

Lydia

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[0 : 0 0] Well if you'd like to have your Bibles open at Acts chapter 16 Acts chapter 16 Don't know if you when growing up or as a Christian you've had someone in your life who's been an example a Role model someone who you've been able to look at learn from Someone who showed you the love of Christ Served you open their home their heart to you someone perhaps who's been able to be that Help to constantly you point you again and again to Jesus Christ Someone who perhaps has helped you financially or materially when you've been in a hard and difficult place When I was first converted there was an elderly couple in my church Who decided that they would take me under their loving care and look after me?

And so soon as I became a Christian they would invite me around to their home I would eat dinner with them. They would ask me questions about how my what was with the Lord It would share things with me so that I could learn from them Share things that would humble me challenge me and inspire me Well tonight we are continuing in our series entitled a better example If you're here in St. Columbus for the first time or you've been away for this summer We've been looking over the last couple of weeks Women in the Bible Who are better example if I could put it like that?

women whose life provide for us a better example of how to live for God an example that we can all learn from And God willing we'll see in the testimony and in the life of Lydia Someone who will inspire us someone who challenges And someone who we can just sit our feet and learn from So far in this series we've looked at Rahab Rahab was the lady in the book of Joshua who protected the Israelites We also look last week at Hannah and the book of first Samuel and her prayer two great women of faith Well tonight we come to a New Testament lady and her name is Lydia You may have heard of her or you may not have heard of her Lydia is an amazing figure Last over the last week as I've been preparing for this sermon I've began to fall in love with this story of how she is converted and how she Gives her life wholly to the Lord. I think the thing that's most striking about this story of Lydia

It's how God takes hold of her and how she takes hold of him And in this we see a woman who is able not only to delight in the wonder of salvation But a woman who in response to the goodness and the grace of God is able to give herself fully This story underlines and underscores that God is in the business if I could put it like that of Saving people from all walks of life, be it the high life or the low life And the God is in the business of transforming them by the power of his gospel And so let's tonight consider a fresh this wonderful woman of faith The sad thing about this story is that there's only three verses in the entire New Testament about Lydia Only three verses verse 14 15 and then verse 40 that even mention her And despite the lack of mention there's a lot that we can learn from these three verses But I thought that if I was just to concentrate on them solely

Then perhaps the sermon would be all over the place and there'd be very little that I could bring out So tonight I want to look at this sermon in three parts I want to give first of all a biography of who she is And then I want to look at the events before her conversion I want to look at how God in his sovereign providence Guided and directed Paul and his band of brothers to bring the gospel to Europe And then finally we'll spend the rest of our time looking at her life after our conversion And as we do this I want us really to build up a picture of a woman who's a better example I want us to see the sovereignty and the providence of God in her life I also want to draw some examples from the life of Paul And how he shares and shows us how we can share the gospel to people from all walks of life And then just to be caught up in a woman who understands the wonder of salvation So let's begin and let's give you a brief biography of who Lydia is

[4 : 44] We know three things about Lydia Lydia was a business woman She was from a city called Thyatira and she was just she's described as a worshiper of God Thyatira is a city in Which would be modern Turkey just north of Ephesus and it was known back in the day for the fact that they produced this purple dye It was one of the rare places in the world that produced it and it became very famous as a manufacturer of purple cloth and purple goods And Lydia was born here and we don't know the circumstances But what we do know is in some strange providence this lady They acquired a business of some sort a business that led her all the way to Europe Phillipi, which is in Greece And there she worked selling purple cloth. She was a dealer in that And as I said, she was a business woman Someone who works it with purple cloth is someone who works with the best and the finest of clothes

Lydia was a woman who if we were to use 21st century terms She was the CEO of Gucci or Armani and in Phillipi the Romans absolutely loved and the Philippines was taken over by Romans and the Romans loved purple. It was a color of royalty nobility high esteem And so Lydia was there she was dealing this purple cloth selling these goods making a absolute fortune we can imagine From this great business this great and liquor of business She's got a house in Thyatira, she's got a house in Phillipi Think house in Milan a house in Paris a house in London think ethnically Asian economically prosperous Then we're told that she was a worshiper of God Now that statement a worshiper of God. It's not really sure what it means And we don't we're not really certain of what Lydia's background was

There is a suggestion in the original language that she wasn't originally a worshiper of God There's a chance that she may have been someone who worshipped many gods a pagan a polytheist But something happened in her life where she came into contact perhaps with Jews and She became an adherent. She was a Gentile who hanged out with heat with Jews And so in short we have this wealthy business woman. She's the manager of her own company And because life is it would seem so good. There's something that indicates that maybe it's not all right Because she's on a spiritual journey She's hanging out with a bunch of Jews because she's spiritually hungry. She's trying to find some meaning in life Humane hasn't changed and we think of those who are very wealthy and rich today those who are in our culture think of Tom Cruise What's his interest right now Scientology

Think of all the pop stars and film stars right now who've got this fascination with new ageism and Buddhism Well, I was a bit similar She was someone who was intrigued by religion and so she joined herself to a community of Jews so that she could have a religious experience They don't know much about it We just know that she hung out with these Jews and we find her in Acts chapter 16 at a prayer meeting But probably the most significant point of the whole of Lydia's story is That Lydia was the first convert in Europe I don't know if you've ever asked yourself or wondered to yourself. How did Christianity come to Europe?

Over the last over the summer. I've been traveling around and I've far north is Wicke and fuzzo far south is Cambridge and on my journeys one of the things that always strikes me is when you're on a train And you look out at all the different cities our Landscape in Britain is just populated with steeples chapels and cathedrals St. Gels just down the road goes right back a thousand years. I reckon it was a medieval medieval cathedral The question is why did Christianity grow?

[9 : 13] Flourish take over the whole of Europe And then when we look at Europe today all these buildings all these things many of them stand as monuments To the world their pubs their nightclubs their cultural centers their art centers In fact, it wouldn't be that different from the Philippi that Lydia was living in Because there was no Christians if anything there was very little of any religious group Hence the reason that they don't actually have a synagogue in the city and they meet outside near a river to pray And I just want us to as we think about this for a moment Think about how the gospel came to Europe and have that at the back of our minds because tonight We're going to see how it did through this woman And how God would use this woman to make Europe the epicenter of Christianity And so that's the biography of Lydia Let's just now spend a few moments considering the providence of her conversion and how God brought her into a living relationship with Jesus Christ

Paul Timothy Silas and Luke These four men are a band of brothers. They love Jesus Christ. They've been called by him. They're now serving him Paul is probably the world's greatest church planner at this time and all he's he's on a missionary journey from town to town Preaching the gospel. This is desire that he would preach the gospel to his people the Jews and then in some strange providence We read in Acts chapter 16 Paul is a vision that Paul is prevented by the spirit of God Versaven from Granite Bethany a place where there'd be Jews It's not allowed to go in there and so he changes his mind and he starts to travel down to Troas another place where there'd be plenty Jews And as he's there in the night time a man appears to him in a vision The man says to him come over to Macedonia and help us We might read that statement and think nothing of it, but this is a statement

Which in NFX says come to Europe? Come to Europe and share the gospel with Gentiles So Paul and the four and his three friends the band of brothers as I call them They go they travel and verse 11 tells us from Troas They put out to sea and they say straight to Samothrace and then the the next day they went to Neapolis This is a 156 mile journey. These men are absolutely filled with excitement and joy to go and take the gospel to place I've never been before And then we read from there they traveled to Philippi Philippi was a Roman colony Was the significance of that well just a few years before the Paul had arrived in Philippi. Philippi had been taken over by the Romans And if you remember from your days in primary school about anything about the Roman Empire is when they took over a place

They built infrastructure. They built roads. They made places that it's an international center for trade The Romans took over this part of Philippi and they did such a good job that they built the biggest and main road in Europe The via Ignatia and it's a road that led from Philippi into Italy And so in the province of God God brings them to this place and we read at the end of verse 12 they stayed there for several days So imagine these men walking into a city they've never been in before They've never seen anything like it and the thing that marks it is that it's owned by Romans And so you can just picture them in your head Can't you as they've been on this long boat journey then hiked 10 miles up from the capitalist They arrived to the city gates of Philippi eyes wide open at everything they see They walk into the city Paul a seasoned church planter and evangelist probably hungry With the thought of look at all these people never heard the name of Jesus Christ before

Look at the opportunity for gospel outreach. I Get the idea that is I reckon that as Paul entered into Philippi that he saw this city He would have scaled and surveyed all the great buildings And notice that there wasn't even one that stood as a monument to a religious group not even the Jews One of the things that I was thinking is I was studying as a preparedness I thought what lessons can we draw from the providential events that's going on in this story I Think one of the one of the lessons that we can draw from this is that we should live with why eyes wide open for opportunities to share in the gospel Sometimes we don't realize why in the providence of God He brings us to places or sends us or prevents us from going to places These men were prevented from going further into Asia and they were taken to Europe Maybe some of you have arrived here tonight your students in Edinburgh and you're beginning a new life here And you're not sure what the future holds

[14 : 29] Maybe unknown to you in the sovereign plan and providence of God He's brought you here because he's a plan to use you for the furtherance and the advancement of his kingdom And that whole idea that Paul walking around the city with the boys looking at all the great buildings and wondering the potential for the gospel It reminded me a story of the first minister of this church Thomas Guthrie In fact if you're to walk down in Princess Street, you would see a statue to Thomas Guthrie That's because there was a period there was an age where our country So esteemed Christianity and preachers that they would make statues to them and if you walk down to Princess Street You'll see this great statue of Thomas Guthrie and one hand he holds a Bible These other arm is round a young boy And that's because at the center of the gospel is these two components truth and love One day Thomas Guthrie was over just literally 200 yards from here standing in George the Forthbridge He just arrived in Edinburgh. This was to be his new parish

And as he was standing looking down onto the cowgate He described it as a living stream of humanity in motion beneath his feet And as you stand and looking down and pondering all these people and all the things that were going on a Should a hand went over his shoulder And he turned around to find that the man standing next to him was none other than the great preacher Thomas Chalmers the founder of the free church And hopeful of success Chalmers surveyed the scene beneath His eye which was often a dreamy which often had a dreamy stare kindled at the prospect of seeing what lay before him Turned in from a wilderness into becoming Eden These full foul haunts of darkness drunkenness and disease Changed into dwellings of the righteous where is heard the voice of melody?

Come on plating the scene in silence With a broad Luther like face describes Guthrie in his book He says Chalmers face glowed with enthusiasm and he waved his arm and exclaimed a beautiful field sir a very fine field for operation in other words Guthrie Chalmers lived with eyes wide open to the potential of the gospel And that's what we have in Paul and the example of Paul and this band of brothers is the inner Philippi Wide open to the opportunities that the gospel can flourish in a city that is very secular filled with pagan gods ethnically mixed multi-faith Cap under captivity if you could put it like that by the Roman Empire And it's here that Paul it's here that God leads his church planters and his Providence I was thinking you know Philippi and Edinburgh they aren't that different are they?

Multi-ethnic multi-faith diverse secular Edinburgh is actually the capital I think in Britain paganism or one of them Here's a question Do we When we look around our city do we see the potential for the gospel to flourish?

Well Paul visited this new city and as it was his practice we learned this from stories before in axes that when he Visited a new city. The first thing he did was he looked for a synagogue He looked for a synagogue so that he could reason with them He could share the gospel with them and so it was most likely that he arrived in Philippi He looked around and the thing that probably struck him was there wasn't any synagogue it says in Acts 16 verse 13 on the Sabbath We went outside the city gate to the river where we expected to find a place of prayer I said I dare that what happened in that day was that they said we can't find religious people But there might be a chance that there's some Jews gathered by a riverside praying is often common practice if the Jews can meet In a city they would look for the local river and set up there And so Paul Timothy Silas and look make their way down And what did this stumble across a group of women praying?

[18:50] Again in the providence of God why did he find this group of women praying and Paul would have been thinking Here's an opportunity to share with some Jews to share the gospel to bring the good news. I Just love what it says next The it says verse 13 On the Sabbath when we went outside the city to the river city gate to the river where we expected to find a place of prayer We sat down We sat down I think I really want to draw from here and learn from here is the fact that when Paul was going to share the gospel with this group of women Didn't stand up preach at them preach to them He got down He got down to their level and he sat with them and he interacted with them and it's this beautiful picture that the apostles Were so committed to sharing the gospel with people that they would get down to their level Just this last week. I was running for a train And as I was running for the train down to Waverly

There's always a guy who sits atop of it homeless guy and often as I run by often glance at him He asked me for spare change and I always say sorry But God bless you or something something to affect and this time as I run down last week And I noticed as I looked up there was two men sitting Then I looked a little closer and I noticed that the guy sitting next to him was one of my friends Struck by it. I thought I'll just go next near them I sat and I stood and I had a conversation with friend. How are you doing?

And he said it was in essence the way he spoke to me was Andrew sit down That is come down to this guy's level if you're willing to share the gospel if you're willing to be involved with people Then you need to get alongside them You need to be with them Unlike Paul and the disciples with a gentle and conversational tone They probably sat with these women and presented to them Christ Because that's what they were passionate about because that's what they were committed to Most likely these women who are sitting there praying were well-taught women Women who are Jews are often steeped and immersed in the scriptures And so you can imagine the knowledge they had they had the knowledge of God's law Do this don't do that do this don't do that One of the striking things is that this is a Sabbath and Lydia not a Jew probably a

Gentile She's not at work. She's closed her business and what's she doing? She's at a prayer meeting Clearly someone who's really wanting to give religion a good go And so there we have Lydia she's sitting there with all these women a good understanding of the Bible and perhaps the fact that they're next to The river would highlight the fact that they know about the holiness of God and That as they sit next to a river the river reminds them that they can have any Ceremonial event they can wash themselves and clean themselves Always been symbolic of sin And as Derek's been teaching us to read and encourage us to lead Leviticus in the morning these women probably knew the whole of Leviticus They knew that if you wanted to have a friendship or a relationship with God Then you would have to offer an animal sacrifice blood would have to be shed And so the question is when Paul sat with them and his disciples What did he say?

What did he say to these women? I reckon that he probably sat down first and he shared his testimony. He said look I was once a Hebrew of Hebrews a Pharisee of Pharisees. I kept the law perfectly. As one who used to love to persecute others for not living in accordance to the law. Paul probably also told them look but I came to know and learn that no one can keep the law at all. And you know all the sacrifices that we make at the temple they're in vain. Because I'll never take away our sin. And it's likely then that Paul would go on and share to them with great passion and great love. The gospel. That Jesus Christ came into this world. He lived the perfect life that we couldn't live. That Jesus Christ came into the world to lay down his life as a sacrifice once and for all. So that we could have a relationship with him and we're told as he shares this wonderful message

[23 : 24] That one of those listening was a woman named Lydia. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. Derek said this morning that salvation is all of the Lord. Salvation is from the Lord. Salvation is to the Lord. Preaching is in vain if we don't ask God to open the hearts of people. Hence the reason we prayed earlier for Sterling and even ourselves that God would open our hearts. God is the only one who can know the truth. God is the only one who can initiate faith in his people. That's what we see in this story is the gospel is shared. God opens this heart of Lydia to respond to Paul's message. That is she hears the wonder of salvation. She hears about Jesus Christ. Yes, she's a worshiper of God. But she doesn't understand anything and then she hears of one who came into this world and died for her and

She turns and she responds to the message. This is Lydia's conversion. These are the providential events that brought it around so that she would come and know and love Jesus Christ. What's the lesson for us there's somebody here tonight and your heart's been opened by God. Or maybe you've sat Sunday after Sunday you've heard the message of the gospel again and again and you think to yourself I love I want to know more of this Jesus Christ, but you've never asked God to open your heart. To hear the greatness of Jesus Christ move you're a Christian you can remember the night when your heart was opened. You can remember that time when you used to sit in church and you heard all the preaching and it didn't matter one iota. And then one night you were in church and you heard the gospel preached. And all of a sudden Jesus Christ and his life and his death and his resurrection came to mean something.

That's what happens when the Lord opens our hearts we respond to his message in faith. That's what we see in Lydia here. And very finally and briefly I want to consider as her conversion. Let's consider her life after conversion and this is really where we see that she's the better example for us. It says that after she responded to his message. She and the members of our household were baptized. That is in obedience to faith she baptized her house because she believed in the covenant promises of God. That is that she came to know the one who was a God of Israel was also the God of the new covenant. And that he would make promises to her household to her children to her servants. And then she invited Paul Silas Timothy and looked her home and she says to them if you consider me a believer in the Lord come and state my house.

There's a beautiful picture here her heart's been opened by God. And now she wants to open her home for the work of God. It's funny Lydia would be a very strong and persuasive woman. I'm sure. So strong that she can persuade the apostle Paul to come and stay at her house. And that's why look notes and she persuaded us. And here the first convert in Europe comes to know Jesus Christ. She comes and she says look in response to the goodness and the grace of Christ I want you to come into my home. I want you to come and make my home the first church. And that's why we read in verse 40 the only other reference to Lydia. That after Paul and Silas come out of prison they went to Lydia's house where they met with the brothers encouraged them. The better example that I had in my younger days was of a godly couple who opened their home to me. Who because God had opened their hearts they wanted to teach me love me and nurture me. That's what we see in the day.

They look at Philippians which we read earlier we read Paul speaking to these Christians That's amazing because he says to these Christians he says Every time I remember you I do so with great joy because of your partnership in the gospel Because being confident of this that God who begun the good work in you will see it on to completion He goes even as far as to say it's right for me to feel this way about all of you because I have you in my heart In fact, I love you so much that I love you with the affection of Christ Jesus and that's some statement to make Thinking back to those people in Philippi Paul ranks this letter 10 years later and he says I long for you with the affection of Christ Jesus The most amazing thing about the letter Philippi Philippians is that it's written to encourage mature Christians It is the most positive letter written in the New Testament to a church And you know one of the biggest that the highlight of the book of Philippians is chapter 4

[28 : 44] When Paul thanks them For a material gift that is given and he says in Philippians chapter 4 verse verse 14 Yeah, it was good of you to share in my troubles Moreover as you Philippians know in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel The days when Paul met Lydia and she came to know Jesus when I set out from Macedonia Not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving Except you only for even when I was in Thessalonica you sent me aid again and again when I was in need Not that I'm looking for a gift, but I'm looking for what may be credited to your account I have received full payment and even more. I'm am place of applied Now that I've received the gift that you've sent from a pathoditis Paul was somebody who received from the church of Philippi most likely I received from a pathoditis Paul was somebody who received from the church of Philippi most likely a wealthy woman like Lydia a very generous gift for the work of the gospel a

Better example, how is Lydia a better example for us? She's a better example because she's a woman who comes to her heart open by God She's a better example because she's a woman who opens her home to see the first church planted in Europe She's a better example because in response to the gospel of God she gives Because all that she has is surrendered to Christ Let's pray Father we thank you for this passage. We thank you for Lydia and her life and our testimony Thank you for her life that inspires in us the wonder of your gospel That God you're willing to save those Who are the highest in society and you're even willing to save those who are the lowest in society?

We thank you for this story because it reminds us of a woman who you took hold of and who in response she took hold of you We thank you father for the transforming power of your gospel a Gospel that would lead someone to give so liberally generously a Gospel that would not only open our heart but open our home Father we pray that as we think about Lydia's testimony that we would consider our lives We consider the lessons that can be learned from her life And we thank you father that her life is a living testimony Because you've begun a good work in her and that you saw it onto completion Father help us to be examples Testimonies and people who live life's worthy of imitation and may you receive all the glory all the honor and praise in Jesus name Amen