

Lydia

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[0 : 00] And we sat down and spake unto the women which resorted thither. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God Herodeth, 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 ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide there.

And she constrained us. You remember that over the last three Sabbath evenings, we've been dealing with the theme of personal encounter, as it is brought before us in the Gospels and in the Book of Acts.

And tonight we're going to look at this encounter which was had by this woman, Lydia, with the Lord Jesus Christ in his Gospel.

And I'm sure that you must have wondered when we chose this incident, what is there in the incident of Lydia's conversion that is so dramatic?

[1 : 51] Why would the minister choose the story of Lydia when we have the dramatic conversion of the Philippian jailer and the young girl with the spirit of divination?

Why Lydia? Well, I'll tell you why Lydia. Lydia. Because, I don't know if you knew, but Lydia is the first recorded European convert to the Christian faith.

And I always like to think of what happened here in the experience of Lydia in the Greek town of Philippi. That's the beginning of the world. That's the beginning of a series of ever-widening circles that at last reached out to these islands of the sea where we have our home.

So that the Gospel at last from Lydia reached right unto us. And perhaps tonight you're saying, no, Lydia's conversion wasn't a dramatic one.

It wasn't one of these bright light conversions. It wasn't one of these great phenomenal conversions like Paul the Apostle, like the Philippian jailer.

[3 : 11] It wasn't one of these sudden things. Perhaps not. But it seems to me that there are lessons in the conversion of this woman, Lydia, that are to be learned by every one of us here tonight.

And by everyone who would be a listener to the Gospel of the redeeming grace of God in Christ. Now tonight I'm going to look at Lydia's conversion from three different angles.

I'm going to look at this woman, Lydia, before she had this personal encounter. That's the first thought.

This woman before her conversion. And then secondly we're going to look at Lydia in her encounter with the Lord.

And then finally and thirdly we're going to look at the evidences that were left in Lydia's life. Which prove that she really did have a personal encounter and a soul-changing encounter with the Lord of glory, Jesus Christ.

[4 : 26] And you know, these three ways of looking at a conversion are always helpful to a congregation. Because I would have tonight the temerity to believe that there are three, perhaps three types of people in this gathering.

There are some of you here tonight and maybe you're in the period before conversion. And maybe you spend a lot of time wondering what is it that keeps you from Christ.

There are others of you who know tonight but you're in the throes of conversion. And you know for a soul in the throes of a true saving conversion to Christ.

It's a real trauma. It's a real big thing in a person's life to be in this valley of decision where men are brought into the groups of the grace of God in the gospel.

And then I dare say there are some in this gathering tonight. And you're looking back on something that happened in your life. You're looking back on a conversion.

[5 : 42] And you're wondering, do I really have the evidences of one who is truly converted? One who has passed from death into life.

Well, let's look tonight at Lydia. And see if we get some help from this woman's experience as we view ourselves and as we examine ourselves in the light of the grace of God.

First of all, then, we have here this woman, Lydia, before she had a personal encounter with Jesus Christ.

And there are some things that we can pass over in a very short space of time that have been told us concerning this woman, Lydia.

First of all, I would like you to notice this woman was a Gentile. She came from Thyatira. That's where she belonged. Now, you know that in years after this, God had a church at Thyatira.

[6 : 50] But there wasn't much evidence of it at the time when Lydia was drawn by the grace of God to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There wasn't much sign of the grace of God at work in Thyatira when she was growing up. And yet, you know, strangely enough, this woman, Lydia, had been singled out by the grace of God, by God and his grace.

She had been singled out by the grace of God from all the multitudes in that town. And you know, I believe that right back, this woman was influenced by the grace of God.

There was a quiet work going on in her life. A work that made her dissatisfied with the heathen gods of Thyatira.

A work that showed her the superficiality and the emptiness of the idol worship of Philippi, where she had gone to work.

[7 : 58] And you know, there may be someone here tonight, and you're just like that. But maybe you see, you know, that so much of organized religion is so empty for you.

And it doesn't really meet the needs in your life. Somehow or other, you see that organized religion lets you down, right, left, and center.

And somehow or other, it doesn't have the answer to your particular needs in your particular life.

Well, I think this woman, Lydia, could follow you.

Because, you see, she was a Gentile employed in a flourishing trade. And yet, it seems to me that there was an emptiness in her heart, and an emptiness in her life, that the known religion of Thyatira, and the idol worship of Philippi, couldn't really get to grips with.

There was an emptiness in her life, despite all her prosperity, in the turkey red dye industry. That's what she was doing. She was a seller of purple.

[9 : 11] And Thyatira was known as a center of this industry, the turkey red dye. Because Thyatira really is in Asia Minor, in Turkey.

And she became a merchant of that dye, and a merchant of the cloth that was dyed in the turkey red. And she went to ply her trade in Philippi, amongst all the idolatry of that heathen city.

And yet, what happened to Lydia? She attached herself to a group of believers from the Jewish faith.

She was dissatisfied with the normal religion of the Gentiles. She didn't get anything out of the life of these people in Thyatira or in Philippi.

It was all idolatry. And she realized something very precious. She realized that there was one true God. The God who made heaven and earth.

[10 : 19] Who isn't to be worshipped in stone or in wood or in idols of any kind. But who is near to all those that call upon her.

You see, Lydia had become what we call a Jewish proselyte. And I believe that that was as a result of a movement.

A strange, strange movement. That was going on quietly in her life. A movement that made her fed up and dissatisfied with the many gods.

And her life was turned to look at the one God. My friend, has your life taken that kind of turn?

You've been surrounded by all the gods of this world.

You've been surrounded by the heathen ways of our nation in 1991. You realize that the syncretism and all the different appeals of the God of this world are all nothing.

[11 : 24] And you realize tonight that there's only one thing will meet the need of your life. An experience of the God of heaven.

The God who is near to all who call upon him. Who call in truth on him alone. And you know where she went with this desire in her heart. She went where seeking souls have always gone.

She went to a prayer meeting. You know, it never ceases to amaze me the way people think about prayer meetings. In the free church, in parts of the free church anyway, there's a belief that you're not supposed to go to the prayer meeting until you've found.

You don't go to the prayer meeting as a seeker. Oh no, you're afraid in case someone else thinks, oh there's something going on in that person's life. There's something happening there.

So you don't go to seek God in the prayer meeting. My friend, do you know, this woman was wiser than many of our people in the free church.

[12 : 32] I remember hearing the story of a minister who was conducting a prayer meeting. And a cow put its head around the door of the prayer meeting house in our village where he was. And he said, All people of this village, will you not look?

The cows are wiser than many in this village. They turn their head to the place where God's people are seeking him. My dear friends, why is it that as a heathen woman, a woman who grew up in heathendom, surrounded by apostasy and surrounded by this whole idolatry of Philippi, should turn her feet to the prayer meeting?

Why is it that she should go there to meet with certain devout women of the Jewish faith to pray to the one God of heaven? I'll tell you why. Because, you know, there was a yearning in Lydia's heart that nothing in the world could fill.

And she knew that where there was a worshipping people and a people who were turned to seek the Lord, that that's where she should be. And you know, it's time that some of us were to realize that very thing.

If you really want to get to grips with God, why are you not with the people of God in the prayer meeting? You know, last night I came out to the prayer meeting and I was looking around the church here and I was so saddened to see all the empty pews.

[14 : 06] And there were 26 or 27 of us gathered there last evening. And yet, you know, that's where God's people love to go. They love to join together in seeking the face of God and there's a blessing to be found where God's people turn in this direction.

That's the way it was for Lydia, you see. She was a woman in the path of duty going to the prayer meeting, seeking the Lord with these other devout women. And one day, God stepped in and God met her.

Where did he meet her? He met her in the prayer meeting. He met her where she was with these devout Jewish women. And then you'll notice something else.

She was a pious woman because the kind of attachment she had made to the Jewish faith was one that believed in prayer and in worship.

And I'm quite sure that where they gathered together in prayer and in worship, they also had the scriptures. You know, I love to see one thing in my Bible and it's this.

[15 : 21] The reverence that the Lord of Glory had for the Old Testament scriptures. Do you ever notice that? The reverence that Christ chose to the Old Testament scriptures.

He doesn't write it off. And so it was with this pious woman, Lydia. She had a deep reverence for the things of God and she was there with the people of God seeking the faith of God.

But you know, there was something that I've got to report about Lydia. Despite all the positive vibes that you might be getting about her, despite her curiosity, her devotion, her devotedness, all of that, there was something about Lydia that you've got to report and it's this.

She had a closed heart. Her heart was closed, firmly bolted against the things of God. And you know, that tells me something about the congregation that sits in front of me on a Lord's day.

It tells me something about congregations of God's people everywhere. that there could be beautiful lives, lives that are so, that are so alike the Christian.

[16 : 41] And yet, these lives could be there and the hearts could be closed to God. And I'm going to suggest to you some of the boats by which hearts are closed tight to the God of heaven who's put every Sabbath day under the preaching of the gospel.

Hearts and lives that are very, very determined never to have an empty place in the house of God. And yet, they're closed and they're bolted.

And let me try and put these bolts perhaps under certain classifications. There's someone here tonight and your heart is bolted tight against God.

And what kind of bolts are on your heart? Well, let me tell you. You're here this evening and your heart is bolted tight against the God of heaven with bolts that are rusty bolts of ignorance and unbelief and enmity against God.

You know, the Bible paints a very dark, oily picture of the natural heart. And the picture that the Bible paints of the natural heart is this.

[18:00] The natural man is enmity against God. The natural heart knows not God neither indeed can he. Why? Because, you see, there's the bolt of ignorance that are tight over the natural man's heart.

And let me tell you something about the bolt of ignorance that is on the human heart that is close to Christ. Let me tell you something about it. You're saying, oh, it's ignorance.

You can't help ignorance. my friend, don't be misinformed with regard to the facts of this ignorance. Because the Bible talks about the ignorance of the natural heart.

And the Bible again and again lays this down for us that mankind is culpable for his own ignorance. mankind is responsible for his own ignorance. It's not something by the by. It's not something that cannot be helped.

[19:07] That's not the kind of thing that this ignorance is at all. No, no. This ignorance is something for which you, my friend, are held responsible.

You know, in a court of law tonight, there may be someone standing there in a court of law. And that man might be charged by the law of the land of having broken the law.

And the man says, I didn't know that this was the law. I was ignorant. That's his claim. That's his defense. Will that defense stand in a court of law tonight?

I didn't know that this was the law. I didn't know that I was responsible. I didn't know that I was responsible for my ignorance.

Will that stand you on the last day, my friend? When you stand before the God of heaven, will your ignorance stand you? My friend, tonight, let me tell you of the bolt of ignorance is on your heart against Christ.

[20:17] And if your heart is tight shut to God because it is bolted with ignorance, let me tell you this, you're chargeable for that ignorance before God.

You're guilty. It's part of your guilt and it's no little part of your guilt, my friend, that you've been ignorant of God.

Because, you see, ignorance is linked in with two other things, enmity and unbelief. All of these things together leave you guilty.

Tonight, let me tell you that on that day when the gospel was preached to Lydia, her heart bolted to the claims of Christ by bolts of ignorance, bolts of unbelief, bolts of enmity against God.

And for all of that, she was totally culpable, she was totally responsible. But then let's look at some of the other bolts. There are human hearts tonight who are bolted against God with bolts that we can call the bolts of pride and presumption.

[21:43] The bolts of pride and presumption. You know, friends, this evening it's true that there are probably in this congregation some who are too proud to bow the knee to God in Christ.

Too proud to come to Christ. Have you ever come across this kind of philosophy in life? A person saying, oh, if I had something really hard to do, then I'd be a Christian.

If I could only do something, I'd be a Christian. I would never be lost if I could only do this or that or the next thing.

You see, you're wanting to do something more than God wants of you. God's terms are laid out so clearly to the jailer at Philippi. This is what God says to the jailer at Philippi.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be seen. Do you see, what God claims from the sinner is trust in himself. I used to be taught in theology that there were three things, the three ingredients to faith in Jesus Christ.

[22:53] What are they? Three things. Knowledge, ascent, faith, and trust. And saving faith is never saving faith until that last element comes into it.

Trust, trust in Christ. And trust can only be the expression of a heart that has been humbled by the grace of God.

the expression of a heart that has been brought down to see its need. And who knows, but there are some in this gathering tonight. Why are you afraid? I'll tell you why. You're too proud to be saved. You won't come down to God's, to the feet of Christ. You won't come down to the gutter. You won't come down to the abasement of what it means to be saved.

You won't be humbled by Christ. You want to hang on to shreds of your own self-righteousness by which you think you'll be right with God.

[24 : 04] But then let me pass on the bolts of presumption. And oh how common the bolts of presumption are in our day that are on the human heart.

Hearts that are saying oh I know I'm not saved and I know the time hasn't come yet but somehow or other someday I'm going to trust in Christ.

And you presume on the mercy of God. Do you know every unbelief has a little ounce, a little element of Arminianism in it.

and the linear Arminianism is saying I can do it in my time. But God never says to you that you can do it in your time.

God always says to me and to you that you accepted time. This is the day of salvation.

[25 : 04] Are you presuming on the mercy of God? Are you thinking oh no I won't become a Christian yet but one day I'm going to become a Christian before I die? I'm going to become a Christian on my deathbed.

What a wonderful conversion I'm going to have. I'm going to turn all around. I'm going to give my life to Christ. Who told you my friend?

Who told you that you could so presume on the mercy of God in Christ that you're going to have a deathbed where you can make a final repentance.

Sinner, don't let the heart of man be tight closed against God because you're presuming on the mercy of God in Christ.

But then let me move on and let me speak about some of the other bolts that are on the human heart tonight. There are some people here tonight I dare say and the bolt that is on your heart is the bolt of despair and discouragement.

[26 : 06] despairing that you're ever going to be really converted. Despairing that the light is ever going to shine into your life because you've been going through the motions of a religious life for so long and nothing seems to work.

You know I dare say that there were days in the Jewish proselyte Lydia's life when she was saying it's never going to happen to me. I'm never going to get this real experience of Christ that my friends have.

I'm never going to know the Christ that other people know. I'm never going to get knowing this God in Christ. Are you not? Are you discouraged tonight?

Are you despairing that you'll ever find him? Are you writing it all off and are you saying what's the use? There are people like that you know and I feel for them.

People who are honest, sincere, but you know what they are, they're sincerely wrong. Because they think that they've done their duty and they're disappointed because God didn't meet them at the point of their duty.

[27 : 21] Let me tell you something about the grace of God. The grace of God, my friend, doesn't meet you at the point of your duty. the grace of God is always operative in the terms of free sovereign grace.

And if you're going to find it, you're going to find it like a poor beggar with empty hands going and saying, nothing in my hands I bring simply to my cross thy cross I cling.

Friend, do you really have the presumption to despair and to discouragement. You know, it's crap in gratitude to be despairing and discouraged as a seeker after God.

Because you know the most common bolt on the human heart against God tonight? It's simply this, the bolt of unwillingness to fit in with the terms of the claims of Jesus Christ the Lord.

you know what God says? My hands have been stretched out to you all the day long, but you will not come to me that you might have life.

[28 : 43] You will not come to me. Is that true? Is it true tonight that really the bolt that closes your heart ultimately against Christ is the bolt of unwillingness?

Unwillingness perhaps to give up your worldly intentions, your worldly ambitions, your worldly desires, your desires, sin. Unwillingness.

There was a deep unwillingness until this moment in the heart of Lydia. but one day the unwillingness melted away and as we're going to sing together in our closing psalm tonight, Lydia was made willing in a day of God's power.

And that's where we are now. We're coming to look at Lydia in the throes of conversion. And listen to the way it's spoken of. A certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, she was a Jewish proselyte, heard us whose heart the Lord opened.

There were two things. You know there were two things in Lydia's conversion that stand out. Just two simple things. What were they?

[30 : 00] They were this. They were the instrumentality of the word of God, allied to the agency of the Holy Spirit.

That's what conversion is all about. The Holy Spirit taking the instrument of the word of God and working in the life of a woman or a man or a boy or a girl and opening human hearts by the agency of the Holy Spirit and the instrumentality of the word of God.

She heard, you know my friend, I'm glad that you come to hear the word of God. I'm glad when I see people coming to church. I'm glad when I see you listening with rapt attention to the word of God.

And oh, may God have mercy on me as a preacher if I don't strive to grab your attention and strive to reach you with the gospel of Christ. God have mercy on me if I'm just speaking a word here to myself in the pulpit.

That doesn't really mean anything to men and women. She heard the word of God and the word of God made claims on her life. And the word of God was working in the hands of God's Holy Spirit as an instrument in Lydia's life.

[31 : 26] Let me ask you, my friend, has the word of God been working as an instrument in the hands of God in your own life? Do you feel sometimes convicted by the claims of the word of God?

Do you feel that the word of God is getting to you and it's reaching you? Do you? Lydia did it.

Because you see, God himself was at work behind the word.

And let me stop a moment and let me express my hope and my ambition for you, my hearers. You know my greatest ambition for you folk who come to listen to the gospel in Greyfriars, Sabbath after Sabbath, it's this, that God the Holy Spirit will take the word that's preached and he'll go into your hearts and into your lives and he'll do a mysterious work of grace in your hearts and he'll open up your lives to the glorious influences of the gospel in the hands of the Holy Spirit in your life.

That's what I want for you. Because you know when that happens, God changes people. God makes new men and new women.

And when God comes with his own word in the hand of the Holy Spirit to reach into a person's life, he opens up that heart to his own influences and he leaves new evidences in that life that were never there before.

[33 : 09] And we're going to look for the last little while we have tonight at the evidences that were left in this good lady's life. And I would say to you that there were three real evidences here.

There were three main evidences. First of all this, she attended, listen to verse 14 at the end, she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.

Do you know the difference between someone that's on the fringe and outside of Christ and whose heart is close to Christ and a person whose heart has been open to Christ?

You know the difference between the two of them? They're both hearers. They both sit maybe next to one another in the pew. Maybe you've been sitting next to someone for the last number of years in your pew in this church and maybe you are both hearers and yet the hearing is so different.

Why? Well let me tell you how. Because you see in Lydia's life there was a concern to apply the word which she was now hearing to her own condition.

[34 : 29] And that's one thing that happens when a heart is open to the influences of God the Holy Spirit in the gospel. There's an application of the truth by the Holy Spirit to the human heart.

My friend, have you been made to apply the word that you hear to your heart? In other words, let's get down to the simplest message of the gospel. You're told to believe.

Have you been given grace to believe? That's what it's all about. It's applying the gospel, attending to the gospel with your own heart.

That's the first evidence that was in this woman's life. She not only became a hearer of the word, but being a hearer of the word, she became a doer of it.

And that's the difference between the two people I was speaking about in the pew. There's one person and they're a hearer only. they're like a man who sees his natural face in a glass and then he turns away and he forgets what he's seen.

[35 : 44] And someone else has had a glimpse of the glory and they'll never ever be the same again because God, the son of righteousness, has shined for our life in the face of Jesus Christ so that they've come to apply the truth as they've never applied it before.

And that's what happens when a heart is opened up to the influences of God, the Holy Spirit, in the word, in the gospel. He becomes not a hearer only but a doer of the word.

And secondly, she had another evidence in her life. She and all her household were baptized. One by one. We don't know who her household were.

We know that the word *eukon*, which is used here, is used for a household made up of a wife and in Greek, it's used for a household made up of a husband and wife and children.

And in all probability it's also used for house servants. what happened to this house? This house was baptized.

[37 : 05] In other words, what was the evidence that God had left in Lydia's life? She was a convert, first of all from heathen dumb and then from being a Jewish proselyte.

And she only knew one thing, to obey God, inner baptism. So in other words, there's a second evidence that comes into the life of a man that receives the gospel, and it's the evidence of a new obedience.

A new obedience. And you know that when you examine yourself, you've got to examine yourself as to your repentance and your love, and your faith, and your new obedience.

Are you wanting to obey Christ? Are you wanting to walk with Christ for the rest of your days, and the rest of your life? Are you wanting to serve him, and to love him, and to obey him?

That's a sign that a person's heart has been opened. But then there was another evidence in her life. If you have counted me worthy as a believer, then she says, I want to share my home with you.

[38 : 20] Her house opened up, you see, to the Lord's people. Her heart opened up to the Lord's people, and there she was constraining these Christians who before she didn't know anything about.

She was constraining them to be her people. Do you remember what happened to Ruth and other Moabites? says, Thy people shall be my people, and thy God shall be my God.

Lydia, what were the three evidences in your life? The evidence of applying the word, the evidence of obeying the word, and the evidence of love to the Lord and to his people.

Do you remember the words of John the apostle? We know that we have passed from death unto life. Why? Because we love the brethren.

Do you love them tonight? Do you love the Christian church in such a way that you can say, these are my people. Whatever the world says about them, and whoever the world sneers about them, these people who love and obey the Lord, they're the people that I love, and I want whatever else to be one of them.

[39 : 47] Let us pray. Oh, Lord, may it please thee to work in our hearts powerfully by the Holy Spirit through the word, so that we in our turn will become followers, as Lydia became a follower, when the Lord opened her heart, and all for Jesus sake, Amen.

Psalms 110, Psalm 110, we're going to sing the first four stanzas, to God's praise.

The Lord did say unto my Lord, sit thou at my right hand, until I make thy foes a stool, whereon thy feet may stand.

The intimations are as follows, God willing, the prayer meetings on Thursday and Saturday at half past seven. The service is next Lord's Day at eleven and six thirty.

three. There's a monthly prayer meeting of the European Missionary Fellowship in the YMCA tomorrow evening at half past seven, and all who are interested are welcome.

[41 : 14] And also, this morning I made advance notice of two meetings that are to be held, which are of particular interest to free church people.

First of all, the annual meeting of the Christian Witness to Israel. This is one of the societies in which the free church has had a deep interest right from its beginnings in the 19th century.

And on the 28th of this month, on Tuesday evening, the 28th, there will be the annual meeting where the Reverend Murdoe MacLeod, the Reverend John Ross, and Mr. David Bond will be the speaker. And I'd also like to mention that it's hoped to re-establish a branch of the Lord's Day of Servant Society in the town of Inverness.

And God willing, the Scottish organiser of Lord's Day of Servant Society, Mr. Archie Hannah, will address a meeting to that end on Monday, the third day of June.

[42 : 25] At the YM, at half past seven. So please note these dates in your diary, and make it a matter of conscience that you attend, especially when we think that during these years, when the bulwarks of the Lord's Day have been so broken down in the town of Inverness, here, we've all seen it happening.

And for so many years, this has been going on. Please make it a matter of conscience to stand for the Lord and for his day.

Thank you. Thank you.