

30b ACTS

Let's pick up our study now in Acts chapter 12 and we had some some great idea submissions during the break about why the gate opened of its own accord and I think all of them partook of or are aspects of what what I see in this. Let me first of all, before I totally flesh out what what I think that means, this is Acts chapter 12 verse 10, when they had passed, this is Peter and the angel, when they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city which opened for them by itself and they went out and went along one street and immediately the angel departed from him. Ok, now with that those details in mind, let's compare this to what you may have forgotten was an earlier and somewhat similar episode back in Acts chapter 5 and verse 19.

This you will remember is the imprisonment of Peter and John in chapter 5 verse 18, they laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail. Remember this Acts 5? But during the night what happened? Acts 5 19, during the night an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison and taking them out he said go stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this life. You think about it now, this is back some 10 to 15 years earlier, not so much is known about the new age, about the new dispensation, about the new calling that is going to be fulfilled by the apostles and those whom they teach.

So the angel comes and he does everything. He comes during the night once again and he opens the gate of the prison. The prison bar doesn't open of its own accord.

He opens the gate, he takes them out and then he gives them verbal instructions. He doesn't take them one block and let them decide. He says you need to go to the temple, you need to stand in the place there and speak the whole, tells them exactly what to say.

Very specific guidance. Why? Infancy of the church age. Very little by way of new revelation.

They need more information at this point. So now we come back to Acts chapter 12 where Peter is being let out and now the gate opens of its own accord as they're walking out. The angel doesn't open it, it opens by itself.

They walk out, the angel takes them one block, doesn't give them any verbal instructions and leaves. You say well, okay, takes two dots to establish a line. Well, turn with me forward, we're anticipating something, but turn with me forward now to Acts chapter 16 and verse 23.

This is talking about Paul and Silas, a little ways down the road here, a few years in the future. Paul and Silas have been imprisoned. They struck them with many blows, they

threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely.

And he, having received such a command, this is the Philippian jailer, you remember this story, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. By the way, this is, let me just, it's too tempting for me to pass up, but there are two different words that are translated cross in the New Testament, or sometimes translated staros, S-T-A-U-R-O-S, always means cross. But another word is often translated cross, especially in your newer translations, and it doesn't mean cross, it literally means wood.

And it is zulon, Z-U-L-O-N. And when it says cursed is every man who hangs on a tree, the word translated tree is zulon. When it says he bore our sins in his own body on the tree, it is zulon.

Now there's a completely different word for tree in Greek. Zulon means wood, and it can mean pole or post, something made of wood. That is the word that's used here in Acts 16.24, they threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the wood, is what it literally says.

Very same word that is used for the cross of Christ and what Christ was hung on. When it says tree in the Old King James, it's zulon. Anyway, I don't have time to flesh that out much, but verse 25, about midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns.

This is the third time somebody's been in prison, third time their deliverance happens in the middle of the night. They're praying and singing hymns of praise to God. The prisoners are listening to them.

Suddenly there came a great earthquake so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. The jailer awoke, saw the prison doors open, and of course the prisoners have remained. They do not leave.

Notice in the first deliverance in Acts chapter 5, you have an angel who takes them by the hand. He opens the gate. He leads them out.

He tells them what to do. In Peter's case in Acts 12, he appears mainly to kick Peter awake, leads him past the two sets of guards. The gate swings open by itself.

He takes Peter a block and he disappears. He doesn't really give him any instructions. In this case, no angel.

What does an angel do? What is his function? Communication. Communicating the Word of God. This is guidance.

This is instruction for us. In the first case, it doesn't say what the Apostles are doing in prison. In the second case, it says that Peter was asleep and had to be kicked awake.

In this case, the Apostles are awake, or Paul and Silas, I should say, are awake and what are they doing? They are communicating. Not only do they not need anything told to them, they know enough to tell others. They are communicating to all of the rest of the prisoners and they are going to communicate to the Philippian jailer.

Acts 16.31, Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. No angel is required. Not only does the gate come open by itself, but the chain is unfastened by themselves and the whole prison is opened up by this earthquake of God.

So now, having sort of put these three episodes side-by-side, what do we conclude from this gate swinging open? As we learn, as God communicates to us, there is more and more that is left up to our discretion, that we are expected to come up with on our own and it isn't going to be held by the hand. It isn't going to be that every little thing... Now God will prepare the way. This is one of our suggestions on the break and it's a great one.

God will create an opportunity. In Peter's case, the door swings open and Peter walks out. The angel encourages him to go forth.

In this case, the doors swing open, the chains come unfastened. It seems like a great divine deliverance. Most of us, the first thing we would do is jump up and run out, but Paul and Silas stay put.

The Philippian jailer's life is at stake if they leave and they evaluate the circumstances and they determine that even though on the surface this seems like God saying, get up and go, there is another truth. They are synthesizing. They are thinking their way through life and it doesn't mean every time there's an earthquake and every time your chains fall off, it's time to rush out.

They have enough of the Word of God at this later point to interpret their circumstances and to make a decision. The other suggestion that was made on the break, which is also a good one, is to think about Revelation chapter 2 and chapter 3. What does the Lord Jesus say to the church in Philadelphia in Revelation 3.7? To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, he who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens, say this, I know your deeds, behold I have put before you an open door which no one can shut. Why? Because you have a little power.

You think about those three episodes. Peter is in that middle point. They have a little power.

I'll put an open door in front of you. I'll take you the first block and then you figure out what to do next. You have kept my word.

You have not denied my name because you have kept the word of my perseverance. I

will keep you from the hour of testing. You have kept my command to persevere.

What is it that we come to know when we have a little power? We know that even if I don't understand it, I'm going to stick with it. You think about the 23rd Psalm. The Lord is my shepherd.

I'm not going to want, I'm going to lack. He's going to provide for me. He's my shepherd.

I'm his sheep. It's his job to provide for me. He's promised to do it.

He's going to do it. I'm not going to sweat provision. He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. Leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow. Have you ever thought about this? Why is the sheep walking through the valley of the shadow of death? Who's in charge of the itinerary here? The shepherd. And if you think, well, he's switched away from the sheep motif, he hasn't.

Walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. Why? Thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. The rod and the staff are shepherd's implements used on the sheep.

Sometimes it just takes a touch. The sheep is wandering around, he's looking around. It's a dark valley.

Who chose that valley as a path? The shepherd did. The shepherd chose it. The shepherd is taking the sheep through a scary place, through a depressing place, through a shadowy place.

But he says, I'm not going to be afraid of evil because the shepherd is with me. I feel the touch of the rod. I feel the restraining of the crook.

You know, they used to have in vaudeville, somebody would be out there and not be going over too well. A bad comic or something and people would start yelling, get the hook! And they would have the hook and yank them off the stage, literally. Well, this is what the shepherd did with his crook, with his shepherd's staff that had the crook in the end.

Because the sheep, they might wander too near the edge of a precipice or start down into a ditch and be unable to climb back out. And he can reach down there and hook the sheep. He can restrain the sheep.

He can pull the sheep back from the brink. He can pull the sheep out of a tight spot with

that shepherd's crook, by rod and by staff. Sometimes he just taps him on the head a little bit, says, no, don't go that way.

Stay on this path and you'll be alright. Don't panic. Don't fall apart just because we're in the valley of the shadow.

Tap, tap. Thump, thump. Hook, restrain, yank out of the little precipice there.

I will fear no evil. You're with me. Then he goes on to change the imagery a bit.

You prepare a table for me in the presence of mine enemies. What a great victory that is to sit down to a meal that God has prepared in the sight of these who are hostile, these who are opposing. By the way, the victory that Jesus won, what does the Bible say about the victory that Jesus won on the cross, the victory that the apostles are proclaiming here in Acts? Paul tells us that he disarmed principalities and powers and led them in a triumph parade.

But it says he disarmed them. And you know what occurs to our mind right after that? What does Paul say about our spiritual warfare, our enemies? He says we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principles. It doesn't say we battle not or we fight with sword and spear.

He says, you know why we're wrestling principalities and powers? It's sort of a non-deadly combat. They've been disarmed. They don't have the weapon anymore.

They can't slay us. I think it's neat to juxtapose those two statements about the Lord. Having disarmed, he led them in a triumph parade.

This is what the Romans used to do. They would strip the enemy king down to his boxer shorts and then lead him on a parade and kind of mock him all the way down the main avenue there and humiliate him. And this is basically the description of what Jesus has done to the principalities and powers in his triumph at the cross.

He has disarmed them. And now he has turned them loose on us and all they can do is wrestle. Why do we wrestle? We build strength.

We gain skill. We learn how to think. So God prepares a table for us in the presence of our enemies.

Why can he do that? Because their teeth have been pulled. Their weapons have been confiscated. They cannot harm us.

We are led by the shepherd. Well, all of that to say that this open gate that is put in front of Peter, he is led through. There is an open door that is put in front of Paul and Silas in Philippi in Acts chapter 16.

We have to know enough and come to the place of discerning which doors to walk through and which doors to let go by. Jesus tells Philadelphian church, Revelation chapter 3, I have set before you an open door that no one can shut. We look at that door.

We evaluate that door. It is an opportunity and we choose whether or not to walk through it. What kind of a door is it? I think the door in Philadelphia is a door of opportunity.

You get to Revelation 3.20 and what does he say? Even though Jesus has the key to the door and he opens the door and nobody can shut it, when you get to verse 20, he says behold I stand at the door and knock. Who is in charge of opening that door? The occupant has the choice of opening that door or not. Earthquake isn't going to open it.

Angels not going to open it. It's not going to open of its own accord. The occupant of the dwelling has to open that door.

So there's a lot to think about when you get to these open gates and open doors. But we're ready now to move a little further forward here in Acts. So you get Peter coming out and we left him last time.

It's taken us a long time to get back to where we left him last time. Peter came to himself in verse 11. I know for certain and anytime you get thrown for a loop, anytime you get surprised, anytime you are taken aback.

I love that term by the way, being a an aficionado of things related to the wooden ship Navy and sailing and so forth. You know what it means to be taken aback? A sailing ship, your sails are supposed to fill out in a certain way and the movement of the air across the front of the sail. A lot of people think that the air blows in the back of the sail like a parachute makes the ship go.

It doesn't. It is the passage of the air across the front of the sail, the curved sail. It's just the same principle that makes an airplane fly.

The loss of pressure of the air going over a curved surface creates a force in the upward direction on an airplane wing. It's in the horizontal direction on a sailing ship's sails. So by manipulating the sails and pointing those curves in a certain direction and getting the wind to go across it, you pull the ship through the air and thus through the water.

But in the course of tacking or going about, you can wind up missing the wind, missing your new direction and you wind up in irons or you wind up being taken aback. In irons means your sails just kind of fall flat and you can't get the ship to point any direction where the sails will fill again. But when you're taken aback, your sails actually go backwards.

They're the wrong way and now you've gone into reverse. When you were trying to get

into second, you've gone into reverse instead. So this term being taken aback is a sailing term and it means you can actually snap your masts and yards and halyards and things when that happens.

So when we get taken aback, when we get stunned or thrown for a loop or jarred out of our reason for a moment, what do we do? Go to what you know. The thing to jumpstart your brain, the thing to prime the pump and get circulation going in your mind again is start with what you know. This is exactly what Peter does.

When Peter had come to himself, he said, now what do I know for certain? What am I sure of? This is a wild thing that just happened, but what do I know? Well, I know for sure the Lord has sent his angel. That angel was from the Lord. This isn't some delusion of Satan.

He has delivered me from the hand of Herod and he has delivered me from all the expectation of the Jewish people. So when he had considered this, notice I'm not just emphasizing this blindly. Scripture emphasizes it.

It says he came to it, he thought about it, he considered it, he said it to himself. When he had considered this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose surname was Mark. Now isn't this interesting? When we did our study of the gospel of Mark, we convinced ourselves that the content of that gospel is largely the preaching of the Apostle Peter.

This is one of the ways we know that. Where is Peter going to first go when he is freed from prison? He goes to the house of John Mark, belongs to John Mark's mother. Why? Because they are close personal friends.

This is where the congregation is meeting in prayer. So he goes there. Many are gathered together praying.

This is a great example, by the way, when someone is in distress, when someone is faced with challenge, what can the rest of us do? Pray. Not just individual prayer, also corporate prayer. Many had gathered together, they are praying, and notice this is the middle of the night.

Peter would sound asleep. These people are not asleep. These people are up in the middle of the night praying specifically for Peter.

Why? Not just because they love Peter. What is the issue if Peter is slain? If he is delivered into the hands of the Jews? This would be a major setback to evangelism. This would be a major setback to the furtherance and the preaching of the gospel of Christ.

They are not just saying, oh poor Peter, please get him out of that damp old dungeon and those smelly old Roman guards. They are saying, Lord, the future of Christianity is

on the line here. We need the Apostle Peter to teach us.

You commissioned him to teach us. We need to not be squelched by the powers that be. It would be awful if they scored a victory in this way and at this time, at the height of Passover when they are in a religious fervor anyway.

For them to score a big victory would be terrible. They are praying in the whole realm of this, and they can spend hours praying about all the different aspects of what this will mean to the entire Christian faith as it then exists. So they are all gathered together praying.

As Peter, this is one of the funny stories of the Bible, Peter knocked at the door of the gate. A girl named Rhoda came to answer. When she recognized Peter's voice, because of gladness, she did not open the gate.

Notice, the gate does not swing open of its own accord. An angel does not come open the gate. The occupant of this house is supposed to open the gate.

Peter knocked at the door. Hello? Anybody home? I see a light in the window. This is Peter.

This is Simon. Shimon. And the girl, Rhoda, hears his voice.

They have been praying for this guy for five or six hours maybe, and she hears his voice outside the door, and it just knocks her for a loop. She is taken aback. So she does not open the gate.

Instead, she ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate. But they said to her, you are beside yourself, yet she kept insisting that it was so. So they said, it is his angel.

Well, if it was his angel, he would open the gate, wouldn't he? That's what the angel does. He opens the gate. Peter doesn't appear to have the authority to just make the gate open.

What does it mean it is his angel? Do they think that this is an emissary from on high? What does angel mean? Its first primary ordinary Greek meaning is messenger. They say, no, you heard a guy out there saying, I have a message from Peter. It's not Peter outside the gate.

It's his messenger. It's his emissary. He's sneaked a message out through the window of the prison or something.

He got one of the guards to hand something. It's his messenger. Now, Peter continued knocking.

What does it say in Revelation 3.20? Behold, I stand at the door and keep on knocking. If

anyone will hear my voice and will open the door, I will come in. I mean, how many parallels do we need here? Peter continued knocking.

When they did open the door and saw him, they were astonished. I see a little bit of a picture here of enthusiasm in our Christian faith. There is a great deliverance that God gives us.

The Lord Jesus stands at the door and knocks and we get excited at his presence and run in and say, it's the Lord. It's the Lord. And you see a lot of enthusiasm that gets excited and does a lot of proclamation, but never actually opens the door and lets him in.

And this is a problem that is illustrated and is exemplified in these passages. When you hear the Lord's knock, when you hear his voice coming through the door, don't pull a rhoda. Don't get excited and go tell others and fail to heed the call, fail to heed the knock.

Enthusiasm is not a substitute for faith. Excitement is not a substitute for obedience. There are lots of enthusiastic Christians.

They are excited about their faith, but they are dumber than a box of rocks when it comes to what their faith is and what it calls them to do. They're all excitement and they're never think to open the door and let the Lord in. How do you let the Lord in? This is a great picture, but we don't have a literal little doorknob we can turn and open up our chest and in he goes.

How do we let the Lord in? What does Jesus say in John chapter 14 and 15? The one who has my words and heeds them. Two parts of that. It doesn't say the one that has my words.

The one that has my words and keeps them, observes them. He's the one that loves me and I and my father will come and dwell, make our home with him. When somebody comes to dwell with you, somebody comes to live with you, do they live on the porch or do they live in your spare room? They come in, don't they? If Jesus says I will come and make my home with him, what does that mean? It means somebody has opened the door, having his words and observing them, living by them, deciding that God is smarter than we are.

That whatever his word says, that's the way it's got to be. I don't care what other people say. I don't care what other people do.

I don't care what other people say about me. This is what the word of God says. The one who has my words and keeps them.

He's the one that loves me. I and my father will come to him. We will make our home with him.

Did you know that there are many many many many many of us as Christians who do not have the indwelling of the Lord Jesus Christ? Many seminaries, many theological persuasions teach that you are indwelt by Christ at the moment of salvation. The Bible does not teach that. You are sealed with the Holy Spirit, you are indwelt with the Holy Spirit, not the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus doesn't say the one that believes in me, I and my father will come to him and make our home. He says the one that has my word and keeps it. It is an operational, policy, day by day decision.

That's what makes this happen. Everybody has heard Revelation 3.20, I stand at the door and knock. If any man will hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and share a meal with him.

Fellowship with him and he with me. If we want this to be real and true of us, if we want to qualify for those blessings of Revelation 2 and 3 that are promised to the overcomers, it doesn't require slaying Goliath. It doesn't require defeating hordes of Philistines.

It doesn't require going and getting nailed to a cross. You know what it requires? Hearing God's word and keeping it. That's it.

I have set before you an open door. God's door is open. It's our door that's shut.

And we're the ones that have to decide to open it. So that's what I see here in Acts chapter 12. Peter continues knocking just like the Lord does.

They finally open the door and they're astonished. But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, go tell these things to James and to the brethren.

Now, we just had a notation earlier that James has been killed. So what James is this? Well, this is the James that wrote the epistle of James, right after Hebrews. This is James, the half-brother of the Lord Jesus.

He is the leader of the Jerusalem church. And interestingly, Peter says to the people, quiet down now. Calm down.

Get your wits about you here. Tell James and the brethren. And then he departed and went to another place.

He didn't stick around. But he told them, he knew they were assembled, and he knew they could get a message to James. He doesn't go see James and rouse him out of a sound sleep.

He just says, you go tell James. Why? He's reporting in. He's checking in.

I'm not AWOL. I'm not a prisoner of war. I'm back on duty.

Let the leader of the church know. Tell James. So Peter is thinking all the time.

It's necessary. It's courteous. It's a good functional decision.

It helps the church know what to do next. Then, as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers about what had become of Peter. That's the understatement of the year.

These guys can die for this. You remember the Philippian jailer and the sweat grenades he was throwing when the jail sprung open. Well, you imagine, there's no small stir among the soldiers about what had become of Peter.

But when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards and commanded that they be put to death. You have to hope that they listened to whatever Peter told them before he left because that was their only chance for the gospel. And if there was any Jewish man on the planet who could give them the gospel of Jesus Christ before they died that day, it was Peter.

He's the guy that saw the sheet. He's the guy that says, Lord has taught me to call no man unclean. So do you think those 16 guys had a chance? I think they did.

Do you think maybe some of them gave it some thought, maybe responded? Have to hope so because that was their last chance. We tend to think that we are nine feet tall, bulletproof, immortal, nothing will ever happen. You never know if this is your last day on the planet.

You never know if this is going to be the period at the end of your sentence and whatever has been written up to this point is going to stand for eternity as the record you've written of your life. This is going to be the basis of the judgment. This is going to be the basis of your entrance into the millennial kingdom and into eternity beyond.

So we have to try to start stacking those chips in a productive way, in a fruitful way because you just don't know. I'm talking to you this week. I could be gone next week.

Anyone of us in this room could be checked out and gone to glory this time next week, this time tomorrow. The Lord only knows how long our life is. So it is a serious and important consideration for us to redeem the time, to make every decision count, every policy choice count.

Take a look at the open door that is before us. God has given us a lot of open doors. Some of them we should walk through.

Some of them we should not. Just because there is not an angel with a whirling flaming sword barring the way, just because it isn't a Balaam situation where the donkey refuses

to go down the road and we have the opportunity to go, doesn't mean we should. Sometimes there is an open door of God's making that we are not supposed to take, like we saw with Paul and Silas.

The only way to succeed in this life is to think our way through it. And you can see that God gives us the information upon which to base our thinking. When we are new and young in the faith, he gives us lots of information, lots of guidance, lots of holding of the hands.

When we get partway through, he starts to turn us loose and let us do a little more on our own. Finally, when you get to that third episode, he is going to shake the ground and we figure it all out. This is not only what happened in those three prison deliverances and acts, it is also what happens in our daily life.

So, having said all of that, we are going to leave here, we are going to fold up our Bibles, we are going to go back to our homes, we are going to resume our lives. What difference does it make? So what? Well, I ask you in the first session, can you think of what that gate opening of its own accord might mean? The second question I will ask tonight is, do you see gates like that ahead of you? Do we have gates in our lives that are opportunities, possibilities? What do we think about them? Are they ones that God wants us to walk through or not? How do we know whether or not this opportunity is one we should pursue? How do we know whether or not we should move in a particular direction? The one thing that is consistent in all three of the episodes we looked at tonight is, God always gives us what we need. Right now, whatever decision, whatever choices we are facing, we have the information to make the choice.

God gives us what we need. If we are young in the faith, He is going to send the angel, He is going to grab us by the hand, He is going to unlock the gate, show us how it opens, lead us right out. If we are intermediate, He is going to establish our direction.

If we are advanced, like Paul and Silas, then it ought to be a no-brainer. We can even pass the test where it is open and we shouldn't go through and remain. Why? Out of consideration of others.

You notice the great commandments, love the Lord your God, love your neighbor as yourself. All the law and the prophets are summed up in these. Why is it Paul and Silas didn't walk through and gain their freedom? It's the Philippian jailer's life, right? Why didn't Peter stay behind so that the 16 Roman soldiers wouldn't die? The angel kicked him and said, get up and go.

Don't worry about the soldiers, they've had their chance. God gives us the information we need, but we have to think. This is why we've so often returned to the idea of meditating day and night in the law of the Lord.

Just take some time to stop and think, well, what does my understanding of the Bible have to say about this situation or this choice? Is this something that is pleasing to God? Is this someone I should associate with? Is this an activity I should engage in? Is this a path I should walk? Is this a gate I should pass through or not? Because God has given us the information we need, we are fully accountable for our choice. We are fully accountable for whether or not we go through that gate. We are fully accountable for what destination we choose once we're outside the gate.

We're also accountable for whether or not we open the door that Jesus knocks on to come in and fellowship with us. That's our choice. That's our opportunity.

It's a great potential that we have because we're believers, because we're still alive in this life, because the period has not been put at the end of our sentence yet. And so in whatever time remains to us, this is why we're here. There isn't anything more important than understanding this principle.

This is why God gives us another day, is to see what we're going to do in this regard. It's all about open doors. Some of them God opens.

Some of them we open. You just have to know which. Let's close in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for illustrating these truths for us so clearly in your word. We pray that as we seek to understand and seek to be in the center of your will, God the Holy Spirit will impress these truths in our hearts. Help us to live in a way that is pleasing in your sight and glorifies our Savior, the Lord Jesus.

We pray it in his name. Amen.