

## Acts Chapter 16

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

As you can see they are going out and they are trying to do mission work, they are trying to go and plant churches and somehow the Holy Spirit is saying “no, don’t go there”. There is something stopping them from going into a certain area and that forces them eventually to go to another area, they have another vision that comes to go down to Macedonia and they changed their plans and it is actually a big U turn that they are taking and they are going somewhere completely different.

There is something we can learn about guidance here. A lot of times we think that God is going to guide us through open doors. We pray God give me open doors into a certain area and then suddenly we go somewhere and then God is guiding us, we can see all. Yes we have opportunity here, opportunity there and that means that God is guiding us in that direction, but here we see God’s guiding hand happening through close doors. It is still the same God guiding but somehow he is guiding people by closing doors and these are people whose heart is set about church planting and doing mission and evangelizing and God is saying, no go somewhere else. **So sometimes God can also guide us through saying no.**

There are different things about guidance that we can learn here.

1. At times we are guided through Nos.
2. Guidance is not just passive but requires an active decision. At the very end it says when Paul had seen the vision immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us. So they came together and they concluded. This is not just like Holy Spirit that I felt. This is actually wrestling with what is God is doing, thinking through it and ultimately coming to a decision. So guidance from God yes is there but we still need to make decisions. We still have to conclude things. We can’t just be people saying, “as the spirit leads”. Yes the spirit leads, we have to be very sensitive to what the spirit says but we have to make decisions. We have to conclude as well. So guidance also happens, it is not just passive but requires active decisions.
3. Guidance is often corporate. This is something you can see. As the things were happening was speaking to many people and they came together. There was a **we**, it was not just Paul decided but it was a we decided. This is Luke speaking so Luke is involved in that. So we can see that a lot of times guidance comes corporately as well. So for us it means that if we are in decision making processes we involve the Christian community around us, people who are close to us, people whose opinion we

value, spiritual leaders of our churches. There are different people that we involve in our decision making as well. So because God's guidance comes corporately as well.

11 So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and 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 some days.

Before we were reading Acts it was always they, they, they. Remember Luke is writing this. So we can see early on he says, and they went through the region. Suddenly he is saying "we". From this point onwards we know Luke has joined the travel. So he is the one writing this. So from here onwards we know Luke is joining into the company, he is traveling with them as well. The Holy Spirit would have continue guiding them into Asia rather than into Europe then probably Luke would have not been part of the journey. Then probably all the letters like 1-Corinthians, Thessalonians would have not been written, but because the Holy Spirit guided them in such a way Luke was able to be on the travel and we know this now through the usage of the word **WE**.

So as they were traveling they finally to Philippi and here is one of the first conversions we are going to look at for today. We have three conversions that happened in this text. There are three people who came to know Christ.

The first conversion is the conversion of Lydia.

13 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. 14 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, 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.

So this is the story of how Lydia came to faith.

### **Who is Lydia?**

Lydia was a business woman. She deals in purple cloth. Purple was a royal color, so it was the more expensive kind of cloth. It was actually rather rare to get that color, you have to take snails and kind of squeeze out the color out of them. They were rare to find to get the purple dye. She was a God fearer, somebody who worships God that means she is probably not a Jew, commentators would differentiate, and she is probably not a Jew because they call her a God worshiper. So if she would be a Jew they would just say a Jew, but they called her a God worshiper. So she was somebody who knows God, who worships God and comes to a prayer meeting, like a small group with women. They come together on Sabbath and they are praying together. So she is probably a moral woman, well to do moral kind of person. So that is kind of character type of who she is, somebody who knows God. It says in the passage that Lord has prepared her heart. Her heart was already prepared to hear the word.

### **How did she come to faith?**

Lydia was in a small group. Paul came to that group and then he shared the gospel and because her heart was already ready to receive it, she was able to hear and then she believed. So that is how she got to know the gospel and it is very important because many of us might fit that kind of type of people who are may be people who have gone to church all their lives and people who are may be cultural Christians, who grew up in Christian homes, they could be identified with that kind of type, people are well off. This kind of type of people who come to church regularly and even though they fear God in a way but they don't have a gospel relationship with God, that is why it is so important that when we go into our small groups, that we continue to preach the gospel to one another, because we have no idea that may be one of our hearts might just be suddenly ready to receive it. So sometimes we may fool ourselves, we think we have that relationship with God but haven't really heard the gospel yet. So it is so important that when we go to our small groups into a place that we continue to preach the gospel to one another. So that we can make sure that anyone of us can always regularly hear it as well. That is how she got to hear the gospel and she responded

### **What is the evidence that she really came to faith?**

After she believed and then she was baptized and then she went out and she told her whole household. She was so excited about what happened, she went to go and tell her household. She called her household together and they all got to hear the good news and they all got baptized and they had effect on her in such a way that she started inviting people to her home. So these are the evidences that we know from her unique story here that this is somebody who was affected by the gospel, immediately she was willing to open her home. She was willing to let it cost her, because having strangers coming to your house and you don't know who those people are. So it affected her wallet as well. So these are the kind of evidences that we see from Lydia here that the gospel took hold on her life and immediately she was affected and she suddenly changed as a person as well.

Few things we can learn from there is that, of course just because we go to church, just because we are cultural Christians, does not mean that we really know the gospel. It shows us that in our small groups or in our small communities that it is always good to regularly preach the gospel because we never know if God has prepared a heart for somebody that there are people out there in the world today who God has prepared, their hearts are prepared already but somebody has to go and still speak the gospel to them. See Lydia's heart was ready but if Paul wouldn't have come and shared the gospel with her she wouldn't have been able to believe. Third thing we can learn from this kind of conversion story is, once we are converted by the gospel it affects us in our lifestyle so dramatically that we are willing to open our homes, get into communities and do things like these. So this is what we can see here from Lydia.

Conversion of slave girl

16 As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. 17 She followed Paul and

us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." 18 And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour. 19 But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers.

### **Who was she?**

She was a slave girl, she was possessed and oppressed. She is being used by her masters that they know that she is having demonic things going on in her and she know that she is suffering, she is being possessed but they are using her and using her for financial gains because through that suffering that she had, she was able to prophesy and fortune tell and they are actually capitalizing on that and actually making money. So she is a very oppressed person, she is sick and being used at the same time. So that is the kind of character that she represents. If we look in our society today there are many people in the same way. People who come to this country who are being oppressed through workplaces, people who are sick, people who are spirit plagued, people who have psychological problems and people who have addictions. This kind of people is a kind of character that she represents here, somebody who is being used and somebody who is sick and somebody who is oppressed.

### **How did she come to faith?**

Through a power encounter she got to faith. It said here that Paul was annoyed. In the Greek if we look at the word, a better word would probably be grieved and troubled, other words which are being used there. So may be being troubled is a good word, it means that he is seeing how she is suffering and how people are making money out of her and he is greatly troubled by this situation. So I don't think he is too troubled by the fact that she is proclaiming the truth, because she is saying, they are people who are going to show you the way to salvation. I think he is more troubled about her. So through a power encounter to somebody coming there and actually casting out the demon or praying over she was able to meet Christ. Now we don't have great length of knowledge of what happened to her afterwards but we only have evidence that she has been saved by the fact of the reaction that happened later on. We see here that the owners were so upset because her possession was gone and she couldn't do fortune-telling any more. The owners wanted to put them in jail. So that is the evidence that we have that something happens to her that something in her life changed.

So few things we can learn from there as well. There are people who fit that category in our world here today that both are having a world view, we must understand they are spirits and we must have a world view of that as well. So actively going on actively praying for people is something that we can really do and then people have power encounters. This kind of person she represents the sick, the oppressed, the needy people and as if go out there and pray with them and help them out, this is the way that we can minister to them as well. So we can see there is salvation that comes through this power encounter as well.

## Conversion of the jailor

20 And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. 21 They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice." 22 The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. 23 And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. 24 Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

So they were put to jail actually helping a slave girl, the information was miscued, the word was changed, people were lying about what they were actually doing and what happened was they were put into jail and they were locked up and this is the kind of the pre-story of how the jailor comes to faith which we can read in this section of the text

25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, 26 and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. 27 When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." 29 And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. 30 Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." 32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. 34 Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

### Who was the jailor?

He was a government servant. He is an average worker in our society, everything from a policeman, fireman, a jailor, an accountant, any kind of clerk type of work. He represents the average person category. So he is about going, doing his job, he is not spiritually possessed like the girl. He is not seeking as Lydia was. He is an average person who is not seeking for God but something happens in his life that suddenly changes his mind and he realized that there is something more to life. Ultimately what happens is, he sees how Paul and Silas are behaving. First of all the first thing that struck him is that, they were beaten, they are struck, they are put into jail and they were singing hymns in the midst of their suffering and pain. Then we had this earthquake and everybody gets loose but the amazing thing is that he thought that they all ran away and he was about to kill himself because back then if you are a jailor and all your prisoners are gone, the government is going to come and going to kill you because of not doing your job correctly. Paul stopped him from killing himself. That is really a character thing. That is really living out the Christian character in every situation that we are in.

Even though they were freed by a miracle of God through an earthquake they did not take that opportunity to go and flee because by law they were actually in jail. So they stayed and because of their character and because of their conduct they were able to speak into that guy's life that the jailor said, "hey there is something different about you guys. What must I do to be saved like you guys?" He recognized that there was something different about them because of their character. So that is how he got saved. How we behave in difficult situations speaks aloud testimony to other people as well.

### **How he got saved?**

He got baptized and the whole procedure happened there.

From today's text there are three very different characters. I don't think these are the only people who got converted in this period of time but Luke specifically points out to those three people. He is trying to tell us something here. Why he has taken people who are so different from one another. There is this rich woman, the slave girl, there is jailor (government servant), he is putting these three different characters together and saying, this is how the beginning of the church of Philippi, people from different socioeconomic groups, people from different characters, people from different pre-spiritual backgrounds. He is putting them altogether to show us one great concept is that the gospel is for everyone. There is nobody who is not deserving of the gospel. I would say, nobody here is worthy of the gospel, it is all by grace, nobody is good enough that they deserve the gospel but nobody is bad enough that they can't receive it. Gospel is the power of God for everyone.

There is something we can learn from it, there are no special groups set aside who are worthy of the gospel and there is no person satisfied who is not worthy of the gospel. So that means every person who we come in contact in our daily lives is worthy of the gospel.

We see in this text that there are different ways how to reach different people. Paul used different ways. In one of his text says, he became all things for all people that he might win some. So how can we become like those people and reach out to them and I think for different groups there are different strategies. There are different ways in how we reach them. May be we have some sick people around and we go pray for them, pray for power encounter. May be there are some intellectuals around, so maybe we get some apologetics and engage them in conversation. There are people who are drawn into unique subcultures; we get involved in their unique subcultures.

Linda Berkovitz did some studies about Kuala Lumpur.

*The church for the rich, call to has the highest number of millionaires surpassing all other cities in the world according to December 2014 report by international wealth research group wealth inside. The city had 13800 millionaires on high net worth individuals in 2013, the most amount of millionaires in the city worldwide*

So there is a place to build churches for rich people.

How can the church come to these and be relevant among them, how can such power be widely used by God?

Some wealthy people of course gather around volunteer group cause a special interest, hobbies, chosen family activities, collecting things, so these might be some ways that Christians can get involved to reach out to them. Sometimes people find identity with neighborhoods. We have to figure out strategies to connect with these people from that area.

How can we reach out with gospel to poor people?

It might be a very different approach.

How do you start a church with people don't want to meet other people?

As we know gospel is for everyone so we have to develop strategies to meet their needs.

Vivian Toh has written

*I see that Kuala Lumpur, where I was born, has so much potential. But beyond infrastructure built to international standards, advertising, and retail businesses driving the economy, the spaces built specifically for art festivals, the traditional 'kopitiam' (Chinese coffee shop) concept made famous, and the mentality of a third-world country, KL is as raw as it ever was – Vivian Toh, Editor-in-chief, Cut Out Magazine Malaysia.*

So it has much potential for the arts and the cultures to be developed and we as Christians can be placed right there and been influenced right there in those places as well. So everywhere we go we can be an influence for the gospel and we have to think through in our workplaces, in our lifestyles, in our subgroups, in our cultures, in our sports, in our activities, wherever we go how can we be the agent of the gospel in that place and a good example from the US, they now have biker churches, they have cowboy churches. They have different kind of ways in how to reach people for the gospel.

There are people who are uniquely different, they are unique complete different social status, they are in different spiritual pre-spiritual conditions when they came to Christ, and they once were reached out through small groups. Living out Christian character brings so many people to Christ. God uses different ways to reach people and we have to think about in our communities how can God use us uniquely to reach unique groups.