



Tower of Strength

**“The name of the Lord is a strong tower
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”**

—Proverbs 18:10

The Conversion of Lydia

A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a certain man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Therefore, putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis; and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony; and we were staying in this city for some days.

And on the Sabbath day, we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled. And a certain 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. And when she had 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 (Acts 16:9–15).

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So begins the account of Paul's taking the gospel into Europe. There are many important lessons to learn from this incident.

1.) Never ignore or underestimate anyone.

After his vision, Paul may have assumed he would preach to a Macedonian man. Turns out he preached to an Asian woman! Paul made his way to Philippi for its greater opportunities to influence the masses. Turns out his first audience was not the marketplace, the hall of philosophy, or a synagogue, but a little gathering of Jewish women.

Paul could have refused to waste his time with a riverside prayer meeting of women. But he didn't, and there proved to be his first convert in all of Europe.

Let us never forget that, all around us at this very instant, there are opportunities to preach the gospel to people who would respond, if they could only hear. We have just overlooked them thus far. We haven't demonstrated care for them thus far. We must speak up.

2.) Diligent faith is often rewarded.

Let's consider Lydia for a moment. The phrase "a worshiper of God" is almost always a technical term for a Jewish proselyte. We can safely assume that Lydia was a Gentile convert. She was a fabric seller traveling on business, whose main home was in Thyatira.

Thus, there were certain impediments to her worshipping God. She could have focused on her business. Undoubtedly the other merchants were open. It was probably disheartening that there was no real synagogue in town—a feeling I've sometimes had while on vacation when finding a group of 10–15 Christians to worship with.

What great faith Lydia showed in unfavorable circumstances, to take the time to pause and observe the Sabbath, and join herself with whatever little group was meeting to pray and read. Those who make time for worship often find they receive a greater blessing than they expected! Because she came, she heard the gospel. I don't believe for a moment this was a chance encounter. God heard her prayers, as clearly as he heard Cornelius's prayers and saw the Ethiopian's scroll, and sent the messenger.

3.) God opens hearts to respond to the word.

Often, we focus on the “sinner’s part” in salvation. For good reason. There’s no question that the gospel is an imperative, and that a person hearing the gospel must hear, believe, and respond. When one hears the gospel, there is something he must “do” (Acts 2:37, 9:6, 16:30, etc), including being baptized. God will not overrule a person’s will; the Holy Spirit can be resisted (Acts 7:51, for example). I stand by the conviction that Calvinism completely misunderstands the role of man in God’s plan of salvation. Being saved is not a passive process. When the word, “the power of God for salvation,” enters his mind, a person doesn’t wait to see what God will do next; instead, he leaps at the opportunity to be saved!

But we go too far if we believe that God is absent from this process. There is no need to hide from Acts 16:14. Let us pray that God will “open doors” for the gospel to be preached (Col. 4:3). God will often bring together a seeker and a preacher, if both are diligent. Let us pray that God will grant wisdom (James 1:5). Let us pray for God to touch the hearts of individual people with whom we are studying. We must plant and water, but God gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:6). When someone is particularly closed-minded to the gospel, let us pray that God will send the kind of circumstances that will cause them to focus on spiritual things.

It’s not that God forced Lydia to be saved. “God forced her to believe,” would be inconsistent with the rest of the New Testament. But, God opened the doors, provided the right circumstances, sent her the preacher, and removed the obstacles, to help her respond to the word. When Lydia stands before God, she will not smugly pat herself on the back and remember how she achieved salvation, but will collapse in unending thanksgiving that God secured, recorded, and communicated salvation to her! We do not congratulate ourselves for obeying; we thank God for providing. As Paul later wrote to the same Philippians, “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you ... confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you, will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:3–6).

4.) Get involved right away.

Lydia immediately put her new-found faith in Jesus to work. She brought the evangelists to her home to speak to her “household” and they were converted to Christ. She opened her home to the evangelists to use it as a base of operations.

Apparently, her home soon became the meeting place for the church, for it is there that Paul and Silas returned after their arrest, where they “saw the brethren ... encouraged them and departed” (16:40).

We can only guess how many disciples Paul made in Philippi before pressing on to Thessalonica. But we do know that when he writes his letter to the Philippian church (maybe 8–10 years later), its tone is extremely positive, and its addressed to a very active and faithful congregation. In fact, it was one of the few congregations that supported Paul’s work elsewhere in the region (Phil. 4:15–19). Surely, Lydia’s instant and ongoing work had a big hand in the success of the gospel in Philippi.

—*John Guzzetta*

Quote of the Week:

“Marriage describes a publicly acknowledged sexual union between a man and a woman, which creates rights and obligations between the couple and any children the union may produce. Marriage as a public tie obligates not only the fathers, but the fathers’ kin, to recognize the children of this union. In every society, marriage is the sexual union where childbearing and raising is applauded and encouraged. Marriage is the way in which every society attempts to channel the erotic energies of men and women into a relatively narrow but highly fruitful channel—to give every child the father his or her heart desires.

“Marriage is not a way of expressing approval for an infinite variety of human affectional or sexual ties; it consists, by definition, of isolating and preferring certain types of unions over others. By socially defining and supporting a particular type of sexual union, the society defines for its young what the preferred relationship is and what purposes it serves.”

—*Maggie Gallagher*