

PM Acts 16:6-15 A quiet conversion

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Date: 02 February 2025

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[0 : 00] And I'll read again verse 14. One who heard us was a woman named Lydia from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods who was a worshipper of God.

The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. The great events in church history are not always accompanied by a great fanfare of trumpets.

The conversion of Lydia was a great event. It was the first conversion in what we now call Europe. And yet it was a very quiet event which would have passed unnoticed by the world. Other more dramatic conversions would follow.

Notably the conversion of the Philippian jailer. At the end of this chapter we read how Paul is in prison. At midnight there's a great earthquake.

[1 : 27] The jailer is woken up by the earthquake. And he comes running to Paul. Sirs, what must I do to be saved? Now that was a dramatic conversion.

But this, the conversion of Lydia, was a quiet conversion. You may remember Elijah meeting with God on Mount Horeb.

1 Kings 19 There was a great wind which broke the rocks. But the Lord was not in the wind.

There was an earthquake. But the Lord was not in the earthquake. There was a fire. But the Lord was not in the fire. Instead, the Lord spoke in a still, small voice.

In the conversion of the Philippian jailer, God was in the earthquake. But here with Lydia, it was the still, small voice.

[2 : 43] Now Lydia's conversion, I think, will resonate with many Christians today.

Perhaps with some of you, it was like that. You heard and you believed. That's all you can say.

That's your testimony. May have been in childhood. Might have been later. But there was nothing dramatic about it. Just a quiet acceptance of the gospel.

People with quiet testimonies like that sometimes feel envious of those who have dramatic testimonies. You know, we have our Christian celebrities, don't we?

People who have been wonderfully saved out of drink and drugs and so on. And everyone loves to hear those testimonies. And rightly so.

[3 : 49] But the story of Lydia reminds us that all conversions are precious. And are all equally the work of God.

I want to consider Lydia's conversion this evening under four headings. A change of direction for Paul in verses 6 to 12.

The word of God preached in verse 13. The word of God believed in verse 14. And a change of life for Lydia in verse 15.

So first then, a change of direction for Paul in verses 6 to 12. And here we have the story of how Paul came to be in Philippi.

As a result of a vision. Now we looked at that vision last time. But it's good to remind yourselves.

[4 : 55] Because everything hinged on that vision. Paul and Silas had set out on the second missionary journey.

At the end of chapter 15. And at first they'd simply gone over old ground. Timothy had joined them at Lystra.

But after that it wasn't clear where they should go. In verse 6 they went through Phrygia and Galatia. Having been forbidden by the Spirit.

To preach in Asia. They were then forbidden by the Spirit also. From going into Bithynia.

How or why we're not told. But God clearly had other plans. Not yet revealed. And so they'd come down to Troas.

[5 : 55] A seaport on the Aegean Sea. And there God had spoken to Paul. By a vision. Verse 9. A man of Macedonia was standing there.

Urging him and saying. Come over to Macedonia and help us. And immediately it says. We sought to go to Macedonia.

Concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel. To them. That sudden change from they to we.

You could almost pass over it without noticing. But look again at the verses. And you'll see that there is such a change. Probably indicates to us. That Luke himself.

The author of Acts. Joined them at this point. What a wonderful moment. To join Paul's mission. Now visions are rare.

[6 : 56] Even in the New Testament. And they usually come at critical moments. Peter had a vision. Telling him to go to Cornelius.

Who was to become the first Gentile convert. Now Paul has a vision. Telling him to go to Europe. This was a bold move.

And it's possible without a vision. Even the intrepid Paul might not have thought of going there. But this was God's command. And immediately they obey.

We need direction sometimes in our lives. Don't we? For us. It may come rather less dramatically. God speaking through the word.

Giving us wisdom. To know the way forward. But once we know. We must obey. Straight away.

[8 : 02] So Paul and his companions travel. Across the Aegean Sea. To the island of Samothrace. And then on to Neapolis.

Then up to Philippi. Which we're told in verse 12. Was the leading city. Of Macedonia. And a Roman colony. And there they remained.

For some days. Roman colonies. Were originally. Settlements of Roman citizens. In conquered territory.

But later they tended to be existing cities. Where Roman soldiers. Were given. Basically retirement homes. And that very likely.

Is how it was with Philippi. Was regarded as a great honor. And a privilege. To be a Roman colony. You may not realize it.

[9 : 02] But I came from a Roman colony. Lincoln. The original name of it. Was Lindon Colonia. And it was indeed. A retirement home.

For Roman soldiers. Philippi. Had become a colony. In BC 42. After the Roman Civil War. And it was organized.

As a miniature Rome. Its citizens. Were regarded as Romans. They enjoyed. Tax exemptions. Maybe that was. What attracted Lydia.

But Paul wasn't here. To admire the city. He was here. To preach. The gospel. So let's come now. To the word of God preached. In verse 13.

On the Sabbath day. We went outside the gate. To the riverside. Where we supposed. There was a place of prayer. And we sat down. And spoke to the women.

[10 : 02] Who had come together. Paul's new. Normal practice. Was to preach first. In the synagogue. He had a basic principle.

That he preached. To the Jews first. And afterward. To the Gentiles. But here it seems. There was no synagogue. Under rabbinic tradition.

It required. Ten men. To form a synagogue. Presumably. There weren't even that many. But there is this informal place of prayer.

By the riverside. With a few women meeting there. And that's where they go. Why by the riverside? Well. Possibly just for privacy.

But possibly for the ritual washings. That were required. Under Judaism. Whatever the reason. This humble women's meeting.

[11 : 01] Outside the gate. Was the scene of the first preaching. In Europe. We may just notice.

Paul's humility here. He doesn't require. A big audience. I'm sure he knew about the day of Pentecost. 3,000 people plus.

No doubt. He would be delighted. To preach to 3,000 people. But he wasn't going to wait. Until he had that many. He would preach to anyone.

Who would listen. Quite content. Just to preach. To a handful of women. Even if it's only. Half a dozen of them. It's still worthwhile.

And even if Lydia. Is the only one. Who's converted. Then it's definitely. Worthwhile. Perhaps. Perhaps.

[12:00] The Lord. Is testing me. Tonight. Do I need. A congregation. Of 30 or 40. To make it worthwhile. Preaching. No. Hopefully.

The same spirit. That was in Paul. Is in me as well. And I'm content. To preach. To a dozen. Or so people. Always be suspicious.

Of any preacher. Who thinks it beneath himself. To come and preach. To a small congregation. Anyone who's a true follower. Of Christ. Will be delighted.

To speak the word. To anyone. Who will listen. But notice also. That this wasn't just. An arbitrary choice. Here was a place.

Where people might listen. What an example. That is to us. To look out. For opportunities. To look for the places.

[12:55] Where people. Will listen. To the gospel. Whether the numbers. Are large. Or whether they're few. What he preached.

We're not told. But we can reasonably guess. Because he preached. The same. Wherever he went. He preached. About Jesus. The promised Messiah.

The saviour of the world. The Lord of glory. And our need. To trust in him. For salvation. And God. Blessed his preaching. So let's look now. At the word of God. Believed. In verse 14. And here we're. Introduced. To Lydia. One who heard us. Was a woman. Named Lydia. From the city. Of Thyatira. A seller. Of purple goods. Who was. A worshipper.

[13:53] Of God. Now there are several points. For us to note. About Lydia. First. She was a woman.

That might seem. An obvious point. To make. But it is actually. Quite striking. How many. Women. Are mentioned. In the New Testament. Luke's gospel alone.

You have Mary. And Elizabeth. And Anna. And the women. Who followed Jesus. And supplied his needs. And Martha. And Mary. And Mary Magdalene.

And others. At the resurrection. In John's gospel. You have the woman. At the well. Actually. There's a striking. Similarity.

Between Jesus. Speaking to the woman. At the well. And Paul. Speaking to the woman. By the river. The woman. At the well.

[14:50] Became the first. Convert. In Samaria. The woman. By the river. Becomes the first. Convert. In Europe. Women.

Were. Not. Highly. Regarded. In the. Ancient. World. But Christianity. Gave women. Their true. Dignity. Secondly.

Her name. Or rather. The fact. That she is. Given a name. Have you ever noticed. How few. Converts.

Are actually. Named for us. In the acts. Of the apostles. There were lots. Of converts. Three thousand. On the day. Of Pentecost.

And thousands. Later. But hardly. Any. Are actually. Named. Some of them. Are named. Later. In Paul's letters.

[15:47] But not. In the historic. Account. Of the. Acts. Of the apostles. There's. Paul. Himself. In Acts. Nine. There's.

Cornelius. In Acts. Ten. There are. One or two. Others. Who are mentioned. By name. But then. There is. Lydia. Here. In Acts. Sixteen. Now.

That. Suggests. To me. That. Lydia. Was. Very. Important. In Luke's. Mind. She's important. Because. She's the first. European convert. Possibly. Also. She was the first. Convert. That he personally. Had seen. Since joining. The mission. Thirdly.

Where she came from. Thyatira. Now. There's a deep. Irony. In that. Because. Thyatira. Was in the.

[16:46] Roman province. Of Asia. Precisely. The place. Where the spirit. Himself. Have forbidden. Paul. To preach. So.

What is going on. Here. Paul. Has forbidden. To preach. In her. Hometown. But. She hears him. Anyway. When she goes. On a business.

Trip. To Philippi. All we can say. Is that God. Is sovereign. As to when. And where.

Each one. Will be saved. And sometimes. It may be. In surprising. Places. Who knows. When visitors. Come.

To this church. Or when you. Visit some other church. God. May have some. Special. Purpose. In it. Fourthly.

[17 : 45] What she was. A seller. Of purple goods. In other words. She was a business woman. Evidently. There were women. In New Testament. Times. Who ran. Their own businesses.

And since purple. Was a luxury. Product. I think. We can assume. That she was. Reasonably. Certainly. Wealthy. Enough. As we learn later.

To have her own house. It's very hard. For a rich person. To enter the kingdom of God. Jesus himself.

Says so. But with God. All things are possible. Converts. In the New Testament. Come from the whole.

Range of society. And so they should. Today. From the very poorest. To the very richest. Fifthly.

[18 : 39] She was. A worshipper. Of God. Now that is a technical term. And it meant a Gentile. Who believed in God.

And worshipped in the synagogue. And there were many of them. And they were often more receptive. To the gospel. Than the Jews themselves.

And the

Specifically to preach to the Jews.

And it's a Gentile convert to Judaism. Who is the first to believe. Truly God's ways are past finding out.

Now as a worshipper of God. Lydia was halfway there. She knew about God. But not the gospel.

[20 : 02] And I suspect that there are many people today. Who are in that position. They believe in God. They attend church.

But they're not converted. You see halfway is not enough. If you're crossing a bridge.

You won't stop halfway and think well that's far enough. No you get to the other side. If you're crossing a road.

You might well stop in the central reservation. To let traffic go by. But you're not going to stay there. You haven't got to your destination. Until you're right across that road.

Halfway is not enough. Lydia probably thought it was enough. To be a worshipper of God. Until she heard Paul.

[21 : 03] And then she realized she was only halfway to salvation. And that day she went the whole way. Which brings us to the main point about Lydia.

The Lord opened her heart to pay attention. What was said by Paul. In other words. She believed. But why did she believe?

Because the Lord opened her heart. It says in Psalm 3. Salvation belongs to the Lord.

And it really does. From start to finish. It was God who first conceived the plan of salvation. It was God who brought it about.

By sending his son to die for our sins. He always takes the initiative. Even when it comes to believing the gospel.

[22 : 07] Even there. Salvation belongs to the Lord. We might think. Well here's something I can do for myself. God provides salvation.

He provides a savior. But at least I can believe. But no. We're dependent on God. Even for that. It is God who opens our hearts to believe.

Yes. You must believe. God is not going to believe for you. But it is God. Who opens your heart.

To enable you to do so. You see by nature. Our hearts are closed to God. Ezekiel speaks of having a heart of stone.

Jeremiah says. The heart is deceitful above all things. And desperately wicked. Even when people hear the gospel. They refuse to believe.

[23 : 10] Or else they just refuse. To do anything at all about it. Lydia was different. Lydia was different. Because God made her different. The Lord opened her heart.

Says in Proverbs. The king's heart is in the hands of the Lord. As the rivers of water. He turns it wherever he wills. And the same is true for each one of us.

Our hearts are in the hand of the Lord. And when it pleases him. To open our cold stony hearts. Then at last. We believe the gospel.

Lydia believed. And that is the most important thing about her. Interesting to know where she came from. And what she did for a living. But these are trivial matters.

Compared with the great matter. Of believing the gospel. For us also. It makes no difference. At the end of the day. Whether you're Scottish.

[24 : 17] Or English. Or whether you have a degree. Or left school at 14. Or whether you have a million pounds in the bank. Or 50p in a piggy bank. What matters.

Is that you believe. The gospel. Lydia did. And it changed her life. Which brings us to our final point. A change of life for Lydia. In verse 15. After she was baptized. And her household as well. She urged us saying. If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord.

Come to my house and stay. And she prevailed upon us. The first thing that Lydia did. After her conversion. Was to be baptized.

That is the gospel command. Christ commanded his disciples. In the great commission. Go and make disciples. Of all names. Baptizing them.

[25 : 16] In the name of the Father. And of the Son. And of the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to observe all things. That I have commanded you. And Paul observed all three parts.

Of that great commission. And so must we. They were down by the river. So presumably it was a simple matter.

To baptize her there and then. Rather strikingly. Her household. Were baptized as well.

That might have included her husband. And children. If they were traveling with her. Almost certainly it included servants.

Such household baptisms. Were seemingly quite common. In New Testament times. Same thing happened with Cornelius. In Acts 10.

[26 : 19] It happens again. With the Philippian jailer. At the end of this chapter. Now this is sometimes used. As evidence.

For infant baptism. You won't be surprised. To know that I don't find that. Very convincing. There's no mention here.

Of infant children. And no reason to assume. That there must have been some. The more likely scenario.

It seems to me. Is that she called her household together. To hear the gospel. And they all believed. We're told that that's exactly what happened. With the Philippian jailer. Again. There's a similarity. With the woman of Samaria. What did she do.

[27 : 21] When she realized. This is the Messiah. She went off to the people in the city. And she said. Come and hear a man. Who told me all things that ever I did. Something similar.

Perhaps is happening here. Lydia's eyes are opened. And either she goes herself. Or she sends a servant. To collect her household together. Come and hear this man Paul.

And a glorious thing happens. They're all convinced. Before anyone takes up the subject with me afterwards.

Let me assure you. I do realize that infant baptism. Doesn't rest upon single texts like this. But it does seem to me.

That the encouragement of this verse. Is not to do with infant baptism. But to do with families. Being saved. The family is important to God.

[28 : 21] And it's not unusual. Even today. For the conversion of one member of the family. To lead to the conversion of others. I've seen that.

In our days at Knapp Hill. And in our days at Lincoln. It's quite amazing when it happens. They seem to fall. Like a deck of cards. One after another. If there are still unconverted members.

Of your own household. In whatever direction. Whether it's. Children in the one direction. Or fathers and mothers in the other.

Or brothers and sisters. And nephews and nieces. And more remote relatives. Around you. Take encouragement. From these household baptisms.

That God can bring them to himself. And loves to do so. It's lovely to have whole families.

Worshipping together here in this church. That's how it should be.

[29 : 24] Pray that the Lord would add whole families. To our congregation here. I know of a church which was very small in number.

They prayed at their prayer meeting. The words of one of the Psalms. Where it said. That God led Israel. In their families like a flock.

Through the wilderness. And they prayed that the Lord would bring families like flocks. To the church. And over the next year. They had three complete families join them.

Wouldn't that be wonderful here? Lydia then is baptized. And her household with her.

And then she invites them. To her house. The Lord had opened her heart. She now opens her house. Where they'd been staying up till then.

[30 : 26] We don't know. Maybe some rented house. But now. They must stay with her. Her reasoning. If you have judged me to be faithful.

Probably refers to her baptism. By baptizing her. They had shown that they regarded her as a believer. Well if she's a sister in the Lord. Why not stay with her?

They're reluctant at first. We're not told why. She's obviously not alone in the house. So there's no impropriety about it. Maybe they just didn't want to be a burden.

But she prevailed. Lydia's house became their base in Philippi. And it seems that the first meetings of the church. Were held there.

Conversion had changed Lydia's life. Completely. No doubt religion was important to her before. But now Christ is the center of her life.

[31 : 27] Just as we were looking at this morning. In Colossians. She didn't just go home. And carry on living exactly the same as before. She'd begun a new life.

The old had passed away. The new had come. So as we draw to a close tonight.

Can you relate to all this? Can you say that something similar has happened to you? Obviously not exactly the same.

As far as I know. None of us was converted in a Jewish prayer meeting. By the riverside. But these outward details are unimportant.

Whether it was by a riverside. Or whether it was in church. Or whether it was in the privacy of your own home. Whether you're five years old. Or 85 years old. Can you say.

[32 : 29] The Lord opened my heart. Just as he did Lydia's. Can you say. I heard the gospel. And I believed.

If not. It's time to think afresh. And to come to the Lord. Can you say. Can you say further. That Lydia is.

Your sister. In Christ. As you read this story. Do you feel. Yes. This is a member of. My wider household. My spiritual household.

Do you feel. A sense of kinship. With all who have come to the Lord. God. If not. Then I have to ask. Where are you spiritually. Are you halfway there.

As Lydia had been. Or only a quarter of the way there. Or nowhere at all. If so. You need to do something about it.

[33 : 33] Halfway is not enough. Halfway. Is lost. You need to believe the gospel. And be saved. And if you are saved.

You need to follow it through. Baptism. Obviously. If you've not already been baptized. But then also. Wholehearted commitment.

To the Lord. And to the church. Recognize also. That it is the Lord. Who has saved you. And praise him.

For what he's done for you. Lydia's conversion. Is. A remarkable testimony. To the grace of God. The grace of God.

In the gospel. Obviously. Christ died for Lydia. Just as much as for Paul. But also. The grace of God. In bringing her. To hear the gospel.

[34 : 32] How remarkable. How remarkable. How remarkable. How remarkable. It is. That she had come. As a business woman. To Philippi. Just at the time. When Paul was visiting.

How remarkable. That she'd come. To this particular meeting. That day. So many things. Could have diverted her. Busy woman. With her work. Maybe family.

To attend to. But she was there. That day. And that day. Paul was there. That's the grace of God. Drawing her together. With the preacher.

To hear the word. God had been at work. In Lydia. For years. Preparing her. For this moment.

He'd opened her heart. First to become. A worshipper of God. Now he's opened her heart. Also to become. A disciple of Christ. It's the grace of God.

[35 : 33] Perhaps in your life. Also. You can trace. The grace of God. Leading you. Bringing you. To Christ. Praise God.

For him. For it. And trust him. That the same grace. That brought you. To Christ. Can bring others. Also. And that the same grace.

That has brought you this far. Will carry you home. Let's sing of that now. In our final hymn. Amazing Grace.

Thanks. Thanks. Thank you.