

June 30- July 4, 2025 Edition

Following
The Year^(s) Of Jesus Part 182
I Am The Gate

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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday:

Those who heard Jesus use this illustration didn't understand what he meant, so he explained it to them: "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep... John 10:6 (NLT)

The disciples saw Jesus do many other miraculous signs in addition to the ones recorded in this book. But these are written so that you may continue to believe[d] that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name. John 20:30-31 (NLT)

Reflection: This week is going to be a doozie as far as trying to understand what Jesus is talking about in John chapter 10. We are currently in a series looking at the 8 "I Am" statements of Jesus from the book of John. They are for the most part scattered throughout John's 20 chapter book about the life of Jesus. It is John's way of bringing the reader to faith... he says so in the last line of his book about Jesus. You read it before you read this so hopefully it's still fresh in your mind.

Jesus did tons of other stuff that I haven't written about in this book, but the things I did write about I wrote to instill faith in you. That's John's purpose statement and he inserts it in the very last line of his book.

In the first chapter of his book is the means by which faith is instilled... when someone asked if Jesus could possibly be Who He claimed to be a man named Philip just replied, "come and see for yourself".

So now John lets you read for yourself what Jesus claimed to be and then you can decide what you believe. Like I said earlier... he sprinkles these "I Am" statements pretty much uniformly throughout his book, giving the reader time to digest one outrageous statement from Jesus about Who He is (the Bread of Life; the Light of the World; the Gate; the Good Shepherd; the Way, the Truth & the Life; the True Vine; the Resurrection and the Life; the I AM) before they get to the next outrageous statement from Jesus about Who He claims to be. Except for here in John chapter 10. Here Jesus makes 2 "I Am" statements not just in the same chapter... but in the same story. He tells a story about a sheep pen, some sheep, a shepherd and a gate and then claims to be both the Good Shepherd and the Gate.

Huh? How can He be two of the metaphors in the story? It's making my brain hurt just thinking about it. If that's how you feel don't be alarmed. You're in good company. Nobody got it then either. In fact the word that John uses which is translated as "illustration" in the New Living Translation is sometimes translated as "parable" (although it's a different word from the regular parables in the Bible), "proverb" or simply "story". But the word is tough to translate. It refers to a story so packed with meaning it's tough to understand. It's like a graduate level analogy being used in a kindergarten class. No wonder they didn't understand. No wonder it takes time for us. This is like a compressed computer file that has to be shrunk down to size in order to be sent from one computer to another. Tons of information condensed into a small space.

We'll spend the next week trying to unpack it. So for today just spend some time thinking about what it means that Jesus is the Gate & the Good Shepherd.

Tuesday:

Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. John 10:9 (NLT)

Oh what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sins are put out of sight. Yes, what joy for those whose sin is no longer counted against them by the Lord.

Romans 4:7-8 (NLT)

"For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope." Jeremiah 29:11 (NLT)

His power at work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine. Ephesians 3:20 (CEV)

Reflection: Ok... so Jesus is the Gate. And the first thing He tells us about the Gate is that it's the entry point to salvation. But that word gets tossed around so much... what does it mean to be "saved"?

Well, I used to think it was just about life after death. That if I was saved I had a home in Heaven when this life was over. That all God cared about in this life was me doing what it took to get "in". Other than that... this was just a sort of purgatory to be endured until real life got started after I died here.

The more I read the Bible the more I see what a crock that kind of thinking is. Jesus cares deeply about this life. He did come to provide us with a place for the next life but that's not all He came to do. He came to do at least 3 other things:

1. He came to save me from my past. In other words, everything that has happened to me that prevents me from really living. Some of it my own doing and some of it due to the decisions of others that have impacted my life. We spend so much of our lives dealing with the guilt, regret and shame associated with our past. But Jesus can save you from that. He can't go back and prevent those things from occurring. He can't even go back and make the bad stuff in your past, good. But He can wipe out the record of those things so that you are on a firm footing with God. You and I have to deal with the consequences of our past, but we don't have to live with the shame, guilt or regret associated with those consequences.
2. He also came to save me from my future. In other words, all of the fear, anxiety and worry about what may or may not happen tomorrow. Jesus wants to save me from that. If we "enter" through the Gate then He saves us from a future without hope. He never promises that we won't have troubles in our future, in fact He promises the opposite:

I have told you these things so that you can have peace. In this world you will have trouble, but be brave, for I have defeated the world! John 16:33 (NCV)

What He promises is you'll never have to go through anything alone. And He promises that He has a plan for your future. So enter through the Gate and live a life free from fear, worry and anxiety (at least that's the plan... it's not like we don't struggle with it but He will help you move forward if you let Him).

3. He also came to save me from my now... from my present. How? By freeing us from the crippling effects of guilt, regret and shame paired with anxiety, fear & worry we are free to live today at our best, and there are people in this life that are counting on you to live today at your best. He promises His power to give you a life filled with meaning, joy, peace and purpose.

And that's what it means for Jesus to "save" you. He wants to free you to live an amazing life right here, right now. It's one part of what it means to enter through the Gate.

Wednesday:

Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely. John 10:9 (NLT)

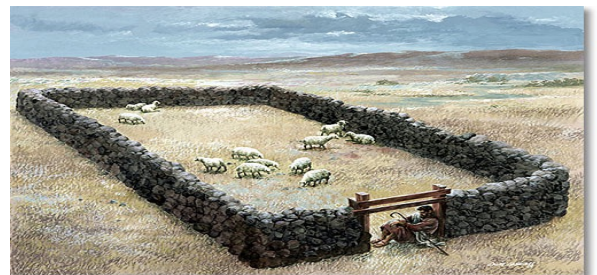
Reflection: Not only will we be saved... we will also come in and go out. But what does that mean?

Well, let's look at the analogy of the gate, the sheep and the shepherd. Jesus is the Shepherd... He's also the Gate. I know... so much meaning compressed in this one story. But that makes us the sheep. And we'll talk more about sheep next week but for the purposes of this lesson let's look at the sheep pen.

It was a place of safety... of security. The shepherds would look for a place to spend the night that provided a natural enclosure so the sheep couldn't get out and get into trouble and so that nothing could get in to hurt the sheep. Then the shepherd himself would lay down at the only entrance to the enclosure so if any of the sheep started to wander they'd have to go over him and if anything wanted to get in to harm the sheep they'd have to go over him.

And Jesus says, I am the gate. Does that give you a visual picture of what Jesus is trying to say?

The sheep would stay in the sheep pen until the shepherd was confident that there was no danger and then the shepherd would move away from the entrance and the sheep could go out and come back in at will with the confidence that the shepherd had them covered... no matter what. They had a place of confidence and stability. Now this is one of the most confusing parts of Christianity to me. Jesus makes this statement- the sheep will go in and come out- and later in John 10 He says this:



"I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me, for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father's hand. The Father and I are one." John 10:28-30 (NLT)

Now I believe this is absolutely true- but it doesn't mean you won't be attacked. In fact, for those of you who got baptized this weekend- don't be surprised if this week doesn't turn out to be a rough week, if things start going wrong for you. Because there are some very powerful forces who won't like what you've done. They'll attack and try to get you to

question your decision. "Why would God let this happen. Didn't I do what He wanted me to do? Why is this happening now?"

And to a certain extent I think churches can make this worse... because we generally only tell stories of how God saves someone miraculously... which I believe happens... but we don't add the disclaimer that sometimes God doesn't seem to intervene and people are hurt or worse... If you know the story of Peter being broken out of prison by an Angel then you have heard about God's power to save His people. And it's true... God's power is unlimited and He does some absolutely amazing things to save His people in this life. But not always.

In that story from the book of Acts, Peter is indeed miraculously saved. But back up to the beginning of that story and you'll see that Peter isn't alone when he gets arrested. James is with him. Herod brings them before the people and immediately kills James. Poof! James is gone. The people seem to enjoy this so much Herod decides to stretch out the festivities and kill Peter the next day. That's when Peter is sprung from the local jail. Peter's family praises the miraculous power of God to save His people but James' family has to be saying, "what about James? Why didn't he get God's miraculous protection? Couldn't God have saved James just like He did Peter?"

I've spent a lot of time thinking about this. I've seen it at work in my own life and in many of your lives when God seems to stand back and let things happen that in my mind He could have easily fixed or prevented. And I have to admit, I don't know what the answer is. I still don't know why sometimes God seems to step in and intervene and sometimes He seems to stand back and let things occur. It is a question that has kept me up at night- in fact some of the darkest nights of my soul have been because of this question. It's a question that is dealt with in depth in the book, *The Shack*, by they way. In that book a man's daughter is killed and he is plagued by this question... why didn't God stop it? He's pretty ticked off at God and that's me using a nice word for it. And to make a long story short... He goes to the shack where his daughter was killed and spends the weekend with God and there are several conversations about this very question which for me was very helpful...

But here's the thing. Jesus never promises a rose garden. At least not all the time. In the 23rd Psalm we are told that the shepherd leads us to quiet places where our souls can be restored but it also says that even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death... I will fear no evil for you are with me. It never promises you won't have to go through that valley. We all do. All of us. It is one of the things we all have in common. This world and the forces of darkness can throw some very nasty stuff at you. What Jesus promises is not a trouble free existence. What He promises is to walk through each trouble with you. And when the trouble becomes so severe that it causes your day to end at death's door- which it will for all of us at some point in the future- Jesus promises that you won't have to take that walk alone either.

For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes in him will not be disappointed."
Romans 10:11 (NASB)

Like I said, I used to look at that and think, oh yeah... what about people like James in the Bible who are killed? Wasn't he disappointed? But now I think no, I don't think so. In fact, if when we get to heaven we were to find Peter and James and ask them who got the better deal that day when James was killed and Peter was spared, I have a feeling they'd both say,

James. See it's those who have already been "disappointed" in this life and have gone on to the next life that understand this verse better than any of us. And because of that we can have confidence in this life. Even if we are threatened with death. I'm not saying it's easy but it's one of the things the shepherd wants to provide us with that if we enter through the gate we are given. But there's one more thing that entering through the gate gives us which we'll look at tomorrow.

Thursday:

Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life. John 10:9-10 (NLT)

Reflection: Ok... what does it mean to find "good pastures"? Well, I think He's talking about a place where the sheep can be nourished, doesn't that make sense? And that's what Jesus wants to provide us with. A place where we can feel secure and confident, a place where we are freed from the energy we waste on the guilt, shame and regret of the past and the worry, fear and anxiety of the future so we are freed up to become who and what God created us to be.

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)

God planned you. He made you the way you are on purpose. He designed you with your unique gifts, skills, abilities, likes/dislikes & personality to play your part in His plan for human history. If you are here it's because God dreamed you up. That means there is no such thing as an illegitimate child in this world. There are TONS of illegitimate parents running around out there forsaking their sacred task of caring for precious little masterpieces as they grow up and mature, but there aren't any illegitimate children. If you're here, God knew you were coming and made plans for your life.

And when I have the energy to live the way God intends for me to live and the confidence/stability to know that whatever happens in the future, I'm with God, then miraculous things can happen in a person's life. I have seen this first hand in my own life. On July 6, 1984 I entered in through the Gate. Again. I was 20 years old but had spent the last 3 1/2 years stumbling through a drug and alcohol induced haze. I had tried tons of times to break free but nothing worked for me. Until I turned to Jesus and said, "ok... if you really want my life, I'll give it to You. But I don't really know what that's going to look like. So I'll start doing everything I already know to do and I'll do my best to learn what I don't know yet but if You and I are ever going to have a close relationship, well that's going to have to come from You because I don't know how to make that happen."

And so I started. I had a lot to learn but I immediately felt the influence of Jesus in my life. And at first it took every ounce of my energy just to not do something that would plunge me back into my old life. It was truly one day at a time for me.

But as time went by subtle changes occurred. As I saw Jesus working in my life I came to trust Him more and more. And as He answered my prayers (not always giving me what I wanted but doing what was best for me) my feelings for Him changed. There is nothing like

seeing God's hand in your life to give you the feelings we think we're supposed to have but don't feel.

Over the last 41 years God has transformed my life in ways I would never have imagined were possible. As I lived within the environment of forgiveness and God's plan for my future I was able to find a place of stability and confidence that has changed me. I'm still Ed, but I'm more "Ed" than I used to be if that makes sense. I am learning that I am exactly who God created me to be. Using my gifts, skills and abilities along with my singularly unique personality to become who He created me to become and doing my best to help others find out who He created them to become. It's going to look different in all of us, but to find the life that He designed you to live is to feel like you are truly living. To feel within yourself that this is exactly what life is supposed to look like. That you are finding the way to your God given identity and destiny. And that in a nutshell, is what eternal life is. Life and more life beginning here and now and moving with ever increasing glory into the future, no matter how long that future may be on this earth.

Friday:

To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Colossians 1:27 (NIV)

Reflection: Ok... the last devotional thought for this week and I wanted to leave you with this idea.

Everything that happened in the Old Testament was paving the way for Jesus to be the Gate for you to find salvation, stability and confidence and eternal life. All along the way the prophets were given small bits of prophecy concerning God's plan. They were dying to know what He was up to but they never got to find out this side of Heaven.

Even the angels were dying to figure out what God was up to. The beings who could explain to us everything we've ever wondered about when it comes to creation, the flood, or any other number of things we've wished God gave us more info on in the Bible, the Angels could tell us. But there's one thing that the Angels need us to explain to them:

The story of Grace. How it feels for God's Grace to touch a life that was filled with regret, guilt, shame, fear, anxiety & worry. How God transforms human lives that seem to be beyond saving.

That's a story I could tell the Angels. It's a story Jesus wants all of us to be able to share. In Colossians Paul lets the cat out of the bag (I wonder where that saying came from? I know I digress but it just makes me wonder. Maybe the Angels could enlighten me on that one too). He says, "hey... psssst... wanna know what the mystery of the ages is? Ok... here it is."

It's Christ in you. The hope of glory.

I used to think that when he said, "glory", he was talking about heaven. That our hope was heaven. And it is, don't get me wrong. It's our birthright. It's our destiny. But it's more than that.

It's also the only way you and I are ever going to live a glorious life. In some kind of mind bending, Matrix sort of reality Jesus is both the Gate for us to enter into the very presence of God, and He's the Gate that allows God to enter into us.

Christ in us, the hope of glory.

And now He invites us to enter into this duality of living our lives with one foot firmly planted in Heaven and the other firmly planted here on earth with God dwelling within us. When that happens, there is nothing like it. And people start to see in us the Real Jesus.

Not a Jesus that someone else explains. Not a Jesus that is some kind of a cookie cutter clone. But the Real Jesus. The Jesus Who shines through each one of our unique personalities and shows the world a different side of God. I am not the Real Jesus by myself... but together, hopefully, we show the world the Real Jesus. It's the hope of glory. So I'm going to leave you today with the lyrics from the Downhere song, The Real Jesus (find it on iTunes and listen to it... somebody please show me, The Real Jesus).

Jesus is awesome!

The Real Jesus:

Jesus on the radio, Jesus on a late night show ~ Jesus in a dream, looking all serene
Jesus on a steeple, Jesus in the Gallup poll ~ Jesus on the radio, Jesus on a late night show
Jesus in a dream, looking all serene ~ Jesus on a steeple, Jesus in the Gallup poll
Jesus has His very own brand of rock and roll

Watched Him on the silver screen ~ Bought the action figurine
But Jesus is the only name that makes you flinch

Oh, can anybody show me the real Jesus?
Oh, let Your love unveil the mystery of the real Jesus

Jesus started something new ~ Jesus coined a phrase or two
Jesus split the line at the turning point of time
Jesus sparked a controversy ~ Jesus, known for His mercy, gave a man his sight
Jesus isn't white
Jesus loves the children, holds the lambs
Jesus prays a lot
Jesus has distinguishing marks on His hands

Oh, can anybody show me the real Jesus?
Oh, let Your love unveil the mystery of the real Jesus

If anybody walks behind the Good Shepherd
If anybody holds the hands that heal lepers
And if you recognize the eyes that see forever, please...

Jesus, Jesus
Oh, can anybody show me Jesus
Oh, let Your love unveil the glory, the real Jesus