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Sermon Series: *The Color of Redemption*, No. 2

Gray (The Gate)

March 20, 2022

John 10:1-10 (NIV)

"Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Would you turn with me back to our text today, which is the tenth chapter of the gospel of John? John, Chapter 10.

My original intention was to begin the message today in the same way I did last week, declaring that "the color of redemption is" this week's color – which is gray.

I was going to start by saying, "The color of redemption is gray."

But I'm not. Because, really, it isn't. Not exclusively anyway.

The thing that threw me is the gate, there in verse 7 where Jesus says, "**I am the gate for the sheep.**"

Actually, that sentence, that declaration of Jesus, has thrown a lot of people through the years. The exclusivity, the exceptionality, the "black and whiteness" of His statement there: some people don't like that and push back against that by trying to, actually, make it more *gray* than it is

We'll talk about that in a few minutes.

But that's not why I chose gray for the color today. I chose gray because that's how I picture a gate – a livestock gate – in my mind.

I've mentioned before that I grew up with several aunts and uncles who owned farms, so I grew up working on farms, and all the gates I ever saw around my families' farms were gray.

They were all those unpainted, galvanized steel panel gates, because those were the cheapest gates you could buy.

If you knew my uncles, you'd understand that completely.

So, I grew up thinking all gates looked like that. All gates are gray.

But then I moved to Kentucky.

Are you aware that we live just north of one of the national centers of gate manufacturing? It's true! Roughly, between Danville, just to our south, and, say,

Russell Springs – in that area of south-central Kentucky – there are a dozen or more gate manufacturing companies, large and small. Green River and Tartar and Scott and Davis and Baird – that's Chubby Baird Gate Company – and lots more.

You drive down Route 127, and you'll see several of them, and of course their gates that are ready for shipping are lined up there, stacked on their lots. You look over those lots and you'll realize that most of their gates are not gray. They come in all sorts of colors – blue and black and red and yellow and green and white.

So, I can't stand up here today and tell you that the color of redemption is gray.

But I would like to think with you about Jesus declaring Himself, in a very non-gray way, "the gate."

We don't know for sure, but it would seem that all this that Jesus says there in Chapter 10 follows *directly* all that happened in Chapter 9, in which Jesus heals a man who was born blind and who was then questioned by the Jewish religious leaders about his healing.

And then, when the man explained how Jesus healed him, those Jewish leaders rejected that man and insulted him – and kicked out of their presence – *simply because he was open to Jesus.*

There, in that interaction, we see a great difference between people.

The fellow whom Jesus healed: he didn't pretend to understand all that Jesus was, nor who He was, nor how exactly Jesus did what He did. In fact, he very freely admitted that he didn't know all that much about Jesus.

In fact, about the only thing he knew for sure was that Jesus did something miraculous for him, which made him open to learning more about this Jesus.

It was all very simple to this fellow. The simple evidence of what Jesus did for him suggested that it might be wise for him to at least be open to hearing a little more about Jesus.

That's just logical. That just makes sense, doesn't it?

So, the blind fellow – the formerly blind fellow – was just doing what was sensible.

The Pharisees and other Jewish leaders, on the other hand (the vast majority of them, anyway) were *not* doing what was simply sensible, which tells us that they were *just not open* to Jesus; they did not *want* to be open to Jesus; they had no *intention* of opening themselves to Jesus, and so no amount of evidence, even miraculous evidence, would convince them to be *even a little bit* open to Jesus.

And Jesus knew this, of course, which is why, when they would ask – not just here, but from time to time, – for Him to do a miracle to prove Himself, He refused.

Because He'd already done one after another after another, and yet their hearts stayed firmly closed to Him.

They were as closed to Jesus as the blind man was open to Him.

And we see this same sort of extreme in people still today. In most peoples' openness to Jesus, there is typically very little gray. Right from the beginning, people seem to be either open to Him, or they're closed to Him.

They're as black or white about Jesus as Jesus is about Himself.

These guys here, even in the presence of an obvious miracle, remained absolutely closed.

And since they could neither explain nor refute what Jesus did, they resorted to insulting the fellow. Just for his openness to Jesus, they insulted him and lectured him and then threw him out.

Which is, unfortunately, another way people haven't changed through the years. This is still how closed – closed-minded – people behave.

All the logic and all the evidence in the world won't matter.

And if they can't argue their point successfully, they resort to insults; they call people names and then boot 'em away.

You see it all the time, especially in the public square.

Why are some people like that?

The big problem here, of course, was that these were the faith leaders of Jesus' day who were doing this – acting like this. These were the *shepherds* of God's people behaving like this, not only rejecting the obvious and common sense and logic, but in the process they were rejecting the very people, the sheep, they were supposed to be caring for.

This fellow, a good and faithful Jewish young man who was born blind, is suddenly able to see. However that came to be, it's an event worthy of celebration!

But his own spiritual leaders – his own shepherds – wind up criticizing and insulting him and calling his integrity and judgment into question.

You see how backward their behavior was?

Can you understand why that sort of closed-minded, rude, downright abusive behavior upset Jesus so much, not just here, but in other places too?

That's why He launches into this discussion of sheep and shepherds: He was watching poor shepherds in action.

He was watching how they were harming God's beloved sheep, and He decided to address it.

And He does it using, well, what is this literary device that Jesus uses here with the Good Shepherd and Gate?

Is it a parable? Not according to the strict definition of parable.

It's not really a simile.

Is it an illustration?

A descriptive statement?

A metaphor? Probably a metaphor more than anything else, and maybe a little bit of all of the above.

It's hard to imagine any more familiar situation that Jesus could have used to make His point than a shepherd and sheep. Given the prevalence of keeping sheep in the

countryside of Israel, everyone there would have easily understood all this imagery.

The question that Jesus was really answering here is, "Who was practicing good shepherding?"

Everyone there knew what good shepherding was; they knew what good shepherding looked like.

Good shepherds did not abuse their sheep. Good shepherds cared about their sheep; they cared about the welfare of their sheep. Good shepherds feed, lead, heal, protect and, when necessary, rescue their sheep.

Everybody knew that.

So, considering how this blind man had been treated by Jesus, on the one hand, and by the Jewish religious leaders on the other, which shepherd would be considered *good*?

That's what Jesus wanted them – and what He wants us – to consider here.

And in His conclusion, He leaves no ambiguity. He draws a clear contrast based on the evidence presented and the consideration of just simple logic.

"I am the Good Shepherd," Jesus says down there in verse 14.

But even before He quite gets there, He makes this other statement about Himself in verse 7, because verse 6 tells us the Pharisees weren't catching His drift, you might say.

To help bring clarity, He says, *"Truly, truly I say to you, I am the gate for the sheep."*

Now, let me say, if you try to somehow completely mesh these two images of Jesus as gate and as Good Shepherd, you'll just get frustrated, because you wind up trying to figure out how the Good Shepherd could walk through Himself as the Gate – and how a Gate can be a Shepherd.

You can't make them completely concurrent metaphors; you'll just give yourself a headache trying to do that.

We have to consider them as informing each other from the same context, but not overlapping.

Jesus is trying to help them understand by providing two points of view to the same image.

So, what does He mean when He says He's "the gate?"

Well, in Jesus' day, most people owned only a few sheep – not dozens and dozens. So, most villages had some sort of common sheep pen for the sheep to stay in overnight – like a lot for overnight parking.

It would have been of a decent size and enclosed by a waist-high or so stone wall with one narrow opening – one break in the wall – that allowed the sheep to go in and out.

At night, all the sheep, belonging to different owners, would enter in through that break in the wall and mix together.

Then in the morning, the shepherds would come and call for their sheep with a unique call that the sheep would recognize, and those sheep that recognized the call of their shepherd would come out through that opening and follow their shepherd to graze in the fields nearby.

So, the opening in the wall, the opening itself, was the gate: the way through which the sheep had to pass in order to find the two things they needed to live.

During the day, they passed through it to go to the fields where there was food and water. During the day, the gate was the way to provision.

And then at night, they passed through it to find safety – salvation from all that would seek to harm them. At night, the gate was the way to protection.

So, in Jesus declaring Himself “the gate,” He’s saying that for people to find true provision and protection, they have to pass through Him.

He’s the opening; He’s the way by which we find freedom from fear and safety in dark places.

He’s the path that leads to the liberty to live and move in freedom and without constraint.

He’s the way through whom we find all we need for life.

He’s the one who provides that – because that’s what good shepherds provide for their sheep.

He’s the gate that allows us, Jesus says in verse 9 there, to “*come in and go out.*”

That’s a very pregnant phrase right there – a well-known Hebrew expression, according to scholars, that means that things are at peace.

You see, when you can “come in and go out,” you’re living a life that is without fear or threat.

When people of a nation can “come in and go out,” that means that that nation is at peace within and with those around it.

Think of the places in the world where that is not the case, where people cannot “come in and go out.” Places like North Korea, Afghanistan, China, Venezuela, Cuba, Myanmar, Iran, increasingly Russia, and Ukraine (because of what Putin is doing to them).

They can’t come in and go out freely. They have to watch and hide and run and dodge and cower. They lack provision, and they’re unsure and unstable and unsafe.

That’s not the life that Jesus describes in Himself, you see?

What He describes here – *personally* in the spiritual sense, and possibly *physically* (depending on the spiritual health of a nation) – is the sort of existence we discover when we find out who God really is, what God is really like, and what God really wants for His people.

You see, once someone discovers the reality of God through Jesus, then in that person there blooms a new sense of safety and security and well-being, both for now and forever.

And, in a spiritually-healthy nation, when a people or nation realizes this, that freedom spills over into earthly existence.

But, whether or not that’s the national situation, still, if God is a God like Jesus reveals, and if a person’s own life is in the hands of that sort of God, then regardless of what happens around, all is well.

This is the life we’re offered through Jesus.

Those Pharisees and other Jewish “religious professionals” did not offer this kind of life – this kind of provision, this kind of security – to the people.

With the blind man there in Chapter 9, we see them nearly at their worst.

But even at their very best, *they* could not be “the gate.”

But, there is a gate to this sort of God, to this sort of life.

And Jesus is that opening in the wall. Jesus is the gate.

Jesus is the way.

And according to Him, He’s the *only* way: to God, to protection, to provision, “*to life,*” to, as Jesus says there at the end of verse 10, “*life to the full.*”

He’s the way to the best, most fulfilling, most satisfying, richest, safest (in eternal terms, anyway) most meaningful life possible.

A super-abundant life.

That’s the kind of life you can find in God, and Jesus is the gate to Him and to this life.

And Jesus is the *only* gate – the *only* way.

He says here very plainly: it is *not* that He’s “*a*” way – or just *one* way of *several* or *many*.

No, Jesus says that He’s “*the*” way.

Now, what does that mean for people who’ve never heard of Him – who have never had the chance to hear of Jesus. Does that mean they’re all (past, present and future) automatically eternally condemned?

What about living in the light that we have?

What about Romans 1 and those people who’ve never heard of Jesus but do acknowledge God in nature and in their hearts? What about them?

What about what First Peter says about Jesus preaching to the Spirits in prison?¹

What about God’s Spirit’s ability to speak Christ to people on their deathbeds?

What about dreams that God gives, revealing Jesus to peoples who’ve never seen a Bible or a missionary?

Those are things to discuss, and Christianity has discussed them for centuries.

But those things don’t apply here, you see, because once we know about Jesus, once we know that Jesus says, “*I am the gate,*” then our state of ignorance is, thankfully, past, and we now know – we’ve been exposed to the truth.

You and I, even if we didn’t know twenty minutes ago or *ten* minutes ago, we know now: we’ve heard; we’ve discovered; we’ve been exposed to this tremendous truth that there *is* a *certain* and *sure* way to God and to *all* His *goodness* and *blessings*. And *Jesus is that way*.

Now we know that, and we have to deal with that.

Jesus is the way into the saving presence of God.

Jesus says it twice here in John 10, “*I am the gate.*”

Jesus also says in John 14, “*I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*”²

The apostle Peter states in Acts 4:12: “*There is no other name under heaven by which a person can be saved.*”

¹ 1 Peter 3:19

² John 14:6

"We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus – the new and living way opened for us..." (Hebrews 10:19a)

"Through Jesus we have access to God the Father."
(The apostle Paul in Ephesians 2:18.)

Hearing all that, some in our world say, "Oh, that sort of exclusivity is bad."

No, it isn't – not at all! It's great! The way to God – for which people have searched for millennia – has now been made known!

The way that the prophets promised has finally come!

This is not *bad* news, or *hard* news, or *disappointing* news, or *limiting* news.

This is *great* news, *freeing* news, *liberating* news!

All the teachings of Scripture that there is only one God, one Messiah, one savior and one true faith: all of these lines converge right here in Jesus.

So, we don't have to search any more.

We don't have to wonder.

We don't have to hope that we can someday *find* God, *reach* God, *know* God, and *know* what He wants.

Now we can *know*.

We can *know* that we *know*, which is precisely why we can say, along with the apostle Paul, "*Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!*" (1 Cor. 15:57)

He's the gate. He's the way to provision and protection – and peace, for now and forever.

You can paint Him blue or green or yellow – or gray. Regardless of the color, Jesus is the gate that we want on our farm.

And we don't even have to go to southern Kentucky to find Him – to make Him our own. He's right here today.

If you want to live a life of coming in and going out in peace, Jesus is the gate for that. If you've never chosen Him before, choose Him today.

Closing Song: *He Is Lord*

Benediction: May the Spirit of God confirm in our hearts the truth and the joy of the fact that Jesus is the gate that leads to God – and to a life of coming in and going out in peace and in joy.