

Letter to the Loyal

Week 6

This week, we are going to take a few minutes here to look at the origin story of the church in Philippi. It is worth reading Acts 16:6-40, but for here we are going to focus on Acts 16:6-15. Go ahead and read through the passage and we will have some questions and insights here.

Visions and Dreams

It is important for us to know that the cultures present in the New Testament took visions and dreams seriously. Here, we see that at night Paul had a vision of “a man of Macedonia pleading with him.” I don’t know how you know he’s from Macedonia. Maybe it is the way he dressed. Maybe an accent. Maybe, like dreams I have, you just know things that you otherwise wouldn’t know. Whatever it was, Acts records that it is a vision of a man and that it is enough to turn the boat around to go and help him.

They arrive in Philippi and go down towards the water where worshippers would often gather in a Roman town. There were temples throughout Philippi for various religions, but there was not a Jewish temple. Luke, the writer of Acts, wouldn’t mind if we understood Lydia and her friends as Jewish women, but he doesn’t say that. We only know that she is a “worshipper of God.” Lydia’s heart is opened to Jesus, Paul baptizes her and the rest is history.

Interesting...

You have probably gathered this. Lydia is a woman. She is probably widowed, has some wealth, and is a leader of a household. With her are other women that day, probably worshipping in some form. In Philippi at this time, sadly unlike some of our world today, women were seen as spiritual leaders. Though Luke may not be promoting this leadership, what he records is that she is leading these women. After this encounter, she is funding much of the mission that Paul is on. She is the beginning of this church. It comes from the faithfulness of these women. Here are a few questions for you to wrestle with:

- Why did Paul turn the boat around for a Macedonian man and then meet women?
- Did he assume the vision was of a man?
- Would he have turned the boat around for a woman?

These questions matter for us.

- When we hear of someone in need, who are we willing to “turn the boat around for?”
- Our kids? Family? Friends? Neighbor? Someone far away?

This question is not to cause guilt. It is to pay attention. We can get ourselves in trouble if we are meeting every need everywhere with no discretion. We can also get ourselves in trouble if we never help anyone. So how do we decide? What role does the Holy Spirit play in this? What role do our assumptions and preferences play?

Concluding Thoughts

Paul turned the boat around to go and help someone. The needy male he expected at the water turned out to be a powerful, influential woman who then helped Paul. That’s a wild turn of events.



Of Lydia, Willie James Jennings writes “we can see and sense in this story a giving up and a giving over in Lydia’s actions similar to those who laid their possessions at the apostle’s feet. Here is power put to good use. This exact dynamic has been at the foundations of so many social movements in the world where women of wealth have turned the full power of their resources toward insurgent endeavors that would facilitate a day of liberation.” I love this quote. I love that it is true. Here’s a few questions to end this time.

- What does the story of Lydia stir up in you?
- What will you do with all that you are experiencing, here, in your home, your ordinary life, and your relationships? What big picture themes and patterns are you noticing?

Take a moment to think through that. It isn’t necessarily that you need to do something with it, but maybe name it. Recognize it. Pay attention.

We will keep journeying with these resource pages after Easter.