

John 56 – I AM the Door**08/17/2025****Scripture 1: (Jn. 10:1-10 ESV)**

"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. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."

This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

Sermon:

After publicly declaring Himself the Son of Man {because previously it was only insinuated as the title was often used by Jesus in the 3rd Person (John 1:51, 3:13-14, 5:27, 6:27, 6:53, 6:62, 8:28)} and after accepting the worship of this formerly blind man (John 9:35-38) {something reserved for the LORD God alone, and which was refused even by the Angels and Apostles (Acts 10:25-26, Revelation 19:10)}, Jesus next indicted the Pharisees for being guilty of their unbelief, for their self-righteous denial of spiritual blindness (John 9:40-41). Then, He carried on with His teaching and presented them a parable, “*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. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens.*”. Jesus presented a multi-layered analogy that would have been very familiar and clear to His audience: one consisting of shepherds, sheep, their care, and the dangers they face. Although this is livestock-related analogy is naturally unfamiliar to most of us in our modern context, the general popularity of John 10 in Christian culture, helps it be superficially familiar to us.

During the Judean winter especially {the next season approaching}, flocks of sheep would be gathered together and kept within covered, stone walled pens {sometimes even caves were used}, similar (except in terms of materials) to modern style corrals¹. Inside, the sheep would mingle and mix together as multiple flocks would share the limited space for maximum efficiency and utilization. Ordinarily, they would only be gathered this way during the night or during inclement weather. Meanwhile, to keep the sheep safely inside, the shepherds of the various flocks would take turns laying across the entrance (usually when sleeping), blocking it effectively (because the sheep would not step over them) and serving as a mobile gate. All of the shepherds using the corral would be familiar with one another, so the gatekeeper would only move aside for a fellow shepherd with sheep inside. Anyone else requesting admission would be refused entry as a thief or a robber.

Throughout this analogy, Jesus uses five characters to describe five categories of people: thieves, robbers, gatekeepers, shepherds, and sheep. But our present, primary focus will be on the first three: thieves, robbers, and gatekeepers.

- Scripture distinguishes between thieves and robbers, dividing them into two classes of criminal. Thieves (Greek: *kleptes*) are those who merely steal, or attempt to steal, things that do not belong to them. However, robbers (Greek: *lestes*), are those who forcibly steal things by using violence or the threat of violence. Although they are individually distinct, when united together in this way, they describe the whole criminal gamut of Eighth Commandment breakers.
- Shepherds are those who lead, tend, and care for the sheep. They may be either the owner of the sheep or they may be the owners trusted managers and agents, working as under-shepherds (1 Peter 5:1-4).
- Gatekeepers may be shepherds, or under-shepherds, that are specifically tasked and charged with defending and protecting the sheep.
- Lastly, sheep themselves are an example of utterly defenseless, helpless, and ignorant creatures who need someone else to care for them and provide for their maintenance.

While we might like to assume that Jesus was presenting a new metaphor, the analogical idea of a shepherd already carried a considerable depth of positive meaning in the historical ancient near East. Shepherds were not generally considered social outcasts, nor were they necessarily members of the lower tiers of society, as some people suggest or assume. The Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; were wealthy shepherds and David was a shepherd before he became a king. Unfortunately, many people treat modern shepherds with far less respect than they deserve because of the difficult and dirty nature of their vocation, which anyone who has ever read or

¹The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament, p.290

watched James Herriot's *All Creature Great and Small* would immediately recognize. But shepherds are exceptionally important people within agrarian societies. Their hard work and effort generates wool for clothing, milk for drinking, and meat for eating, while in pre-Christian society their flocks often supplied the sacrifices that were deemed necessary to appease angry pagan gods or to atone for Hebrew sins against the LORD.

But shepherds were not merely socially important, they were also important civilly. The LORD is often depicted in Scripture as “the shepherd of Israel” (Genesis 48:15, 49:24; Psalm 23). Similarly, ancient kings, such as the Babylonian Hammurabi², also claimed the title of shepherd in their formal self descriptions.

Thus Jesus's use of “shepherd” in this parable would have immediately brought up these positive metaphorical connections in their collective minds. The shepherd would have been accepted as the righteous hero in the story and considering the context within John's narrative, of Jesus teaching in Jerusalem and His present engagement with the Pharisees and religious leaders after just healing a man born blind, Jesus's audience would have naturally and intuitively identified the shepherd as the LORD and the sheep as God's people, Israel.

However, the categories of thieves and robbers, and the gatekeeper, would not have been as obviously associated or applied. But it was clear who was the “good guy” and “divine ally” in the story. Only one of these categories were naturally “*on the LORD's side*” (Exodus 32:26): the gatekeeper; and that is who the Pharisees and Jews presumed themselves to be.

But who was this gatekeeper supposed to be in this metaphor? What was their role, duty, or job?

The gatekeeper completes the wall of the corral. He defends and protects those who are within it; keeping them inside and safe by preserving and enforcing particular boundaries. He is also the means of access and the arbiter, or determiner, regulating access to the sheep and to the world beyond. Defending the sheep is the core duty of the gatekeeper. Keeping thieves and robbers out of the corral while also keeping the sheep in, is their primary responsibility. The one to whom he owes this duty and responsibility is the shepherd.

Considering the shepherd as the LORD, the gatekeeper in Jesus' analogy serves as the means by which the sheep access God, and the gatekeeper also who determines and decides what “god” the sheep has access to. The gatekeeper opens and closes for the shepherd to whom he is most loyal. Furthermore, since the gatekeeper completes the corral, a righteous boundary, we should understand that the walls within this spiritual analogy would be representative of Scripture's commandments and statutes, as governed by the Regulative Principle.

Yet thieves and robbers are not without means or opportunity to access to the sheep, if they also have the willingness. But each of those means demonstrate and prove the wickedness of their actions and intention. They may attempt to sneak in by climbing over the wall but, that will not benefit them much since they could only steal one or two sheep, lifting them out over the wall, before they would be discovered. Or, they may startle and

²“LAWS of justice which Hammurabi, the wise king, established. A righteous law, and pious statute did he teach the land. Hammurabi, the protecting king am I. I have not withdrawn myself from the men, whom Bel gave to me, the rule over whom Marduk gave to me, I was not negligent, but I made them a peaceful abiding-place. I expounded all great difficulties, I made the light shine upon them. “With the mighty weapons which Zamama and Ishtar entrusted to me, with the keen vision with which Ea endowed me, with the wisdom that Marduk gave me, I have uprooted the enemy above and below (in north and south), subdued the earth, brought prosperity to the land, guaranteed security to the inhabitants in their homes; a disturber was not permitted. The great gods have called me, **I am the salvation-bearing shepherd**, whose staff is straight, the good shadow that is spread over my city; on my breast I cherish the inhabitants of the land of Sumer and Akkad; in my shelter I have let them repose in peace; in my deep wisdom have I enclosed them. That the strong might not injure the weak, in order to protect the widows and orphans, I have in Babylon the city where Anu and Bel raise high their head, in E-Sagil, the Temple, whose foundations stand firm as heaven and earth, in order to bespeak justice in the land, to settle all disputes, and heal all injuries, set up these my precious words, written upon my memorial stone, before the image of me, as king of righteousness.” *Code of Hammurabi*, Epilogue (<https://avalon.law.yale.edu/ancient/hamframe.asp>)

frighten the closely packed animals, risking themselves to fall and be trampled by the hard hooves of panicked and fear-maddened creatures. Or, they might kill and murder the gatekeeper, to steal the sheep at their leisure. Or, they may subvert, twist, and corrupt the gatekeeper, bringing him into their conspiracy so that he will allow them to slip in and out with ease, and turn a blind eye to their sinful thievery.

Yet even if the gatekeeper and the wall are both able to be bypassed, the sheep are not left utterly defenseless, because when the shepherd comes *“The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.”* Every sheep knows the one to whom they belong. They recognize their shepherd's voice and he is the only one whom they will willingly follow. Thus thieves and robbers, if they gain access to the sheep, still have a difficult and challenging time stealing sheep.

Like the metaphorical thieves and robbers in this analogy, there are many ways that the wicked use to attack, subvert, or corrupt God's special chosen people. But, there is only one set of means that the LORD, our shepherd, approaches us: through the ordinary means of grace of Word, Sacrament, and prayer; and there is only one way by which we come to Him and to follow Him. That one way passes through the gatekeeper, the one God-man who is also “the Door”.

Again, the gatekeeper in this story is the character whom the Pharisees, the Levites, the scribes, and the Priests (the whole class of religious leaders that John frequently calls, “the Jews”) would have self righteously presumed to identify themselves with, since their prescribed and assumed duty was to be the gatekeepers of Israel and they were each ultimately responsible to the LORD (James 3:1).

- The Levites and scribes were the keepers and teachers of Moses' Law (Leviticus 10:8-11).
- The Pharisees were the strict and rigid enforcers of righteous practice (an assumed duty).
- The Jewish elders of the Sanhedrin were the arbiters of religious justice (Exodus 18:13-26).
- The Priests made atonement for sins and offered sinners absolution (Leviticus 16).

But the Jews, in their spiritually blind state, *“...did not understand what he [Jesus] was saying to them.”* Although they may have been doing their duty, they were failing in their responsibility. During some when and for some why, they stopped doing their duty for the LORD's glory and His people's benefit. They stopped working to guard and protect God's people for the LORD, but for the benefit of their own maintenance and their social status instead. Their allegiance and loyalty had been subtly shifted to another shepherd, the devil. It was shifted towards thieves, robbers, and themselves rather than the shepherd whose flock they were entrusted with.

Seeing their confusion and their lack of understanding, Jesus explained. *“Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door.”*. Confidently and authoritatively, Jesus again proclaimed, *“ego eimi”*, *“I am the door.”*, to them. Once again, invoking the impression of the Divine Name, He declared, I AM the gatekeeper, and I AM the gate. I AM the one that decides who may come to the LORD, and I AM the only way by which they can reach Him. Again, Jesus proclaimed His spiritual authority and placed it in contrast to the Jews. Yet,

- Jesus did not belong to the tribe of Levi.
- Jesus was not a member of the Pharisee party and did He follow their “traditions”.
- Jesus was not a member of the Sanhedrin.
- Jesus was not eligible to be a priest, not being a descendant of Moses' brother, Aaron.

Yet Jesus claimed their duty and their responsibility for Himself. First, He proclaimed Himself the gatekeeper, “*I AM the door.*” and then, He effectively declared everyone else to be thieves and robbers, “*All who came before me are thieves and robbers...*”. But, Jesus did not include Moses, or the prophets, or John the Baptist within this category because they were “supporting evidence” for His authority. Recall, Jesus told them in John 5, “*Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?*” (Jn. 5:45-47 ESV). Therefore, Jesus accepted and affirmed those men and their teachings, contained in Scripture, as fellow good and faithful gatekeepers because of their mutual agreement, while He rejected, denied, and condemned men like the Pharisees and Sadducees because of their deviance away from divinely ordained orthodoxy and orthopraxy, into heterodoxy and heteropraxy; for their addition of required “elder traditions” (Mark 7:3-13) and their practice of religious observations instead of the obedience that is generated by faith in the LORD (Isaiah 1:14-17, Amos 5:21-24).

Then, as if that was not outrageous enough, Jesus further explained, “*I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*”.

- Jesus claimed to uniquely offer (or be) the means of salvation, publicly placing Himself and His teaching in direct opposition to the Jewish leaders and theirs.
- Jesus claimed to be able to provide abundant life, eternal life while accusing His spiritual opposition of existing only to steal, kill, and destroy.
- Jesus, by claiming to be “the door” itself, claimed to have an even higher role and duty than even the Jewish leaders aspired to. He was claiming the role of mediator between God and man; a role like Moses; claiming to be another Moses.

Jesus asserted a sense of absolute, religious exclusivity here within this passage. He reasserted and now applied the authority He previously had claimed to have received from the Father (John 5:19-47); having the sole authority to judge (5:27) and the sole authority to give people life eternal (5:39-40). Jesus's audience would have had little doubt or uncertainty about what He was implying about Himself. They would have been right to be upset, if Jesus were not who He claimed to be.

But what is the spiritual message that Jesus was trying to convey with this parable and analogy?

The first part of this parable reveals an important contrast between the gatekeeper and the thieves and robbers.

- The gatekeeper defends and protects the sheep, seeking to improve their good benefit for the glory and honor of the shepherd.
- But thieves and robbers only exist to harm the sheep and try to harm the shepherd. They only desire their own benefit and glory, seeking it at the expense of the shepherd.

So, after hearing this parable, Jesus' audience needed to judge and decide for themselves, which was which. Who was the most credible gatekeeper of the LORD: Jesus or the Jewish leadership? Meanwhile, a core application question from this story for modern Christian's is: do we really, truly believe that Jesus is not only the right gateway to God, but the only gateway to salvation?

Scripture clearly and plainly teaches us that a person is saved only by God's sovereign grace, through a gracious faith given by His Holy Spirit in regeneration, in Jesus Christ alone (Deuteronomy 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4; John 3:3; Acts 4:12; Romans 9:13; Ephesians 2:8-9). This tenant is foundational to the Christian faith and it cannot be set aside or ignored. We know that Jesus is the only way to God, period. Faith, *pisteuo*, in Jesus Christ is the only means by which we may enter heaven and enjoy eternal life in His Kingdom.

God requires His people's sole allegiance and full obedience, while we are protected and preserved by Him through the end. That is His promise and our hope. Christ is the door to our spiritual corral and while we trust that He will not permit bad actors to come in and remain among His sheep, that does not stop Satan from still trying.

United in wickedness and under Satan's command in this analogy, Jesus distinguishes between thieves and robbers. Together they represent, as a class, all of the wicked powers who oppose the Kingdom of God in allegiance to Satan. But, as separate categories, they differentiate between those that are engaged in active efforts to harm God's people and those that are engaged in more passive efforts. Both categories are dangerous and God's sheep must be able to recognize them whenever they “climb over the wall” and try to steal us away.

“Robbers” describes those people and power which are actively engaged against the Church and Christians.

- They may approach us like an “*angel of light*” (2 Corinthians 11:14), but they are really devils in disguise. This would include advocates of the “deconstruction” movement, encouraging people to question the fact of their faith as a means to improve it, or to free them from an assumed oppression.
- Similarly, the “evangelistic atheists” so actively hate God, that the idea of a person believing in Jesus, enrages them and they are driven to argue against believers, trying to persuade them to turn against God.
- There are also those who are best described as “wolves in sheep's clothing” (Matthew 7:15). These are the false prophets and teachers who will twist and misapply Scripture to try and corrupt God's sheep, to mislead them, and redirect them onto destructive paths and into barren spiritual wastelands (Matthew 24:24). This includes those who like to introduce strange doctrines (like pre-millennial dispensationalism; affirming “Love is Love”; promoting the acceptability of homosexual lifestyles) (1 Timothy 6:3) or add “creative innovations” to worship (like emotive music, led by “praise bands”, being uniquely identified as “worship”; women preaching; use of “interpretive dance”; promotion of using nonsensical and unintelligible “secret” prayer languages; altar calls and “anxious benches”; or “At the Movies” sermon series and worship settings) (Numbers 26:61), as well as those who simply preach a “gospel” different from the one taught by Scripture (like Joel Osteen, Kenneth Copeland, Andy Stanley, Paula White, Joyce Myers) (Galatians 1:8).

“Thieves” however, while passive in their expended effort, are more dangerous because they are more difficult to recognize immediately. Most examples of such spiritual “thieves” take the form of ideas, rather than persons or recognizable individuals {although the ideas will always be mediated and promoted through people}.

- This includes ideas like “higher criticism” and “source critical theory” from the late 19th Century. These ideas attack the heart of our doctrine of Scripture: attacking Scripture's inerrancy and infallibility; attacking Scripture's authority and reliability through denying particular examples of Biblical authorship (Moses, Isaiah) in favor of unrelated, biased editors (JDEP).
- This includes modernist ideas like those of early 20th Century Liberalism. Christian Liberalism promoted the “social gospel”; the promotion of “good works”, the improvement of society's welfare, and the betterment of humanity for its own sake rather than as the Christian response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, of charity or social activity, as our response to all that He has done for us.
- The popular acceptance of liberalism by some professing Christians, eventually led to the rise and acceptability of Marxism and/or Socialism within Christian circles. These ideas were wrongly applied and promoted as expressions of Christian faith. They wrongly suggested that Jesus was the “first socialist”, whose ministry advocated for the redistribution of wealth (Acts 4:34-35), contrary to the Eighth Commandment. It wrongly suggested that the Christian religion naturally supports Marxist systems of “class struggle” (1 Corinthians 7:17-24) and “liberation theologies” (Isaiah 61:1-3; James

1:25). Like Liberalism's "social gospel", Marxism and Socialism confuse and conflate their alleged positive, intended effects with the Gospel's true purpose (Ephesians 2:10), which is a person's reconciliation to God, and the purpose of a Christian's "good works" (James 2:17-26), which is as evidence of a person's faith in Christ Jesus.

- The ideas within the Christian Neo-Orthodoxy of Karl Barth and its derivative child, Progressivism, try again to confuse the doctrine of Scripture and the faithful good works of Christian response. While Neo-Orthodoxy verbally affirms the authority and inerrancy of Scripture, it also denies it by simultaneously suggesting that the Bible "contains" God's Word or that the Bible "contains" truth, rather than affirming that the Bible "is" God's Word and that the Bible "is" true and teaches the truth. Progressivism resurrects the old "social gospel" and re-brands it as being "Missional", but then they wrongly promote the inclusion of things and people whom the Gospel and Scripture intentionally and expressly exclude from the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 6:9-11), namely: the wicked, the unregenerate, the unrepentant, and the unbeliever; instead, it welcome them into church fellowship and offer them all of the rights and privileges that entails. Although such sinners do need to hear the Gospel and need to be shown Christ's love for them, so that they might hear, believe, and repent, they can not be welcomed in as they are.
- Or there are the false ideas of religious "Pluralism" and its attendant social slogan, "Coexist". The premise of these ideas directly contradict the plain teaching of Scripture and the words of Jesus: "*You shall have no other gods before me.*", "*I AM the door.*", and "*I AM the way and the truth and the life...*" (Exodus 20:3; John 10:7+9, 14:6). These ideas oppose the clear revelation of Scripture regarding the necessary exclusivity of the Gospel, the necessary exclusivity of Jesus Christ, and the necessary exclusivity of God. Many other religions (past and present) make similar exclusivity claims (such as the exclusivity claims of Islam³), but Christianity is the only one that is persecuted, denigrated, and condemned because of it. While some pagan, polytheistic religions (such as Hindu) are willing to tolerate, accept, and adopt Jesus Christ into their pantheon, their affirmation is also naturally self-condemning, if they honestly affirm the words of Christ.
- Similarly, the assertion of the ecumenical movement's that Christians (also technically, and wrongly, including the Roman Catholic Church, Mormons, and Jehovah's Witnesses in this category), Jews, and Muslims all worship the same God⁴. But this idea cannot possibly be true because each one refutes and denies the exclusive truth claims of the other two, despite their claim of similar origins within the person of Abraham.

Our modern day spiritual "thieves" and "robbers" are not very different from those that Jesus confronted and condemned in the 1st Century, such as the religiosity of the Jews, Hellenization and adaptation to Roman culture, or outright apostasy. Their lies and corruptions, as well as their methods and means of attacking God's people have not changed because truly, "*...there is nothing new under the sun.*" (Eccl. 1:9 ESV). So long as we continue living in the world, within this fallen *kosmos*, we expect to remain under continuous attack by the devil's powers. Satan is bound (Matthew 12:29) and his efforts are only vain roaring (1 Peter 5:8), but God's people still need to remain diligent and determined in our obedience and faithfulness.

Jesus is "*the door*" of the spiritual corral that surround God's people. He is the completion and the security of the LORD's protection (Psalm 20, 59:1-2, 91:14-16; Zechariah 9:14-16). We are confident that He has, He is, and He will continue to guard and defend us (John 6:39, 10:28-30) through His supernatural power and might. But, He has also given us various helpful tools and means to join Him in our own defense.

³Surahs al-Nisa 4:150-151, Al Imran 3:85, Al-Fath 48:13,

⁴<https://www.usccb.org/committees/ecumenical-interreligious-affairs/vatican-council-and-papal-statements-islam>
<https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/issues-in-christian-muslim-relations-ecumenical-considerations>

- We are each given spiritual protection, the “whole armor of God” (Ephesians 6:11-20), that we must become comfortable wearing.
- We are given God's revealed Word, the “sword of the Spirit”, so that we may know the truth, believe the truth, and so that we may distinguish falsehood from truth by testing it against Scripture (1 John 4:1).
- Like the sheep in Jesus' parable, we are also given the ability to hear and recognize our Shepherd's voice so that we may follow Him only, and flee from the wicked strangers who desire to harm us.

So, let us therefore, trust in Christ's protection and help. Let us trust in His help to both flee from sin (1 Corinthians 6:8; 1 Timothy 6:9-11; 2 Timothy 2:22) and to resist the Devil and his temptations, so that he will likewise flee from us (James 4:7). Let us pray for the increase of our faith, an increase in our trusting of Jesus as “the door”: the good and true gatekeeper who opens up access and grants us passage to our heavenly Father, the mediator of a far better covenant, as the “suffering servant” who has given His life as an atonement for our sin, and as the resurrected LORD who reigns over us and for us, until the day of His return.

AMEN