

Lydia

Preached by Phil Kayser at DCC on 2021-08-29

We are on our 18th sermon in the Women of Faith series, and I want to look at the businesswoman, Lydia. Let's read Acts 16:6-15.

Introduction - why Lydia was a critical first contact in Europe

I want to look first of all at why Lydia was a critical first contact in Europe. Where the conversion of the Philippian jailer (which occurs later in this chapter) opened doors into the military and into the civil government through that veteran soldier's extensive contacts, Lydia was a merchant of a product that was highly sought after by virtually all of the wealthy and influential people of the city. It appears that she had the corner on the market for Tyrian Dye and the purple clothing made unique by that dye. So she would have been an incredibly valued member of the Philippian business community. And since she imported her products from her home town of Thyatira (where no church had been planted yet) she was a key contact for *that* city as well.

And I will try to demonstrate that her conversion blew doors wide open for the Gospel to come to the most influential people in both cities. Paul couldn't stay there for long because it was illegal for Jews to be in that city, and it is providential that Lydia had not yet converted to Judaism or *she* would not have been able to stay there.

But I could summarize the impact by saying that in the few days before Paul was kicked out of Philippi, Paul made inroads into two very important influence-spheres in any society - civics and business. The Reformed missionary, Douglas Layton, points out that Western Missions has been way too individualistic and as a result has missed the covenantal aspect of seeking to win a culture by winning the seven spheres that most influence a culture - what he identifies as civics, religion, arts, education, business, family, and media - and I would add an eighth, medicine. In fact, I lumped Media and Arts together and added medicine as my seventh in the diagram in your outline.

If you can make inroads into those influential spheres, you can have enormous influence within a city or county. Within days Paul made inroads into three of those spheres - civics, business, and family. Yes, he and his team were asked to leave. But it was too late for Satan to do much about it - the leaven of the kingdom was already planted, and within a few short years one of the healthiest churches was thriving in the city of Philippi. And within two centuries the entire region was Christian. But it all started with the businesswoman, Lydia.

Background - Why Lydia was significant to reaching Europe (vv. 6-13)

Let's back up a bit so that you can see God's sovereign plans written all over this cool story.

Philippi - a small beginning, but a momentous turning point

Verse 6 takes place in June of AD 50. Paul was hoping to plant new churches in the unreached areas of the Roman province of Asia - which is not modern Asia, but is the Western one-third of modern Turkey. So he started to travel toward Laodicea and then to Ephesus – a very logical route. Those were major cities that Paul would later plant churches in. But there is a timing for everything, and in verse 6 God forbids the team from preaching the word anywhere else in the Roman province of Asia. That definitely rules out Laodicea and Ephesus. So he travels northeast from Galatia on the main Roman highway through the eastern part of the province of Mysia, hoping to go up into Bithynia, which is way north. But the Holy Spirit didn't permit them to go into Bithynia either. And on the highway they were traveling, that means they have to take the left fork to Troas. Why this roundabout route? Well, if he had tried to go to Europe when he was way south in Lystra, he would have passed through Ephesus and completely missed Troas. What was in Troas? Luke. That's where Paul's team met Luke, and he becomes an indispensable part of their team. From that point on, Luke stops saying "they" and starts saying "we." He is now on the team. So verse 10 has the first occurrence of the word "we." If God hadn't taken them way northeast to the border of Mysia and Bithynia, they would not have met Luke. In verse 9 God gives the vision of the man from Macedonia calling for the team to help them there. So that's where they travel to in verse 11.

Verse 11 says, "Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis." Finally, they are out of Asia. They crossed the Dardanelles Straights, spent a night on the mountainous island of Samothrace, and then sailed into Neapolis, the sea port ten miles away from Philippi.

Verse 12 says, "and from there to Philippi." I want to spend a bit of time giving background on this city, because it shows the sovereignty of God preparing the way for the next 1500 years. Philippi was just about 10 miles inland on the Via Egnatia highway. So it was a fairly easy trip. And Luke comments, "which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony." Every word in that statement is critically important. Liberals scoff at this statement, saying that Philippi was not the capital of Macedonia – Thessalonica was. But this doesn't say it was the *capital*. It says it was "foremost." And Philippi was indeed foremost in terms of a glorious history, Roman administration, finances, and influence. It was by far the most important city in Macedonia. It had a massive gold mining industry, producing more than 1000 talents of gold every year. That's 2,632,000 ounces/year. There was a lot of wealth in this city. There was a leading medical school there. This was also where many of the best Roman military officers retired with beautiful estates. And so it was a city of influence. If you could penetrate Philippi, you would have connections all over the empire.

But it was also extremely hostile to what they considered cults. And this factors into the story as well. This is likely why these women were praying outside the city - so as not to get caught. Paul usually tried to find a city where a synagogue could be a starting point for preaching. But there was no such synagogue. And we will see why in a moment.

Verse 12 ends by saying, “And we were staying in that city for some days.” Apparently they just were not having any success in their outreach - until they meet Lydia. I’ll jump ahead for a second and point out that Paul’s team only succeeds in winning Lydia’s family, the demon possessed girl and the jailer’s family before they are kicked out at the end of the chapter. It does not seem like a very auspicious beginning for their missions trip to Europe - at least if you are an American individualist. But Paul and Silas were not discouraged in the least. Even in jail in verse 25 they are praying and singing hymns of praise to God. Why? Because they fully trust the sovereignty of God in missions. There are no wasted moments in God’s plan.

And even though the beginnings in Philippi seem small, we know that this wealthy businesswoman became a key inroad into this influential town, and the jailer became a point of contact for the military and civil network of that city. If you can penetrate business and government, you have done pretty well. And when he cast the media demon out of the slave girl who made her owners a lot of money broadcasting current events, one of the hostile media outlets was shut down. Anyway, because of these small inroads, Philippi very quickly becomes one of the healthiest and strongest of the New Testament churches. But more than that, missions books say that her conversion was the tiny tip of a massive fulcrum which would quickly lead to the entire continent of Europe becoming Christian, and through Europe, missions spreading to the rest of the world. Are they exaggerating on this point? I don’t think so. As one missions speaker said,

As we look back, across the intervening twenty centuries, we can see that this is one of the most important events of all time. It changed the whole course of Western civilization. Perhaps no single event since the cross of Christ has so affected the world as Paul’s seemingly unpretentious decision to cross a narrow neck of water [to Philippi].¹

I bring all of that up because we many times get discouraged over small beginnings. We get discouraged over the detours, the financial setbacks and the slowdowns that God orchestrates into our lives. But we need to stop and realize that it is God who is orchestrating those things in our lives. If we would study the sovereignty of God, we would begin to be able to rejoice over these setbacks just like Paul and Silas did and realize that God is always doing something great - yes, even through our supposed setbacks.

Gangites River – an unlikely preaching point, yet God’s ordained penetration into Europe

But let’s look at this prayer meeting at the river - and commentators say it is the Gangites River. They hadn’t been doing too well in the city. They couldn’t even find a synagogue. So they travel about one and a quarter miles outside the city gates to the banks of the river. Why would they do that?

I think the reasons are hinted at in verse 13. Verse 13 says, “And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down

¹ Ray Stedman at <https://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/acts/d-day-at-philippi>

and spoke to the women who met there.” There are two things to note: First, they couldn’t find a single Jewish man. In a city that size, that should seem odd. Second, he speaks of it being *customary* for prayer to happen beside the river in such circumstances as these. Why would it be customary?

Well, Josephus records a Jewish decree that if there is no synagogue, people should gather on the Sabbath by the waterside for prayer. You can see that in his *Antiquities* 14, section 258. And because this was a decree, all Jews knew where to go if they couldn’t find any other Jews in a city. It’s a perfectly logical place for Paul to look on the Sabbath.

A second reason why they met outside the city may have been because of persecution. The year before (which was AD 49) Emperor Claudius had expelled the Jews from Rome because they were blamed for creating a religious disturbance. Acts 18:2 mentions this edict as the reason why Aquila had to leave Rome. Here’s why that is significant. Luke mentions in verse 12 of our chapter that Philippi is a Roman *colony*. Colonies were treated as being outposts of the city of Rome. They were districts directly under the control of Rome just like the District of Columbia is under the United States Congress. And so, it is almost certain that all the Jews were expelled from Philippi the year before as well. A decree in Rome would automatically become a decree Philippi.

Well, that helps to explain verses 20-21.

Acts 16:20 And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, “These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; 21 and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe.”

The owners of the girl that Paul cast the demon out of were furious at Paul for their lost income and they looked for a way they could get even. When you start attacking or competing with the modern demonically controlled media outlets (like Gab, Rumble, Epoch Times, and other competitors are trying to do today) they will persecute you; they will sic the government on you. And if you are a Christian media outlet, it will be even worse. Anyway, when the owners of the girl discovered that Paul and Silas were Jews, it was easy. They simply appealed to a law. What law are they appealing to? The decree of Claudius the year before. Paul and Silas have the exact same charge brought against them that was brought against the Jews in Rome the year before. They didn’t want Jews in that city. So the likelihood is that any Jewish population that had been present in the past was now moved to another city in Macedonia.

So if the Jews left, who were the women? Some of the commentators believe that these were Gentile God-fearers who *weren’t* Jews yet, but who worshiped the God of the Jews. Because they haven’t converted yet, they would have been seen by the Romans as still being Roman. But John Polhill says that being friendly to Jews would have made any meeting they had suspect in the city.² So they decided to meet out by the river. But because of God’s sovereign expelling of the Jews, the lack of Jews spared the church of Philippi from

² “If there were no Jews present and all the women were Gentile ‘God-fearers’ like Lydia, this may have made their gathering even more suspect in the city.” (p. 348).

all the Judaizing problems plaguing other churches. God knows what He is doing. There needs to be a strong base from which to go into the rest of Europe. So Claudius' tyrannical decree actually protected this church.

Now, back to our story, because of the edict, Paul knows that the likelihood of finding any Jews praying by the river is slim. But surprisingly, when they get there to investigate, they do see some women praying - but on further investigation it was just some *Gentile* women. And yet this is God's penetration point into Europe. Out of weakness God brings strength. Out of the most unlikely circumstances, God creates what will become one of the strongest of the New Testament churches.

Lydia's household - an unlikely home, yet the launching pad for missions (vv. 14-15)

The third unlikely thing that we see is *who* gets converted. It's a single mom. And I love the way God works. Paul no doubt had his plans of what would be likely the best way to proceed. But God is sovereign, and He sometimes surprises us. Verses 14-15:

Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." So she persuaded us.

There are three things that make Lydia's house an unlikely base of operations - at least from a human perspective. First, she is a single mom. We aren't told what happened to her husband, but she is a single mom. Second, her main home is not even in this city. She is a foreigner. Her home town is Thyatira, a city smack dab in the middle of Asia where no church has yet been planted. That means that she is a foreigner. That would lessen her influence to some degree. Third, she was friendly to Judaism, which made her suspect in the city (at least if they knew about it).

But think of what God was orchestrating: First, to be a seller of purple from Thyatira meant that she was extremely wealthy. All of our historical and archaeological evidence shows that this was a rare and lucrative market with a secret recipe that has not been figured out until recently - a recipe that involved trapping hundreds of thousands of murex sea mollusks, then extracting color producing glands (with just two drops of clear liquid in each gland - that had to be oxidized with salt and then reduced down to about an eighth of a drop), then grinding the shells, then processing the color over a period of days. It apparently took 60,000 murex sea creatures to produce one pound of dye,³ which made this

³ Varying figures appear among researchers. This site says 10,000 molusks were required to produce one gram of dye and that in 301BC one pound of this dye was worth three pounds of gold. https://www.worldhistory.org/Tyrian_Purple/ Kistemaker says, "'Since approximately eight thousand molluscs were required to produce one gram of purple dye, purple cloth was extremely expensive.'"³³ Purple garments were worn by emperors and by private citizens as a status symbol. In Rome, purple stoles were attached to senatorial togas. We conclude, then, that Lydia belonged to the class of wealthy merchants and was

dye far more expensive than gold per weight. It's cost ranged from a high of 15 times the price of gold to an absolute low of 3 times the price of gold, depending on the century. In 301 AD it appears that the emperor didn't like the prices, and brought the prices down to three times the price of gold with price controls. But even then, most wealthy people could only afford a band of purple on their clothing. Even with modern methods of extracting dye more reasonably, a gram of dye (a gram is not very much - a gram of dye) costs \$3,725. You can't die much of anything with a gram of dye.

In any case, Lydia was probably dealing in the hundreds of millions of dollars with her business. This was a luxury item; an item of prestige. Ben Witherington points out that within a few years this particular color became an imperial monopoly and the dye guilds became a protected guild serving only the emperor's household and his favored nobles. But in AD 50 everyone was trying to get a little purple into their wardrobe if they could afford it - even a thin line of purple on a scarf. The point is, she was very wealthy because she was needed.

Second, this was a product that only the wealthy of the city could afford, so this meant that she would have contacts in influential places in the city. It was a highly sought after product among the wealthy and influential. There is some evidence that at this early stage, Lydia may have had a monopoly on this dye, though a guild does develop in Philippi at a later time. In any case, she is in the perfect position of influence in Philippi.

Third, since this is a second home for her when she traveled back and forth from Thyatira, this meant that Paul now has a contact for reaching Thyatira for Christ without Paul even setting foot in that city. And in fact, it does become a city with a church within a very short period of time. One of the letters of Revelation was written to this church 16 years later. We aren't told if that was because of Lydia and her contacts, but it makes perfect sense.

Fourth, because of her business connections (which are obviously international) there are numerous other contacts that Paul will be able to make.

So in hindsight, Lydia proves to be one of the best contacts that Paul could have made in this city. Though Paul's team is not able to live with her a long time before being kicked out of the city, her homes (plural) become bases of outreach throughout Asia and Europe. And contacts from the jailer will help out as well. The whole history is fantastic. And this is something that modern missions is finally picking up on. Hallelujah!

The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization has in more recent years recognized that missions has been much more successful when Christianity begins to capture one or more of seven spheres within a society - with business being one of them. In a 2005 Lausanne article, David Claydon focused on the phenomenal way that businesses have

the owner of a large house (vv. 15, 40)." Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 17, *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 590." For some history on this, see <https://krikor-tersakian.blogspot.com/2010/12/murex-imperial-purple-dye-of-tyre.html>

opened doors in country after country that had completely closed their doors to Christianity. They have reopened because of business. The point is that money and influence can sometimes pave the way for the Gospel. We ought not to think of that as being a bad thing; it was God's strategy. And it's actually easier than sending missionaries in. This article said,

It is easier to teach ministry to a businessperson than business to a mission person. They [that is, business people] focus on good business practice and integrating ministry into the business rather than starting a mission and trying to posture it as a business. If the business thrives, so does ministry to its employees and community, all without foreign funding or donations.⁴

I am not at all surprised that it's easier to teach ministry to a businessman than it is to get a minister of the Gospel to be expert in a business. Many of the pastors that I have talked to don't have a clue about economics - even though business and economics is all through the Bible. Anyway, another paper, called "Business as Mission Manifesto," states,

We call upon the Church worldwide to identify, affirm, pray for, commission and release business people and entrepreneurs to exercise their gifts and calling as business people in the world – among all peoples and to the ends of the earth.

We call upon business people globally to receive this affirmation and to consider how their gifts and experience might be used to help meet the world's most pressing spiritual and physical needs through Business as Mission.⁵

SIM and Navigators have picked up on this. Gary and I have a friend who helps strategic Christians to set up businesses in their countries in Africa. Geoff Botkin knows some phenomenal businessmen in Africa who have used their business clout to promote Christ's kingdom and more comprehensive Biblical worldview. Vishal and Ruth Mangalwadi's fabulous book on William Carey shows how this more comprehensive approach to missions is why missions in the early church on up to the 1800s was far more successful than modern missions. Douglas Layton's book, *Our Father's Kingdom: The Church and the Nations*, does a fantastic job of showing how modern missions needs to go back to this more comprehensive approach. Andrew Sandlin said about Layton's book, "You are holding in your hands the most revolutionary book on the topic of Christian missions written in the last one hundred years."⁶

The point is that we need to penetrate and eventually capture the seven spheres of a society. Support alternative media. Like William we need to support Christians seeking to

⁴ <https://lausanne.org/content/lop/business-mission-lop-59#5>

⁵ <https://lausanne.org/content/lga/2013-11/business-as-mission-building-a-movement-that-can-bring-lasting-societal-transformation>

⁶ On the jacket of the book. The book can be purchased here: https://smile.amazon.com/Our-Fathers-Kingdom-Church-Nations/dp/0970424302/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=Douglas+Layton+Our+Father%27s+Kingdom&qid=1630163220&sr=8-1

penetrate the arts. Christians should be on the cusp of using new technology for Christ's kingdom. We can no longer neglect the seven most influential spheres of society. So that is the first major lesson from Lydia - her business connections formed a wonderful launching pad for missions in Europe. And we should value the Christian businesses in our circle of friends. Christian business is key to the spread of Christianity.

God's sovereignty

But let me quickly summarize all of the ways in which God's sovereignty is also written all over this story. This is the second major lesson.

Over the trip (vv. 6-12)

I've already mentioned that God was sovereign over the trip and over Paul's guidance.

Over finding Lydia at just the right time (v. 14)

Second, God was sovereign over finding this woman. If she had been traveling to one of the other cities at which she had distribution points, Paul would never have met her. Both he and she had to be in the right place at the right time.

Over the influence Lydia had gained internationally (v. 14)

Third, God was sovereign over the success that Lydia had in her business, and over the influence that she could exert, and over the bases of operation that she had in Europe and Asia. He was sovereign over causing her to be interested in Judaism. But He was also sovereign in making sure that she didn't become a Jew yet. But she had enough theological background that Paul would not have to undo a bunch of polytheistic and evolutionary ideas. God was sovereign over the fact that she did not get kicked out of Philippi when all the other Jews were. This was no doubt due to the fact that she hadn't converted to Judaism yet.

Over Lydia's salvation

And finally, God was sovereign over the nature and timing of Lydia's conversion. Notice that verse 14 says, "The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul." God could have opened her heart earlier, but He chose not to do so. He could have opened the hearts of the other women, but he chose not to do so. He could have given success to the work of Paul and their team in the days earlier, but He chose not to do so. In your outlines I've written down seven indications of God's sovereignty in her salvation. As Voddie Baucham worded it in a meme this past week, "The Gospel is not about how special you are; it's about how sovereign God is." And I say, "Amen!" Let's look at these seven indicators of God's sovereignty in her salvation.

She was sovereignly chosen out of millions in the city (see Romans 9)

First, out of the millions in that city, God chose to bring only three conversions while they were there – the conversion of Lydia, the slave girl and the Philippian jailer. She no doubt heard God’s Word many times before, but for the first time in her life her heart was opened to those Scriptures and she was riveted by the message of Paul. She could not help herself. The Bible came to life within her and she came to salvation. But God was sovereign in choosing her. As Romans 9 says, “I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion... Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.” Was she better than the other God-fearers by the river? Probably not. He picked one socially good person and left other socially good people behind.

Her heart was no better than the hearts of the other women (see Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Deut. 5:29; 29:4; 30:6; 1 Sam. 10:9; Rom. 8:7; 3:11; 1 Cor. 2:14; Jer. 17:9; 1 Kings 8:38; Jer. 24:7; Ezek. 11:19; Eph. 2:1; 2 Cor. 4:6; Matt 15:8; 2 Cor. 3:15; Rom. 3:10-18; Eph. 4:18; etc)

But let’s dig deeper into that phrase. When verse 14 says, “The Lord opened her heart,” it implies that her heart had been closed. Right? What’s remarkable about that is that she was a seeker, but she was a seeker with a closed heart. She prayed, yet still had a closed heart. The word used for worship is σέβω, and means to go through the outward motions of worship, yet she did it with a closed heart. How is this even possible? Surely such a wonderful lady would not have had a closed heart, would she? But she did.

This is a critical theological truth to understand. Apart from God’s grace, all hearts are closed to God - no matter how outwardly good they may seem. We speak of this as being the depravity of man, the bondage of His will, the hardness of his heart. Even the most religious of men and women have hearts that are closed, and impregnable to the Gospel *until God opens them*. They cannot believe. They may go to church, yet their hearts are closed. They may pray like she did, but their hearts are still closed. They may go through the motions of worship and come to prayer meetings like Lydia did, yet their hearts are closed. They may be caring parents like Lydia appears to be, yet their hearts are closed to the Gospel. Now if you had looked at Lydia apart from the Scriptures, you might have thought that she was a nice lady, a devout lady. “Surely she could not be depraved!!! Surely she had a soft heart!!!” And yet the Scripture is clear that her heart was slammed so tightly shut that it would take a sovereign work of God’s grace to open it.

I want you to listen carefully to a series of Scriptures that I am going to read to you about the closed nature of every human heart. And I will start in Genesis 6:5. This describes the state of the heart of every man, woman and child that died in Noah’s flood. This is a description of the unregenerate.

Genesis 6:5 Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

There is nothing good in man – only evil continually. What does Isaiah 64 say? Verse 6 says that “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.” It doesn’t deny that humans can do good things, but those good things (those righteousnesses) are polluted. It’s like an omelette that has 11 good eggs and one slimy, foul smelling, rotten egg. All the good eggs become polluted by the one rotten egg. And in the same way, even the good things the unregenerate do are polluted by their inward sin and are thus unacceptable to God. Proverbs says that even the plowing of the wicked is sin (Prov. 21:4). Lest you think that these kinds of descriptions can only be true of adults, I will read Genesis 8:21. It says,

And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma. Then the LORD said in His heart, “I will never again curse the ground for man’s sake, although the imagination of man’s heart *is evil from his youth*; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done.

It says that from *youth* man’s heart is evil. How far back in their youth? Well, Psalm 58:3 says, “The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies.” And yes, babies can lie by what kinds of cries they learn to manipulate with. Though the human heart makes all kinds of counterfeit religion in order to make us look somewhat good, it is closed to a true submission to God. Deuteronomy 5:29 says this:

Deuteronomy 5:29 Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!

Without an opened heart, they cannot fear God, cannot truly keep His commandments, and cannot avoid judgment. Now I am reading all of these Scriptures because a lot of people have a hard time believing that a wonderful woman like Lydia could have a closed heart.

Deuteronomy 29:4 says, “Yet the LORD has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this very day.” Notice that God is the giver of a heart that can perceive, see and hear spiritually. And yet this verse speaks of God’s sovereignty. He had decided not to give them such a heart. He could have, but He decided not to.

Deuteronomy 30:6 says that when God does heart surgery, people will always come to God irresistibly. The result of faith flows irresistibly from regeneration.

Deuteronomy 30:6 And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

What is the only way that we can have life? It is for God to do open heart surgery on us. We call this regeneration or the new birth.

1 Corinthians 2:14 says, “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” Most people do not understand the extent to which their own hearts are depraved. They fool themselves into thinking they are good and that they don’t need a heart transplant (which involves a new orientation of the mind, will, conscience and emotions). This is why Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can understand it?” The unregenerate are so self-deceived that they don’t even know their own hearts.

Ezekiel 11:19 says, “Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh,” Can you see the imagery? Every metaphor of regeneration shows that we are passive, unable to turn to God, and that God is the Sovereign who works on our hearts. Regeneration is likened to a resurrection from the dead. Ephesians 2:1 says, “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins.” A corpse can do nothing but lie there. It is God who raises the spiritual corpse. The Bible speaks of this regeneration of the heart as being a new creation. How did God create the world? Did it come into existence on its own through evolutionary means? No. God spoke it into existence. And 2 Corinthians 4:6 says, “it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” It’s a sovereign work of God. We call this monergism, which means that He alone is active in regeneration. Lydia cannot take any credit for her conversion.

I have had people object to this Calvinistic doctrine of a closed heart, and they will say that churchgoers are obviously seekers who have hearts that are soft to God. But think of Lydia. She *worshipped* God, but her heart was closed the whole time. Here’s what Jesus said to the worshipers of His own day.

Matthew 15:8 “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me.

Do you see that people can outwardly look like Christians; they can go to every meeting of the church; they can be very religious like Lydia was, yet have closed hearts. I knew one man in our previous church that always looked like he was in ecstasy as he sang the worship songs with his arms lifted up. He had a big smile on his face. You would have been absolutely convinced that his heart was open to God. Yet when he couldn’t get his girl who attended our church (he later admitted that it was the only reason he went there), he left the church and left the faith altogether. God had never opened his heart. Like these religious people, he drew near to God with his mouth and honored God with his lips, but his heart was far from God.

2 Corinthians 3:15 says of the worshiping Jews of Paul’s day, “But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart.” What an amazing description of closed hearts. There is a veil completely covering the heart, keeping the light of the Gospel out. No wonder Romans 3 says,

Rom. 3:10 As it is written: “There is none righteous, no, not one; 11 There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. 12 They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.”

Now this has been a long list of Scripture, but I think it is important background to understand what was going on in the life of Lydia. So going back to Acts 16:14, it says, “Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us.” [She heard us. There was nothing wrong with her physical ears. It was her heart that had to be changed. It goes on.] “She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God.” [Notice that you can worship God and be as lost as sin. This is not the normal word for worship, but a word that means to go through the motions. But praise God, the text goes on to describe His sovereign mercy.]

God sovereignly regenerated her heart (see Eph. 2:1)

“The Lord opened her heart” [It doesn’t say that she opened her heart, or that Paul opened her heart. This is a sovereign act of God in bringing open-heart surgery. “The Lord opened her heart.”

God sovereignly gave her faith – it came as a result of her regeneration (heart surgery) (see Psalm 110:3; see the gift of faith in John 6:29,35-39,44,45,64,65; Acts 3:16; 18:27; Rom. 12:3; Eph. 1:19; 3:12; Gal. 5:22; Phil. 1:29; 3:9; 2 Pet. 1:1,5,3; the gift of repentance in Acts 5:31; 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25)

But notice that as soon as she is regenerated, God gives her faith. The text says, “The Lord opened her heart *to heed* the things spoken by Paul.” That’s faith. Arminians say that faith results in regeneration. They say that when you believe you get a new heart. This says the exact opposite- the new heart comes first. Let me give you some examples of regeneration coming first and then resulting in faith and repentance and love. Jeremiah 24:7 says, “Then I will give them a heart” [there’s the regeneration] “to know me that I am the Lord...” [There’s the resultant conversion.] Until you are given a new heart, you cannot know God in this personal way. 1 John 5:1 uses the perfect tense for being born again, and the present tense for the belief. The perfect tense means that the being born again always occurs beforehand. It says, “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.” If he believes, he has already been born of God prior to that belief. This means that no person can have even a second of faith without already having been born again. And I can give you a long, long chart of similar Scriptures.

All of these Scriptures highlight the fact that salvation is 100% of God and we can take no credit because we didn’t make the first move. It’s no wonder that the Bible over and over says that faith and repentance are a gift of God’s grace. *He* sovereignly gives faith to some and keeps it from others. John 6:44 says, “No one can come to Me [coming to Him is faith, but He says “No one can come to Me”] unless the Father who sent Me draws him...” Acts 3:16 speaks of “the faith which comes through Him...” Acts 18:27 speaks of “those who had believed through grace.” Ephesians 1:19 speaks of “us who believe according to the working of His mighty power.” We couldn’t believe without His mighty power working in us. Ephesians 2:8 calls faith a gift of God. Acts 5:31 says that God gives repentance and Acts 11:18 says God grants repentance.

God sovereignly led her to good works (v. 15; Ephesians 2:10; Phil. 2:12-13; Tit. 2:14)

Even the sudden interest in good works that Lydia shows in Acts 16:15 flows from a regenerated heart and a work of God’s grace. Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” He chose every one of our good works. He is sovereign. Philippians 2:13 (the letter that was later written to this church) says, “for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” God is even the one who makes you willing. It’s all of grace; sovereign grace.

God sovereignly chose her household (See Gen. 17)

When you begin to see that God's sovereignty covers it all, then infant the baptisms of Lydia's kids the Philippian jailer's kids begins to make sense. It's not our choice that counts, but God's choice of us. And God has chosen to include our children in the covenant, so we apply the sign of the covenant to them. God symbolized His choice by having us baptize babies before they even know what is going on. And it is a beautiful symbol of monergism. So is the mode of baptism by pouring. It's God's action, not ours, that counts. In these verses it is only Lydia who believes, yet her whole household is baptized. On what basis? God's choice. He said, "I will be a God to you and to your descendants after you." But think of the implications. If it is based on *His* choice, it is so encouraging. If God has chosen to have our children placed in the covenant, then we can have much higher confidence that our children will grow up to be regenerated and believe. It's not by accident that over the past 2000 years, the vast majority of new believers come from parents who are believers. Rejoice in God's sovereign choice. It gives you comfort for your children.

"Salvation is of the Lord." (Jonah 2:9)

This is why Jonah says, "Salvation is of the Lord." We can rest in His sovereign mercy; His sovereign goodness; His sovereign grace. And once you have tasted of that sovereign grace, you cannot help but devote your life to serving His people as Lydia does in verse 15.

And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." So she persuaded us.

Salvation results in eager service. That could have been another whole point. If we are truly saved, we will want to serve God.

Other Lessons

Business as a leverage point for the kingdom

But let me end with two more applications from the life of Lydia. First, don't treat your work is unimportant in Christ's kingdom. It can be a leverage point of influence for Christ's kingdom. Many historians of the Protestant Reformation pointed out that it was business associates who would use their contacts to spread the Word - not just the import businesses that smuggled Bibles or the printers who printed Bibles, but cobblers, street vendors, international traders, restauranters, weavers, wine makers, and all kinds of businessmen. If we are bold to declare Christ and if our business is a good reflection on Christ and His kingdom, then our witness can be powerful.

And this passage indicates that women can be business owners. We have looked at what a phenomenal businesswoman Katie Luther was. She inspired many other women to use their businesses to grow God's kingdom.

The home as a leverage point for the kingdom

Second, Lydia's *home* was a powerful leverage point for the kingdom. Look at how eagerly Lydia sought to share her home with these ministers of God. She begged them to stay. And this was opening her home to a rather large team. It included at least Paul, Luke, Timothy, Silas, but it likely included some others. Enthusiasm for hospitality is a work of God's grace.

And notice that she was willing to identify her home with jail birds. When they were released from jail in verses 35 and following, she welcomed them into her home. She didn't worry about the negative business implications because her business was now Christ's business. And neighbors who looked on must have thought, "They can't be that bad, if Lydia welcomes them." Hospitality is a great way of serving the Lord. It shows all the neighbors who you are willing to identify with.

Verse 40 mentions "the brethren" that were at Lydia's home, implying that there were by this time some converts. But that means that there was already a small church meeting in her home. That is another way of using the home as a leverage point - having it as a meeting place for small Bible studies and the beginning of a church. But as many books have pointed out, the church in her home became the start of Christ's kingdom taking over Europe.

In our church we have women whom God has strategically placed in areas of influence - in business, in medicine, in education, married to church officers, and in various ministries. Let's pray that God would supernaturally leverage their efforts to advance the kingdom. Amen.