

LYDIA

Acts 16:14 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.

How much of a miracle was it when you became a Christian? You might have belonged to a Christian family, taken to church and Sunday School, your parents prayed and read the Bible to you ... and it is what you have always known. However, your brother or sister were taught the same as you, but they rejected it and have no time for God. ... Or perhaps, you were brought up with little mention of God. You were not brought to church, and you did not read the Bible. You never prayed. ... How did you come to be saved? What happened?

Paul began his second missionary journey in Jerusalem and travelled north to Antioch, and westwards to Tarsus, his home city. He intended to continue further west to Asia Minor. However, the Holy Spirit said, “No”, **Acts 16:6** 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. ... This meant Paul and his fellow-workers who had come from the east couldn’t go south because it was the Mediterranean Sea, and they were forbidden to go west ... The only option was north, but again, the Holy Spirit said ‘no’ (v.7). By now, they might have been thinking, “Lord, where *do* You want us to go?!” ... North, south, east, and west ... the Lord seemed to be shutting the doors! However, Paul knew he had been called into the work and the Lord had *somewhere* for him to be.

He crossed the region of Mysia (v.8) and arrived in Troas, on the north-western shoreline of modern Turkey. Troas had been made a Roman colony by Caesar Augustus. While there God clearly gave Paul the direction to take, ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them. ¹¹ Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; ¹² 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. ... So, this small band of missionaries, - Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke, - sailed across from Troas to Samothrace, a small island in the northern Aegean Sea, to the seaport of Neapolis and then went the short distance inland to Philippi. Philippi had become a Roman city, a ‘Rome outside of Rome’, with all the privileges. ... Paul’s natural inclination was to firstly search out the local Jewish meeting, so, ¹³ on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. It seems there was not enough Jewish men to constitute a synagogue for it needed at least a quorum of ten men (a *minyan*) ... so *the women* met on the riverbank. ... Under normal circumstances, it would

hardly have been the first choice for a male Jewish missionary team. Nevertheless, it was where the Lord led them.

So, here is a group of women, in the open air, not meeting in a synagogue ... but on the banks of the river and Paul found them praying. This was the Gospel being introduced to Europe.

He noticed a certain woman whose name was Lydia (v.14), from the wealthy Gentile city of Thyatira in Asia Minor where she had her own successful business selling elegantly lavish purple material. Previously, she had converted to Judaism. She was an honest, upright woman, and here she was, according to the Jewish tradition she had adopted, ¹⁴ *[she] worshipped [revered, honoured] God.*

She was trying to be obedient to the Law of Moses. She had left behind her the worship of the many idols of her Gentile upbringing ... but, at the same time, there was something continuing to elude her. ... She could not have told you what it was but as she listened to Paul, a Jew, explain how Jesus was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament ... and as he shared with her and that congregation their need of salvation, she listened, and ‘took it all in’.

God knew where this woman was, and that is why He sent Paul to find her ... to this small number of women meeting on the riverbank outside the city (v.13). With all the directions Paul could have taken since leaving Jerusalem, the Lord brought him to *exactly* where Lydia was. He would *never* have found her otherwise for this was no ‘chance’ encounter, in the same way your meeting with God was no ‘chance’ encounter either. This meeting was in God’s plan to perform the work of His grace concerning this woman.

She was a faithful religious Jewess ... but she did not yet know Jesus as her Saviour *until* the Lord opened her heart to believe (v.14). Her search for God was rewarded and she went from a religion which did not satisfy to a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ for as she listened to Paul, the light of the Gospel shone into her darkened soul. He spoke about Jesus Christ, and how He died on a cross to pay the punishment for her sin, and if she would believe in Him, her sin would be forgiven. God brought Paul to where she was so that she attended *Ἰπροσέχω* unto the things which were spoken of *him [the Lord Jesus]*.

God had taken Paul all the hundreds of miles from Jerusalem to find this woman Lydia, on the riverbank outside of Philippi. ... And God had also taken Lydia over a hundred miles from her city of Thyatira to meet Paul. ... Look back and

remember the circumstances the Lord put together to bring about where you met Him? ... Remembering it now, you see ‘the threads He had been weaving’ in His plan to bring you to Himself. There was nothing of ‘chance’ or ‘accident’ about your salvation ... as the hymn says, “My Father planned it all”.

Were you happy as you were? Perhaps, or was there always something inside, - like a spiritual ‘niggle’, - quietly searching for that elusive extra you could not adequately explain? ... When God comes looking for you, He will find you no matter where you are.

That is how God saves a soul. He seeks until He succeeds in what He sets out to achieve. He promises all who desire to find Him, *Dt. 4:29* if ... thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul. ... That is what it means, ¹⁴ And a certain woman named Lydia ... *heard* us. Many people come to a place where the Gospel is preached, and yet they don’t *hear* how the message is for them. They leave as they entered, not having received Christ ... but when God is working, the sinner *hears* for the message of the Gospel will not let them go and they will come to Christ. They will realise it was for them He shed His blood and died on the cross of Calvary.

It is a great privilege when you hear Jesus died for you. Many people block their ears and don’t want to listen ... and yet you heard and listened because God opened your heart, - as He did with Lydia, - so you would understand He sent His Son for you.

And Lydia was saved because the Lord opened her heart. If He hadn’t opened her heart, it would have remained closed, and she would not have been saved. The picture is often drawn where Christ is standing on the outside of the door of your heart pleading to come into your life ... and He is waiting patiently in the hope you will open the door. But no, instead *He* came to where you were, and *He* opened your heart that you would believe in Him, and *He* entered. ... You are saved all because of His grace, - **God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense**, - ... because of what *He* did to redeem you. ... He reached out to you with the Gospel, and He brought you to realise His Son Jesus died for you, and He showed you how when *He* comes in, your life becomes His. That is what Lydia discovered when ¹⁴ she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. ¹⁵ 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. ... Her faith was not an ‘add on’, but it was a ‘take over’.

How do you know you are saved? How do you know you truly belong to God? ... Lydia saw no blinding light on the road to Damascus, like Paul, no flashes of lightning, no thundering trumpets ... just a quiet confidence in God's promise, whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved (Acts 2:21) ... That is what she did, on the banks of the river, on the outskirts of Philippi ... that is how she believed in Jesus Christ as her Saviour. ... And following on, she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul (v.14). She listened to him teach the Scriptures and learned how they speak of the Saviour. She would have heard Paul explain the Old Testament texts concerning Him. ... And the more she listened, the more she wanted to hear and learn.

There was a change in her life for she was taken out of her lifeless religion to believe in the living Jesus Christ as her Saviour and Master ... and immediately, she identified with Him by being baptized. In front of her friends and colleagues, she witnessed to her new faith in Christ ... she invited the Saviour into her heart and into her home, ¹⁵ come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us. ... She wanted to be with God's people. She was saved, baptized, she witnessed, she brought her new faith into her home and into her work, and she wanted to be in the company of fellow-believers. The work of salvation had turned her into a new creation.

Sometimes our salvation comes upon us so quietly, and we wonder if we are truly saved. ... Did it really happen? Is my faith genuine? ... Those are not uncommon questions, especially for young believers. You will see here perhaps something of that in Lydia's statement, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there (v.15). ... If you believe my salvation is real, come into my house, and abide there. ... I, and everything I have, now belongs to the Lord! ... That is the evidence of your salvation, - "I am His, and He is mine ... Loved with everlasting love, drawn by grace that love to know".

Consider again how the Saviour found you, how He formed the circumstances whereby you would come to know and love Him. Look back and remember with gratefulness how He began His work, and how He has brought you to where you are today,

For all the Lord has done for me,
I never will cease to love Him;
And for His grace so rich and free,
I never will cease to praise Him.