

**The Only Way Out is In**  
John 10:1-10  
Westside Fellowship CRC: 8 April 2018  
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Do you remember the children’s song? “One door and only one and yet its sides are two! Inside and outside; on which side are you?” One door and only one. All of the symbols that Jesus uses to talk about himself in the gospel of John are like this. Exclusive and all encompassing. I am the bread of life – the only bread that will not spoil and leads to everlasting life. I am the one light of the world – the only light that dispels the darkness. I am the gate – I am the only way to the inside of salvation.

We learn later in this chapter that Jesus may have said these words during the ‘Feast of Dedication’ – or Hanukkah (Hebrew for ‘Dedication’). Hanukkah was not a festival established in the Old Testament, but one established between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the new. In 332 BC, Alexander the Great conquered the Middle Eastern world and after that time, the Greek way of life seeped into all other distinct ways of life. This was called Hellenization. There were corrupt Jewish priests who allowed the temple to be desecrated by Greek soldiers with pigs’ blood and pagan idols. In the 160s BC, a war broke out between the Hellenized Jews and Greeks on one hand and the conservative Jews on the other hand. In 165, a man by the name of Judas Maccabeus captured the temple and rededicated it – thus, the feast of dedication or ‘Hanukkah.’<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gary M. Burg, *NIV Application Commentary: John*, p. 286-289.

During this feast, Jews pondered what it meant to have good leaders and lamented the poor leaders of the past. A text like Ezekiel 34 might have been read in the synagogues:

This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered... .

Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, because my flock lacks a shepherd and so has been plundered and has become food for all the wild animals, and because my shepherds did not search for my flock but cared for themselves rather than for my flock, therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock... ." (Ezek. 34:2 –10)

It is in the context of this feast that Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd. I am the gate. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers." Jesus is saying that in contrast to the former shepherds – and in contrast to the Jewish leadership with whom he was debating and arguing all through these central chapters in John, he was the *true* leader. And if anyone else was to lead the people of Israel, they had to do one thing: lead their sheep to the Good Shepherd – lead their sheep through the true gate – the one door – and only one.

One hundred years ago, Scottish biblical scholar, Sir George Adam, was walking around in the desert with an Arab shepherd. The Arab shepherd showed Sir George his sheepfold where his sheep would sleep at night.



The fold had four walls and an opening. Sir George said to the shepherd, 'That is where they go at night?' 'Yes,' said the shepherd, 'and when they are in there, they are perfectly safe.' 'But there is no door,' said Sir George. 'I am the door,' said the shepherd. This shepherd was not a Christian man; he was not speaking in the language of the NT. He was speaking from the Arab shepherd's standpoint. Sir George looked at him and said, 'What do you mean by the door?' Said the shepherd, "When the light has gone, and all the sheep are inside, I lie in that open space, and no sheep ever goes out but across my body, and no wolf comes in unless he crosses my body; I am the door."<sup>2</sup>

Jesus is our shepherd and Jesus is our door – he is the one door and only one through which we can enter into the full and abundant life. Now if you can imagine yourself as a sheep in the deserts of Palestine, it's not difficult to feel a sense of relief/connection to your shepherd who is also your door. The desert that stretches out on the eastern side of all of the major cities of Israel – that desert is a dangerous place. There are wild animals and steep eroding cliffs. And most of the year, the desert has very little water and very little pasture. In that context – the gate of your sheep fold represents safety and relief... There is truly only one way to the full life – the free life of moving in and out and finding pasture.

But the abundant life, the full life, the free life of moving in and out for us - we don't normally associate that kind of life with one door. Perhaps, we don't normally think of the full life within the walls of a sheep fold. Perhaps we think of abundant and full life as life without boundaries – perhaps life on holiday, or life away from responsibilities. Waking up in the morning and being able to do what you want, how you want, with whomever you want, when you want to... Which leads me to the central question of this message – what really is the free and abundant life? Is freedom and abundant life a life without boundaries and edges and alarm clocks and bosses and leaders and rules and crying children? Or is freedom and abundant life a door and a Shepherd?

I think about a friend of mine – we'll call her Laura. She is a devout Christian woman who has made a definite decision not to drink alcohol of any kind. Her dad has struggled with alcoholism and so she knows what drinking too much does – and so she doesn't drink at all.

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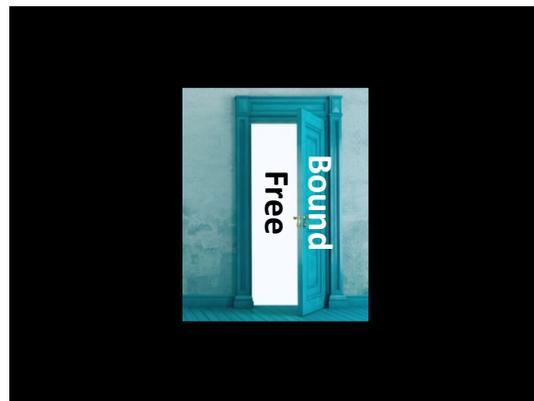
<sup>2</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 451.

Laura has spent significant amounts of time in two different environments. Back when I knew her best, during several of her summers, she's worked on a road construction crew with men who cuss and drink and live with their girlfriends – and during the academic year, she studies at a Christian place of higher education with friends who go to church on Sundays and study God's word and God's creation. One of these groups of friends respects the fact that she doesn't drink – the other group of friends thinks she's crazy not to drink. Ironically, her rough and crude construction friends are the ones who respect her choice for sobriety. They even ask her about it and are intrigued by her commitment.

It is her Christian friends that go to church with hangovers on Sunday morning and give her a hard time about not drinking. And this is something they have long and deep debates about. They say to her, "Laura, you are too uptight! Laura, don't you know that you're free in Christ to enjoy alcohol? Don't you know that Jesus came that you may have life and have it to the full? Don't you know that it is for freedom that Christ has set you free?! Forget about the law, Laura – it's all about grace!"

What really is the free and abundant life? Is the free life a life without rules and restrictions? Or is freedom a door? Is freedom a gate?

Jesus says, "I am the gate." And the only way to true freedom is in through me. The only way out to freedom is in through me. For a Christian, there is an intimate connection between bondage and freedom. They are not two ends of the spectrum, but two sides of the same coin – or door. The only way out is in.



Martin Luther put it this way: “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”<sup>3</sup>

Both of these are true – and Christ is the gate connecting these seemingly contradictory realities. In the cross, Christ took our wickedness on himself and gave us his lordship. In the exchange that happened on the cross, we took on his freedom and he took on our bondage to death. When this exchange happened, a knot was tied and we became bound to Christ in such a way that now we express our faith in him by loving and serving him. Following the law of God now becomes part of the free believer’s expression of faith.<sup>4</sup> “I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture” (John 10:9).

For Laura, she enters the gate of Christ and in Christ she finds freedom from the bondage to alcohol that she grew up with in her family. She feels free when she’s *not* drinking alcohol. That rule in her life is a bondage to Christ and through it, through that gate, she finds freedom. The only way out of bondage to the world is in through the gate of Christ.

Think about a marriage. Now, some are not called to marriage for any number of reasons, but for some, they might argue that marriage is restricting – it cuts them off from the world of freedom. There are some who would even say that marriage and monogamy go against our natural instincts and tendencies. Marriage is a tie that binds. But blest be that tie that binds. In a good marriage, being bound and being free are two sides of the same gate. A husband and wife are never more bound to a person than they are to each other, and they are never freer to be themselves than they are with one another. And in all that freedom they have to be themselves, they also delight to deny themselves and to serve the one they love. This is how a good marriage should work. (And if it’s not working that way, it’s not because ‘marriage’ is bad, it’s because the husband and wife aren’t living into it the way God calls them to.) As Paul says in Ephesians, a marriage is a reflection of Christ and the church. When we submit to each other in marriage, we are reflecting that bond between Christ and the church.

Bondage and freedom are two sides to the same gate. The only way out of bondage to the world is into true life through the gate of Christ...

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther, as quoted by Martin Marty, *Martin Luther: A Life*, p. 63.

<sup>4</sup> See Marty, p. 66.

Life – full life. The word ‘life’ is one of John’s favorite words. It occurs 36 times in the book of John – that’s more than twice as often as it occurs in any other NT writing. But it occurs in an important place in Matthew (16:24-26). “Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For whoever wants to save their life<sup>f</sup> will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. <sup>26</sup> What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?” (Matthew 16:24-26)? The only way out of bondage is in through gate of Christ. The only way out is in.

And with a twist of words, the only way in is out. The gate of Christ swings both ways. The only way in to life with Christ is out into the world he sends us to – taking up our cross and following Jesus. No matter what phase of life we’re in – no matter what our particular vocation, we are going to experience the most and the truest freedom and the fullest life if we are walking through the gate of Christ out into the world. (Insert Examples)

In and out. Out and in. We go through the gate of Christ – the gate that swings both ways. This is what the church is all about. It’s kind of like breathing. The church breathes us in to worship and communion with God through the gate of Christ – and the church breathes us out to serve. The only way out is in – and the only way in is out - - - One door and only one, and yet its sides are two – inside or outside? On which side are you? As long as you are coming in or going out through the gate of Jesus, I hope you’re on both sides.