

I AM THE GATE, JOHN 10:1-10

Who is I AM? #3

◆**Intro:** This passage can be a bit confusing. I must admit in pondering it I had a great deal of difficulty in deciding what truths to share that may be of help to us. That's because there are many of them embedded in the passage. In this text Jesus makes another "I AM" claim, which we've already seen is the root term of the sacred Hebrew name for God, the name God told Moses to tell the people captive in Egypt. That phrase alone indicates the presence of God himself. But then Jesus uses it at multiple times and places. With each one we learn something about God, who came and walked among us. Our text is complicated because Jesus pictures himself (without saying it) as the **shepherd** coming to the corralled sheep, and calling them out. But he also pictures himself as the **gate** the shepherd approaches, that is, the access point to the flock. If Jesus is the gate, who is the shepherd coming to the gate? And then, in the very next section of John 10 he comes right out and makes the claim "I Am the Good Shepherd." We'll look at that next week but you can already see there is some overlap in what Jesus is telling us. In addition, later in John's gospel, Jesus will claim to be the singular "way" to God (Jn 14:6), which sounds a lot like the "doorway" in our text, except here he is the door *to the sheep*. So if we're not careful, we just may go off on some biblical tangents. We aren't the first to struggle with what Jesus meant. Apparently it was confusing for the people then too (see v.6) Let me try and share what sense I can make of it.

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◆ In John 10, Jesus is using shepherding imagery to describe who he is. It's pastoring imagery, after all, the term "pastor" actually means "shepherd". These people were sheep-raising people so they understand the imagery, just not how it applied to Jesus. One of the things the whole sheepfold-shepherd imagery conveys to us is that...

◆ **1. Jesus is my rightful owner, not me.** This is not what most people believe. We think we have a right to manage the fold of our life ourselves. We think we are self-made men and women. We think we can *decide* if we are male or female. We think we determine if family needs a mom and a dad, or can maybe two of one. We think that we actually get to *choose* which God is really God for us. We think nobody can tell *us* how to live. We think we know all that we need to know already. That we own *ourselves*, and *I* am the boss of me...

◆ But it's not true. You are not your own boss. You did not cause your life, or any other thing in existence. Only your true source has the right to say who and what you are, or for that matter why you are. And the story of Easter which we are heading up to, says that true source is Christ. Christ owns you. Paul, said the same.

◆ *"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by*

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him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” Colossians 1:15-17, NIV.

◆Ok, a little background on the sheep fold. The sheep fold was just for protection during the night from either wild animals, or rustlers. It is not a place to live or stay. There were two types of folds for the eastern shepherd. One in the country would be an enclosure of a low stone wall, or maybe sticks and brambles, possibly a cave, with one opening only. The shepherd himself would sleep in the opening acting as the gate. The sheep fold in town was usually adjacent to another building, consisting of a large enclosed court where many herds of sheep might be together at any given time. It would have a watchman posted who would allow only the shepherds to take out their own sheep. [I know what you’re thinking; don’t all sheep look alike, just like all Anglo Saxons look the same to all Asian people? Yes, but that didn’t matter.] Sheep are very loyal, and quickly form deep attachments. All the true shepherd needs to do is call. They pay no attention of anyone else’s voice just as Jesus says in v.3-5. Here’s a sample video illustration...

◆Play <https://youtu.be/e45dVgWgV64>

◆**A.** So the sheep that belong to someone will always come to the rightful owner. They know and are known. The unspoken question of the religious leaders around Jesus is, “Why are these people following Jesus?” Jesus’ spoken answer is this little parable that basically says “People who are really God’s people

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believe in me because I'm their rightful owner." Jesus has come, claiming to be God's Messiah, to gather all his sheep. He did not come merely in case you might need a little help with something. He came to call his own. I wonder if you can hear him...

◆ Here's how it fits with the **door/gate** image. The rightful owner of a house enters by the door. Thieves sneak in other ways. The rightful owner of the flock enters the fold by the gate. Thieves sneak in other ways. Jesus is saying he's the rightful owner of the people of Israel. He is their God and has come to their front door to call them to himself. So the gate/door image signifies Jesus' ownership of all who are truly God's people.

◆ Now in the context, the religious leaders of the day (Pharisees and Sadducees) were all agitated because this new preacher was gathering quite a following, which of course was making all their Bible study and Life Group attendance shrink. People weren't frequenting their Facebook pages, or listening to their podcasts because this Jesus fellow was doing miracles!

◆ (We can't have God show up while we're doing church, can we?! What if God showed up here and interrupted MY sermon about him! ...Do you see the irony?)

◆ In chapter 8 Jesus said he was the Light of the World. Then in chapter 9 Jesus gave a blind man light and sight. People are astonished of course. And that man naturally becomes a disciple of Jesus. That's when the local preachers decide to kick that man

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out of their churches on account of it! "If you're gonna follow that guy, you can't be a member here.!"

◆**B.** Now, we need to realize that Jesus' claim to be the Gate, or the Real Owner is an indictment of these religious leaders and religious people in general. God's sheep listen to God's voice, but these folks aren't listening. God's sheep come into his fold (v9), but they aren't coming. In other words, they are not God's sheep! That really stings for them because that's exactly who they think they are! Lots of people think they are cool with God when in reality they are not at all. Look, these folk think they are in with God because they follow **Moses**, Israel's first leader and writer of the first five books of the Bible.

◆"Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from."" John 9:28, 29, NIV.

◆And they think they are God's because they come from **Abraham's** family!

◆"They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"" John 8:33, NIV.

◆They were part of the right denomination!! In verse 39 they claim Abraham as father again. In verse 42 they claim **God** is their father. But Jesus responds:

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- ◆ “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me.” John 8:42, NIV.
- ◆ So you see what’s going on? Jesus has come claiming to be God’s own Son, here to gather God’s people. He is the rightful owner of God’s family and they are not even in it! _How about you? Do you love him?
- ◆ **C.** What does it all say to us?
 - ◆ 1) On one level, as God, Jesus owns everyone, and he owns you & me. We are his creation. His idea. He defines what happens in our existence. We didn’t choose to be, and we don’t decide how we should be either. No, the owner does that. We don’t negotiate reality or truth according to what we want or how we identify. No, he defines it. We don’t decide what should be right/wrong, moral/immoral. That’s his prerogative alone. It doesn’t really matter if you like it, there is a God and you are not him (say that out loud!). You are owned. That would make it pretty important to find out what the real owner says, wouldn’t it? You can align your life with his directions to your betterment, or you can resist to your own ultimate destruction.
 - ◆ If you work on the line at SIA, it’s pretty important that you align what you do with what the owner(s) want done. You aren’t going to keep your job putting Subarus together *your* way. You’re not going to get

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your pay and bonuses, and benefits just for *knowing* a how a part goes on. You have to do Subaru-making the way the owner says. It's the same with human life.

◆ John the Apostle is reminding us here that all of life has to do with Jesus; every atom, every occupation, every soul, all of it. So maybe it's time to pay attention.

◆ 2) On another level, only those who believe in, and follow, God are the ones truly "owned" or truly belonging. Some folks believe that they belong to God when in reality they do not. They think they know basic moral law, are pretty decent people, and therefore cool with God, and have learned enough to go it on their own now. But they aren't, and they haven't. See, Christianity isn't about being religious, or knowing about a certain amount of goodness or badness, building a big church, or being able to say you've read the whole Bible. It's about listening to and following Jesus everywhere you go, at all times. That's what Christianity is. It's about going "in and out" of the fold (v9) with Jesus in front of you. This all leads to some further observations:

◆ While hanging around God's church increases the likelihood of my hearing God's direction and wisdom, merely doing religious activity or, like the Pharisees, claiming religious ancestors, or heritage –does not

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mean I belong to God's family or will be in it after this life is over.

◆ St. Augustine commenting on this text wrote: "There are many who according to the custom of this life are called good people, –good men, good women, observers of what is commanded in the law; paying respect to parents, abstaining from adultery, doing no murder, committing no theft, giving no false witness against anyone –yet are not Christians. They have not walked through the door. They live well, but what good will it do them?"

◆ *"...Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.' "But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.' "Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' "But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!"* Luke 13:23-27, NIV.

◆ In Matthew 5 Jesus says there are even people who will have done miracles in his name who will not be numbered among those who are saved. Knowing there is a door, and

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even loitering near it does not break the power and penalty of sin. You have to go through it. One final observation:

◆3) To go through the Gate is accepting Jesus' total management of my life, and it is my best option. Now many folks think of God more as though he is in fact a thief or a rustler. A thief/rustler only has interest in the sheep as far as they are a benefit for him. People think "God just wants to control my life and get some good deeds out of me." Or, "God just wants someone to boss around."

◆But this isn't true either. That's why Jesus uses the gate/sheepfold image. Sheepfolds are for their safety at night. But they are polluted places of mud and poop. Sheep need to go in and out. That's the "full life" of v10. So a good shepherd is up early to lead them out to graze, and roam. Early too, to get moisture off the grass which may be their only water. Sheep would never do it on their own. They tend to be dumb. They don't have the mechanical sense to back up when their head is stuck in a fence. They freeze up when a predator attacks and just stand there to get slaughtered. One shepherd lost 30 sheep when a cougar got in his fold overnight!

◆**Conclusion:** There's a reason so much of scripture pictures God as shepherd and not, say, a cowboy. To "fold" sheep is so much more than merely feeding them for market. Sheep need leadership and care. Sheep, treated kindly, are animals that

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develop deep attachment with their owners. And the gate, is one place where the shepherd calls each one by name, checks every detail, and gives attention. That is how God is with people he calls. The one who is life gave it up for his sheep. We are created for his glory, and he uses it to shine on us! Do you want a full life? Use the Gate, decide to follow your owner. You can do that in prayer right here and now.