

## I AM THE GATE

A few weeks ago Steve Semple spoke about Jesus the Good Shepherd. He mentioned then that the Good Shepherd knows his sheep and his sheep know him. The shepherd was willing to lay down his life for the sheep. Sheep are defenseless animals that need protection.

Back in the 1950s George Reeves was the first actor to be Superman on TV. Back then TV actors were not quite as "elite" as some seem to be now. They would throw out the first pitch at a little league game. They would fire the starting pistol for a soap box derby race in Oklahoma City. They would be at the dedication of a statue in a city park in Boise. People could meet them, shake their hand, and, of course, get an autograph. George Reeves was popular for guest appearances, but his fame included risks. Kids might kick him in the shins or throw rocks to find out if he was the "real" Superman or a "pretend" Superman, the same way kids pull on Santa beards to find out if they are real. It seemed like every time he appeared in public as Superman, someone wanted to put him to the test.

In 1953, he faced real-life danger appearing at a department store opening. A young fan, who wanted to see bullets bounce off Superman's chest, brought his dad's loaded Colt 45. Reeves talked him into putting it down. He told the boy that Superman could survive the shot without being hurt, but "when bullets bounce off my chest, they might hurt you and others around here." He continued to make public appearances, but never again in the Superman costume.

Like George Reeves, even though other people may think you are strong, the reality is that non of us are bullet proof. All of us are vulnerable. All of us like sheep need protection.

John 10:1 "I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. 2 The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. 3 The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." 6 Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them. 7 Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. 8 All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the gate - whoever enters through me will be saved - He 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."

Today we are ending our series looking at the I Am statements from the Gospel of John. Today we want to talk about the fact that Jesus is the Gate. What does that mean? In the chapter before Jesus had healed the man who was blind from birth. Because he was healed on the Sabbath, the Pharisees were angry and accused Jesus of wrongdoing.

John 9:35-40 Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36 Who is he, sir? the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." 37 Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." 38 Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. 39 Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." 40 Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?"

In Christ we have been given everything necessary for abundant life. These things include:

1. The Gate of SALVATION - whoever enters through me will be saved

For abundant life there needs to be an understanding of salvation. Fear of death can be a prison. In July of 1944 the US forces attacked Japanese forces on the Pacific island of Guam. The fighting was fierce and there were heavy casualties on both sides. During the battle one Japanese man named Soichi Yokoi was separated from the rest his men. He hid in underground caves, coming out only at night to eat venomous toads, rats and eels. The war ended when Japan surrendered a year later on Aug 15 1945, but there was no way for Soichi to know that.

He spent the next 27 years in hiding, afraid to come out. Afraid of capture. Living on rats and toads. He was eventually found by some hunters on January 24, 1972. Imagine living 27 years of your life in hiding, alone and afraid. Wondering every day if you would finally be caught. Fearing something that no longer exists. What a waste. There are many people like that today. A few weeks ago we talked about the fact that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. We do not need to be afraid of death. Through Jesus the sting of death has been removed. We can be reconciled with God. The war is over.

However, as bad as it is to fear something that you should not, many people today have put their hope in things that are not able to save. They no longer fear what they should not, but they also no longer fear what they should. They place their trust in good works and religion to save them.

The sheep pen was a place of safety. It had only one door; there was one way for the sheep to get in and one way for the sheep to get out. It was through this exclusive opening, this exclusive door. We see in this scripture that Jesus says that He is THE gate. He did not say He was a gate, one of many different ways of salvation. He claims to be the only door by which the sheep may make their way into the fold. If the sheep don't enter through that door, they stay outside for the evening! Similarly, Jesus is the One Door by which we must enter—or remain outside the Kingdom of God.

Religion cannot save us. It does not work. Jesus is the only Way!

Matthew 7:13-14 Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

Acts 4:12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

Saying that Jesus is the only way of salvation is highly unpopular today. It is downright intolerant. It is the worst thing that one can be in our politically-correct culture of the day. Tolerance can only be the supreme virtue in a society which has lost the will and the means to distinguish right from wrong, truth from error. If tolerance is our chief value, then sincerity comes to be our chief requisite.

Now *sincerity* is a fine word. No one wants to be a hypocrite. However, sincerity alone is not much of a virtue, for one can be sincere in their belief and be sincerely wrong!

This afternoon at lunch, some of you may eat something made out of tomatoes. Until just a few centuries ago, tomatoes were thought to be poisonous.

On September 26, 1820 a man named Colonel Robert Gibbon Johnson announced that he would consume a bushel of tomatoes in front of the Boston courthouse at noon. Thousands of spectators turned out to watch the man commit suicide by consuming the poisonous fruit. It is said that spectators were shocked when they realized the Colonel would not die after consuming so many tomatoes.

The people who bought tickets on the Titanic were no doubt sincerely convinced that the ship was unsinkable. Sincerity alone did not save them from death. Sincerity must be grounded in truth.

The way of salvation is through human achievement but through divine accomplishment. It is not what we do but what Jesus has done for us.

2. The Gate of SECURITY - he will come in and go out

For abundant life there must not only be the assurance of salvation but also the trust in ongoing safety. I may be safe right now, but what if something happens tomorrow? True life requires a measure of security. There are many today who live in constant fear. What about Nuclear war and the thinning of the ozone layer? What about climate change? What if I get a new disease or cancer? The key here is safety. True living means that we must have a measure of safety in which to live.

In Christ we have perfect safety and therefore have no reason to fear. Jesus is our gate. He is our protector.

In the days of Jesus sheep would be often kept at night in pens that were made of stone or thorny bushes. The enclosure would have a narrow opening. Once the sheep were inside the shepherd would lie across the opening. This meant that anything that tried to enter the pen or anything that tried to leave the pen had to go past him. David knew about God as his protector.

Psalm 46:1 God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. 2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea

E.g. Analogy of the ship and the storm - it can be scary when the closest solid ground is 3 miles down! But we know that God is all powerful and that He loves us and that He is in control, and therefore there is absolutely nothing that can touch us that He does not know about. Whoever enters WILL BE saved. Past tense. No exceptions.

Full life also requires freedom. We come in and go. and Think about this: To go in but not out means prison. To go out but not in means banishment. Both are necessary for true living. E.g. paralyzed man in Toronto. Without Christ we are all like that paralyzed man - we are chained to our sinful nature and death and have no hope of parole. Through Christ we have been set free. The chains that bound us have been broken. Paul knew about this freedom.

Romans 7:24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin. 8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in

Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

### 3. The Gate of SUFFICIENCY - and find pasture

So many today are wandering about looking for pasture. Jesus said that He came that we not just have life but that we might have it to the full. Christianity is not just a pie in the sky when you die. Jesus gives us abundant life. That does not mean that we will get everything that we want. It does mean that we will have everything that we need.

Psalm 23:1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not be in want. 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, 3 he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

David paints a beautiful picture. He says that God makes us lie down in green pastures and that He restores our soul. Philip Keller wrote a book titled A Shepherd Looks at Psalm Twenty-Three. In his book, Keller says that in order for sheep to lie down 4 things are required:

First, they have to be full. Hungry sheep stay on their feet searching for another mouthful of food. Jesus is the bread of life. He feeds the deepest hunger in our souls. He is Jehovah Jireh, the God who meets our needs.

Secondly, they must be unafraid. They will not lie down if they're fearful. The least suspicion of an enemy and they stand ready to flee. Jesus is the resurrection and the Life. We know that in Him we do not need to be afraid. He is Jehovah Nissi, the Lord our banner.

Thirdly, they must be content. If flies or fleas are bothering them they'll stay standing. They must be comfortable before they'll lie down. Jesus is the way the truth and the life. Even in our doubts we can trust Him. He is Jehovah Rapha, the Lord our healer.

Finally, sheep will not lie down unless there is harmony in the flock. If there is friction over the butting order among them, then they simply cannot relax and lie down. Jesus is the vine. If we remain in Him we will bear much fruit. He is Jehovah Shalom, the Lord our peace.

In his book, I Shall Not Want, Robert Ketchum tells about a Sunday school teacher who asked her group of children if any of them could quote the entire twenty-third psalm. A little four year old girl was among those who raised their hands. A bit skeptical, the teacher asked if she could really quote the entire psalm. The little girl came to the podium, faced the class, made a little bow, and said: "The Lord is my shepherd, that's all I want." She then bowed again and sat down. She may have overlooked a few verses, but I think that little girl captured David's heart in Psalm 23. We are utterly contented in the shepherd's care and there is nothing else that we desire.

It's all about Jesus. There is only one way to salvation. There is only one way to find fulfilment and contentment and peace. Yes, that is a very exclusive statement, but it is also the truth.

So many people today have bought the lie that there are many paths to God, that all religions are basically the same. That we all worship the same God just in different ways.

One illustration was made popular a few years ago by a Buddhist parable. Men who were blind from birth were gathered together in a room with an elephant. Each man was led to a different part of the elephant – one felt the head, one the legs, tail, ears, and trunk. Afterward they were asked, “What is an elephant”? They began arguing when one claimed it was a plowshare, or a tree trunk, a brush, etc. The conclusion is that they all saw one part of the greater whole. In other words, we who argue about truth are arguing about the same god that has been revealed to us in different ways.

It is a very clever parable but holds one truth that I’m sure the author did not intend. Each one of these men was blind and each one was wrong. Until God reveals Himself to us, we all grope around in the darkness vainly searching for some semblance of truth. Without Jesus there is only darkness.

Macbeth, in Shakespeare's play of the same name, reveals his philosophy of life.

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
And then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.

The bible reveals that life is not summed up in a philosophy but in a person: "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men". If you're looking for the essence of life in a philosophy, you'll go away empty-handed. But if you come to the person of Christ, you will find that He is life, and you'll walk away with your arms full of His abundance.

Normally the flight from Nassau to Miami took Walter Wyatt, Jr., only sixty-five minutes. But on December 5, 1986, he attempted it after thieves had looted the navigational equipment in his Beechcraft. With only a compass and a hand-held radio, Walter flew into skies blackened by storm clouds.

When his compass began to gyrate, Walter concluded he was headed in the wrong direction. He flew his plane below the clouds, hoping to spot something, but soon he knew he was lost. He put out a mayday call, which brought a Coast Guard Falcon search plane to lead him to an emergency landing strip only six miles away. Suddenly Wyatt’s right engine coughed its last and died. The fuel tank had run dry. Around 8 p.m. Wyatt could do little more than glide the plane into the water.

Wyatt survived the crash, but his plane disappeared quickly, leaving him bobbing on the water in a leaky life vest. With blood on his forehead, Wyatt floated on his back. Suddenly he felt a hard bump against his body. A shark had found him. Wyatt kicked the intruder and wondered if he would survive the night. He managed to stay afloat for the next ten hours. In the morning, Wyatt saw no airplanes, but in the water a dorsal fin was headed for him. Twisting, he felt the hide of a shark brush against him. In a moment, two more bull sharks sliced through the water toward him.

Again he kicked the sharks, and they veered away, but he was nearing exhaustion. Then he heard the sound of a distant aircraft. When it was within a half mile, he waved his orange vest. The pilot radioed the Cape York, which was twelve minutes away: "Get moving, cutter! There's a shark targeting this guy!" As the Cape York pulled alongside Wyatt, a Jacob’s ladder was dropped over the side. Wyatt climbed wearily out of the water and onto the ship, where he fell to his knees and kissed the deck. He’d been saved. He didn’t need encouragement or better techniques. Nothing less than outside intervention could have rescued him from sure death. How much we are like Walter Wyatt. Peter Michelmore, Reader’s Digest, October, 1987.