

THE SECRET OF ACCESS

Ted Schroder, February 7, 2010

“I am the Gate for the sheep. All those others are up to no good – sheep stealers, every one of them. But the sheep didn’t listen to them. I am the Gate. Anyone who goes through me will be cared for – will freely go in and out, and find pasture. A thief is only there to steal and kill and destroy. I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of.” (John 10:7-10. *The Message*)

Jesus is proclaiming that he will protect, nurture and enrich the lives of those who follow him. We live in a world of competing claims. Each religion and philosophy claims to lead to wholeness. How do you distinguish between them? In Jesus’ day there were the gods of Greece and Rome, the classical philosophers: the Stoics, the Cynics, and the Epicureans. There were the oriental religions and philosophies of Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. Jesus was confronted with the religious authorities of Judaism: the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the Essenes. He was aware of all these competing claims to speak on behalf of God. The world has not changed in that regard. We are no more pluralistic today than in the first century. So his claim to be the Gate, the point of access to God, to the life of God in all its fullness, was no less controversial then than it is now.

To add to his assertions, he characterized those who offered another entry to God as criminals. “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.” (John 10:1) The inference is that those who seek to influence the children of God toward another faith, or way of thinking, are like sheep-stealers who kill and destroy the fullness of life that he guarantees.

This seems to be most intolerant to those who wish to affirm all faiths as leading to God. Yet, an honest appraisal of all faiths and philosophies will show that each contradicts the others. They cannot all be right. The principle of contradiction is that contradictory statements cannot both at the same time be true. Aristotle stated that if one is true, the other is not; one of the two must be false. Wishing it were not so will not make it different. Wishing that all religions lead to God will not make it true if they contradict one another, as they do. Jesus cannot be both the One and Only Son of the Father, and one among many. Jesus cannot die for the sins of the whole world, or for none. Jesus was either God who can forgive sins or a charlatan. He was either a healer of diseases, a raiser of the dead, the ruler of the forces of nature, the multiplier of loaves and fishes, the wise teacher, the compassionate sufferer, or he was not. He was either genuine or a fake.

Jesus is not saying that a particular church or denomination is the way to God. No church leader, no evangelist, no Christian teacher, or preacher, or priest, can claim to be the gate through which people can find eternal safety, security and salvation. Neither can they claim absolute claims over their own flocks, or infallibility for their own teaching. They have no right to preach that there is no salvation outside their own organization. Only Christ has the right to claim such authority.

Christianity is Christ, not a church, nor a sect, nor a movement. Our faith proclaims that only the historical Jesus, through his life, death and resurrection can provide access to God. No preacher, prophet, teacher, or philosopher, can replace or replicate the uniqueness of Jesus. No ecclesiastical hierarchy, or academic fraternity, or popular celebrity, can speak with the final authority of Jesus. All of us have a limited understanding of the truth. No one should presume that they are never mistaken. Only Jesus is the Gate to the heavenly pasture. All other claimants may have some light, some truth, some aspect of revelation, but none have the fullness of light, and truth, and revelation that is in Jesus.

We are called to direct people to the Gate, not be the Gate ourselves. We are called to point people to where they can find life in all its fullness. No one did this better than Sam Shoemaker, one of the spiritual leaders who helped draft the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. He wrote his famous mission statement: *I Stand By the Door*.

I stand by the door.
I neither go too far in, nor stay too far out.
The door is the most important door in the world –
It is the door through which most people walk when they find God.
There's no use my going way inside, and staying there,
When so many are still outside and they, as much as I,
Crave to know where the door is.
And all that so many ever find
Is only a wall where a door ought to be.
They creep along the wall like blind people,
With outstretched, groping hands.
Feeling for a door, knowing that there must be a door,
Yet they never find it....
So I stand by the door.

The most tremendous thing in the world
Is for people to find that door – the door to God.
The most important thing any person can do
Is to take hold of one of those blind, groping hands,
And put it on the latch – the latch that only clicks
And opens to the person's own touch.
People die outside that door, as starving beggars die
On cold nights in cruel cities in the dead of winter –
Die for want of what is within their grasp.
They live, on the other side of it – live because they have not found it.
Nothing else matters compared to helping them find it,
And open it, and walk in, and find Him....
So I stand by the door.

Enter the door yourself. Help others enter it. Jesus said, "I am the door."

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