

The I am Sayings of Jesus  
iv. I am the Door  
John 10:7

The children's chorus I sang so many years ago is so appropriate when we consider Jesus' statement "I am the door of the sheep" (v7)

*There's a way back to God  
from the dark paths of sin  
There's a door that is open  
And you may come in  
At Calvary's cross is where you begin  
When you come as a sinner to Jesus.*

Jesus' great statement is made in the midst of opposition from the pharisees after the Feast of Tabernacles. They took exception to Jesus healing a man born blind. Some scholars argue it was made during the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah) some three months later, celebrating the re-dedication of the temple by Judas Maccabeus after its desecration by the Greeks. This context suggests that Jesus' admonition about false shepherds is not directed to the pharisees alone but all false leaders who lead people astray.

The allegory of the door is misunderstood by Jesus' hearers. They were familiar with two types of sheepfold Jesus was referring to, but failed to grasp the spiritual significance of Jesus' words. A communal sheepfold in which various flocks were kept overnight for safekeeping is the first setting. In the morning a gatekeeper opens the gate or door and each shepherd calls his sheep by name and leads them out. By way of contrast thieves and robbers climb over the wall to gain access to the sheep.

Verse 7 onwards sees Jesus refer to a makeshift sheepfold out in the fields, comprising boulders and rocks arranged in a circle with thorn bushes on top for added protection. There is no gate or door, so the shepherd lies down at the entrance, protecting the sheep from predators.

The communal sheepfold is still in use today. Gary Burge refers to an incident in 1988 during the Intifada the Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation. A town south of Bethlehem refused to pay taxes as they regarded it as financing their occupation. The Israeli army punished the townspeople by confiscating all their animals and placing them in a large barbed wire compound. A week later a Palestinian widow begged the commanding officer to release her sheep as they were her only means of livelihood. He responded that it was impossible as he certainly could not find her sheep in the midst of hundreds of others. She asked that if she could in fact separate them herself, would he be willing to release them. He agreed. A soldier opened the gate whereupon the widow's son produced a small reed flute. He played a simple tune over and over. Soon sheep's heads popped up across the pen and made their way to the entrance. The young boy continued his music and walked home with his mother followed by twenty-five sheep.

This is the image Jesus creates. His sheep hear his voice, listen and follow him. Three things ensue:

- i. They are *saved*  
Our greatest need, viz salvation from sin is secured by Jesus.
- ii. They are *safe*  
They 'come in and go out' not by some revolving door, rather symbolic of safety and security.
- iii. They are *satisfied*  
They 'find pasture' reminiscent of Psalm 23 and the restoring of one's soul.

In contrast to thieves who steal by stealth, robbers who destroy through violence, or the hired hand who runs away, Jesus offers life in all its fullness. However, the question remains: whose voice do we heed. The siren voices offering success on the cheap? The deceptive voice of Satan leading to destruction? May God give us grace and discernment to hear and heed the voice of Jesus in the midst of so many voices plying their spiritual wares. For he alone is *the* Door granting access to the Father. He alone is *the* Good Shepherd who saves and satisfies.