

John 10:7-10 I am the gate

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We've spent a couple of weeks looking at the 'I am' sayings of Jesus.

I am the bread of life.

I am the light of the world.

Today we are up to 'I am the gate'.

It's a metaphor that only lasts a few verses

before Jesus swaps to another metaphor 'the Good Shepherd'.

The Good Shepherd which we will cover next week

is an evocative picture.

It lends itself to a range of Christian organisations,

including a welfare organisation locally.

But even 'the gate' is taken up by Christians.

We have Gateway Church, a significant independent church in Seaford.

There's Lifegate church in Glen Waverly.

There are gates out there.

Though to a first look,

it's not the most exciting metaphor.

I mean, all our gates seem to do is shift a bit so the hinges won't latch.

I doubt your gates are that much more exciting than ours.

But let's get excited,

because Jesus is the gate for the sheep.

What does he mean when he says he's the gate?

Well it helps a bit to know how they cared for sheep in the first century.

In our world, you build fences around your paddocks.

That's to stop the sheep from wandering off.

And you might shoot or poison feral animals that would attack the sheep.

I'm not a farmer,

but I think those would be the top options to protect your sheep today.

In the first century, they didn't really build fences around their properties.

They had boundary marking stones,
so that you knew where your land finished and the neighbour's began.
So the gate wasn't a gate in your driveway,
that opened the way between your place and the outside world.
The gate was the entrance to the sheep pen.
They had two ways of trying to keep their sheep safe.
There was the shepherd and the sheep pen.
There was a problem with wild animals putting the sheep in danger,
pretty much like we have today.
Except probably worse.
They didn't have guns or poisons
to keep down the population of wild animals.
So if there was a lion or a bear or something,
then it was the shepherd's job to fight it off
and keep the sheep safe.
But they realised
that even the best shepherds are going to need to sleep at night.
And shepherds in the first century
didn't come equipped with night vision goggles.
And a lot of the animals
that might prey on your flock are more active at night.
So night is a problem.
Their solution to the problem was to build sheep pens.
During the day, the sheep could go out and eat pasture.
At night, the shepherd would lead them back to sheep pen for safety.
The sheep pens would have high enough walls to keep out wild animals.
And they would have a gate to let the sheep in and out.
In for safety at night.
Out for food during the day.
And Jesus says, "I am the gate".
That is, he's the one who allows them to go out for pasture
and in for safety.

In Jesus' words, Jn 10:9 "They will come in and go out and find pasture."
So that helps us understand what it meant
to be the gate for sheep in the first century.
The gate was the means by which you could have security at night
and food by day.
So if you were to apply this metaphor to people,
Jesus is saying he is our security and our supply of what we need.

Well it doesn't take much thought to see that Jesus is claiming
that he does what God did for his people in the Old Testament.
The Lord God is our security and the source of blessings
in the Old Testament.

So for example Psalm 18:2.

"The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer;
my God is my rock in whom I take refuge,
my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold."

Well the word 'gate' might not be there.

But just about every other metaphor for security you could think of is.
A rock, a fortress, a deliverer, a shield, a stronghold.

They are all metaphors for security.

And so it is here that Jesus the gate is our security.

If you want some confirmation that gates were looked to for security,
you need look no further than the book of Nehemiah.

All the effort Nehemiah goes to, to reconstruct the gates of Jerusalem
is precisely because Israel needs security from their enemies.

In the Old Testament,

the Lord God is also the source of supply of everything we need.

This time we don't even need to stray from the imagery of the passage.

"The Lord is my Shepherd,

I lack nothing.

He makes me lie down in green pastures,

he leads be beside quiet waters."
I don't need to tell you which Psalm that one comes from.
There's not much difference
between a gate allowing the sheep access to pasture,
and a shepherd leading the sheep out to pasture.
In either case the point is that God is the provider of good things.

God is our security and our supply.
And here Jesus says, "I am the gate."
I am your security and I supply your needs.
What does it mean for us that Jesus is our security and supply?
I think it means we can work backwards
from what Jesus gives us as security,
and decide that those things must be most important.
Worrying about safety has become an obsession.
It was already an obsession and then we had a pandemic
and the obsession became extreme.
It's as though we have temporarily forgotten
that we are all going to die one day.
They used to say that the only two certainties in life were death and taxes.
That's about right.
I imagine that the obsession with safety
would fade somewhat if I lived in the Ukraine.
When there is the prospect of meeting a Russian tank
up close and personal,
I'm going to be less concerned
about removing the swings from the local children's playground
because someone might get hurt.
But what sort of security does Jesus offer?
Fundamentally, it's eternal security.
He's not offering protection against Russian tanks or pandemics.
As I said in a sermon last year,

the people marching with "the blood of Jesus is my vaccine" placards were seriously misguided.

Jesus is offering security against the judgement of God.

He is offering security of knowing that when you've lived for yourself and made mistakes that have hurt other people that you can still stand before God.

Think about Zacchaeus the tax collector.

He'd ripped lots of people off.

If he lived today,

there would have been a lynch mob on social media baying for his blood.

But what did Jesus say?

"The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost, for this man too is a child of Abraham."

Jesus offered Zacchaeus security.

Not the security that says that he would suddenly become popular.

I'm guessing that didn't happen.

But it was the security of knowing that he stood accepted in God's sight.

A guy who'd accepted that he'd done the wrong thing,

who was willing to make amends where he could,

but wasn't trusting in his efforts to make amends to save him.

He was trusting in Jesus.

Jesus offers us security and he offers to supply our needs.

That's the other thing the gate did for the sheep.

When night was over and it was day again,

they could go out of the gate to munch on some juicy, juicy green grass.

Jesus own words for his promise of supply are,

Jn 10:10 "I have come that they may have life and have it to the full."

When I was studying at Ridley,

I did some part time work with the Deakin Uni Christian Union group.

And some of the students wanted to get a tee shirt printed,

"Life to the full" in reference to the verse here.

It was 20 odd years ago
so I can't remember whether the tee shirts ever made the light of day.
But it's an interesting choice of a tag line for your Christian group.
Back in the day, I would have been more of a Jn 3:16 man.
Or even a 1 Jn 3:16 man,
"This is how we know what love is:
Jesus Christ laid down his life for us."
That's what my kids are wearing at the moment.
I probably would have thought of 'life to the full' as a bit soft.
A bit too much like
you were trying to avoid the core message of repentance and faith.
Like you were ashamed of the cross.
A bit too much like
you were trying to get people to join your group
because you were cooler than the cool kids.
And possibly there was some of that there.
But you can never tell the full story in a tag line.
I wonder if 'life to the full' is not so bad.
One of the great misconceptions in our society at the moment
is that Christians are killjoys
who voluntarily put themselves under all kinds of needless restrictions.
The non Christian thinks,
"I can have sex with whomever I want whenever I want
and you guys are missing out.
I'm out fishing with my mates on a Sunday morning,
while you guys are sitting in there with your masks on."
It's a good thing to remember
that Jesus is the gate to beautiful green pasture for his sheep.
He didn't come to steal our fun or restrict us.
He came that we might have life to the full.
Now yes there are going to be times where we need to explain
that life to the full

does include faithfulness within God's good gift of marriage.
But that shouldn't be too much of a stretch
when you look at how much hurt and betrayal,
misery and low self esteem,
goes hand in hand with the sexual free for all that our society encourages.
Jesus' life to the full will look a bit different
to the picture of life to the full that your average non Christian dreams up.
But that's largely because their picture of life to the full
has been twisted by the lies of the evil one.
He tells them that behaviours and attitudes that will wind up hurting them
are going to be great fun.
They get sucked in and find out later it's not fun at all.

Jesus is the gate.
It means he's our security.
The security of knowing we stand accepted in God's sight.
He offers us the supply of everything we need to live life to the full.
And it's very important
that we realise that it is indeed life to the full that Jesus gives us.
Ours is not an impoverished and restricted existence.

But there's one more thing in our passage about Jesus being the gate.
We couldn't consider Jesus as the gate,
without contrasting him to the people who aren't the gate.
In 10:8 "All who came before me are thieves and robbers."
Who are these thieves and robbers?
They are people who set themselves up as leaders of God's people
and try to take them on a journey.
Jesus isn't talking about Moses or Joshua or David.
He's talking about people who claimed to be the Messiah.
You see Jesus was not the only person or the first person
to claim to be the Jewish Messiah.

The prophets said that God would send a future great leader.
A man in the line of David.
A prophet like Moses.
But when the centuries dragged on,
there was no shortage of fellows who said,
"I am he.
I am the one God has sent you."
They could spin a good story.
But God had not sent them.
And Jesus says they are thieves and robbers.

What do thieves and robbers do?
They steal and kill and destroy.
That's right, isn't it?
The farmer creates something that benefits others.
He grows food that gives him a livelihood.
But he also gives work to the butcher and the miller and baker
and they get a livelihood too.
But a thief creates nothing.
He just steals things that others have gotten through hard work.
And if someone tries to stop him,
not uncommonly, his theft turns to murder.
And if something gets between him and what he wants to steal,
your front door or your window,
he will happily destroy things to get what he wants.
"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy."

Let's skip over the false messiah's of Jesus time
and go straight to the false messiah's of our day.
Who are they?
The two that spring to my mind at the moment
are Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin.

They hold out before their people the promise of greatness.

That's what a messiah does.

Xi says, "I will make China the greatest nation on earth.

Follow me and we will be the strongest nation on earth militarily and economically."

Vladimir says, "I will restore Russia to her glory days.

It will be like the days of old when the Czars ruled.

The smaller neighbouring peoples

looked to the great Russian people for leadership."

These are messianic visions.

They are the false messiah's equivalent to life to the full.

But how do they aim to achieve their vision of utopia?

Well they will steal and kill and destroy.

The lives of the young Russian soldiers

who have been captivated by promises of Russian greatness,

many of those lives will be stolen early,

if Vladimir pursues his dreams.

And they will kill people in the Ukraine

who resist giving up their freedom

in the service of someone else's dreams of glory.

And the destruction will be terrible.

Power stations and dams,

service stations and bridges,

railway lines and airports.

All will come under a hail of missiles.

The destruction of even a short war will take decades to repair.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.

False messiahs aren't interested in you having life to the full.

They are interested in dangling dreams of greatness

in front of your eyes like a mirage,

and using you in the service of their ambition.

If you compare that to Jesus,

he gave up his own life
that we might have life to the full.
He is the gate that we come through to pasture.
False messiahs inevitably use us as the gate to their greatness.
Our lives forfeit to their dreams.

OK, I get it, the analogy is topical but not super relevant.
No one here is likely to give up their life in the service of Xi or Vladimir.
If you think about it more broadly,
there are other thieves around.
False messiahs making false promises.
But it's a little more abstract than Russia and China right now.
The fashion industry promises women mostly
the green pastures of beauty,
and steals their money by charging outrageous amounts for clothes,
kills lives of the workers in their sweat shops who make the clothing
and destroys the environment by encouraging a throwaway society.
The pornography industry promises men mostly
the green pastures of sexual gratification,
and steals their minds so they can't think about anything else,
kills the people who produce their videos with suicide and drug addiction,
and destroys the relationships of addicts.
The thief comes to steal and kill and destroy.
Whatever your false messiah,
it's not that it doesn't measure up compared to Jesus.
It's that it's actually out to harm you.
These false messiahs are not benign.
They are malicious.

And that is why we must be thankful for the gate.
Jesus came so that whoever enters through him will be saved.
Jesus was prepared to sacrifice his own life,

so that we could have life and have it to the full.
He is the one who gives us security and supplies our needs.
As his flock, we thank God for Jesus the gate for the sheep.