

I AM the gate for the sheep
March 7, 2010 – John 10:10

10 “I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ² The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. ³ The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them.

⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, “I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

On a scale of 1 to 10, with one being low and 10 being high, how would you rate your quality of life today? To come up with your rating, you probably considered a variety of factors. Maybe you thought about your level of happiness. Maybe you looked at the state of things at work or school or at home. Or maybe you thought about how restricted or free you feel to pursue your dreams.

People have had a fair amount to say about quality of life over time. Greek philosopher Aristotle said “the quality of life is determined by its activities.” Alexis Carrel was a French surgeon, biologist and eugenicist, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in

Physiology, stated “the quality of life is more important than life itself. Surveyor Don A. Dillman said “Rural life is viewed by a growing number as having a higher quality of life not because of what it has, but rather because of what it does not have!” Author Alice Kahn writes “For a list of all the ways technology has failed to improve the quality of life, please press three.”

Now I don’t know where you’d rate your quality of life today or what measurement you’d use. But I do know Jesus had a lot to say about life during His time on Earth. He even spoke about the quality of life. Today, we’re going to see Him reveal how to find the highest quality life. So no matter what rating you gave your life, Jesus has something to say about improving its quality. To reach the highest quality life—continuously come to Jesus.

Through this pre-Easter season we are looking at what Jesus did and said in the Gospel of John. We’ve seen Him make significant use of the phrase “I AM.” In the Old Testament book of Exodus, God spoke this phrase out of the burning bush. Moses asked God for His name. God said in Exodus 3:14 – “I AM WHO I AM.” So I AM became the divine name of God. In John 6, we saw Jesus provide real

bread for 5000 men and their families. Then He made the claims – “I am the bread of life. I am the bread that came down from heaven.”

So Jesus claimed to be *the* source of our spiritual life and nourishment using the divine name.

Last week, we saw Jesus claim “I AM the light of the world,” and “Before Abraham was born, I AM.” So Jesus claimed to be the light who would guide His people just like God guided them in the wilderness with the pillar of fire. We saw last week that when Jesus claimed to exist before Abraham, the Jews picked up stones to kill Him. But He hid himself and then left the temple grounds.

Then Jesus healed the man born blind. At the end of this episode Jesus again engages in discussion with some Pharisees or religious leaders. Here He makes another claim using the divine name and raises the issue of high quality life.

Today, I hope you will leave with answers to the questions “What is the highest quality life Jesus talks about? How do we get this life? We’ll conclude with an opportunity to begin, continue or reconnect with the highest quality life out there.

John 9:38-10:10 (NIV)

³⁹Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."

⁴⁰Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?"

⁴¹Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains."

¹"I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ²The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. ³The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them.

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What is the highest quality life? (John 10:9-10)

The highest quality life is life with Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit to taste an always increasing portion of God. Jesus talks about life to the full in verse 10. This high quality life focuses on the things of heaven – Loving God, loving people, creating; working; healing; helping; building up in God’s strength. It is full of Christ, full of love, full of God and full of fulfillment. It is full of all that is true and honorable, just and pure, lovely and commendable, excellent and

praise worthy. Those living this life display love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control.

What led up to this statement by Jesus? The healed blind man sees and believes in Jesus. The Pharisees question Jesus if he thinks they're blind. Jesus reveals that He thinks they are blind at least spiritually. They had just failed to recognize the work of God in the blind man's healing. They got caught up in more technicalities. The healing occurred on the Sabbath. They were more concerned with discrediting Jesus than rejoicing in a miracle from God.

But Jesus goes beyond His charge of blindness in chapter 10. He likens the Pharisees to sheep stealers and robbers. God entrusted them with the shepherding responsibility of the people. But what had they just done to one of their own sheep? They mocked and belittled him until they finally threw him out of the synagogue. So instead of faithful shepherds, they were like thieves or robbers. They brutalized the sheep instead of caring for them. They used the sheep to maintain their own position of power.

Jesus launches into a parable about this using the image of a sheepfold. These rectangular shaped enclosures served to protect the

sheep when they weren't out in pasture. Shorter stone walls surrounded the sheep with one opening. So the sheep would go in and the watchmen or shepherd could stay at the door to protect them. But thieves or robbers could climb over the walls to steal the sheep.

Jesus refers to them in verse 1. "The man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in some other way, is a thief and robber." The Pharisees had just acted like robbers who brutalize sheep. Jesus contrasts them with the man in verse 2. He enters by the gate. Apparently, this fold had several flocks of sheep in it. This shepherd goes in to call out his sheep.

Eastern Shepherds have a unique call that their sheep recognize. It's like having a dog that recognizes your voice but will not respond in a friendly way to a stranger. The shepherd leads the sheep out. He goes ahead. They follow him. They didn't use sheep dogs to herd the sheep and drive them to where they need to go. The only people who drove the sheep were butchers! So these sheep follow their shepherd but they won't follow a stranger.

He's talking about the Pharisees. He's saying they've acted like butchers when they should have acted like the shepherds in this parable.

But they don't get it. John lets us know that in verse 6. "Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them." Jesus recognizes their misunderstanding. So he changes the metaphor a bit in the next verses. Here we discover the highest quality life. Verse 9 – "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out and find pasture." So picture the sheep in this verse. They go into a safe sheep fold. They get to come out of the sheep fold and find pasture. In other words, whoever goes through the gate called Jesus has everything they need for a high quality life.

But Jesus goes even further at the end of verse 10. "I have come that they may have life and have it to the full" or "have it abundantly." Is this a life full of things? The sheep in this picture find pasture to eat their fill. Sadly, some have interpreted this verse to mean Jesus promises us a life of abundant material possessions and health. Therefore, if you're not healthy and wealthy, you're missing

out on the abundant life. But compared to other parts of the Bible which talk about the reality of suffering, the abundant material life misses the point.

Jesus is not talking about a life abundant in quantity but abundant in quality. One commentator puts it this. *This life fulfills the whole idea of life, the good of life, the perfection of life, the satisfaction of life in God.* So the abundant life is not abundant material possessions, but abundance in quality.

It involves connection with God and fulfillment of God's purpose for us. It involves life as we were created to live it – released from sin's bondage and experiencing close relationship with our Lord. It is life connected to the one who knows us best.

Joni Eareckson puts it this way.

No matter how connected we are with our loved ones, we are always left aching for more, for someone to comprehend our world and enter our struggle -- to embrace us with a passion that seizes and melts us into a union that will never be broken. God answers this ancient longing. We melt into him when we let go of pride, when we let go of the itchiness to have things our own way, when we let go of

desires and dreams and feast on him. But in losing ourselves for his sake, we discover our true identity; we step into the person we've been predestined to be.

Then she prays "I step by faith closer to you today, Lord. I leave behind my wants and wishes. Show me who I am in you and I shall be ecstatic!" That's from a quadriplegic. It sounds like she has found this highest quality life.

How do you get the highest quality life? (John 10:7, 9)

We can enter into the highest quality life **by constantly coming to and through Christ the door.** Verse 7 – "I am the gate for the sheep." Verse 9 – "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved or be kept safe. He will come in and go out and find pasture." Jesus makes another I AM statement. He claims to be the way to come into this highest quality life only God can provide. So Jesus invites people to come directly to Him. One of the most famous invitations he offers is Matthew 11:28-30. "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest." That sounds like He's talking to people who have pursued the quality life apart from Him and have ended up exhausted. He goes on. "Take my yoke upon

you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Isn't that beautiful, wonderful and inviting? Friends we need to come to Jesus to begin this life and we need to keep coming to Him to continue this life.

I was asking the staff this past week "in what ways has God been speaking to you lately?" One answered that through studies and devotionals God has been saying "constantly come to me. Constantly depend on me. Each day, appointment, phone call, encounter – trust me, depend on me, ask me for words to speak. They described a Jesus' dependent life that permeated their whole day. That's how we stay connected to the highest quality life.

The problem arises when we go out and get distracted by other shepherds at different sheepfolds. Sin, Satan and demons like to disguise themselves as good shepherds. They invite us into their folds and claim we will find good pasture. They say "Come and be satisfied." So we think pursuing more and more stuff will satisfy – get that new toy; that bigger house; that new car; go on that vacation; win

the lottery. Then we'll have the quality life. But many attain that and it's not enough. There has to be more.

Or we think that feeding our appetites for food or sex or happiness or recreation or excitement outside of God's boundaries will somehow satisfy us.

But we discover that it's an ever diminishing return. I love how C.S. Lewis puts this in the Screwtape letters. Screwtape is a senior demon writing to his nephew demon Wormwood on how to tempt humans. Lewis writes through Screwtape – "God made all the pleasures. Hence we always try to work away from the natural condition of any pleasure to that in which it is least natural, least pleasant to its Maker, least pleasurable. An ever increasing craving for an ever-diminishing pleasure is the formula."

So we walk along life's path. Many invite us into their sheepfolds promising good pasture. We get confused or distracted from Jesus. We go into their fold. We taste something that seems good and filling for awhile. But then we discover the same portion is less satisfying. So we need more and more. Instead of an ever increasing quality of life, we experience a diminishing return. Having

ignored Jesus' call, we desperately seek more from the same shepherd or sheep fold.

But then we hear Jesus' call again and remember, coming to Him brings real rich pasture. Life with Him is the highest quality life. It is the life God created us for. It is life in God's sheepfold, protected by the Greatest Shepherd. We must constantly return to Him, walk with Him and commune with Him. Then we more clearly see that His pasture blows away the cheap and unsatisfying pasture of those other shepherds. His pasture provides 16 oz succulent steaks not mystery meat from a hot dog stand.

The eternal abundant high quality life starts now for the Christian. Now we already get to taste heaven; we have the Holy Spirit in us. We communicate with the one in heaven through Jesus. God uses our sufferings to continue to build in us that perseverance of faith in Him. He uses the experiences and challenges of this life to shape and mold us into Christ likeness for tomorrow. But to find and wade our way to this life today, we've got to come to Jesus; all the time. Keep coming to Jesus; in Him and through Him – safety; go in and go out and find pasture now.

Some of you have never come to Him. Today you can begin that highest quality life. You must turn from the old ways of trying to find ultimate satisfaction in sin or something else. Turn to Him as your Savior and Shepherd. Some of you have faithfully kept coming to Him. Continue to lean and depend on Him. Some need to reconnect with Him. You've been spending time in another sheep fold with unsatisfying pasture. It's time to leave that behind and come to Him.

Hear God's invitation for you to come from Isaiah 55:1-2

“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.”