

107
February 23, 2020
Acts 16:11-15
Lydia

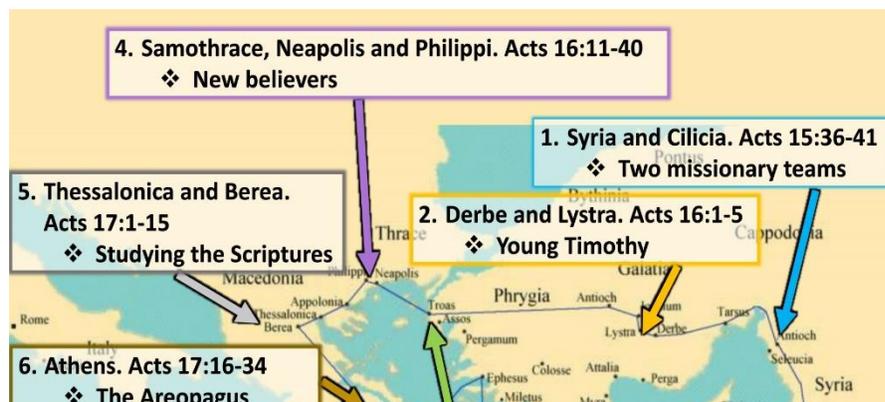
¹¹ So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, ¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the^[a] district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. ¹³ And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. ¹⁴ One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵ And 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.

When I was living in Lithuania, I did quite a bit of translation and interpretation. We all know many funny stories about how translation can go very wrong. It can be very embarrassing when you translate totally not what the speaker wants to say. One time, I heard a preacher who was talking about us being channels for God’s to work. Somehow, the translator – fortunately it was not me – went from channels to tubes and from tubes to tobacco pipes. The point was totally lost.

After ordering his meal, my father-in-law told the waitress in Lithuanian “viskas” meaning that he was finished ordering his meal. She heard something else and brought him a glass of whiskey.

Once I was translating for a Norwegian women speaking in English at a women’s retreat. She said, “I will be talking today about Lydia.” and I said in Lithuanian, “I will be talking about Lydia from the Bible.” She looked at me and told me, “I did not say Bible.” Of course, I was embarrassed. She was right, she did not say Bible, but when you do interpretation, most of the time you do your best to get to the point that she /he is trying to make. It is not possible to immediately translate word for word. I do not remember what she said afterwards, but it was a lesson for me: A lesson to forgive, a lesson to listen and be more careful with my words.

So today we will indeed talk about Lydia from the Bible. I surely can talk a lot about my mother, but instead we will talk about Lydia from Acts chapter 16 in the Bible.



Last week, Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke wanted to continue their missionary journey. After plan A and plan B did not work, Paul had a vision of the Macedonian Call so they went to Europe. In those days there was no line of demarcation between “Asia” and “Europe”. As our missionaries sailed across the northern part of the Aegean Sea they were only conscious of traveling from one province to another, not from one continent to another.

Look at the purple arrow in this picture.

400 years earlier, Philippi was named after the father of Alexander the Great. It was also the scene of the decisive battle in which Augustus established the Roman Empire. Now 4 missionaries arrived to establish the kingdom of God in Europe.

They spent several days in Philippi. Whenever Paul visited a new city, it was his practice, to attend the local Jewish synagogue on the first Sabbath after his arrival. At Philippi, however, there does not appear to have been a regular synagogue. That means that there were not even 10 Jewish men. All you needed to constitute a synagogue was a quorum of ten men. So the missionaries attended the closest thing to a synagogue. It was a “place of prayer”.



I wonder what people Paul expected to find there? What was their reaction when they found women and probably children? If I had been Paul, I would have been thinking: “God you closed two doors and you, God, open *these* doors? What is this? A group of women by the river? I am pretty sure I saw a Macedonian man in my vision urging us to come and help: Not women gathering on the banks of a river.”

Logic says they should have been preaching to the city fathers in the center of the city. Instead they were outside the city gate not talking to philosophers and rabbis. According to Isaiah 55, God’s ways are not our ways.

Sometimes there is a Pentecost experience in which great crowds join the church. More often, though, the Spirit of God moves in lives through quiet witness like this small group by the river. Numbers are irrelevant. It is all about obeying the promptings of the Holy Spirit and bringing glory to Christ Jesus.

Maybe the team remembered how Jesus sat down and visited with the woman at the well. They humbly sat down with the women and had a conversation.

One of them was Lydia. She came from Thyatira. Thyatira was previously the Ancient kingdom of Lydia. Most likely her name was not Lydia but she was known as the Lydian lady. It was her trade name.

I love the way Holy Spirit orchestrated the meeting between Lydia and these 4 missionaries. This was an encounter in which the truth of Jesus Christ and Him crucified met openness, represented by Lydia.



The very next story in Acts 16 is about a demon-possessed slave girl who is delivered. In contrast, Lydia was at the opposite end of the economic continuum. Jesus came for all people regardless of economic status.

Lydia was a financially secure resident of the city of Philippi. She owned her own business and her own home. She was a “seller of purple”; a “merchant of expensive purple cloth” from the well-known textile city of Thyatira. Thyatira was renowned for its purple dye which would not fade like most other dyes. Purple clothing was the mark of wealth and royalty in the Roman world. To be dressed in purple was to say to the world I am rich, powerful, and influential. To be dressed in purple is to say to the world — I am a mover and a shaker. This is our Lydia.

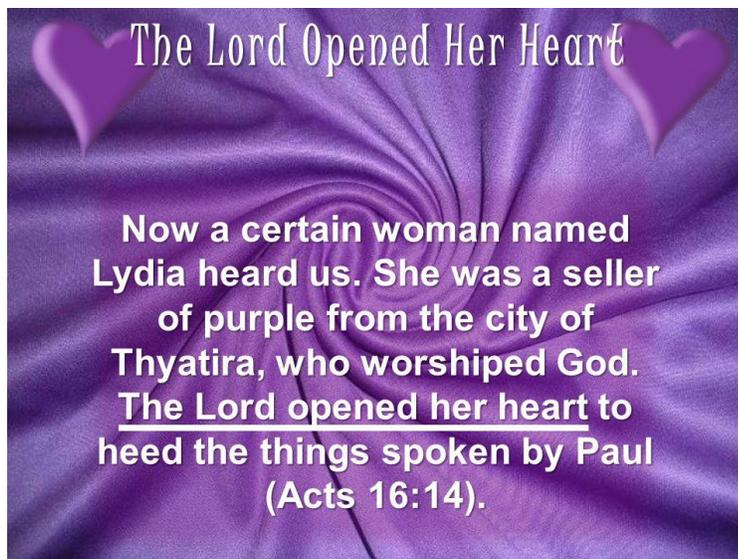
Even though she had everything the world could offer, she knew enough to worship God. She knew that there are things that riches, and even security, cannot keep us safe and saved. I believe one of the most important things women need is to feel secure. What makes us secure? What makes you feel secure? Trust in the people we love, financial stability, safe and nice place to live? Even if you will check off the entire list of all you need to have to feel secure, you will find emptiness and fear: fear of the present and of the future. As soon as we realize it and have wisdom to seek God we will find the peace and security that does not depend on people or things.

Lydia is so different from other women we read about in the Bible. She is not sick. She is not a poor widow. She is not possessed by demons. Her life is not messed

up. She was Liz Clayborne of the Macedonia world, trading at the top end of the market.

All people need God. Rich and poor, man and woman, young and old: all of us need God.

Before she met Paul, Lydia was a worshiper of God. In her work, in her home, in her daily life she brought glory to God. She did come to a prayer meeting and her worship did not start there and did not end there. Sometimes there is big disconnect from who we are on Sundays and who we are during the week. She was a worshipper of God in her life, in her business, in her home, in her community. Are you a worshipper of God in your life?



Verse 14 tells us that:

#1 She worshipped God before she came to the place to worship.

#2 She heard what Paul was saying. You need somebody to share and you need a person who will hear you. Nobody else can make you to listen. You can choose to come, but are you willing to listen so you hear?

The second part of verse 14 tells us: "The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul".

#3 You can have a great preacher like, Peter or Paul, and have the best intentions, but in the end it is the Lord who opens the heart. Yes, the individual listener must be willing to surrender to God. You have to trust in God. If you are the one sharing the gospel,

you dare not depend on yourself. Yes, do the best you know and are able, but trust in God.

You can do all the right things and practice all the disciplines like prayer, fasting, worship, tithing, taking communion, fellowship with Christians, or even memorize the entire Bible. It is only the Spirit of God who will bring you salvation, bring you meaning and purpose or bring you joy, courage and peace. God is the only one who open the eyes of your heart. God worked in Lydia's heart and gave her new life when she heard the gospel. She became a follower of the Way by God's gracious and saving Spirit.

So here we have the first mention of someone converting to faith in Jesus on Europe soil and that convert is a wealthy lady named Lydia.

The pattern is the same all through the book of Acts. Lydia listened, then she believed and then she was baptized.

After Lydia's conversion she and her household are baptized. What is next? "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."

#4 Once the heart is opened, the home is opened, too. Lydia insisted, urged them to come and stay at her house.

At the end of Acts 16, Lydia's home was still open to the missionaries even after Paul and Silas got out of prison.

Robert Schnase wrote a book called "5 Practices of Fruitful Congregations". The top of the list is what he calls radical hospitality. How are we doing in making people feel at home in this church on Sunday and all week long? How can we improve?

There are many places in the Bible that encourage us to open our homes. I understand that it is not easy for so many of us. For me, I feel I must clean my house. It is extra stress and work. I like the way things are in my house. Inviting people over means inviting interruptions with my order. We all have excuses for not opening our home.

Romans 12 provides a long list of Christian character. One of these is "given to hospitality." I Peter states that it our Christian duty to practice hospitality.

May Lydia serve us today as an example. Maybe we can start with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Lydia's first response was inviting missionaries to her home.

This week we will be celebrating Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent. As I was reading these verses from Acts and asking God to lead and guide I was seeking ways to apply this passage in my life and in New Life community. I would like to see somebody follow Lydia's example and open their house during Lent for prayer. We

would meet once per week just to pray. I would be glad to help and guide. I trust in the Holy Spirit. I trust if God is nudging and encouraging one of you to open your house for New Life people to gather and pray during the Lent. Let me know if it is you.