

=THE BOOK OF ACTS=

Lesson 16

The Conversion of the Philippian Jailer - Acts 16

AIM: to teach my pupils the story of the conversion of the Philippian jailer, and the conversion of the first convert in Europe—Lydia.

POINT OF CONTACT: A significant passage would have to be Acts 16:9 when the man in Macedonia prayed, “Come over into Macedonia, and help us.” Paul had been at Troas and would have gone elsewhere, but the Holy Spirit forbade him to do so. Then came this vision of a man at Macedonia saying, “Come over into Macedonia, and help us.” Since this was a vision, and because visions and dreams are so closely associated, ask the pupils something about dreams. Ask them if they ever thought that God spoke to them in a dream. Ask them if they can remember any funny dream they had. Have them briefly give a detail or two about it. Then they might also think of all the dreams mentioned in the Bible and who dreamed them.

INTRODUCTION: Acts 16 deals with the spreading of the Gospel into Europe. It is certainly vitally connected with each of us, for the Gospel first went to Europe, and from Europe it came to America. Hence, we owe a great deal to the events of this chapter.

- I. THE STARTING OF THE EUROPEAN WORK. The first convert was Lydia. Read Acts 16:12-15. Let us notice some significant facts about this story.
 1. Philippi was a wicked, idolatrous city under the rule of the Roman Empire.
 2. Notice the words, “where prayer was wont to be made,” in verse 13. This could be called “the place of prayer.” The “place of prayer” is a Jewish phrase. It was used for special prayer places that were located throughout cities where no synagogues were built. If a city had no synagogue, they would build some kind of a wall, usually circular, with no roof, simply under open sky; and almost invariably, this was near or beside a river. This is what is meant in Psalm 137:1a, “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept.” These places were located strategically and were places where the Jews would meet for prayer.
 3. The work had a small beginning. The fact that there was no synagogue leads us to believe that the work was very, very small. In any city where there were at least ten Hebrew men, there they built a synagogue. You will notice here that only women were present. Simply a little group of women, recognizing their need of God, gathered in the place of prayer in Philippi. Someone has said, “Great oaks from little acorns grow.” God can do a lot with a little. Think of the Gospel as it spread throughout all of Europe. Think of Martin Luther in Germany, John Calvin in Geneva, John Knox and his great revivals in Scotland. Think of Wesley, Whitefield and the other men whom God used to accomplish great works in Europe. All of it came from this small beginning. Never minimize little things. It was a little maid who pointed Naaman toward Elisha for the healing of his leprosy. It was a little lad who gave his loaves and fishes for the feeding of the five thousand. It was a little rod that was used to smite the Red Sea and cause the Jews to walk over on dry ground. It was a little stone that felled Goliath; it was a little lad who hurled the stone. It was a little slingshot that the lad used. It was a little Gideon who slew the Midianites. It was a little Andrew who won Peter to Christ. Here we find a little group of women laying the foundation for the great work that has been done in Europe through the Holy Spirit.
 4. The first convert in Europe was Lydia. She was from Thyatira, which, interestingly enough, was one of the cities that Paul had to bypass in obeying the call from the man in Macedonia who cried, “Come over into Macedonia, and help us.” Though it seemed like Paul was bypassing Thyatira, one of the citizens was waiting for him at Philippi. Let’s learn about Lydia.
 - 1) No doubt she started the church in Thyatira.
 - 2) She was a business woman. Perhaps this is why the Lord led her to be the first convert. She had contacts and met many people every week. She could be a ready witness for Christ.
 - 3) She was interested in religious matters. Some think she was a Jew, and hence, she came to the place of prayer. Others think that she was a Gentile converted to Judaism, and hence, she came to the place of prayer. The fact that she left her Gentile idolatry and came to Judaism would

lead us to believe that she was seeking the truth. One step that she was taking forward was in accepting monotheism, which is a belief in one God. She was ready for the true Gospel!

- 4) She was a constant source of joy to the Apostle Paul. In Philippians 1:3-5 we read, “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.” What was this “first day”? This was the day when Lydia was saved. Paul always remembered that experience with joy and delight.
5. The women were present. (Acts 16:13) Something we should not pass by is the fact that Paul was willing to come and preach to these women. Paul had been a Pharisee and for many years of his early life had repeated every day such words as these: “Oh, God, I thank Thee that I am neither Gentile nor slave nor woman.” He also wrote later in Galatians 3:28, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” What a change we see in Paul’s life!
6. Note also the importance of there being a place where God’s people gather, whether it is an enclosure near a river or a church on a street corner. God has always had a place for His people to gather for fellowship and praise. This has not necessarily been a gathering for worship, as worship can be done alone, but rather a gathering for fellowship, praise, encouragement and strength. This teaches us to believe that God would have us get together; hence, we have our churches.

II. SATAN’S ATTEMPT TO FORM AN ALLIANCE. (Acts 16:16-18) When God begins to work, the Devil wants to use God’s power and the success of God’s servants, especially if one of God’s servants has become famous or well-known or if one of the works has become prosperous. This is the case here. A fortuneteller or a false religionist sought to get the two religions to go together—Paul’s teaching of Jesus Christ and the false religion embraced by this lady. We are not surprised that this temptation came immediately. Let us beware of entanglements with those who do not believe the true Gospel.

III. PERSECUTION. This progression inevitably is followed: first, the power of God; then, Satan’s efforts for alliance; then, persecution when God’s people refuse to align themselves. (Acts 16:19-24) Paul and Silas were placed in prison. They were in the inner prison, which was dark, deadly, and dismal. Their feet were fastened into stocks so there would be no physical comfort in the dark hours. They had been publicly whipped, beaten, bruised and lacerated. Notice a fact that we have tried to bring out again and again and again: Satan does not persecute us because we pray or because we worship; he persecutes us because we win souls and have spiritual victories.

IV. THE TESTIMONY. (Acts 16:25) This is one of the great verses in all the Bible. Let us notice a few things about this verse:

1. “...prayed, and sang praises...” Paul and Silas were “hymning,” which means they were singing the Psalms or some other songs of the early church. They were rejoicing, testifying, praising God and singing psalms.
2. “...and the prisoners heard them.” The word “heard” means “listened intently.” It is the strongest kind of listening. It implies putting your ear up to the keyhole, bending your ear, eavesdropping, etc. No doubt these prisoners could not believe what they heard! It was the talk of the prison! They listened carefully to hear what was happening. What a testimony! May God help us to have such a testimony!

V. THE DELIVERANCE. See Acts 16:26-28. God has a way, doesn’t He? Right will come out right in the end. However, if it does not come out right in the end, right is still supposed to be done. Right is right even though it turns out wrong; but, bless God, in the end it will not turn out wrong. It may seem wrong for a while; discouragements may come for a while. Paul and Silas could have said, “Look what standing for the truth got us into! Look at our condition!” They didn’t. They had faith that God would deliver them. God will deliver those who do right.

VI. THE SOULS. After we have refused the alliances, accepted the persecution, given the testimony, and enjoyed the deliverance, souls are inevitable. Let us notice several things about the conversion of the Philippian jailer.

1. The question. In Acts 16:30, the word “Sirs” is the same word that is used for “Lord” in verse 31 when Paul says, “...Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ...” The word “Lord” and the word “Sirs” in verse 30 are the same. What the jailer was saying was, “Lords, what must I do to be saved?” He was casting his worship in their direction, believing them to have some supernatural power, no doubt. I think, however, in this place he was not asking for salvation of his soul. Perhaps he was asking for deliverance.
2. The answer. What a tremendous time to witness! Paul told him how to be saved. Here is the one place in the Bible where the question of how to be saved is answered. Paul is saying here, “Don’t call me Lord; Jesus is the Lord! The salvation you need is not salvation of the body from this earthquake; you need salvation for your soul.” Then he said, “...Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.”(Acts 16:31)
3. Notice the change in the Philippian jailer.
 - 1) He washed their stripes. What a change! His attitude toward the preachers was changed. This is the same fellow who the previous night had plunged them into the inner prison, cared not at all for their bleeding wounds, and went off to sleep.
 - 2) He took them to his own house. He set a table before them and gave them food. Get the picture: He washed the bleeding wounds that he had helped to inflict, and then he fed the same men whom he had tried to starve! Here we see the great power of the Gospel, the transforming power of Jesus Christ!
 - 3) He was baptized immediately. (Acts 16:33) This same thing is told about Lydia back in verse 15. Here in this one chapter we have two definite examples of converts being baptized immediately. These had been rugged people. They were the kind that we would want to “wait and check on.” Not so in the Bible! It should not be so now. (Stress to your class the importance of baptism. If there are those who have been saved but not baptized, emphasize their need to follow Christ in believer’s baptism this very day.)
 - 4) His entire family was saved. (Acts 16:34) This had been promised, of course, in verse 31.
 - 5) He rejoiced in his salvation. (Acts 16:34)

MEMORY VERSE: “And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house,” (Acts 16:31)