

## ONLY JESUS LEADS US TO A NEW LIFE, AN ABUNDANT LIFE, AND AN ETERNAL LIFE!

Anyone here today who has a fenced yard with a gate in it? Anyone ever seen a fenced yard with a gate? Great! Now, what is the purpose of the gate? Gates let people in and keep other people out, and gates keep others inside while not allow others entrance. Gates open and gates close.

Jesus tells us in our text, "I am the gate." He is telling us that he alone is the gate through which people, his people, believers, enter to have eternal life. He speaks of others before him, "thieves and robbers:" as he calls them, who tried to lead the people astray. He has in mind Pharisees, Sadducees, and other self-righteous leaders in the church of that time. As harmless as they might seem to some, their teaching regarding self-righteousness and good works was spiritually deadly. It robbed people of eternal life. In that same context, there are "thieves and robbers today who can lead us astray, too. They are found in the philosophies of the New Age members and Scientology. They are found in the messages of some television evangelists who deceitfully rob you not only of your hard earned money but of your eternal life, too! They are found in the intellectual world, the scientific community, the entertainment world, and even within the Church herself. They tease our intellect with thoughts like a loving God will never condemn anyone, you don't God in your life fore you have power to save yourself, or that there is no God therefore there is no judgment, therefore live as you wish! Very subtlety these and others act as agents of satan, working against our faith in God and our belief in God's promises and love.

The ultimate goal of satan is not just to create doubt, cause you to leave your local congregation, or try some new lifestyle. Nor is the goal to leave you with worries, fears, angry, or frustration with God. And the goal is not just to have you avoid worship and the Word. The ultimate goal of satan is to steal your faith, to lead you away from God, and right smack into hell! He does not want to see you saved!

Our LORD and Savior chooses this illustration of the sheep pen gate to teach us, his sheep, believers, that when we are with Jesus we are protected in a save spiritual environment. Anyone familiar with the old Middle Eastern sheep pens would understand the meaning of this illustration, as well as the love and sweetness Jesus shows for his sheep. In those days there were no barbwire fences, split rail fences, or chain link fences to keep intruders out and the sheep inside. The walls of the ancient sheep pens were maybe four feet high, constructed out of mud,

bricks, and rocks. Heaped on top of the walls would be a three to four foot pile of branches from thorn bushes with four to six inch sharply pointed thorns. These pens had but one entrance or gate, and only way in and one way out. By keeping out the thieves and robbers, the gate provided a safe environment for the sheep. Jesus says, **“I am the gate.”**

Jesus has shown us that He is the one way to the Father in his sacrificial death on the cross. He is the gate! Jesus willingly faced death for all our sins, including the times we followed the teaching of all the false gates, the spiritual robbers and thieves, all the false religions, and philosophies in this world. Jesus paid for the many sins we commit when we give credence to and dabble in, associate with, participate among, or even try out their teachings. Mankind was literally doomed; but Jesus stepped up and suffered our punishment and offered us forgiveness, a new life with God, and eternal life, and a life now in the presence and love of God. No other gate, no other person in all of history has ever done this: died for the world and rose to life again!

One of the spiritual dangers today is that we as sheep sometimes wander into seemingly rational alternatives to the Christian faith. They use many things to lure us out of the safety of the sheep pen. It might be a university professor, a well-meaning friend or coworker, a Hollywood personality or theme a of television show. It could be a television evangelist, a family member, a congregational member, or even a close friend. Beware! Let Jesus be your gate!

The great Scottish Old Testament scholar of the past century, Sir George Adam Smith, recalled an event that took place on one of his many research trips to the Middle East. He had met an Arab shepherd who insisted that Sir George come and see his sheep pen where he would hold up his sheep for the night. It had four walls and looked very similar to what I described to you earlier.

“When my sheep are in here,” the man boasted, “my sheep are perfectly safe (in here throughout the night).” “Where is the gate?” the Scottish professor asked. “Where is the gate? There is no gate to the pen!”

The shepherd responded, “I am the gate!” Sir George asked bewildered, “What do you mean by ‘you are the gate’!”

The shepherd replied, “When the light has gone and all the sheep are inside, I lie down in the open space (between the walls); and no sheep ever goes out without across my body. And no wolf comes in unless he crosses my body.” He smiled,

“Sir, I am the gate!” The story shows us that the sheep are absolutely safe and are in the care of their loving shepherd. So, too, when we are in the care of Jesus, we are absolutely safe.

Now there are two of the main points Jesus’ words give to us for our lives today. Or people today wonder, “What is in it for me?” First, you can be sure that when you are in the presence of Jesus you are absolutely safe. As we struggle to deal with the many events of our sinful world, the disappointments, failures, hurts, and struggles, when we are with Jesus, we are safe. None of these will ever lead us astray from our LORD if we let him be our gate to salvation.

Second, listen only to Jesus’ voice! Stay away from the spiritual thieves and robbers; do not listen to them. They will only lead you away from Jesus! Sheep know the voice of their shepherd; they can distinguish their shepherd’s voice from all others. Can you recognize Jesus’ voice in the midst of our sinful, deceptive, materialistic world? Why do think I am asking all of you to read the Bible this year? I want you to know, recognize, and follow the voice of Jesus!

We are exposed to all sorts of ideas, false teachings, choices, and ways of life that differ from God’s Word. They will include all sorts of promises, offerings, sensual pleasures, even riches. What do we do when we hear something that sounds good and promises us lots of good things? Check it out! Follow the advice of St. John (1John 4:1-3) and the Bereans (Acts 17:10-15) John tells us to test the spirits, new ideas, philosophies, readings, and religions. Compare them to what the Bible teaches. What do they say about Jesus, his person, and his work? When the Bereans first heard St. Paul preach the Gospel, they went home and studied the Old Testament. They compared it to Paul’s teachings. They discovered that Paul’s message was true; Jesus is the Messiah! Then they believed and rejoiced!

Jesus promises his sheep an abundant life. Be careful not to define “abundant life” strictly in terms of worldly goods, materials things, and cold cash! The robbers and thieves will bring you a life filled with uncertainty, meaninglessness, fear, doubt, worry, loneliness, feelings of a lack of fulfillment or emptiness, selfishness, and self-centeredness. When we stay in Jesus’ presence and Word, we will have a meaningful, satisfying, and purposeful life filled with joy, hope, peace, comfort, love, forgiveness, and kindness. Our abundant life will bring us comfort and assurance of our salvation! This salvation becomes ours now, today, while we are on this Earth, the moment we follow Jesus and trust in him as our Savior. This salvation includes: the forgiveness of sins, fellowship with God as His child, spiritual union with Jesus, the promise of the Holy Spirit, we can call to God in

times of trouble for His deliverance, God's providing for our needs/daily bread, power to resist temptation, and eternal life. These are ours now when we come to faith and live with Jesus in the safety of His sheep pen.

Jesus promises you: "I AM THE GATE...I COME THAT YOU MAY HAVE AN ABUNDANT LIFE!" Come to Jesus, my friends. Stay in his pen. Let him be your gate! IJN, amen!