

Faithful Response
Acts 16:9-15
May 22, 2022

Last week we had the account of Peter and the sheet being let down with all sorts of animals in it. He was told to kill and eat. Peter didn't want to do that but in the next few minutes, he is brought to know that what he had considered unclean was now declared clean by God. Clean-unclean, chosen, and those who were outcasts, not one of the Israelites. Quite a shift in thinking and yet because he heard from the Lord that the unclean was now clean, he was willing to follow the three men to Caesarea where he came to know, to understand that the Lord was giving the same gift to the Gentiles as He did to Peter and the rest of the Jews. Peter said: Acts 11:17 If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way? He was saying it was God's way to bring the Lord Jesus Christ to the whole world.

This week we have another vision, this time given to Paul. This vision is of a man from Macedonia who was standing and urging Paul to come to Macedonia. Paul took this as God calling him to preach the gospel there.

On the way there he and those who were with him, make some stops. One is in Philippi. They stop for a few days and while there, on the Sabbath they went down to the river where they got a chance to visit with some women. The exact words they were told, isn't told us but in the teaching, and the hearing by the women, one woman named Lydia from the town of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, had her heart opened by God to take to heart, as it were, those words that brought her to faith. She heard and was changed, she and her household were baptized and she then invited Paul and those with him to stay at her house.

This is our text for today. It may seem like such a simple thing but isn't it like our everyday lives? Oh, maybe not the vision but the desire to go and do what the Lord would have us do and as we are going about our lives, there are those times when we get a chance to sit and talk with someone or someones. Some have their hearts open to what we say about the Lord. It may come about unexpectedly or there may have been other visits that have led up to that day. Do we know when the Lord will open a heart to hear? No, we don't. We know what He says though, Isaiah 55:11 so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

Isaiah knew that the word that went out from his mouth was like rain in a dry land. It would result in what the Lord wanted it to do. The Lord opened the heart of Lydia to where she believed what was taught her. No longer just the Law, but the Gospel of the one who gave His life as a ransom for many. She heard of baptism as the new circumcision, not just for the male of the specie but for all, she and her whole household.

She heard, with her two ears of what now was. Now, everyone was to look to the Lord Jesus who lived, died and then rose again, after paying for the sins of all. She heard and you have heard with your ears as Paul wrote in Romans 10:12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing His riches on all who call on Him. He then quotes from the prophet Joel 2:32 For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Paul was intent on going to the Gentiles. Yes, he witnessed to the Jews too but his was the ministry to the Gentiles. He was headed to Macedonia. There he would meet Jews but many more Gentiles.

Lydia had been blessed by the Lord. She got to hear from Paul and had her heart changed to believe. First off, she let her family know what she had come to know. They too wanted what she had and they, upon hearing her good news, now had good news of their own to tell.

Paul was led to go to the river to see if they might find a place to pray. There is no mention of a prayer meeting but of a group of women who had come together for one reason or another. When he had the man from Macedonia speak to him in the vision of coming to help, did he think that he would be bringing the gospel to some women?

We see Paul going to synagogues and the like but here he is down by the river, witnessing there too. The time was right, the people were willing to listen and the Holy Spirit was already there preparing the heart of Lydia. We don't hear if any of the other women who heard Paul and those with him but maybe Lydia would be the one to speak to the others over time to where they too wouldn't resist the Holy Spirit and be brought to faith.

Do you know when the opportunity to witness of Jesus will be? You don't have to be looking for a place to pray as Paul and those with him were looking for. It may be when you too least expect it.

We don't know what was said, what was asked but this woman of God was receptive to be let in on the rest of the story as Paul Harvey used to say. The rest of the story for her was that God had come to earth as He promised their original parents. They hoped it would be in their day which for Adam was over 900 years. What a long wait on a promise never to be seen come and yet how lucky Lydia must have felt, #1 that she happened to be visiting from Thyatira, #2 that she was there, in that spot on the river, #3 that Paul was there that Sabbath and he was willing to visit with them about their Messiah who had come, went to the cross and died for their sins, rose from the grave and ascended to heaven where He now rules.

No doubt she wanted to know what she must do, coming from the religion of the Jews with all the laws they sought to keep. How exciting it must have been to hear of baptism that brings the person into the family of God who is the perfect Father.

We can only guess of the conversation but whatever it was, you too have the same information about Jesus as Paul and the others with him. Whose heart is it that is going to listen? Wouldn't it be nice to know ahead of time and yet how much would we lose out on, by not getting to know even those who may never have their heart changed.

I know each of you know others who maybe even are friends with who are not believers. Do you only associate with those who know Jesus and what He had done for them? Yet, what is your hope for those who don't believe? It is that some day they will stop resisting the Holy Spirit. Yes, we will be in prayer for them and for ourselves that we will be ready with those words of eternal life, words that will trigger a longing for what we have and what we know they need.

Paul went to the region of Macedonia to bring the Good News of Jesus to a people needing to hear of Jesus. Was the vision from a man who could see that the fields were ready for harvest? How encouraged Paul must have been to see the Holy Spirit instill faith in Lydia. Going to pray and instead, the Holy Spirit directs him to some women on the banks of a river, who is ready to hear.

She invites them into her home there. She could have had a couple homes. The purple goods trade was said to be a good one. Having a base of operations in the leading city of the district of Macedonia would probably make it easier to get around to the various outlets for her goods.

We think of Jesus only really being in a few communities in a 100 mile area. He touched so many lives in that area but how many also heard who traveled miles away, back home to let those at home know what they come to know while on their travels. You can imagine that as they traveled home and got in discussions of where they had been and where they were going that the matter of Jesus, the guy who said things that were almost too good to be true. How about those miracle healings, the casting out of demons and the knowing of things that only someone very wise could know would give opportunity to tell the Story of Jesus?

We may not be traveling to foreign countries but how many people out there do you know that have come from other countries to live here in the US? The donut people are from, I think Cambodia. There are all sorts of military who have found a spouse in some foreign land and have brought them back with them. Even though we don't like seeing what is happening on the border, how many coming will want and need to have Americans to take them under their wing and help them to acclimatize to being here and become a productive American with Christian values and will then take with them the Good News of their Savior to a whole new bunch of people to receive what they have to say about Jesus and His good news for them.

We think of how the Romans brought a period where travel was easier. They made it safe and provided roads to travel on that could get you to where you were going more quickly. How far did the wise men travel to come to Bethlehem? Quite a ways. They came and gave gifts to the Christ child and then went home by another way, not just one way to get home but another.

Who are you going to meet this week? Could it be a Lydia? Or are you going to not be ready for the one Jesus brings into your lives? Yes, you can live only for yourselves, but how many are out there who are going to die in their sins while you have the comfort of knowing your sins are forgiven.

You have been made a part of the family of God. It is a family that is always looking for more new brothers and sisters. Are you ready for a few more? Who knows if the person may have a faithful response to your witness, they may even become a very good friend in the mean time.