

Not all plain sailing

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 03 August 2025

Preacher: Simon Jackson

- [0 : 00] The theme of today's service is not all plain sailing.! I want to ask you a question this morning.
- Make you again think about why you're here. But what would you do if you were unexpectedly asked or interrupted by God?
- If God met you in a dream and asked you to go somewhere or to speak to someone or to give someone something, would you do it?
- Would we trust in God's voice? Would we trust in his provision for us? Would we stop what we were doing and do what God had asked?
- Would it make a difference if you knew that the task wasn't going to be easy?
- [1 : 32] That it wasn't going to be plain sailing? And you know, that's exactly what happened to Paul when we heard from that reading today.
- Paul was called by God through a vision, a dream, to visit Macedonia.
- And in that vision he saw a man pleading for him to come over and help them.
- And Paul's immediate reaction was to trust God, to know that God was calling him over there to proclaim the good news to the folks over there.
- And that he needed, he needed to follow that call. Paul would have known that the journey would not have been easy.
- [2 : 45] And the Aegean Sea, as I said to you, has got some strong northerly winds. If we can just get that up.
- Can we get the map up please, Mike? Sorry, I've given up using this thing. Yeah, there we go. So it would have been quite a difficult task.
- And the reason I tried to compare that journey from here to Hollopool around the North Tip is it would have been a similar journey for the folks in Smallcraft in those days.
- There would have been winds, there would have been tides, there would have been a risk to that boat. And possibly a risk of potentially lives being lost on that journey.
- And it would have taken Paul quite a few days to get there. And it would have been quite an effort to get there.
- [3 : 47] But it didn't put him off. That's the important thing to remember. It didn't put him off. But perhaps, perhaps Paul knew from experience that life following Jesus was an adventure.
- It meant getting comfortable with the unexpected. That's what it meant. And it also meant being willing to go whenever and wherever God asked him to go.
- So having reached Philippi, that was the leading city in the region of Macedonia in those days, Paul spent several days there.
- Perhaps he was searching through the city for a man or that man that he'd seen in his vision. I don't know. But on the Sabbath day, Paul went outside the city and down to the river.

And perhaps he was expecting to find a place of prayer. Again, I don't know. But God led him there.

[5 : 05] And instead he found a group of women led by Lydia, who was an unbaptised Gentile believer.

She was a dealer in purple, purple cloth. Now some of you know that was quite a valuable asset in those days.

So she would have been quite wealthy. And she would have been the head of her household. She was not attached to a man.

So one can assume from that, that she was quite a strong woman. Well empowered, I would say. And that would have been counter-cultural in those days as well.

But, God opens her heart. We heard that read to us today.

[6 : 07] And that's a complete reversal, complete reversal from the story of Pharaoh in the Exodus. Do you remember that? That's when God closed his heart.

So there was this group of women meeting outside the city to worship and to explore their faith together. And it wasn't what Paul had been expecting.

Now, even though this was the early days of the church, the real early days, perhaps this group of women could be considered a fresh expression.

And we've got to be open to that as we go forward in our journey to find a new minister. We've got to be open to that type of calling.

So for Paul, so for Paul, it would have been like, it would have been a bit like that opening scene in the Wizard of Oz when Dorothy stepped out.

[7 : 21] Do you remember that golden brick road? Her first step on that journey to go and find this all-powerful wizard that was going to heal things.

But that wasn't why Paul was there. Paul went on a journey. He went there to offer himself.

That's why he travelled. But in the end, he ended up receiving. He ended up receiving from that lady. And when we look at Lydia herself, she's very, very open to the Gospel.

And it's quite striking, actually. And when Paul speaks to her and the other women, the Lord opens her heart to respond.

And that kind of divine intervention reminds us folks that it's not merely our words that move others to faith.

[8 : 31] It's how God is working in our hearts, in our actions. You've heard me talk about that before. But Lydia's story also highlights to us the importance of being in places where God can reach us.

That's quite important as well. Lydia was at prayer and she was actively seeking God when the message of salvation came to her.

So let's have a look at that again. So after believing, Lydia's past act is one of hospitality.

She invites Paul and his companions to stay at her home. And it's read, if you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my house.

That's what she said to them. Her faith is immediately reflected in her actions. she opens her home, her resources, everything that's available to her, plus her life, to serve others.

[9 : 54] And it teaches us that faith isn't passive. It's alive. And it's demonstrated through the acts of generosity and service.

And it also reminds us of the profound impact that having an openness to God's call, to the gospel, to serving others, is important as well.

and I would ask you this morning to reflect on your own lives as you're sitting there. And how often has it been in the past that we allow fear or resistance to block us from responding to God's invitation?

Lydia's courage to embrace the gospel and her initiative to act on it should challenge us to have receptive and open hearts to God's work in our lives.

So what expectations do we have of how God works that maybe needs changing? Does it have to be a miracle that inspires each and every one of us to do something?

[11 : 34] Or is it the small things in our lives that inspires us? I don't know. But we are holding on or wanting a life that is plain sailing.

that's what we want. We are very resistant to change in our lives. And I would challenge you today to start looking the other way.

We've got to look for the turbulent waters. We've got to be thinking how can we follow God through the unexpected and help others.

So the lessons I got from that passage maybe you have as well as well I think applies to our own lives.

We've got to be attentive to God's call. we must cultivate a readiness to hear and to respond to God's guidance.

[12 : 54] Even if that upsets what we want to be doing. Okay? That's really really what I got out of it. The other one is to recognise God's work in others.

Now Lydia's transformation reminds us that God opens hearts in his time. Not our time, in his time.

Our role is to share the gospel and trust in his powers to move others. That's why I encourage people to read from the Bible.

But you also saw that we had another interpretation of it today. It's different ways of putting it over. That's the key thing. And faith also requires action.

We've heard me talk about this before but Lydia's immediate reaction to hearing the word was to open up her house, to open up her resources to everyone.

[14 : 06] That demonstrates a true faith is expressed in service and generosity. And the other thing that we've got to think about is we've got to be looking in our lives for places of spiritual growth.

We've got to be starting to amass ourselves in scripture. just as Lydia was found to be a prayer by the river, we should position ourselves in environments that we can get to that really nurture our connection with God.

And that doesn't mean just once a week here on a Sunday. That doesn't mean that. It means you've got to find places where you are in touch with our Lord.

Now for me that means getting up out and reading passages, listening to music, stuff like that. That's me. But you will have different ways of connecting.

So as we leave here and go our separate ways today, I pray that we have the courage to say yes, yes to God's call.

[15 : 34] The openness to let him work in our hearts, the resolve to live out our faith in tangible ways is so important.

And I want to ask you like Lydia to embrace the opportunities to serve God and others in our own homes, in our own communities, and even further afield.

Really encourage you to do that today, folks. amen. May the words you've heard today be an enlightenment and something that you can form.

May the words you've heard today be an enlightenment