

“The Conversion of Lydia”
(Acts 16:11-15)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Last week, we saw the Lord guiding where His Gospel would and would not go.
 - a. He had given them the general call:
 - (i) Jesus had personally called Paul to be His apostle, His herald of this message.
 - (ii) He had called Silas and Timothy through the church.
 - (iii) And through His Word, they knew they were to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every living creature.
 - (iv) All they lacked were the specifics.
 - b. But He provided those specifics as they went through His Spirit.
 - (i) He opened the door for Paul, Silas and Timothy to go into Phrygia and Galatia, but not in Asia.
 - (ii) When they tried to go into Bithynia, He would only allow them into Mysia.
 - (iii) And when they arrived in Troas, He clearly showed them it was His will that they go into Macedonia to preach His Gospel.
 - (iv) If they had made no attempt, if they hadn't pressed forward as they did, humanly speaking, they never would have discovered His will.
 - (v) But God was pleased to reveal it to them as they earnestly sought to serve Him.
2. How can we expect God to show us His will, if we're not willing to do what He has already shown us?
 - a. If we're not willing to take the first step He wants us to take, why should He show us the second or third?
 - b. But if we set our hearts to know His will, by pushing ahead, by trying the doors, by doing everything that is in our power to do now, He will continue to light the path before us.
 - c. He may not guide us in exactly the same way He did Paul, Silas and Timothy – we can't expect visions or immediate communications from God – but we can expect guidance through His Word, through His Providential government, through the church, and through the Spirit's work in our hearts.
 - d. We just need to be willing to do what He tells us to do (Cf. John 7:17).

B. Preview.

1. Paul, Silas and Timothy were willing, as was Luke, who joined them at Troas, and because they were, the Lord continued to guide and to use them.
 - a. After Paul received the vision and saw God's will, they immediately sought to go into Macedonia.

- b. Jesus now had them where He wanted them to be:
 - (i) He has His timing.
 - (ii) He is the One to whom God has entrusted the government of the world.
 - (iii) He rules and overrules all things to His glory and the furtherance of His kingdom.
2. This morning, we'll see the beginning of the church at Philippi. And we'll consider three things:
- a. First, we must never despise the day of small beginnings.
 - b. Second, we must trust that the Lord will do His work to bring His elect to Himself.
 - c. Third, we must expect to see fruit in the lives of those the Lord regenerates and brings to Himself.

II. Sermon.

A. First, we must never despise the day of small beginnings.

1. Paul was at Troas when he saw the vision the Spirit gave him. Immediately, he followed the Spirit's direction, as did those with him (including Luke, 'we'; vv. 11-12).
 - a. They made a straight course to Samothrace (an island in the Aegean Sea, off the coast of Thrace).
 - b. The following day they went to Neapolis (means 'new city', the sea port of the inland town of Philippi), and from there to Philippi (about 10 miles further inland).
 - (i) Philippi was at one time the capital of Macedonia, named after Philip of Macedonia, the king of Macedonia from 359-336 B.C., the father of Alexander the Great.
 - (ii) A. T. Robertson writes, "In the time of the Emperor Augustus [died AD 14] this city became a Roman colony, *i.e.*, a military settlement of Roman soldiers, there planted for the purpose of controlling the district recently conquered. It was a 'miniature Rome,' under the municipal law of Rome, and governed by military officers . . . who were appointed directly from Rome."
 - (iii) At this time, it was the leading city of the eastern district of Macedonia.
 - (iv) Matthew Henry writes, "It was a colony. The Romans not only had a garrison, but the inhabitants of the city were Romans, the magistrates at least, and the governing part. There were the greatest numbers and variety of people, and therefore the most likelihood of doing good."
 - (v) If the Gospel were preached here, it would more likely spread throughout all that country.
2. But they were there for some days, and nothing seemed to be developing (v. 12).
 - a. They may have wondered where the man of Macedonia was, or why there wasn't a group waiting to receive the Gospel, as when the Spirit sent Peter to speak to Cornelius (Acts 10).

- (i) It also appears as though there weren't any synagogues of the Jews in that city; if there had been they would have gone there first.
 - (ii) But even though there didn't appear to be a synagogue, there were God-fearers, such as Lydia (v. 13).
 - (a) These God-fearers must have been converted to Judaism – although not fully – in other places, such as in Thyatira in Lydia's case.
 - (b) Being worshippers of Jehovah, they wanted nothing to do with the idolatry of that city.
 - (c) And so they would go somewhere else to worship Him.
 - (iii) It appears that there was such a place where they would worship.
 - (a) There was a little river, Gangites, one mile west of town, where there was very likely a small enclosure used for prayer.
 - (b) It's possible that Paul and his company noticed this by the river as they came into the city or during the time they were waiting on God there.
 - (c) "Josephus (*Ant.* XIV. 10, 23) quotes a decree of Halicarnassus which allowed the Jews 'to make their prayers . . . on the seashore according to the custom of their fathers'" (Robertson).
- b. On the Sabbath Day, they went to this place of prayer, where, upon arrival, they found some women who apparently had gathered for worship:
- (i) Early Macedonian inscriptions show that women had greater freedom in Macedonia than in other places of the Roman Empire, which would explain why they were gathered by themselves.
 - (ii) Lydia, one of their number, was a God-fearer, so we shouldn't suppose they were there for any other purpose than for worship.
 - (iii) It only took ten Jewish men to constitute a synagogue, so there must not have been even this many in the city.
 - (iv) But there were women, at least a few, who desired to worship Him.
 - (v) This might not be the greatest of opportunities, but it was an opportunity, and so Paul took advantage of it.
 - (a) We should never despise the day of small beginnings.
 - (b) Even if what the Lord gives us to do might not seem that important or promising, we don't know exactly how He is going to use it.
 - (c) When the minister failed to show up at the Primitive Methodist Chapel on that cold morning in 19th Century England, the poor man who stood in the pulpit to read the Scriptures had no idea that his efforts to minister to God's people that day would be used of the Lord to convert Charles Spurgeon.
 - (d) God may not have ordained great things for us to do, but we might influence someone the Lord will use.
 - (e) Paul was looking for a man from Macedonia, but found a group of women instead, one in particular: Lydia.

B. Second, we must trust that the Lord will do His work to bring His elect to Himself. “A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul” (v. 14).

1. Who was Lydia? What do we know about her?
 - a. She was from the city of Thyatira: one of the cities in the area the Spirit had forbidden them to preach in: in Asia. Thyatira was in a region named Lydia: it’s possible Lydia was named after that region.
 - b. She was a seller of purple fabrics, which was in great demand in that culture, since it was the color of royalty.
 - (i) She must have been a woman of means to have set up her business so far from home.
 - (ii) Apparently there was a Jewish settlement in Thyatira especially interested in the dying industry.
 - (iii) She probably became a proselyte there. The others with her might also have been proselytes, which meant they already had the background necessary to receive the Word.
 - (v) But she was still unconverted: she may have feared God, but she didn’t trust in Christ.
 - (vi) When the Lord Providentially plants seeds or lays a foundation of knowledge in the lives of others, we should make use of it, as Paul did.
2. But something more was needed, something Paul couldn’t supply, but which God did.
 - a. As she listened to the Gospel, the Lord opened her heart to respond to it.
 - (i) Why did He need to open her heart?
 - (a) Because apart from God’s grace – His Spirit – she would never have been able to receive Christ.
 - (b) She was experiencing the deadly effects of the Fall: she was born dead in trespass and sin (Ps. 51; Rom. 3:12).
 - (c) The only One who can overcome this is God.
 - (ii) And that’s what He did.
 - (a) He quickened her to life, causing her to be born again (John 3:5).
 - (b) He changed her heart of stone to one of flesh (Ez. 11:19-20).
 - (c) And she received Jesus as her Lord and Savior.
 - (d) This is what the Lord does for every one of His elect He brings to faith, and this is our confidence as we bring Christ to others.
 - (e) We must believe not only that He is able, but that He will do so: He has ordained witnessing and preaching so that He might save His sheep.
 - b. She also responded by being baptized and by making sure that her household was as well (v. 15).
 - (i) Luke is usually one to give a great amount of detail, but here he doesn’t detail for us who was in Lydia’s house.

- (a) Were these women with her, her servants?
- (b) Were they related to her?
- (c) Was she married? Did she have children?
- (d) Luke doesn't tell us.

- (ii) All he tells us is that she and her household were baptized.
 - (a) This means everyone in it was baptized: children, servants, etc.
 - (b) Luke doesn't tell us that they all believed, as he did in the case of Cornelius and as he will in the case of the Philippian jailer, which could mean that perhaps they didn't.
 - (c) But the fact that they were baptized is consistent with what we would expect: when the head of the household comes into the faith, the Lord brings the household with them.
 - (d) This doesn't mean they are necessarily saved – they can only be saved through faith in Christ – but it does mean that the Lord is Lord of that household.

C. Third, we must expect to see fruit in the lives of those the Lord regenerates and brings to Himself: “And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay.’ And she prevailed upon us” (v. 15).

1. Lydia didn't know these men very well, but she was willing to take them into her home.
 - a. She provided for them while they were in Philippi.
 - b. Even later when they were arrested and released (v. 40).
2. There is immediate fruit in conversion.
 - a. The root is changed and so new fruit begins to grow.
 - b. This includes not only a changed heart towards the Lord, but towards His people.
 - c. There is a desire to promote the work of the Gospel and of those who are being used by the Lord to do so.
 - d. This is the fruit that we should expect to see – as we've seen in the evening: if we love the Lord, we'll want to advance His cause.
 - e. This is the fruit we should expect to see in ourselves as well.
 - (i) Let's pray then that the Lord will help us to promote His work, no matter how small our opportunities might be.
 - (ii) Let's expect Him to work with us, since it is His work we're doing.
 - (iii) And let's expect to see lives transformed by the Gospel, since this is what the Lord does through His Gospel. Amen.