

Christ — the Door of the Sheep

Notes of a discourse on John 10: 1-10

It is on the latter words of the Lord Jesus in the passage just read I wish to say a little at this time. What did He mean the souls who then heard, or those who afterwards should hear, to gather from the remarkable clause, "I am the door of the sheep"?

There is a change in the employment of the words. In verse 2 He represents Himself as the Shepherd, but does not yet call Himself the good Shepherd. He takes up a well-known figure of the Old Testament in which the kings of Israel were frequently designated their shepherds, the Messiah of course pre-eminently.

In this part of the chapter accordingly He speaks of the sheepfold. There is not as yet an allusion, as in verse 16, to the sheep which do not belong to the Jewish nation: "Them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one flock [not, as is familiarly known, "one fold"], one shepherd." Those who conceive (and it is a general error) that there is now a "fold" go back in heart and mind to Judaism. The Lord has really a flock in immediate relationship to Himself. The Jewish sheep, as He tells us, He would lead out, others not of it He would join with them; and these should form not two companies, but one flock round the one Shepherd.

The chapter begins with telling us how the Lord first in the case of Israel showed He was really the Shepherd. He had come in by the door, in the appointed way, at the proper time, and subject to all divine ordinances. So when to be baptized by John He says, "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." Afterwards He performed the miracles and manifested that character of mission which the prophets had predicted. He had come in by the door as the Shepherd, He only; others might claim it, but they were thieves and robbers. Not that some before the Lord Jesus had not sought the good of Israel. Josiah, Hezekiah, Jehoshaphat, David, were far from being thieves and robbers; but they were witnesses to the coming Messiah, not usurpers. But those who had claimed the sheep as their own while in truth they were God's, what could they be called but thieves and robbers? And the Messiah was very jealous, as was Jehovah, over Israel, His people reserved for His Shepherd.

But now Messiah was come, and they alas! refused Him. The blind man had been cast out, because he, no longer blind, confessed Him. Some in the same hatred had before this taken up stones to stone the Son of God. In spirit He, rejected Himself, was now leading His sheep out. That murderous prelude on the part of His people was but an anticipation of His own death; and as with him once blind who now saw, so it would be with all who worshipped Him. Jesus would lead His own outside the world's religion. It was no question of staying to improve or reform, as think the infidel school of progress in every age; grace was calling out from what is sentenced to judgment. He was not going to work now as they expected. Israel's blessing and the glory of the earth await another day. A yet deeper task was in hand to be sealed in His blood. Therefore He would lead the sheep out and go before them Himself. He shows Himself as the Shepherd come in the due and long-predicted manner which God's word had let them to expect, as the Seed of the woman and of Abraham, as the Son of David and of man. He had seen their hatred of Him and His Father, and this would be soon apparent in His cross. There was no course but one open to Him; and He was not only going outside the fold but about to lead His own out too. The blind man who now saw, was cast out by men blinder than himself, to be with Jesus.

The sheep follow Him; for they know His voice. A stranger will they not follow; for they know not the voice of strangers. The ears of Israel were heavy; they could not understand. Yet there is not a hard word in what the Lord uttered. Why is it that people, then as now, do not understand the Scriptures? Not really because of difficult expressions. It is the truth that grates on the reluctant will of man. This is the source of all unbelief. It is resistance of the will to face the terrible fact of man's ruin; it is the pride that rejects God's grace and will not bend to one's own need of it. Hence the guilt of unbelief, not because man has a feeble understanding, but because he fears not God and believes not His love. Yet is not the truth good in itself, and full of goodness to man, spite of his evil? Is it not the only means of blessing, or of salvation? Is it not by the word of God that he is begotten, and nourished, that he can serve, enjoy, or worship God? be happy with Him now and for ever? Why then does not man love it? Because he has departed from God and refuses to return in God's way. He indulges himself in the fond delusion that he would like, some time if not now, to serve God; but he really likes nothing but His own will. Yet if God is to be served at all, it must be according to His will, which alone is holy and good.

But there is a deeper question than of his serving God. Some souls before me may flatter themselves that they would rejoice to serve God; but are they willing to take the place of having no good thing in them, of being lost and not merely in danger? Not merely that they have done evil in the sight of God, but that they are all wrong before Him? It is a serious thing when the heart of man bows to the solemn sentence of God, when one stands and confesses oneself lost before the God whose love and will have been slighted habitually. What then is to become of the soul? What of the body when resurrection to judgment comes?

Such then was the state of Israel, the fold; the Shepherd was obliged to go outside. The test that any were His own was that they heard and knew His voice. The crisis was at hand; when He has put forth all His own, He goes before them, and the sheep follow Him. It was the sentence of death on the best religion of the earth. The only persons who can boast of divine religion for their nation are the Jews; but here, solemn to say, the Lord virtually sentences the Jews and their religion. In the fullest love to them already had He gone into the fold, and they would not hear Him; so He goes out and leads His own out after Him. He always takes the first place, in sorrow as in all else; in the deepest of all He suffers for them, Just for unjust. Then He goes before His own sheep, whom He knows by name and leads out.

In truth all is in ruins, the world and man; the true Light has been put out, as far as man could. God Himself who came in love is gone. They felt not the sin. They believed neither His glory nor His grace. They could not understand His words; nay, how few did even the disciples then understand! It was not merely the Jews who were blind and deaf: the disciples were half Jews and half blind still. Men do not understand what they do not like, not because there is not adequate, yea, abundant, light vouchsafed of God, but because their own will is at work, producing darkness in the heart. "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." It is an unerring test: with Christ the object, our soul is full of light. Have I darkness as to this or that? If so, and so far, my eye is not single. Why do I say it but because it is the truth, and that you and I may look to Him who alone enlightens and makes us light? In vain to look for divine light till you receive Him, and rest on Him, who will shew what He is for you and to you in the smallest need of every day, as in the greatest for eternity.

But there is more than this that follows (ver. 7): the Lord Jesus takes an entirely new place now outside Israel. He introduces this truth in the same solemn manner, not the sentence of death on Judaism, but the opening out of life and salvation to sinners. "Verily, verily [says Jesus], I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep . . . by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved." How blessed! He

speaks to the same souls. What love! to the souls who could not understand Him! If the true Messiah was going outside His ancient people He would save sinners. Ah! they were sinners, and till the sinner feels that he is a sinner, he feels nothing aright, least of all as to God or His Son.

This is the beginning of wisdom. The first lesson of goodness is that I know and confess my badness. Nothing a man likes so little as to know and own that he is good for nothing before God; the grace that came by Him who is full of grace alone effects it in any. It is most true that I cannot have true faith in Christ unless I repent toward God. Never seek to divorce the one from the other. It is not only a human error but a snare of Satan for simple souls, where they are severed, for God has joined them in receiving the gospel. God would have souls feel and confess their sins. Repentance is when a soul no longer ignores God, cheating itself as to its own evil; he repents who by grace is willing to receive God's sentence on his own sinfulness in the sight of God. What a change! It is a man who abandons himself, because of his evil as judged by God, and looks with horror on himself as before Him.

Christ is the test of this as of all else. Thus in the case before us what could be worse in His sight than the self-will that refused to receive the Messiah? They did not like Him when they knew Him after a sort; they would have liked one to flatter them, and give them power and glory, making them the most exalted people on earth and crushing all their enemies. This will all come in due time from God, who will yet raise Israel from their fallen estate and put them on the pinnacle of greatness. But they, as we, must be put down first in their own eyes as sinners. By-and-by they will be brought to God; they will then own that they pierced Him, that it was their guilt though by lawless hands of others. In fact no man can have the blessedness of the truth or the grace of God unless he bows to Jesus as himself a sinner. This is the necessary controversy of God with every soul of man as he is. It is not faith to confess truth in an abstract manner, though in this way Satan often cheats souls. They own the forgiveness of sins in a creed, or as a dogma; but are they forgiven? They do not pretend to any such thing; it would be presumptuous on their part! O senseless souls in the face of God's express message! Faith feels the truth about itself more deeply than about others. Unless I believe the reality of God's grace and truth for my own soul, it is worse than a form. It is the hour when God will have reality (John 4). The Lord had come to the fold, the place of forms; but He has led His own out, and He must have them in the truth. True worshippers, they must worship God in spirit and in truth.

The reason souls are not really saved is that they are not in the truth for their own soul's need. I must meet God about my sins in this world or at the judgment-seat. No man can be saved in the day of judgment. It is in the place of my sins I must find salvation; where I am lost, I must be saved; where I have been an enemy of God, I must be reconciled to Him. The Saviour is come, yea is gone again, and the work is done. What would not Israel give to know it! Their eyes are blinded and they see Him not. They are strangers to Him; not His sheep, they did not know His voice. There they remain outside, waiting for the Messiah who is come. They know not that the Victim has been offered, and is accepted on high. We by grace have believed without seeing, and know that, His blood having been shed for sin, He is gone into the holiest of all.

Thus, if the Lord opens a new figure, it is for a new truth. "I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved." Whosoever pretends to bring man to God, to step between God and souls on earth to claim Israel. the church or any souls as his own, as his people and his flock, is a thief and a robber. What! man stand between souls and God! Is he not himself a sinner? Does he not need salvation? "All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers." Jesus is the door. He gives us to see what He was about to do after leaving the fold. He would save sinners. Now, accordingly the door is open to any. "By me if any man enter in, he shall be saved." Grace and truth came by Him; man has

neither. And the law can only condemn him; for he is a sinner. He needs salvation. It is no longer a question of being schooled even by the law of God; man is too far gone. As long as there is life, he will tell you, there is hope. But man has not life toward God. Earthly religion may try to remedy the disease by keeping up hopes before mankind; but it is all vain; for the patient is dead. There is no hope, no life, for man in his natural state; and he has proved it by rejecting the Son of God. But if His death be the great sin man has done, it is the infinite grace of God there to meet him in the gospel. "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved." There is more than hope now, there is present salvation in Christ. There is in Him everlasting life. Those who believe, as He declares, shall never perish.

Do you draw back fearing this is too great grace? Who then, and what, are you to give God the lie? If you are a great sinner, is not the Son of God a far greater Saviour? Are you afraid to trust Him? Afraid to trust your soul in the hands of Him who died for sinners and rose again? It is the express mission of the Son of man to seek and to save that which is lost. Granted that man is dead; but is not Jesus the quickener of the dead. By-and-by He will raise the body. Now it is the hour of quickening the dead who hear His voice. He quickens the soul, and brings salvation. When He comes again, He will change the body into the likeness of His glorious body; now He blesses the soul. How proper is the order! How blessed for those who repent and believe the gospel; but how dreadful for sinners to be raised sinners, raised for eternal judgment, raised to be cast into the lake of fire! But He is now come to save, having done the work needful for it.

Thus is Christ the door; and now, thanks be to God, you are invited to enter. Will you not come in? He is calling: do you not hear His voice? He may have much for you to do when you enter. He gives each of His servants his work. He leads even now into more and deeper blessing. But if you have not come in, this is not what you want. The sinner cannot serve the Lord till He has served the sinner — till He has saved him. Why then do you hesitate? To delay is most dangerous. It is now loss incalculable; it may be ruin irretrievable.

I do call on you to weigh with all seriousness these words of Jesus which evidently apply after He left the Jewish fold. He speaks as the rejected Son; He was going to the cross. He knew all that was coming, He required no prophecy about Himself, or God, or man. "Lord," said Peter, "thou knowest all things"; and so He did — all things; excepting only, where as servant He waited for the word of His Father (Mark 13: 32).

I invite and urge you then to believe in His name on God's testimony. He is the Saviour, the only Saviour of sinners; and you need a Saviour. Believe Him to be what He is. Rest on the work He has done. The Saviour and His work will perfectly suit your need, as they do the glory of God. Were He one hair's breadth less than He is, I could not trust Him for either. He could neither have glorified God nor save sinners. But the truth is that there is an infinite distance between Him and the highest of creatures, were it Gabriel and Michael themselves. For they are creatures and He is the Creator. He is God, even as the Father and the Holy Spirit in the Godhead; whatever be the difference of person and of function, Scripture is plain. Man is blind and unbelieving; and the worse, the less he suspects it.

Such then is the Saviour: can you trust Him? Seeing that the Creator of all the world came to save from sin, yea became Himself a man to save them righteously by His death for their sins on the cross, do you hesitate? Had it been only man, there could be no salvation, as far as such an one was concerned; but He that was God became man in order to it. No doubt He was Messiah and rejected. But God turns His rejection to our salvation, and opens the door to sinners. It is no question now of a Messiah for the Jew, but of a Saviour. And are there not some here awakening to His voice, some

souls that answer to Jesus? Is He not now saying, "By me if any man enter in, he shall be saved"? For what is He as the door? Does He refuse any? Not one. "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." He invites you. By me if *any* man enter in, he *shall* be saved. "He is not looking for qualities of which He approves, but for sinners that need Him to save them; and there is no man now who hears His voice and remains outside but because of the self-will that refuses to bow to His word. Salvation and every other needed blessing are in Him. The first call of God, the first obligation of man is to believe in Him; the first blessing for my soul is to have life in Him and be saved.

Shall I tell you why men say no man can know that he is saved? They think that God is such an one as themselves. They attenuate Christ's glory, seeing neither His person nor His work. When He bore God's judgment of sin on the cross, did He procure an uncertain salvation? Let none say so who fear God or honour Jesus. How could a divine person fail? It is His glory, at all cost to Himself, to bring in perfect salvation and this He now gives freely to the believer. To bless is what God loves. Only sin made Him a judge. He does not judge His counsels, nor salvation, nor the saved. Judgment has been borne by Christ for the believer. And the Spirit seals them, instead of doubting them. Thus does He fill the heavens even now with due praise and adoration. God is love and light, not a judge, in His own nature; but He will deal with all that is contrary to His nature, and so much the more solemnly with those who prefer self and sin to Christ. Judgment will be Christ's vindication on the unbeliever and ungodly, whatever grace may do at the end of this age.

In point of fact, if you, an unconverted man, were brought to heaven, no place would be so irksome to you. It is so now to be where others sing of Christ and pray, and you are anxious above all to get away and have done with it. What would heaven be to you with not one feeling in harmony with Him whom all praise there? No place could be so unsuited to the sinner.

How can one then be fitted for heaven? "By me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved." What is implied in salvation? Two things at least, whatever more may be: a new and eternal life, and a propitiation for my sins. That life you cannot win, and no creature can give it you. Shame on those besotted enough to say, even if they do not believe, that water sprinkled on one can give life? Do they not accept a fiction as baseless, and if it be rested on quite as ruinous, as his wafer-god is to the poor papist? If the one trifles with the Lord Jesus, the other surely does with the Holy Spirit. But no: in Christ is life. Here is the Shepherd, here is the door, here is salvation. The only boast then is in Him and His cross. And no wonder; for He is the alone worthy One and your Saviour. We hear and know His voice; we know not the voice of strangers, nor follow them. The propitiation too is once for all in the Saviour's blood. The mass, or anything equivalent, is Satan's cheat for it.

Oh, fear not, doubting one, to trust in what He has shed to blot out very sin. Are you not hindered by those around you who believe not? Do you not slip into their thoughts and words? To have the dead with the living is dreadful combination. It was so in the Jewish fold; but Jesus led His own out. Go not back to that which He has left for ever. You that have come out to Him, cleave to Him; know that the only security is Himself, the one joy of saints is to be with Him. He not only has life in His own person, but He died that He might give that life to sinners. Sin must have been an everlasting barrier, but He died for it. Here is the One to look to and confide in; and He invites you. "By me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved." There is no question as to the result: you have the positive word of Jesus for it. Do you believe in Him? Can you not trust the testimony of God who sent Him and raised Him from the dead? This is the One I commend to you. Rest all your weight on what He is; you may trust Him. He has suffered once for sins, the Just for the unjust (without this all were vain), that He might bring us to God. This blessing comes not when we die but now in this world when we believe the gospel.

Ineffable blessedness — to be brought to the God I dreaded, left, and was cast out from! And is every barrier removed? It is. God says so, and who knows as He? But again, if I believe, there is nobody that I know like God, not even my wife or my child. He alone has told me all His heart; and I am sure of God, not of any other: my best friend may fail me, He never will. And Christ makes Him known. He is the One God calls me to confide all to. He gives life to me; He died for me; the moment you believe, life in Him is yours. It is altogether wrong to think life-giving is a process, though the conviction of it may be. But to have life eternal is the simple consequence of faith in Christ. How do I know? He says it Himself, and there is nothing so good or true or sure as the word of Jesus. It is most humbling too, for it makes everything of Him and nothing of me or of any other child of Adam. Is not this as it should be? Or are you not prepared for it? Beware of dishonouring Him.

Man likes to be occupied with himself. If I receive life, propitiation, salvation, yea, all in Christ, is it not the annihilation of self? He is faithful too, and will make all real and living in the soul of the believer. Let your heart then be occupied with Him. It is a false gospel that sends you to look at yourself for proof of life. If God tells me to look at myself, it is to humble me. It is reversing the gospel to judge of His grace or of my standing by myself. If God gives blessing, He wishes it to be enjoyed. People in this world seem to grudge what they do for others. Indeed it was the Greek or heathen idea of God that He was jealous of man's happiness. The true God delights in the happiness of those He has called; and though men have sinned irreparably in the death of Christ by their lawless hands, it is by that death He blesses any in His own mercy, and this righteously. The moment I look to Jesus and His blood, at God's word, my sins are gone. And this is only the beginning of the Christian's career.

But, besides salvation, there is another rich blessing — "he shall go in and out." The truth makes free, the Son makes free. It is the essence of Christianity — liberty to do as God likes. It supposes responsibility to Christ. I am Christ's bondsman, but free to serve Him. You who look to Jesus, are not you at liberty also? Do you say that you are still tied and bound with the chain of your sins? Such is not the christian state but rather a denial of it. "He shall go in and out." This is the liberty in which we ought to stand fast: so says the apostle to the Galatians who had let it slip. Anything short of it is not Christianity, though it may be the state of souls born of God. It is not merely your gain or loss that is in question, but the Lord's glory. For God has Christ before Him, and He blesses you by leading you to think of Christ as He does. Nor can you duly serve as Christ's bondsman unless you know what it is to be His freedman. It is liberty to please the Lord, no longer like the Israelite under law, still less bound to the world or its conventionalities, its hopes or its fears, its pursuits or its pleasures. We are free to serve Christ, delighting in Him now. Having heard His voice, we shall serve Him in a changed body on high, as well as here in these bodies made the temple of God by the Spirit dwelling in them.

But the Lord adds that the believer shall "find pasture." He will feed us according to His own heart. "For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." We need to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But He will surely see to it and does. What a blessing to have such an One to care for us! This is the Saviour I call on you to believe in and to confess. You that confide in the Christ of God, will you not confess Him? There is not for a starting-point a sound from a man's heart so sweet as a poor sinner's confession of the Saviour when he casts himself upon His grace and God's free justification through His blood.

May the Lord make it yours even now. His for ever, may we serve Him, seeking only to do His will: He will show you how, for you will hear His voice, as you follow Him. He will care for you, as He binds Himself to give not only salvation but liberty and pasture. "He that spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" "Therefore

let no man glory in men; for all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come: all are yours; and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

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