall of the house served as one wall, with three stone walls making a rectangular pen. One of these walls had a gate to give access to the shepherd and the sheep. Of course, it wasn’t a gate like we think of in East Texas. The gate looked more like a gap than anything else. A whole in the wall.

At night, several shepherds would lead their flocks to the safety of a fold. Hundreds or even thousands of sheep could find protection in just one sheep fold. Since there was only one way in and one way out of the pen, one shepherd could protect all the sheep. The stone walls kept the wolves, coyotes and thieves away from the sheep. But, what about the gap in the wall?

Modern-day shepherds in the Middle East continue to use sheep folds like the one Jesus described. Four stone walls with an open doorway for access. These shepherds have discovered the best way to protect the sheep at night is to lie across the open doorway. There is no way for a wolf or a thief to get into the sheep fold except to cross over the body of the shepherd. There is no way for a sheep to escape the sheep fold except to cross over the body of the shepherd. Perhaps this is what Jesus had in mind when he said, “I am the door.” The only way in is through Jesus. The only way out is through Jesus.

## **II. The Door as Entrance.**

**John 10: 9...I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.**

The first thing Jesus says about himself as the door is about salvation. Just as there is only one way to enter the sheep fold, so there is only one way to be saved. Jesus is the legitimate door of entrance into salvation.

This interpretation for the door of the sheep fold makes a lot of sense. As long as the sheep were inside the sheep fold, they were safe. Outside the sheep fold, there were wild animals and thieves who did not care about the safety of the sheep. Inside the sheep fold, the sheep were secure. In the same way, Jesus provides us with safety and security. However, not everyone has this kind of safety. Safety is only possible to those who enter through the door. Jesus is the door. Jesus is the way to salvation.

I recognize this to be a very narrow and exclusive claim. It is even intolerant of other religious traditions. But, it is a claim based on what Jesus claimed for himself. For the past two weeks, we have looked at Jesus' claims about himself. Jesus took the meager lunch of a young boy and used it to feed over 5,000 people. Then, Jesus said, "I am the Bread of Life." People who eat physical bread will gain temporary nourishment but will eventually die. People who receive Jesus as the Bread of Life will live forever. On another occasion, Jesus stood in the Jerusalem Temple after an elaborate lighting festival. The candles and torches and Menorahs were burned out. The candles and torches and Menorahs were supposed to remind the Jews of the way God demonstrated his presence to their ancestors in a pillar of fire in the desert. And, Jesus said, "I am the Light of the World. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but have the light of life." If light is a symbol for the presence of God, then Jesus is telling us that Jesus himself is the source of God's presence. Jesus is the source of salvation.

This is Jesus' claim about himself. Jesus is the only way to be saved. Satan is one who wants to attack you. He is a thief and a wild animal. He is not concerned about your safety. He is only concerned about himself. His intent is to steal, to kill and to destroy. His primary tool is temptation—to lead you into sin. But, Jesus has come to give you salvation. To save you from sin and all the attacks and temptations of Satan. The only way to be saved is to enter into God's fold through Jesus.

Jesus is the door that says, "Welcome" and "Home Sweet Home." All who come through Jesus are at home in God's sheep fold with God's people.

### III. The Door as Exit.

**John 10: 9 – 10 ...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.**

Notice that Jesus describes the door as both an entrance and an exit. "(The sheep) will go in and go out, and find pasture." Obviously, to enter through the door is to have salvation. But, what could it mean to go out of the sheep fold?

The key to understand this is the way Jesus qualifies it with the phrase "find pasture." As long as the sheep remained in the sheep fold, they were safe. However, there was no food in the sheep fold. Grass would not grow on the floor of the sheep fold. All the grass had been worn down by the

sheep. Therefore, the shepherds had to lead their sheep out of the sheep fold in order to find pasture.

But, I think we can qualify this even further by reading Jesus' words in the next verse. Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." Other translations say, "and have it more abundantly." In other words, the sheep enter into the fold to find salvation and leave the fold to find life.

Jesus is the door. On one hand, Jesus provides us with the safety of salvation. On the other hand, Jesus provides us with life. This is not just any kind of life. It is Abundant Life. Jesus did not come to give you an "Adequate Life" or even a "Happy Life." Jesus wants to give you Abundant Life. Abundant Life is life that is overflowing...Life that is more than adequate. It is a full and complete life.

You were not created to have an adequate life. God wants you to live a thrilling and fulfilled life. God wants you to have life to the fullest extent...Abundant Life. There are three things we can say about Abundant Life...

**1. Abundant Life is Knowing and Being Known...** Through faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, you can know God and be known by God. God is not a distant and detached God. God knows you by name and wants to be in relationship with you. God is concerned about every aspect of your life, from the biggest decisions you make to the days when you don't feel like going to work. Imagine how horrible it would be to live in complete anonymity. We all want to be known by others. Jesus gives us an opportunity to be known by God.

**2. Abundant Life is Having a Purpose...** Jesus saves us from sin, but that is not all. Jesus saves us from sin and saves us for a mission to the world. It would be terribly selfish for us to think that Jesus saves us so that we can brag about being God's people. This is similar to the mistake the Jews made. They had forgotten that God had given them an assignment to be a blessing to the entire world. They thought God had saved them to sit there. God doesn't save anyone to sit there. God saves us to continue the work of Jesus in the world. On one hand, this is a Gospel mission—to share the story of Jesus so others can be saved. On the other hand, this is a mission of love. God calls us to be outwardly focused...Not focused entirely on ourselves as individuals or focused only on our church. We are to leave the walls of the church (sheep fold) to serve the world and to bring others to Jesus as the door.

**3. Abundant Life is Freedom...** In the Old Testament, we read about God's standards for his people. We know by personal experience that no one can fully live up to God's expectations. Therefore, we live in fear of God's wrath. The cross of Christ tells us that we don't have to face the wrath of God. Those who have faith in Jesus have God's assurance that he is not angry with us anymore and will never be angry again. This is true freedom. If God is not angry with us, then the Law, sin, death and Satan no longer have any power over us. Their power over us comes in the form of fear and guilt. Jesus gives us the freedom to live without fear and guilt. Abundant Life is a life free from fear and guilt.

#### IV. Conclusion.

God does not want you to live an anonymous life. He wants to know you. God does not want you to live a life with no purpose. He wants to give you his purpose. God does not want you to live

burdened with fear and guilt. He wants to give you freedom. This is God's Grace...It is only available through Jesus.

This week, a friend of mine reposted on his Facebook profile what he read on Leonard Sweet's Facebook profile... "Grace means that we no longer have to push on open doors."

I think we can put that in the context of Jesus' words in John 10. If Jesus is the door, then we don't have to push on the door. The door is open. The door reads, "Welcome," "Come on in," "Home Sweet Home," "Come to Jesus for salvation and Abundant Life."