

February 28, 2021

“Called to Serve”
Lesson 5 of Unit

Acts 16:11-15, 40; I Cor. 1:26-30

Intro

Today’s study is the last of five under the theme “The Call of Women.” In this passage, Paul has just seen the vision commonly referred to as “The Macedonian Call.” He comes to Philippi (about 52 AD) and meets Lydia. How they meet and how she responds are at the heart of this lesson.

Read Acts 16:11-15

1. vs. 11: Sailing from Troas to Neapolis

Troas is on the eastern side of the Aegean Sea, Neapolis on the western side

The distance is about 150 miles; it only takes 2 days to get there!

This short time suggests they had favorable winds

The same trip in reverse (Philippi to Troas) takes them 5 days in Acts 20:6

“We”—indicates that Luke is accompanying Paul on this trip, as he did several times

2. vs. 12: From Neapolis to Philippi

They walk from the seaport to the town, roughly 9-10 miles

Philippi is a Roman colony

Became a Roman possession about 168 BC, a Roman colony about 42 BC

By the time Paul gets there, it’s Roman influence is covers about 200 years

Philippi as the “leading city” of that district

Could mean, “first big city” in that area

More likely—it’s the major city in importance and economics in that area

At the eastern end of the Via Egnatia

Roman highway of 535 miles that crosses the Greek peninsula

3. vs. 13: The first Sabbath they are in Philippi

Paul usually goes to the synagogue on the Sabbath to talk about Jesus

There apparently is no synagogue in Philippi

To have a synagogue, must have 10 married Jewish men in the community

Philippi does not appear to have that many—no synagogue

Indicates this city is overwhelmingly Gentile

Paul and Luke go “outside the city gate to the river”

Commentaries suggest it is the Gangites River

It is about 1 ½ miles west of Philippi

Longer than a “Sabbath’s day journey”

Meeting near water overrides the legalities

Where no synagogue is, Jews preferred to meet at pure place near water

Ritual washing of hands before prayer as one reason for this

The group appears to be made up of only women
Group likely made up of three religious groups
Jews, converts to Judaism, God-fearing Gentiles
The third group is most likely the majority
Philippi is predominantly Gentile
This seems an echo of Jesus talking with the Samaritan woman (John 4)

4. vs. 14: Lydia

From the city of Thyatira, which is east of Troas, where Paul just came from
Likely got her name from the Kingdom of Lydia (roughly 1200-546 BC)
The kingdom covered most of the area that included Troas, Ephesus, and Lystra
Roughly the western half of what is now Turkey

Lydia is identified as “a dealer in purple cloth”

Purple dye was hard to get, thus rare
Collected drop by drop from a shellfish or a particular plant
Purple cloth is a luxury item; only the wealthy could afford it
Lydia is likely wealthy, and likely has wealthy connections

She is called a “worshipper of God”

Term is frequently used of Gentile believers (Cornelius, Acts 10)
May have been a proselyte to Judaism, but not for sure
Meeting at the river for prayer is a decidedly Jewish solution to no synagogue
Must have been some Jewish women there with her
Gentiles who worshipped God could pray with Jewish women at the river (!)

5. vs. 15: Her response to what she heard from Paul

She and her household get baptized
Indicates she believed the Gospel message and responded in faith
Suggests that Paul also spoke to her household (were they at the river too?)
He wouldn't have baptized anyone for form's sake; only real faith

Invitation for Paul and his companions to stay at her house

Lydia appears to be the owner of the house; acts with authority on this issue
Must have been a large house for Paul and company to stay there comfortably
Must have been big enough that no shame would come to them for staying there
She is grateful for their bringing the Good News to her and her house
She is able to do something for them, and offers it freely

She emphasizes “If you consider me a believer in the Lord...”

She could be emphasizing the uprightness of her offer in spiritual terms
She may be also be asking this as a test of the genuineness of their faith
Would Jewish men visit the house of a Gentile woman?
How much is she to be included in God's kingdom?

Read Acts 16:40

1. vs. 40: Impact / importance of Lydia's house and hospitality

Paul and Silas return to her house after release from prison

This may be the only place they know anyone, at least this well

There are other brothers and sisters in Christ at the house when they get there

Lydia's house likely the meeting place for the believers in Philippi

Read I Corinthians 1:26-30

Paul has planted a church in Corinth about 52 AD. The first letter to the Corinthian church is dated about 56 AD. Part of the reason for his letter is the reports he has heard about factions and disunity in the church.

1. vs. 26: Paul reminds them of where they came from

Few of them were considered "wise", or influential, or of noble birth

They were a lot of ordinary Gentile people

Paul may be reminding them of their lack of standing with God as Gentiles

They now have been "called"—God accepts them

Reminding them of these lacking qualities helps to remove disunity

He's saying "You were all lacking before God; why do you think you're "better" than others now?"

2. vs. 27: God's way of doing things is usually counter to how man thinks of doing something

Man would choose the wise and the strong

God chooses the foolish and the weak

God loves all people; humans usually choose to love those who are like themselves

God chose Christ's crucifixion as a means of salvation

The Jews were scandalized by this; this isn't what the Messiah is supposed to do

Jesus tells Peter that He is going to the cross to suffer, die, and rise again

Peter tells Him, "This shall not happen to You!"

3. vs. 28: The word "lowly" here is the antonym for "noble"

The cross is seen as "ignoble"

In Roman world, nothing more ignoble than the cross

Only the worst criminals are executed this way

For Jews it is also an issue

"Cursed is he who hangs on a tree" Deut. 21:23

A cross is an acceptable symbol of Christianity today

In the 1st Century, it would have been seen as a shameful and despised object

They would have seen it as unexpected and humbling

4. vs. 29: God's plans / way ensures that no one can claim credit for their own salvation
No person would develop, much less think, of this plan to be saved
God's ways are opposite to and not understandable by human thinking

5. vs. 30: We can claim this salvation, in this form, because we are "in Christ" in three areas:
Righteousness: comes from a term meaning we're guilty of the sin but there is
no longer a penalty
Is more "the presence of right actions" than the "absence of wrong actions"

Holiness: God through the Holy Spirit, is working / developing holiness in us
We learn to identify sin in ourselves
We learn to overcome it
We learn how to produce the fruit of the Spirit
We are enabled to live holy lives that we couldn't without God's power

Application: Over the past 5 weeks, the lessons have dealt with various women in the New Testament and how they followed and served God and the Church. Anna, the Samaritan woman, Mary Magdalene (and others), Priscilla, and now Lydia. Each of these women served where God gave her the opportunity and the gifting. This is still true today. When a woman senses God's calling to serve, she will use her position, her resources, and her gifting to serve as she is called.

All who follow Christ are practicing a faith that many in the world don't understand; they see it as "foolishness." That's God's wisdom to us. As He did with these various women, He still uses people following His way to show His wisdom to the world.

Prayer: Father God, thank You for Your salvation, which inspires in us a desire to serve You. Help us see the places we can serve You, both within the church fellowship, and to those who don't know you yet. Help us hear your call. In Jesus' name, Amen.