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Jesus: The gate for the Sheep

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Introduction

The latest figures from the Australian Video Viewing Report show the average Australian home now has 6.6 screens in which to consume video content. These screens include multiple devices such as internet-capable TVs, tablets, smartphones, and high definition TV sets. Every day the average Australian watches a little over 2.5 hours of TV and uses the internet an average of 5.5 hours. Compare that to the most recent NCLS church survey that says less than half the Sydney Anglican churchgoers read their bible once a day. They are some challenging statistics aren't they 8 hours a day of internet and TV compared to less than half of Anglican Christians spending any time with their bible in a day. As we start 2020 we are challenged in today's passage as to whether we hear and know Jesus voice and given the best way to know and hear Jesus voice is through the bible these statistics are not painting a good picture. Let's dig a little deeper into today's passage to find out what Jesus is saying.

Last week we looked at how Jesus healed a blind man on the Sabbath. You would think that this would be regarded as an amazing thing, something to be celebrated. Instead we see the Pharisees, the local religious rulers, get increasingly upset with the man and Jesus. And just before the chapter we read today, they ask Jesus "Are you calling us blind?!" That's the setting for our chapter today.

In today's passage Jesus is still speaking to the Pharisees and he tells them a sort of story, what is described in verse 6 as a figure of speech. This is not a parable, because parables are about the Kingdom of God. But like a Parable Jesus is taking a relatable story and applying it to a deeper meaning. Jesus tells them about sheep.

Sheep, Shepherds & a Gate

Now Despite Australia having the 2nd most sheep in the world, this scene I suspect is pretty foreign for most of us. But the picture Jesus paints would have been familiar to most of Jesus listeners. Sheep herding was a common thing in 1st Century Judea. When the sheep were out in the open the

shepherds would look after the sheep 24/7 but it was a little different when they got to a town. Shepherds would bring their flock to a walled off area and leave them for the night. There would be only one gate in that would be watched by a gatekeeper or sometimes the shepherd would literally be the gate and lie in the entrance. There would be walls which would keep out wild animals and thieves. In the morning the shepherds would come to the enclosure and call out their sheep and the sheep would come. As I prepared this talk I read an article from the BBC which said sheep are surprisingly intelligent in the area of memory and recognition skills. That's how a shepherd can call names for his sheep and have them separate from other sheep and come to their shepherd. I've even seen videos of shepherds calling out their own sheep from amongst large flocks.

So who do the characters in the story represent? Who are the Sheep, Shepherds, Robbers, Gates and Gatekeepers?

In the second half of our passage Jesus does start explaining some of the characters, but before we look at that, there is some more context we should be aware of that can help us start identifying characters. If we want to hear this parable in all its depth we need to hear it as Jesus listeners heard it. That is, against the background of Old Testament prophesy. Passages like Jeremiah 23:1-8 that we read earlier would have been in the back of the Jews minds and sets the mood for what Jesus said. For the Jews there were 2 people that shepherds would represent from their knowledge of the Old Testament, God and Jewish leaders. Passages like the Jeremiah one are common in the Old Testament. The Jewish leaders are often portrayed as bad shepherds who do not look after their sheep, while God is portrayed as the good shepherd who does look after His sheep. And in our Jeremiah passage God says something about a future shepherd who is coming. in **verse 5-6** it says

"The days are coming," declares the Lord,
"when I will raise up for David[a] a righteous Branch,
a King who will reign wisely
and do what is just and right in the land.

6 In his days Judah will be saved
and Israel will live in safety.

This is the name by which he will be called:
The Lord Our Righteous Savior.

This prophesy points forward to someone from the line of David that will be a saviour and a good shepherd.

In this context then, Jesus explains his story a little more from verse 7.

Jesus is the only way

You may be wondering why Jesus needs to explain further. Given that I have said it's harder for us to understand the story because we are detached from the world of 1st Century why are the Pharisees not understanding it in verse 6? It's because they were blind to their problems. That's what Jesus was talking about at the end of last week just before our passage today. In chapter **9:39-41** 39 Jesus said,[a] "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."40 Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?" 41 Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.

So in verse 7 Jesus tells his story again further explaining verse 1-5. Jesus now says he is the gate for the sheep and basically says that the Pharisees are the robbers and thieves trying to take the sheep. We can figure out given the context from the Old Testament and what Jesus is saying here is that the Jewish people were the sheep.

As Jesus retells the story, before saying he is the shepherd, which he will say in next weeks passage, he says he is the gate and whoever enters through me will be saved. And This is the part that we want to focus on today.

What does it mean that Jesus is the gate? Well, Jesus is contrasting himself to the thieves and robbers who would have to climb over the fence to get in to the sheep pen and who come to kill and destroy. Jesus is the gate which leads the sheep to pastures outside or safety inside the sheep pen. Jesus is saying that being safe and having life to the full can only be had through him.

Now that is a huge statement isn't it. This is an unpopular thing to say in today's world. To say that Jesus is the only way and that there is only one way to be saved. It is perceived as being arrogant to say something like that. Because what we are saying is that no matter the person, even if you're a good and helpful and loving, no matter how spiritual or faithful you are in your religion or belief, that unless you go through Jesus, you will not be saved.

So that prompts the question What does it mean through Jesus we can be saved? How do we enter through the Jesus gate? Is there a bell to ring a door to knock? Well for John, the author of this book the themes of being saved and life are throughout his book so we can look to other sections of his book to explain. Earlier in **John 3.16** For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

We can see that To be saved by Jesus means to believe in him. Now it is important to understand what this means. Through Christmas I read in a UK news article that Muslims love Jesus. Is that enough, is loving Jesus the same as believing in him? No. When John says believe he actually outlines what that means towards the end of his book when he helpfully says why he wrote his book. **John 20:31** But these are written that you may believe[b] that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

We need to not just love Jesus we need to believe that he is the Messiah and that he is the Son of God. Believing Jesus is the Messiah means to believe that he is Gods promised saviour. That Jesus is the answer to the promise of Jeremiah 23. So the first part of believing in Jesus is that he is our saviour. The second part is believing that he is the Son of God. This means knowing that he has the power to save us but also that he is also our ruler. Sometimes I think in our eagerness to share Christianity and the great hope that Jesus brings we glaze over this part. Believing in Jesus means to believe he saves us, Yes but it also means believing that he is our Lord, our ruler and therefore we should aim to follow him. I’m not saying that you need to do good things to be saved, but part of being saved is believing that Jesus is God, that Jesus has a right to tell us how to live and that from now on we should be trying to live lives that obey him. The great news is that Jesus promises that Life will be life to the full.

What does this mean? Jesus promises that his sheep will have life and have it to the full.

Does having life to the full, mean that I will have a full material life? My life will be full because I will have lots of stuff? Or my life will be full because I will be so healthy. Well, I would answer no to those questions. To have life to the full does not necessarily mean a materially wealthy life now. So, What does it mean for us to have life and have it to the full?

Christian author John Piper explains it well when he says, Abundant and full life is not about having stuff. It's about having peace, having joy, having God. This means that whatever circumstance we might be in, whether everything is going well, or whether we're in the deepest of valleys we have life to the full. We have been made alive, we have eternal life with Jesus, and we are safe and secure in his loving arms, nothing in all of creation can separate us from the love of God. Knowing these promises of Jesus that are given to us, gives us a full and abundant life.

So the question is, Do you have this life that Jesus gives?

And this brings me to my final question, Do you know Jesus voice?

Before I finish, I want to challenge everyone here. If you are currently someone who doesn't believe in Jesus or know much about him, I want to challenge you in this new year to find out more about who this Jesus is. Find out about his claims, which you can find in books like Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. We have free copies of some of these books of the bible available for you to take, please come and ask me for one if you can't find it. I admit it is a bold claim to say that Jesus is the only way to be saved, but he backs that statement up. Read one of the books about Jesus, it won't take more than a few hours. And what's a few hours, if I'm wrong you will at least be better informed about what Christians believe and can discuss things more easily with them, but at best you could be discovering the way to be saved and to have eternal life, to have a new and full life with Jesus.

Now I said I had a challenge for everyone. So my challenge for the Christians here is how well do you know our shepherds voice?

Jesus says that his sheep know his voice and will not follow the thieves and robbers.

Do you know Jesus voice? Are you able to figure out when someone speaks that they are speaking truth? Maybe it's not another religion at all that we are in danger of hearing, maybe it is the voices that claim to come from within Christianity that are harder to figure out whether they have Jesus voice behind them. Are thieves and robbers saying that you need something other than Jesus to be saved? Are they saying you need to be good enough first to be saved, are they saying that you need to be able to speak in tongues or give a certain amount of money? Any of these things are adding unnecessary requirements to what you need to believe to be saved.

I have just finished my bible in a year program and the last thing I read in Revelation always stands out for me. **It says** I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. 19 And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll.” We should be aware of what Jesus voice truly says not with extras, not missing things. And the best way to know his voice is to listen to it. Read the bible, listen to the bible, discuss the bible with other Christians, go to bible studies. The more we immerse ourselves in Gods word the easier it will be for us to hear his voice.

Finally maybe its not another religion or distortions of Christianity that we are in danger of hearing, maybe Jesus voice is getting drowned out by other things in our lives. Maybe it's a focus on money and things, maybe it's a focus on family and friends, maybe it's on education and career, maybe its 8 hours a day of internet and TV. In of themselves these things aren't bad, but when they become our focus, when they distract us from Jesus voice, from the bible then they can be as bad as listening to another religion entirely. In 2020 let's challenge ourselves to know Jesus voice more, to start reading the bible daily, to start going to a bible study.

If you are not following the voice of Jesus the shepherd who are you following? Everybody follows someone.

Let me Pray