

Lydia

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[0 : 00] Now please turn back with me your Bibles to Acts chapter 16. We can perhaps take as our first for the evening verse 14.

One who heard us was a woman named Lydia from the city of Thyatira, a dealer of purple goods who was a worshipper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.

Isn't it amazing when you read in the Bible how sometimes you can read a chapter that you are familiar with and something new jumps out. A verse or something you haven't quite appreciated before.

Well I was reading through this for sermon prep and it was this verse that caught my attention. Lydia who was a worshipper of God, the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.

Do you notice what's said there? She's a worshipper of God before her heart is opened. She was a worshipper of God but she wasn't yet saved. She was a worshipper of God but she wasn't yet a Christian.

[1 : 09] She didn't know the Lord Jesus until the Lord opened her heart to receive the message from Paul. But the Lord did open her heart and that changed and that changed everything for Lydia.

Acts 16 is the entrance of the Gospel into Europe. We read about how Paul and his companions had been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.

They had tried to go into Bethany but the Holy Spirit had prevented them. Paul has this dream, this vision of a man from Macedonia who says come over to Macedonia and help us.

Paul, taking this as a prompt from God, follows that leading and the Gospel comes to Europe for the first time. The Gospel comes to European shores for the very first time and a church is established and a church is planted.

But you notice that although the dream said come over to Macedonia to help us, it doesn't say where in Macedonia. Paul goes but he's got to work out for himself where to go and Paul is a man who's got a very definite plan and a very definite strategy.

[2 : 16] He begins where the people are. He begins in the key cities, the population centres and works out from there. And normally within the places he goes he has a strategy of beginning at the Jewish synagogue.

He begins there, sharing the Gospel with his own countrymen. So Paul comes to Philippi and we're told Philippi was a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony.

Paul follows his own strategy and on the Sabbath day in verse 13, we went outside the gate to the riverside where we supposed there was a place of prayer.

Now reading between the lines it seems there wasn't a Jewish synagogue in Philippi. You needed at least 10 Jewish males to form a synagogue so it seems likely that they just didn't have that amount. But instead we find this little group meeting down by the riverside where they met to pray and to worship God.

We don't know how many was there but Paul met with them there and one of those who was there was this woman called Lydia. So who was Lydia?

[3 : 23] Well let's see what information Luke gives us when he records this. He says, Lydia was from the city of Thyatira. She was a foreigner. She wasn't from Philippi. She wasn't a local. She was from this city called Thyatira.

Now there's a bit of an irony there. Paul had wanted to go to Asia to share the Gospel, had been forbidden by the Holy Spirit. He goes to Europe instead and his first convert is in Asian.

That's where she was from, Thyatira was in Asia. In fact some people argue that Lydia wasn't actually her own name because the area of Thyatira was known as the area of Lydia in ancient times.

But we're told she was from Thyatira. We're told that she was a foreigner living and working in Europe, a seller of purple goods.

In modern terms she could say she was a businesswoman. She was a CEO. She was an executive. She was a woman of some independent means. She certainly seems to have had her own house in Philippi, a large house by implication of that.

[4 : 29] So she seems to have been pretty wealthy, someone who ran their own business. And that business was a dealer in purple cloth. Now Thyatira was renowned for producing purple items, purple textiles.

Purple dye was very, very expensive and it was only the very rich, the very wealthy who could afford purple garments. It was the kings, queens, royalty, the very wealthy who wore purple. So Lydia being a seller of purple you could say, you can see what kind of client she's going to be operating with here. She's going to be selling these goods to very powerful, very influential, very wealthy people.

If she was around today you could say she was the clothier to Hollywood, that kind of thing. She was a wealthy client, a people of power, influence and financial muscle.

So we're told she was from Thyatira. We're told she was a seller of purple goods. And we're told thirdly she was a worshipper of God. Now we need to unpack that term a wee bit. What does Luke mean when it says she was a worshipper of God?

[5 : 40] It sounds a very positive thing, a good thing to be described as isn't it? Many of us would be delighted to have that compliment paid to us. And it is a positive thing to say, but in terms of Lydia on its own it still falls short.

You see, Lydia is not yet a Christian. Lydia has not yet heard the gospel. Lydia has not yet saved. So in what sense then can we understand what Luke means when he says she's a worshipper of God?

Well the term worshipper of God in this sense is almost a technical term. It's a technical term used of someone who's a gentile by birth, not born a Jew, who begins to follow Judaism, who begins to follow the God of the Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible.

So she would have met together with other Jews, she would have read the Hebrew Scriptures, presumably in a Greek translation of it. She was perhaps drawn to the ethics of Judaism, she was perhaps drawn to the unique claims as the God of Israel, as the one God to be worshipped, the God who created everything, and the one God who commands all worship.

But Lydia is not yet saved. You know these are all positive things we can say about Lydia, she was drawn to the God of the Bible, she was drawn to the Old Testament ethics, she's probably got a heart that is seeking after God, that is seeking after truth, that is seeking after the ultimate reality, but she's not yet saved.

[7 : 16] And you know if anyone could understand Lydia's position, this isn't the apostle Paul. What was Paul's testimony? Was it not very similar to that?

Paul had dedicated his life to being what he thought was a worshiper of God, a Pharisee of the Pharisees. The rising star in the ranks of the Pharisees, he was a supreme religious athlete.

But he was persecuting Christians. And it was an encounter with the risen Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus that transformed everything for the apostle Paul. He says this about himself, he says, if someone else thinks they've got reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I've got more.

Circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, in regard to the law of Pharisee, as per zeal, persecuting the church, as per righteousness based on the law, faultless.

But whatever gains to me, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.

[8 : 30] I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

If anyone could understand the Lydias of this world, it was the apostle Paul. And he see the great infinite love and mercy of God, that here's this woman coming into Judaism, coming to become a worshiper of the God of Israel, and God in His infinite compassion and infinite mercy sends to them a messenger who will tell them about Jesus.

Whether to go to Asia, no. Whether they go to Bethany, no. The Holy Spirit instead sends Paul and his companions, so Lydia would hear the news. So Lydia would hear of the one her heart needed, so Lydia would hear of her Saviour and so that Lydia would be saved.

God in His infinite grace sent a messenger to tell them about Christ. You know, I mean, a lot of people will say, why I believe in God?

Maybe some will read the Bible, some will go to church, some who won't, but they'll say, why I believe in God? What does Jesus say? You believe in God? Believe also in me.

[9 : 53] You see, Jesus takes a vague belief in the existence of God and he draws it into himself, doesn't he? He says, you believe that there is a God? To use the word to the Apostle James, you believe in God? Good. So did the demons and they shudder and they trembled.

Jesus takes this vague belief in the existence of God and he focuses it in on himself and he says, you believe in God. That's a good start. There's not enough to believe also in me.

There's only one way to have our sins forgiven. There is only one way to worship God in a way that is pleasing to Him. And that's through His Son Jesus. It's through faith in His Son Jesus.

As Jesus himself would say, I am the way, the truth and the life. Who sees the way too? In context, it's not the way to heaven. No one comes to the Father except through me.

You see what Jesus is saying there? He said, the only way to know God, the only way to know the Father is through me. That's what He's the way to in that context. And to know God is to have eternal life.

[11 : 05] To try and worship God apart from Jesus is not to worship God at all. So there's a difference between just being religious and being a Christian.

Do you know the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you love Him tonight? Have you put your trust in Jesus? Believe in God, believe also in me, Jesus says.

It's good that you want to worship God. These are good desires, but there's even better news. And it's that God has sent His Son, and His name is Jesus, that whoever should put their trust in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

The Lord wants you to know the way because the Lord wants you to take that way and He wants you to have eternal life. So look what happens here. Paul shares the Gospel, he shares his message and we're told that the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was being said by Paul.

He tells them about the God that they will worship Him. He tells them about the hope that the Old Testament held out. They had the Old Testament Scriptures and you can imagine their excitement for the first time someone coming to them to say, The Messiah has come. The Messiah we have been waiting for, for millennia has come and His name is Jesus of Nazareth.

[12 : 31] Let me tell you about His love, let me tell you about His life, let me tell you about His death and let me tell you about His resurrection. Now He tells you about the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. Paul would have shared all these things.

And Lydia listened and Lydia heard about the God who loved the world and the God who had sent His Son. And Lydia learned about the Savior who loved her. And Lydia learned about the Savior who had come to forgive her sin.

The Savior who had come to give her eternal life. The one who thought she was precious and who would be her Savior and her King. She heard things she had never heard before.

Isn't it true? Sometimes we can be so familiar with the Gospel. We stop hearing it. We stop seeing how amazing it is for the first time. Lydia heard about the Son of God who loved her and gave himself for her.

And Lydia's heart just opened. And Lydia was just taken in by this good news and she believed the message that Paul gave her. She believed the message that Paul delivered.

[13 : 41] And you know what it says? The Lord opened her heart. It's not just that she believed it to be true. It's that she heard the message and she found it beautiful. It's that idea. She was attracted to it.

She was drawn to it. You know Romans 1 ultimately says every human being in the world knows the truth about God. That God exists. But in our sinful nature we reject that truth. We don't want that truth. We push it away.

But here as she heard the Gospel message the Spirit of God opened her heart and she saw Jesus. And she heard about Jesus and she found him beautiful. The Saviour who had come for her. The lover of her soul.

And her heart was just opened. And I love the language here as well. It doesn't say Lydia opened her heart does it? It's the Lord who opened her heart. As she sat under God's Word God's Spirit opened her heart.

And God's Spirit still does that today. Maybe God's Spirit is doing that tonight. Under God's Word God's Spirit opens hearts and opens minds and draws us to Jesus.

[14:57] It's the Lord who opened Lydia's heart. And for those of us who are Christians that's there to again make us very humble and draw praise to God.

Thank you Lord. We didn't see this on our own. Our hearts weren't changed on our own. You did this. You're not a Christian here tonight. Maybe you're a Lydia.

Maybe you're here for the first time. Maybe you've been very religious all your life. I don't know many of you. The Lord's offers the same. Come and put your trust in the one who loves you and who gave his life for you.

Come and put your trust in the one who died upon a cross and rose again for our sins to bring us eternal life. Lydia's testimony in many ways was very boring, isn't it?

Can you imagine if Lydia was in... I can imagine in my congregation you say, Lydia would you mind giving your testimony at the ladies meeting tonight and she'd go, I don't really have anything to say. You know, I just listened to a sermon and I became a Christian.

[16:06] Can you imagine the first week church meeting in Philippi? There's the jailer and he said, there was an earthquake and there was all these amazing things. There's the slave girl who had demons cast out of her.

And there's Lydia as well. I just heard a sermon, I believed. I didn't have an earthquake. I didn't have demons cast out of me. I didn't have all these spectacular things that all these other people had.

My testimony's pretty dull. But her testimony's in no way less powerful or less beautiful than any of the others. The Lord opens her heart. It's still an act of grace.

And you know, Lydia must have told her testimony. Do you know how I know that? Because it's in the Bible. She could have walked away from that service. Nobody would have known she was a Christian.

Nobody would have known she was changed. But the evidence was there and she must have told. At least Luke, he wrote the gospel. She must have told Luke what had happened. She must have told Paul she shared what had happened to her.

[17:09] Maybe you've got a testimony like Lydia. Maybe you've often hankered after. I wish I had all these spectacular things happen to me so I could be really sure I'm a Christian.

Maybe you've been reticent to share your testimony because it seems so dull and so ordinary. And what could you really say? You know, our testimony is not about amazing things that happened in the past.

If all our testimony is, as this happened to me 20 years ago, 30 years ago, 40 years ago, it's not a testimony. Our testimony is what Jesus means to us. How we came to know the Lord, but what Jesus means to us.

There's clear evidence that Lydia's heart has changed. There's clear evidence. The whole book of 1 John, maybe if you doubt, how do I know I'm a Christian? Why 1 John was written? That we might know that we belong to those of faith.

He gives the signs that we know that we belong to Him. What are the signs off the top of my head? There's a few that we want to obey Jesus. Not that we always do obey. That would mean we were sinless.

[18:20] Everyone says, if you say that, you're a liar. But that we want to obey. And when we fall, it bothers us. When we sin, it bothers us. And we want to obey the Lord. That we love our fellow Christians, our brothers and sisters.

We know we have passed some death to life when we love our fellow believers. There's the doctrine test that we hold on to the truth about Jesus, that it matters who Jesus is and what Jesus has done.

And the free test John gives, that we might know that we belong to the household of faith. Look at the evidence in Lydia's life. Outwardly, she hadn't changed, but inwardly, she absolutely had.

What evidence do we see that she was changed? Well, immediately after we're told that the Lord opened her heart, verse 15, and after she was baptized and her household as well.

She immediately made a public stand. She lived out Romans 10. She believed in her heart and she confessed with her lips. She openly professed what had happened. She had trusted in the Lord.

[19 : 24] That's you who've trusted in the Lord but maybe never said anything to anybody. Don't hide what the Lord has done. Tell somebody. Tell your friends. Tell your family. Tell the church.

Get baptized. Become a member of whatever it is. When you do, your spiritual life will flourish. Your spiritual life will thrive. Take that step. And I know it can be a scary step, but follow Lydia's example.

She believed in her heart and she confessed with her mouth. The next evidence we see is her hospitality. She urged Paul and his companions saying, If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay. And she prevailed upon us.

And then again at the end of the chapter in verse 40, Paul and Silas get out of prison. Where do they go? They visit Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.

Lydia has received God's word. Lydia has professed her faith in Jesus. And Lydia opens her home to the people of God. She practices hospitality.

[20 : 32] I was a really good line in one of the commentaries on this passage about hospitality. It said, hospitality says, this home is not mine. It's a gift from my master. Hospitality doesn't try to impress, but to serve.

Hospitality doesn't try to impress, but to serve. The Lord has given this to me and I'm going to use it for the good of his people. Paul and his companions come to Philippi. They put nowhere to stay.

They don't have a Premier Inn.

There's no travel lodge, no B&Bs.; They're dependent on other people's generosity. And Lydia opens her doors to them. She welcomes them in. She doesn't say, well, a better Hoover and dust than get them washing on and then come and stay.

Maybe it's just me, but I find that one of the first things I discovered when I got married was that my definition of what constitutes a tidy house was very much not what my wife defined as a tidy house.

Maybe some husband's here can relate to that.

We've got people coming over and she says, is the house tidy? Absolutely. And then I get what for when she gets home and she saw what I regarded as a tidy house. Lydia doesn't care.

[21 : 40] She's there to serve God's people. She wants to build up and to help. God's ministers and God's servants and she takes them under her roof.

Don't underestimate the power of hospitality. Hebrews calls on us to practice hospitality. A qualification for being an elder in the church is that we practice hospitality.

And it's such a powerful thing in a world that's getting increasingly isolated. People becoming increasingly fragmented and isolated to come out their doors in the morning, get into a car, go off, come back.

Don't know their neighbours, don't know people. Hospitality can be a radical act and it can just make the world a difference to somebody. Somebody who's alone, somebody who needs help, somebody who needs friendship and fellowship.

We can open our homes. There's a spiritual gift there to practice hospitality to one another and to those that we come across. Lydia becomes one of the three founders of the first church in Europe.

[22 : 47] Lydia, the slave girl and the Philippian jailer. This is pure conjecture coming up but I hope you'll let me off with this. I suspect that Lydia, being the wealthiest of the three, would have been the one who provided much of the input into the early church.

The slave girl would have had nothing. Who's going to care for the slave girl? Her master's kicking her out. She's got nothing. Who's going to care for her? Who's going to look after her? Who's going to provide for her?

And I guess I'm going to say Lydia. The Philippian jailer. He's a Christian but as far as we know he's had no background in the scriptures.

He doesn't know the Bible. He doesn't know as much as he would want to know about Jesus. But Lydia, being a worshiper of God, would have some knowledge of the Old Testament. She could begin sharing. She could become teaching.

Maybe she had access to copies of the Greek scriptures. Lydia could have been a huge asset supporting the jailer, supporting the slave girl, and beginning this little fellowship in the town of Philippi.

[23 : 57] Three more unlikely people you couldn't meet. The wealthy, the seller of purple, the kind of ex-servicemen, turned jailer, and the slave girl.

In some ways you could say working class, middle class, upper class. All coming together. Three people who would have nothing to do with one another. And God saves them. And He puts them together. You're the church in Philippi.

You're going to be my representatives and you're going to be my witness. And these three would have had to figure out how to love one another. These three would have had to figure out how to work together, to love one another, to support one another, and share the good news of Jesus with their community.

That's what they do. And Paul later writes to the church in Philippi, the church has grown. The church has multiplied and God has done a work. Three very different, very disparate characters. The three that had come to know Him and loved Him and loved one another. You know, God works through all kinds of people. God saves all kinds of people.

[25 : 04] Some get very spectacular entrances into the kingdom. Some come in very quietly. But what matters is not so much the way we come into the kingdom, it's that we come into the kingdom.

That we are all brought ultimately to the same place. We love Jesus. We see what He's done for us and we love Him. Is that your testimony tonight?

I would love it to be the testimony of everyone of us that we can say, I love the Lord. Because my voice and prayers He did here. I love the Lord because He first loved me.

I love the Lord because He gave His life for me. Have you been a Lydia up to now? A worshiper of God but not really sure where Jesus fits in.

A worshiper of God but not really coming to put your confidence wholly upon Jesus. Well tonight His message to use this, believe in God, believe also in me.

[26 : 06] Come and put your trust in the Son. Come and put your trust in the Lord. He is the one who has come to take your sin away and to bring you into a relationship with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Maybe you've got a Lydia in testimony but you've never told anybody. Well tonight's the night. Tell someone what God has done. Tell someone what God has done in your heart that you love the Lord.

You know it's such an encouragement. It is such a blessing when we hear what God is doing. Encourage one another and share what God is doing in your heart and in your life.

Do you already love Jesus? God wants to use you to bring the good news of Jesus to others. He did with Lydia and He will with you. Do you love Him?

Does your heart say that you love Him? Well He loves you. And I pray that you respond to the message in the same way that Lydia did. Amen.

[27 : 13] Let's just bow our heads and let's pray together. Father I pray for this church fellowship here and I pray that you would continue to bless.

I pray that you would continue to raise up people to serve you. That you would be bringing people from darkness to light. And for anyone Lord in this fellowship who may be coming to church but not quite yet in a place where they have got their trust and confidence in you.

I pray Lord that you would change that. That your spirit would change hearts. I pray for any Lydia's who have been hiding what you have done. And been scared to say to anybody for whatever reason, Lord that you would prompt them even tonight.

That you would prompt them to speak. That you would prompt them to say that I love the Lord. And that you would pour out your blessing on them. We thank you for the knowledge and when we take a step of faith with you, you meet us.

Just as in the Old Testament where they set their foot upon the river the waters parted. But they had to take that step. So I pray for any who are in that situation here tonight.

[28 : 27] Lord as you brought together these three people in Philippi so different, so eclectic and yet you built your church through them. We pray that you would continue to draw whoever you choose into our churches.

We know you don't choose as we would choose. But we pray that you would add to your number daily those who are being saved. And we pray that you would bring glory to your name through the work done here.

And in all congregations that love you and want to honour you in Scotland and around the world. And we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.