

THE DOOR OF THE SHEEP

SERIES: I AM: GETTING TO KNOW JESUS



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John 10:7-9

Third Message

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John 10:7-9

Growing up, I remember a few occasions when my sisters and I would make my mom breakfast in bed on Mother's Day. This is a classic Mother's Day activity. Did any of your moms get breakfast in bed this morning?

This morning, my children and I did not make breakfast in bed for my wife, Linzy. This is not because we forgot it was Mother's Day. It wasn't even because I had to be out the door at 7 am this morning, though that didn't help. The real reason why we didn't make Linzy breakfast in bed this Mother's Day or any Mother's Day is that Linzy would hate basically everything about breakfast in bed. First of all, there is the sleeping in. Linzy doesn't like to sleep in. She likes to get up before the kids and enjoy some time in the quiet before the chaos erupts. Also, she doesn't like eating first thing in the morning. She needs some time. And then there are the crumbs — sourdough crumbs all over our white comforter are not her cup of tea. So breakfast in bed is never happening on Mother's Day at our house.

But, lest you think I am a terrible husband for abandoning my wife with our three kids at 7 am on Mother's Day, let me defend myself a little. I made Linzy a delicious coffee cup, and coffee is definitely the key to Linzy's heart. A few weeks ago, I ordered some specialty beans from her favorite coffee roaster—an Ethiopia Dry Process coffee. There are notes of wild blueberry, passion fruit, and some lavender on the finish. This morning, I ground those beans, heated the water in the kettle, and brewed her a delicious pour over—the perfect start to any day in our house.

I bring this up today not to boast about what an incredible husband I am—remember, I did still leave Linzy at home with our three kids at 7 am on Mother's Day—but rather, I bring this up as a bit of a confession. You see, I also brewed one of those cups of coffee for myself. And after that, I brewed another cup of coffee for myself. And every day, this is how my day starts—two cups of coffee before I am out the door in the morning. If I don't have those two cups of coffee for whatever reason, I don't feel so great. My eyes are heavy. My mind is a bit foggy, and eventually, the headache kicks in.

On those days when I don't get my coffee, it feels like I am only half alive. Like I am not really living.

Do you ever feel like that—half alive? If you feel that way before your first cup of coffee, like me, we have our own problem and might need help.

There is a more serious sense in which we sometimes feel half alive. As humans, we have something built into us that causes us to look for meaning in life. We don't just want to live any old life. We want a full life, a satisfying life. We don't want to feel half alive. We want to be fully alive.

So how do we do that? How do we live a life worth living?

There are lots of different ways that we try to do this. Some of us think that pleasure is the key to the good life— if we can maximize pleasure and reduce pain, we will be fully alive. Others believe that power or influence might do this for us, so we work and work and work to accumulate more power and influence in our quest to become fully alive. Still, others think that love is the key to a full life. Keep your money. Keep your power. Just let me find true love with another person, and then my life will be full.

This morning, we are continuing our series called “I Am: Getting to Know Jesus.” In this series, we are looking at the seven different “I am” statements of Jesus—these statements where Jesus tells us who he is.

In John 10:7, Jesus says this, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.” This is probably the most obscure of the “I am” statements. When Jesus says, “I am the bread of life,” or “I am the light of the world,” immediately we might have an idea of what he means. When we hear, “I am the door of the sheep,” we are probably scratching our heads a little.

So we have a bit of cultural work to do to analyze this image. But as we do that, we will see that this is an image that wants to shape our understanding of the good life. This image speaks to those who feel half alive and offers the one, true solution to that problem. Let's take a look.

Sheep, shepherds, and other such things

I want to start by reading the beginning of John 10 to help set the context for us.

John 10:1-6:

“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. 2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. 5 A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” 6 This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

It is clear in this passage that Jesus is dealing with imagery that is not familiar to most of us here in Silicon Valley. If he had gone with chickens, I know a few of you could relate. Golden doodles, sure. But sheep? I don't think any of us have sheep at home. But in Jesus' day, most families did, so this is the image he uses.

There are a number of different elements of sheep farming that Jesus mentions here: the shepherd and the sheep, the sheepfold or sheep pen, a door to the pen, and a gatekeeper to the door. And then you have the thieves and robbers.

In this “figure of speech,” as John calls it, it is clear that followers of Jesus, disciples of Jesus, are the sheep. The sheep are being threatened by the thieves and robbers—those who break in and try to harm the sheep. Who are the thieves and robbers? Just before this scene, Jesus has just finished rebuking the Jewish leaders for their mistreatment of a blind man and for their own spiritual blindness. Jesus probably has these Jewish leaders in mind when he speaks of thieves and robbers. However, in a deeper sense, Jesus speaks of Satan and his demons, who are the ultimate enemies of God and his people.

Who, then, is Jesus? Is he the shepherd? Is he the door? Is he the gatekeeper? Yes. Yes. And maybe yes. Jesus is mixing metaphors here, which might bother us but seemed very natural for him. However, as the people hear this, they do not understand. In response to this,

Jesus is going to get a little more clear, and in the rest of the chapter, we get two more “I am” statements: “I am the door of the sheep” and “I am the good shepherd.” Scott Grant will take us through the Good Shepherd passage next week, but let us take a closer look at what Jesus says about himself as the door of the sheep.

Jesus is our protection

John 10:7-9:

7 So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

Here, Jesus says it explicitly: I am the door of the sheep. Let me give you a little refresher on some 1st-century sheep-farming practices for those of you who haven't dusted off that textbook for a while. In the 1st century, nearly every family had sheep. Sheep provided wool for clothing and milk for drinking and making cheese, so it was very practical to have sheep. But sheep are very vulnerable animals. They were vulnerable to predators like wolves and bears, but they were also vulnerable to thieves and robbers because they were valuable property.

To protect your sheep, you would keep them in a sheepfold or a sheep pen—some kind of wall-in or fenced-in enclosure that would keep the sheep in and the predators out. In the cities, the fold would just be the courtyard of the family home, in which case the door would be an iron or stone gate. In the country, however, the fold would be out in the open, and these kinds of folds often did not have a physical door. In that case, the shepherd himself would lie down in the doorway at night, acting as the door. So it is possible that when Jesus says, “I am the door,” he has this image of a shepherd acting as a door in mind, or maybe he is thinking of a physical door. It doesn't make much difference to Jesus' metaphor here.

What does a door do? What is it about himself that Jesus wants to teach us by calling himself the door to the sheep? He tells us in verse 9, “If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.”

First, let's think about the first part: If anyone enters by me, Jesus says, *he will be saved*. One of the primary functions of the door of the sheep is to save—that is, to

protect—the sheep from predators. If Jesus were here today, he would probably say, “I am the *firewall*. I know there are a lot of hackers out there who want to steal your data or corrupt your network, but I will not let them through. I will protect you. I am the firewall.”

Jesus wants us to know that he is our protection. Jesus is our protection. He is our protection from all who would do us harm.

We see Jesus acting as a protector just a few chapters earlier in John 8. The Jewish leaders—those same ones that Jesus refers to as *thieves* and *robbers* in this passage—come before Jesus with a woman whom they caught in the act of adultery. The Old Testament law, they say, requires that such a woman be stoned, so they ask Jesus if he thinks they should kill her.

The Old Testament law that the Jewish leaders refer to actually requires that both the man and the woman who engage in adultery should be stoned, but the man is nowhere to be found. The Jewish leaders are not concerned about justice or keeping the law. Rather, they want to destroy this woman's life—to end it, actually—and to trap Jesus as they do. They are thieves and robbers through and through.

Now, this woman is in an incredibly vulnerable situation. As a woman in the first century, she had no power in this situation. Her fate was completely up to these men. And they come against her with threats of violence—they want to kill her. Her life is in danger. But even if her life is spared, her dignity and reputation have been destroyed. These men have pulled her out of her home, or maybe out of the bed that she was in with this other man. They have aired all of her dirty laundry in front of Jesus and all who were in the temple with him. This would have been more than humiliating. So much shame. So much guilt. So much vulnerability.

But Jesus steps in and says, *No. I don't think so. Do you think she deserves to die for her sins? Let the one who is without sin throw the first stone.* And one by one, those thieves and robbers walk away until no one is left to accuse her.

I am the door. I am your protection, Jesus says. *I am the one who steps in for you when people come against you to destroy you. I am the one who guards you against those who would do you harm.* And Jesus does not just mean this in a physical sense—though here, for this woman, he does save her life. Instead, Jesus says this, knowing that he is going to the cross. On the cross, Jesus takes

our sin, our guilt, and our shame on himself. He bears the punishment that we deserve because of our sin. And he takes his righteousness and gives it to us.

Think about a bank account. Left on our own, we have accumulated a debt because of our sin, and no amount of good that we do can offset that debt. It doesn't work that way. But Jesus had no debt of his own. He was sinless, perfect in every way. In his account was not a debt of sin but a positive balance of righteousness. When we place our faith in Jesus, our balances are switched. The debt of sin in our account is transferred to Jesus, and the credit of righteousness in his account is transferred to us.

So now, when the voices of Satan and his demons come and accuse us (and this is what Satan does; he accuses us)—*You are worthless. No one could love you if they really knew you. You don't even love yourself. You should be so ashamed of who are you*—Jesus stands before us as the Door and says, *No. I don't think so. Here is my daughter. Here is my son. And I love them. They are mine.*

And now, because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, we are saved from eternal separation from God and torment in hell. Jesus is our protector. He is the door.

Jesus is our provision

As the door, Jesus not only protects us from harm; he also leads us into a life of blessing. And this is what he says in the second half of verse 9. “If anyone enters by me,” Jesus says, “he will be saved, and will go in *and out and find pasture*.”

At night, the door of the fold was closed to protect the sheep from their predators. But during the day, the door was opened, and the shepherd would lead the sheep out of the fold and into the green pastures, and there they would find all the food they needed.

In this way, Jesus is saying that he not only protects us; he also provides for us. As the closed door, Jesus is our protection, but as the open door, Jesus leads us into provision. Jesus is our provision.

And just as Jesus had demonstrated earlier in the gospel of John that he is our protector through the story of the woman caught in adultery, he has also demonstrated that he is our provider. Two weeks ago, Paul Taylor took us through Jesus' statement that he is the bread of life in John 6. That statement came on the heels of an incredible miracle that started with the disciples' fear of lack. They saw a massive crowd gathering and

realized that they would need to feed them. But they didn't have nearly enough food. *How is this going to work? What are we going to do?* They gathered all the food they could find, and they had five loaves of bread and two fish. *This is not nearly enough!* Then, Jesus takes these five loaves and these two fish, and he breaks off piece after piece after piece until all 5,000 people have had all that they can eat. At the end of this, the twelve disciples gather up all of the food that is leftover, and they can fill twelve baskets full. Twelve baskets of surplus for twelve disciples. The point? Jesus is saying, *I will provide you with everything that you need.*

As the door to the sheep, I will be closed at night to protect you from those who would harm you, but I will open during the day so that you may go in and out and find all that you need.

So what do you need? Or maybe a better question is: what do you need that you fear you will not get?

This question is really about our fears more than it is about our needs. Think about it: One of our greatest needs—and perhaps our most urgent need—is the need for oxygen. Without it, we would all be dead within minutes. And yet, I doubt that any of us were afraid of dying from lack of oxygen before I just mentioned that because there is plenty of oxygen around. Though we desperately need it, we are afraid we won't have it.

But we need many other things that we are not so sure that we will get. Some of those are still physical needs—the need to put food on the table, the need to pay rent, and the need for physical healing. But many of our greatest sources of fear are somewhere higher up Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

One of my greatest fears in life is failing to be a good father to my children. How can I raise my kids to love and fear the Lord, be kind and generous, and be wise and diligent when I am so broken and sinful? The task feels overwhelming, and I am afraid I won't be able to do it. And it is in that place of fear that I need to look to Jesus as my door—the one who opens both to my children and me so that we might go in and out and find pasture so that we might find all that we need in him.

What do you need this morning? What are you afraid that you won't get? I hope and pray that in the midst of that, you can move past fear as you experience that provision of Jesus.

Jesus is our abundance

After establishing himself as our protection and provision, Jesus wants to take us one level deeper.

John 10:10:

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”

A few years ago, Linzy and I were hiking at one of the local open space reserves. Peyton, our oldest, was about six months old, so I was carrying him on my back. Because you need a lot of things when you have a six-month-old with you, we had left the diaper bag in the car full of diapers, wipes, snacks, and toys.

As we finished our hike and returned to the trailhead, we saw somebody in our car actively grabbing everything they could find, which was just a diaper bag, but they didn't know that. As we realized what was happening, we started yelling at them, and they jumped in their car and drove off with our stuff.

To get into our car, these thieves had smashed in the rear window, damaging the tailgate and a few other things as they went. In the end, the car's repairs cost much more than the cost of the stolen items—stuff they almost certainly didn't need anyway. I remember thinking, *If you could have just asked, I would have given you the money, and we could have avoided this whole thing! It would have been better for you; it would have been better for us.* But that is not the way it works with a thief. No, a thief doesn't come with a request so that you can work out the most economical way to get them what they want. Rather, they come to take what they want and destroy whatever they need to in order to get that.

This is what Satan and his demons do in our lives. They come to steal, kill, and destroy. They are filled only with thoughts of hatred, violence and destruction. They want to steal, kill and destroy our joy, our peace, our love for God and each other, our self-confidence, our courage, and our faith. Anything and everything that is good, true, and beautiful in our lives— anything that is from God—they want to take it all from us. They want to destroy us. That is the enemy that we are up against.

In contrast to that, Jesus says, *I have come that you may be life and have it abundantly.*

Abundant life. That's what we want, isn't it? A full life? A satisfying life? A life worth living? We don't want to feel half-alive. We want to be fully alive! We want an abundant life.

The greatest lie that Satan can get us to believe—the most destructive lie to our well-being, both in this life and the next—is that the abundant life is found in something other than Jesus.

Satan would love to have us believe that the good life is found in a successful career. He would love to see us running on the hamster wheel of success, always trying so hard but never really getting where we want to go. He would love to have us believe that the good life is found in things that money can buy—that new toy, that next vacation, that new house. Satan would even be content—in fact, he would be thrilled—if he could get us to believe that the good life is found in being a good person, even a good Christian—I go to church, I read my Bible, I give some money. I am a good Christian. If you think that is the path to the good life, you are going to die on the vine.

Abundant life is not found in any of these things. Abundant life is found only in Jesus himself. In knowing him. In building a relationship with him. In experiencing his love for you. In the truest sense imaginable, Jesus is our abundance. He is our abundance. He is not a good normal teacher. He is not a ticket into heaven. He is not a backstop there to save us when life really gets out of control. He is the only place in which abundant life is found.

C.S. Lewis says it this way in his essay, The Weight of Glory:

It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.¹

If you are looking for abundant life anywhere other than in Jesus, you are doing yourself a disservice. Sure, there are many things other than Jesus that can deliver

some sense of pleasure and satisfaction. But these things are nothing compared to the infinite joy available to us in Jesus.

Endnotes

1. C.S. Lewis. "The Weight of Glory." In *The Weight of Glory*. (San Francisco: HarperOne, April 7, 2015, Revised edition, (first published 1949)).