

## GOD OPENED LYDIA'S HEART

Acts 16:6-15

### I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. **2** The gospel is for all (**Mk. 16:15**: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”; **Matt. 28:19**: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations”; **Rev. 22:17**: “Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.”; **Rom. 1:16**: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.”).
2. The book of Acts is God’s demonstration that the gospel is indeed “the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes”; the gospel is adapted to the spiritual needs of every person regardless of race, culture, gender, nationality, etc.! \*\*
  - ✓ Jews (Ch. 2),
  - ✓ Gentiles (Ch. 10 & 11),
  - ✓ Half-breeds under the influence of a sorcerer (8:1-25: Samaritans, Simon the sorcerer),
  - ✓ An important government official (Ch. 8:26-40: Ethiopian eunuch),
  - ✓ A misguided, murderous religious zealot (chaps. 9, 22, 26: Saul of Tarsus),
  - ✓ A military officer (Ch. 10 & 11: Cornelius, the Roman centurion),
  - ✓ A prison guard (Ch. 16:19-34: the Philippian jailor),
  - ✓ Sinners in the very depths of depravity (Acts 18: the Corinthians; fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, sodomites, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortions).
  - ✓ Pagans under the influence of idolatry and superstition (Ch. 19: people of Ephesus, shrines to Diana, practiced magical arts, burned books worth as much as \$500,000),
  - ✓ A governor and a king (Chaps. 24:24-26: Felix, Festus, Agrippa, Bernice),
  - ✓ A liberated businesswoman (Ch. 16:11-15: Lydia).
3. **3** Background: Lydia, Acts 16:11-15:
  - A. **Who**: Preachers were Paul, Silas, Timothy, Luke.
  - B. **What**: Delivering the decree from Jerusalem (15:27), “strengthening the churches” (15:36, 41; 16:5), increasing “in number daily” (16:5).
  - C. **How**:
    - ✓ Paul and Silas had been sent out as a result of the Jerusalem conference to counter the false teaching of the “Judaizing” teachers (15:22-29; 40-41; 16:4-5); they first deliver the letter to the church in Antioch of Syria (15:30-33).
    - ✓ Paul, Barnabas and Silas spend a bit of time in Antioch “teaching and preaching the word of the Lord” (15:35).
    - ✓ “Then after some days,” Paul and his cohorts decide to take another preaching trip, “Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing” (15:36).
    - ✓ However, a rift arises between Paul and Barnabas over whether or not to take John Mark along on the trip; Paul decides to take Silas and head for “Syria and Cilicia” (15:40) while Barnabas takes John Mark and heads for the island of Cyprus (15:39; In 2 Timothy 4:11 Paul requests Mark to come to him “for he is useful to me for ministry.”; Barnabas and Mark were cousins per Col. 4:10.).
    - ✓ As chapter 16 opens we find Paul and Silas coming to Derbe and Lystra where they add Timothy to their preaching party (16:1-5).

- ✓ Paul and his party go through Phrygia and Galatia, but “they are forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia” (16:6).
  - ✓ The Spirit continues to “guide” them, steering them away from Bithynia and Mysia and they finally come to Troas (16:6-9).
  - ✓ Here Paul sees the vision of “a man from Macedonia...pleaded with him, saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’” (16:10)
  - ✓ Also at Troas Luke joins the party: 16:8, use of “they” indicates Luke had not yet joined them; but in 16:10 Luke shifts from “they” to “we.”
  - ✓ Paul and his company book passage on a ship at the seaport of Troas and in two days make their way to Philippi (vv. 11-12).
4. **4** That brings us to the theme of our lesson. We want to examine the conversion of a person named Lydia and especially investigate how God “opened” Lydia’s heart.

## II. DISCUSSION:

### I. **5 God’s Providence:** Acts 16:6-12

- A. God certainly provided some “direct guidance”:
  - (1) Holy Spirit forbid them to go into: 1) Asia, or 2) Bithynia. (16:6-7).
  - (2) So they travel to Troas where Paul has a vision (16:8-10).
- B. But also note how God’s providence was involved:
  - (1) Ships don’t set sail just everyday to where you want to go! This explains why God hurried their journey across Asia. God got them to Troas at the precise time to catch a ship going to the exact place where people with “noble and good heart[s]” could be found who would accept the gospel!
  - (2) The ship had to cross the Aegean Sea from Asia Minor to Macedonia. Luke says they “ran a straight course to Samothrace” (16:11). No “tacking,” God provided them with favorable winds. (see Hardeman)
  - (3) The text says, “the next day came to Neapolis” (16:11). Neapolis was the port city of Philippi. In Acts 20:6 the return trip over the same route took 5 days!
- C. We don’t always know how God’s providence works until we look back. But the Lord through His providence made arrangements to get Paul and his companions to the:
  - (1) Right place, at the
  - (2) Right time, to catch the
  - (3) Right ship, to go to
  - (4) Right place, Philippi, to meet the
  - (5) Right people, so they could preach the
  - (6) Right message (Rom. 1:16), to produce the
  - (7) Right fruit, the first fruits of the gospel in Macedonia! (Later on same journey they plant churches at Thessalonica, Berea, and Corinth. Chaps. 17-19)
- D. Think back to your conversion and I imagine a bit of providence was involved as well!
- E. **6** Lydia’s case is similar to the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26, 29) and Cornelius (Acts 10:9-20) in regards to providence. Note that in each case God guided a preacher to preach the gospel to a receptive audience:

- (1) Ethiopian eunuch: “angel of the Lord spoke to Philip” (Acts 8:26) and told him where to go, “‘Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’” And what did Philip do when he got there? “Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.” (Acts 8:35)
  - (2) Cornelius: Recall that Peter was told to go: “While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, ‘Behold, three men are seeking you. 20 Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them.’” (Acts 10:19-20)
    - (a) For what purpose did the Spirit send Peter to Cornelius? Acts 10:32: “When he comes, he will speak to you.”
    - (b) What did Peter speak? Facts of the gospel, Acts 10:34-43 **Acts 11:13b-14:** “...Peter, I 4 who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.”
- F. Therefore, in God’s providence He brought gospel preachers into the presence of people in Philippi who had honest and good hearts so these preachers could sow the seed of the kingdom! (Lk. 8:4-15; **Acts 17:27:** “so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;”)
- G. That’s how God chooses to work in the salvation of souls.
- (1) \*\* If God had wanted to, Lydia (or the Ethiopian eunuch, or Cornelius) would have been the perfect candidates for Him to speak directly as Calvinists claim! Why go to all the trouble to send a preacher if the Holy Spirit operates directly on the convert’s heart?!
  - (2) But, on the contrary, God sent preachers to preach the gospel! (more to say about this later) (Rom. 10:8-17; Rom. 10:17; **1 Cor. 1:21:** “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.”)
- H. We must never lose faith in the power of gospel preaching! Remember what it is? Rom. 1:16-17
- I. There was no synagogue in Philippi as there was in Thessalonica (17:1), Berea (17:10), Athens (17:17), or Corinth (18:4). Therefore, where to start preaching? God’s providence once again guides Paul and his companions: **Acts 16:13:** “And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there.”

## 2. **7 Lydia**

- A. Lydia was an unusual woman for her times:
- (1) Business woman, probably quite rich (In a business that required a high amount of capital!).
  - (2) She was from Thyatira, ironically the same general area from which Paul, et al. had just come!
  - (3) Seller of purple. [Probably a seller of “purple” fabrics. Purple dye (and thus garments) very expensive.
    - (a) Dye came from shell fish or mussels, each one containing only a drop.
    - (b) A very lucrative business due to preciousness of the dye.
    - (c) Purple the color of royalty (Mk. 15:17, 20), aristocracy, rich folks (Lk. 16:19).
    - (d) Classical Greek writers, Homer (Odyssey) and Strabo spoke of the legendary dyes of Thyatira.
  - (4) Lydia was also very religious: Lydia ceased operation of her business on the Sabbath! She prayed to and worshipped Jehovah God (Jewess? Proselyte? V. 14: “who worshiped God”). (BTW: not totally depraved (Hardeman).
  - (5) However, she, like all unbelievers, had a heart that needed to be “opened.”

- (a) Even though religious, we can deduce from the fact she had to have her heart “opened” in order to receive the gospel that her heart was closed.
- (b) It was not closed by “total depravity”, but closed due to “ignorance” of the gospel (e.g., Apollos, **Acts 18:24-28**; Cornelius, **Acts 10:1-2**: “There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, 2 a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.”).
- B. **8** Very importantly note that she gave a “receptive” hearing to the gospel: **Acts 16:13b-14**: “we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. 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.**” (KJV)
- C. What exactly did God open? He “opened” her “heart” What is the heart? 3 things involved:
- (1) **Intellect**: “heart” is not the “blood pump”, but the “mind”. Vine: “...stand[s] for man’s entire mental and moral activity, both the rational and emotional elements” (**Mk. 2:8**: Jesus speaks of people “reasoning” in their “hearts”; **Prov. 23:7**: “...as he thinketh in his heart, so is he...”). Thus, in the Bible the “heart” is that part of us that enables us to think, to ponder, to decide, and to act, to make decisions. It has to do with our God-given intelligence. The “heart” is not here (chest), but here (head).
- (a) The intellect is “opened” by instruction or education.
- (i) God accomplishes this through teaching (**Deut. 4:9**: “teach them to your children and grandchildren”; **Ezra 7:10**: taught “statutes and ordinances in Israel”; **Psa. 86:11**: “Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; Unite my heart to fear Your name.”).
- Jn. 6:44-46**: “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. 45 It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.” (Purpose of the Great Commission! **Mk. 16:15**)
- (ii) The mind is educated by the **facts** of the gospel (**1 Cor. 15:1-8**). **1 Cor. 15:1-2**: “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; 2 By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.” (KJV) (Note the word “memory.” Do we “remember” with our blood pump or mind?)
- (b) Paul had “delivered” something when he “declared” and “preached” the gospel to the Corinthians. What does he mean by that? Paul is going to tell us how he educated the Corinthians. Paul educated them with the **facts** of the gospel (**1 Cor. 15:3-8**) According to Paul the **facts** of the gospel are:
- ☛ Jesus died for our sins,
  - ☛ He was buried,
  - ☛ He was raised from the dead (resurrected),
  - ☛ Resurrection was attested to by witnesses (i.e., people who saw him, talked to him, ate with him, etc. after he was raised from the dead).
- (c) These are the same **facts** Philip preached to the eunuch (**Acts 8:35**: “preached Jesus to him”), and Peter preached to Cornelius (**Acts 10:34-43**).
- (d) Thus, man is not “totally depraved” because the **intellect** can be educated and changed by **facts**.
- (i) This is the part of man’s heart that has to be “opened,” or educated, by instruction in the will of God (**Jn. 6:44-45**).

- (ii) There has to be a “*hearing*” to “*learn*” before we can come to Him! Also, see (**Psa. 119:130**: “*The entrance of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple.*”; *pethach*: opening (from *pathach*: to open wide).
  - (e) Therefore, Lydia’s intellect had to be educated! This was done how? Through the things Paul “*spoke*”! What did he speak? The gospel! (**1 Cor. 1:21**: “*For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.*”; Rom. 1:16; 10:17)
- (2) **Emotions**: are also a part of the “*heart*.”
- (a) Man has an emotional component (Acts 2:37) “*they were pricked in their heart.*” When where “*they pricked in their heart*”? “*Now when they heard this*”; heard what? The gospel preached by Peter! (**Lk. 24:47**: “*and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*”)
  - (b) Thus, the **facts** of the gospel not only educate our *intellect*; they also stir that part of our heart we call our “*emotions*”; therefore, when the emotions are properly stirred the Bible says we’ve been pricked...*in the heart.*”
  - (c) So the emotions have to be stirred and quickened. In general, the word of God appeals to our emotions by: 1) the goodness of God, and 2) the severity of God (Rom. 11:22).
    - (i) For example, what made Paul tick? “*for love of Christ compels*” (2 Cor. 5:14) and “*Knowing, therefore, the terror of Lord, we persuade men*” (2 Cor. 5:11).
    - (ii) Thus, Paul was motivated by love of Christ and the prospect of people (even himself! 1 Cor. 9:27) being lost eternally.
  - (d) We need to learn the right emotions: i.e., learn to love, to hate, to fear the right things vs. the wrong things.
    - (i) Make no mistake, first her intellect had to be educated; she had to comprehend the facts.
    - (ii) Then those same facts acted upon her emotions. She now understood the things spoken by Paul and appreciated their extreme importance.
- (3) **Will**: Repentance is a change of will.
- (a) In a person with an “*honest and good heart*” a change of will is the natural result of the education of the intellect and the subsequent impact of the facts of the gospel on the emotions (**2 Cor. 7:10**: “*For godly sorry produces repentance leading to salvation...*”).
  - (b) The will is activated to make a conscious decision...to turn away from sin; recall the effects obtained by preaching the gospel in Acts 2:
    - ✓ v. 36: “*Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly*”. Know what? “*that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.*” (i.e., summary of gospel message...the **facts**!)
    - ✓ What did they know with? Their intellect! Their intellect was educated by the **facts** of the gospel! (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1-8; Acts 10:34-43; 3:11-19; etc.)
    - ✓ What effect did their knowledge of the gospel’s **facts** produce? First, “*they were pricked in their heart*” (v. 37). Their emotions were stirred and quickened!
    - ✓ What did the stirring of their emotions gained by knowing the **facts** of the gospel produce? It caused them to make a decision to change their will! They “*said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?*” (v. 37)

- ✓ What were they told to “do”? “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you” (v. 38) “Change your mind and your life. Turn right around, and do it now!” (Robertson’s New Testament Word Pictures)
- ✓ What happened? “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized” (v. 41) They that gladly received what? “his word”
- ✓ How had they received “his word”? Through hearing the word preached, not through a direct operation of the Holy Spirit! Rom. 10:17

### Summary: Acts 2

**Intellect:** By hearing the gospel preached they came to “know” the facts of the gospel (v. 36).

**Emotions:** The facts of the gospel stirred their emotions (v. 37).

**Will:** The knowledge of the facts and the stirring of their emotions motivated them to change their wills (v. 37) and such is evidenced by the fact that “they that gladly received his word were baptized” (v. 41).

- (d) \*\*The same thing happened to Lydia, when God opened her heart He used the same process!

- ☛ Intellect educated by things “spoken by Paul” (v. 14),
- ☛ Emotions stirred by those things she heard so that she wanted to act and she did act...she “opened her heart to heed to the things spoken by Paul” (v. 14; NKJ; NAS & NIV = “respond”).
- ☛ Her will was activated in order for her to give “heed” or “respond” to the things spoken by Paul, she obeyed the things Paul instructed her to do...baptized (v. 15).

### 3. 9 Final Thoughts: How Does God Open Hearts?

- A. Matthew 13 tells us why hearts have to be opened; because they are closed.

**Matt 13:14-16:** “And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: ‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, And seeing you will see and not perceive; 15 For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them. 16 But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear;”

- (1) Why are people’s hearts closed to the truth? “their eyes they have closed” How did they get their eyes closed? (v. 15; not literal eyes: **Eph. 1:18:** “eyes of your understanding”)
- (2) Did the Lord miraculously “zap” them so they couldn’t see? No! They closed their own eyes! “their eyes they have closed” (v. 15).

**Isa. 53:6:** “All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way;”

- (3) Acts 28 records another example where the same prophecy from Isaiah 6:9-10 is applied (**Acts 28:17-29**).
- (a) Why did Paul apply this same prophecy to some of the Jews in Rome?
- (b) Was it because the Lord had “fixed” their hearts so they could not believe? No!
- (c) In fact, v. 24 says some believed! Why did they believe? Because “...some were persuaded by the things which were spoken,” by the facts of the gospel Paul preached (v. 24); they made a choice to obey!
- (d) However, some “disbelieved” (v. 24)? Why? Because they were not “persuaded” by the facts of the gospel! They chose not to believe!

- (4) The prophecy of Isa. 6:9-10 applies to anyone who chooses not believe the gospel.

**Matt. 23:37:** “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!”

The prophets tried!

**2 Chron. 36:15-16:** “And the LORD God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. 16 But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, till there was no remedy.” (Psa. 81:8-12; Jer. 6:16-17; 25:3-7; 35:15; 42:9ff; 44:4-5)

The key is: “but you were not willing!” Most people chose to be lost! (Prov. 1:24-31; Matt. 22:3; Lk. 14:17-20; 15:28; 19:14)

- (5) If a heart is closed who closes it? Does God shut a heart so it cannot receive truth and do what is right? No! (**Jas. 1:13-15:** “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”)(recount my own conversion).

- B. God gives us free will! **Rom. 6:16-17:** “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? 17 But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.”

(1) We “present ourselves”: Whose servants are we? The one we decide to obey!

(2) The Roman Christians had voluntarily been servants of sin, but now they had changed their mind, they obeyed from the heart...“that form of doctrine which was delivered you” (KJV)

(3) How was it “delivered”? Through the preaching of the gospel!

- C. **Rom. 10:8:** “But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith which we preach):”

(1) What is near you? “the word of faith which we preach”

(2) What is it that is put into the heart? “the word of faith which we preach” (Lk. 8:11, “The seed is the word of God.”) Note the progression of these verses (Rom. 10:9-13-15):

(a) Who can be saved? “whoever calls on the name of the LORD” (v. 13), but notice that the “whoever”...

(b) Can’t call “on the name of the LORD” if “they have not believed” (v. 14), but hold on, they...

(c) Can’t “believe” unless they have “heard” (v. 14), but hold on, they...

(d) Can’t hear unless there is a “preacher” (v. 15), but hold on...

(e) There won’t be a “preacher” unless someone “sends” the preacher! (Mk. 16:15: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”).

- D. God’s plan is simple:

(1) In every generation we must go forth and “preach the gospel to every creature,”

(2) Why? The “gospel” is the “power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16). The “gospel” is the “seed” that when planted in a “good and honest heart” will produce Christians (Lk. 8:4-15; **2 Thess. 2:13-14:** “But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in



*the truth, 14 to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”; Jas. 1:18: “Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth...”).*

- (3) This is God’s plan and we cannot change it or improve upon it! There is no power in heaven or on earth, other than the “gospel” that can make a man or woman into what God wants them to be! (Rom. 1:16)

## II. CONCLUSION: 10

1. Do you need rest from your sins? **Matt. 11:28-30:** “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”
2. Judgment is coming! (**2 Cor. 5:10-11a:** “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. 11 Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men;”; Rom. 14:12; 2 Thess. 1:7-9)
3. Invitation:
  - ✓ **Hear:** Rom. 10:17
  - ✓ **Believe (faith):** Heb. 11:6; Jn. 8:24
  - ✓ **Confess:** Mt. 10:32; Rom. 10:10; Acts 8:36-37
  - ✓ **Repent:** Acts 2:38
  - ✓ **Baptism:** Jn. 3:7; Acts 22:16; 10:47-48; 2 Tim. 2:10; Gal. 3:27; Acts 2:41, 47
  - ✓ **Faithfulness:** Col. 1:18-23; 2 Pet. 1:3-11

Adapted from a sermon by Connie Adams.