

Break Every Chain

Impact Series, March 20 & 21 | John 10:1-10
Senior Pastor Rob O'Neal

WHAT MAKES YOU FEEL SAFE?

Did you miss Sam Sheepdog and Ralph Wolf from Warner Brothers cartoons?

They're easy to miss, because Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck get most of the attention.

Ralph Wolf actually looks like Wile E. Coyote, except that he has a red nose and white eyes.

Rather than hunting road runners, Ralph Wolf spends his days trying to steal sheep.

But Sam Sheepdog is always there to watch over the sheep. Sam foils each of Ralph's plots.

It's interesting, but for Ralph and Sam, it's all just part of their jobs. In every cartoon featuring Ralph and Sam, they arrive at the sheep farm like two guys showing up for work. They punch a timecard, exchange pleasantries, and head off to work. It's just that Ralph's job is to hunt sheep, and Sam's job is to protect them and stop Ralph.

Ralph Wolf reminds us that it's in some people's nature to be dangerous.

Ralph gets up every day and heads to work where he threatens sheep.

It's Ralph's nature. It's a role he plays every day. He is a threat to the sheep.

Ralph reminds us that there are things around us that are threatening by nature.

Sam Sheepdog reminds us that it's in some people's nature to protect.

Sam Sheepdog has a mop of hair that covers over his eyes. He sometimes seems to be asleep.

However, no matter what, Sam Sheepdog is always on the watch, always protecting.

Danger and protection are on our minds a lot lately.

The COVID pandemic makes us think about the danger of virus when we go into public.

Masks seem like protection for people around us. Ironically, though, people with masks traditionally were trying to hide their identity, which usually meant that they were a danger.

Vaccines now seem like protection. They can protect us from spreading the virus.

We process many of our interactions through the lens of danger and protection.

As we look at the Bible today, we're going to discover that there are more threats around us than we realize, but we're also going to see that we have a protector.

JESUS IS THE DOOR

In John 10:1 Jesus warns us that there is danger.

Jesus said,

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber."

Sheep, shepherds, and sheepfolds were very common in the Ancient Near East. Sheep were important sources of wool and meat in the ancient world. Shepherds had an important role in caring for sheep, because sheep take maintenance. Sheepfolds were also very common. Sheepfolds were pens of wood or rock where shepherds kept their sheep at night.

It was also common in the Bible to describe God's people as God's sheep. God is the ultimate shepherd of his people, and he entrusts his people to leaders who shepherd in his name.

When Jesus talked about sheep in a sheepfold, it's a common, comforting image.

But Jesus took things in a threatening direction. He said that there are some who climb over the walls of the sheepfold to get in. He describes them as thieves and robbers. Thieves steal something by stealth. Robbers steal things by violence.

Jesus was warning us that there was danger in our world. While we think we are sheep safe in the sheepfold, there are thieves and robbers out there who seek to climb the wall, take things, take us, and do damage to us. That's unsettling!

Then in John 10:2-6 Jesus contrasts shepherds and strangers.

Jesus went on to say,

"But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

In verse 2 Jesus added a shepherd. The right shepherd comes through the door. The sheep recognize his voice and follow him. We'll say much more about the shepherd and his sheep next week.

For this week, note that Jesus reminds us of thieves and robbers out there. They are the strangers he speaks about in these verses. The sheep don't recognize strangers. The contrast of shepherd and stranger is what's so important here.

Then in John 10:7-10 Jesus calls himself the Door.

So Jesus again said to them,

"Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."

Once again, Jesus contrasted shepherds and strangers. Strangers come to his sheep with the motive of stealing, killing, and destroying. The threat is worse than we thought! About himself, though, he said, "I came that they may have life ... abundantly." Jesus came that his people might have life, real life, true life, and eternal life.

The focus in this passage, though, is when Jesus calls himself the Door in verses 7 and 9.

In some ways he means something like what he meant when he said that he was "the Way." He provides people with access to God. But that's not the full force of what he says here.

When Jesus says that he is the Door here, he means that in order to get to his people, you have to go through him. When Jesus says that he is the Door, he means that in some way he stands between his people and everything that would threaten us. He's our protector.

We have to know Jesus' audience to understand what he's really saying.

Jesus was speaking to a crowd.

That crowd included a man who had been born blind that Jesus healed.

The crowd also included some of the Jewish religious leaders. By this point, the Jewish religious leaders had a running conflict with Jesus. It got worse in John 9 when they cast out the man born blind because he said that he was a follower of Jesus. Jesus told them that they were worse than blind. They were guilty! They were still in the crowd.

There were lots of other people in the crowd who were in Jerusalem for the Feast of Booths.

In chapter 10, Jesus was talking to this whole crowd about the Jewish religious leaders.

The Jewish religious leaders were wrong because they stood against Jesus.

They were wrong because they put their faith in works. They thought that a person could earn their way to God by rituals and keeping the letter of the Law.

However, Jesus knew that the Jewish religious leaders were dangerous because earning our way to God never works. It can't be done! It's like an impossible, never-ending quest.

Jesus himself is the only Way to God, and he would die in order to open that Way.

Jesus was saying that telling people they could earn their way to God made the Jewish religious leaders like thieves and robbers climbing a wall to steal, kill, and destroy sheep.

But Jesus the Door—our Protector—looked squarely at them and said to the crowd of people listening, **"You don't belong to them!"**

JESUS THE DOOR PROTECTS US FROM FALSE TEACHERS

Who are the false teachers of our day, the ones Jesus the Door protects us from?

There are some obvious candidates. Of course, the teachers who actively spout false doctrine are false teachers. Jesus the Door stands against them.

Jesus gives us an interesting standard for recognizing false teachers. They are the ones who seek their own benefit and their own interests. Beware of any religious teacher who puts a burden on you or wants something from you. Popularity and power are powerful lures.

Obviously, those who live double lives are false teachers as well. These are the religious leaders who secretly live ungodly lives. We've heard far too many of their stories.

I don't like to talk about religious leaders who fall. Why?

There is always more to the story. We never know all of the details until we look back.

Also, it's cheap. It's easy for me to score points by saying, "Look how bad so-and-so is," but it doesn't really help anyone. I want to build people up, not tear them down.

Plus, we're all sinners. I am a sinner. There are moments when we all disappoint.

Beyond that, I value leaders. I want to cheer for good leaders and help struggling ones.

However, when a leader in the church falls, that fall hurts many people.

Someone is always hurt directly.

There's collateral damage because we put faith and trust in our leaders. When our leaders fail, we're disappointed and question everything.

Inevitably, some people walk away from the Church and from faith in Christ.

Jesus the Door, our protector, leads me to say two things about Christian leaders' falling.

First, Jesus the Door calls some of us to be better leaders.

Jesus the Door tells us leaders that he's watching! He's the Door, protecting His people. He only wants shepherds coming into his sheepfold who have the right voice and who are seeking to give life to His people. That's a call to right motivation.

Jesus the Door sets himself up as the example for us as leaders. We intentionally must seek to lead the way Jesus leads. That's a call to accountability.

Jesus the Door calls some of us to be better leaders.

Jesus the Door calls all of us to say: You don't belong to "them."

When a religious leader falls, we haven't fallen. Their mistakes are not our mistakes and should never ruin our faith.

Beyond that, we should never put church leaders on a pedestal. We can and should follow leaders, but we can't idolize leaders (even good leaders).

We don't belong to our leaders. We belong to Jesus.

Jesus the Door protect us from false teachers. He protects us from false masters as well.

JESUS THE DOOR PROTECTS US FROM FALSE MASTERS

This concept may seem like a bit of a leap from Jesus' protecting us from false teachers.

When I started to develop this series, I started by thinking through ways that Jesus showed compassion to people. There are simply too many to include in any series.

Then I realized that Jesus' compassionate acts come out of who he is. Jesus tells us who he is in this series of statements in the book of John that start with the words, "I am."

As I thought about Jesus' describing himself as "the Door," I realized that he was talking about the way that he protects us, his people.

That protective nature comes out in the many times Jesus cast demons out of people.

That helped me to realize that Jesus doesn't just protect us from false teachers who want to ensnare us; he protects us from all kinds of false masters.

We see this when Jesus the Door protected from false masters a man who called himself "Legion".

What happened is recorded in Mark chapter 5.

Jesus and the disciples crossed the Sea of Galilee and came to the eastern shore.

When Jesus stepped ashore, he was immediately confronted by a demon-possessed man.

The tombs had become the man's home. No one could keep him tied up for his own safety or for the safety of others. Instead, he was even able to break chains.

It was awful. He cried out day and night and cut himself with stones.

The man saw Jesus, ran, fell down before him, cried out that Jesus was the Son of the Most High God, and begged Jesus not to torment him.

Jesus asked the man, "What is your name?" The man replied that his name was Legion since there were many demons in him.

The demons begged Jesus to send them into a large herd of pigs feeding nearby.

Jesus gave the demons permission to enter the herd of pigs. Roughly 2000 pigs rushed down a steep bank and drowned in the sea when the demons entered them.

The man recovered quickly after the demons were gone. His false masters were no longer in control, and he began to share the story that Jesus was now his true master.

We need Jesus the Door, because people are in chains put there by too many false masters.

Legion was in chains put there by openly demonic false masters.

Other people are in chains to false masters with less obvious diabolical connections.

Some people are in chains to the false masters of addictions to all kinds of drugs and alcohol.

Other people are in chains put there by more subtle forms of addictions to all kinds of appetites, even including our appetite for approval.

Mental illness frequently feels like a set of chains that bind us.

Many of us find ourselves in chains of one kind or another, to one false master or another, at one time or another in our lives. As I said earlier—there are more dangers than we realize.

Usually, we open the door to false masters ourselves.

There are times when thieves and robbers climb over the wall and sneak into the sheepfold.

Frequently, we let them into our lives. We opened up a hole in the wall and let them in. We started habits. We believed lies. We let both find places to grow until they were in control.

Jesus the Door reminds us: You don't belong to "them."

Legion himself didn't belong rightfully to the demon horde inhabiting his mind.

We don't belong to the false masters who claim to control our lives. Our false masters want us to think that they have the right to control us. They don't.

The Good News is that in Jesus the power of sin is broken. Sin is like slavery. Paul the Apostle openly admitted that at one time we were slaves to sin. We were in the power of false masters, and we had given them the right to control us. However, Jesus changed all of that. Paul wrote in Romans 6:17-18,

But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

That means that Jesus broke the power of sin. We are no longer slaves to sin or to the false masters that claim us when we sin.

Instead, we belong to Jesus. Yes, Jesus is our master. However, Jesus is our true master. Beyond that, Jesus gives us life instead of death. There is powerfully good news here!

JESUS THE DOOR CALLS US TO PROTECT PEOPLE

Jesus the Door breaks chains and binds up hearts.

Let me remind you again that when Jesus began his public ministry in Luke chapter 4, he went to the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth. He read from the scroll of Isaiah the prophet. In the passage he read, Isaiah wrote about a deliverer. Isaiah 61:1 includes these words:

... he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound ...

When he finished reading this statement, Jesus said to the congregation, "This passage is fulfilled today in me." He was talking about himself!

Jesus came to break the chains of those who are captive. Freedom for captives isn't just about people in jail. Prisons come in all shapes and sizes, and Jesus came to break all kinds of chains.

In addition, Jesus came to bind up the hearts of the brokenhearted. Why? Yes, Jesus came to comfort those who mourn. Beyond that, a broken heart always goes along with being in chains. So, Jesus came not just to set the prisoners free but to heal their hearts as well.

The way that Jesus breaks chains and binds up hearts has come to life in a Valley member.

He grew up in a loving, supportive family.

He was raised going to church but walked away from religion.

He found alcohol and drugs as a foreign-exchange student during high school.

He rode that wave into college and eventually ended up needing to leave college.

He spent time in rehab before finishing college and starting his career.

His life took twists and turns. Some of those twists and turns were fantastic. He ended up here at Valley following Jesus, married, started a family, and found years of stability in his career and sobriety in his fight with addictions.

But his career and raising children ended up putting immense pressure on him, and eventually he turned to alcohol again to make the pain go away. This led to a problem that escalated again over years and ended with two massive relapses.

At the end, he faced some stark choices. He chose sobriety, his family, and Jesus.

God has seen him through difficult days and amazing days since that time.

God broke the chains of all kinds of addictions in his life—one at a time. And God has bound up his broken heart by surrounding him with brothers and sisters in Christ.

His Christian family constantly reminds him that he does not belong to any other masters.

He has become a leader in our Celebrate Recovery ministry, and he is now helping other people find the freedom he has found.

Very practically, our Celebrate Recovery ministry breaks chains and binds up hearts.

As you heard in the trivia question from last week, Celebrate Recovery helps people with their hurts, habits, and hang-ups.

Celebrate Recovery breaks the chains that bind people. Our hurts, habits, and hang-ups become the chains that bind us. They become the things that become prisons for us and false masters. Celebrate Recovery proclaims boldly, **"You don't belong to them!"** Instead, Celebrate Recovery reminds us that we belong to Jesus and to the family of faith.

Celebrate Recovery surrounds us with supportive brothers and sisters in Christ who bind up our hearts and remind us that we are loved by God and loved by others.

I'm so grateful for the ministry of Celebrate Recovery. If you are in chains of any kind, struggling with hurts, habits, and hang-ups, then this ministry can help you! There is hope.

Jesus the Door calls us to break chains and bind up hearts.

Throughout this series we are trying to figure out how to live out our vision to build a community of believers who actively impact our world for Christ. We want to have impact!

As we study the example of Jesus the Door, we learn that in order to have impact, we need to be protectors. Protectors break chains and bind up hearts.

I recognize that this call may feel intimidating to you but stick with me.

I recognize as well that this call may hurt if you've got a family member or close friend who is in chains and has been fighting to get out for years. You've done everything you can, and they are still in chains. Your church is here for you. Stay with me.

It's got to feel intimidating to engage with people who are in chains. That may involve working with people with addictions and the like, and you may not know what to do!

Hear this clearly: It's not about knowing all the right techniques to help people who are in chains to addictions or knowing how to help people experiencing demonic oppression. Some people do know how to help people going through those experiences very practically. If you don't, though, it doesn't change the call Jesus has placed on us together.

More important than having the right techniques, we must be the kind of people who will take the journey with someone who needs to come out of captivity. That doesn't mean that we are all called to stay in dangerous situations or that we give up all of our boundaries. It does mean that we determine that we will never give up on people or on what God can do.

Most importantly, Jesus the Door, the breaker of chains and binder of hearts, calls us to have hope and to offer hope. When we think about the chains, prisons, false teachers, and false masters present in our lives and in the lives of others, Jesus calls us to remember constantly and proclaim boldly: **"You don't belong to them!"**