

Focus Scripture:

I am the gate of the sheep (text: John 10:7; context: John 10:1-18).

Theme: Christians believe our greatest security is found only in Jesus.

“GROUNDED IN ETERNITY”

The metaphor of the gate in the missionary instructions of Jesus is twofold. In the Palestinian countryside, a typical sheep pen was a circle of rocks piled one upon the other with a top layer of thorny branches and a narrow opening for the “gate.” The sheep would be taken out of the pen early in the morning and allowed to graze all day. In the evening the sheep would be herded back into the pen where they would spend the night. To keep the sheep from wandering out of the pen, and predators from entering, the shepherd would lay his body down across the narrow opening. He would become a living gate.

In the cities or towns, larger sheep pens were built for containing multiple flocks. In this setting, a hired gatekeeper would be posted to let the flocks in and out at the call and direction of their respective shepherds. The gate would be a makeshift lattice of long sticks or tree branches laced together with rope.

John 10:1-18 seems to be referring to both kinds of situations. The gatekeeper opens the gate for the shepherd, and the sheep hear his voice (10:2-3). This seems to allude to the larger city sheep pen with multiple flocks. Yet when Jesus says, “I am the gate for the sheep” (10:7) he evokes of the image of the country sheep pen where the shepherd uses his own body as the gate. On the other hand, Jesus could still be comparing himself to the stick-lattice gate of the city sheep pen. In either case, Jesus projects himself as the one who shields the sheep from thieves and bandits; those who come only to steal, kill, and destroy.

Jesus evokes the figure of the “thief” as a catch all metaphor for those who threaten the sheep. He could be referring here to false prophets, false teachers, or false Messiahs. He could also be referring to the devil as he did in 8:44. In contrast to the thief, Jesus comes so that the sheep may have life and have it more abundantly. Of course, the sheep in this allegory are human beings. More specifically, they are the followers of Jesus. There are an amazing variety of sheep both horned and unhorned, but Jesus compares his followers to the most familiar and most vulnerable of the species in His environment, the Palestinian broad-tailed sheep—famously defenseless, and notoriously naïve.

Conversely, Jesus describes a dangerous world for His sheep. A refuge for His disciples is desperately needed. Jesus is both the entry to that refuge and the refuge itself. Jesus says, “Whoever enters by me will be saved” (10:9). Our greatest security is found only in Jesus. He is security for our souls.

Much of our lives is driven by the quest for security. We seek safety, sustenance, and supply. Notably, the marketplace caters to this quest, and intensifies it. For the reason, the quest for security is largely materialistic in character and focus. Ironically, the more the quest continues, and the more material things we accumulate, the more insecure we become.

Jesus summons us to true security. It means the protection of our souls and the guarantee of eternal life. It is altogether non-materialistic. This does not mean that God has no concern for our material needs. God provides our material needs all the time. However, our greatest need is for the safety of our souls, so that we are not robbed of our eternal peace. It is the soul that remains when all else is lost.

The more spiritually secure we are, the less importance we assign to material things. Yet the less importance we assign to material things, the more materially secure we become. This is because everything is in the hands of God. We therefore discover complete security when we enter the gate.

FOCUS QUESTIONS - John 10:7

- What occurs to you as you read this? What questions arise for you?
- How has Jesus served as gatekeeper in your life?
- Can you block that gate against danger with your own body and efforts?
- Are you walking through “the valley of the shadow of death” right now? What would it look like to endure without fear because he is with you, to protect you (cf. Psalm 23:4)?
- In order to have Christ as your gate, you must dwell in the pen. How do you know that you are inside his security and refuge?
- What causes you to wander towards the boundary of the pen?
- What hinders you from racing back to the flock and the gate when you’ve gone astray?
- How like-minded are the sheep in your flock? Are you “dwelling”, associating, practicing and living in community with fellow flock members who are protected by the same gate?
- How do you keep your labor, your work, within the pen? Is all of your effort protected by the Gate?
- Even though the meaning of this story is that Jesus safeguards and protects our soul, it is easy to read this as Jesus protecting us from harm. For some, the reality is that predators and hazards in the environment hurt us, even when we are living as the Shepherd tells us to. Security does not mean that Jesus will not let anything bad happen to us. What the metaphor assures us is that Jesus as the Shepherd will not leave us when we are distressed and in trouble. Knowing that he has already saved us from sin through his death and resurrection assures us that even in the grimmest and darkest of times, our eternal security has been secured. God will continue to work with us through every situation for his glory. Do you feel in peril? How can this return you to a focus on the true security that Jesus offers?

Life/Discipline Application:

What does this passage mean in your school or department - consider the implications of the passage to your day-to-day lives.

Personal Reflection:

What does this mean to you - examine the implications of the passage to your own day to day life.

Additional Print Resources:

- Fuquay, Rob. *The God We Can Know: Exploring the “I AM” Sayings of Jesus*. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2014.
- Harris, W. Hall III. *Commentary on the Gospel of John*. <https://bible.org>. 2009.
- Marrow, Tim. *Before Abraham “I AM!” The Claims of Christ from the Gospel of John*. Bloomington, IN., CrossBooks/Lifeway, 2010.
- Okorie, A.M. “The Self-Revelation of Jesus in the “I AM” Sayings of John’s Gospels.” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 28/5 (2001): 486-490.
- Simmons, Billy. “A Christology of the “I Am” Sayings in the Gospel of John.” *The Theological Educator* 38/1 (1988): 94-103.
- Whitacre, Rodney A. *Commentaries for the Book of John (IVP New Testament Commentaries)*. www.biblegateway.com. 2010.
- Wiersbe, Warren W. *Jesus in the Present Tense: The I AM Statements of Christ*. Colorado Springs, Co., David C. Cook, Publisher, 2011.