

# Opening Iron Gates

Acts 12:1-12

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## INTRODUCTION:

- A. How many of us in this audience today have ever felt imprisoned . . . chained locked into a set of circumstances . . . or a situation over which we have little or no control? Jailed, as it were, behind iron gates . . . Iron gates we are powerless to open.
1. Perhaps it's a dead end job that has us imprisoned.
  2. Perhaps its a marriage situation that you just can't seem to work out.
  3. Maybe it's a financial burden so cumbersome that there is just no way to pay the debt.
  4. Maybe it's a medical problem that is terminal . . . or one that will at least inhibit our life-style.
  5. Perhaps it's loneliness.
  6. Perhaps it's a temptation to sin.
- B. Whatever it is, it has you imprisoned behind iron gates. If in anyway you feel imprisoned, my hope is that this study will be of help to you.
1. Let's take our Bibles and read an account of the opening of a major iron gate. **Acts 12:1-12** - Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church.
    - 2 Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword.
    - 3 And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was during the Days of Unleavened Bread.
    - 4 So when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover.
    - 5 Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.
    - 6 And when Herod was about to bring him out, that night Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping the prison.
    - 7 Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, "Arise quickly!" And his chains fell off his hands.
    - 8 Then the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and tie on your sandals"; and so he did. And he said to him, "Put on your garment and follow me."
    - 9 So he went out and followed him, and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision.
    - 10 When they were past the first and the second guard posts, **they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of**

**its own accord**; and they went out and went down one street, and immediately the angel departed from him.

11 And when Peter had come to himself, he said, "Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people."

12 So, when he had considered this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying.

1. We know little about Herod, and most of what we do know is bad.
2. In order to gain favor with Rome as well as with some of the powerful Jews of his time, Herod was unmerciful in persecuting the church in Jerusalem.
  - a. He had James, the brother of John put to death with a sword.
  - b. He was now coming after a second member of the inner circle of the apostles - Peter.
  - c. Although he had Peter arrested during the time of Passover, Herod, not wanting to disrupt the feast time activities, had Peter placed in a secure prison with plans to deal with him when the feast ended.
3. Herod assigned tight security.
  - a. A "quaternion" was a company of "four"; consequently the whole number employed here was sixteen . . . . .  $4 \times 4 = 16$ .
  - b. The Romans divided the night into four watches so that the guards could be relieved; those who were on guard occupying three hours, and being then relieved.
    1. Of the four who were on guard, two were with Peter in the prison (Acts 12:6), and two kept watch before the door of the prison.
    2. The utmost precaution was taken that he should not escape; and Herod thus gave the most ample assurance to the Jews of his intention to secure Peter, and to bring him to "trial."
4. While the carefully guarded apostle slept, members of the church gathered in the house of John Mark and his mother, Mary, for prayer. No doubt, they were praying for Peter's release.
  - a. Suddenly, an angel appears in the cell, awakes Peter, tells him to get dressed.
  - b. Immediately the chains that had bound him securely . . . fell off from his wrists.
  - c. Peter and the angel walked through the prison unchallenged.
  - d. They came to the high **IRON GATE** that led from the prison to the city street. Now what does Peter do?
    1. Exit appears impossible . . . has he come this far for nothing? . . . has he been given a false hope? The answer is no . . . he hasn't.
    2. Then the gate opens of its own accord.
      - a. No key.

- b. No human force is exerted.
- c. The Greek word for this opening is means “automati” . . . “self moved.”
- 3. The gates that had been securely closed and locked by the human exertion of the soldiers and the key . . . now open without them.
- 4. You may call it providence . . . or a miracle . . . or whatever you wish.  
But know this . . . **God intervened in the life of one of His children.**
- E. Now that we have been introduced to this Biblical narrative, I want to revisit the events recorded herein and set forth some concepts and principles we can apply directly to our lives when we feel:
  - 1. Locked up.
  - 2. Imprisoned.
  - 3. Chained
  - 4. Inside our own, very real **IRON GATES** of circumstances and situations.
- F. Let’s talk about how we can open some of the iron gates in life.

### **FIRST OBSERVATION: PETER SLEPT.**

- A. A number of things were happening near him.
  - 1. Members of the church were in fervent prayer for his safety.
  - 2. The city was caught up in the celebration of Passover.
  - 3. Many Jews were celebrating the death of James, a prominent Christian leader.
  - 4. Herod Agrippa was no doubt calculating his political advantage that would be gained from killing Peter as he had James.
  - 5. But the very night before his possible death, Peter is sleeping.
    - a. Brethren, this is grand testimony to his faith . . . to his absolute, total trust in God.
    - b. Do we trust God enough . . . do we have sufficient faith to sleep the night before our death?
    - c. That’s faith . . . genuine Biblical faith.
- B. Most of us have some money in the bank or some other financial institution (credit union, investment firm, etc.)
  - 1. Our dealings with that institution are called fiduciary (fi-du-see-ary) affairs.
  - 2. The word “fiduciary” was first made popular in religion.
    - a. It comes from the Latin word that means faith.
    - b. It was used by Martin Luther.
    - c. Fiduciary is the Latin word for personal trust.
    - d. Martin Luther maintained, and rightly so, that the Christian life is a fiduciary relationship with God . . . a relationship of faith . . . a relationship of personal trust.
    - e. Webster’s II New Riverside Dictionary defines fiduciary, in part, as: “Relating to or involving one that holds something in trust for another.

3. Now we must come to understand that we cannot have a fiduciary relationship with the bank unless two conditions are met:
  - a. First: We must have some funds on deposit . . . something invested there.
  - b. Second: We must trust that institution to care for our investment.
4. So it is with God. A faith in God is our fiduciary relationship with Him. It means two things:
  - a. One: We invest ourselves in Him.
  - b. Two: We trust Him completely with that investment.
- C. An important question needs to be asked of everyone present . . . Have you given your life to God . . . Have you invested your life with God . . . all of it?
  1. Have you given Him your job?
  2. Have you given Him your family?
  3. Have you given Him Your finances?
  4. Have you given Him your health?
  5. Have you given Him your broken relationships?
- D. Brethren, Peter had that kind of faith . . . Peter was banking on God.
  1. **Peter was trusting God so deeply that he could sleep so soundly even in a Roman prison.** He is a peace in, of all places, a dreary Roman prison.
  2. That peace is a result of His faith, his fiduciary (fi-du-cee-ary) relationship with God.
  3. Trusting God . . . Peter sleeps. Peter is at peace. Not because he is locked securely behind an iron gate, but because He is locked into the love and care of an all-powerful God.
  4. Faith helps us to navigate the storm-tossed seas of life.

## **SECOND OBSERVATION: WHILE PETER SLEPT, THE CHURCH PRAYED.**

- A. The prayers of the church are powerful.
  1. The preacher needs your prayers. I thank you for every prayer you pray on my behalf.
  2. The elders need your prayers.
  3. The deacons need your prayers.
  4. The Bible class teachers need your prayers.
  5. Brethren in serous difficulties need your prayers.
  7. Our young people need your prayers.
  8. All of the brethren need your prayers.
- B. Your prayers for brethren behind iron gates are needed.
  1. Some of our brethren are knee deep in sin . . . They need the prayers of the church.

2. Some of our brethren are captured by the evil one . . . They need the prayers of the church.
  3. Some of our brethren are struggling with serious health issues . . . They need the prayers of the church.
  4. Some of our brethren are financially imprisoned . . . They need the prayers of the church.
  5. Some of our brethren are facing career decisions . . . They need the prayers of the church.
  6. Some of our brethren are socially imprisoned . . . They need the prayers of the church.
  7. Some of our brethren are imprisoned in spiritual weakness . . . They need the prayers of the church.
  8. Some of our brethren are facing the uninvited challenges of the aging process , , , They need the prayers of the church,
- C. Some may have the mistaken idea that the only reason to walk down church aisles is sin. No, there are others needs that require prayer.

### **THIRD OBSERVATION: PETER OBEYED THE VOICE OF GOD AND WAS DELIVERED BY THE ANGEL.**

A. Note the text if you will:

1. The angel told Peter:
  - a. “Quick, get up. Peter could do that.
  - b. “Put on your clothes and sandals.” Peter could do that.
  - c. “Wrap your cloak around you.” Peter could do that.
  - d. “Follow me.” Peter could do that.
2. Four distinct commands given . . . each is instantly obeyed by Peter with question.
  - a. Obedience had a part in Peter’s release from behind the iron gate.
  - b. Release from imprisonment and all other dimensions of the Christian life are based upon our obedience to God’s will through the word.

B. Are you familiar with the principle that God will not do for us what we can do for ourselves?

1. Example #1: Jesus turned water into wine . . . something we could not do . . . but first asked those there to fill the water pots. When man did his part, Jesus did His.
2. Example #2: Jesus fed 5,000 . . . something we could not do . . . but first he let the apostles find the loaves of bread and the fish. . . some thing they could do. When man did his part, Jesus did His.
3. Example #3: Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead . . . something we could not do . . . but he asked them to remove the stone from the tomb entrance, and later to remove the burial garments . . . something they could do. When man did his part . . . Jesus did His.

C. Did you notice that in each of the three examples that God’s grace demanded a response on the part of man? It still does.

1. **John 3:5** - “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”
  - a. Man utilizes the water available.
  - b. God makes the Spirit available.
2. **Luke 13:3, 5** - “I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.” Forgiveness of past sins demands repentance.
  - a. Man repents in heart.
  - b. God sees and accepts that repentance.
3. **Acts 2:38** - “Then Peter said to them, Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”
  - a. Man can be baptized.
  - b. Only God can provide the remission of man’s sins.

D. **ILLUSTRATION:** I recall the story about a lady caught in a local flood. The water was up to the porch. A boat comes by and the men asked her to get in. “No thanks, the Lord will save me.” Sometime later the water had forced her up to the roof. As she climbed atop the porch another boat came by and those in it asked her to allow them to take her to safe ground. “Oh no,” she replied, “The Lord will save me.” Finally the water had forced her to the crown peak of the roof. A helicopter hovered overhead and the loud speaker blared, grab hold of the rope and we’ll save you. “No I will wait upon the Lord to save me.” Do you know what she did next? SHE DROWNED! At heaven’s gate she complained to Peter: “I thought God was going to save me?” Peter replied, “But madam, He did send two boats and a helicopter.”

**FOURTH OBSERVATION: EVEN IF WE LEAVE THE IRON GATES TO GOD, WE MUST REMEMBER JAMES IN OUR TEXT.**

- A. James was beheaded. The iron gates opened for Peter, but seemingly remained closed for James. This draws us to two very solemn truths:
1. Sometimes God does not deliver us as we understand deliverance.
  2. Sometimes He leaves us where we are and stays there with us.
    - a. Remember Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane? “Let this cup pass from me.”
      1. No deliverance, as we understand deliverance, but Luke says “Angels came down and ministered to Him.”
      2. God was still in Heaven . . . and Jesus was still in the Garden of Gethsemane . . . But now it was better than before.
    - b. Remember Paul’s “thorn in the flesh?” No deliverance from it . . . no removal of it, but a promise, “My grace is sufficient.”

- B. We need to know that there will be times when the iron gates will remain closed.
1. Our family relations will still fracture.
  2. Our health will still fail.
  3. Bankruptcy will occur.
  4. Temptation will defeat us.
  5. Death will still come.
- C. Brethren, there are times that God has something better in mind for us.
1. God sometimes chooses for us a course different than the one we would choose for ourselves.
  2. God has other plans for us and our existence here or in the hereafter . . . trust Him! . . . Trust Him!
  3. **Romans 8:28** - And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.
- D. Friends . . . iron gates can be confusing.
1. Sometimes when we get up to our iron gate it is only an imagined fear and nothing else
  2. Sometimes we discover the gate is not as difficult to open as we thought.
  3. Sometimes mountains always look steeper from a distance.
  4. Sometimes we are able to work our way through iron gates.
  5. And sometimes we must depend upon God's grace and omnipotent help.
- E. Solomon said in **Proverbs 3:5-6** - "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths."
- F. You see, iron gates are:
- Tough.
  - They are strong.
  - They seem impossible.
- But God is stronger than any iron gate of man.
- G. We just never forget that regardless of the iron gate which confronts us, God will open it and lead us into a brighter day.

## CONCLUSION:

- A. If you are imprisoned by sin, the iron gate can be opened by:
1. Faith . . . belief.
  2. Repentance of sins.
  3. Confession of Christ.
  4. Baptism for the remission of sins.
- B. Maybe, having done that, you have returned to the prison of unfaithfulness.
1. Repent.
  2. Confess.
  3. Pray for forgiveness.

- C. **John 8:32** - "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."  
FREE INDEED . . . FREE INDEED . . . INDEED WE CAN BE FREE!
- D. **God's Plan for Man's Salvation**