

In this remarkable story of Peter miraculous deliverance from prison, we may experience some stretching of our credibility . . . as about other miracles reported in the Bible.

But William Barclay says:

In this story we do not necessarily need to see a miracle. It may be that the story is one of a thrilling rescue and escape. Even if it were such it would still have been told in the same terms because, however it happened, the hand of God was most definitely in it.

But the theological problem is more difficult for me than the history. And that is this "Why are some people delivered and others are not?" I imagine that the early Church prayed hard for James, the brother of John - just as hard as it did for Peter, yet he was not delivered...he was put to death with a sword. Prayers are not always answered like we want them to be. Deliverance does not always come according to our timetable. Peter escaped, James did not.

Indeed, Jesus did not either. Remember how he prayed for deliverance. . . but that was not possible and Jesus died on the cross. What can we say? Well, we can say is that while God always delivers us, he doesn't always deliver us as we think he should. Beyond the cross there is Easter. God does deliver . . . and I believe in deliverance . . . god is able to deliver us from prisons.

There are various kinds of prisons, other than those which restrain and limit us physically. Hawthorne wrote: "What

dungeon is so dark as one's own heart. What jailer is so inexorable as one's self?" 2

Some are prisoners of their own prejudices. They are locked in their preconceived notions and cannot escape. We put people in pigeon holes, then reject the pigeon holes.

Then some are prisoners of their own patterns. They get in a rut and shout their motto: "We've never done it that way before". We do not have to be locked into the patterns of the past, especially the bad ones. We can, by the grace of God, change for the better.

Sometimes we are prisoners of our own past. Just because we once thought a certain way we think we have to think like that always. It does take courage to say: "I know what I once thought, but I've gained new insight. I feel differently now" My mind is made up, don't confuse me with facts. Emerson said: "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds."

At least half the trouble in the world today is caused by people who, having once made a mistake, think they have to defend it until death. And we keep escalating our errors. As Christians, tho, we do not have to be locked into the past.

However we understand the story of Peter's deliverance, I think the most important point is that the God of the Bible



is a God who opens doors. In the Old Testament that is what <sup>3</sup>  
God is always doing. He is leading people from bondage into  
freedom, from darkness into light. The exodus from Egypt  
is an example of what God is always doing . . . opening doors,  
present a way.

In the New Testament, Jesus took to the pulpit of his  
home town church to speak one day . . . and what did he choose  
to read? The passage from the book of Isaiah which says:  
"The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed  
me to preach good news to the poor, He has sent me to pro-  
claim release to the captives". (Isaiah 61:1-2; Luke 4:18)  
One of the earliest titles given to Jesus was 'soter' which  
is a Greek word we usually translate 'savior'. It literally  
means 'liberator'. Christ was the one who liberated people;  
he freed them from the past and liberated them for the future.  
He freed men from guilt concerning the past and from anxiety  
concerning the future so that they could live in love in the  
present.

The God of the Bible is the God who opens doors.

Ernest Campbell a number of years ago preached a sermon  
with the interesting title of "Locked in a Room with Open  
Doors".

The title came from a chapter head in a book called  
"Masks of Life and Love" by Hans Sachs. The story behind the

title was in the opening paragraph:

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"In a family of my acquaintance there were two brothers, the younger of whom had an idiosyncrasy: a dread of open doors. The older one became impatient, as older brothers will, and, wanting to break him of his habit, he threatened: "One day I will lock you up in a room with open doors!".

What a provocative picture those words portray. "Locked in a room with all the doors open.

But, actually, according to Jesus, that is the way it is with the world. The world is God's home, and in God's home all the windows and doors are open. Sometimes, like the younger brother in the story, we are frightened by all the openness, and we want a bit more privacy. We want to rope off a section for ourselves and keep out our neighbors. All that openness is risky . . . and it frightens us.

But the God of the Bible is a God of open doors.

You and I do not have to be locked into our prejudices and patterns of the past. We are free to become what God intended for us to be, and what he wants us to become. And probably the biggest thing holding us back is ourselves.

Under God we can refuse to be prisoners of our prejudices and our past mistakes, and sins. We can go out into the world and put our arms around the world and around each

other . . and love the world and one antoehr as God loves  
the world and as he loves us. 5

In the last book of the Bible there are all sorts of weird and symbolic utterances, many of them difficult to understand. But at least one seems crystal clear. In the admonition to the Church in Philadelphia, one of the seven churches in Asia Minor, to which messages are addressed, it is said that the church has "little power", but has nevertheless remained faithful.

And what is the message to that church? It is this:

"Behold, I have set before you an open door". Now we do not  
(Rev 3:20)  
know whether or not the Christians of the Philadelphia Church went thru that open door.

But I suppose a more important point is: "Will we go thru the open door"?