

Lydia, Judged to Be Faithful

Lesson Scripture: Acts 16:11-40

Focus Scripture: Acts 16:11-15, 40

Key Verse: When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she prevailed upon us. Acts 16:15

ACTS 16:11-15, 40 (NRSV UE)

Acts 16:11-15

11 We therefore set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis,

12 and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days.

13 On the Sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there.

14 A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul.

15 When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she prevailed upon us.

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40 After leaving the prison they went to Lydia's home, and when they had seen and encouraged the brothers and sisters there, they departed.

ACTS 16:11-15, 40 (KJV)

Acts 16:11-15

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.

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40 And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.

Key Terms

- **Ethnicity** – Related to a person's or people's race and identity.
- **Speculation** – Guess at a reason for a thing or event; an opinion.
- **Hospitality** – Friendly and generous reception and care for guests.
- **Immigration** – The act of moving from one country to live in another.

Introduction

The story of Lydia is one of those open-ended stories that allows anyone with a particular agenda to use the story to support that agenda. But here is what that

story says in its generic sense. God's favor is never restricted by ethnicity, social status, location, or gender factors. Thus, we don't need elaborate structures as sanctuaries for people to meet with God. The Lord of heaven meets us where we are both devotionally and physically. And when God meets us, that encounter leaves in us a special radiation that draws others to Christ.

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Telling the Bible Story

Paul went to Macedonia because of a vision. This naturally prompts the question of what a vision is and how it differs from a mere dream. For John Calvin, a vision is an experience where God (by visual imprint) "sealed his truth by clear revelation." Unlike mere dreams, visions have a clear meaning that is always consistent with scripture. Visions call for obedience to the revelation given.

The "we" in verse 10 has sparked speculation on the reason for its use. One view is that the writer of Acts, Luke, is noting his presence in the scene. If this is indeed the case, then

he is boosting the credibility of the events he reported. Luke is saying, "I can verify that the events happened this way."

From the text, we see that Lydia was a wealthy businesswoman. That would have made her outstanding in her day. But the text also raises another interesting point. Paul's ministry included women – Gentile women. But we stop

short of using this passage to support the view that it shows God has no problem with women pastors. That is a debate for another dinner table.

A major point that readers of the passage overlooked is that Lydia was a worshiper before the encounter with Paul. So, we can say, not only was her body in the right place to witness to Paul's ministry, her heart was also in the right place. This is key for anyone claiming her blessings.

Also note that at that time, hospitality was a prized virtue in the ancient Mediterranean world and a visible characteristic of the early church. Luke mentions hosting concerning Lydia and the jailer (v. 34). Are we interested today in following Lydia's lead?

Sankofa

For a non-Bible Lydia, Rebecca Protten (1718 - 1780) fits the profile. She was born on the Caribbean island of Antigua, kidnapped as a child, and enslaved on the island of St. Thomas. Around age 12,

when her slave master died, she got her freedom.

She became a Christian through the witness of Moravian missionaries on St. Thomas. After her conversion, she witnessed to the enslaved people on the island, often at great risk to her life. But she pushed on and earned credits for

ministry in the Caribbean, Germany, and modern Ghana. Hence, the title "Mother of Modern Missions" honors her ministry work. The records do not show that Rebecca had Lydia's financial means. Yet, like Lydia, she opened her home and life to be vehicles for spreading the great news of God's love for humanity.

Luke mentions hosting concerning Lydia and the jailer (v. 34). Are we interested today in following Lydia's lead?

Case Study

One of the tragedies of modern Christian witness is that too often church members can only see events through the lens of their denomination or the opinions of preachers they like. This is unfortunate because the core messages of the Bible have no denominational tint, racial or gender paint.

When it comes to the story of Lydia, we try to stay clear of the usual debate about whether her story proves that God ordains women as he does men. Our approach is more conciliatory and keeps us in the middle of the road. So, what we see in Lydia's story is a wealthy businesswoman who loved the Lord. She had an active relationship with God before she encountered Paul. Apostle Paul helped her to formalize that relationship in Christian theology.

After that point, she showed her Christian generosity by supporting the minister whom the Lord used to expand her understanding of a relationship with Jesus Christ. Therefore, out of this story shines the principle that you don't have to be poor to be humble. And God is not

against the rich. In fact, Lydia showed a spirit that more people – men and women – should adopt. Her salvation was not just for herself. She started a local church assembly right where she was. She felt led to do it, and she did. Thankfully, she did not get trapped in debating whether

God ordained women or not. She did what the Holy Spirit led her to do right where she was.

Now, here is where it gets tricky. For those who believe her story shows God's approval of female pastors, ok, use her story. No problem. For those who oppose that view, note that she was a co-worker of Paul. Since Paul was the senior minister, we can say she really worked under Paul's covering. Problem solved!

Life Application

The issue of immigration – legal and illegal – and how the church community should treat immigrants, is currently before us. Without dancing around the core matters, what is your opinion on this issue? Sure, it is a multifaceted issue. But

you must settle down around the issue at some point. Here is a haunting point to consider. Does Christian duty ever override legal rules? At what point does the Christian duty to feed, clothe, and shelter strangers override immigration status?

So, what we see in Lydia's story is a wealthy businesswoman who loved the Lord. She had an active relationship with God before she encountered Paul.

Maybe not with illegal strangers, but these are the types of issues Lydia and Rebecca would have faced when they opened their lives and homes to people. Sharing God's love can be demanding. Lydia's story challenges us to step up to that demand.

Questions

1. How could Lydia have been a worshiper before she met Paul?
2. The Bible text seems to decry rich

people. Is wealth a hindrance to humility?

3. What, if anything, about Lydia's life could you adopt and practice today?

Closing Devotions

Closing Hymn: "Lead Us, Heavenly Father, Lead Us" (AMECH #547)

Closing Prayer: Lord God almighty, help me to develop the accommodating spirit that is right for the ministry of your love. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

August 31–September 6

Monday	Romans 8:31-39 (More Than Victorious)
Tuesday	Genesis 13:14-18 (See What God Has Promised)
Wednesday	Deuteronomy 34:1-12 (The Promised Land Revealed)
Thursday	Hebrews 4:1-10 (God's Promised Rest)
Friday	Hebrews 10:14-18 (God's New Covenant)
Saturday	Psalms 27 (Whom Shall I Fear?)
Sunday	Joshua 1:1-11 (Be Strong and Courageous)