John 10:7 Therefore Jesus said again, “I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep…I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.”

 The context of this particular sermon of Jesus is so very important. Let’s just be sure we understand that context. We will actually be speaking of a couple of day’s activity with Jesus. With Jesus before the Jewish leadership and them questioning everything they could in regards to Jesus.

 We go all the way back to chapter 8. In this chapter Jesus is at the Mount of Olives teaching when the Pharisees bring him the woman caught in adultery. We know that famous history of Jesus, how he challenged anyone without sin to cast the first stone. Slowly but surely the mob dispersed, that is those who were going to condemn the woman melt into the crowd. Jesus tells her He does not condemn her but he also clearly tells her, **“Go now and leave your life of sin.”** By the way, we are not told she did that nor are we told that she was a woman of faith. That plays into the next conversation.

 With that, Jesus then begins to teach all the people around him. He teaches how He is the light of the world. He teaches them the truth of sin and the horror of their unbelief. For instance, in verse 19 of this chapter he tells them, **“You do not know me or my Father.”** With those words Jesus has told them they are not really children of God the Father. Later on in this chapter Jesus will plainly tell the religious leaders and those who followed them: **“Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire.”** This whole discussion ends with Jesus saying, **“Before Abraham was born, I am!”** Every Jew there knew that Jesus had just claimed to be God and it was by miracle that Jesus then slipped away from their desire to stone him to death right then and there. You can grasp then that tensions are high between Jesus and the religious authorities.

 Now comes chapter 9, we think the next day. Chapter 9 starts with Jesus healing a man who had been born blind. Everyone knew it and though this miracle speaks to the special nature and uniqueness of Jesus, the Pharisees begin an in depth investigation of this miracle that they might deny it. They question the man born blind about the sinner Jesus and the man’s responses are awesome. He says, **“Whether he is a sinner or not, I do not know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!”** And when they chastise him for not answering as they want, the man then says, **“Now that is remarkable! You don’t know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”** That’s when the religious leaders threw the man out of the Temple.

 It is then that Jesus once again finds this man, reveals He is the Messiah and brings forth from him the confession: **“Lord, I believe.” I**n front of the crowd that has gathered and before many of the Pharisees who had also gathered Jesus says, **“For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”** Then directly to the Pharisees who claimed to see Jesus says, **“If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.”** Those are the words that end chapter nine and now before us sit the words of chapter 10. Jesus clearly addressing the false shepherds of the Jews. Jesus making clear the truth of the church and how the church will be. It is all based on Jesus, isn’t it? Our theme: **THE GATE. 1st. Pens and sheep. 2nd: Shepherds, watchman and sheep. 3rd. Jesus!**

 Now, I have to tell you that this parable is somewhat difficult to understand and yet it is easy to understand. Keeping in mind the context helps a lot and keeping in mind other teachings of Jesus helps a lot. We need to grasp this is a parable as Jesus tells us in verse 6, but the Pharisees do not grasp the meaning and the importance of this parable. Jesus does clarify and still they will refuse to believe. And here is the interesting question to ask in this, “Do you believe what Jesus says or are you like the Pharisees who deny the truth spoken here?” I bring this out, because you need to grasp that many churches, yes, many Christian churches have leaders that would deny and throw out these words.

 So what do we know? First, note that Jesus starts with that **“I tell you the truth.”** This is Jesus’ way of emphasizing this is not something up for debate, this is not something that can be fudged or denied. What He is going to teach is the absolute and clear truth of God!

 We will start by contemplating exactly what the pens and who the sheep are. Using an illustration familiar to all in his day, Jesus gets them to thinking about pens and sheep. In a nutshell, the pens and sheep are the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints. This is all those who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Note that the sheep are in pens, because the pen is the Christian church, the place where sheep gather. It is the place where the sheep come to find the protection of the shepherd and the safety of being behind the gate. It is the place where the sheep, the shepherd, the gate and all connected with God function for the good of God’s children. Or it should!

 Let’s be clear on something. Jesus warns us here that there will be men, thieves and robbers who will attempt to enter the pen and destroy the sheep. Please note that nowhere are these men called shepherds or even false shepherds. They are called thieves and robbers. Jesus further defines them in this way: **“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.”** In contrast to the thief and robber, please note that the true shepherd enters by the gate!

Here is what Jesus is trying to tell us. In this world of ours there will be false teachers and prophets, those who are out for themselves, out for worldly things rather than godly. They will try to get into the pen. They will try to hurt and harm the sheep, all the while pretending to be caring for and loving the sheep, and I might add, they might even believe they love and care for the sheep. Another thought. If these thieves cannot get in the pen or finally, when the real sheep of Jesus refuse to hear and follow them, you can bet that these thieves and robbers will set up false pens, places where they can fleece and destroy any who go in there thinking it is a real pen of Jesus. Here is Jesus teaching and warning against the false teachers and preachers of this world, in his specific case, pointing out that the Pharisees are false teachers and preachers, actually thieves and robbers rather than shepherds of God’s truth. Clearly we sheep need to be on guard. We sheep, need to be sure the voice we hear is the voice of the true Shepherd. Sheep and pen are the Holy Christian Church, something no true sheep would do without!

Next we need to consider the shepherd and watchman and again the sheep, but in a bit more detail. Please note that when it comes down to the shepherd and watchman, there are really two possibilities and yet the possibilities are the same. The shepherd and watchman can be Jesus, yep, all at the same time. But note that the shepherd and watchman are also those appointed by Jesus for that task. The true shepherd and watchman speak with the authority and voice of Jesus. They have the love and compassion of Jesus for the sheep. They are called by Jesus to be in his place and of them Jesus says in Matthew and Luke: **“He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me.”** The shepherds and watchmen speak with the authority and voice of Jesus. And let’s be real specific here, they speak the clear and precise Words of Scripture because to alter, change, twist or contort the clear truth of God is not to be a shepherd or watchman but rather a thief and a robber!

 Then let’s get back to the sheep. The shepherd calls, the sheep follow. The watchman opens the gate, the sheep go in and out. The sheep are to know the voice of the true Shepherd, Jesus. Note that Jesus says, **“But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.”** The sheep have a bond with Jesus and the shepherd, a bond that causes them to be only for and with the shepherd and under the care of the watchman. Sheep have responsibility too!

 You are not a real sheep if you are not hearing the voice of Jesus! You are not a real sheep if you reject the idea of sin or think that sin is of no account. You are not a real sheep when you follow the voice of the thief and the robber, who takes you away from the true voice of the Shepherd Jesus. You are, when you hear the voice of the stranger, of the world and of the false teachers, you, dear sheep are to know the voice of your true Shepherd Jesus and follow him only. And if you do follow the stranger, that will be on your heart that you failed to listen to the true Shepherd Jesus.

 And that brings us to our third part. Jesus! It is so awesome to recognize that Jesus really fills all the roles of authority that are given here. Jesus is the true Shepherd. He reveals only what is of the Father. He cares for the sheep and loves them. Jesus the Shepherd took on the enemy of the sheep and gave His life that the sheep might live. Jesus appoints some of his believers to be his under shepherds who carry his Word and authority and Jesus considers these under shepherds His voice and His Word! When shepherds speak falsely, as did the Pharisees, they are denounced and exposed not as under shepherds but as thieves and robbers!

 Jesus is the watchman. He establishes the pen where the sheep can be safe at night, you know, safe in the darkness, safe from the world and the destruction it desires for you. The watchman opens the gate for the shepherd. The watchman closes the gate when the sheep are safe and sound. The watchman guards the gate and the pen. There is no need for a watchman unless there is a pen. Again, it is a subtle lesson that sheep need the pen and the wonder of the watchman Jesus.

 And yes, Jesus is the gate for the sheep. You get in the pen, the Holy Christian Church through Jesus. You are safe in the HCC through Jesus. You are guaranteed the wonder of the HCC in Jesus. In regard to this gate Jesus says, **“I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.”** The gate is a key component. You have the security of Jesus with you whether you are in the pen or you are out functioning in the world. And even in speaking of this gate, Jesus says “you will find pasture.” He is the source of your wellbeing! He is your nourishment, your strength, your sustenance, your path, the one who blesses you and on and on. Did you catch the fact that there is only One gate? It is Jesus or there is not eternal life and salvation! Please don’t quickly dismiss what is said of the Gate.

 And then note exactly how this teaching of Jesus ends. He speaks of His work. He says, **“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”** Jesus is about life, the true life that is found in the promise of eternal life. Seriously, are you only living for this life and world? Then you do not have true life and Jesus. The true life of Jesus is altering. The true life of Jesus changes perspective and helps us see the world just like the blind man got his sight. The true life of Jesus leads us to be sheep, sheep of the pen! Sheep who confess, **“Lord, I believe.”** Amen.