

An Opened Heart

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- [0 : 0 0] The young ones will go out to their Sunday school now, and we'll read in Acts chapter 16.
- So Acts chapter 16. And we'll read from the beginning of the chapter. Acts 16, and from the beginning.
- Let's hear the word of the Lord. Then came he to Derb and Lystra, and behold, a certain disciple was there named Timothy, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed.
- But his father was a Greek, which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. Him would Paul have to go forth with him, and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters.
- For they knew all that his father was a Greek. And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that they're ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem.
- [1 : 2 3] And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily. Now, when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, after they were come to Mycenae, they assayed to go into Bithynia.
- But the spirit suffered them not. And they, passing by in Mycenae, came down to Troas. 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.
- And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.
- Therefore, loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracea, and the next day to Neapolis, and from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia and a colony.
- And we were in that city abiding certain days. And on the Sabbath, we went out of the city by a riverside where prayer was wont to be made.
- [2 : 3 7] And we sat down and spake unto the woman which resorted thither. 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.
- 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 and came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought our masters much gain by soothsaying.
- The same followed Paul and us and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the Most High God, which show unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days.

But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour. And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas and threw them into the marketplace, unto the rulers, and brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city and teach customs which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.

[4 : 01] And the multitude rose up together against them, and the magistrates rent off their clothes and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely, who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison and made their feet fast in the stocks.

And at midnight, Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God, and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake. So the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's bands were loosed.

And the keeper of the prison, awakening out of his sleep and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.

But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm, for we are all here. Then he called for a light and sprang in and came trembling and fell down before Paul and Silas and brought them out and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes and was baptized, he and all his, straight away.

[5 : 23] And when he had brought them into his house, he set me before them and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house. Amen. We pray for God's blessing in that portion of his word there.

Now we're going to turn to look at some verses there in a few moments. But first of all, we're going to sing in Psalm 87. Psalm 87. And we'll sing the whole psalm.

Psalm 87. A psalm that is essentially a psalm of going through the different people groups and a reminder that in Zion, in heaven itself, on God's register, we won't be seen as people from one place or another place, one nation or another nation.

We'll all be there as those who are Zion born, as one people of the Lord. Upon the hills of holiness, he his foundation sets. God, more than Jacob's dwellings, all delight in Zion's gates.

Things glorious are said of thee, thou city of the Lord. Rahab and Babel, I, to those that know me, will record. Behold, even Tyrus, and with it the land of Palestine, and likewise Ethiopia, this man was born therein.

[6 : 39] And it of Zion shall be said, this man and that man there was born, and he that is most high himself shall establish her. When God the people writes, he'll count that this man born was there.

So not born in Ethiopia or Palestine or anywhere else, but our new identity is in the Lord, as those who are in the register of Zion itself. So we'll sing the whole psalm there, Psalm 87, to the praise of God.

Psalm 87, to the praise of God.

Psalm 87, to the praise of God. Psalm 88, to the praise of God. Behold, even Jesus, and with it the Lord, things glorious are said of thee, Thou city of the Lord.

Pray, have and babe the light to those that no need will report.

[8 : 11] The holy child stand with it, the land of Palestine, and likewise if you be, this man was for let in.

And it of Zion shall be said, this man and that man then was born and he that is most high, in such a rich child.

When God the people write, he'll tell that this man born was heaven.

Let me sing and sing and sing and all my wealth fleets in the air.

Well, with God's help, you can turn to Acts 16 and we'll read there again in verse 14. So Acts 16, verse 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.

[10 : 14] Now, testimonies is something that we're used to hearing, maybe less used to it now. Perhaps we used to hear more testimonies in days gone by.

But testimonies is something that I think people, a lot of people enjoy hearing how the Lord worked in people's lives. And there are some testimonies that you're completely gripped by, gripped by maybe the manner in which the Lord actually brought this person to saving faith.

So for example, maybe there was some kind of remarkable providence involved or some kind of, you know, outward signs that accompanied this person coming to faith.

And when you hear stories like that and testimonies like that, very often you're gripped. And when you're thinking of testimonies like that, your mind tends to go to people like, you know, Saul. He's the usual one we refer to, the Damascus road experience that Saul had.

Or as well, there's others as well, even in act itself. So we read of one there with the Philippian jailer. He went through quite an amazing experience as well with an earthquake and all sorts going on in his own testimony, his own conversion story.

[11 : 30] And very often when you hear those kind of testimonies and when you hear those kind of examples of people coming to faith, we think of them almost as having a kind of a, I suppose, a wow factor to them.

You know, something that really engages you when you hear it and when you read about these things. But in many ways, the most amazing conversions of all are those who are very gently and very simply brought to saving faith without any earthquake, without any flashing light, without any Damascus road experience at all.

And that's exactly what you find here with this woman here, Lydia. Conversions like Lydia, they're remarkable because in a way, she didn't really have, outwardly speaking anyway, an amazing testimony to tell.

That's what makes it remarkable. She didn't come with stories about an earthquake. She couldn't come and tell you about bright lights in the sky or anything like that. There's a remarkable simplicity about this testimony, this conversion that we're about to witness here today.

And that in itself, the simplicity of it, that in itself marks it out as quite remarkable indeed. Because when you consider the likes of Saul of Tarsus, or like I mentioned earlier as well, the Philippian jailer, when you read those accounts and you read what happened, it's almost no surprise that they came to faith.

[13 : 06] You know, when you think about what they experienced, when you think about what these people saw, you read that and think, well, no wonder they've got assurance. You know, no wonder they've put their faith in the Lord after all that's happened.

But here, with Lydia, you see someone who's saved in such a relatively simple way. And that in itself is quite incredible.

Because I think conversions like this, they show us that conversion and regeneration, the Lord's work, it is the Lord's work. It's not brought about by outward factors or merely outward factors.

Yes, the Lord can use things. He used things, outward things, and the likes of the Philippian jailer's life and Saul's life and others as well. But fundamentally, conversion is brought about not because of these outward things, but rather something inside, a work of the Lord in our hearts.

And I think that's important because an atheist, for example, an atheist might try and maybe explain away the conversion of Saul. You know, an atheist might say, well, maybe Saul just went through some kind of psychological thing after seeing some kind of bright light in the sky and maybe he was mistaken and psychologically he thought that was a conversion and that's why he's the way he is.

[14 : 21] Or an atheist might as well explain away the Philippian jailer's conversion by maybe some kind of a psychological response to a near-death experience because we read there in the passage, he nearly lost his life.

He was about to kill himself. He was about to take his own life and through that experience, he was brought to the Lord and the atheist might say, well, that's why. Some kind of psychological response to a near-death experience.

But an atheist can't give an explanation for the likes of Lydia. You might explain away these other outwardly impressive, as it were, conversions, but you can't explain away Lydia's conversion here.

It's simplicity. It's simplicity is what makes it remarkable and it shows, it highlights really the power of the gospel message itself. We're going to see that in a few moments.

The power of the message of the Lord that comes and that through the Spirit at work transforms our hearts. And that's what I want to look at today, this gospel encounter here.

[15 : 20] And I want to look at three things in the experience of Lydia. And I want to use language actually from the parable of the sower and the seed. So the three things we're going to look at is, first of all, the Lord preparing the sower, then the Lord preparing the ground, and then the Lord producing fruit.

So the Lord preparing the sower, preparing the ground, and then producing the fruit. So let's look first of all then at the Lord preparing the sower. Now, the chain that brings us to Christ is made up of many different links.

It's never just one thing that brings us to Christ. Well, in effect it is, it's the Spirit. But you know what I mean. It's never just one event or one conversation. There's always lots of little links in this chain that ultimately brings us to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

And one of the links, an important link, is the person that actually comes and shares the gospel message with us. The sower. The person who scatters the seed itself.

And here, in this narrative, the Lord is beginning this process in the conversion of Lydia here by preparing a sower. Preparing somebody to come and actually to scatter the seed, to share the gospel message with Lydia.

[16 : 41] And of course that man is Paul who we read of here. And we see earlier on in the narrative, Paul is, he was said to enter into Bithynia initially, but then in verse 7 there, the Lord basically, or the Spirit of the Lord, tells him not to, forbids him to go in.

And the reason for that is because the Lord had other plans for Paul here. And the Lord gives Paul this amazing vision here, this kind of dream, this vision of this man of Macedonia.

And the man of Macedonia is there calling, calling for his help. And Paul can tell what this means. Paul knows that this means, well, the Lord wants me to go there, to preach to someone there.

And actually it wasn't just to one person, as we saw a wee bit in a reading there, it was to multiple people that Paul was being led to here. But one of those people was this woman here, Lydia. And Lydia wouldn't have known about this.

But when this was all going on in Paul's experience, Lydia had no idea, but God was putting in place a plan that was going to lead in her salvation. And she would have just been going about her, probably her daily duties, her daily activities.

[17 : 48] None the wiser. A couple of hundred miles away, the Lord was at work. And the Lord was at work in the life of Paul himself. And the Lord was preparing this sower to plant the seed in her heart.

And you never know. You never know who the Lord is actually preparing to bring into your path somehow. And to share the gospel message with you.

You just never know. You never know. Even at a time when you have got no interest at all. And the Lord is at work preparing someone. Preparing someone to come and actually share the gospel message with you.

Because when the Lord works in that kind of saving way, it's never just a case that he's preparing the heart of the person who's going to be saved. There's more to it. Yes, of course, he's doing that. And we're going to look at that in a few moments.

But as well as that, he's also preparing the sower. He's preparing the person who's going to go out and scatter that seed. seed, whether that's a family member, whether that's a Christian friend that you have, whether that's a colleague, whether it's someone in your community, a neighbor, whoever it might be, the Lord preparing that person to scatter, to share the seed of the gospel itself. And for you who are the Lords here today, you maybe remember that. Maybe you remember, you know, the sower who first scattered the seed in your heart. Maybe you remember that word coming in. You might not have been saved when that seed was scattered initially, but maybe you remember who it was, who shared that gospel message with you. And when you think back in your own testimony, you maybe think to yourself of the Lord's hand at work beginning once the seed of the gospel was there. But the reality is that the Lord's work began even before then. It began when the Lord was actually preparing the person who sowed the seed, preparing the person who actually scattered the seed of the gospel itself.

[19 : 47] The hand of the Lord is at work well before you even actually become aware of it yourself. And that's the case here. And the Lord leads Paul here. Even before Lydia is aware of anything, the Lord leads Paul here to Philippi. And it's Paul's usual practice. You probably see this when you're going through the book of Acts. His usual practice is when he goes somewhere new, he finds a synagogue. That's his policy. He's got this policy of to the Jew first and then to the Gentile.

But the problem here is when he arrives here, there isn't actually a synagogue here. But what he does find is he finds that outside the city, there's a gathering of Jews and they're meeting there for prayer on the Sabbath day. So there's no synagogue. So he goes there instead.

He knows there's a group of Jews. It seems to be a woman who are meeting there. So he goes out. And in verse 13, we see there that Paul, he sits down and he talks to that group of women who are met there. Now, there might have been men. It's not actually, it doesn't actually say specifically there was no men here. But if there was, I don't think there would have been many because if there was many, they would have formed a synagogue. There may have been or may not have been men there, but that's neither here nor there because it's the woman who he's speaking to. Paul is sitting down and he's specifically sitting with this group of women here. And that point in itself is quite interesting because a lot of people, a lot of people who are very against the word of God, and let's be honest, there's many of them. A lot of people, they look at Paul and the teachings of Paul in the New Testament. And they're very hard on Paul. And they see Paul as being a very sexist man, indeed, a man who had no time for women. And these people claim that the teachings of Paul in the New

Testament show that. But here he is in the very first recorded message of the gospel, the very first gospel encounter in Philippi. And in fact, it's more than that. It's the very first gospel encounter in the whole of the European continent. That's how big a deal this moment is. And who is it with?

It's with a group of women. It's a group of women. It was a man of Macedonia that came to him in his vision. But the very first gospel encounter that's recorded here anyway, is that of a woman.

[22 : 15] This woman here, Lydia. So the Lord prepares this sower. He prepares Paul. That's one part of this equation here. But secondly, the other part of the equation is that the Lord prepares the ground. So he's prepared the sower. But secondly, he prepares the ground. And the ground is obviously, you know, following the analogy of the parable of the sower and the seed. The ground is, of course, Lydia's own heart. So what do we know about this woman here? What do we know about Lydia? Now, we don't have an awful lot, do we, in that little verse there? We're not told, given a massive biography of her life. But one thing that we are told there is that she is from a place called Thyatira. And Thyatira is actually a town in a larger region that's actually called Lydia. So the region itself is actually called Lydia. So there's actually some debate as to whether her name actually is Lydia.

It might not actually be that her name was Lydia. It might just be that's what the people here are calling her, because that's where she's from. You know, she is the Lydian one. We do that ourselves.

That's quite common in our own culture in the islands, to refer to people in terms of where they're from, whatever island they're from, or whatever village they're from. And that may well be the case here. So this woman who goes by the name Lydia, she's from the region of Lydia, but specifically in Thyatira. And there's two important facts about where she was from that are relevant to her testimony. And the first important fact about where she was from is that it's a place that was famous for something. It was famous for purple dye and textiles. It was something that was well known, well connected to that place. And Lydia herself, as we read here, she was a woman who was basically trading in this. She was trading in this purple dye. And the thing about the colour purple, we don't think anything about colours in our days when you're buying clothes. Whatever colour it might be, it might all be the same price. But in this day, purple was a very expensive colour. That's why you hear of purple robes on royalty. Christ himself, a purple robe. The colour purple is connected with wealth. And that probably implies that Lydia herself was more than likely a very wealthy woman. If she was trading in this, she probably made a lot of money. And there's actually further evidence as well that highlights that to us, that she was quite wealthy indeed. And remember what Jesus says about wealth. Remember what Jesus says about money. He famously says in Matthew chapter 19 and verse 24, he says,

I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man or woman to enter into the kingdom of God. And that's so true, isn't it? That is so true. You know, money and a comfortable life, these things can cause all sorts of barriers to the gospel. Money can cause people to be blinded. You know, comfort, material comfort can cause people to be blinded. And we see that in our day, in our culture, let's be honest, you know, in the last generation or so, we've become a lot more comfortable materially in the Western world. That may well change with the way things are going in the world. And we don't know how things are going to go. But right now, people are comfortable. And it's no coincidence that there's that level of, you know, generally speaking, I know that's not the case for everyone, but generally speaking, there's a level of comfort amongst those who live in the

West. And it's no coincidence that that coincides with a spiritual decline, a lack of interest in spiritual things. Our interest in material things gets greater, and our interest in spiritual things begins to wane. Because humanly speaking, when we have lots of material possessions, we don't see our need for Christ. And that's the reality of our day. People don't see their need for Christ. They don't see their need of anything. They think they have everything they need. And the world itself supplies all of that. And, you know, Jesus is saying here, it's impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. But the thing is, what is impossible, the Lord can make possible. And that's exactly what we see in this encounter here with this wealthy woman. She is going to have the Lord working in her heart.

[27 : 02] We're going to see that in a few moments. The Lord's going to work in her heart, and she's going to see her need. She might have a lot. She might be quite wealthy, but she doesn't have the one thing that is needful. She doesn't have salvation in Christ. And that's exactly what the Spirit is doing, working in her heart, showing her that. So that's the first important fact connected to where she's from, Thyatira. It's a place that deals in the purple dye. She's a seller of that, so it implies that she's quite wealthy. So she's a wealthy woman. But the second, second important fact about Thyatira is that it's a place where there was a known community of Jews. That wasn't the case everywhere. But in that place, there was a known community of Jews. And she's obviously had some kind of an interaction with the Jewish faith in the past. We don't read that she was a Jew, historically, I mean. We're not actually told that she was a Jew. But more than likely, growing up in Thyatira, she's come to learn about God there. And she's become a worshipper of God, and to worship according to the Jewish practice. And you see that because again in verse 14, we read there that she worshipped God. She was a worshipper of God. Now, that word, that word, it implies really that she was a God-fearer. That's the kind of language that's been used. She's a

God-fearing woman. So she's a wealthy woman, but she's also a God-fearing woman. Her upbringing, being brought up in Thyatira and with a Jewish connection there, her upbringing has instilled in her this sense of the fear of God. She's got this sense of godly fear. She's not converted.

She hasn't been saved, but she is a God-fearer. And I think that's true to many in our own communities here and in our islands as well. I think the experience of Lydia is very relevant to us. There's a sense in which we can find relevance in every character that you study in the Bible and the Gospel accounts. But I think here with Lydia, we have someone who we can very much relate to. Because there's many people in our communities here, and their upbringing, less so now, unfortunately, but there still is a presence of this, whose upbringing have instilled in them a sense of the fear of the Lord himself. And it's amazing how many people you'll speak to, and they'll say something like, oh, I'm not a Christian. I'm not a born-again believer. I'm not a member in a church, but I'm a God-fearer. Yeah, I'm a God-fearing person. And I think that's a legitimate distinction. I think a lot of people in other cultures might not understand that distinction, but I think it's a legitimate distinction to actually make. And I think this is a prime example of it. Because here, even before Lydia was converted, before she was saved, she's a God-fearer.

We read that. But the thing is, the answer to this kind of conundrum of how you can be a God-fearer or not be a Christian is that there's two types of God-fearing. There's two different kinds of God-fearing.

Some people, they have a God-fearer that essentially keeps them away from God, keeps them at a distance from God. So maybe they believe in God. Maybe you believe in heaven and hell. Maybe you believe you're a sinner. You believe all of these facts. But all of these facts results in a God-fearer that actually keeps you away from the Lord himself. It's a God-fearer that keeps you at a distance.

[30 : 43] And that kind of God-fearer, that is not the kind of God-fearer that Christians have. That's not at all. The kind of fear that Christians have, the godly fear of God, is a fear that draws you towards the Lord. It's not one that keeps you away. It's one that, where you acknowledge your sinfulness, but you're drawn towards the Lord and you're drawn to seek his forgiveness. The forgiveness of our Father in heaven. And if you want to know, well, what kind of godly fear do I have? Because I suspect if I asked everybody in here, probably everybody would say, I'm a God-fearing person. I have a fear of God. But what kind? That's the key.

What kind of God-fearing person are you? Are you the kind of person who has this fear of God that's keeping you well away from God and I'll just stay at a distance, thank you very much? Or this kind of fear of the Lord that draws us in and that draws us to put our faith in the Lord and to seek that forgiveness that he offers. And here, Lydia, she's a God-fearer, yes, but as of yet, she's not yet saved. Initially, her heart is closed. Her heart is closed to the things of the Lord. But then we begin to see it opening up. And again, if you look at verse 14 there, we read that whose heart, Lydia, whose heart the Lord opened. It's just one wee statement, one wee phrase in that verse, the Lord opening her heart. You know, again, to go back to what I was saying earlier, in the book of Acts, you have amazing testimonies. You have, you know, Pentecost, thousands of people saved at the preaching of Peter. You've got the Ethiopian eunuch who was, you know, amazingly saved on his journey, in his chariot. And the ones I mentioned before, Saul of Tarsus and the Philippian jailer and all of these kind of amazing conversions. And what you see in all of these conversion accounts is almost like an outside view. It's like you're standing on the outside and you're seeing what's happening.

You're seeing what they're experiencing. But here with Lydia, we get an inside view. We get literally an inside view in what's going on. And we're told there that the Lord is actually opening up her heart. The Lord is doing something. Doing something. Something that is, largely speaking, hidden. Because, you know, you can't see. I can't see what's going on in your heart.

You can't see what's going on in my heart. This is a work that's hidden. We can't see that. We're seeing it here because Scripture's telling us. But it's a hidden work. The Lord coming in. And the Lord is reminding us there. Again, in case we were in any doubt, that the work of salvation is his work.

It's absolutely his. So, for example, the people at Pentecost, they weren't saved because Peter preached a really impressive sermon. A really compelling sermon. That's not why they were saved. Saul wasn't saved because he saw bright lights in the sky. Saul wasn't saved because he had a Damascus Road experience. That's not why he was saved. That's not the case at all. Something was going on inside.

[33 : 56] Inside these people. Something hidden. Something invisible. The Lord, as we have it here, was opening up their hearts. Just like he's opening up Lydia's. He was opening up theirs as well. That's always the way.

Always the way the Lord works. And that's what happened in our hearts too, for those of us who are the Lord. Because naturally speaking, naturally speaking, we are completely hardened to the gospel.

You know, by default, we're completely, completely hardened to the truth of the gospel. Our minds, the word reminds us, are darkened. Our minds are darkened by the God of this age, the devil himself.

So by default, our hearts are absolutely closed. And supposing, even in here today, supposing, Paul himself, or Peter, or any other renowned preacher of the past, supposing they came in here today, and again, preached the most compelling sermon, the most convicting and convincing sermon that you could ever hear, it would have absolutely no impact on you at all, unless, unless the Lord has actually opened up our hearts. And that's always our prayer. That has to be our prayer.

Our desire, your desire here, isn't just that lots of people will come to the church just to fill the pews. That's not your desire. That shouldn't be your desire. Yes, we want to see them come to hear the gospel. We want to see people under the sound of the gospel. But we're praying for more than that, surely. We're praying that, yes, they'll come under the gospel, but importantly, that the Lord would work in their hearts, that God would open up hearts, so that when that gospel seed is scattered, it lands in fertile ground, and it springs forth to new life. And that leads us to our third point, and just briefly on this point, the Lord producing fruit. So we've seen the Lord preparing the sower. We've seen the Lord preparing the ground, Lydia's heart. And now here, we see the Lord actually producing the fruit. Because Lydia's heart being prepared, that in and of itself is not enough.

[36 : 12] The seed, the sower has to come and plant the seed into it, into that ground that has been prepared, into that fertile ground. And then when that happens, when the seed of the gospel meets with that ground that has been prepared, then you get this explosion of new life. And we read again there in verse 14 that Lydia, she attended unto, or she paid attention to the words spoken to her. So her heart has been opened, and she listens. And the wording there actually, in the Greek, it implies that she's gripped by what they're saying. She's gripped by the teachings of Paul and those who are with them here. And Paul would have been telling her all about the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul would have been telling her that Jesus is the Messiah that the Old Testament had promised. That the Messiah that you're reading about in your Old Testament, that's Jesus. He would have told her that Jesus, the one who was crucified, the one who was killed, that he is none other than the Son of God. The one who has come as an atoning sacrifice for sinners like us. And that salvation is now on offer because of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. And he would have said to her, repent. Repent, believe, and be baptized. That's the message we see in other places. That's what he would have said. He would have proclaimed the gospel message.

And because the Lord's opened her heart, because God has already been at work there, she takes heed of these words. It doesn't just go over her head. She doesn't go in one ear and out the other like perhaps it's happened to us many times before. No. Because the Lord has been working. The seed bears fruit to eternal life.

And she's enabled to put her trust and faith in the Lord. See, that's the key. When God is at work opening the heart, he enables you to put your trust in him. He enables you to put your faith in him.

And that's exactly what you have here. A simple conversion, but an amazingly remarkable conversion as well. You know, at a time, especially in this time period in Acts, at a time when, as I was saying earlier, people were being saved through unbelievable outward signs. You know, miraculous healings and flashes in the sky and all these sorts of things. And yet here is this woman who just simply has the gospel explained to her after a prayer meeting on the edge of a river. And the Lord opens her heart and she believes. That's it. A testimony that would probably take two minutes to tell, but a remarkable and powerful testimony indeed. And we must never lose sight of the power of the actual gospel message preached or shared. I'm not just talking about it from the pulpit here. I'm talking about yourselves as well. Sharing the gospel message. Never forget the power. The power of the gospel message going out and how the Lord can use that to transform lives. And that's exactly what we see here. And that should really be an encouragement to us to do that. To share the gospel. I think sometimes, particularly in our own day, that we've almost stopped believing that the power of the gospel, we've almost stopped believing that the gospel will actually save. And when you start to think like that, what happens is you're more reluctant to share the gospel. You're more reluctant to share the good news.

We can't be like that. We need to remind ourselves on what the gospel has done in the past, what it's even done in the community here in recent times, even in recent years. Remember the power of that gospel.

[40 : 06] And to go out with that gospel, to share it. Maybe just a word here. Maybe just a word there. And you never know how the Lord might use it. Because when this message of the gospel, when it meets with a heart that has been prepared. And the thing is, you don't know whose heart has been prepared.

That's the thing. You know, with the parable of the sower and the seed. Was the sower going out and sort of looking to see where the good ground was and aiming for the good ground. He wasn't. He had no idea. He was scattering it everywhere. And it's the same for us. We don't know. We don't know whose hearts the Lord are working in. Maybe we assume because people in church, that it's the people who are in church that are most likely to receive it. We don't know that. Might be people who don't go anywhere near a church. But the Lord might be working there. So that's an encouragement for us to share that seed of the gospel with everyone. With all those who we encounter. Because you never know.

When the Lord might prepare the ground. And when that seed falls in it. And comes to life itself. And here with this woman, that's what you see. You see this life. And there's evidence of her newfound faith as well. There's always evidence. When someone comes to faith. When someone comes to the Lord. You start to see evidence. You know, marks of grace as we commonly refer to them. But there's always evidence of some kind of a change. And here you see evidence. Because she makes her home.

a place of fellowship and hospitality. For Paul and his companions here. So in verse 15 there, we read that, and when she was baptized and her household, she besought us saying, if you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide. There. She's opening up her home. She wants to be with the Lord's people. And then actually, her house then becomes the church, basically, for Philippi. Which also maybe suggests that she was quite a, again, quite a wealthy woman.

And you see that because, see at the end in verse 40 there. This is after Paul and Silas when they're miraculously freed from the prison cell at the end of chapter 16. And in verse 40, you see there that, where do they go? They go to Lydia's house. That's where they go. Straight away. Lydia's house to meet with the rest of the brethren. She's made her house a place for the Lord's people to come. The Lord's people to gather. That should always be the case for those who are the Lord's. There should always be this desire there to be together. Not just in church. Yes, it's important to be together in church and in public worship. But not just like that. But to be together often.

[42 : 48] Praying with one another. Meeting with one another. That is a sign of saving faith. That desire. That desire to be there. I know that's been difficult over the last couple of years. But we need to rekindle that. And get that desire back to be sharing and being with one another again.

And that's exactly what you see here. This evidence of saving faith. This desire for Lydia to open her home. Have the Lord's people with her there. So you have there then an amazing conversion. A conversion which maybe from the outside looks incredibly unimpressive. And actually if you're reading through Acts, you're probably thinking, well this is the most unimpressive, outwardly speaking I mean, the most unimpressive conversion in the whole of the book of Acts. Yet the Lord gives us an inside view here. An inside view. And something amazing is happening. He's opening up this woman's heart.

And she hears the gospel. She's able to embrace it. No fireworks. No flashes in the sky. No earthquakes. None of that. Just the Lord coming in. Opening her heart. And she puts her faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's a miracle. That's a miracle. You know we often say we don't see miracles nowadays.

Yes we see miracles. There's evidence of miracles all around the community here. People who have been brought from death to life because the Lord maybe didn't give them an earthquake. Maybe didn't give them a flash in the sky. But opened their hearts and enabled them to believe. And my prayer is that that'll be true of every one of us. That we too would be enabled to put our trust in Christ by the Lord coming in. Opening our hearts and embracing that gospel message. May that be what we pray for and you pray for as a congregation here as well. Amen. We pray for the Lord's blessing on those few thoughts. We'll bow our heads now in a word of prayer. Heavenly Father, we give thanks that you are the God who is still very much in the business of salvation. And we're maybe especially reminded that in that book of Acts that we read from earlier on. And we see so many people brought to saving faith.

And we see the different ways in which people are brought to saving faith. And our prayer is, as we read of there in the experience of Lydia, that you would indeed work in the hearts of men and women and boys and girls. Those who are with us today and those who are not with us today. Those who maybe haven't even gone near a church in their lives in this community. Our prayer is that your hand would go out and open up their hearts. And encourage us as the Lord's people to go out and scattering that seed. May we be prepared as sowers to share the gospel message, not knowing whose hearts have been prepared to receive it. Give us the courage and the boldness and the words to do just that. And we ask for your help in it all, cleanse us from sin. For Jesus' sake. Amen.