

Great Event of Western Civilization **Acts 16:11-15**

I did an internet search this week to try and discover what the learned minds of our days thought were among the top 100 events that shaped the course of Western Civilization. The discovery of Iron was mentioned in 1000BC. Greek Philosophies of Plato and Aristotle in 400BC. As well as Rome's rise to world power. The Battle of Hastings was mentioned when the Normans conquered England in 1066. Marco Polo's world travels 1292 were mentioned along with Columbus's brave adventure in 1492 that unveil the Americas to the rest of the world. The first moveable type in 1455. Napoleon defeat at Waterloo in 1815. Einstein's theory of relativity in 1905. The World wars. The invention of the transistor in 1947 which led to an electronics explosion. But nowhere was mentioned the story that we will be studying this morning. Perhaps it should have been included.

This morning we study what seems like a rather minor and obscure event. Yet as we look back on history, this turns out to be one of the most significant for impact on western civilization. It doesn't seem very important at a first read, but the story in Acts 16:11-15 is the story of how the gospel came into Europe. Paul and his fellowship of the gospel were driven by the Lord of All things across the Aegean Sea from Troas to Philippi. As they cross the Dardanelles, the gospel is moving from Asia to Europe. This moved changed dramatically the whole course of Western Civilization as had no event since the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

If Emperor Claudius who was in charge of Rome at that time was asked to name the most important event of his reign, he would never even dream about suggesting this story. I doubt he even knew about a little prematurely balding Jews decision to leave Asia and head for Europe. Which highlights the fact that we rarely know the truly great events of history. Or even rarely do we recognize the reality of the truly

great events of our own life when they happen and then only sometimes in retrospect do we see the impact of our choices and decisions.

Paul and Silas have joined with young Timothy and the one who would eventually be the author of the book of Acts, a doctor named Luke. They were in the city of Troas where Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia asking him to come over and help. God had directed this group by shutting down doors behind them and left only this crack of a door open to Europe. Once God had given him a vision of the need, Paul's missionary team did not wait around. They left Troas immediately and headed for Macedonia. (READ) Acts 16:11-15

They "ran a straight course" which is a nautical term for having the wind at their backs. They made the trip in just two days, which is amazing because the trip back over the same mileage takes them 5 days (Acts 20) They step onto European soil in Neopolis and walk 10 miles to the leading Roman city in the area Philippi. In v.12 Luke is careful to tell us that it was a Roman colony. The Philippians took great pride in that. About 100 years earlier, there had been a great battle fought just outside the gates of Philippi. It was a battle between the forces of Brutus and Cassius, the assassins of Julius Caesar fighting against the forces of Antony and Octavian. Octavian who later became Caesar Augustus came out victorious. Because of the assistance from the Philippians, the emperor granted Roman citizenship to all the people who lived in Philippi. So the city became kind of a mini-Rome. The people had all the rights of any Roman and were governed in the same way the Rome was. They were given a lifetime exemption from taxes. The people took great pride of their political heritage. Philippi was situated on a hill and a natural military outpost. Roman soldiers were a common sight as were the trappings of Roman dress and manner.

So how does one start a church, a Christian work in a strange, pagan land where you knew no one and had never been before? How would you go about it? Typically, Paul started in the most logical place.

The Jewish synagogue. This is where people were interested in God and had all the background of the Old Testament. They needed only to be introduced to what God had done in Jesus and that He was the fulfillment of everything they had been hoping and praying for. But in Phillippi there was no synagogue. The Jewish population must have been so few, or apathetic there was none. It required at least 10 men to start a synagogue and here in Phillippi there was none. So what was Paul going to do? He always did the same thing. He always started with the same activity. He proclaimed the wildly radical message about Jesus.

Even back in New Testament times this was a revolutionary story. A story of a man who came onto the scene and did some remarkable, miraculous things and lived an amazing life and then through a dramatic series of events was taken by the authorities and crucified in the city of Jerusalem. Not only that, but he didn't stay dead and rose from the dead and appeared to many witnesses who actually saw and touched, talked and ate with Him. The evangelists would then explain the incredible implications of how through all these events, God was able to meet the need of the human heart. God through Jesus Christ brought meaning and purpose to the soul...brought relief from guilt and freedom from the bondage of debilitating habits which keep us sidelined and unproductive.

Paul usually went to the synagogue, but where there was none the Jewish law provided that in the event there was no synagogue they were to meet by a river and have a prayer meeting. So that is why Paul and the group walked along the riverside on their first Sabbath in Phillippi to see if possibly they could find any Jewish prayer gatherings. Sure enough they found one but probably to their dismay the only ones there were women.

Now if I were starting out in an unknown area for the first time evangelizing a city, I would want to gather the most influential people together. But God knows what it would take here in Phillippi. These women probably were the ones that could influence this town best for

Christ. Certainly that is true in many communities. I am always amazed at the influence and power that women have when they have made up their minds about something and know that its true. They are a force to be reckoned with as they work behind the scenes.

The vision that Apostle Paul had was a man from Macedonia calling “come over and help us” but when they arrived in Europe, it was not a man, but a woman, a business woman named Lydia that was the first to respond to the gospel message. In the last few chapters the fact that the gentiles are afforded equal access into the family of God has been repeated so often it begins to sound like a broken record. But now here we see that not only are gentiles welcomed fully into God’s family but women are equally let in as well. This may be somewhat of a surprise in a very male dominated culture. But Jesus always went out of the way to treat males and females with honor and equality and respect. Remember there were many women who ministered to Jesus during His ministry here on earth. Jesus had no problems in crossing the cultural boundaries of the day to speak to women, to heal women and challenge and encourage women. It was the women who anointed his body for burial. It was a woman who first saw the empty tomb. It was a woman who first saw and spoke with the resurrected Jesus. Jesus loved all people male and female and was able to meet them where they were and knew their needs. He still does it today. Galatians 3:28 says “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”

Christ came to break down barriers of race, prejudice, hatred and bring freedom to those captured in prisons of sin. Prisons of our own making. The good news of Jesus is available to all. And here we see a business woman named Lydia respond to the gospel message, by a river in Phillippi.

What do we know about this woman. V. 14 says her name was Lydia and she was from the city of Thyatira. She was not originally from

Phillippi. Possibly she had relocated with her family to engage in the selling purple cloth that her hometown was so famous in making. She could have been renting a home there and was on a business trip... we don't know. Only that her hometown was back in Thyatira, in the Bythinia area and she was here in Phillippi doing business selling the royal color fabrics that the Romans loved so much.

Why is that encouraging to know about where she is from? Lydia's hometown was from the very place that Paul had been prevented from going to in the area of Bithynia. But if Paul had gone there, she wouldn't have been there. God knew that. So God funneled Paul toward Philippi and Lydia probably thought she was going to be in Philippi simply to do some great business deals and turn a profit...but God had a divine appointment for Lydia. God wanted her to here to good news about Jesus and so was providentially providing a divine appointment between Paul sharing the gospel and Lydia ready to listen to it. It says here she was a worshipper of God, but she needed more. She needed to be believer in Jesus Christ and accept the grace gift that God had given her in Jesus so God brought them together.

Let me ask you a question. What brought you to Yacolt? Let me suggest it wasn't just better deal on a home, more land, it wasn't the country life, or the great steelhead fishing. I believe that God had a divine appointment for you to come right here to this town. I believe that God wants you to know the truth about Jesus too just like Lydia knew. What drew you to this service this morning? I believe that it was more than just finding some feel good moral instruction for you kids. I believe it was more than just hoping to hear a few good tips about how to get in good with God. I believe that it was more than just to find a couple of friends that are kind and helpful. I believe that for some of you God have divinely, providentially drawn you to come here and you may not really know why...but you're here and God wants you to listen to the good news about Jesus Christ. That is what this talk is about. A woman who

responds to the good news about what God has done in Jesus Christ. And God wants to meet you here this morning.

Not only does God divinely arrange appointments for you to hear His good news message. He also is the one actively preparing your heart. See there is v.14 it says she was listening and the “Lord opened her heart to respond...” God is the active ingredient in the preparation of men and women’s hearts to hear the good news. He even know is preparing some of your hearts to be able to understand the information of the truth. God has already prepared people that have come into your life as examples of godly men and women. These are not perfect examples, but they are examples and models of someone who continually goes back to God for strength and stability and forgiveness. God has given you an example of a godly father or neighbor. Maybe it was a mother that has prayed for years for your heart to be softened to the truth that God wants you to hear this morning. God is preparing your heart and ridding it of the skepticism and ridicule and preconceived lies that have rattled around in your head. God may have prepared you through difficult circumstances and failures at your attempts to try and make life work out on your own. God may have prepared you by showing you clearly that apart from Him there is very little purpose and meaning in life. Prepared by opening your eyes to see the vanity of all the stuff you have been chasing after that you thought would bring you satisfaction and fulfillment, but it only leaves you with an empty missing void in your heart.

I want you to know that God is the preparer of hearts. God is the one who will open your heart. It does not say that Lydia opened her heart. She responded certainly. She responded in faith. But it is God who opened her heart. Paul didn’t do it by clever words or preaching. God did it.

Look at verse 14. Lydia was a woman who listened. She was listening because she was interested...more than that she was listening because she was hungry and thirsty to know the truth about God. I will

let you in on a little secret that if you have ever done much public speaking you know this already. The people who are out in the crowd listening think that if they are in the back few rows they can hide. But they can't. Unless the speaker is glued to his notes, he can see quite well exactly who is hungry and listening and who is not. He can tell those with the glazed far-away look whose mind have wandered off thinking of the afternoons football game and the problem at work and the roast in the oven. He can easily tell the ones who have given up and are sleeping in heavenly peace. He can also tell those who are on the edge of their seats anticipating expectantly to hear a word from God. He can tell those who are hungry and thirsty to hear from God ready to catch every single word. Lydia listened and desired and hungered for God's word. Is that the way others would describe you as they see you worship in the word. Are you listening? Hungry? Expectant? I find it interesting that people can go and sit in a movie theater for sometimes over 3 hours watching a show, watching without dreaming of being tired or bored. When the movie ended wishing it would keep going on. But that's different you protest. Yes. It is far different. Here lies the Word of a powerful almighty God who has divinely brought you here, providentially prepared you and desires to speak to your heart. It is far, far different then a movie show. I say this not to condemn for I too am equally at fault. I say these things to motivate us.

Lydia listened. The Lord opened her heart. She responded in faith and belief. In v. 31 It says "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved." And with that faith that too comes from God, Lydia responded and believed. She moved forward in active obedience and publicly identified herself as part of the family of God. She was baptized. Maybe some of you have believed but have not taken that step of faith to tell the community of believers and identify fully with the family of God. I Jesus man I believe and intend to follow Him. I am Jesus woman I want to serve Him and walk in His steps.

Lydia told others about the good news that she had heard. She told the rest of her family and they too responded in faith, believed and were baptized. Lydia was ready to use the resources that God had given her to be a blessing to others. She must have had a very large house as she could easily provide housing for Paul, Timothy, Silas and Luke without raising any question of impropriety. The things that God had given her, she held with an open hand for God to use as He desired.

Maybe you are already a believe and have responded in faith to the good news about Jesus Christ. Possibly there were points of application that we could learn something about God. That He is in the business of providentially arranging divine appointments. To the believer the fact that you are here in Yacolt is not an accident. Even the family that you were born into no matter how difficult is no accident. Each conversation...even each automobile accident is no accident. As point of application knowing that God is making divine appointments and preparing peoples hearts I want us to pray this week that God would open our eyes to see those hearts that He has prepared and ask what part we are to say, to act, to be a part of His divine drama. God sent Paul to the riverside. He may just as well be sending you to a heart that He is right now preparing.

Maybe you are a woman and always kind of felt the Bible was so male dominated and God never had a special place for you. Maybe you look at some of the business or leadership skills that you have and wonder why it is that if you were a man you would have a far greater capacity to minister. Would you affirm to God that He made you just the way He planned. God loves to work through people in the most unexpected ways. Would you thank God for making you a woman and ask him to help you be the most influential woman you could be for the kingdom of God.

Maybe your application this week is in the area of listening. You have grown lazy and undisciplined in your listening and it has slid into a

lack of earnestly desiring to hear from God. Would you even now ask God to give you a hunger to listen to Him and His word? Would you commit to doing everything you can to eliminate distractions that might keep you from listening to God.

I believe this morning there are several of you who have come in here wondering what drew you in. yet at the back of your heart you have begun to realize that today is a divine appointment for you. You can tell that God has been preparing you heart, and God is opening your heart just like He did for Lydia. God has opened your heart to see that you are a sinner and in need of help. God has opened your heart to understand the simple gospel message that Jesus is God's son who died on the cross to pay for my sins. That Jesus was raised from the dead to life and that we too can experience that same resurrection power in forgiveness and freedom from the prisons that we have locked ourselves in. Why are you in Yacolt? Has God prepared your heart? Has God opened your heart? Just like Lydia on the riverside that Sabbath morning. Today may well be the appointed day of salvation for you. I would like to know if anyone is God-prepared and ready to respond. Raise you hand. Go

Acts 16

What is going on in the story?

v.1 Paul returns to those towns visiting the believers. He does not just share the news and leave. He comes back to check up and encourage them.

Timothy: Jewish mother, a believer

Gentile father, not a believer. Mixed cultural heritage. Yet a good reputation known in several cities and respected.

v.3 Paul was also impressed with this young man and wanted to disciple him. This guy was gifted for ministry. He had him circumcised because of the Jews who were in these parts. Because the Jews all questioned his mixed breeding and it was a major barrier for one who was trying to reach out to these people. WHAT?? Paul did? I thought the whole last chapter was that circumcision wasn't needed. Why? I Cor 9:20

Example of limiting my freedom in order to communicate the gospel message.

For the fellowship of believers between Jews and Gentiles. Timothy was already well respected. This was not a salvation issue. Timothy wanted to have a voice to minister. Even since he came from a mixed family. He was even more suspect.

This was a **very unselfish act to do on his part. This act did not come without cost. I'm willing to do this as long as its not very inconvenient to me.** I usually say "hey there is freedom in Christ. I don't have to do that"

v.4 They too were bringing the elders message from Jerusalem to the gentile churches since they haven't heard it yet. explaining what the elders in Jerusalem had decided that salvation is by grace alone and circumcision is not needed. But love limits my liberty and I will become all things to all men in order to save some.

v.6 How does the spirit move? Forbidden to speak in an area. "It seemed good to me" How does God move people?

Bigger message they are seeking out God and sensitive to their leading. Were they led by the spirit to head in that direction but then God changed his mind and said no. go this way. God is certainly planning and directing history of the spread...but Is this not disturbing? Or is it more restful knowing that God can move and direct in his way.

Sometimes God lets us in a plan that's bigger and sometimes he doesn't. If it **appears that sometimes he changes his mind that's Ok it happened to Paul and so if it happens to you and feels frustrating that's Ok because its happened before to apostle Paul.**

Abraham and Isaac. God changes mind and provides the ram? No this was God's plan all along. **We must have a strong view of who God is** to reconcile what appears like a capricious God.

We tend to doubt ourselves. Did I miss something the first time? What did I do wrong?

v.7 Any difference between the holy spirit and the spirit of Jesus?
Same person of Holy Spirit.

V8 A vision. A from Macedonia. Must have had a Grecian dress. Language of Greek with Macedonian accent. "come over to Macedonia and help us." He immediately headed out for Greece.

v.10 We decided. A team decision. Not a leader ramming down people throats.

V13 to the Jew first. Seek out the synagogue and godfearers.
"I'm going down to the river. Not 10 men in the town. No synagogue.

Why is this story here? Why the **mention of a woman?** Breaking down of barriers to women. Culturally bias against women during this time. Luke is **giving the introduction of how the Eurorpean church was born.**

v.14 Lydia, dyer of purple. At Thyatira. Probably a gentile.
Worshipped God

Listener

The Lord **opened her heart.** This happens to everyone at salvation. Why was it necessary for God to open her heart? Because it is God that opens a persons heart. He does the work in her spirit.

She **responded to the message** Paul preached

Was **baptized. Identified into the family** of God. Her whole house **Hospitable.** Prevailed on us to stay with her. Did she have a husband? Would this not be scandalous to have these Jewish men stay in her home.

Wealthy enough room for extended stay guests.

Thyatira was famous for its production of crimson purple dye and dyed cloth made from the juice of local madder root.

v.16 Slave girl is fortune telling. Masters of her get a profit off of her. Paul says "Whether they preach Christ out of envy or wrong motives whatever. I'm glad Christ is speaking."
You may not want a wrong kind of endorsement. She may have continued to drown on and on in a loud voice so that he could not preach the gospel well.

Literally "a sprit, a Python" The pythonic spirit was a snake that supposedly inspired the prophetesses at Delphi to speak oracles.

v.18 Paul was greatly annoyed. So he cast out the demon. It wasn't a personal thing about the girl...but cast out the demon. He recognized the source of the comments.

v.19 The magistrates were angry and tossed them in prison. Was this just a trumped up charge? Or was there any validity to their charges that v.21 they are proclaiming a lawful for us to accept or observe being Romans. Inciting rebellion against the roman empire. But really they were mad because they just lost a revenue stream.

Paul and Silas were in Phillippi in 50 AD less then a year after Emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome for causing disturbances. Roman scorn for Jews was at high tide.

Men capable of exosing spirits required maximum security. Paul and Silas were probably scarcely able to move form the blood loss and lacerated muscles. Sitting or lying with the feet fastened in stock so they could neither shift nor roll over must have been agony.

If a prisoner escaped, the life of the guard was demanded in his place. Suicide was the accepted Roman alternative to the disgrace of execution esp since the suicide victims property went to the heirs and the executed mans went to the state. This guy was so terrified by the supernatural power to even think to look to see if they had gone.

v.37 Paul and Silas had to establish their innocence in order to protect the believers in Phillippis to avoid the precedent of treating Christians and missionary harshly.

Swindall p.141

v.11 "ran a straight course" a nautical term for wind at their backs. They ;make the trip in only two days which is amazing because the trip back over same millage takes 5 days. Acts 20:6

They step on European soil in Neopolis and walk 10 miles to the leading Roman city in the area Phillipi. Earned citizenship by helping to defeat the enemies of Ceasar Augustus in 43BC and exempted them from taxes forever. It became a mini Rome and there was much political pride. Phillippi was situated on a hill and was a natural military outpost. Roman soldiers were a common sight as were the trappings of Roman dress and manner.

Paul's encounter with the medium fortune teller demonstrates that not everything in fortune telling is fraud and humbug. Real fortune telling powers are demonic. Do not go there. The truth the girl told received her knowledge from demons.

In every major breakthrough, there is a corresponding resistance. For every new advance there will be a counterattack by the enemy. Do not be intimidated and do not give in. We have Christ's power. We can stand fast in Him. "I John 4:4 "Greater is He that is in you than he who is in the world"

So after the demon was gone it was not smooth sailing like you would think.

Counterattack: What happened? Greed. The girl's masters cared nothing about the girl's well being only their profits were gone. They lost income and wanted to exact revenge. Prejudice. "being Jews" v.20 Exaggeration and lies. "Paul and his men weren't "throwing the city into confusion". They were only doing what right. They had not broken any unlawful customs.

The Jews were not a big threat in Phillippi we know there were not many there. Not enough for a synagogue

How would you respond in such mistreatment? Lied about. Beaten. Thrown in dungeon, locked in stocks cracked ribs scream out with each breath you take. Your back aches from pain and vice like muscles are cramping. Rats scurry across the floor. Feel like singing??

What did Paul and Silas do in prison? If they were like many normal Christians they would have said, "Why did we ever start out on this journey? It is just too hard to bring the gospel to Europe. If they were more theological they might have said. " I guess none of these people here in Phillippi are part of God's elect. As soon as we can we had better get out of here and go find somewhere God is going to bless>' Or if they were a lot like modern Christians these days, they would say, " I'm not very happy in this prison. God wants me to be happy. Let's get out of here and find a place where we can be happy." Paul didn't say any of those

things. They spent the hours of the night praying and singing praises to God.

Most of us would look at that and say “Things are so bad, nothing good could come of it. But Paul says look at the opposition God has got to have some incredible things up His sleeve. God has a wonderful opportunity in the making here.

Praising God in hard times reaps a harvest of benefits. They could have become very discouraged and despaired and yet they choose to believe that God was still at work in the midst of the pain and his hand was working things out for their good.

Was Paul advocating “household salvation” Was he promising that when the head of the household comes to belief everybody else will inevitably believe also? No that is not what the bible teaches. But it happened here that everyone heard and believed.

Luke seemed to stay behind. V40 “They left. “ perhaps he stayed to teach and pastor this flock.

Kent Hughes p212

God’s forces of nature propelled them forward with the message of grace.

Illust p215 Salvation armies persecution and attacks in London.

The officials who punished Paul were called Lictors in Latin. This is where we get our expression “getting you licks “ came from. The mens backs were reduced to a sticky swollen mass of skin and dried blood.

Jay Moser

God’s plan includes weakness. Yours and mine.

3 ways god builds his church and still does today

God can lead you to prepared people v.13

Some of you can tell that God prepared you. Set you up ready to receive the truth. This was her divine appointment with God as Paul and the group go the river that day.

Its great when fruit just falls into our laps.

God can give you wisdom when evil must be confronted.

There really are powers of darkness. There’s a battle out there.

The powers of darkness are not as strong then the power of God.

When the gospel comes into conflict with someone’s wallets there is ruckus.

Paul didn't confront it right away. Time to pray for wisdom. Look for God's timing and God's words to confront.

When God's people respond to suffering with grace there are always prisoners listening.

Prisoners to sin. The jailer was imprisoned and needed freeing. They want to know if the church is more than what they read in the newspaper. Is it real. The way we respond when things are tough...people are watching. When things are good people are watching. God is real. When we see the truth of the gospel lived out in another Christian you say. Whatever they've got I want because it is real.