

The First European Christian

Առաջին Եվրոպացի Քրիստոնեացի

Acts 16:11-15

We are studying the letter to the Philippians. Last Sunday we covered the first 11 verses. We found how Paul was in prison, and he saw an opportunity to write a letter of joy and encouragement to this newly established church of Philippi. I hope you had a chance to read Acts 16 to see the details of how God used Paul and Silas (Maybe Luke as well) to visit Philippi for the first time.

In Philippi, a prominent woman called Lydia accepted Christ and quickly got baptized. Who is this first European convert? What is special in this event?

Background:

-The Macedonian Call

⁶And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. ⁷And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. ⁸So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. ⁹And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰And when Paul⁶ had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Paul, Silas, Timothy and perhaps Luke were on Paul's Second Missionary Journey.

-The Spirit of the Lord forbade them to go to Asia, but encouraged them to go the Macedonian region, namely Greece, and they arrived in Philippi. In fact, Luke says a Macedonian man appeared in vision and told them to come to Macedonia.

It happened many times with Paul, when God's Spirit led him **where to go or where not to go**. I admire this kind of a relationship that Paul had with Holy Spirit. In fact, Paul was praying for the church of Philippi **to grow in**

love for knowledge and discernment. What kind of intimate relationship did Paul have?

Oh, how much we all need this in our lives. To be close to God and grow in His love to know Him and have the Holy Spirit to direct our thoughts.

- The group arrives in Philippi.

So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, ¹²and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. (Acts 16:11-12 ESV)

Philippi was an important city in the district of Macedonia. It was influenced by the Roman culture and religion. The city's location was important as well. It was between Rome and Asia Minor (modern day Turkey).

Paul usually found a synagogue as a first place to attend and share the Gospel. This city did not have one. It was required to have a minimum of ten Jewish men to have a synagogue, and we don't know why Philippi did not have one.

- By the River

And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. (Acts 16:13 ESV)

No Synagogue, yet there is group of women who came together for worship. Who were those women? I don't know, most likely some Jewish ladies and perhaps some who married Greek men.

Please notice that Paul and his group saw an opportunity to find a group of ladies to preach the Gospel. Usually Paul grabbed to opportunity to preach the Gospel in the local Synagogue. And here he found and an opportunity to spread the Word near the riverside. And I am glad he did.

- Receptive towards the Gospel

One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by

Paul. ¹⁵ **And after she was baptized, and her household as well,** (Acts 16:14-15a)

Here comes a name of a woman **called Lydia**. Verse 14 describes who was she:

One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God.
(14a)

-Lydia was a businesswoman; she was a seller purple goods, expensive stuff.

-Lydia used to attend the river worship meetings before meeting Paul. She had an interest in knowing Yahweh and worship Him. The ground was ready. Her heart was ready, and she was receptive towards the Word of God.

Yet, the initiation comes from God:

The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. (14b)

The Lord opened her heart, and she paid attention....

How much I pray for this in my life. How much I want to hear His voice. More than hearing, OBEYING His voice...

There is no other way to approach God. God's Spirit works in us, and when we are receptive to it, miracles happen.

-Not only she accepted Christ, she also invited her household to come to Jesus. Right after her conversion, she was ready for baptism. She was ready to announce her faith openly as a testimony. Not only Lydia, but her household as well. "Her baptism was indeed the outward expression of the salvation which she received and the faith which she showed."¹

Lydia became the first European person to become a Christian. Isn't it amazing how God works?

- **Welcome to My Home**

And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us. (Acts 16:15)
So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed. (Acts 16:40 ESV)

Lydia did not just open her heart to God, she opened her home as well. Her home became the house of hospitality, rest, and worship. Later on when Paul and his friends were put in jail because of their preaching, Lydia was waiting for their release. When they were released from prison, Lydia took them back; she took the risk in bringing the men into her house. It shows her commitment to Christ.

Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. (1 Peter 4:9 ESV)

Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth. (3 John 5-8 ESV)

I will end sharing with you a story of a woman called Zevart (joyful in Armenian) who resided in the middle of Syria, in a city called Homs.

Homs is the middle city between Aleppo and Damascus, or Aleppo and Beirut. The city is in the middle of a dry area. Travelers did not have too many options to stop in rest areas like we have here in the US. Mrs. Zevart was ready to receive travelers to her home. She had a special place for pastors, evangelists, Christian musicians, bands, choirs, traveling between those cities. Zevart welcomed us to her home. Her home was not a big home, but her heart was. She cooked for all of us. She fed us, she prayed with us, she had a wonderful voice, she sang hymns with us, and she put us back on the road in the hot summer or the cold winter of Syria to our final destination. I do not forget Mrs. Zevart. She was our Lydia. She had three daughters. All of them grew up to know the Lord and serve Him faithfully

along with their families in three countries around the world (the US, Dubai and Jordan).

Application:

1. Giving ear to the Holy Spirit. Paul was led by the Spirit of God to go to Philippi. Lydia was receptive to the Spirit of God. Are you receptive to His voice? It is not magic. Have time with God, grow in His love to know Him and have discernment of what is good and bad. Give ear to God's voice.

2. Crisis brings opportunities. No Synagogue, fine, there is an informal gathering by the river. God always opens new opportunities. Maybe not the one you were asking. Paul was in prison when he wrote the letter to the Philippians. He saw it an opportunity to write. These days we live in the crisis of a pandemic. Yet, God opens new opportunities to spread His Word via the Internet. Do you know how much teaching and worship is being broadcast these days via the Internet? This is an opportunity to spread His Word.

Instead of being sad, get out of your chair and ask God, Lord, can I be your instrument in this specific situation?

3. Have an open heart to God, and an open house as well. An open house could mean different things to different people.

The word hospitality is a close to hospital. In a hospital we are cured; it is a "home" that is designed to bring healing and wholeness. Not everyone has the gift of literally opening their homes to everyone. Yet, we all have the passion and ministry of being a community of believers supporting each other. We are a community and the church is a hospital where each of you has a role in bringing healing to the society.

It is Mother's Day. We have experienced our mothers' love, care, and hospitality. Let us honor them today and thank God for their presence in our lives. Some of us have not enjoyed the care of our biological mothers for different reasons. But someone else played the role of the mother in our lives. Don't forget to call them today and thank them. (if it is possible).

Amen

1. Howard Marshal, Tyndale Commentary Acts