

Numbers and their Meanings (John 10:1-10)

Years ago, 2005-2010 to be exact, I used to watch and enjoy a CBS crime drama called *Numb3rs*. It featured an FBI agent (Don Eppes—Rob Morrow) who recruits his genius mathematician brother (Charlie Eppes—David Krumholz) to solve crimes in Los Angeles using algorithms and equations. The series often featured math concepts applied to forensics, surveillance, and criminal profiling.

In the Bible, the numbers 12 and 3 have special meaning and significance. The number 12 related to the 12 tribes of Israel, the 12 disciples, and the 12 baskets of leftovers after the feeding of the 5,000. All signifying divine perfection, completeness, and wholeness.

The number 3 representing the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is used to indicate a “beginning, middle, and end.” Jesus was dead for three days before rising, symbolizing complete victory over death. Jesus’

ministry lasted three years, Peter denied Jesus three times, and Jonah was in the fish for three days.

Major Biblical themes often represent a new beginning or a, decisive act of God, such as the three patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob).

But the **number two** is a number we don't hear much about in the Bible. In the Bible, the number two signifies witness testimony, union, and division, often establishing the truth of a matter or representing duality. It represents companionship (sending disciples in pairs), the union of marriage (two becoming one flesh), and the duality of creation (male/female, day/night). In addition, there are also the two tablets of the Ten Commandments, two of every animal on the ark, and the "double portion" of manna provided on the sixth day.

Now, let's get to the heart of today's sermon and the **number two**, Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:3 that there are two kinds of people in this world: those who are

poor in spirit and those who believe they have no need to depend on God. He continues with two roads in life: an easy road and a hard road (7:13-14). There are two kinds of trees that bear two kinds of fruit: good and bad (7:16-17). There are two houses built on two foundations: rock and sand (7:24-27). And there are two gates with two destinations: the narrow gate to eternal life and the wide gate to destruction.

So, Jesus set up a dichotomy between two different kinds of influences on our lives. One leads to life and the other to destruction. Which door will we choose?

I remember the game show Let's Make a Deal. The host Monty Hall would offer contestants a chance at taking home whatever was behind the doors they chose. Depending on their selection, they received either a fabulous prize or a comical dud. Wouldn't that show have been a whole lot easier if contestants could have received a sneak-peak

behind those doors? That's not the way the game worked, and that's

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not how life generally works. But Jesus gives us an advantage. He said, "I am the door." Behind this door is life—abundant, hopeful, and healthy life, the kind God intends for us. That's the kind of life Jesus came to give us.

Behind Door #2, though, is the thief in broad terms, the "thief" is anything that would distract us from receiving the abundant life that Jesus can give us. It is anything that prevents us from experiencing the forgiveness, freedom, and joy of God's image alive within us. What are the thieves in your life that threatened to "sneak in, steal, and destroy" you? Maybe it's a brokenness in your relationship with others, or a failure both to forgive and to be forgiven. Maybe it's a constant worry about your future, or a nagging addiction that is damaging you or others. Or maybe it's a confrontation with your own morality. Here's the good news. You don't have to choose

those doors sight unseen. You know what's behind them already.

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So, choose Door #1. Choose Jesus, who is the door that leads to abundant life.

In this Scripture reading Jesus speaks of himself as both the **door** or “the gate” to the sheepfold and “the good shepherd.” In the first century, sheep were kept overnight in a communal pen with a watchman or guard. The shepherd enters the fold by the gate; the watchman, recognizing him, opens the gate; the shepherd's sheep hear and follow him. The contrast here is with the thief and robber who does not enter via the gate, as well as with the stranger whom the sheep do not recognize. Instead of following him, they run away.

Jesus' listeners don't understand this story, so he puts it in another way. First, Jesus identifies himself as the gate—the only way into God's flock is through him. Indeed, this is the way to be saved and find

pasture. Jesus came to bring us to the life that God intended.

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Before Jesus, there were thieves and robbers who came to kill, steal, and destroy, but the true sheep didn't listen to them.

Second, Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and as such he willingly lays down his life for the sheep. He is the Great Shepherd of the sheep. The contrast here is with the hired hand: he sees tending the flock as just a job and abandons it in a crisis.

Third, the Good Shepherd is in solidarity with the Father. The Son is known and loved by the Father, and the sheep are privileged to know and be known by the Son. The flock consists of all who come via Jesus—Jews or Gentiles.

Jesus, then, is both the gate to God's flock and the Good Shepherd who, by giving his life, provides the way to shelter. This is why Jesus has come. All

who turn their back on pretenders and come via Jesus have real life—they know the Son, and they know the Father.

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The thieves, robbers, strangers, and hired men in this context are the religious leaders of Israel—those who come in religious garb, whose goal is comfort, ease, and a secure paycheck but not the security of the sheep.

The Christian faith is all about Jesus. The gate is not a set of dogmas or rules, but a person to be trusted and known. Jesus shepherds the sheep by laying down his own life and pouring out his blood for them.

So, what are the lessons we can learn from this Scripture reading from John?

Jesus is the true shepherd and the door to salvation, providing protection, guidance, and “abundant life” for his followers. As the door, Jesus is the legitimate entry point for salvation and relationship with God. The true shepherd enters by the door, and the sheep recognize

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his voice, while thieves come to steal and destroy. This warns followers to be discerning about who they trust. This passage also emphasizes that following Jesus is not a restrictive life, but rather one that brings security and joy through his guidance.

Please bow your heads as I pray.

Lord Jesus, you are the Good Shepherd, who calls us by name and the Door to the sheepfold. Thank you for leading us away from danger and toward eternal life. Please attune our hearts to your voice alone, so we may follow You and not be misled by

the voices of thieves and strangers. Give us the wisdom to trust your guidance, the grace to accept your protection, and the courage to walk through the gate of your sacrifice into the abundant life you have promised. May we find security in your love today. We ask this in

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the name of Your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ.
Amen.