

Three very different people

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[0 : 00] Now, let's turn to that passage that we read in the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 16. Acts chapter 16, and I want to look at three or four verses there throughout the chapter.

First of all, verse 14. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us, whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.

And then verse 18. And this did she many days, but Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the Spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.

And then verses 30 and 31. Jailer brought them out and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. We read here of three very different people who all experienced the power of God's love.

[1 : 18] Three very different people. And in three very different sets of circumstances. And I want to look at these three tonight with you.

Because this brings home to us that although there is only one way to God, that is through the Lord Jesus Christ and his finished work, yet there are many different ways in which people come to the Lord Jesus and come to know the power of his salvation.

These were three cases of conversion of God touching their lives in various ways.

And they were in a very strategic position. Because these were, as far as we know, the first three Christians in Europe. This was a very strategic mission of the Apostle Paul.

When he responded to that vision of the man of Macedonia. He crossed over from Asia to Europe. An area of what we would call now present day Greece. And so the gospel came in this very powerful way to our continent.

[2 : 31] And we today, still to this day, are benefiting from the result of that mission of the Apostle Paul into Europe. But I want to focus with you on these three individuals and their experience as they came to know the power of the gospel.

And I want to apply that to ourselves here this evening in different ways. So that we may find, perhaps, some way the Lord speaking to us through the lives and experiences of these three.

First, I want to look with you at Lydia. Lydia, the seeker who finds. Because here, I believe, was a woman who was searching.

She was looking for something. We're told a little about her. We're told that she was a seller of purple of the city of Thyatira. In other words, she was a businesswoman. We don't know anything else about her family background.

She may have been a widow. She may have been a kind of self-made woman. We don't know.

There were such an ancient world. But certainly, she was a businesswoman. And probably well off.

[3 : 45] This was a special kind of cloth. A special kind of dye that came from that area in Asia Minor.

And therefore, it was something in great demand throughout the world. And no doubt, she was quite well off because of it. But in spite of the fact that she probably had so much materially, and had possibly quite an interesting life, and been able to travel from this place to that, yet there was something missing in her life.

She felt the need of something. Now, is that your position here this evening? You may have many things materially. Your life may be good at many levels.

But yet, there's something missing. There's some emptiness. There's something that you're looking for that you haven't quite yet got. And it may be, like Lydia, that you feel that you ought to be looking in the direction of religion.

That's, in fact, what she was doing. She came from a Gentile nation. Yet, she had somehow or another come in contact with Jewish people.

[5 : 00] Now, there wasn't a Jewish synagogue in Philippi. I think we can deduce that quite properly, because where there was a requisite number of men, there could be a synagogue established.

But here, we read that there were women who went to the riverside, and they had prayer there. So, probably this means that there wasn't a big Jewish community there at all, just a few and a few women who were interested.

And somehow or another, Lydia had come in contact with them, and what they stood for and what they talked about struck a chord with her. There was something attractive about the Jewish religion. Something that she had not found in her pagan background, with all the number of gods and goddesses, and all the paraphernalia of pagan religion.

Here, there were those who worshipped the one God. The one God who had created the whole world. The one God who had given his word, his commandments, his law, to men, to the Jewish people.

[6 : 13] And there was something very attractive about the Jewish religion to Lydia, and to many other Gentiles, because we read of other people who were God-fearers, they were called.

They didn't themselves go as far as becoming Jews, but they had an interest. They were people who were searching spiritually, and here they found something that seemed a stage better than what they had found in paganism.

There was something upright and something noble about the Jewish religion and their attempt to follow God's law. So here was a person who was searching.

I wonder if tonight that's true of you. You've sensed an emptiness in your life, and you are searching for the truth. And perhaps you've come a good distance in that search.

Perhaps you've come as far as Lydia. Perhaps you've come as far as the stage of recognizing that there is one true God, and you're seeking to know him. Perhaps you have a great attraction to the word of God, to the Bible, and you would respect what the Bible tells you.

[7 : 23] You would respect what the church stands for. But still, there's something missing. You still haven't arrived. You still haven't come to know, really, what it's all about.

But, at least, you're on the right road. Because Lydia here was at the place of prayer. And it's good that you're here this evening.

Whatever has brought you here, whatever it may be, it's good that you're in the place of prayer. It's good that you're in the place where the things of God are spoken about. Because there, just as in the case of Lydia, God may take these things, take his own word, and apply them to yourself, to your own situation.

Well, Lydia here this day, went as usual to the place of prayer. And there was something surprising. There were some visiting Jews. Some men, who were able to expound the scriptures, who were able to bring them a message, and they brought a very surprising message.

She listened to the Apostle Paul, as he spoke not only about the Old Testament, but about how these things were fulfilled in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[8 : 39] So, she listened, and she was aware that this was something that she lacked, something that she didn't know.

She'd never heard this before, and it came to her totally as something new. Now, I wonder, have you had that experience as well? That you've been searching for the truth, you've perhaps had a respect for spiritual things, and for the church, and so on, but have you had this experience of hearing something new?

Hearing the gospel coming to you in a way in which you've never heard it before? Perhaps all these years you may have felt that you were listening to what the preacher was saying, but you never grasped really what it was about.

Have you come to know the surprising thing of God speaking to you a new thing? Showing to you all the things, all the parts of the Bible coming together making sense only in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Now, that's what happened there that day for Lydia. She was changed. Now, what exactly was changed about her, we may ask? Well, we're told here that it was her heart.

[9 : 58] Whose heart the Lord opened? she was listening to what Paul was speaking about, listening to his preaching of the gospel. And something happened.

Something happened to her heart. Now, in the Bible, the heart does not mean primarily the emotions. It includes that. The emotions are affected, but the heart in the Bible means the very center of the person.

What you really are deep down. not what people may see on the outside, but what you truly are. So, what happened to Lydia that day was that the word of God had a profound effect on the very depth of her being.

She was changed from the inside out. And how was it changed? What happened to change her? We're told that her heart was opened.

Now, that would seem to imply that before that her heart was closed. And you know, that's true of every one of us. We may have an interest in the church.

[11 : 05] We may have an interest in the word of God. We may have an interest in hearing the preaching of the word. But at a certain level, it all washes over us. Because our heart is closed.

We've closed our heart to the impact of God's own word. It has no impact upon our lives, no change because our heart is closed.

And in this case, in the case of Lydia, her heart was opened. How did it open? Well, again we're told, the Lord opened her heart.

Whose heart the Lord opened? And you see, that's what happens when someone becomes a Christian. Christian. It's not something marvelous that they do themselves.

It's not that they do something that entitles them to be called a Christian or to become worthy to be a Christian. It's that the Lord does something from beginning to end, that the Lord sends his son into the world.

[12 : 12] The Lord applies that work of the Lord Jesus Christ to our hearts. He opens up our hearts so that we receive Christ. We trust in him.

It's the Lord's doing from beginning to end. Do you know that experience? Do you know that work of the Holy Spirit of God bringing home to you the meaning, significance of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

That's what happened to Lydia that day. The Lord touched her. The Lord opened her heart. heart. Now see how quietly this happened. Here she was sitting by the river bank in Philippi and Paul was preaching and a change came over her.

There were no bright lights, nothing dramatic. It happened oh so quietly. Now you see, that may have already happened to you, but you may be thinking, ah, but that's not enough.

I need some kind of dramatic experience or I need some kind of thing that will assure me that I really have trusted in Christ. And we may be looking for something that the Lord is not giving to us.

[13 : 28] And the Lord is not going to give to us. Because the Lord doesn't deal with everybody in the way in which she dealt with Saul of Tarsus who became the Apostle Paul. Not everyone has that kind of Damascus road experience.

Lydia, just very quietly, her heart was opened and she accepted Christ. Now that's true of you, that you know why Christ died and that you look to the Lord Jesus Christ for your salvation.

The Lord has opened your heart. Now you are a Christian and you are entitled to come to the Lord's table on the coming Lord's day. Not because of your work, but because of God's work in Christ and in your heart.

Well that's the first case we meet here, the first Christian we meet in this great mission of Paul to Europe. But then there's the second person and here we have not a seeker who finds, but the slave who is freed.

And here we see a complete contrast to Lydia. It would be hard to imagine a greater contrast.

Lydia, the businesswoman, Lydia, the person who was upright and concerned to know God and to keep his laws.

[14 : 50] And here we have this servant girl, this slave girl, we would call her nowadays, and a very different character from Lydia. She was a slave to masters, first of all, people who owned her, and she was a slave also to some kind of occult power.

literally it was that she was a slave to the spirit of python, a kind of snake spirit that the Greeks believed in, that had the power of prophecy, of foretelling what was to take place, a kind of fortune teller.

Now it's difficult for us today to assess exactly whether this was in fact some manifestation of the Greek religion in terms of this occult power, or whether it was a great deal of chicanery and a great deal of double dealing and that kind of thing.

But at any rate we can see that this girl was certainly under an evil power, an evil spirit. And she, we're told, was fascinated by Christianity, by what Paul and Silas had to say.

And we did in verse 17, she followed Paul and cried, saying, these men are the servants of the Most High God, which show unto us the way of salvation.

[16:23] Now wasn't that interesting? She was saying the sober truth concerning Paul and the others. She was giving a very good witness to what Paul and the others stood for.

Yet there was something about the way in which she was doing this, obviously, that was very distressing to Paul and the others. She was following them and did this on many occasions, several days, and it was obvious that this was grieving Paul, because it was coming out in a way that was, of course, not obviously glorifying to God at all, but rather the opposite, bringing discredit on them. And so Paul turns and says to the Spirit, I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour. Now, there are many people today too who are fascinated by the spiritual world, and many people enmeshed in the occult, many people enslaved by these things, just as this girl was, and it's a growing problem in our society, and people are dabbling with all kinds of things, whether it's under the name of New Age or whatever, but what they're dabbling with is the same ancient kind of spirituality and occult powers as existed in the ancient world. And many people may be doing it without believing in the reality of these powers, but many will get their fingers burned, and more than their fingers burned when they discover that there is a real evil power.

Now, maybe you can't say that you have that kind of problem or that kind of fascination with the spirit world, but every one of us, I'm sure, to one extent or another, have to admit that we are slaves to something.

[18:30] Here was this girl who was a slave and who was being exploited by her human masters and also she was a slave to a spiritual power.

Now, if we are honest and if we allow the word of God to speak to us, to enable us to be honest, we will admit that there are many things in our lives that smack of slavery also.

The Lord Jesus Christ said, he who commits sin is a slave to sin. And that may become apparent to you at one particular point or another, where you can see that there's perhaps one sin.

That no matter how you may try to deal with it, to get rid of it, to turn from it, it's still there, it keeps recurring, and indeed it keeps getting worse and worse.

You're enslaved by that sin. You're an addict to sin. It may not be anything as sensational as the occult or as some of the other more obviously sensational sins like drug addiction or addiction to drink or whatever.

[19:43] Maybe a tendency to gossip, in a hurtful way about other people. Maybe a tendency to lose your temper or whatever it may be.

But at that point you know that you are not free, you are a slave to sin. Well this girl was free of her slavery to evil by the name of Jesus Christ.

I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her, Paul said, and he came out the same out. The girl was totally transformed, no longer was she under the domination of this evil spirit.

She was free from that power, so much free that her masters recognised it and saw that their hope of gain was now completely gone. She was no longer an attraction for the people that paid them a lot of money for her fortune telling ability.

So a real change had come over that girl. Now it's not stressed here what happened to the girl afterwards or how profound was the change in her or any of these things, but it would appear to me that here was the second person that we're told about who experienced the power of Jesus Christ.

[21:01] Here was another person in this new church that the Apostle Paul was establishing there in Philippi. Have you come to know that experience of being freed from sin, being freed from slavery to sin by the Lord Jesus Christ?

Do you know that ongoing work in your heart that although maybe you fall and you fail, yet you know that the Lord is working in you and he's dealing with sin in your life and you have the knowledge that he will conquer, he who has begun a good work in you will bring it to completion.

Again, if you know the Lord dealing with sin in that way in your life, again that's an indication that you are a believer, but again you are entitled not because of anything in yourself, but because of the Lord's work for you, his redemption, to come to the Lord's table and to rejoice in his presence. Well then thirdly and finally we see again a totally different kind of person. Here we see the man we know simply as the Philippian jailer, the suicide who was saved.

Here was a man that we first meet of in terms of his profession. He was the jailer, in all probability he was an ex-Roman soldier, a retired Roman soldier, there were many of these in Philippi, it was a Roman colony and this would be an ideal job for such a person.

[22 : 40] And when we meet him at first he's simply going about his business. He comes into the story because Paul and Silas come into his story. They are arrested and they're beaten and they're thrown into prison because of what they did in setting the girl free.

Now don't think that because you become a Christian or because you are a Christian life is going to be easy and everybody's going to love you because sometimes we will have to speak out about things or do things that will contradict the wisdom of this world and particularly at points where that may cross people's values with regard to material things or whatever as it did here then people will become annoyed.

People became annoyed with Paul and Silas and they set the law on them and they had them thrown in prison. Now the jailer was just going along with his normal business.

They were people committed to him and as far as we know he was quite happy to throw them into prison and certainly he put them into the innermost prison where they would be most secure and he put their feet fast in the stocks.

Now that had a twofold purpose. Not only did it keep them secure that they wouldn't be able to escape but also there was an element of torture in it too. So here was a man brutal, perhaps brutalized Roman soldier going about his normal business as jailer and as far as he was concerned this business of Christianity had nothing to do with him and he was quite happy to keep these Christians in chains.

[24 : 26] And there are many people in the world still like that who perhaps don't go the extent of throwing Christians in prison but they're quite happy as long as the church keeps quiet and doesn't impinge upon their lives.

And many people have many ways of silencing the Christian message, of turning off and not listening to it. And that may be true of yourself this evening. It's very easy for you to silence the message that perhaps begins to speak to you and you turn off and you let your mind wander off in other directions.

You can do that just as surely as the Philippian jailer did it in a very direct and brutal way. But then in one dreadful moment his whole life was turned upside down.

In one dreadful moment he lost all hope for living. Now it may seem surprising to us as we read this with modern eyes. There was this tremendous earthquake, the prison was shaken, the doors were opened, the chains of the prisoners were all broken, they were free to escape.

And the jailer woke up and in a flash he saw the situation, the doors opened and he jumped to the conclusion the prisoners had all escaped. Then we're told he went to take his own life.

[25 : 50] Seeing the prison doors open he drew out his sword and would have killed himself supposing that the prisoners had been fled. Now why did he do that? Explanation is that the prison warden was responsible for keeping the prisoners and if they escaped his life was forfeit.

We read of that earlier in the book of Acts. The same thing happening when the apostles escaped from prison. Now the jailer, and again here's an indication that he was a retired Roman soldier, soldier, was going to do the honourable thing.

Rather than all the shame for himself and for his family of being found guilty of dereliction of duty, he was going to do the honourable thing and take his own life.

And in that moment you see he had despaired of all hope of life. And perhaps suddenly up before him came all the issues of life and death, all the things that he hadn't thought clearly about before, all the things he had put out of his mind before, they all came before him now.

And then we read that he came to ask the greatest question of all. Very shortly after that he came to ask the question, what must I do to be saved?

[27 : 12] I wonder have you truly come to ask that question for yourself? And if you haven't, let's see how this man came to that position where he asked that most profound of all questions.

Why did he ask it? Well, there was one thing that caused him to ask it, and that was the first words, first direct words, he heard from Christians.

what was the first direct words he heard from Christians to himself? They were these words, do yourself no harm.

That was the first thing that he heard directly to him from Christians, from Paul and Silas. Do yourself no harm. Here were people who were concerned for him and for his well-being.

There he was, about to take his life, and he had totally misapprehended the whole situation. The prisoners were still there. And Paul and Silas, instead of behaving as perhaps many of the other prisoners would have wanted to behave, instead of them keeping quiet, and when the man had killed himself, then escaping, they spoke out.

[28 : 31] They shouted, don't harm yourself. And that must have had a profound effect upon that man. Here were people who were concerned concerned for him.

Concerned for him in his distress, in his despair, so much so that they shouted out to stop him. Now, I find that tremendously interesting.

And it's something that those of us who are Christians should bear in mind all the time. You see, the thing that so often sticks in our memory about this passage is the question, what must I do to be saved and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you'll be saved.

And so often that is expressed as the heart of the gospel, and so it is. But how did the man come to ask the question, first of all? He came to ask it because he heard from Christians a message, don't harm yourself.

Now I wonder, is the world hearing that message from us tonight? Are they hearing a message from us saying, don't harm yourself? you're involved in drug addiction or drinking too much or this sin or that sin, you're destroying your lives and we're concerned about you.

[29 : 43] Don't harm yourself because you are people of value. You are people made in the image of God. That image may be marred and broken, you may be alienated from God, but you are people made in God's image whom God cares about, that he speaks and he says, do yourself no harm.

arm. Remember the story Jesus told of the ten coins. The woman had lost one of them. She went and she searched diligently until she found it.

Now why did she look for that lost coin? Because that one lost coin had the same value when it was lost as it had when it was with all the others.

It still bore upon it the mark that made it valuable. And in the same way the Lord Jesus came into the world to seek and to save sinners who were made in God's image but are lost.

And he has come to bring us back and to restore us. So we need to communicate that message to the world around us. but tonight do you know that message for yourself?

[30 : 57] Do you know that God cares for you and he's saying to you don't harm yourself?

Sometimes you may despair and you may say well I can't cope with life. I can't deal with this sin or that sin or whatever. God's word comes to you saying don't harm yourself don't put yourself down.

I care for you and I'm concerned for you and I will show you the way out of this situation. Now of course there are other reasons why this man then came and said sirs what must I do to be saved? Because why did he phrase his question in that way? And the reason isn't far to seek. What after all had that slave girl been saying about these men?

She'd been saying these are the servants of the most high God which show unto us what the way of salvation. Now she'd been shouting that for days in Philippi.

So everybody knew what these men were about. Whether they had some sort of caricature of what Christianity is it doesn't matter. And isn't that interesting? You see the Lord will not be without witness.

[32 : 03] It may have been difficult for the Apostle Paul and the others to communicate their message to all the different groups of society in Philippi. But God ensured in the surprising way from a very surprising source that some of the essential words of their message would be heard by many people as this girl went about shouting.

So often the devil overdoes himself doesn't he? And you see sometimes from surprising sources something comes that can help people to understand what God's word is all about.

Here we see an example of it. And I wonder perhaps has God been speaking to you maybe from a source that you might not expect at all. And something has made you sit up and take notice.

That's God working perhaps in a surprising way. Perhaps not in church. Perhaps something someone else has said. Maybe somebody who doesn't attend church at all. But something they've said has set you thinking.

You see already this man had something there in the back of his mind that perhaps he had dismissed at the time but it came back now with a vengeance. He had lost all hope. He was in despair. What had he to do to be saved?

[33 : 19] It was so natural to speak now in these terms. He had heard the idea of salvation, of being saved. No doubt there was something else as well although it's not highlighted here.

But remember we're told that Paul and Silas there they were their backs sore from the beating of feet in the stocks and at midnight they were praying singing praise to God.

Now the jailer also no doubt would have heard something of that whether all of it or not we don't know but something of it maybe again something of that stuck in his mind.

Maybe he didn't think much about it when he went off to sleep but maybe it was working away in his subconscious. There's something different about these men. They've been beaten.

They've been put in prison yet they're still praising their God. What kind of saviour is this that these men know? Now there's something of great encouragement to us as Christians.

[34 : 23] Remember when you're in trouble when you're afflicted. Remember what a tremendous witness it is to other people if under affliction and under trials of one kind or another you bear up and you bear witness to the Lord and that you don't complain and moan as other people do but that you express thanks to God for the benefits that you do have.

That can have a tremendous impact upon people and how often I've heard as I've visited people in hospital how often I've heard of the witness of a Christian suffering and in suffering the impact it has had upon non-Christian people in that ward or even the staff in that ward.

Here we see perhaps an example of that kind of thing with this man. And so he came to ask this greatest question what must I do to be saved? Well God worked that question in his heart so that he asked it but God also had the answer ready through Paul and Silas.

Now isn't it interesting again that Paul and Silas didn't embark on some kind of complicated theological discussion with the man and say wait a minute now you can't do anything.

You know we've got to get this right about the sovereignty of God first you can't do anything. They didn't say that. They didn't go into any great complicated details or depths about the thing.

[35 : 57] There was one thing this man needed to know that there was a way of salvation. He needed to know that there was hope. He needed to know that the Lord Jesus Christ was available the Lord Jesus Christ had come into the world for sinners just like him.

There was a way of salvation and there was something demanded of him and that was that he believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Literally it is believe on or believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words you're going to place your trust on him as if you're going to lean on someone when you're in trouble or if you're going to stand upon a rock in a slippery place or something like that kind of idea.

That's exactly what the man was in. He was in a desperate condition and he needed to know that there was one who was reliable who was able to save him. That's what we need to express today to people.

We need to tell them that there is hope there is a way of salvation and it is through what God has done in Jesus Christ. And we need to tell them simply what is required of him.

[37 : 03] They need to believe in Jesus. They need to believe certain things about him but they need to trust him personally. And that's the message that Paul and Silas gave to the man quite simply and that's the message that that man responded to.

Have you responded to that simple message of the gospel? There are profound depths in the gospel. There are great great questions that we can debate and discuss about things in the Bible but do you know the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Do you know the reality of these things in your own heart? Because until you have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ you're never going to make head nor tail of all these great theological discussions.

If tonight you have come to know the Lord Jesus you can say yes I believe on the Lord Jesus. I trust in him for my salvation. Then again you are entitled to come to the Lord's table not because of any great achievement that you have done.

It's not that you've done something to be saved. It's rather that the Lord Jesus Christ has done something to save you and you rely upon him. You trust in him.

[38 : 16] If you have done that then you are invited and welcome to come to the Lord's table too and to rejoice in his presence. So there we have it. Three very different people.

Three very different situations. And three different aspects of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Showing that the love of Jesus Christ can reach out to all different kinds and classes of people in different circumstances.

Showing us also that there is no one blueprint for the experience of coming to know the Lord Jesus Christ. God has created us as individuals and he deals with us as individuals.

Don't be looking for some kind of stereotyped way of coming to the Lord. Don't be putting limitations on the way in which the Lord will deal with you or has dealt with you.

If you have come to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ if you know his grace at work in your life by whatever means it has come by whatever path he has led you then you are a Christian and you come to the Lord's table as he has commanded you to remember the Lord's death because you see there is only one gospel and one Lord one saviour the Lord Jesus Christ and if you know him if you believe that he is Lord that he is the greatest that he is your saviour then you come to honour him and to thank him and to glorify him and to enjoy him not only here and now at the Lord's table on the Lord's day but you look forward to that time when you will glorify him and enjoy him forever and you will celebrate with him and you will take part in that marriage supper of the Lamb when there will be no separation and no leaving but an eternal enjoying of the presence of

[40 : 22] Christ forever. Let us pray. our gracious and loving Heavenly Father we thank you for your own word to us a word that lifts us up from the depths in which so often we find ourselves a word that speaks to us of the glory of the Lord Jesus and of your concern for us and we pray that this evening you would indeed prepare us in heart and mind for this weekend of celebration and of remembering the Lord's day.

O Lord convince us and convict us of our own sinfulness our own need of the Lord our own need of salvation and convince us to of the sufficiency of the work of Jesus Christ to cleanse us from all sin and point us to the Lord Jesus that we may look away from ourselves and away from everything that would distract us looking away to Jesus trusting holy in him.

We pray for rich blessing upon this congregation on this coming Lord's day and throughout the whole weekend bless those who come to preach the word and those who dispense the sacrament and we pray that all together the people of God here may be encouraged and may rejoice together and may greatly glorify the Lord Jesus.

We ask these things in his name and for his sake. Amen.