

TUTORIAL
1.47

Jesus is the only door to eternal life

See Tutorial 1.6 notes for overall instructions.

The portions of Scripture referred to in this tutorial are: **John 10:7-11, 14:6.**

Last time

On a trip north to the slopes of Mount Hermon, Jesus discussed with His disciples who people were saying He was. Then He asked them who *they* believed Him to be. Peter responded by declaring that Jesus was the Messiah. But when Jesus revealed that His future held suffering and death, Peter protested. Jesus firmly rebuked him, saying that Satan was behind that kind of human perspective. Later Jesus took Peter, James and John to a mountaintop where for a brief moment they were allowed to glimpse the glory of His *deity* that was normally hidden by His *humanity*.

Jesus uses a compelling metaphor about *sheep* and *shepherds*

As the Narrative unfolds, Jesus continues to challenge people's view of Him and helps them to understand His role. To do this, He uses a number of metaphors taken from everyday life... familiar, concrete things that help His audience understand the abstract truth He's communicating.

John records some of these. In the first, (John 10:7-11) Jesus likens Himself to the *gate* of a sheepfold. To the people listening that day, everything to do with raising and looking after sheep is commonplace. Each morning for part of the year, a familiar sight is the local shepherds leading their flocks out to wherever grass and edible shrubs can be found for grazing. In the evenings you can see and hear them bringing the sheep back to the enclosures on the outskirts of the towns and villages. In the hot summers they probably won't be around as they've led the sheep up into the cooler hills. Again, in cold winters you won't see them because they've taken their flocks for warmth and shelter down to lower valleys.

But even out in the wilderness, they have enclosures with walls made out of rocks and whatever else comes to hand...perhaps some thorn bushes. Some of

these are built against a cliff face, particularly if there's a handy cave... To let the sheep wander at night is a sure way to lose many to thieves and to wild animals.

In fact, a conscientious shepherd knows that he can't just get the sheep into the sheepfold and then disappear into his tent or cave and assume everything's fine for the night. What he does is get them in then lie down in the gap, the entrance...to be, as it were, the gate himself. Then, even if he does go to sleep, it's like half of him is awake so that at the slightest disturbance he's ready to keep any wandering sheep *in* or to keep anyone else *out*. So the audience immediately has this very familiar picture in mind when Jesus starts talking about shepherds and gates.

Yes, certainly everyone has seen what He's describing...on their way out in the mornings or back at night, the flocks often mingle. But it all gets sorted gradually as the different sheep recognise their own shepherd's voice calling out to them and eventually gather around him.

And it's true that only the true shepherd of a flock goes through the gate, anyone sneaking over the wall must be up to no good. But clearly Jesus is using it as an illustration of something. What's His point? Teacher, what are you trying to tell us? We don't understand...

But as He continues and expands the illustration His meaning starts to emerge. He's saying that they, we, all people, are like sheep. In other words, rather foolish creatures, prone to aimless wandering, badly in need of rescuing, care and protection. In this picture, *He* is the gate for the sheep...the entrance into peace with God, protection from his Enemy, and purpose in this life and beyond. The sheep that are drawn to His voice come to Him and to Him alone because they realise that His offer is completely genuine. All other claims are false. They are made by imposters - Satan, his spirit helpers, and often unknowing human collaborators - who care nothing for the sheep. They want to steal and kill...to entirely destroy all life and hope. In contrast, Jesus cares deeply for the sheep; He wants to lead them to where life can be rich and satisfying, now and forever.

In fact, as a shepherd, He loves the sheep so much He's willing to give His life for them. Were the listeners that day reminded of the prophet Isaiah's words, written centuries before but clearly pointing toward the man now speaking to them? "...He was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own."

Jesus stated that He is the way, the truth and the life

A little later in his record (John 14:6) John recalls Jesus making another statement about who He is. His claims here are so *definitive*, so *exclusive*, that anyone who actually engages with them has to accept them as truth, OR to dismiss them as the pathologically conceited ramblings of a madman. Again, He leaves no middle ground... no neutral position regarding who He is. Speaking to His disciples one day, and specifically addressing Thomas - the proverbial skeptic among them - Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me."

So first of all, Jesus is saying that He, and He alone, is **the way** that anyone can relate to God. All other attempts whether under the banner of "Christianity", another organised religious system, or some other vaguely "spiritual" ideology, are dead-ends...they don't lead to God. Even if these activities make people feel temporarily peaceful, comforted, uplifted, "in tune with God" or whatever...Jesus categorically states that unless it is through Him, it is definitely not God they're relating to.

Secondly, He says that He is **the truth**. It's important to note that this, like the other claims Jesus makes, are not just - to use philosophical terms - *epistemological*, i.e. about how things are *known*. Rather, He is making *ontological* statements - what things are in their very essence, their existence...in other words, who *He* actually is.

So while it's perfectly true that He teaches truth and through him truth can be known, even more fundamentally, he is saying that He is the truth. Truth has no external existence apart from Him. Nothing can accurately reflect reality if it doesn't accurately reflect who He is.

Any worldview, ideology, belief, thought pattern, opinion or statement that is not aligned with the Truth that He is, is by definition false. But this is not just a theoretical statement...and truth is not just some cold, detached propositional doctrine or dogma.

Because He is the good shepherd, because as well as being Truth He is also Love and Grace, He shares Himself - the Truth - gladly and willingly with those who come humbly to listen and learn. He takes on Himself the burden of reaching out to us and patiently leading us in the journey of truly knowing Him and the Father.

Because, as His third statement makes clear, as well as being the way and the truth, He is also **Life**. Again, this is an *ontological* statement. The concept "life" is meaningless without Him. All existence that is not part of Him, part of His life, no matter how great it might look, is a fake - as Adam and Eve began to find out in that bitter day in the garden. For one thing, "life" apart from Him is just a brief pathway that is leading to physical and then spiritual death - eternal punishment and separation from Him. But His statement about Him being *Life* goes infinitely further than just offering a way to escape the horror of death. It also includes the incredible, mind-blowing possibility of living now and eternally without ever being separated from Him...of walking through life

beside Him while He progressively opens up to us all that God intends for His image-bearers to experience in this gift called life. It does not mean any kind of escape from the bumps, and problems and real pain of life on earth. But it does mean that those who come to him *for* life - who accept him *as* life - have the opportunity to experience a purpose and hope that is absolutely real and limitless...because He is.



DISCUSSION POINTS

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1. Why do you think Jesus used so many analogies and illustrations from everyday life rather than just laying things out in a straightforward point form? Can you think of any overarching characteristics of God that this demonstrates? Are there any principles about communicating truth we can glean from this?
2. How does it make you personally feel to consider Jesus' description of Himself as the loving shepherd who is willing to give His life for the sheep?
3. How would you answer someone who objected to the idea that Jesus' claims are exclusive - that He, and He alone, is the way, the truth and the life. How would you respond to the challenge that anyone who says that about Jesus is not being respectful toward other beliefs...and that it leads to intolerant fundamentalism?



ACTIVITIES

Jesus is the only door to eternal life

1. In no more than 6 Power Point slides, put together a presentation you think would help someone understand what Jesus was teaching through the illustration of sheep, shepherds, gates, thieves etc.