

## Metaphors of Christ #7: Christ the Door

Jn. 10:1-18

A sheepfold is a fenced-in enclosure where shepherds can lead their flocks for safety from wild animals and from thieves. It might be a large one near a town for all the local shepherds to use, or it may be a small, single-flock one when they have ranged too far to return to the town each night. The shepherd would guard the door, except for the large sheepfolds, which might have a “porter” or doorkeeper who would admit the different shepherds as necessary. Different flocks all mingle, but then in the morning, the porter opens the door as each shepherd comes. The shepherd calls his own sheep. His sheep recognize his voice, and follow him out to wherever he leads them for the day. The rest stay there, waiting for their own shepherd.

This arrangement is a bit foreign to us because instead of open range, we use fences and barns, and maybe guard animals (dogs, donkeys, llamas). But to them, Jesus was speaking in very familiar terms, to convey spiritual truths. He does this with two distinct but related metaphors – He says that **he is the door of the sheepfold**, and also that **he is the good shepherd**. Together they convey several truths – that there is no way to God but through him, that our protection is in him, that he leads, guides, provides, and protects us, and that ultimately he would give his life to save the sheep.

In this analogy, we have several parts:

- The sheep – the people of God
- The sheepfold – the place of rest and protection for the sheep
- The door to the sheepfold – the only way in and out of the sheepfold, under guard
- Enemies of the sheep, like wolves, bears, and thieves – Satan, demons, and any number of people who are determined to undermine the faith and persons of God’s elect
- False shepherds – men who pretend to be pastors, but who in fact prey upon the flock, or flee when under threat
- The good shepherd – Christ the Chief Shepherd (and by extension, those godly men who are called and faithful “under-shepherds” (i.e. pastors or bishops) to oversee, guide, teach, and protect the sheep under their care)

### God’s People Referred to as Sheep

Ps. 23:1-6 – “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want, . . .”

Ps. 100:3 – “we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture”

Isa. 40:11 – “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, . . .”

(also, Jesus sent disciples out as sheep among wolves; judgment of sheep and goats; Jesus said he was sent only to the lost sheep of house of Israel, Jesus had compassion on multitudes who were like sheep without a shepherd, . . .)

### As Sheep have Enemies, so do God’s people

In that land, sheep had many enemies and potential adversities – wolves, bears, lions, getting lost and separated from the herd, injury from the rocky terrain, sickness, thieves, lack of pasture or water, etc. Shepherds were necessary to lead them to pasture, to find safe places of rest, to protect from predators, to bind and treat their wounds, etc.

What are the things that God provides for us, and protects us from?

- Being lost, he searches us out and brings us back to the safety of the herd. He gives us spiritual food and water, places of rest, communion with him in our daily lives, fellowship and encouragement with other believers, gifts and opportunities to use them
- Physical sickness, car wrecks, muggers, all kinds of physical and psychological trauma. Sometimes he sends his angels to deliver us from trouble, other times he gives healing and restoration. Heb. 11
- False teachers, false prophets – heresies, men who desire to have a following and to “be somebody”
- Unfaithful pastors (“hirelings”) – men who see ministry merely as an occupation, or a way to “fleece the sheep”, or an opportunity to practice their adulterous, homosexual, and pedophilic desires undetected.
- Demonic and Satanic attacks – Jn. 10:10-11

## What is the Sheepfold?

In a literal and physical sense, it is a place where the sheep are enclosed and protected while the shepherd can sleep. Probably a rocky wall topped by thorns, with a single door.

**It is the salvation experience now, and ultimately our “heavenly home” after death.** In this sense, the sheepfold represents the kingdom, with the saved being in the fold and the world outside. This is why the NT commonly refers to our being “in Christ”. The only way to be able to enter is the new birth by “receiving” Christ (Jn. 1:12). Jn. 10:9 - Jesus is the door of salvation – **there is no other way into the kingdom.**

Jn. 14:6 – “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

Ac. 4:12 – “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved.”

If there was ANY other way to get to heaven, then his incarnation, death, and resurrection would have been unnecessary. Jn. 3:16-18

If someone doesn't go in by the door, but sneaks in some other way, they obviously either have evil intent against the sheep (10:1), or they are attempting to make a way into God's presence that is more palatable to their pride, than to simply accept the work of Christ on their behalf. People constantly try to get to God in some other way than that which God has provided. For example, other religions, cults, secret societies, psychology, moralism, legalism, traditions, prayers to saints, philanthropy, self-mutilation, child sacrifice, asceticism, philosophy, etc.

There is a problem though, if we see it only as “heaven when we die”. Jesus says the shepherd calls his sheep and they go out (of the sheepfold, 10:3). 10:9 says that he is the door, and those who are saved “go in and out, and find pasture”.

**In a fuller sense, it is the place of rest and comfort, a safe place even in the midst of the world around us.**

We experience and love times of rest and refreshing, when we feel God's presence and love, and the fellowship of the saints. But we have to live in this world and so we go out into the world each day to face the trials and difficulties. God could have taken us to be with him as soon as we believed, but he leaves us here to be salt and light to a corrupt and dying generation.

His answer to our need is not retreat from the world, like in monasteries, but times of rest similar to sleeping. We can't work constantly, but we work and sleep, work and sleep. So spiritually, we need times of rest and refreshing so we don't allow our spiritual batteries to go dead. How?

1. Personal reading and study of scripture, daily devotions of some sort
2. Prayer and personal communion with God Ps. 27:8
3. Faithful attendance and participation in a local church
4. Seeking one's personal gifts, and how to use them to God's glory

At first glance you might think, “That doesn't sound like rest, but work!” This may or may not be true, depending on your attitude. If you see it merely as a religious duty, or a way to “earn points with God”, then it will be unfulfilling and exhausting. But if you are sincerely seeking God's presence and wanting to yield yourself to him and to hear his voice, you will find that these are times of rest and rejuvenation. Jesus had times when he would “come apart” from the crowds so he could pray and get comfort and direction from the Father.

The Israelites refused to trust and believe God, and so were condemned to wander in the wilderness for 40 years. He had promised them blessing but they refused it. Heb. 3:18-4:1 “To whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.”

Heb. 4:8-11 – “For if Jesus [*this means Joshua*] had given them rest, then would he not afterward spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.”

So in summary, going out of the sheepfold is to go out into the world day by day, living faithfully to and for God. Coming back into the sheepfold is to enter into God's rest through faith and obedience. Cease from your own works and find your rest in God.