

THE 'I AM'S' OF JESUS

Part 2

I AM THE DOOR

Based on the book: "The Great I Am's of Jesus."

By Anthony Coniaris, Light and Life Publications

Jean Paul Sartre, the French existentialist wrote a play in 1944 called "No Exit". The story goes that three people go to hell and instead of finding fire and brimstone they find themselves in a room with no exit. They are stuck there and they know it. There is no way out. The greatest torture certainly.

On the contrary, Jesus used a farming image when he said, "I am the door; if anyone enters through me, they will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture." (John 10:9) *Εγώ ειμί η θύρα. εάν τις εισέλθη δι'εμού, σωθήσεται. και εισελεύσεται και εξελεύσεται και νομήν ευρήσει.*



Jesus Christ used language and illustrations that were understood by the people of his day, two thousand years ago. To understand what he meant by "door", we need to remember that in those days the shepherd would gather his sheep at night into open-air sheep-pens for protection. These sheep-pens were enclosed

by a wall, with thorns on top to keep out prowling wolves.

The shepherd would station himself at the narrow door and call the sheep to come in. He would know each one by name and as each came through, he would examine them for any scratches or wounds. If he found a wound, he would anoint the wound with olive oil.

After this the sheep would satisfy their thirst in a large basin of water that was nearby and would proceed into the pen. When all the sheep were in, the shepherd would light a large fire within the pen to frighten away wild animals. Then the shepherd would wrap himself in a cloak and lie down across the narrow door, which was the only entrance. Thus, no wild animal could get into the pen except over his body. The shepherd was the door in the most literal sense; there was no entrance to the sheep-pen except through him.

So when Jesus said, "I am the door" he was saying that he was the means by which his people would enter into safety and be protected from danger. "I am the door of the sheep... I lay down my life for the sheep." (John 10:7&15)

During the Middle Ages, a carpenters' guild in England used these words of Christ, "I am the Door" as their trademark. They would section off each door into four vertical rectangles leaving the relief of a cross in the middle of the door. To this day, many of our doors bear the relief of the cross in the middle. They remind us that Jesus is the door... the door to salvation, the gateway to life.

What is it about doors that appeals to us?... What is behind a door?... A locked door can make us feel left out. An open door makes us feel welcome. In daily life, passing through a door into someone's home also means passing into another realm.



In the Old Testament Jewish Temple, the innermost sanctum was known as the “Holy of Holies” (Τα Ἅγια τῶν Ἁγίων). In front of it hung a huge curtain. The curtain or veil symbolized the final and greatest mystery which the mind could not pierce, the mystery of God’s presence.

Into the Holy of Holies, it was only once a year that someone would enter, the High Priest. And he was not to linger there too long lest God would strike him dead. To enter into the presence of God was a rare thing and a fearful thing.

But the gospel tells us that when Jesus was crucified, and “...yielded up his spirit. ... the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. What does this mean? It means that the death of Christ pulled aside the the veil from the throne of God. Jesus opened the door to God’s Presence. Now its not hidden! Now we can see!

As the Letter to the Hebrews puts it so beautifully:

***19** Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, **20** by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, **21** and since we have a great priest over*

*the house of God, **22** let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:19-22)*

We can draw a parallel with the Royal Gate of the Iconostasion in Orthodox Christian churches, the Oraia Pyle (Ωραία Πύλη). This large gateway in the middle of the icon-screen, represents the opening of the curtain which was made by Christ. And unlike the once a year event of the Jewish Temple, we open this gate, this 'doorway', at every gathering of worship.



The door that is Christ is always open. So why linger outside the door? Step in. Inside you will find salvation, security, peace, love, meaning and abundant life. And when your life finally comes to an end, you will find that the last door, the grave, is not a closed door, but one that is open. There you will find Christ, the good-shepherd, standing at the threshold of eternity to take you by the hand and

lead into the joy of everlasting life.

Amin.

Sermon delivered by Fr Gerasimos Koutsouras
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