

2nd Quarter 2020
April-May-June 2020
INTRODUCTION

Trusting God when You are Afraid

When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me? (Psalm 56:3-4) "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you." Psalm 56:3 "The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? The Lord is with me; he is my helper." Psalm 118:6-7

If we apply what God says about fear, fear would be eradicated and it would have absolutely no power over us. It would be diminished into what it is, which is nothing but a strategy of the enemy. God tells us to not fear, but to take courage. He says perfect love casts out fear, and that He is love. He tells us to not give up and to press on.

That's because our all-knowing God knows that fear is going to come in numerous forms to take away what He actually intended for us. By facing our fears, and by trusting in God when we are afraid, we're able to take back the moments the enemy stole from us by instilling fear. God's purpose is still there for us.

The enemy, however, is in the business of stealing, killing and destroying, and one sure way to do that is to implement fear; that is what the enemy relishes in. But God, being sovereign, holy and good, is fighting for us.

What if we began to imagine that? God of the universe and Satan of the abyss, both fighting for you? Except it's not like a tug-a-war, God is bigger than that. We know that God wins, but is that an excuse to live in the grip of fear until the rapture finally comes? No. It means to have the victory now, in this moment, and to take your life back from the hands of fear in order to live what God has so wondrously planned for your life on earth today. It's being bold in the moments you feel like cowering, and then trusting God when you are afraid. Allow God to do the rest. *"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." 2 Timothy 1:7).*

The AFBC Sunday School Curriculum Committee

LESSON 1- LYDIA: A MODEL OF SERVICE AND HOSPITALITY

APRIL 5, 2020

Background Scripture: Acts 16

Lesson Passage: Acts 16:11-15 (KJV)

Introduction: Scripture does not supply us with any information regarding Lydia's background apart from the fact that she lived in Thyatira, one of the Macedonian colonies. Thyatira was conspicuous for its many guilds. One of these guilds was that of dyers. The water of the area was so well-adapted for dyeing, that no other place could produce brilliantly permanent dye. This unique purple dye brought the city universal renown. Lydia was a well-known seller of this product (Acts 16:14), and typifies a successful businesswoman in a prosperous city. Lydia was an example of the comparatively independent women in Asia Minor. She was prosperous in business and she also owned a spacious home with servants to care for her.

While it is not certain whether Lydia was of Jewish descent, it is evident that she was a Jewish proselyte. "She worshipped God," we are told. Lydia, in spite of all her secular obligations, found time to worship according to the Jewish faith. Daily she made her way to the riverside where prayer was made. She knew that in order to successfully meet the stiff competition of the Philippian traders, she needed grace as well as knowledge. At that riverside prayer meeting, perhaps she met other Jewish dyers, and with them eagerly waited, unknowingly, upon the ministry of Paul and his companions.

Scripture Reference: Acts 16:11-15 (KJV)

11 Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; 12 And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days. 13 And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and 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. 15 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.

Memory Verse: *15 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 (Acts 16:15) KJV*

Topic Explored: "Lydia: A Model of Service and Hospitality" ~The Lord; not only opened Lydia's heart to respond to Paul's message, but He also opened her heart to respond to the needs of the travelers. Her simple invitation revealed her own generosity (Acts 16:15). As a merchant of fine purple cloth, Lydia could afford generous hospitality, and her home could easily accommodate Paul and his companions. At Lydia's insistence, they lodged in her house. Her home eventually became a place where local Christians gathered (Acts 16:40). To bring someone in your home is to upset your order and ways. Yet Lydia coerced Paul and his companions to reside in her home.

The word *hospitality* is a relative of *hospital*. We rarely put those two words together in our culture because the mental images they generate are so different. But a hospital is place away from your home that is designed to bring healing and wholeness. Hospitality is not about a vacation, but about allowing your home and your presence to bring emotional, mental, and spiritual healing to others. Lydia's transformation of life was evidenced by her eagerness to give missionaries the hospitality of her fine home. Lydia always had "open house" for the saints of God and her home became a center of Christian fellowship in Philippi with perhaps the first Christian church being formed therein (Philippians 1:1-7).

Lesson Focus: Acts 16:11-15 (KJV)

Verses 11-13 ~ God gave the missionaries favor in their travel. Note that Luke is now part of Paul's missionary team. His account is quite remarkable. What's remarkable is the ease at which they sailed and the wind being in their favor carrying them across the sea. This journey only took two days. Coming back took five days. God was with them, carrying them along with the wind. Leaving the port city of Troas, they sailed to the small island of Samothrace. They stayed the night on Samathrace and then set sail the next morning to Macedonia, where they remained 'some days'.

The missionaries traveled from Neapolis on foot about ten miles to the north to Macedonia's chief city, Philippi. What's important to note here is that even though Philippi was the leading city (literally, the city of chief importance), there was no synagogue. Traditionally, a city had to have ten Jewish men to start a synagogue. Because it doesn't, we see the paganism in the city of Philippi and the region of Macedonia.

It was Paul's normal practice to seek out a synagogue to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Here in Philippi, there were no synagogues. Where would the team go to share the Gospel? God gave the missionaries favor in their message. There were no synagogues but there were a few worshippers. Note: Rome practiced toleration of religion. When they conquered a people, they would allow the people the freedom to worship their gods if they agreed to also worship Caesar. For Jews and for Christians this was not acceptable. Sometimes Rome would allow exceptions if the religion was an established religion already being practiced. That was the case with Judaism but not the case with Christianity. It seems Philippi was different. Most scholars believe that even Judaism was greatly frowned upon by the Romans in Macedonia, perhaps that is why the worshippers were found down by the river in a place outside the city limits.

So, they hear of some worshippers down by the Gangites River and Paul and the others head down to share the Gospel with these worshippers. They arrive at the river and find a small group of women praying. The women welcome Paul and the others and through the course of their conversation Paul begins an exposition of Scripture. Perhaps he shares with them from the OT how Jesus is the Messiah. He no doubt mentions the cross and the resurrection of Christ as was very typical for Paul to do.

Just as God's favor was on their travel, His favor was on their message. God moves and connects Paul's words with the Holy Spirit then He excites faith within Lydia and she believes.

Verses 14-15 ~ Luke describes Lydia as a businesswoman who dealt in purple cloth. What made this cloth valuable was the fact that it was very much in high demand because purple was the color of royalty. Because purple was in fashion Lydia's cloth was in high demand. The second

reason Lydia was very wealthy was that purple cloth was extremely rare because of the great cost involved to manufacture the dye. The purple dye came from shellfish living in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea. It took approximately 8,000 mollusks to produce 1 gram of dye, the dye and in turn the cloth was extremely valuable. This is what Lydia marketed.

Much like Cornelius, who also worshipped God, she had a good foundation of who God is from the OT that she had been taught. So now, Paul explains the rest to her. Even though she was categorized as a worshipper, she still needed to hear the Gospel of Christ in order to be saved.

Christ prepared Lydia through the synagogue teaching of the OT. Now He sent Paul and the other missionaries to Philippi so that Lydia was able to hear the message of salvation. Luke ascribes to the Lord, not to Paul, the act of saving Lydia. Salvation, then, is not man's work but the Lord's. Not the Word itself, but the Lord Himself (Luke 24:45), opens the human heart. The result is that Lydia responds to Paul's message and accepts the Lord as her Savior. Remember when Paul and the others were prevented from going to the regions of Galatia and Bithynia? We all wondered why the Holy Spirit would not want Paul to preach the Gospel in those areas. By the providence of God, Paul had another divine appointment. He had to be at the river on that Sabbath. Not only did Paul have to be there at that moment but Lydia also had to be there. In It was in God's wonderful plan that she sold purple cloth. It was the business of selling cloth that she was in Philippi from Thyatira. It was by Divine Providence that they were together on the riverbank that day.

There is one more act of Providence spoken of here in this passage; *The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.* God had placed her at the right place at the right time, though she may have not even realized it. Not only was she there at that moment; but God also prepared her heart. When Paul scattered the seed, it found its way into Lydia's prepared heart and it took root, sprouted and grew immediately.

Did God know that there would be a prayer meeting on the river that day? Did He know there would be a woman named Lydia who would pray for salvation? Did God prevent Paul and then lead him to this riverbank? Did God open her heart? Isn't the Providence of God amazing? Luke wants us to understand that it wasn't the message of the Gospel that saved...it wasn't the missionary that saved...It was the Lord who saved Lydia. He opened her heart to believe. The response she had once God had worked to convert her was to be obedient to Jesus' command to get baptized. Then her heart led her to open her home to the missionary team and she would not take no for an answer.

Let's talk about it. . .

- Lydia serves as a marvelous model of one who recognized that our worship of a generous God can be expressed with *anything* we choose to offer Him. How did Lydia express her worship to God?
 1. her heart (Deuteronomy 6:5)
 2. her home (Romans 12:13)
 3. her time (Ephesians 5:15-16)
 4. her treasure (Luke 12:34)

Making it personal:

- Salvation occurs when God moves and opens the human heart to pay attention and believe. In our text today, notice how God moved to convert Lydia. It wasn't Paul or his preaching that initial change, but it was God who caused her to pay attention to the Gospel.
- When we are led by God to speak to someone about Jesus Christ, we must realize that God is at work orchestrating the divine encounter. He will help you to speak what He desires you to speak. He will also be working in ways you may not see. But He will be working.
- When God moves and opens or converts a heart the person is changed on the inside. Their changed heart is what fuels godly behavior.

Closing Prayer: *“Dear God Jehovah, please help us to be motivated by faith as was Lydia. Help us to not walk in fear; but open our hearts to Your Word and help us to open our homes to hospitality. Let us live a life of faith not fear. In Jesus’ Name we pray. Amen.”*