

LYDIA

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A woman of courage and faith

"That night Paul had a vision: A man from Macedonia in northern Greece was standing there, pleading with him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" So we decided to leave for Macedonia at once, having concluded that God was calling us to preach the Good News there. We boarded a boat at Troas and sailed straight across to the island of Samothrace, and the next day we landed at Neapolis. From there we reached Philippi, a major city of that district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. And we stayed there several days. On the Sabbath we went a little way outside the city to a riverbank, where we thought people would be meeting for prayer, and we sat down to speak with some women who had gathered there. One of them was Lydia from Thyatira, a merchant of expensive purple cloth, who worshiped God. As she listened to us, the Lord opened her heart, and she accepted what Paul was saying. She and her household were baptised, and she asked us to be her guests. "If you agree that I am a true believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my home." And she urged us until we agreed.

When Paul and Silas left the prison, they returned to the home of Lydia. There they met with the believers and encouraged them once more. Then they left town."

(Acts 16:9-15, 40 NLT)

Lydia's biography

- Rich influential businesswoman, importer and seller of purple cloth. Roman purple dye was a highly prized, luxurious colour extracted from Mediterranean sea snails. It was reserved for elite Roman, and later Byzantine, officials, emperors, and priests, signifying high status. The dye was extremely expensive—sometimes costing more than its weight in gold.
- From Thyatira in the province of Lydia (modern day Akhisar in western Turkey). During the Roman era (1st century AD), it was famous for its dyeing facilities and was a centre of the purple cloth trade. Among the ancient ruins of the city, inscriptions have been found relating to these trade guilds. The guilds would have all been heavily involved in idolatry and emperor worship.

- Thyatira was one of the seven churches mentioned in Revelation 2 and condemned for sins of immorality and idolatry.
- She lived in Philippi, a Roman city and colony originally named after Philip, the father of Alexander the Great. At this time it was populated by Roman army veterans and was a centre of worship of Roman gods, including emperor worship. The main language was Latin, not Greek. There was no evidence of a synagogue, probably due to the absence of Jewish men.
- Gentile believer in the Jewish God. She met with other women outside the city walls regularly for prayer near the river. Paul and Silas (also probably Timothy and Luke) met this group of women to share the gospel around 49 AD.
- First European convert to Christianity.
- Founder member of the church at Philippi which met in her home. Other founder members were a Roman jailer and his household and a slave girl miraculously delivered from demon possession. This church had a special place in Paul's heart.

"So it is right that I should feel as I do about all of you, for you have a special place in my heart. You share with me the special favour of God, both in my imprisonment and in defending and confirming the truth of the Good News. God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:7-8)

(Written 13 years later in AD 62 when Paul was in prison in Rome)

Lessons

- Her courage and faith became part of the church she helped to found.
- She was a woman of prayer – prayer leading to salvation of whole households and a thriving church.
- She stood up for her faith while mixing with the elite of Roman society. This was risky (in view of what happened to Paul and Silas).

- She was obedient to Jesus' message: repent and be baptised.

*"Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear."
(Philippians 2:12 NLT)*

- The presence of the Holy Spirit in evangelism – her household were saved and baptised. It was God Himself who opened their hearts.
- Generosity and hospitality – she wouldn't take no for an answer ('implored', 'entreated', 'compelled').
- She used her resources (finances, large house, influence) to build a thriving, generous, compassionate church – a church where Paul could send co-workers where they would be guaranteed some rest, refreshment and some much needed pampering.

*"As you know, you Philippians were the only ones who gave me financial help when I first brought you the Good News and then traveled on from Macedonia. No other church did this. Even when I was in Thessalonica you sent help more than once. I don't say this because I want a gift from you. Rather, I want you to receive a reward for your kindness. At the moment I have all I need—and more! I am generously supplied with the gifts you sent me with Epaphroditus. They are a sweet-smelling sacrifice that is acceptable and pleasing to God. And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus."
(Philippians 4:15-19 NLT)*

*"If the Lord Jesus is willing, I hope to send Timothy to you soon for a visit. Then he can cheer me up by telling me how you are getting along... And I have confidence from the Lord that I myself will come to see you soon. Meanwhile, I thought I should send Epaphroditus back to you. He is a true brother, co-worker, and fellow soldier. And he was your messenger to help me in my need. I am sending him because he has been longing to see you, and he was very distressed that you heard he was ill. And he certainly was ill; in fact, he almost died. But God had mercy on him—and also on me, so that I would not have one sorrow after another. So I am all the more anxious to send him back to you, for I know you will be glad to see him, and then I will not be so worried about you. Welcome him in the Lord's love and with great joy, and give him the honour that people like him deserve."
(Philippians 2:19, 24-29 NLT)*

- Not perfect!

*"Now I appeal to Euodia and Syntyche. Please, because you belong to the Lord, settle your disagreement. And I ask you, my true partner, to help these two women, for they worked hard with me in telling others the Good News. They worked along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are written in the Book of Life."
(Philippians 4:2-3 NLT)*

Conclusion

Lydia's courageous faith resulted in obedience, generosity, hospitality, compassion and evangelism in a hostile environment. The church that she helped to build had these same characteristics. She is a great example for us to follow in building our church for future generations (and avoiding becoming a Euodia or Syntyche).