

## The Seven I AM Statements of Christ

*I AM the Door of the Sheep* (John 10:1-10)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on October 27, 2024

### Introduction

- ❖ If you take the time to read through the Bible, you're bound to come across difficult passages. Verses that many people find troubling. Now there are two types of difficult passages. There are those passages we label *difficult* because their meaning is hard to interpret. Perhaps certain words in the original language are obscure or the passage contains cultural idioms too far removed for us to grasp. So they're difficult for us to understand.
  - ▶ **But then there are those passages we call *difficult* – not because we don't understand them – but because what they plainly say is difficult for us to accept.** It's hard to swallow. What the passage clearly teaches leads to a theological conclusion that makes us uncomfortable. And that's why they're difficult.
  
- ❖ That would be the case for this morning's passage. **Here in John 10:7 Jesus uses a figure of speech where he calls himself a door.** *"Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep."* Now sometimes biblical metaphors can be rather difficult to interpret. But, as we're going to see, Jesus's meaning in calling himself *"the door of the sheep"* is not all that complicated. It's pretty straightforward. **But it's the theological implication of what he said that many are going to find difficult.** Difficult to accept. Let me flesh it out for you.
  - ▶ **By saying, *"I am the door of the sheep"*, what Jesus is implying is that if you want to access the sheepfold of God and to experience the abundant life enjoyed by God's sheep, then you *must* enter by him.** To get into the sheepfold; to enter the kingdom of heaven; to join the body of Christ; to be a part of the family of God – choose your metaphor – you have to go by the door. You *must* enter by Jesus.
  
- ❖ Like I said, this is difficult. **This passage is stressing the exclusive claim of the Christian faith that salvation is found in Christ and Christ alone.** Now, I get it if some people might be thinking I'm reading too much into these few words. That I'm reading my theology into Jesus's words. But this is not the first time Jesus makes exclusive truth claims in John's Gospel, and it won't be the last.
  - ▶ We've been in this series on the Seven I AM Statements of Christ in John's Gospel. A couple weeks ago, we looked at Jesus's declaration in **John 8:12** where he says, *"I am the light of the world."* Note that he didn't say, "I am the light of Israel." **He's not just the light of one nation or the light for one religion. No, he's the only light available for the entire world.** The light of the world.
    - And in a few weeks, we'll return to this theme when Jesus says, in **John 14:6**, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* This idea of salvation being found in Christ and Christ alone is a consistent theme in John's Gospel, and one that comes from Jesus's own lips.
  
- ❖ These are difficult passages. **Now granted, in abstraction, they're easy to accept.** If you're just surrounded by Christians all the time, you probably won't even bat an eye at these I AM statements. But if you have non-Christians in your family; if you have Muslim colleagues in the workplace; or Buddhist friends in the classroom; **or if your kids play with kids from a Hindu family across the street, then it's not so easy anymore to agree with John 10:7.**

- ❖ **Perhaps Jesus is a door but am I so sure that he's THE door?** Do I really believe Christianity is the one true faith? Do I really believe my non-Christian friends have to enter by Jesus in order to access God and his salvation? Do I really believe they're lost without him? These are the kind of difficult questions raised by a difficult passage.
  - ▶ **Friends, my goal this morning is to bolster your confidence that Jesus is the one and only Door to the Father's sheepfold.** I'll try my best to make these exclusive truth claims – not just easier for you to swallow – but actually compelling and convincing. So that you're motivated to tell your non-Christian friends and family that a Door exists. And if they would just go through it, they would find themselves in the arms of a merciful Savior.
  
- ❖ This morning, I want to extend three invitations based on this text that invite you to enter by that Door. (1) Come and enter God's sheepfold by Jesus – for there is no other door. (2) Come and enter God's sheepfold by Jesus – and rest in eternal security (3) Come and enter God's sheepfold by Jesus – and graze on eternal life.

### **There is No Other Door**

- ❖ Let's consider the first invitation – the one that stresses his exclusive claim. **Come and enter God's sheepfold by Jesus – for there is no other door.** This will never be a popular idea. Especially in our pluralistic day and age. **The popular argument these days is that heaven has many doors by which you can enter and many roads to lead you there.** Christians might go by Christ, but other people of other faiths can enter by other doors. But Christ himself will argue to the contrary.
  
- ❖ But before we consider his words, let's first set the context. This discourse follows on the heels of what took place in chapter 9 where Jesus healed a man born blind on the Sabbath. Which led to another confrontation with religious leaders. The Pharisees were incredulous towards this miraculous sign and ended up expelling the man from the synagogue.
  - ▶ **So Jesus's point in vv1-6 is to argue that those who were expected to be spiritual leaders for the people were demonstrating by their response that they were in fact *not* good shepherds but rather thieves and robbers.** Now continuing with the metaphor, Jesus goes on to identify himself as the rightful Shepherd who enters by the door of the sheepfold, unlike thieves and robbers who climb in by other ways.
 

*"<sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup>To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out."*

    - **The emphasis is on the personal knowledge and familiarity shared between the Shepherd and his sheep.** How they know his voice and how they come whenever he calls. The blind man in chapter 9 was one of those sheep who recognized his Shepherd's voice and followed when called (9:38).

- ❖ But now, in v7, he slightly changes the metaphor. “*So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.”* **So here Jesus is no longer the shepherd who goes through the door to get his sheep. Rather he is the door.** The focus shifts from Jesus as the rightful spiritual leader of God’s people to Jesus as the very means by which we enter God’s fold to enjoy the safety found therein.
  - ▶ Now what we have here in v7 (and also in v9) is Jesus’s third “I AM” statement. As we’ve been saying, each instance is a self-disclosure of Jesus’ unique identity as the Son of God, as being one in nature with Yahweh God.
    - And each phrase that follows “I AM” further defines his identity and mission. This is stated in v9, “*I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved.*” **So Jesus is on a mission to save, and he is claiming to be the very Door you have to enter by in order to be saved. To be part of God’s sheepfold.**
  
- ❖ Jesus made a similar point, in the Sermon on the Mount, when he said, “<sup>13</sup>*Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. <sup>14</sup>For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.*” (Mt 7:13-14)
  - ▶ **That was the passage John Bunyan had in mind when he described that “yonder wicket gate” in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*.** A wicket is a small door or gate built into a wall. So near the beginning, Christian meets Evangelist who points him to that Wicket Gate in the far distance. Telling him that that’s the only way to access the King’s Highway. **In other words, you have to go through the Wicket Gate to enter the Celestial City.** So Christian journeys to the gate, knocks and introduces himself as a needy sinner, and is warmly welcomed onto the road leading to the Celestial City.
  
- ❖ Well, at one point along the road, Christian meets a young man named Ignorance who says he’s also going to the Celestial City. **But Ignorance didn’t come by way of the Wicket Gate.** So Christian wonders how he expects to gain entrance into the City. Ignorance explains that he lives a good life, prays and fasts, pays his tithe and gives alms, so he’s confident he’ll get in. **But Christian reminds him that you can only be admitted to the Celestial City by way of the Wicket Gate.** To which Ignorance replies that they’ll just have to agree to disagree. That each should just respectfully follow the religion of their respective country.
  - ▶ He’s basically saying you have your door and I have mine. That sounds like a contemporary argument. But *The Pilgrim’s Progress* was written in 1678. **My point is that there really is no argument against the exclusivity of Christ that hasn’t already been made.** That hasn’t already been debated. There will always be objections to this. Why do Christians always insist that there’s only one Door that everyone has to go through? Why are we so narrow?
  
- ❖ **The Christian response is that we’re so insistent that salvation is found in Christ alone – because Christ alone has accomplished what is necessary to rescue us from our sins.** To redeem us from the debt we owe. He *alone* lived the life we should’ve lived. And he *alone* died the death we should’ve died. So he *alone* offers entrance into eternal life.

- ❖ But notice, in v9, how Jesus says, “*if anyone enters by me, he will be saved.*” If anyone? Anyone can enter? That doesn’t sound very exclusive. In fact, that sounds pretty inclusive. You see, **the Christian faith is exclusive** only in the sense that the means of salvation exclusively requires a conscious faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ.
  - ▶ **But it’s totally inclusive** in the sense that anyone – regardless of what religion you grew up with or if you’ve never been religious; regardless of what you look like, how broken you feel, or how messed up your life is – *anyone* can come to Jesus, enter by him through faith, and be saved. **Friends, if any of you are still hanging around the door – not sure if you want to go in or not sure if you’ll be let in – don’t miss what Jesus said.** If *anyone* enters by him, you will be saved. That includes you. If you want to come through the Door called Christ, there is nothing to stop you.
  
- ❖ **You know, the world thinks that believing in Jesus as the only door to eternal life will make Christians arrogant.** And to the extent that we are, we ought to repent. But the fault is not found in our conviction that Jesus is the only door. The fault is in our sinful hearts. We take a good truth and misapply it, which leads to arrogance.
  - ▶ **But the conviction itself that Jesus is the only Door, when applied rightly, gives you a huge heart and an inclusive, universal concern for the salvation of all kinds of lost people.** You want to share Jesus with all kinds of people different than yourself because you believe there is no other door by which they can be saved.
    - **Far from making you narrow-minded, this conviction makes you a global-minded Christian.** With a passion to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, sharing the good news that *anyone* who enters by Jesus will be saved.

### Rest in Eternal Security

- ❖ Friends, no matter who God puts in your path – no matter how far from God they might appear – you can invite them to enter God’s sheepfold by Jesus. They can stop searching. They can stop wasting time on trying to open shut doors or doors that only lead to destruction. Come and enter by Christ. That’s the first invitation. Here’s the second: **Come and enter God’s sheepfold by Jesus – and rest in eternal security.**
  - ▶ In other words, if you enter by the one Door, you’ll find safety on the other side. **You’ll experience the same security enjoyed by all of God’s sheep.** You’ll be protected from all the dangers that lurk outside the fold.
  
- ❖ Jesus alludes to these dangers in v8, “*All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them.*” **So there were others who came before Jesus who claimed to be the door to God’s sheepfold. But these false teachers turned out to be false doors.** They turned out to be thieves and robbers intent on harming and not saving.
  - ▶ In the context of John’s Gospel, Jesus was probably referring to the Pharisees. The way they treated the blind man in chapter 9 demonstrates a sad perversion of godly leadership. They were not good shepherds. They were not true doors. And the real sheep could tell. They didn’t listen to the Pharisees. They were waiting for the voice of another. The voice of their True Shepherd.

- ❖ And we can hear his voice extending an invitation in v9, *“I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.”* That phrase *“go in and out”* is a Jewish expression that describes all the activities of life. The idea is that wherever the Shepherd leads us – no matter what we’re doing – we’re under his protection.
  - ▶ There is a strong connection between v9 and **Numbers 27:16-17**. There Moses is about to die and the people are about to cross into the Promised Land, so Moses asks the LORD for a successor. *“Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be as sheep that have no shepherd.”*
  
- ❖ And in the next verse, the LORD identifies Joshua as that shepherd. He’s going to lead and protect God’s sheep. And interestingly enough, the name *Joshua* is the Hebrew equivalent for the name *Jesus* in Greek. **So I think it’s safe to say that Joshua, in the OT, served as a type pointing to the True and Better Shepherd.** Who would one day come and lead God’s people out and bring them back in. This Good Shepherd will guard and protect his sheep in every activity of life until they reach the final Promised Land.
  - ▶ This is what Jesus was alluding to when he calls himself the Good Shepherd in John 10 (vv2, 11, 14). It’s apparent that he’s mixing metaphors. **He presents himself as both the Shepherd who rescues his sheep AND as the Sheep Door they go through to find safety and shelter.** That can be hard to comprehend. Picturing Jesus as a Good Shepherd is easy. Imagining him as a Door is a bit more challenging. But picturing him as both Shepherd and Door, at the same time, is flat out confusing.
  
- ❖ But then I read a story recounted by a biblical scholar named **Sir George Adam Smith**. It helps to understand how these two metaphors can come together in one person. One day, he was traveling in the Middle East and came across a shepherd and his sheep. He started a conversation with the man, who showed him the fold into which the sheep were led into each night. It consisted of four walls with only one way in. Sir George asked the man, “That’s where they go at night?”
  - ▶ “Yes,” replied the shepherd, “and when they’re in there, they’re perfectly safe.” “But there’s no door,” Sir George pointed out. The shepherd responded, “I am the door.” Now understand that the man wasn’t a Christian, so he wasn’t trying to quote Jesus. He was just speaking from the experience and perspective of an Arab shepherd. Sir George asked, “What do you mean you’re the door?”
    - This is what the shepherd said, “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.”
  
- ❖ That’s it. That’s what Jesus is saying. **No wolf, no thief, no enemy will be able to snatch us away from the fold. If they want to get at us, they have to go through Jesus first.** He is, for us, both our Shepherd and our Door.

- ❖ Listen to what Jesus says later on in **chapter 10:27-29**, “*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.*”
- ❖ **Friends, if you are one of his sheep, Jesus is saying that you’ve been given eternal life, which means you will never perish.** What an amazing promise! But I want to make sure no one walks away misunderstanding of what Jesus means by *never perishing*.
  - ▶ **Because it doesn’t mean you’ll be impervious to harm.** It’s not a guarantee of physical safety for the rest of your life. Jesus’s sheep have been persecuted and killed since the beginning of the church. So what does *never perishing* mean?
    - There’s this passage in **Luke 21:16-18** where Jesus is warning his disciples of persecution to come. “*You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But not a hair of your head will perish.*”
- ❖ “Some of you will be put to death . . . . But not a hair of your head will perish.” **That makes no sense. Until you realize that, when Jesus says you won’t perish, he means you still might be killed – but you can be sure you won’t suffer eternal, spiritual harm.** Since you’re in his hands, you won’t be – you can’t be – snatched out of them.
  - ▶ As a believer, you can enjoy the eternal security of knowing that no matter what trouble may come – you will not perish in the sense of falling away from Jesus permanently. You will not be lured away by false shepherds or snatched by wolves.
    - *No power of hell no scheme of man / Can ever pluck me from His hand / Till he returns or calls me home / Here in the power of Christ I’ll stand.*
- ❖ **And beyond personal assurance, this truth emboldens us whenever we leave the fold to go out into the world.** Every Sunday, we gather as a flock in this local sheepfold. But on the other six days of the week, we go out from here and are scattered into the world.
  - ▶ May the confidence we gain from our eternal security in Christ embolden us to accept the necessary risks that come with sharing his gospel. May we embrace the necessary awkwardness that comes with inviting our lost family and friends to enter by Christ alone. May we be so bold to go out to the ends of the earth to reach all kinds of lost people. Never fearing since, no matter what happens, we will not perish.

### **Graze on Eternal Life**

- ❖ So anyone who enters by Christ can rest in eternal security. But there’s another blessing available. We can enjoy eternal life. **When you enter God’s sheepfold, the life you receive is – not only eternally secure – but qualitatively transformed.** Different than life before.
  - ▶ This leads to our third and final invitation: **Come and enter God’s sheepfold by Jesus – and graze on eternal life.** Look at vv9-10, “*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.*”

- ❖ Jesus makes it clear that his mission is to come and rescue his sheep and give life. When that word for “*life*” (*zoe*) appears in John’s Gospel, it’s not referring to a prosperous life, a comfortable life, a convenient life. It’s referring to eternal life.
  - ▶ **And while the idea of eternal life clearly has a future reference point, let’s not overlook the earthly dimensions of this life that can be enjoyed in the here and now.** It’s a mistake to assume that eternal life is something reserved for heaven. That it doesn’t kick in until you die. That modifier *eternal* doesn’t just describe the length of this life. It describes the quality.
    - **The point is that Jesus came to give us – not just everlasting life – but abundant life.** Life at its best. Life at its fullest. Just picture plump, flourishing sheep in Jesus’s fold. The kind that shall not want. The kind that are made to lie down in green pastures to feed and graze to their delight. Just picture our Shepherd having prepared a table before us in the presence of our enemies. He anoints our heads with oil. Our cups overflow in abundance.
  
- ❖ **Brothers and sisters, are you experiencing this kind of life within the sheepfold of God?** Or did you think that eternal life was not something you could enjoy until you got to heaven? Could it be that you’ve been settling for a sparse, joyless Christian life? But why? **Why would you settle for anything short of the abundant kind of life that Jesus promised?**
  - ▶ If that kind of life feels foreign to you – if that’s not what your experience of the Christian life has been like so far – don’t settle for that. **Acknowledge to the Lord how far you fall short and then pray for abundance.** For an abundance of joy. For an abundance of peace. For an abundance of faith, hope, and love.
  
- ❖ **Now don’t expect to always overflow with peace and joy day in and day out. That experience of the fullness of your salvation will have to wait till heaven.** For now, we see our salvation only as in a mirror dimly. One day, we’ll see it face to face. Now we know in part; then we shall know fully, even as we have been fully known (1 Cor 13:12).
  - ▶ But even as you await the fullness of your salvation, make every effort to experience the joy of your Shepherd right here, right now. There is a degree of joy to be experienced every Lord’s day. Every time we gather as a flock in this local sheepfold.
  
- ❖ **And as our Shepherd leads you out from here week to week– as you go out to pasture – may you be bold to implore all kinds of lost people to share in the abundance of your joy.** Invite them to join us in the sheepfold. Invite them to enter by the same Door.
  - ▶ There is no other name under heaven by which they can be saved. **If we stay silent – if we don’t speak the name of Jesus – we are leaving them in their sins.** Leaving them condemned under the judgment of God. There’s no hope in hoping that they’ll somehow make it to heaven by means of another path. By means of another door. There is only one Shepherd and one Door. Let’s tell the world who he is.