

It Happened by the Water

Jim Elliff

It took place by the stream just outside the gate of Philippi in Macedonia or today's northern Greece.

The apostle Paul knew that there was no Jewish Synagogue in this Roman military colony, since that required ten Jewish men. But perhaps there was at least a "place of prayer" for the Jews. Since Jewish rituals require water, it was logical to look along the river on the Sabbath day. There, sure enough, he found some Jewish women assembled. Among them was Lydia, a business woman who sold purple fabrics.



What is so important about Lydia?

She was a worshipper of God. There can be little doubt but that she was sincere in her desire to attribute honor to God. After all, even without a synagogue, and far away from her true home in Thyatira, she still chose to gather with those who cared enough to pray to God.

She was a listener. When Paul began to converse with these Jews, as was his custom in almost every town he visited, she was riveted to his words.

Then, surprisingly, God "opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul." Jesus once said that the Spirit moves upon the dead soul like wind. "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). A worshipping person, even a listening person, may not necessarily be a responsive person. That takes the work of God.

And what was her response? It was to believe in the Messiah, or to wholly rest her future in Christ's words, His death, and His resurrection on her behalf. That is the only response that saves and it was the message that Paul always preached.

Then, she was baptized, along with her household, who had obviously also heard and responded to Christ.

Finally, the Bible reports that she opened her home to the Apostle Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke, as their base of operations while in Philippi.

This is a good pattern, isn't it—from worshipper, to listener, to believer? Then, as a true believer in Christ, she was baptized and began immediately to do good works, helpful to the spread of the gospel.

What can we learn from Lydia?

First, we can see that it is possible to be a worshipper, and even an attentive worshipper, and not be a Christian. Does that describe you? Sadly, there are

many in this condition. Some have thought of themselves as true Christians just because they prayed a "sinner's prayer" when they were younger. Or they believe they are a genuine Christian because they are members of a church. But prayers and church membership do not save. Only God can save, by opening the heart.

Second, we learn that it is important to listen to God's word. Though Lydia listened, it still took God working on her heart to radically change her. Yet, if she had not listened she would not have been converted. Paul said that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word (or message) of Christ (see Romans 10:17). Peter, another apostle, said that we are "born again . . . through the living and abiding word [the saving message] of God" (1 Peter 1:23). Therefore, hearing the message is vital. It is the context that God has ordained for granting saving faith.

If you are not a believer yet, or if you wonder about yourself, try listening to the message more frequently. Attend a church that teaches the truth about Christ, and read the gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) over and over, listening to His word like Lydia did.

Third, we learn that obedience and love flow from a changed heart. You could see it immediately in Lydia. She wanted to be baptized, as an outward symbol of her new-found faith in Christ, and she offered her home to complete strangers in order to further the reach of the gospel. An opened heart resulted in an open home. Love is the true mark of new life in Christ.

I'm sure Lydia did not dream that her simple story would be recorded in a book that would be read by millions for thousands of years. Yet, God included it to show us how wonderfully He works for our salvation. Lydia in some ways represents every Christian, for God has opened the hearts of each person who has ever believed in Christ.

Worship. He is worthy of your adoration and submission even if you are not a true Christian.

Listen. He has the words of eternal life.

Respond by putting your trust in Christ.

Be baptized as the first act of obedience for every new Christian.

Do good deeds, the natural way of love for all true believers.

A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshipper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. (Acts 16:14; see verses 11-15 for the whole story)

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