**I am the gate**

**John 10:1-10**

We have heard Jesus’ claim to be the bread of life and the light of the world but there are many things that offer us life.

* Other religions will promise us life too.
* Adverts promise us life, the good life, if we use their products.
* Politicians promise us the better life if we have them as our leaders.
* Are they all equally valid options, do we just pick the one we like best?

In today’s passage Jesus warns us of others who promise life but deliver the exact opposite

He uses an analogy of shepherding.

* Throughout the passage he is contrasting himself with thieves.
* We will see 3 points:

**1. If they don’t enter through the gate they are thieves (v1-2)**

Jesus’ illustration is pretty clear – if you see someone climbing into the sheep pen rather than going in through the gate they are up to no good.

Jesus is talking pointedly about the Pharisees – the religious leaders of his day who are opposing him (see John 9:35-41 following Jesus healing a blind man).

* There is an Old Testament ring to this teaching. Ezekiel 34 speaks of the leaders of Israel as bad shepherds who don’t look after the sheep but neglect and devour them.

So what’s Jesus’ point? Well Jesus says in v7 that he is the gate.

* So Jesus is saying of the religious leaders of his day – they are thieves. They aren’t merely misguided, they are evil.
* And this is still true today. Anything, any leader, movement, ad campaign and so on that promises life but doesn’t lead you to Jesus is a thief.
* Faithful shepherds will always come through Jesus and take you to Jesus.

**2. Jesus’ sheep have built-in voice recognition**

So here the analogy changes – Jesus is no longer the gate but the shepherd

* In this sheep-pen there is more than one flock.
* Jesus says in v3 the shepherd comes along and calls his sheep and they come to him.
* Now notice the repetition of the idea of voice recognition v3, 4, 5.

It is Jesus’ teaching, his voice, that his sheep will recognise.

* Jesus’ miracles drew crowds but it was his teaching that was the focus of his ministry (see Mark 1: 38).
* People thronged to him as healer but were divided by his teaching.
* Jesus says that his sheep will recognise his teaching and will follow him.

This is the testimony of the Christian – that as we hear Jesus’ teaching we recognise the voice of our shepherd.

* Even when the teaching is hard or by instinct we disagree with it, we nevertheless say that this is the voice of my shepherd and I will follow him.
* And as we look to tell others about Jesus we must simply be faithful in telling them the message of Jesus and trust that if they are Jesus’ sheep they will recognise his voice and follow him.

If you are exploring Christianity it is Jesus’ teaching you need to focus on and be wary of those who claim to be Christians or even Christian leaders who don’t hold to Jesus’ teaching.

* Listen to Jesus’ teaching and respond to it.

**3. Thieves kill, Jesus gives life to the full. v7-10**

Here is why it all matters – it is to do with what they bring you

* What is the aim of the thief? – To steal, kill and destroy
* Jesus is saying that those religious leaders of his day bring death
  + As will anything that promises us life apart from Jesus.
  + And as we said at the start there are lots of things that promise us life but Jesus says they will lead to death… But they are so tempting!
  + So people give themselves to the pursuit of life through career, family or holidays.
  + But even if we achieve our next goal, life always feels just slightly beyond our grasp. So, we think, maybe it will come with the next achievement or experience.
  + But it never happens and so often our pursuit of life only leads to destruction.
  + To failed marriages, broken homes, addictions and depression.
  + And ultimately our pursuit of life can’t give us life forever however much we try. Without Jesus there is only death, eternal death.

What happens to sheep who come to Jesus, the gate? – They are saved (v9), safe and well fed (v9) and they have life to the full (v10).

* Now I want to focus on ‘life to the full’.
* In a future sermon in this series we will think about life beyond death but just hear what Jesus is saying
  + The life Jesus gives isn’t just life of infinite length but of the greatest quality.
* But we need to ask what Jesus means by ‘life to the full’.
  + What do you think of when you think of someone living life to the full?
  + Maybe we think of someone experiencing all this world can offer: hiking Machu Pichu, going in a hot air balloon over the Serengeti in Africa and snorkling in the Maldives.
  + But that clearly isn’t what Jesus has in mind – which is good because many of us can’t do those things. We need to realise what real life is.
  + Real life doesn’t consist in cramming in incredible experiences. After all many who follow Jesus suffer terribly for their faith and some are killed for it.
  + Jesus explains in John 17:3 (Have a read!)
  + Jesus is saying that real life, eternal life, consists in knowing God, being in relationship with God. That, he is saying, is far greater than anything this world can offer.
  + So you can live life to the full wherever you are and whether you can travel the world or whether you are in prison for your faith. Life to the full is found in knowing God and only Jesus can give you that.
  + We start that experience of knowing God now but we know that much more awaits as Paul says **1Cor. 13:12** ‘Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.’

So we need to heed Jesus’ warning about thieves and to take up his invitation that he is the gate, the only way to be saved and to have life to the full.