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The Amen of Christmas Jesus: I am the Door John 10:7-9

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Sermon Text
John 10:7-9

⁷ So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

Introduction

Shepherds tend to get a bad rap. That is especially true this time of year when we rehearse the story of the birth of Jesus. The question is often posed this way, “Why would the birth of the long anticipated Messiah, God’s Son, the Savior, be announced to shepherds? The implication of the question is that the shepherds were on the low end of the totem pole when it came to the social structure within Israel. Often they are referred to as “lowly shepherds.” We do know that in later rabbinical writings, much later than the time of Christ, that shepherds eventually were looked down upon and despised. But it is unclear whether or not that was the common public opinion during the time of Christ. True, they were probably common people, but not necessarily “lower” than any other common person. There is nothing to suggest that they were lower than fishermen or carpenters. They definitely were not lower than tax collectors or lepers. So yes, there is comfort in knowing that this grand announcement was made to average “lowly” common folk like you and me. But I am not sure that they were singled out because they were somehow even less common than the average person.

Some have suggested that this grand announcement was made to these shepherds because they were tending the sheep that would eventually be sacrificed in the temple. That may be possible, being that Bethlehem was somewhat close to Jerusalem. Of course, Jesus is later identified as “*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*” When Joseph is told to take Mary as his wife and to not divorce her quietly, he is told of this baby, “*She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.*” And so perhaps this is why the birth of Jesus was announced to shepherds. It was their connection to sacrificial lambs and it was a way of pointing us to the true Lamb of God who will make final sacrifice for our sins.

And yet, I wonder if there isn't something more "royal" and "exalted" going on here in choosing the shepherds to receive this birth announcement the night our Lord was born. For example, in the Old Testament, God is often referred to as a "Shepherd." Of course, that famous passage immediately comes to mind, "*The LORD in my shepherd, I shall not want.*" But it is not a term that just speaks to the tender care of God for his people. It is often coupled with the idea of God ruling over his people. For example, in Psalm 80:1 we read, "*Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock.*" And then with exalted language it says, "*You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth.*" Here, this divine *Shepherd of Israel* is the exalted God who reigns over all things.

When the prophets began to talk about the coming birth of the Messiah, they too merged the idea of a shepherd with one who would be the ruler over God's people. For example, you have the prophecy of Micah, that identifies that town of Bethlehem as the eventual birth place of the Messiah. The prophet writes in Micah 5:2, "*But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, ancient days.*" And then it says in Micah 5:4, "*And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth.*"

In the Old Testament, the religious leaders of Israel were often referred to as shepherds and as shepherds, they were to take care of the souls of the people of Israel. But the prophet Ezekiel speaks out against the religious leaders of Israel for only thinking of themselves and neglecting to "spiritually feed" and care for the people of Israel. And so through the prophet Ezekiel, God says that he will come and be the shepherd of his people. Listen to what he says in Ezekiel 34:23-24, "*And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David.*" Remember, David was a shepherd who became a king and he was promised a son who rule over God's kingdom forever. Ezekiel continues, "*and he shall feed them, he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them.*" There it is again! This coming ruler and king will shepherd God's people and bring them peace.

So guess what we hear Jesus saying in our passage today, John 10? Guess what Jesus says of himself in John 10? He says in John 10:11, "*I am the good shepherd.*" Jesus is identifying himself as the one Ezekiel spoke about, the one who would both care for the people of God and be their ruler. He is the one Micah said would be born in Bethlehem, this ruler who would "*shepherd his flock.*" And so Jesus says, "*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*"

I wonder if this isn't why the birth of the Savior, our Lord, was made to shepherds. The angelic announcement given to them that night was, "*Fear not, for behold I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*" Lying in that manger was "*the good shepherd*" - he was one of them, if you will. Here is *the good shepherd* who has come to lay down his life for us so that we might find peace and forgiveness of sin.

I Am the Door

During this Advent Season we have been looking at the sayings of Jesus that begin with the phrase, "*Truly, truly, I say unto you.*" We hear Jesus use this statement twenty-five times in the Gospel of John. The word, "*truly, truly*" is the translation of the Hebrew word for "amen." You could translate this phrase, "*Amen, amen, I say unto you.*" In fact, we have been calling them "the double-amen statements of Jesus." The word "*amen*" means "so be it" or "may it be done in accordance with the will of God." When you give your "amen" to something, you are affirming it to be true. So when Jesus says, "*Truly, truly, I say unto you,*" he wants us to hear what he is saying because it is true. And furthermore, he is calling us to give "our amen" to what he has to say. Often, these double-amen statements tell us something important we need to know about Jesus.

In John 10:7, we come to another one of these "double-amen" statements. Here we read, "*So Jesus again said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.'*" This is the same passage where Jesus claims to be *the good shepherd*. So you could say, in this passage, Jesus is mixing his metaphors. He is the good shepherd. We know from other passages, he is also the "Lamb of God." And now, we discover, he is also "*the door of the sheep.*" You don't have to ask, "well which is he?" Is he the shepherd? Is he the lamb? Or, is he the door? He is all of these and more!

When Jesus said, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep,*" everyone knew exactly what he was talking about. Part of the job of the shepherd is to keep the sheep safe. He was there to protect the sheep. I love the image of David in 1 Samuel 17. As he stood before King Saul, this young man was building his case for why he could go out and face Goliath who had been taunting the soldiers of Israel. Basically, David was presenting his resume to the king by saying, "Listen, I am a shepherd and I had to rescue my sheep from bears and lions." I love when he says in 1 Samuel 17:35, "*I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and stuck him and killed him.*" That is what shepherds do. They protect their sheep.

So when Jesus said, “*I am the door of the sheep*” he was speaking of an image very familiar to the people of his day. In order to protect the sheep, the shepherds had stone enclosures where they could herd the sheep into a place of safety and there was only one opening, one way in and out. Often, the shepherd would stand guard at this opening, and at night he would often sleep at the opening. Quite literally, the shepherd was the door to the sheep pen. And so when Jesus claims to be the *door of the sheep* he is making a very strong and bold statement. There is only one door to the sheep pen. There is only one way in and out. He is the way by which the under-shepherds and the sheep must enter. It is through Jesus that we find our way to God.

In thinking about this claim Jesus makes, I would like us to think about common everyday doors and what a door symbolizes on a building.

A Door: Identity

First of all, think of “identity” when it comes to a door. You can often identify a building by the door. When looking for a certain house, you often are looking for a certain door to help you locate that house. Or, different kinds of doors are used for different kinds of buildings. The door to my house is different than a door you find at a school or a museum or a church. And so it is with Jesus. By claiming to be “*the door*” he was claiming that salvation is identified with him. If you are looking for salvation and the cleansing of your sin, it is identified with Jesus. He is the door.

This identity of Jesus as the way for salvation is wrapped up in the person of Jesus. A name you hear often during this season is the name “Immanuel.” It is a name applied to Jesus and it simply means “God with us.” A key question everyone has to answer, whether you realize it or not, has to do with the identity of Jesus. It is a question Jesus asked his disciples, “*Who do you say that I am?*” Peter, said, “*You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.*” In other words, core to our faith, is the recognition that Jesus is God in the flesh. Speaking of Jesus, Paul puts it this way in Philippians 2, “*though he was in the form of God, he did not consider equality with God as a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking on the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.*” Jesus is identified as God in the flesh. In doing so, he identifies himself with man and, at the same time, his identity as God means that he is the door. In a few moments we will sing, “*Silent night, holy night. Son of God, loves pure light. Radiant beams from thy holy face, with the dawn of redeeming grace. Jesus, Lord at thy birth. Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.*” He is salvation for everyone who turns in faith to him. He is the forgiveness of sin for anyone who repents and turns to him, no matter what is in your past.

Recently, I saw a moving story done by ESPN as part of their ESPN 60 documentary series. It was about a ten year old boy from Simsbury, CT. Barring a miracle, he is coming to the end of his battle with brain cancer, which resulted in multiple surgeries since he was three years old. Like many boys in this area, his room is filled with New England Patriots memorabilia, and of course, Tom Brady is his hero. Prior to his last surgery, he asked his doctor if he could have the number 12 etched into his skull. Both his mom and his doctor decided to do just that, given all that he has been through. When Tom Brady heard of this, he recorded a greeting for Logan and told Logan how much he admired this young boy and his perseverance. I love what Logan said when Tom Rinaldi asked Logan what he thought about Tom Brady sending him this video. He said, "I was so shocked. Tom Brady sent 'me' a message!" Rinaldi asked, "Why were you so shocked?" Rather incredulous, Logan replied, "He is freaking Tom Brady!"

When we come to the manger and see the wonder of the Christ child, we ought to have the same kind of reaction Logan had to someone far less than Jesus. We ought to say, "I am so amazed that God sent me a message. But it was more than a message. It was a person. He sent the Son of God to become a man like you and me so that we could know God. If you are looking for salvation, it is found in Jesus. If you are looking for freedom from guilt and hope for life beyond the grave, it is found in Jesus. If you are looking for meaning and purpose in life, it is found in Jesus. He is the door!"

A Door: Access

Secondly, a door also provides access into the building. That is the emphasis in verse 9, where Jesus says, "*I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.*" Access to God is through Jesus. In fact in John 10:8, Jesus speaks about "*thieves and robbers.*" According to verse 1, a thief and a robber is someone who tries to get into the sheepfold by climbing over the wall instead of going through the door. So Jesus says in John 10:1, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber.*" Access to God is through the door, through Jesus.

In the context of this passage, "*the thief and the robber*" is a reference to the religious leaders, the spiritual shepherds of Israel. In the previous chapter, John 9, Jesus heals a man who was born blind. This sends the religious leaders into a religious tizzy. After Jesus heals this man, the religious leaders haul him in and basically put this man on trial. They asked him questions like, "*How were your eyes opened?*" He told them, the man named Jesus healed me. "*Where is he?*" He responded, "I don't know." They brought

his parents in to verify whether or not he was their son who was born blind. Indeed, his parents positively identified him as their son. And so they turned to the parents and asked, “*How then does he now see?*” They were afraid of the religious leaders, so they said, “Ask him! He is of age and he can answer for himself.” Hauled in a second time before the religious leaders, this man who was healed looked at the religious leaders and said, “all I know is that I was blind, but now I see. Clearly this Jesus comes from God.” And so they kicked him out of the synagogue based on his testimony. The irony of this passage is that it is the religious leaders who are the ones living in darkness and are blind to the truth about Jesus. And so, as we move into John 10 and hear Jesus talk about “*thieves and robbers*” trying to make their way into the sheep pen, he is saying that even the religious leaders need to come through Jesus to find access to God.

It doesn't matter who you are, or what family you come from, or what race you belong to, or what job you hold or what religion you were raised in, or how “good” you might think you are. No one has access to God apart from Jesus. Our sin separates us from God. But when Jesus went to the cross, he took the judgment for our sin and he opened “the way” for us to come into the presence of God. Through faith in Jesus, who died and rose again, we have access to God. Through Jesus, we have relationship with God.

A Door: Security

Finally, a door symbolizes security for the one who finds refuge behind the door. It is a picture of safety. When we lock our doors at night, there is a feeling of safety that comes over us and so it is with Jesus. The promise for the sheep is that they will “*be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.*”

Do you ever notice that on many of the old churches the doors are red? There was a time where every piece of architecture in a church meant something. For many, the first thing you might think of when you see a red door on a church building, is the blood of Christ. Through the blood of Christ, his death, our sins are forgiven and we enter into his presence. But the symbol didn't stop there. Traditionally, red doors meant “sanctuary.” And anyone who comes through those doors should know that they are safe. In fact, there was a time, where you could not pursue an enemy beyond the safety of the red doors of a church. No one could be harmed or captured behind the red doors of a church. Behind those doors you found sanctuary.

So it is with Jesus. As the door, he gives security to all who enter through him. When Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead, he opened the door to God and to

heaven. And so, in that great psalm of the shepherd, Psalm 23, the promise for the one who enters through the door, through Jesus, is that not even death can harm him. *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me . . . Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”*

When Logan was asked about facing death in that ESPN story, I loved his response. He was asked, “What if anything scares you about the future?” Logan said, “It doesn’t, because I know I am going to go to heaven.” His dad said of Logan that he was “stoic and enduring” through the whole thing. And though the disease may take his son, it never broke him. How can that be? It is because when you go through the door, that is Jesus, nothing can separate you from the love of God. That is what makes this day so special. *“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”*

Conclusion

When you look at the manger scene and see the shepherds, take note of where their eyes are fixed. Their eyes are fixed on *the good Shepherd* who also happens to be *the door*. Salvation is identified with Jesus. Jesus gives us access to the Father. When by faith, you go through that door, through Jesus, you are safe.

Paul writes in Romans 8:31-39. *“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Enter by the narrow gate, through Jesus. And you will find life!