



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 16:11-15

"Great Lion of God

Paul and the Second Missionary Journey, part II

Paul In Philippi - I"

TRANSCRIPT

We are looking at the Apostle Paul in his second missionary journey and he has left the city of Antioch and has passed over into Asia Minor, he has sought to enter into Asia and the Spirit did not permit him to do that. He then went North to Bithynia or towards Bethany and he attempted to go into Bithynia but again the Spirit suffered them not and so passing by Mysia he went down to the coast of the Aegean Sea an ancient Troas or Troy as we know it. And there he had a vision of a man of Macedonia who asked him come over into Macedonia and help us. Well, it must have been a rather surprising thing for the apostle and he evidently conferred with the others explained the vision that had appeared to him and as they discussed it they finally came to the conclusion that evidently the Lord was leading them to go over into Europe. And so Luke who is the historian of the account says in the tenth verse of Acts chapter 16: "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."

Evidently this was something the apostle had not anticipated when he began the journey and so that is why they conferred, and you'll notice that Luke uses now for the first time in the book of the Acts the little plural pronoun "we", which perhaps indicate that Luke joined the party at Troas. Now, we will read in the next few verses through the sixteenth chapter language with the first person plural pronoun and then it will stop. And Luke will go back again to the third person until the apostle again comes to the area of Philippi the twentieth chapter where again Luke will use the first person plural pronoun. Which would indicate it seems that in view of the ministry that transpired at Philippi and that the ministry was fruitful, Luke was one of the party that stayed in Philippi after Paul left, and went on into Southern Greece.

It may help us to remember that those who were traveling with Paul included Silas who joined Paul right from the beginning and then remember having been separated from Barnabas as they landed in Asia Minor who went with Mark to the Island of Sipras. Silas accompanied Paul and as they came to Lystra they were joined by Timothy and with Luke now that have a little apostolic company including Paul, including Luke, including Silas and no doubt two or three others whose names are not mentioned here although we are not absolutely certain of that.

So we're turning now to the continuation of the journey and this is an important event because here the gospel through the apostle Paul for the first time comes to Europe and of course, the passage that we're going to look at Acts chapter 16 verse 11 through verse 15 is a message that is famous because of the woman who is the first convert in Europe through the apostles ministry. Remarkable woman Lydia, one who was as we said from Asia the very place that Paul was prevented by the Spirit from entering earlier because evidently he had an Asian over in Greece that the wanted to be the first to receive the gospel through Paul in Europe.

As we know the bible is crammed with remarkable women. There is: Eve or the prototype woman; Lots wife, the friend of Susan Knickerbocker, the Syrian of the society

pages; Ruth the Moabites, proof that a woman can make up her mind; and Deborah the first female public servant, who was the Margaret Thatcher of her day; one for whom I would vote if she were running for the presidency of the United States, and don't tell it in Gath, don't publish it in Ashkelon unless the uncircumcised Philistines of the Republican Party here. But I would vote for Margaret Thatcher over Ronald Reagan too. At least in one particular I'm not a male chauvinist after all. Then of course, there was Delilah the devilish, the wife of the British Rob Roy of Israel, Samson; and Abigail, a beauty and a brain. Abigail is a very interesting woman she proves that a woman can be beautiful and also be intelligent. We read in 1 Samuel chapter 25 verse 3, and she was a woman of good understanding and of a beautiful countenance. But as is often the case, this beautiful wise woman married a husband who was churlish and evil in his doings and he was of the house of Caleb. There is Elizabeth, whose son was the greatest of men and Mary the noblest woman of them all.

The woman of our story here is a kind of prototype of the modern woman because she was a career woman. She's called a seller of purple of the city of Thyatira, which was in Asia so she was not in her home town and we can only surmise since purple was a very precious commodity that she was a woman of substantial means and perhaps was in Philippi on business at the time. We know from reading the account that Lydia was a woman who was something of a proselyte to the faith or at least one of the friends of the faith because she was meeting with the women who were meeting by the side of the Gagitee River in the prayer session.

The apostle had been at Troas and he had been puzzled and perplexed but the vision gave him his clue and so putting two and two together, that's the meaning of the expression, "gathering" that the Lord had called for us to preach the gospel unto them, that word translated "gathering" is a word that is often used as the breeding of female and male horses and so it's a word that means to unite so the apostle evidently weighed the alternatives and then in the light of the vision that came to him he had decided that it was

the time to go over into Europe. The journey from Troas to Philippi or to the seaport of Philippi will take five days later on, but you notice as you read this that it took only three days for this particular trip; and Jay Campbell Morgan I think it is the one who comments on the fact that evidently the nature itself was helping the purposes of grace and so everything was positive for the trip into Europe.

Let's read a few verses beginning at verse 11 of Acts chapter 16: "Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; (now, that was the port to Philippi) And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony."

Now, that is important, later on the apostle in writing to the Philippians will comment upon the fact that our citizenship is in heaven because the colony signified that it was a Roman city even though it was not in Rome, it was a little bit of Rome away from Rome. The reason for this is that it was a great battle fought in Philippi in 42BC, and there the Romans with Octavian Caesar had won a great victory over Brutus and Cassius and universal empire had crotched at the feet of Octavian Caesar which was the result of that battle, which was one of the ten most important battles in all of history. Usually classified in that category.

Well, as a result of that many of the Roman veterans stayed in that area and took up their domicile there and by a grant from Rome, those who lived in Philippi were regarded as Romans. That's why Paul will say your citizenship or our citizenship is in heaven. They placed a great deal of value upon the fact that they were citizens of Rome. And he wanted to remind them in his letter to the Philippians that there is a citizenship that is better than Roman citizenship. So when Luke says here that it was a colony he means that is was a Roman colony and it's citizens were Roman citizens even though they were in Greece.

"And we were in that city abiding certain days and on the Sabbath we went out of the city by the river side where prayer was want 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 in the city of Thyatira, which worshiped God, heard us, whose heart the Lord opened that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul and when she was baptized and her household she besought us saying if he hath judged me to be faithful to the Lord come into my house and abide there and she constrained us."

[Message] Now, Philippi we see is a very remarkable city and so the apostle's journey from Troas to Philippi has some significance. If you in your minds eye can go back to the time when the apostle with his little company of people arrived in the city of Philippi you might have imagined the conversation like this taking place, if someone really had an idea of what was going to happen. Can imagine somebody on the street corner speaking to another person and saying, "What is that motley little group of people?" And someone else will say, "Well, now, that is a man by the name of Paul, he's a Jewish man whose been preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ who was crucified by the Jews in Jerusalem and these people are literally turning the world upside down, and that little group of people with him are those that are traveling with him."

And then the person if he had foresight and really knew he would say, "By the way, the time is coming when you are going to be forgotten in Philippi; as a matter of fact, the great victory that was won here by Octavian Caesar is going to be forgotten too, there will be only one out of a thousand people that will know that that was one of the ten great battles of human history, but everybody, everywhere will know about that little man and that little group of people who are now treading the streets of Philippi. And furthermore, he will write some literature that will be studied by the great men of human history down through the centuries." So you never can tell from the outward view of things the really important things. The really important person in Philippi was the apostle

Paul and the really important thing that happened in Philippi was not the battle of Philippi in 42BC but this little engagement that the apostle is going to carry on out by the riverside where the group of women are gathered.

Now, in the eleventh and twelfth verses it is stated that they came from Troas to Philippi, and then in the thirteenth verse there is another journey, this time from Philippi to the Ganges River. I've always thought since someone suggested this to me that many years ago that verse thirteen is about as perfect an anticlimax as one can imagine. Here is the apostle in Troas and from the romance of a heavenly vision thinking about the opening up of an entire continent and now he arrives in the place of Europe to which he has been called by the Lord he feels and perhaps he was thinking he could have been think of the great crowds that would hear him preach and instead of the Sabbath day he goes out to a little dirty prayer enclosure by the side of a River. One might have thought particularly since it was a man of Macedonia who called him by vision over into Europe that at least some men would have been there. But all it is is just a group of women who were sitting down by the riverside in a little prayer enclosure and this is the group of people to which the apostle has been called.

He must of thought this was some anticlimax it was a magnificent vision it was a vision of a man but now well, it's very much like we find in many of our churches today when you go to our churches and you attend the prayer meeting on Wednesday nights. Frequently it's just a few women sitting who are to pray or it might not even be a prayer meeting it may be a meeting of the ladies auxiliary. Many a young preacher have left the theological seminary to his church to which he's been called thinking of something rather significant to discover that it is just such an anticlimax.

Well, one man writing on this particular point says it was an up-to-date prayer meeting at least because only the women were present that's true in many of our churches. Fortunately, it is not true in Believer's Chapel the men do take an active part in the things of the work of the Lord here for which we are grateful. There were some

interesting people in that church who were the women, remember, that Euodias and Syntyche are later mentioned by the apostle when he wrote to the Philippians and probably also in the fourth chapter in the second verse when the apostle uses the expression translated in the authorized version as "true yoke fellow" that probably is also another person by the name of Syntyche which is the Greek for a yoke fellow, but probably instead of being a descriptive noun it is a proper noun and describes a person.

Well, now, the apostle arrives, by the way there were so few Jews in the City of Philippi that they couldn't even have a synagogue. It was a rule among the Jews that if there were ten Jewish men in a particular locality that they were required to build a synagogue to have a synagogue so evidently there were not ten men who were Jewish in the City of Philippi and only the women were gathered then by the side of the river in the prayer enclosure. Then Luke goes on to describe the one woman who is significant for him and that woman of course, is Lydia. And in the description we have one of the truly important little theological sections in the book of the Acts.

Amon Brunner who was a rather liberal neo-orthodox theologian of the last generation, professor of systematic theology at the University of Zurich in Switzerland, made some excellent comments in his systematic theology, even though his view point was on the liberal side, he once said theology protects the church from food poisoning. Now, that's a good comment, I like it and someone else said in a little more up-to-date comment concerning theology that theology is the quality control of the Christian church. Everything ought to be judged by our theology, but of course, we shouldn't stop with our theology we should seek to live out our theology but we could never live out our theology successfully if we don't have good pure theology, orthodox theology to begin with.

Now, here we have one of those beautiful little sections in which the apostle sets out for us the way by which a man comes to know Jesus Christ. Now, let's talk about the subject for a moment, and certain woman named Lydia a seller of purple. We said that

Thyatira was in the ancient kingdom of Lydia, which was in Asia and it was famed for the manufacturer of purple die. Now, purple die was extremely expensive because it was derived in a very expensive way and I need not go into it because, in the first place my mind is a little hazy about exactly how it was derived, I've forgotten whether it was derived from a certain kind of fish, or what, but at-any-rate it was a very difficult kind of die to obtain and therefore anything that was dyed with this particular die was very expensive and she was a seller of purple.

I think, of course, I've already indicated this but you'll notice that she is specifically said to be for Thyatira, which in the light of the proceeding context indicates that this is just one of those provisions that the Lord makes for his elect. She was not down there where Paul had sought to enter she was up here. Furthermore, we learn that she had a household and her household suggests that she also was a wealthy woman; it included servants, and workers and so she was the kind of person who traveled and perhaps she had another home another domicile in the city of Philippi.

But, now, let's notice how Luke describes the experience of Lydia under the preaching of Paul, one can distinguish a number of stages in this if you carefully analyze the words. And notice first of all it says that she worshipped God. Now, that means that she was either a proselyte to the Hebrew faith that is she had been a Gentile who had been convinced of the monotheism of Israel it's worship and had become a Jew or else it means that she was a Gentile who was attached to Judaism impressed by the monotheism having been brought up in paganism with it's polytheism but had not yet joined Judaism nevertheless, she attended the meetings and was in the synagogues when instructions was given in the faith. It says here simply that she worshiped God. So evidently she was a person who was attached to the Hebrew faith, attached to monotheism, she had evidently a high regard for the old testament scriptures and we can just put it down in this way by simply saying that this was not the beginning of the work of God in Lydia's heart in other

words, God had already been working in Lydia's heart before the apostle Paul arrived in Philippi.

Now, the second thing that we notice about this account is that it states that she heard us whose heart the Lord opened that she attended unto the things spoken by Paul. I often say this and I know you're tired of hearing it, but nevertheless I feel this very much. I would have loved to have heard one of the apostle's sermons, now, we have one that he preached to the elders of the church of Ephesus, but that's a message that he gave to people who were in the church. We have also an account of his message that he gave to the synagogue in Antioch in Pisidia that will give us some idea of how he preached. But I would love to have heard one of the sermons word-for-word that the apostle preached.

Now, if we go by the sermon that he preached at Antioch in Pisidia the way he preached was along these lines. He went back to the Old Testament; he began with the great promises given to the nation of Israel, he spoke about Israel's election, he spoke about God's guidance of history, he spoke about some of the great men who arose, men like Moses, men like Joseph and then ultimately he using the old testament history of salvation came to the climax in the ministry of John the Baptist and of the Lord Jesus Christ. In effect he said the old testament promises are ours they've been given to us by God and they find their culmination in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ who was crucified, who was put death and buried and who has been raised from the dead and he is the salvation that God has promised.

I would imagine that this is something like the apostle preached here and that we are to understand the things which were spoken by Paul to be the word of God that is the Old Testament as he understood it enlightened by the New Testament events. It would be nice of course, to go back and hear how the apostle did that and compare it with our Lord's sermon on the Emmaus road where he evidently did something of the same thing. It's not a bad way to preach.

Some time ago, well, it really was only a few months ago in Chicago I was one of the delegates who gave a little paper at the hermeneutics conference and they had a section on expository preaching. And one of the men who gave his paper on expository preaching started out with the given that everybody ought to do expository preaching that is he ought to take a passage of scripture and open up that particular passage of scripture being sure to dwell on the principle theme of the passage and gather his comments around that and have an introduction with appropriate means by which he made transition from point-to-point and an appropriate conclusion. And one of the men who was not use to that kind of preaching also gave a paper and his point was that expository preaching is not taught in the bible at all; and that one, can't hardly find anywhere in the bible expository preaching as it is defined today.

Well, actually he was not so wrong because when one looks at the preaching as it is found in the New Testament, most of the preaching that is found in the New Testament is historical kind of preaching in which the authors of the sermons or messages go back to the old testament, center on the theological content of the old testament and show how it is fulfilled in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the kind of preaching. They ordinarily didn't say, "Now, my text is a passage from the book of Isaiah and I will now expound it and my three points are, and the big idea that I want to get over is this, and my introduction now is this, and my conclusion is this," when he came to the appropriate point. It's a rather interesting thing to think about.

But, one of the reasons for that, that doesn't necessarily mean that we should dispense with the expository preaching to which we are accustomed; but it does mean that that's not the only way to preach. And one of the reasons that it was no doubt done was because of the fact that they were in the midst of an unfolding of the great historical events, and it was necessary for them to gain some perspective, and see what God had accomplished in the tremendous ministry of John the Baptist and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So the thing spoken by Paul, that's the second thing in the salvation of Lydia. She was the recipient of common grace. God had worked in her heart and she was prepared, she was attracted to the faith of the word of God and now, the apostle preaches the word to her and in verse 14 we read a little word which we passed by because I think that it really ought to be mentioned now, this passage says, "Which worship God heard us." Now, that word "heard us" is a word that refers to the fact that she listens to the things which the apostle was preaching and she was the recipient of the convincing ministry of the Holy Spirit but still she is not in the family of the faithful because the apostle goes on to say, "Whose heart the Lord opened." Now, I consider that one of the really important clauses in the book of Acts, "Whose heart the Lord opened." Now, when I consider it one of the really important clauses in the book of Acts it's one of the important theological clauses in the book of Acts, "Whose heart the Lord opened." Now, will you notice, it does not say that she opened her heart.

Now, no doubt Lydia would have been perfectly legitimate in saying to someone I opened my heart. That's the way we do, we say, I chose the Lord Jesus Christ and then we read the bible and discover that he chose us. Or we say that I responded to the invitation and later on we read that it was the Holy Spirit who caused us to. But here it is, "Whose heart the Lord opened." It was not Lydia, it was not her prayers, it was not even Paul. Paul was an apostle. Not even Paul opened her heart. In fact, the scripture plainly says, "Whose heart the Lord opened." Now, I think this is significant in the light of the way in which Luke begins this great book. He begins this book by writing to Theophilus as he did in the book of Luke. He says, "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up, after he through the Holy Spirit had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen." But notice the expression, "of all that Jesus began both to do and teach."

Now, in Luke's gospel in the ministry of the Lord Jesus what Luke says that he writes there are the things which Jesus began both to do and teach; in other words, he

has not stopped doing and teaching he began to do and teach in his earthly ministry and what he began to do and teach he continues now.

Now, I cannot prove this so I don't want you to get the impression that I'm trying to prove this but I do believe that when we read whose heart the Lord opened that we're reading what Jesus continues to do and teach. Now, if you read through the book of Acts, if you read through it in one sitting, and read through it in one sitting with the idea that I'm reading what Jesus continue to do and teach you'll catch some of the flavor of the book and here when we read, "Whose heart the Lord opened." I just feel that when we get to heaven we will discover that this is the Lord, the Son.

Now, the term Lord is suitable for Father, Son, and Spirit, but here in the light of those opening words this is what the Lord Jesus is continuing to do through the Holy Spirit. So, "whose heart the Lord opened," is of course, a reference to the special calling by which a person is regenerated. So here is Lydia she is the recipient of common grace, she's a friend of Israel, has come to understand a great deal about the Old Testament to be attracted to the teaching, she has heard Paul, she is the recipient of the general appeal of the gospel to all men; it is to go out to all men. And now, she is the recipient of the special calling by which she is brought to life through Christ. It is very important to stress, I think, the fact; that it is the Lord who opened her heart.

There are people who have the ideal that the way to bring people to faith in Jesus Christ is to engage in a lot of persuasion, and so we have very earnest appeals that are often very lengthily made; altar calls, they have come to be called. There are many churches that do not think you are preaching the gospel if you do not have an extended altar call as soon as the message is over.

Now, there isn't anything wrong with a preacher preaching with earnestness and zeal, but if you think for one moment that it is by earnestness or by zeal that a person is brought to the knowledge of Jesus Christ you have a very faulty understanding of the gospel of Christ.

Oral Daphne, one of the greatest of the Southern theologians, has a little chapter on effectual calling, it's a very interesting chapter and a very valuable chapter and in it he talks about this. He says after he points out the semi-Pelagians of New England felt that the work of the Holy Spirit is only suasive that means persuasive through the truth and not renovating or not bringing to life. And makes his work, that is the Spirit's work, the same generically, only vastly stronger in degree with that of the minister who holds forth the gospel to his fellow men adds, "It was said for instance by Dr. Duffield, the only reason I cannot convert a sinner with gospel truth like the Holy Ghost is that I am not as eloquent as he."

Now, what a misunderstanding of the gospel of Christ, if I were just as eloquent as the Holy Spirit I could convert a man. But the Holy Spirit does not convert my eloquence if that is true the apostle Paul confesses he had no eloquence in his remarks to the Corinthians he was there in fear and trembling and in no persuasiveness of human speech. In fact, you would be surprised that anyone was ever converted by Paul if it was by eloquence.

No, conversion is not by eloquence conversion is by the supernatural renovation of an individual through the Holy Spirit. And furthermore, it is not because our wills act in response to the truth and therefore, it is traceable to the act of our will. Our wills are secondary agents and they respond to our dispositions or our understanding. And so consequently when a person's decision of the will takes place is because something more fundamental than the will, and what the Holy Spirit does to when he brings new life to a person is to renovate his disposition his inner nature so then his decision of the will is positive toward God. To change the human will is utterly inadequate and irrelevant to salvation because the change that is necessary goes back of the will so it's a divine and almighty work of God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, by which our disposition is transformed through the mighty power of the Lord God. That's what

happened when we read, "Whose heart the Lord opened." The work that God did upon Lydia touched her inmost being or as Luke says, "her heart."

Now, I think if one thought for a moment or two about this you would realize that this is true because when the gospel goes forth in power, what happens is that some people respond and some do not respond. And when an individual responds it is because of the work of God. If the gospel itself was the thing that converted people, those who heard it would be converted. But there is more to it than that. As a matter of fact, strange things happen you can see an individual who's heard the gospel over and over again and you know what happens when a person hears the gospel over and over again they get hardened and hardened and more hardened and more hardened still and then suddenly, often, not always, unfortunately, but often here is a person that heard the gospel twenty years and he is a hardened old sinner then suddenly the gospel transforms that individual so we say. But really what has happened is that God in his supernatural work has performed a mighty work upon that man and even when he was young and pliable he was not saved by the gospel, but now when he is old and hardened he is. You see the one who saves is the Lord God. I wish I had time to illustrate that but we don't.

Now, we read here, by the way these words, "whose heart the Lord opened," indicates that Lydia was just like the rest of us filled with all kinds of prejudice when she heard the apostle begin his speech because her heart had to be opened by God. She no doubt had heard about Paul, she had heard no doubt that there was a man down there who was one of the leaders in Judaism who had turned to Jesus the Messiah, she had no doubt heard what the nation said in reference to Christ his blood be upon us and she was sympathetic with them. She had all the religious prejudices of her day, now could I possibly be converted by a man who was apostatized from the faith of Judaism and furthermore, he was preaching that old fashioned Calvinistic doctrine too [Laughter] and can anybody be converted by that old Calvinistic doctrine but the Lord opened her heart and so she responded and we read she attended unto the things which Paul spoke.

Now, that is faith. So the heart of Lydia was opened by God and she believed, this is her passage from rebellion through no doubt, doubt, perplexity, "How is this man able to expound the Old Testament so clearly and so intelligently and why am I understanding this better than I've ever understood it when the Rabbi's talked about it when it is one who is apostatized from our faith?" Through rising interest as the Holy Spirit is impressing upon her the mind that this is the truth until finally there comes excitement as Paul is in Isaiah chapter 53 to the joyous cry, "I must have this Savior he's my Lord and my God."

Magnificent salvation and mind you she's the first in Europe and a kind of pattern of the salvation that will take place in Europe. Lydia to put it in our Lord's parable of the soil is good ground. What a magnificent thing it is, what a magnificent work of divine grace it is to create us as good ground; how could you ever be thankful enough for the fact that by the grace of God we are good ground and the Holy Spirit has worked and has brought us to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, you know what happened afterwards when she was baptized, that's what you do when you have believed in Christ that's the biblical way to express your faith you should be baptized in water, "And so when she was baptized and her household she besought us saying if you have judged me to be found faithful come into my house and abide there and she constrained us." So you can see already the love of God in her heart and she is doing good deeds to the people of God, that's one of the distinguishing marks of the divine elect. Lydia is the first convert in Europe and she is a pattern to those that follow and she was a genuine convert too, for when Paul writes the Philippians later on he talks about the work that was done there at the very first.

I think I'll just conclude by reading those few verses in Philippians chapter 1 when he wrote this company of people who are going to believe he says: "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you always and every prayer of mine for your making request with joy (you know what he was thinking, thank you Lord for those women by

the side of the river for Lydia and for the response that you brought in her heart how you opened her heart to hear the message that I was preaching, and then he says) for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now." That's what Lydia did she invited them home to her house and she entertained them and Paul, thanks them for their fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. That is nothing more than the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. If a work of God has been done in a person's heart he will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Well, it's time for us to close let's close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we thank thee for thee magnificent work accomplished through the apostle Paul in Philippi. We thank thee Lord for thee encouragement that it gives to us that as we preach the word of God the Lord Jesus is still doing and teaching, and that we may count upon him to renew the dispositions of the elect people of God and bring them to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, O God may we be faithful, may we be zealous, may we not be disappointed....

[TAPE ENDS ABRUPTLY]