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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“THE GATE, THE DOOR”

John 10:7-10

? Have you ever felt the walls closing in on you? Does it sometimes seem your life is shrinking, that time and pain and regret are pressing in so hard from all sides that you can barely breathe? You need a door to open so you can step out into fresh air and wide open spaces.

? Have you ever felt like you were standing out in the stormy night, looking through a window into a cozy room? Does it sometimes seem you are locked out in the cold where unseen dangers lurk in the shadows? You need a door to open so you can step into light and warmth.

Our need does not always *feel* so urgent. We get used to the claustrophobia. We resign ourselves to the darkness.

But sooner or later it gets to be too much. Our eyes are opened. We realize we need a way in and out.

▣ Please turn to John 10:7-10. Jesus declares,

⁷ **“Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”**

“I am the θύρα [thúra], the gate, the door.”

(θύρα is the word for both types of portal).

☑ First century Jewish shepherds were living gates. Their rustic sheepfolds consisted of stone walls and an open doorway. Many of them did not have a solid door – just a space through which to pass. While the flock was bedded down, the shepherd slept in the opening. His body was, in effect, **“the θύρα.”**

☑ {A. Dieleman} This practice continued into the modern era. In the early 1900s George Adam Smith toured Palestine. When he asked a shepherd why the fold had no gate the man said, **“I am the door. When ... all the sheep are inside, I lie in the open place, and no sheep ever goes out but across my body, and no wolf comes in unless he crosses my body. I am the door.”**

{Ps 23:2} At dawn the shepherd was the θύρα through whom the animals passed into the out-of-doors where there were **“green pastures”** and **“still waters.”** He gave them access to the essentials.

{Ps 4:8; 23:4} At dusk the shepherd was the θύρα who made it possible for them to **“lie down and sleep”** **“in peace”** without **“fear”** of any **“evil.”** He protected them against predators that sought to devour them, and also against their own tendency to wander.

■ In verse 9, Messiah proclaims: **“I am the gate [the door]; whoever enters through me will be saved.”**

There is a way out! There is a way in! It is Messiah.

{Jn 3:17} That is why he took on flesh and dwelt among us: **“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world,”** to deliver and preserve and make us whole **“through him.”**

? But what has Christ come to save us from, and what has he come to save us for?

★ He has come to deliver us *from* sin, guilt, shame, fear, alienation from God, estrangement from others, self-hatred, despair, futility, and eternal mortality. His work is to save us *from* Death of the body, mind, soul, and spirit. Salvation is being shepherded out of death.

★ He has come to deliver us *for* right deeds, innocence, honor, union with God, reconciliation with others, peace, faith, hope, love, joy, purpose, conformity to the Son’s likeness, resurrection, and eternal life in the kingdom of God. His work is to save us *for* Life of the body, mind, and soul. Salvation is being shepherded into all-embracing, all-encompassing, comprehensive life.

■ And so, in verse 10 the Savior says, **“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”**

“Very truly I tell you, I am the θυρα,” “the gate,” “the door.” Four things stand out here.

✎ First, Jesus is making an exclusive claim.

“I am *the* θυρα” has an emphatic ring to it. **“I am”** means no one else is.

Moses and the prophets and the apostles are not **“the gate,”** they are witnesses who point the way to **“the [door].”** The same is true of theologians and preachers and Bible teachers.

Clean living is not **“the [door].”** Neither are church membership, good deeds, or right beliefs about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Lord claims to be **“the door.”**

People of other religions deny this outright.

Many professing Christians – including Evangelicals – say he is **“the gate,”** but *act* as though their creed, their lifestyle, or their politics is really the way of life.

? What about us? Are we looking to Christ Jesus as the one and only door?

✎ Second, Jesus is inviting us to enter into him.

☑ How do you use a door or a gate? You walk under the lintel, over the threshold, and between the posts. In order to pass in or out, you must step inside its margins.

{Jn 6:54, 56} So it is with the Savior. In an earlier chapter, he asserts: **“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.... Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them.”**

This is not a statement about Holy Communion; it is an invitation into deep relationship. It is a call to seek and find him in obedience and service to God, in Christian fellowship, prayer, worship, and also in the sacrament.

{Jn 15:4-5} Later, he announces: **“I am the vine; you are the branches.” “Remain in me, as I also remain in you.”** This is the language of connection, union, intimacy.

Life is not found in doctrine *concerning* the θύρα; it is *in the* θύρα himself. Life is not found in verbal testimony *about* the gate; it is *in the gate* himself. Life is not found in deeds done *for* the door; it is *in the door* himself.

? What about us? Are we going deep in the Lord?

✈ Third, Jesus is urging us to keep entering in.

■ What does he say in verse 9? **“They will come in and go out, and find pasture.”**

The phrasing implies repetition. The sheep go out for food and water over and over. They come in for protection and rest time after time.

Salvation is not a punctiliar event that occurs at one single point in time; we keep receiving it. It is an ongoing process that carries on at least until our glorification – and then, after that.

Think about it: will our salvation end when we see the Lord face to face? Hardly!

Will it plateau and remain the same forever? No! It will continuously change for the better.

{1 Co 1:18} Hence, the apostle Paul writes **“to us who are being saved.”** He does not say, ‘to us who *have been* saved.’

Salvation is not a diploma we hang on the wall, it is a map we carry with us. It is not a destination, it is a journey. It’s not a terminal, it is a life. More than that, it is a dynamic, growing relationship with the Savior.

? What about us? Are we coming in and going out through Messiah again and again?

? {Jas 1:20} Scripture warns, **“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”** What can we do to act upon *this* word?

☑ How many have heard of the game show “Let’s Make a Deal”?

The highlight was when the leading contestants got to choose between Door #1, Door #2, and Door #3. Each door concealed a prize, but one prize was always substantially better than the others. It might be a new car or a lot of money. And sometimes, depending on the deal, the winner walked away with all the prizes.

Life is not a game show. Even so, we are always opening different doors in the hope of winning. The door might be sensuality, wealth, power, knowledge, religion of every kind (including Christianity as a system), and so on.

There is a prize behind every door. Sex is (normally) pleasurable, even when it entails immorality. Power (generally) boosts our self-worth, even when it involves injustice. Religion (commonly) makes us feel secure, even when it embroils us in idolatry.

But only one door opens up to reveal the Grand Prize, and that is God the Son. He is the Gate. In him is **“life ... to the full.”**

★ {Heb 12:2} We fulfill this text by choosing the Savior, moment by moment, every day of our lives. We **“[fix our] eyes on Jesus,”** entering through him to find vitality and satisfaction for our souls.

★ And we fulfill it by pointing others to the Door.

A word of confession: I do not always do this.

Usually, it is because I am indifferent to my neighbor.

That's my biggest failing.

Sometimes, though, I assume they have no interest.

Or I am afraid of rejection. Or I think what they need most is my doctrine, my lifestyle, my politics.

{Mt 23:13-14} At my worst, I have judged them to be unworthy. In those instances, I have been just like the Pharisees to whom Messiah said **“Woe to you ...! You shut the door of the kingdom in people’s faces.”** God have mercy on me, the sinner!

I repent! I don't want to do that ever again.

I want to help my neighbors find **“life ... to the full.”**

I can't walk through the Door for them; but I can help usher some of them to the threshold.

■ Christ Jesus says, ⁹ **“I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ ... I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”**

John 10:7-10 is the word of the Lord.