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**I am the Gate**  
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*John 10:1-10 (NIV)*

I'd like to begin by inviting you to think about John's Gospel. It is different than the other three Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, in that it has a different focus and narrative line. John's Gospel has sometimes been called a more "spiritual" Gospel. Because John is the beloved disciple, his viewpoint of Jesus is an inspiration for anyone who longs to have a deeper relationship, a closer walk, with Jesus. John has a theme of sevens running all through his Gospel; the "I Am" statements are one such thread.

In our series, we have learned that Jesus is the Bread of Life, gives us all the sustenance and nourishment we need; that Jesus is the Light of the World, he illuminates our lives and gives us direction; and now that Jesus is the gate, or the door, that through him we enter eternal life.

When Jesus says, "I am the gate for the sheep" in *John 10:7* and then again in *John 10:9*, "I am the gate," do we believe his claim is trustworthy? Even if we accept that Jesus is using metaphoric language, he's claiming to be the portal through which we must all pass if we hope to experience abundant, eternal life. *That's quite a claim!*

Let's listen to Jesus' words again in *John 10:1-10*, "*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. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 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. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.*"

*Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them. Therefore, Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."* *John 10:1-10 (NIV)*

Jesus longs for us *all* to have full, abundant life.

In our world, we have many sayings about doors, gates, and the like:

- "You make a better door than a window."
- "Opportunity knocks."
- "When one door closes, another one opens."
- "When good fortune knocks, open the door."

- “Change is a door that can only be opened from the inside.”
- “Personality can open doors, but only character can keep them open.”
- “Old ways won’t open new doors.” Put another way, “Old keys won’t open new locks.”
- “Trust God; sometimes a closed door is the hand of God protecting you or keeping you from a mistake.”
- “Be an opener of doors.” – Ralph Waldo Emerson
- “Enter by the narrow gate.” – Jesus (*Matthew 7:13*)
- “For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.” – Jesus (*Matthew 7:8; Luke 11:10*)

Literature is filled with famous doors, mystical portals into other realms. Think for a moment if you will about some of the most interesting gates and doors in literature.

1. There’s the **wardrobe**, a magical doorway to Narnia, in C. S. Lewis’ “The Chronicles of Narnia” to which we are introduced in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.
2. One of my personal favorites, the **cupboard door** in *The Indian and the Cupboard* by Lynne Reid Banks.
3. The many doors, beginning with the **rabbit hole** to Wonderland, in Lewis Carroll’s classic, *Alice in Wonderland*.
4. The **door to the garden** in Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret Garden*.
5. **Platform 9 ¾**, notable to any Rowling fans.
6. **The Doors of Durin** by J. R. R. Tolkien, magically recreated in “The Hobbit series,” the fantastic novel and cinematic prequel trilogy to the Lord of the Rings.

What makes these doors so memorable is the land of stories that lies beyond each one. They beckon us into realms of suspense, laughter, adventure, friendship, life lessons, and so much more. The author of each door gives us fair warning: *step through this door, and you may never be the same.*

Jesus says to all who are listening, “I am the gate,” or “I am the door.” He gives fair warning – when you enter this portal, you will never be the same. However, Jesus isn’t talking about entering into a land of fable and folklore. Rather, he is inviting us into the fullness of life in the way that leads to eternal salvation.

I have some images of several famous doors or gates in our world.

1. The first are the doors to the **Wittenberg Church**, where Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses.
2. **Auschwitz Concentration Camp** in Austria with the famous phrase, “Arbeit Macht Frei”.
3. Some may recognize **10 Downing Street**, the historic London residence of the Prime Minister.
4. Then we have the doors to **St. Peter’s Basilica** in Vatican City.
5. Finally, the gates to **Green Lake Conference Center** in Green Lake, WI, the American Baptist Assembly Ground.

I have passed through the gates of the Green Lake Conference Center several times. Just as you prepare to enter the grounds, and the last thing before leaving, you see these mighty iron gates, inviting each one to remember the significance of the moments spent there. I attended the Fellowship of American Baptist Musicians for years during my youth under the direction of wonderful clinicians and counselors. They cultivated in me a deep love for music and song. We enjoyed youth and children's choirs, adult choir, handbells, organ, orchestra, jazz band. My love grew and grew for giving thanks to God through music.

In earlier years, I lived near the Golden Gate Bridge, which upon its completion was the tallest suspension bridge in the world. It remains to this day a symbol of strength, beauty, and prosperity, built across the one mile straight of water that connects the San Francisco Bay to the Pacific Ocean, known as the Golden Gate. It was in this region where prospectors found gold and where the gold rush of 1849 took place, which symbolized another kind of abundance. This gateway serves as a reminder of the riches that some people found, and along with them, the struggles, the joys, the losses, and the lessons.

Not far from there stands the great Redwood National Park, a larger-than-life forest full of dizzying sequoia trees, impressive sentinels serving as guardians of a gateway to nature's abundance and the beauty of God's creation.

In grade school, I daydreamed and wrote of magical portals that led to other dimensions. How incredible it would be, I thought, to be translated through a shimmering, interdimensional doorway from one place to another, not unlike being 'beamed up' or crossing the threshold of a stargate.

For Jesus' original listeners in the setting of the Ancient Near East, a gate was the entry point into a walled, protected city, just as a gate was the entry way into a pen for sheep. Think of the mighty, invincible gates of Troy, protecting its inhabitants from invading armies. How did the Greeks pass the gates, but brought a great gift, a giant, wooden horse, symbol of the city of Troy? The Trojans, thinking they had bested the Greek armies, eagerly took the horse into their city, filled with hidden soldiers.

If you wanted to get into the city among its people, if a sheep wanted to rest safely in the sheep pen among other sheep, the gate must be passed. Even to this day, for all who visit the Old City of Jerusalem in Israel, you must first pass through one of the city's many gates that have stood the test of time (The Eight Gates of Jerusalem).

This will be familiar to Nancy and Ramzy Asfour who just returned from a wonderful trip to Israel. We're glad you're home and that you had what sounds like an incredible journey!

One of my favorite theologians, Shelby Greemore, who has also visited Jerusalem and the Holy Land, reminded me that gates have two purposes: to keep things out, and to keep things in.

**What are some things we need to keep out of our lives, and what do we need to hold fast?**

**Is some hidden sin weighing you down?**

***Bring it through the gate into Jesus' arms.***

**Is there a relationship habit plaguing your spiritual growth?**

***Bring it to Jesus, who is the Gate.***

**Is there a desire, a hunger, and a thirst, to see your spiritual maturity full and complete?**

***Bring it through the doorway into the realm of perfection in Christ by laying self aside and living into the fullness of being a new creation in Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 5:17)***

Brothers and sisters, if we desire to enter God's holy city, if we wish to walk among God's holy people, we've got to go through Jesus. He himself is the way to a land of safety and security. In him, the promises of God are brought to fruition, yes and amen.

The alternative is a less-than desirable option. Last week our student ministry reminded us of this truth with the lesson from *Hebrews 12*, Throw Out the Trash; get rid of the things that are holding you down and holding you back. Think of the soldiers stealthily creeping out of the wooden horse and opening the gates wide for the invading army to attack by night. Stealing, killing, and destruction characterize other paths to life and other gates than Jesus, who instructed his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount,

Wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leads to destruction, a well-traveled path. Small is the gate and narrow the path that leads to salvation, a quiet road. (*Matthew 7:13-14*, paraphrased)

***Why wouldn't we simply choose life, abundant life, and salvation, safety, and security?***

Would you be surprised to know that it is because of these very things themselves? When we chase after the illusion of prosperity, safety, and security in any way other than Christ in this life, and when we lose our focus on eternal, unchanging realities, we neglect to choose the life that is really life.

When we try to make our own way or put our own stake in the ground apart from a firm foundation in Jesus, the lot line is temporary at best, and what is the eternal benefit to us?

When we try to do our best, be good enough, or save ourselves by our good works, we run the risk of trying to become our own savior, our own gate to safe pastures, which can never be.

*So let's choose Jesus, who is **the Gate**.*

Jesus talks about the relationship between shepherds and their sheep in this "I Am" statement as being one of respect, mutuality, and care. He contrasts this to relationships where selfish ambition reigns, which leads to the loss of abundant life.

We are the sheep. We are the ones who are invited to go in and out and find pasture in the Lord. We follow Jesus because we know his voice. The thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy, but this is how we can know Jesus: he is the one who has come to give us abundant life.

How often do we encounter people who want to give us abundant life? It's human nature to want to keep and enjoy abundance for ourselves, but Jesus comes to share abundance. When we are willing to put our faith in him, immediately we experience the blessing of life in him, and we desire to share that with others.

Now, there is a difference between a gate and a door, and Jesus is both. A gate is usually outside, separating one piece of land from the next. A door usually separates things inside the house. Jesus wants to set the priorities **inside and outside** our hearts and lives, wants to have an impact on all we say and do and how we live.

Notice that Jesus doesn't say, "I am A gate, but I am THE gate." Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved (*Acts 4:12*). In an age of complementarianism, compromise, and pluralism, it can sound like the epitome of closed-mindedness to repeat such a claim of Christ. However, the invitation is open to all. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts...today is the day of salvation (*Psalms 95:7-8; Hebrews 3:15*)

One of my favorite quotes is the following, the three gates of speech. We can pass these gates wherever we are in the world on a daily basis.

Before you speak, let your words pass through three gates.

At the first gate, ask yourself, "Is it true?"

At the second gate ask, "Is it necessary?"

At the third gate ask, "Is it kind?"

This poem was penned by the great Sufi poet Rumi and remains a practice we can embrace and easily engage at any age.

Rumi's words were re-written in 1835 by Beth Day into a poem called, "Three Gates":

*If you are tempted to reveal  
A tale to you someone has told  
About another, make it pass,  
Before you speak, three gates of gold.*

*These narrow gates: First, "Is it true?"  
Then, "Is it needful?" In your mind  
Give truthful answer. And the next  
Is last and narrowest, "Is it kind?"*

*And if to reach your lips at last  
It passes through these gateways three,  
Then you may tell the tale, nor fear  
What the result of speech may be.*

I pondered those three gates: true, necessary, and kind. I realized that they correspond to the three parts of the Hebrew Bible. **T** for Torah, the law, where we learn the truth about God's holy love; **N** for Neviim, the prophets, who speak necessary truths about God's love to God's people; and **K** for Ketuviim, the writings, filled with examples of God's loving faithfulness and kindness.

**T**True. **N**Necessary. **K**Kind.

Torah (Law). Neviim (Prophets). Ketuviim (Writings).

Together, those three make up the TNK (Tanakh), 39 books of the Hebrew Bible, which we call the Old Testament. We can pass through the Old Testament and still miss Jesus.

I've heard those three gates expanded to five gates: THINK.

Is it **t**true? Is it **h**elpful? Is it **i**nspiring? Is it **n**ecessary? Is it **k**ind?

I suppose you could add: is it the right time, in the right way, with the right tone, in the right place...? It seems there can be no end to gates if our goal is not to offend. Why go through any? Why not remain silent and hold our peace?

Jesus promises to protect us and speaks words of love over us when we enter through the Gate. He is able to keep us safe, *and even* when we go out to find pasture, he is still there with us. Whether the Berlin Wall and the Great Wall of China crumble to dust, Jesus's love for us remains.

If it is important to gauge and guard our words, how much more the state of our souls? Let us pass through the one gate, through Christ, into God's realm of love and find abundant pasture. He will keep us safe, and his words are true and can be trusted.

Come, find safe passage, protection, and eternal life. Follow the Master, Jesus, and in him find the life that is really life. I invite you to pray with me.

### **Prayer**

Jesus, Bread of Life, feed those who are hungry.

Jesus, the Light of the World, light our sometimes-dark path.

Jesus, the Gate, fling with the doors that lead to life, and lead us through them. Help us to know that you are walking with us each step of the way, we pray in your holy and worthy name. Amen.

### **Questions for Discussion or Reflection:**

1. What are some of your most beloved doorways or gates?
2. How is Jesus like a door or a gate?
3. How is Jesus calling you to enter into fresh pastures in your life?
4. Where do you need safety and security in your present situation?
5. Who can you reach out to for prayer today?
6. Read *Psalms 121*. How does this Psalm, a song of ascents, remind you of Jesus' words in John 10?
7. Can you think of other scriptures that remind you of *John 10:1-10*?