

“I Am the Door” | John 10:1-10

The Rev. Dr. Samuel D. Ferguson | The Falls Church Anglican

Preaching Draft | September 21, 2025

(Discussion questions on page 7)

Seven times in John’s Gospel, Jesus begins a statement with the weighty phrase, “I Am,” than adds a rich image or metaphor. I am the bread of life. I am the light of the world. I am the resurrection and the life.

These statements tell us about *who* Jesus is, and *what* Jesus does for us. For the hungry, he is bread. For those in darkness, he is light. For those spiritually dead, he is life.

Today we come to John 10, where Jesus makes two I Am statements, all rising from the image of shepherding.

Jesus sets before his hearers the world of sheep and shepherds, sheep folds and good pasture, and sheep-thieves who come to steal and destroy the flock. Within this rich imagery, Jesus refers to himself as “The Door of the sheep” (10:7, 9) and “The Good Shepherd” of the sheep (10:11, 14). Today we consider Jesus as Door, next week as Good Shepherd.

It will be helpful to make a few comments about this rich imagery of shepherding—so familiar in Jesus’ first-century, Middle Eastern setting.

Context and Conflict

Shepherding was a common metaphor in Jesus’ day. Leaders were compared to shepherds, not only in the sense of tender care of provision, but in relation to their authority and lordship.

Moses and David were shepherds, literally and figuratively (Ex 3:1; 1 Sam 17:34).

God is likened to a shepherd and his people to sheep. The elderly Jacob speaks tenderly of “the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day” (Gen 48:15). David famously opens Psalm 23, “The Lord is my Shepherd (23:1). In other Psalms the people of God say, “we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture” (Ps 100:3).

A good shepherd protected the sheep, provided for them, settled their fears, and fended off their enemies.

And God appointed under-shepherds to care for his people—these were the priests and religious leaders of Israel. The immediate context of John 10 is the failure of these shepherds.

In John 8-9, these leaders are not only in increasing conflict with Jesus, but are throwing people out of God’s flock for affiliating with Jesus:

the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue. (Jn 9:22).

The blind man who Jesus heals in John 9 has fallen prey to their cruelty. Hearing he favors Jesus, they “cast him out of the synagogue” (9:34).

Thus, the context of Jesus referring to himself as the Door for the sheep, is a sheep who has been treacherously barred from God's fold. The failure of Israel's spiritual shepherds was an old problem. Words from the prophet Ezekiel surely ring in the background of John 10:

Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? ³ You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. ⁴ The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. ⁵ So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts (Ezek 34:2-5)

But Lord goes on,

Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out.... ¹⁵ I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep (Ezek 34:11, 15).

It is with this promise of God coming to shepherd his people that we hear Jesus in John 10:7-11:

Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. ¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (Jn 10:7-11).

Jesus is the entry way into the flock. Jesus is the true shepherd of the flock. Once again, with the "I Am" sayings, Jesus points to his divine identity—he is God come to shepherd His people.

With the rest of our time, we consider what Jesus means by saying, "I am the door of the sheep" (v 7, 9). We'll start big picture then zoom in, making three observations: **(1) The Meaning of Doors; (2) The Only Door; (3) The Benefits of Jesus as Door.**

I. The Meaning of Doors

It seems the Door image is the least reflected upon of Jesus' I Am sayings. It is not an image that grabs attention as immediately as "Good Shepherd" or "Light of the World."

Yet doors are all around us. Every day we see them, open them, close them, and lock them. Some people have pictures of famous doors on their walls, or coffee table books of beautiful doors in their living rooms. As a metaphor, a door is a powerful image. Consider its significance across Scripture.

In Genesis 3, when humanity is sent away from the garden of Eden and Tree of life, the entrance back into Eden (the door) is barred: God "placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life" (Gen 3:24). In a profound sense, human life today is an experience of being locked out of God's presence, the door locked and guarded. We are *outside*.

There is the door of the Ark, which Noah and his family enter, and God shuts as the waters rise (Gen 6:16; 7:16).

There is the door (or curtain) in the Tabernacle and Temple, separating people from the Holy of Holies (Exod 26:31, 33, 37).

The Bible speaks of “doors of heaven” that God opens (Ps 78:23; Rev 4:1). Jesus speaks of entering the kingdom of God through a “narrow door” (Lk 13:24) and of having “the door” of the kingdom “shut” on you (Matt 25:10).

In Scripture, we might say a door represents these things:

Access—coming inside and having access to God with all the benefits entails.

Security: the door represents security, as when Noah is shut inside the Ark and kept safe from waters of destruction. In Scripture, to be left outside the gates of a city, or outside the doors of a banquet, means to be vulnerable as the night sets in, as the waters rise, and without protection from the evils that lurk about.

Possibility: the door opens to possibility. To walk through the narrow door into the life of the kingdom is to find a way out of the mess of hopelessness and into the world of endless possibility—possibility for growth, adventure and joy—“abundant life” (Jn 10:10).

Home: finally, the door speaks of home, of permeance. The door image reminds us that a core feature of human life is that of *dwelling* or *being home*. We are not made to be nomads or endless wanderers or pilgrims forever. We are made to find home, and finding home, to be invited inside.

I think we see these features in the image Jesus is using here.

In John 10, the door represents *access*: “he who enters by the door” (10:2). It represents security: “I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved” (10:9). It represents possibility, “he will go in and out” (10:9), a phrase that speaks of ongoing life. And it represents all the life that being home with God and God’s people entails, “he will find pasture” (10:9)—with pasture representing life inside the fold of God.

This is no dull metaphor. And it is good news.

Sometimes life feels like being trapped in a mess with no way out. But Jesus says, there is a door out of any mess—a door opening to my presence and power.

Sometimes life feels like running into a brick wall. You feel stuck. You have battled a sin with no progress; you prayed but feel no answer; you sought success and found no opportunity. You keep hitting a brick wall. To you Jesus says, “I am the door.” He sets in your brick wall a door—a way through, into a solution, an answer, a provision, that is He himself.

Other times, life feels like looking in windows, but never being invited in. I spent a year studying in England. It was partly wonderful, but also lonely at times, especially at holidays. I remember walking one night down the city streets, past all the homes that were lit up. You could see the people inside—friends enjoying time together, families eating. Away from friends and family in a foreign place, I felt on the outside—there were no doors into the warmth of fellowship; just

windows to catch glimpses. You may feel like your life is all windows—you are always on the outside, looking in on other people's joy. To you Jesus says, "I am the door!" There is a way in—into fellowship with me.

That is the meaning of the door—it points to our need for a way out, a way through, a way in. To our need for being safe, invited inside, finding home.

Second, notice that there are not many, but only one door.

II. The Only Door

To enter the sheepfold—which represents God's Kingdom and His people—one must enter through the door; there is no other authentic way in:

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber (Jn 10:1)

That single door, is Jesus:

I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

There were two types of sheepfolds in the ancient world—one in the city, the other in the countryside. In the city, there might be a large fold that was shared by a few shepherds, so there would be a few flocks kept there at night. This fold was surrounded by a fence and had a gate that was guarded by a "gatekeeper" (10:3) overnight so the shepherds could get some rest.

Out in the countryside a sheepfold might be a circular wall made of stone. The door was simply an opening in the stone wall. The Shepherd slept in the open space at night to keep the sheep in and the wolves out. In this case, the shepherd literally was the door. Hence, Jesus can move so easily from saying he is the shepherd (vv 11, 14) to saying he is the door (vv 7, 9).

His claim is exclusive on the one hand: you can only enter into the people of God "by me" Jesus says in verse 9. But, on the other hand, it's incredibly inclusive: notice he says in verse 9, "If *anyone* enters by me." And we've seen this in the Gospel already, as Jesus opened the way of salvation to a Samaritan woman—someone who would not have been allowed to come into the Jewish Temple.

Why is Jesus the *only* door? Consider a few reasons.

Jesus is the door, because Jesus reveals to us who the Father truly is: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9); and "No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn 14:6). We don't know the way to the door, or recognize the door, unless Jesus reveals it to us.

Jesus is the door, because he is our *high priest who, by the grace of his sacrifice, brings us to God*.

We tend to assume access to God is opened to all and opened always. But this is not what the Bible presents. Since Eden, we are barred from God's presence.

As God makes a way for us to come near him, it is at first through priests and the Temple. And to enter the Temple and go into the holy of holies, priests went through a radical ceremony of

preparation. God explains it to Moses in Exodus 29. It involves the priestly line of Aaron, and all takes place at the door—the entrance—of the Temple:

First, priests were washed: “You shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting and wash them with water” (Ex 29:4).

Then, anointed: “You shall take the anointing oil and pour it on his head and anoint him” (Ex 29:7).

Third, they were marked with the blood: “Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the ram, ²⁰ and you shall kill the ram and take part of its blood and put it on the tip of the right ear of Aaron and on the tips of the right ears of his sons, and on the thumbs of their right hands and on the great toes of their right feet, and throw the rest of the blood against the sides of the altar.” (Exod 29:19-20).

The meat from the sacrifice was then cooked eaten.

Imagine what these men looked like when this service was completed. They are covered in blood from the tops of their ears to the tips of their toes. They smell of wood-smoke and burnt flesh; they are exhausted from the effort of sacrificing and butchering. And all this to prepare them for entering the door to God’s presence.

Here was a vivid reminder to Israel: God’s presence is not cheap. There is a cost to sinners walking through that door.

Jesus is our door, because he is our Great High Priest, who sacrificed his own life, and now brings us to the Father: “Since then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heaven, Jesus, the Son of God” (Heb 4:14).

Do you recall that when Jesus died the curtain in the Temple was torn asunder. This was the door separating all people from the Holy of Holies. Do you know that embroidered in that curtain were the same cherubim that guarded the entry into Eden. Jesus opens the door by his death.

And Jesus is the only door, finally, because in his humanity, he has become sympathetic of our need to come inside—he knows what it is like to be cold, hungry, and weary. Tenderly he longs to welcome us in:

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin....² He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. (Heb 4:15; 5:2).

In the Gospels, we do not see a picture of Jesus as a stern gatekeeper; we see him as the shepherd who goes out after the one lost sheep to bring him home.

Hence Jesus is the door for blind and sick and sinful suffers like you and me, because he shows us the way, pays the price of admission, he tenderly woe us to come.

There is a temptation to create extra doors for people today. Even in the church, ministers and Christians can add to the door of Jesus, the door of their view of cultural or social issues, or their politics. To be sure, Jesus’ followers are engaged in these various matters—but only by being sent

out. These matters are not the doorway in. Beware of the minister, or person, who makes access to the Kingdom of God any door other than Jesus Christ himself.

Let's consider one last thing: what are the benefits for the sheep who find this door and, as Jesus says, "go in and out and find pasture" (v9)?

III. Benefits of Coming in and Going Out

To walk through the Door that is Christ, we need only faith and humility. In a sense it is a wide door, in that it is open to "anyone" (v. 9); but it is also a narrow, small door, in that only the humble can pass.

If you recall C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the children pass into Narnia through an old wardrobe that is a secret door. But the door only works for children, not grownups—which for Lewis, seems to represent childlike faith. We enter the door through a simple belief and trust that Jesus is God, our Lord, our friend.

And what are the benefits of passage through that door? I leave us with three:

First, there is security. The sheep who come in are now protected by the True Shepherd. Christians in the flock of God are protected from our archenemies, the devil and death. And inside, we are protected from the full consequences of our sin.

Second, there is liberty. Your sins are forgiven. You are no longer estranged from God but now are a son or daughter. You have freedom to live without fear. Your Father's house is your house. You are free to "go in and out and find pasture."

Third, there is abundant possibility: sometimes when people talk about their hopes for the future, they say, "I am hoping a door will open." What they mean is an opportunity—for work, for relationship, for life. The opening of such a door is not merely an arrival, it is also the beginning of new possibilities, opportunities for adventure and growth. The door that opens for us in the Gospel of Jesus Christ is to abundant—even boundless—possibility:

I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. (Jn 10:9-10).

When you walk through that door, you walk into the Kingdom of God. You walk into your Father's presence, His love, his commitment to you. You walk into the friendship of the Son—into Jesus promises to *always* be with you. You walk into fellowship with the Holy Spirit. And you walk into the Triune God's profound commitment to your life, your future, your joy.

Perhaps like the Chronicles of Narnia, to walk through that door into Narnia is not to walk into something where all conflict as already ceased—perhaps there is yet a battled being settled. But it is to walk into the world that is most real, to join the side that will win, and to know that no matter what happens around you, you never, ever, ever will be shut out. You are forever inside. You have found the Door. His arms are forever open to you.

Small group questions for John 10:1-10, “I Am the Door.”

1. In John 10:1-10, Jesus refers to himself as “the door of the sheep” (10:7, 9). What does he mean by this? What do people enter into, when they enter by Jesus?
2. Across Scripture, there are many images of doors or entry ways—entry into Eden (Gen 3:24), door of Ark (Gen 6:16), door into the Temple and Holy of Holies (Exod 26:31, 33, 37), “doors of heaven” (Ps 78:23; Rev 4:1), the “narrow door” of the Kingdom of God (Lk 13:24). As a metaphor, doors represent “access, security, possibility, and home.” Which of these “door-qualities” speaks to you right now? How does Jesus as “the door” answer some of your deeper needs in this area.
3. Jesus insists that the only authentic entrance to the fold is “by me” (Jn 10:9). Why is Jesus the only way into true fellowship with God and God’s people? Does this claim of exclusivity offend you? If there were other ways into perfect and lasting fellowship with God, would it have been necessary for Jesus to die?
4. In verse 9, Jesus says that those who enter by him will “go in and out and find pasture.” What does this look like, practically, in your day-to-day life? What might it look like when you feel like you are stuck, or hitting a brick wall, or barred from entrance, for Jesus to be a door to you in that moment (with work or family or sickness or hardships)? Can you think of a time when Jesus was a door for you in a seemingly impossible situation?
5. Jesus contrasts true shepherds with “thieves and robbers.” Who or what are the modern “false shepherds” that tempt people away from Jesus, and how can the church guard against adding “extra” or “false” doors?