

Preached on 3/27/22 at GBC - Ruston

"The GOD OPENED Heart"

Acts 16:

The Scriptures have a lot to say about the **HEART OF MAN**, and almost without exception they paint a picture of man that shows the impossibility of salvation for any sinner if **ANY PART OF** that salvation rests on them! Now by the "**HEART**", we're referring to the inner man. That is what the meaning of the original word translated "**heart**" means – 'inner man, mind, will, heart, understanding, or SOUL'. After Adam's fall in Eden as our Representative, we see the resulting natural depravity that permeates the entire human race. Before Adam's rebellion, he walked and talked with God – "*And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought [them] unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that [was] the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.*"(Gen.2:19,20) After his fall, this same man, along with his wife hid from God and were both afraid of God – "*And when the woman saw that the tree [was] good for food, and that it [was] pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make [one] wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they [were] naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where [art] thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I [was] naked; and I hid myself.*"(Gen.3:6-10) Even worse still, Adam **BLAMED** God for his sin and his fall – "*And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest [to be] with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.*"(Gen.3:12) Before the flood, this is the record given concerning mankind – "*And GOD saw that the wickedness of man [was] great in the earth, and [that] every imagination of the thoughts of his heart [was] only evil continually.*"(Gen.6:5) The word translated "**only**" means 'altogether, surely, exclusively'. The word translated "**evil**" means 'bad, disagreeable, **or malignant**'. The word translated "**continually**" means 'days or **LIFETIME**'. Think about what this meant – **EVERY** "**imagination of the THOUGHTS of man's heart**" were altogether, exclusively, and surely **MALIGNANT** for their **LIFETIME**. This condition also applied to Noah, because **three verses later** the Scriptures declare – "*But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.*" King David wrote the same thing **TWICE** concerning man's heart by nature – "*The fool hath said in his HEART, [There is] no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, [there is] none that doeth good.*"(Ps.14:1;53:1) Paul referenced King David's words in his description of man's condition by nature in **Romans 3**. Wise Solomon declared – "*The tongue of the just [is as] choice silver: the heart of the wicked [is] little worth.*"(Prov.10:20) Solomon also declared – "*This [is] an evil among all [things] that are done under the sun, that [there is] one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness [is] in their heart while they live, and after that [they go] to the dead.*"(Eccl.9:3) Jeremiah summed up mankind's condition concisely – "*The heart [is] deceitful above all [things], and desperately wicked: who can know it?*"(Jer.17:9) That phrase "**above all [things] and desperately wicked**" means 'incurably sick'. It is **THIS KIND OF HEART** that lost, foolish religious people ignorantly call on one another to "give it to the Lord." This mindset reveals one to be "**dead in trespasses and**

sin” and “*ignorant of the righteousness of God*”. We see this on full display in God’s dealings with one of His lost sheep in the conversion of Lydia here in Acts. Every circumstance in Lydia’s history shines forth God’s sovereign grace and mercy in opening her heart!

First of all, consider the circumstance of **HOW** Lydia arrived in this particular city of Philippi at the exact time that the Apostle to the Gentiles Paul was sent there to preach the Gospel – **Vss.10-13**. For times sake, let me give you a synopsis of what has occurred in this 16th chapter. Back up in **Vss.6,7**, Paul’s desire was to go to Asia to preach the Gospel, which included Mysia, and Bithynia, but the passages state – “*were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not.*” According to **Vs.14**, Lydia was from Thyratira, a **CITY IN ASIA MINOR**, where God had forbidden and prevented Paul from preaching the Gospel, yet **HERE** is Lydia, because of her occupation, in the **RIGHT PLACE AT GOD’S APPOINTED TIME OF SALVATION**. Like the “*certain woman*” at Jacob’s well, or the “*certain man in Caesarea named Cornelius*” or the Eunuch in the desert, this “*certain woman named Lydia*” was brought where God’s servant would declare His voice in her hearing. Truly Christ’s words were fulfilled according to His Divine providence – “*And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, [and] one shepherd.*”(Jn.10:16) Lydia went to Philippi in order to earn a living, but in reality God had brought her there because she was a lost sheep of the house of Israel. When I read of God’s providence toward this lost sheep, I can’t help but recollect God’s providence in bringing me under the sound of His Gospel at the **EXACT TIME** He had appointed – **ELABORATE**.

Secondly, I would have us consider this sweet circumstance in Lydia’s history as to **HOW** valuable she was to the **LORD**. In the eyes of the world, she was a person of no great rank or character, merely a seller of purple. She wasn’t like the rich man in the parable, “*who which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day.*” She traveled great distances, moving from place to place, in hope of making an honest and meager living. Yet to the eyes of the Lord, she was **SO PRECIOUS** that He sends a special messenger to her to tell her words by which she shall be saved. Please learn from this your great value to Christ as one of His chosen sheep, and how diligently and meticulously He moves all things to guarantee the eternal security and salvation of every object of His love – “*For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.*”

The **THIRD** circumstance that stands out in Lydia’s history is this: Like all God’s elect before the Lord is pleased to reveal Himself **TO THEM** and **IN THEM** by His Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Gospel, Lydia was religious, moral, dedicated, **YET LOST** – “*And 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]. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God.*” I’ve said what Pastor Mahan told me many times: “Everybody thinks they’re saved, before they’re saved, **UNTIL THEY ARE SAVED.**” Lydia was in Philippi for work, yet on the Sabbath day she goes down by the river side where prayers were offered. All these women that were gathered, including Lydia, participated in this religious devotion. According to **Vs.14**, this “*certain woman named Lydia*”, a **GENTILE**, “*worshipped God.*” The word translated “*which “worshipped”*” means ‘devout or religious’. This doesn’t mean she **KNEW** or was **WORSHIPPING** the true and living God, but **LIKE**

CORNELIUS, she had converted to the Jewish religion and served the God of Moses, unlike the other Gentiles who served other gods. In other words, she had **CHANGED RELIGIONS**, but she **HAD NOT CHANGED GODS**. With the exception of God's elect who were Jews by nature, the majority of natural born Jews were devoted to a God they called Jehovah, but they were in reality worshipping and praying to "**a god who cannot save.**"

The **FOURTH CIRCUMSTANCE** in Lydia's life and conversion is the one that should give us all encouragement and hope – **Vs.14**. It was the **LORD** that "**OPENED**" Lydia's heart "**that she attended unto the things that were spoken of Paul.**" **Get this picture in your mind:** Lydia, along with these other women, were out by the river on the Sabbath Day praying, going through all the motions and activities of religion. The Holy Spirit moved Paul to go where they were at and **PREACH THE GOSPEL** to them. If you look back at **Vss.9,10**, after being forbidden to go to Asia by the Spirit, the Lord sent Paul the Macedonian vision, which exhorted him to go **WEST**, instead of **EAST**, as he had purposed – "**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 endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.**" Just like Peter when he had the vision and was instructed to go to Cornelius, Paul was obedient to the heavenly vision. Like all God's children, Paul knew the Lord has a people, and that He will save His people through the preaching of the Gospel. Lydia listened to him preach, and those other women listened to Paul's words as well. They all **HEARD** the words Paul proclaimed **EXTERNALLY** with their physical ears, yet they could not understand or receive the truth proclaimed. But then, as Paul preached the Gospel, this "**certain woman named Lydia**", she "**HEARD**". The word translated "**heard**" means 'to be endowed with the faculty of hearing, not deaf'. Solomon declared: "**The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the LORD hath made even both of them.**" (**Prov.20:12**) When John the Baptist was imprisoned, he sent two of His disciples to Jesus to make an inquiry – "**Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?**" Listen to Christ's answer to their inquiry – "**Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.**" (**Matt.11:3-5**) As Paul preached, Lydia "**HEARD**". **This is so important:** Lydia wasn't listening more closely than the other woman, nor was she more diligent or desirous to understand what Paul was declaring. This **HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH ANYTHING IN LYDIA** – "**But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, [even] to them that believe on his name: Which WERE BORN, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.**" (**Jn.1:12,13**) She "**heard**" because the Lord had "**opened**" her "**HEART**". The word "**opened**" is the **KEY** in understanding Lydia hearing and receiving Paul's words. The word translated "**opened**" means 'a male opening the womb, i.e. the first-born'. What happened to Lydia, which gave her the gift of hearing, **WAS A BIRTH**, the new birth, literally **LIFE FROM THE DEAD**, which our Lord told Nicodemus was absolutely essential for a sinner to **SEE** or to **ENTER** the kingdom of God – "**Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and [of] the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.**" (**Jn.3:3-7**) The **CAUSE** of this **NEW BIRTH** is the Holy Spirit, and the **MEANS** the

Holy Spirit **ALWAYS USES** is the **WORD OF GOD** – “*In whom ye also [trusted], **after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation:** in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.*” (Eph.1:13,14) Lydia had listened to and heard the Old Testament Scriptures that were proclaimed with her natural ears, even seeking to obediently follow its instruction. But she had never been capable of hearing and understanding that which alone is the “*power of God unto salvation.*” This Gospel message of Christ’s accomplish death for His people is **WHAT PAUL ALWAYS** was determined to preach to all – “*For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching [was] not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.*” (I Cor.2:2-5) Paul declared to these women the same Gospel message he preached everywhere concerning Christ’s blood and righteousness as the sinner’s only hope and cause of salvation – “*Be it known unto you therefore, men [and] brethren, that through this man is **preached unto you the forgiveness of sins:** And by him all that believe **are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.***” (Acts 13:38,39) Somebody had to tell Lydia about the “righteousness of God”, and that message is **ONLY EFFECTUAL** when empowered by the Holy Spirit – “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.*” (Rom.1:16,17) The **FACT** that the Spirit drew Lydia to Christ and that she now by God-given faith believed in Christ as the “*LORD our righteousness*” are evidence of the everlasting love of God to her – “*The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, [saying], Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.*” (Jer.31:3); “*No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.*” (Jn.6:44,45) Nothing could have prevented Lydia from hearing and believing – **NOTHING!** And if you’ve been “*born of God*”, you know exactly what occurred in this moment – **ELABORATE**. I believe these words by Josiah Conder express this truth beautifully – *Tis not that I did choose Thee, for Lord that could not be; This heart would still refuse Thee, hast Thou not chosen me. Thou from the sin that stained me, washed me and set me free; And to this end ordained me, that I should live to Thee. ‘Twas sovereign mercy called me, and taught my opening mind; The world had else enthralled me, to heavenly glories blind. My heart owns none before Thee, for Thy rich grace I thirst; This knowing if I love Thee, Thou must have loved me first.*

Look at the **LAST CIRCUMSTANCE** in Lydia’s history and we’ll stop – “*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.*” She followed our Lord’s command to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This act didn’t save her, but was an identification with and testimony of her **ONENESS** with Christ and all those who are His – **ELABORATE**. Let me point this out and we’ll close – **SHE HAD DESIRE TO BE IN FELLOWSHIP** with God’s servant and her brethren – **ELABORATE**.

I hope this will be of some encouragement and value to us all.

