“I am the Door”

The “I AM” Sayings of Christ: “I am the door of the sheep... I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture” (John 10:7, 9).

Introduction

Much of what has been written already of our Lord’s life in the previous nine chapters of John’s Gospel relates to His interaction with “the Jews”: an expression which often refers, in particular, to the religious leaders. What we read in John chapter ten regarding the next two “I AM” sayings – “I am the door”, and “I am the good shepherd, was spoken immediately after the words at the end of chapter nine; in fact, what happens from John 7:2 to 10:21 appears to have occurred around the same time – the Feast of Tabernacles, held in the Autumn. “The Jews” who heard these next two “I am” sayings from our Lord (John 10:19) therefore included some “blind” Pharisees (John 9:40-41 – see our article “I am the Light of the World”); to them He says, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber (cf. Mark 11:17-18). But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep” (John 10:1-2). What happens from John 10:22-39 appears to have occurred a couple of months later, at the Feast of the Dedication, John 10:22, which occurred in December.

The Door into the Sheepfold

The Palestinian sheepfold was “a roofless enclosure in the open field. It consisted of a wall made of rough stones and provided with a sturdy door... (which) was locked... and... was guarded by a door-keeper” (William Hendriksen: Commentary on the Gospel of John). As usual, when Jesus spoke this “parable” (or “figure of speech”), the Jews “understood not what things they were which he spake unto them” (verse 6). Jesus then gives this explanation: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (verse 7-10). The scribes and Pharisees were blind to the reality of who Jesus was, and deaf to the message of salvation which He preached; consequently, they never saw their need to be saved through faith in Him alone. The Jews could not grasp that there was anything wrong with themselves, or that they needed to enter by “the Door” into the sheepfold of God’s kingdom: **they assumed they were already in it**; after all, they were Abraham’s children (John 8:33, 39). They were hypocrites whose religion was a matter of outward show and formality. There are many such people today who think that they can enter God’s kingdom by a mere show of religion: having a religious upbringing, temple/synagogue/mosque/church attendance, religious rites and observances, reciting prayers from a book, fasting, and other religious practices. Similarly, there are those who would not consider themselves to be religious but are relying on their being “a good person” and doing charitable deeds to make themselves acceptable to God (if He exists). All such outward attempts to please God are doomed to failure, because they do not effect a

change in what lies at the heart of man's problem – the problem of his unclean heart: "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders (including hatred), adulteries (including lustful looks), fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies (or, "slanders"): these are the things which defile a man" (Matthew 15:19-20). Outward religion and outward morality will not pass the test of the One who is "of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity" (Habakkuk 1:13), "for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD (Jehovah) looketh on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

Perhaps you think that if you live a fairly good life, and try to be a kind, helpful person, then God will consider that your **good** deeds outweigh any **bad** ones: after all, the Bible says that He is a God of love and mercy. Yes, He is a God of love and mercy: He is also a God of absolute purity and of unbending justice, who must punish sin wherever He sees it, and He sees sin in all of us: "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God (he may or may not acknowledge that there **is** a God, but he thinks and behaves **as though there were no God**: he is a practical atheist). They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good. The LORD (Jehovah) looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: **there is none that doeth good, no, not one**" (Psalm 14:1-3). In God's eyes, there is nothing that sinful people like you and me do which can be considered a truly "good" deed (i.e. done for the right reason – love for God, and from the right motivation – to glorify God), and therefore any attempt to please God with our self-righteousness is doomed to failure, because even our best efforts at doing what is good and right are but "filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6 – literally, "a menstrual garment") in God's sight.

To seek to enter God's kingdom by any other means than God's appointed "Door" – Jesus Christ, is to "(climb) up some other way" into the sheepfold (John 10:1). Jesus is "the Door" by which "we have access by faith into this grace (this state of being "saved" – John 10:9: "justified", and having "peace with God" – Romans 5:1) wherein we stand" (Romans 5:2). God's kingdom is a kingdom of grace: we do not enter it, we are not saved, by anything we can do; salvation is God's gift to undeserving rebels; entry to God's kingdom is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone (Ephesians 2:7-8). Religious leaders who seek to prevent the sheep from entering into God's kingdom by Jesus Christ alone (cf. John 9:22, 34), by teaching some other way, are accounted as "thieves and robbers", and God will hold them to account one day for their words and actions. Jesus had some very strong words of condemnation for those who profess to be religious leaders, but who lead people astray: "But **woe unto you**, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in" (Matthew 23:13); in fact, in Matthew chapter 23, Jesus describes the scribes and Pharisees with the words "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" no less than seven times! As religious leaders, the Pharisees should have been leading the people into the truth, but instead, as Jesus tells the multitude, they were "blind guides" (Matthew 23:16), and "blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (Matthew 15:14). God is not content with a religion of outward formality; He desires "truth in the inward parts" (Psalm 51:6). "For he is not a Jew (a true, Israelite of God, and therefore a member of His spiritual kingdom – Galatians 6:16), which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one **inwardly**; and circumcision is that **of the heart**, **in the spirit**, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God" (Romans 2:28-29). The mere performance of outward ritual is not enough, and does not please God; our first need is that of a clean heart (Psalm 51:10), and a spiritual, new birth in

Christ (John 3:3); and the kind of worship which is acceptable to God is a worship which is "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23-24). The only "Door" into the kingdom of God is Jesus Christ.

Tumbling over the Wall

In his "Pilgrim's Progress", John Bunyan gives a very graphic picture of two men who came "tumbling over the wall" into the way to the Celestial City (heaven), rather than entering by the gate (which is Christ) at the head of the way; their names were Formalist and Hypocrisy:-

"... he (Christian) espied two men come tumbling over the wall ("the highway up which Christian was to go, was fenced on either side with a wall, and that wall was called Salvation" – Isaiah 26:1), on the left hand of the narrow way; and they made up apace to him. The name of the one was Formalist, and the name of the other Hypocrisy. So, as I said, they drew up to him, who thus entered with them into discourse.
CHR. Gentlemen, whence came you, and whither go you?
FORM. and HYP. We were born in the land of Vain-glory, and are going for praise to Mount Sion.
CHR. Why came you not in at the gate, which standeth at the beginning of the way? Know you not that it is written, that he that cometh not in by the door, 'but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber?' Jn. 10:1.
FORM. and HYP. They said, That to go to the gate for entrance was, by all their countrymen, counted too far about; and that, therefore, their usual way was to make a short cut of it, and to climb over the wall, as they had done.
CHR. But will it not be counted a trespass against the Lord of the city whither we are bound, thus to violate his revealed will?
FORM. and HYP. They told him, that, as for that, he needed not to trouble his head thereabout; for what they did, they had custom for; and could provide, if need were, testimony that would witness it for more than a thousand years.
CHR. But, said Christian, will your practice stand a trial at law?
FORM. and HYP. They told him, That custom, it being of so long a standing, would, doubtless, now be admitted as a thing legal by any impartial judge; and beside, said they, if we get into the way, what's matter which way we get in? if we are in, we are in; thou art but in the way, who, as we perceive, came in at the gate; and we are also in the way, that came tumbling over the wall; wherein, now, is thy condition better than ours?
CHR. I walk by the rule of my Master; you walk by the rude working of your fancies. You are counted thieves already, by the Lord of the way; therefore, I doubt you will not be found true men at the end of the way. You come in by yourselves, without his direction; and shall go out by yourselves, without his mercy."

When Christian and the other two come to the hill "Difficulty", while Christian goes straight on, up the hill, the other two seek an easier way and go astray from the path: one goes into Danger, and the other into Destruction; and neither of them are heard of again.

Entering into Life

Through Jesus Christ we enter into **salvation** – "he shall be saved" (John 10:9). We are born into this world as sinners, defiled in God's sight: "Behold, I was shapen ("brought forth") in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5); and sin is an offence to a holy God. But "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15). How should we approach "the door" in order to be saved? We should come humbly, with an awareness of our own guilt and uncleanness; we should come acknowledging that we have offended God in thought and word and deed, for which we are truly sorry. We should come in repentance, seeking God's forgiveness and His grace to turn from our sin; we should then look, by faith, to Jesus Christ as our only hope, trusting in His all-sufficient atoning sacrifice for sin on the cross: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Through Jesus Christ we also enter into **abundant life** – they shall "have life, and... have it more abundantly (have it in abundance)" (John 10:10). Jesus Christ brings life to those who are spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1). Our life in this world, without Christ, is an empty one which can never give true and lasting fulfilment. God originally made us for better things, a better life, which Adam lost: a life of communion with God, true satisfaction of the soul, and eternal happiness: which things are restored in Christ. This "Life", which God gives to those who come to Christ by faith, is an "abundant" life, so that those who have it can truly say, "my cup runneth over" (Psalm 23:5). "God hath given to us (believers) eternal life (the highest form of life available to men), and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life (literally, "the life" – the true life of God); and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life ("the life")" (1 John 5:11-12).

Conclusion

God provides full and complete salvation for those who enter His kingdom via the Door: cleansing from sin in Christ's blood (Colossians 1:14), and the beautiful, spotless robe of Christ's justifying righteousness to cover our moral nakedness (Romans 3:22); and we have the Life of God in our souls (Psalm 36:9), an eternal life of supreme "abundance" (John 10:10).

Have you entered God's kingdom through the Door that He has provided in His Son, Jesus Christ? If you are trying to enter by some other way, whether religious observances or personal self-righteousness, then God considers you "a thief and a robber" (John 10:1), robbing Christ of the glory that is due to Him, and to Him alone. Jesus Christ is the one and only Door into God's kingdom **now**, and into His **eternal** kingdom, in the "new heavens and the new earth" (2 Peter 3:13), when He returns in glory. Jesus calls to you, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden (under the burden of your guilt and sin before a holy God), and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you (yoke yourself to me as your guide and instructor), and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

Come: stand humbly at the Door and knock, confessing your sins to God, and looking only to Jesus Christ for all your hope of forgiveness and acceptance, and He has promised to grant you entrance into God's kingdom: "him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37).

Jesus said, "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture". Amen.