

Armagh Baptist Church – Sunday 13th December 2009

'I am the Gate for the Sheep'

John ch.10:1-21

Introduction

We are currently making our way through the 'I am's of Christ in John's Gospel. The first one 'I am the Bread of Life' appeared twice in John 6 (35/48). The second one, 'I am the Light of the World' also appeared twice – first of all in John ch.8:12 at the end of the story of the woman who was caught in adultery, and then at the beginning of the story of the man who was blind from birth in John ch.9:5.

Tonight we move on into John Ch.10 where we find two more 'I am's of Christ' They both appear twice and they both appear in this one chapter - John ch.10:

'I am the gate for the sheep' (v.7 & 9)

and

'I am the good shepherd' (v.11 & 14)

These are obviously very closely related. They are all about shepherds and sheep. So let's see what we can learn from this great chapter of Scripture...

1. An Illustration (vs.1-5)

I want you to picture this scene in your mind's eye:

It's night time and it's dark.

We're out on a hillside somewhere in Judea.

There's a full-moon in a star-lit sky, so in the dimness we can just see, on the hillside, against the skyline – a stone-walled enclosure.

As we go closer we can see that it's square in shape, with stone-walls on all four sides. But on one side there's a gap just a few feet wide. And in the gap there's a man lying asleep for the night.

As we look in through the gap we can see that the enclosure is full of sheep, some lying asleep, others are up and restless as they hear us approach.

But the man is still lying across the entrance to the sheep-fold, so there's no way they can get out, and there's no way we can get in, except, literally 'over his dead body.'

(v.1) The only other way would be to climb over the wall, but if you went to those lengths you would probably only have come either to steal or destroy some of the sheep. (Only thieves and robbers climb over the walls of sheep-folds).

But as we wait in the stillness, the sun begins to rise and a new day begins to dawn.

Just then we see 3 men walking towards the fold. They have long flowing cloaks on and they're carrying sticks with curved ends –these are their crooks. Because these men are the shepherds (v.2).

The man who has been lying across the gap, hears them coming and gets up from his sleep. He was the 'watchman' or 'doorkeeper'. The shepherds pay him his agreed wages and he leaves (v.3).

Then the shepherds, one by one, stand just outside the gap in the wall and begin calling out a few names, and one by one sheep begin to come out through the gap and go to each shepherd.

It's amazing how each sheep knows which shepherd to go to.

They seem to know their own shepherd's voice and they will only go to him.

Then when the shepherd has all his sheep around him, he turns and sets off across the hillside and the sheep hurry along behind him. Because they know where they're going – they're heading to lush green pastures for the day (v.4).

We could call after the sheep, but they wouldn't listen. They know their own master's voice and they'll not follow anybody else but him (v.5).

N.B. It's strange that in this country we drive animals, but in Eastern lands sheep follow the shepherd when they hear his voice – he knows where the good grass is. A Shepherd has a very special relationship with his own sheep.

Jesus used this illustration one day when he was talking to the Jewish leaders – the Pharisees. They regarded themselves as the shepherds of the Jewish people, and yet they couldn't understand what Jesus was trying to say to them! (v.6).

The point was that they had failed as shepherds of God's people. They were more like the thieves and robbers who killed and destroyed the sheep, rather than shepherds who were supposed to care for the sheep and feed and look after them.

(See Ezekiel 34:1-10 for what God had to say about OT Religious Leaders!)

Following the Illustration of vs.1-5, Jesus now goes on to give us the Application in vs.7-10.

2. The Application (vs.7-10)

From what Jesus says in vs.7-8 it shows that He wants us to find a spiritual application for the illustration he has just given. He obviously intended his original hearers to do the same, because he says in v.7:

'I am the gate for the sheep' (NIV) or 'I am the door of the sheep' (KJV)

Now if we remember in the illustration that Jesus said that the door in the sheep-fold was just a gap, but the watchman (or the shepherd himself) lay down in the gap and formed a door with his own body, then Jesus is saying that He was like that shepherd – ***'I am the gate for the sheep.'*** It would be literally over his dead body that anybody would get at his sheep. That's the price that he was willing to pay for them!

But if Jesus was the gate of the sheep-fold, then what does the sheep-fold itself represent? And who are the sheep?

Well we need to remember who Jesus is speaking to here: (See 9:13,40,41). Jesus is still speaking to these same Pharisees as we come into ch.10 - these self-appointed leaders / shepherds of the Jewish people – the nation of Israel.

In ch.9 Jesus had just healed a man who had been blind from birth – but because Jesus had healed him on the Sabbath, these Pharisees had thrown the man out of the Synagogue! (v.34) So these so-called shepherds had just thrown a genuine sheep out of their sheep-fold!

Jesus is still speaking to these Pharisees in ch.10:16 when he says:

***'I have other sheep that are not of this sheep-pen.
I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice,
and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.'***

This ties in so well with what we were talking about this morning from Acts 11. ***'This sheep-pen'*** refers to Israel (to which the Pharisees belonged).

'Other sheep that are not of this sheep-pen' refers to the Gentiles, or non-Jewish people.

'The sheep' who listen to the Good Shepherd's voice and follow Him are the true disciples or followers of Jesus.

'The one flock and one shepherd' is the Church with Jesus Christ as its Good Shepherd or Chief Shepherd. And it's made up of true sheep from both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds – now united by their faith in Christ!

So clearly the sheep-pen in this story is Israel or the Jewish Religion.

'I have other sheep that are not of this sheep-pen...'

The 'sheep' in that pen at that time were the Jewish people – the people who at that time were practicing the Jewish religion.

But Jesus says twice clearly: ***'I am the gate for these sheep'*** (vs.7 & 9).

Jesus was saying that he was the door or the gate. He was at one and the same time both...

- **The way out of** the Jewish Religious System, that had deviated from God's Word,
- And **the way in to** a true and real experience of God's salvation. (cf Matthew 15:1-12).

The point I am making, and that I believe Jesus was making, is that a door has two sides, it has two purposes. It is both a way out of something, and a way into something else.

As far as the Jews were concerned at that time they were still **inside** the door inside the sheep-pen of Israel, but they were practicing a dead religion. In a very real sense they were being hemmed in or penned in by it. They weren't experiencing true freedom in Christ!

But Jesus says in v.3 that he wants to lead them out of that dead religion. He had just stood up in the gateway of the sheep-pen of Israel and he was now calling his own sheep by name to lead them out! That's what it says in v.3: ***'He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out!'*** (Not in; out!)

And if they will only come through Him ***'the gate for the sheep'*** He will not only lead them out of a dead religion, but he will also lead them into something far, far better! Look what he says in v.9:

'I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved!'

So Jesus wanted them to leave their old dead religion behind, and through Him ***'the gate'*** they could enter into true **salvation!**

He wanted to lead them out of the confines of the sheep-pen of Israel and into new open pasturelands where they could graze to their hearts' content! (v.9b)

He wanted to lead them out of their dead religion of petty laws and traditions, away from the false shepherds who were exploiting them, who weren't feeding or caring for them, and into true **salvation** and **freedom**.

So Jesus was fulfilling the prophecy of Ezekiel 34:11-16 & 30-31.

The Good News is that Jesus still wants to do the same today!

- Are you trying to follow a dead religion?
- Trying to keep a dead set of rules and regulations?
- Trying to make sure you go to church as often as possible in order to be pleasing to God, hoping that at the end of the day he will be kind to you?
- Are you trusting in your baptism, or your church membership, or how often you take communion to get you into heaven?
- Hoping that by doing your best, or not doing anything really bad, that God will see you alright in the end?

Let me tell you tonight that none of those things will ever save you! None of them! Those are the things that are hemming you in, keeping you penned up in this church or that church, this religion or that religion, but it's all dead and lifeless! Jesus wants to lead you out of all of that, so that he can then lead you in to all that he has in store for you – as He says in v.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!

That's what you're looking for tonight. You may not know it yet, but you are!

So how can you be saved?

Well, we've seen the Illustration in vs.1-5,

We've seen the Application in vs.7-8,

So now in vs.9-10 let's see:

3. God's Way of Salvation (vs.9-10)

Jesus says very clearly, 'I am the gate' or 'I am the door'.

And then He goes on to say:

'Whoever enters through Me will be saved.

He will come in and go out, and find pasture.'

God's Salvation is wrapped up in a person. That person is His only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

God saves us whenever we come to trust in His Son, and to know His Son personally for ourselves.

So Jesus Christ is the way in for us to come to God the Father.

Without Him, as that door, or that gate, or that way in, we are cut off from God.

Each one of us is separated from God the Father because of our sins.

Our sin is like a great barrier or dividing wall between us and God.

But Jesus says to us tonight: 'I am the door!' 'I am the door in that wall!'

I can open up that way in for you to get back to God, because I have taken

your sin on my own body on that cross, and literally *over my dead body* you

can now come to God, know your sins taken away, and know peace with God!

Jesus loved each one of us enough to die on that cross for our sins.

He's taken the punishment for our sins.

Now we must come to Him, accept what He has done on that cross to purchase our forgiveness.

And through trusting in Him, enter through that door into a right relationship with God tonight.

(i) Who can come? – 'Whoever enters through me will be saved' (v.9)

Anyone can come – it's not just for the Jews now.

In fact it never was! It's for us as well.

It's not just for the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

It's for us! – We are those 'other sheep' of v.16!

'Whoever' – includes you – whether you're saintly or sinful, it includes you!

You could be saved tonight!

(ii) How can you be saved? – 'Whoever enters through Me...'

You can be saved by coming to Christ tonight.

Jesus said, '***I am the door***'.

Well, to go through a door, you have to take a step over the threshold.

You've got to take that step to Jesus tonight, by faith, trust in Him alone to save you! There is no other way.

(iii) Listen to these promises, if you do:

The last 3 words of (v.9): '***Will be saved!***' – no ifs or buts – you will be saved!

That's a clear and definite promise. All you have to do is believe it!

Come to Christ, ask him to be your Saviour, and He will save you.

'SAVED'

You'll be saved from the penalty of sin – from eternal death and punishment.

You'll be saved from the power of sin – He'll give you victory over it now.

You will be saved from the presence of sin – eventually in heaven.

FREEDOM: 'You will come in and go out and find pasture' – true freedom!

No longer bound or penned in by an old dead religion, but you'll enjoy a new living relationship with the shepherd, who knows what you need before you even ask.

He'll give you spiritual **FOOD** - fresh green pastures in His Word as you read it for yourself, it will come alive!

He'll give you **FULL** abundant life –

'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full!' (v.10).

If you're not saved, you haven't even begun to live yet.

Abundant Life: Don't settle for anything less – Come to Jesus tonight!

