

The Conversion of Lydia

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Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0 : 00] Welcome here for this Sunday, June 29th, 2025. My name is Kent Dixon and it is my joy to be the pastor here.! This morning we're continuing in our ongoing sermon series, Acts to All the World.

And through this series we're exploring the New Testament book of Acts. We've been at it quite a while and there's more to come. One of the best reasons I think to study the book of Acts is because it includes so many different examples of people who converted to Christianity. People who heard the gospel, recognized who Jesus was, and changed their lives to dedicate them to him. It gives us the example of the gospel of Jesus Christ being preached and then how people responded to that.

We have the example of detailed preaching from Jesus and his ministry. Who he was, how God's grace and forgiveness became available to everyone through him.

And then we see over and over through the book of Acts and other places in Scripture how individuals and even huge groups of people responded to that message.

[1 : 10] But it's so sad that over time this simple, pure message that is so clear has become twisted into something that ultimately often doesn't even closely or remotely resemble what the true gospel is.

Some declare that Jesus will make us rich if we ask him to. That's our right as his people. Others say that we can only be saved if we strictly follow certain human laws and regulations.

Some say that the gospel and God's word, God's message, are not enough adding their own messages and writing and books to that.

Others suggest that God's grace is actually a license of some kind to keep sinning. We're forgiven, right? But doesn't that cheapen salvation and grace?

In perverting, and yes, I'm using that word, in perverting the message of the gospel, people undermine the authority of Scripture and distort a true perception of God.

[2 : 30] They mislead followers and prevent them from experiencing a true relationship with God as God intended.

All these things often create confusion and division and resentment within the larger church, between brothers and sisters of Christ, for crying out loud.

It's all the more reason for us to keep returning to Scripture as our source for truth. You thought that was a sermon? Nope.

It is a sermon. So this morning, we come to our sermon titled, The Conversion of Lydia. And perhaps she's the first convert to Christ from the European continent.

We're going to look at that. Last week, we looked at Timothy joining Paul and Silas after they headed out on their next trip. And if you read Acts 16, 6-10, remember I said last week, we're going to be jumping, but I'll let you know.

[3 : 32] If you read 16, 6-10, you'll learn the start of this trip in detail. And notably, that the Spirit guided and directed the path that they would take.

So Paul and his company, his group, had been making their way through Phrygia and Galatia, we hear. And they passed a place called Mysia and found themselves in a place called Troas.

Acts 16, 9-10 says, During the night, Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, come over to Macedonia and help us.

After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. So Paul received a vision, we hear there, right?

And he sensed the Spirit calling them to head to Macedonia. And that's where we pick up the story. So our passage this morning is Acts 16, 11-15.

[4 : 30] So if you want to look that up in your Bible, Acts 16, 11-15, and I will read it for us as well. From Troas, we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace.

And the next day, we went on to Neapolis. From there, we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony, and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there for several days.

On the Sabbath, we went outside the city gate to the river where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth.

She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. If you consider me a believer in the Lord, she said, come and stay at my house.

And she persuaded them. On the road. So we begin in a place called Troas. We heard that, right? Troas was one of the great port cities in Western Asia Minor.

[5 : 41] Where is biblical Western Asia Minor? Well, primarily modern-day Turkey. So that kind of sets the stage of where this is. And in the first century, Troas had a population of approximately 50,000 people.

It was flourishing during Paul's time as both a commercial and a maritime center. And then we learn right away that Paul and his group left the city of Troas.

They sailed to a small mountainous island called Samothrace. Great name for a child, right? This is my son, Samothrace. Lots of biblical names work. That's probably not one of them.

So while Samothrace is only mentioned briefly, it is significant because its location in the northern Aegean Sea made it a convenient stop for ships that were traveling between Asia Minor and the region of Macedonia.

So it was a good stop-off point in between. And this trip actually marks a key moment in the spread of the gospel to Europe. And I mentioned that a moment ago. They traveled from Samothrace to a place called Neapolis.

[6 : 48] And Neapolis served as the closest seaport to Philippi. And you know the name Philippi, the city. Roughly 13 kilometers away. So still a pretty big distance from the coastal city of Neapolis where their ship would have landed to Philippi.

So Philippi was the predominant city in that part of the Macedonian region. It's also notable because Paul is believed to have preached for the first time on European soil at Philippi.

The church at Philippi became significant. You know, we know the name of that place. There's maybe books named after it. There were recipients of a letter, the church in Philippi.

And we know it as, of course, the book of Philippians. So after they arrived in Philippi, Paul and his companions, including Luke. So Luke is the author of Acts, remember.

Did you catch the wording, we? It kind of pops out of, a little bit out of the blue. In that passage I just read for us this morning, Acts 16, 11 to 15. If you go through it, you'll notice we.

[7 : 56] So the author of the book that we're reading is speaking as though, and he is, with them on the trip. So after they arrived in Philippi, they were staying in the city for several days.

We hear that. So on a particular Sabbath day, the group went down to the river looking for a nice place to pray. And as we know, remember, it was Paul's custom.

This is the way he often began in a new community he would go to. He would begin preaching at the local synagogue in any community that he visited. And scholars suggest that there was actually no synagogue in Philippi at that time.

But instead, what we hear there is that there was a place of prayer, the passage says, by the river, and women gathered there. So according to Jewish law, a synagogue is defined as any place where ten men can gather for worship and study.

And then tradition holds that a synagogue was established to provide an alternative for those who were unable to travel to the temple in Jerusalem.

[9 : 04] So it was an alternative for people to worship who couldn't actually go to the temple in Jerusalem. So perhaps the Jewish population in Philippi was just too small to warrant a synagogue.

But whatever reason, it's likely not a coincidence that Paul and his companions found himself there at the river, and they began speaking to the women who had gathered there for prayer and connecting with each other.

Let's meet Lydia. So a woman named Lydia was one of the people gathered at the river, and we learn that she was from a city called Thyatira. Thyatira was an ancient city located in the region of

Asia Minor, which is present-day Turkey, remember.

So Thyatira was known for its trade and commerce, especially its dyeing and textile industry. And we learn that Lydia was, as the passage says, a dealer in purple cloth.

So I certainly approve of her color choice. For anyone who knows me, you know why. And purple dyes would have likely been expensive because they would have been associated with royalty.

[10:17] Royalty, aristocracy. Purple dye was popular amongst that group. So there would probably have been lots of people in Philippi who would die to have Lydia's money and lifestyle.

So we also learn from our passage this morning that Lydia was a religious woman, and she worshiped God, we hear that. God opened her heart, the passage tells us, to Paul's message.

So she didn't just hear what Paul was saying as he preached the gospel. It impacted her. It penetrated her. And as Paul says himself in Romans 10, 17, faith comes by hearing the word of God.

So by God's grace, people's hearts and minds can be open to not only hear the gospel, but receive the message. Because the power of the gospel is the power to save, made possible only through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The gospel demonstrates God's goodness and love. And that should lead people to repent and then turn to God in faith.

[11:30] So it's one thing to simply listen to what someone has to say, but it's something far different to truly take notice of it, to obey it, or actually to allow it to shape your thinking or your life.

So Lydia really seemed to take notice of what Paul was saying here, and she was willing to not only hear, remember, but obey and take action from there. Knowing that the apostles preached the gospel and then urged people who believed in Jesus to be baptized, we can safely assume that message was also conveyed to those women.

So we learn that Lydia, and it says the members of her household in the passage, they were baptized. So this isn't just Lydia. They probably filled the riverside, the area where they were. Everybody got in the water and they were baptized. Presumably, Paul and Silas went in the water with them. Her household could have realistically included blood relations, right?

She may have had close family members, nuclear family members, extended family members, but even family servants would have been considered to be family, part of the household.

[12:49] So that's probably quite a group that was changed on that day. So what can we learn from Lydia's conversion? Well, you've heard me say this before, but some of these points are important, and we need to be reminded of them.

The first thing we can learn from Lydia's conversion is that religious people, use quotey fingers if you want because it's appropriate, religious people need saving.

Would you call yourself religious? I have, I, so some of you know, I volunteer as an RCMP chaplain. So I interact with RCMP members, Mounties, a lot.

And I hear sometimes, well, I'm not religious. And I say, well, good, because neither am I. And they just go, what? But aren't you a pastor? Yeah, but I'm not religious.

I have a relationship with Jesus that changes my life. I'm grateful to Jesus. And you could have a relationship with Jesus too. But I'm not here to convert you, I often say to them as well.

[13:50] But throughout the book of Acts, the gospel was preached to religious people. There were thousands of devout Jews in Jerusalem on Pentecost who heard the gospel.

There were many Jews gathered at Solomon's porch at the temple who heard the gospel. The Ethiopian eunuch who traveled to Jerusalem to worship heard the gospel.

Saul of Tarsus, a devout Jewish rabbi, heard the gospel. Cornelius, a devout Gentile who feared God and was committed to prayer, we hear in scripture, heard the gospel.

Without Jesus, even people that can be seen as religious in one way or another are ultimately lost. Do you see that? Religion only really boils down to following a set of rules.

It's a relationship with Christ that saves. Only Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. There is no other way to God but by him.

[14:55] We learn in Acts 4 verse 12 that there is no other name but by Jesus by which someone can be saved. 1 Timothy 2, 5, and 6 tells us that only Jesus can act as the mediator between God and humanity.

It's not enough to just be religious. We need Jesus as our savior and we need to have a vital and dynamic relationship with him.

The second thing we can learn from Lydia, baptism is the logical conclusion to gospel preaching. Right? We've talked about that before in past weeks.

In every case of conversion mentioned in the book of Acts where we're given details, we're not always given full details, but where we're given details, baptism consistently occurs quickly after the gospel is preached.

Right? And you've heard me say, baptism is not salvation. Right? But it's clearly important because the apostles would preach the gospel and say, be baptized.

[16:04] They were connected together. Do we understand why? Not necessarily, but it's important. In every case of conversion, baptism followed shortly after.

And in many cases, after hearing just one lesson about Christ, right? The Ethiopian said, great, got it, baptize me. Right? I'm looking for water.

So baptism is a critical step of obedience in following Jesus. The third thing we can learn from Lydia's conversion is an indication of faithfulness.

Well, what do I mean by that? In asking Paul and his companions to stay with her, Lydia asked, you remember, if you've judged me to be faithful to the Lord, she says, then come and stay at my house.

So following her conversion, Lydia was faithful. She overflowed with generosity. She opened her home and presumably her resources after that to Paul and his team.

[17:07] Some suggest that Lydia's home was essentially a home meeting place that grew to be the Philippian church. Generosity and service should naturally flow from people who've surrendered their lives to Jesus and are sincerely following him.

Through the story of Lydia's conversion, we have the story of possibly the first European convert. As I said a moment ago, potentially the beginning of the church at Philippi, which may have begun meeting at Lydia's home, right?

We also have an example of God's providence, big theological word. His active involvement, his guidance in events that spread his message across continents and cultures.

Leading servants servants who are prepared to teach to teach to people who are earnestly seeking him. God puts those pieces together so beautifully.

We see that in the work in the story of Cornelius, the story of the Ethiopian. These men who are sincerely seeking God, God finds someone to give them the message.

[18:28] As Jesus said in Matthew 5, 6 from his sermon on the mount, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be satisfied. Matthew 7, 7 to 8, Jesus said, ask and it will be forgiven to you.

Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives. This one, the one who seeks finds.

And to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Friends, people who sincerely seek God's truth, his forgiveness, salvation through Christ, will receive those gifts.

Lydia was a successful merchant, but she knew there was something much more valuable than money. Her worship and prayer gave her the opportunity to hear the gospel.

and then she showed her faithfulness to God by obeying the gospel immediately through faith and baptism. Lydia's story reminds us that we are called to be faithful in worshiping God with everything we do and everything we are.

[19:46] And she also modeled such an amazing and fearless generosity and hospitality that flowed immediately out of being introduced to Jesus.

For some of us we may have met Jesus many years ago. But let's live like we just met him. Can we do that?

Let's let our lives be changed by him every day and in every moment. Amen.