

For those of you who missed the last two Sundays, we have been in the Book of Acts and learning about the spread of the gospel as Jesus had instructed the apostles to go into all the world and preach the gospel, first in Jerusalem, then in Samaria and Galilee, and to the uttermost parts of the world. The apostles originally misunderstood and thought they were to spread the gospel only to the Jews. But when Dorcus was resurrected from the dead in Joppa, the whole community learned of the event and spread the news wherever they went. Last week we discovered that the gospel was for Jews and Gentiles. Therefore when God does wonderful things or new things within our congregation, the faith community, the church, we are to share with other the good news of what God has done!

In our scripture Peter is no longer the main character, but God is now using Paul to spread the gospel to an even broader audience. To this point the apostles have not gone out of their way to contact the non-Jews, but have preached to them only if requested. Today we listen in on what the Holy Spirit directed Paul and Silas and their companions to do and where they were to go. When we learned of the missionary trips of Paul, they were initially in Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. The Holy Spirit has Paul and Barnabas to visited cities in modern day Turkey and established churches in communities where there were Jewish synagogues. As Paul commences his second missionary journey he does not want to go west, but east in to Asia. But each time he attempted to go east, the Holy Spirit would not allow them to go. We don't know for sure how the Holy Spirit communicated this to them, but we know that when the message was clear to them, they did not go to Asia. While they were waiting for instructions Timothy and Luke were added to the missionary team and Paul prepared them for whatever God would have them do next. God even permitted Timothy to be circumcised so that he would not

offend the Jews and would be welcomed into their synagogues. I can also imagine Paul and Silas (who was a prophet) attempted to teach Timothy and Luke everything they knew about the gospel and techniques for evangelism.

While they were at Troas, a seaport city on the Aegean Sea near the ancient site of Troy, God gave positive direction by means of a night . . . vision to Paul. In the vision Paul saw a man of Macedonia, a Roman senatorial province, which is in modern day northern Greece.

After comparing notes, they immediately set out on their journey. The journey from Troas to Samothrace and to Neapolis, the seaport city for Philippi, was a rapid one, less than five days, implying that the wind was with them. The missionaries went straight by sea, rather than the long land route. They felt an urgency to obey and get on with their task.

From Neapolis the missionaries traveled the 10 miles on the Via Egnatia, the Egnatian Road to Philippi, which Luke described as a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. Quite clearly Luke displayed pride in the city he came to love. Some say he grew up and attended medical school there. Philippi, originally named Crenides (“Fountains”), was taken by Philip of Macedon, the father of Alexander the great. The city was renamed after Phillip. In 168 B.C. Philippi became a Roman possession. After Mark Antony and Octavian defeated Brutus and Cassius, the assassins of Julius Caesar, near Philippi in 42 B.C., the city was made into a Roman colony. This gave it special privileges (e.g, fewer taxes) but more importantly it became like a “transplanted” Rome. The primary purpose of colonies was military, for the Roman leaders felt it wise to have Roman citizens and sympathizers settled in strategic locations. So Octavian (who became Caesar Augustus, the first Roman emperor, in 27 B.C.) settled more colonists (primarily former soldiers) at Philippi after his defeat of Antony at Actium, on Greece’s west coast, in 31 B.C.

Although it was a Roman colony with many residents, the Jewish population at Philippi must have been limited, for there was no synagogue there; 10 Jewish males were required for a synagogue. Nor were they greeted by the man in their vision. It seems that nothing was doing on in the form for true worship within the city. Scholars say there was an inscription on the arches outside the city of Philippi that prohibited bringing an unrecognized religion into the city.¹ Therefore a place of prayer, which may have been a place in the open air or a simple building, was located by the Gangites River about a mile and one-half west of town.

When Paul located the place where the women . . . gathered, he presented the gospel. He did not hesitate to preach to males or females, slaves or free, Jews or Gentiles.²

Lydia was a seller of purple cloth. This purple color came from a shellfish, the murex, or from the root of a plant. She was from Thyatira, a city known for its commerce in Asia Minor. She was a worshiper of God, a term used for Gentiles (and those in Thessalonica and Athens) who were not proselytes to Judaism but who did worship Yahweh. Even so, they were not members of the New Testament church, the body of Christ. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. Again Luke stressed the sovereignty of God in bringing salvation. It was God who opened her heart and allowed her to believe.

Lydia heard the missionaries' message and was then baptized, as she stated her faith in Christ. Scholars believe that members of her household probably included her children, and her servants, if she was a widow. This was common in the New Testament when the head of the home accepted Christ the "household" members came to Christ also.

¹ Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Streams, Ill., Life Application Study Bible, 2018

² Abraham, A. Kenneth, ed., The Matthew Henry Study Bible, 1994, 2261

Lydia was a business woman and a woman of considerable means, as her house was large enough to accommodate the members that already lived there and provide space and food for the four male missionaries, without embarrassment.³

We learn a few things from the story that apply to us in the church. First as we make our plans for what we are going to do for God, let us be pray-ful and listen to what God wants us to do. It sounded to Paul and Silas like a wonderful idea to go and preach in the east. But that is not what God wanted them to do at that time. The nominating committee has asked several people to service as officers, chairs of committees, elders, and members of the diaconate. But what we want is that God's will be done and then we will know that every person is using their gifts for the increase, improvement, and maintenance of this congregation. That means we need to do what God wants us to do.

The other thing we learn is that God uses mothers, women head of households, and business women to support the growth of the church. When Lydia accepted Christ, she had influence over her children and her employees and led them to Christ as well. One scholar said that when the head of the house become a Christian that means the house becomes a Christian home. Ladies, this means that God has given us great responsibilities. We are to encourage our children, our grandchildren, our great-grandchildren, friends, neighbors and co-worker to give their lives to Christ. Paul said in one of his letters to one church that he established that the believing wife or husband purifies and sanctifies the marriage, which affects the unbelieving spouse and the children of the marriage. But in this passage we understand that if the woman works outside the home, or has employees, because she is self-employed or a business owner, her faith also affects the lives and faith of all those which whom she comes in contact.

³ Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1993, The Word In Life Study Bible, New Testament Ed., 479

Mothers, women, don't underestimate your role. God has given you responsibilities to love and nurture the family. Lydia went a step further. As the first European convert to Christ, she opened her home to be the place where the missionaries stayed as their home base. It becomes the center of worship and instruction. On Friday I attended the Church Women United Friendship Day of Greater Flint with Sandy Ryan. It was hosted here. I was impressed that these women from Methodist, Presbyterian, Catholic, and other churches were modeling for all of us how Christians can work together in prayer, planning, and execution of those plans to the glory of God as they worship and show how we can have a common witness regardless to denominational differences.

Men, women, boys and girls, you also can learn that you can do your part in supporting the gospel, in the church, home, business, community and world. Thanks be unto God.⁴

⁴Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:398