

THE ONLY GATE

Good Shepherd Sunday

John 10:1–10 with Acts 2:42–47; 1 Peter 2:19–25 and Psalm 23

INTRODUCTION

On June 18, 2023, five men climbed into a 22-foot carbon-fiber submersible and descended toward the wreck of the Titanic, two and a half miles down. The vessel, Titan, was operated by a company called OceanGate. Each passenger paid dearly for the privilege.

But Titan was not certified by the U.S. Coast Guard or any recognized maritime safety authority. OceanGate’s CEO, Stockton Rush, dismissed certification as needless bureaucracy. Former employees warned him. Experts wrote letters. Investigators later said the company ignored hull anomalies from prior dives and failed to do the kind of maintenance, inspection, and off-season storage a vessel under that kind of stress demands. He pressed on anyway, convinced he had found a better way.

At that depth, the ocean’s pressure is merciless—around six thousand pounds on every square inch (about 6,000 psi). On the descent, the pressure vessel suffered a catastrophic failure and Titan imploded, killing all five instantly. The gate had been bypassed, and the deep did not forgive.

The company was called OceanGate. The gate was in the name—and they would not go through it.

PART I — THE GOOD AND RIGHTEOUS WILL OF GOD

Jesus says, “Anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in some other way, is a thief and a robber... I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved... and find pasture” (John 10:1–2, 9). That is not soft imagery; it is a claim about reality. There is a right way into life with God, a true belonging in the Father’s fold—and that gate has a name: Jesus Christ.

Acts shows what it looks like when people actually enter through that gate: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). They shared with any in need, gathered often, ate with “glad

and sincere hearts,” praised God, and lived with a credibility the surrounding world could see (Acts 2:42–47). This is the “life to the full” Jesus promises (John 10:10).

And Peter names the posture of that life: “It is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God” (1 Pet. 2:19). The redeemed life is not self-certification; it is trust in God’s ordering—carrying the crosses that come, knowing the Shepherd “oversees your souls” (1 Pet. 2:25).

So the call is clear: love God with heart, mind, soul, and strength; love your neighbor as yourself; hear and follow the Shepherd’s voice; enter through the one gate. Live in Word, prayer, and fellowship; practice generosity and humility. This is not only command—it is the grain of the universe.

PART II — OUR ABJECT AND MISERABLE FAILURE

Now—look at us.

We are Stockton Rush—every one of us.

We have, all of us, decided at some point — at many points — that we know a better way in. We have climbed the walls of our own making and certified our own righteousness. We have told ourselves that our sincerity, our good intentions, our personal decency, our private spirituality — somehow that is sufficient. That God will be reasonable. That the gate is for other people. That we can find our way down on our own terms.

We have not loved God with our whole heart. We have loved comfort, image, and distraction. We have not devoted ourselves to the apostles’ teaching; we have devoted ourselves to whatever trains our desires most efficiently. We have not shared life with the saints with “glad and sincere hearts” when it was costly or inconvenient.

And we have not loved our neighbors. We have used them, judged them, ignored them, and withheld mercy when it might have inconvenienced us. We have justified our bitterness and quietly refused the love of enemies Christ commands.

And we know it. God’s law does not take excuses. “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way” (Isa. 53:6). We are lost not by accident but by refusal—looking for another gate: our own terms, our own righteousness, our own certification.

And the pressure is relentless. Guilt, shame, anxiety, fractured relationships, and futility do not wait for us two miles down; they begin at the surface. The uncertified life is always under strain—and sooner or later the seam shows.

PART III — FORGIVENESS THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

Here the gospel becomes staggering news.

The Shepherd did not stay safely in the pasture.

He came. He descended into our humanity and our cursed, dying world. He took the full weight of what the law demands and bore our wandering, pride, and rebellion in His body on the cross. He entered death as its conqueror, rose bodily on the third day, and reigns at the Father's right hand with all authority.

Truth: we were condemned. Justice: the penalty was paid. Mercy: it was paid by Another, in our place.

So the message is not advice but news: “Repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38). And He does not announce forgiveness at a distance—He delivers it. He sets the Table and gives His body and blood, “for you,” for the forgiveness of all your sins.

You did not earn this and you cannot. The gate stands open because He is the gate. And He says: Come in.

PART IV — THE LIFE OF THE RESTORED AMBASSADOR

Jesus says the one who enters through Him “will come in and go out and find pasture” (John 10:9). That is a life of holy movement: in for worship, nourishment, absolution, and fellowship; out for vocation, witness, and love. The forgiven do not hoard mercy—they become vessels of it.

Acts shows that the church did not stay locked in fear. Their shared life was so real that “the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). Not because of clever marketing, but because Christ was making a people visibly alive.

You are that people now—restored and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. When you return to the Shepherd's commands—loving with sacrifice, devoting yourself to Word and prayer, bearing suffering with patience—the Spirit goes to work, shaping you into the likeness of Christ: the fullness of what it means to be human.

And Peter says that when you live this way—especially when it costs you—“it is commendable before God” (1 Pet. 2:20). The Father is pleased with the faith He Himself sustains, and He stores up a reward no culture can erase.

This confirms who you are. You are not defined by forgiven failures or by anxious performances. You are defined by the voice that calls your name—the Shepherd’s voice. You are a sheep of His pasture, an heir of His kingdom, and an ambassador of His mercy in a world full of sinking, self-certified vessels.

CLOSING — THE ILLUSTRATION RESOLVED

Stockton Rush built his own way down. Brilliant, driven, confident—he dismissed certified warnings and bypassed the gate. And where there is no rescue and no appeal, the pressure found him.

Titan became a tomb because its maker trusted himself more than the gate.

But the Good Shepherd has gone into the deepest darkness—sin, death, and hell—and He has come back. He alone holds open the gate that stands against every depth. He holds it open now, for you, and He says:

"I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out and find pasture. I have come that they may have life — and have it to the full."

The Lord is your Shepherd. You shall not want. Enter through the gate and experience life in all its fullness. Amen.

Pastor Ron Breight

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