

“The Conversion of Lydia”
Acts 16:13-15
(Preached at Trinity, January 17, 2006)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In **Chapter 15** Paul and Barnabas had a dispute over Mark who had abandoned them on the first missionary journey. Paul was adamant about not bringing him and so Barnabas took Mark and departed for Cyprus. Paul chooses Silas as his new companion in the ministry and **Chapter 16** opens with their arrival at Derbe and Lystra where they minister to the new believers converted on their first journey. It was there that they meet Timothy who would also travel with them.
 2. In **Verse 10** the three pick up a fourth companion. Notice the change from “they” to “we.” Apparently Luke joins them and continues with them on their journey.
 3. In **Verse 12** we are told they arrived in Philippi and decided to remain there for several days. It was Paul’s custom to go to the nearest synagogue on the Sabbath where he might preach the Gospel to the Jews. Apparently there was no synagogue in Philippi but they heard of a group of women that gathered by a river to pray on the Sabbath so they went to speak to them. It is here that we are introduced to Lydia.
 4. Lydia was probably a widow. We are told that she was from Thyatira and that she was a seller of purple. Thyatira was famous because it produced a purple dye extracted from the madder root. If you were a Roman citizen you wore a purple toga and the best purple togas came from cloth that had been dyed with the purple dye that came from Thyatira.
 5. Lydia was probably a prosperous woman with servants and a large house.
 6. We are told that she worshipped God. She was probably a Jewish proselyte. She wasn’t a true worshipper for true worship can only come through Jesus Christ, yet she had been taught that God was the one true God, the Creator. She had been taught the law and obeyed the Sabbath.
 7. As Paul preached she received his words and believed. She became the first convert in Europe. This text records Lydia’s Christian conversion. Tonight I want us to look at her conversion. We can apply the things seen in her conversion to every conversion.
- I. She was brought by providential circumstances
- A. God had worked in Lydia’s life to prepare her for conversion
 1. She had already been introduced to God
 2. God planned all of the details that led her embrace the Jewish religion
 - a. How many Jewish rabbis had spoken to her of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. How many times had she heard of God’s covenant?
 - b. Whatever extent of her commitment, she was being obedient to keep the Sabbath.
 - c. These things, however, were not sufficient for salvation. She did not know the Savior. God cannot be worshipped fully apart from His Son.

- 3. God wasn't through with her
Philippians 1:6 – “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform *it* until the day of Jesus Christ:”
 - B. God sent Paul to preach the Gospel to her
 - 1. Paul had made plans to enter Asia but there was some sort of constraint that prevented him.
Acts 16:6 – “*they were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia,*”
 - 2. Then they decided to go to Bithynia but again they were prohibited.
 - 3. So they went down to Troas where they must have been perplexed as to what course to take. It would seem that God was shutting every door.
 - 4. That evening Paul received a vision:
Acts 16:9 – “And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.”
 - 5. The man turned out to be a woman.
 God sent Paul to preach the Gospel of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection.
 - C. God also ordered the events so that Lydia would be at the riverside that day
 - 1. She was from Thyatira but had chosen that particular time to be in Philippi.
 - 2. She had chosen to go to the riverside that day and was there as Paul began to speak
 - D. The same is true in your life
 - 1. How did you hear the message of the Gospel?
 How is it that you were in the right place at the right time?
 - a. Perhaps you attended a particular service – why were you there
 - b. Perhaps you happened to pick up a Bible and read – How did you come in possession of the Bible?
 - c. Perhaps you were born into a Christian home – how did that happen?
 - 2. How many people did God raise up to speak to you?
 - 3. But God had to do something else. This is where the Arminian goes wrong.
- II. God prepared her heart to receive the Gospel
Acts 16:14 – “And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard *us*: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.”
- A. Our hearts are naturally shut against the Gospel
 - 1. God knows our heart
Jeremiah 17:9 – “The heart is deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” – God does

2. God knows that our hearts are set against Him
He knows that our hearts are determined to rebel against Him.
Romans 3:10-12 – “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: ¹¹ There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. ¹² They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”
 3. Left to ourselves we would never seek to follow God – we are set against Him. God has to do something supernatural
- B. Salvation demands a powerful move of God upon our hearts
1. Modern Christianity displays Christ as a beggar.
“The Savior is waiting to enter your heart, Why don’t you let Him come in? There’s nothing in this world to keep you apart, What is your answer to Him? Time, after time, He has waited before, and now He is waiting again To see if you’re willing to open the door, Oh, how He wants to come in.”
 2. Is Jesus so lacking in power? Is He this dependent upon our willingness to receive Him?
- C. The Bible paints a far different picture – It shows God drawing men effectually
Isaiah 65:1 – “I am sought of *them that asked not for me*; I am found of *them that sought me not*. . .”
John 6:37-39 – “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. ³⁸ For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. ³⁹ And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.”
John 6:44 – “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.”
1. Lydia did not open her own heart to God.
 - a. Her prayers didn’t do it. Paul didn’t do it.
 - b. Lydia’s heart had to be opened by mighty power outside herself.
 2. God’s grace not only provides salvation, but His power also gives us the ability to both desire and receive it. He works in us both to will and to do.
 3. God is the Author and Finisher of our salvation.
- D. What does it mean that God opened her heart?
1. Salvation demands a work of the Holy Spirit upon our hearts
 2. By the word heart, Scripture sometimes refers to the mind, sometimes the emotions, sometimes the will.
 - a. The Gospel message come to the mind but God has to enable our mind to understand. We are naturally blind to the things of God – we cannot understand the Word of God.
 - b. The mind must also be made willing
 - c. The entire person must be turned to God
 3. Have you ever noticed that most people are bored with the things of God? Most are bored with preaching. Some, however, show an intense interest. Why is this?
 4. God first has to open our eyes to our sin – Lydia she saw herself as guilty
 5. As Paul preached the Gospel Lydia saw her own need for Jesus Christ

6. She saw the Gospel as good news. It became her chief interest.
Notice after her heart was opened she "attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul."

III. She manifested the fruit of conversion

A. Obedience

Acts 16:14 – “she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.”

1. What were the things spoken by Paul?
 - a. Paul preached the Gospel of Christ. He spoke of the holiness of God. He spoke of the wickedness of our hearts – our condemnation before God. He spoke of God’s solution: Christ and Him crucified.
 - b. He also preached God’s requirement for salvation. It was the requirement preached by Jesus.

Mark 1:14-15 – “Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, ¹⁵ And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.”
 - c. This was the consistent message Paul preached.

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2. No one has ever been saved without willingly turning from their sin to Christ. The Bible teaches that men with their own mind and heart must renounce their sin and willingly trust Christ.
 3. The same Bible that states that man must repent and believe to be saved also states that because of his sinful nature, is totally unable to repent and believe. Regeneration is God giving us the spiritual life that enables us to repent and believe.
 4. True repentance is characterized by obedience. It is the fruit of regeneration which is evidenced by a transformed life.
Acts 26:20 – “repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.”
 5. As a symbol of her obedience she was baptized. Baptism demonstrates the Gospel she received. Baptism is not something forced upon us as a requirement for salvation. We don’t submit out of fear of condemnation but out of a simple obedience.

B. Love

Acts 16:15 – “And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide *there*. And she constrained us.”

Acts 16:40 – “And they went out of the prison, and entered into *the house of Lydia*: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.”

1. Lydia's heart was turned toward the brethren
 - a. She asked these four strangers to come to stay at her house.
 - b. They again went to her house after being freed from prison.
 - c. Jesus unites us together into one body.

Ephesians 4:1-6 – “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, ² With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; ³ Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ *There is* one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ One Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ One God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all.”

2. This cannot be overstated – The person who has been transformed by the Gospel has his heart turned towards other believers.

1 John 3:14 – “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not *his* brother abideth in death.”

3. Those who are mean spirited and are always ready to devour one of our Lord’s sheep give little evidence that they know Christ.

1 John 4:20-21 – “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? ²¹ And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.”

Conclusion:

1. God worked every detail of Lydia’s life in bringing her to faith in Christ. He brought her to Paul to hear the Gospel preached. He opened her heart to receive it. He granted her repentance to live in newness of life.
2. This is true with every conversion. God worked in your life. He brought you to hear the truth. He gave you a new heart. He has turned your heart towards Christ. Now you are living a life consistent with that heart. It is all for the praise of His glory.

Listen to Paul describe it:

Ephesians 1:4-12 – “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: ⁵ Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶ To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. ⁷ In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; ⁸ Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; ⁹ Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: ¹⁰ That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: ¹¹ In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: ¹² That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.”