



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Acts 15:36-16:15

Acts

"Answering Europe's Cry"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We are in the book of Acts, and if you remember from last week, we finished chapter 15. We didn't finish chapter 15; we finished a major section of it. With the Jerusalem council, which a major decision was reached, and following that counsel, Paul and Barnabas, along with Judas and Silas, returned back to Antioch in Syria.

We read now in verse 36 of Acts 15, and we are reading, by the way, down to verse 15 of chapter 16, "After some days Paul said to barn, 'Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaim the word of the Lord, and see how they are.' Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also. But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

"Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And a disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek, and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in

those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe. So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily.

"They passed thur the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit the; and passing by Mysia, thjey came down to Troas."

Now, all of that may seem a bit abstract in just reading it, but if you take some time and look at the map that you probably have at the back of your Bible, you get a picture of the geography, how they left from Antioch and Syria, traveled westward through southern Asia Minor, or Turkey, and they came to the province of Asia, which is a section of Asia Minor on the western end of the continent, where the city of Ephesus was located.

They weren't able to go in there; the Spirit prevented them from doing that, so they went to Bithynia, which is directly north. And so they traveled to the northern part of Asia Minor, near the Black Sea of that region and were unable to go there, and so they went northwest to the coast to the town of Troas.

Verse 9, "A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them."

Now, I want to make one more brief comment of a theological note, because I'm not going to touch on it in the lesson itself. But if you'll notice from verse 6-10, the Spirit of God is directing them, and in verse 6 it's the Holy Spirit; and then in verse 7 it's the Spirit of Jesus. And then finally in verse 10, the direction to go to Europe to go to Macedonia is given by God.

All of this could be described as the Holy Spirit, but for reasons probably not stylistic - that could be a reason; Luke was simply varying his style - but probably not stylistic, but rather theological, we can account for this theologically, that this is a reflection of the early church's belief in the Trinity - one God who subsists in three persons and He refers to God in terms of Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, and God, we would understand as the Father.

Well, we read in verse 11, "So putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis; and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony; and we were staying in this city for some days. And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled.

"A woman named Lydia, from the city Thyatira, a seller of purple of fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay.' And she prevailed upon us."

May the Lord bless this reading of His word. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for this time together. It is a great privilege to gather together with men and women who have believed in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, open the Bible and read it together. And what a privilege it is to continue together in study and seek to understand in some depth the text that we have read.

We are blessed, not only with Your inherent word, but we are blessed in believers in Jesus Christ with the Holy Spirit, who is the seal upon our heart, who not only keeps us in Your grace, who keeps us from ever being lost, who guides and directs us through this life, but is also our teacher, and we pray for that teaching ministry this

morning. May each of us be receptive to what You would have us to know.

Bless us as we listen, and bless this speaker as he teaches. Bless us spiritually, bless us physically. We are a needy people, Lord, and there are many who are in physical distress. We pray for them. We pray for healing. We pray for encouragement. We pray for blessing.

We pray that You would bless us this evening as we come back to this place and celebrate the Lord's supper and remember His death for us and remember that He's coming again. And may we, by that meeting tonight, be urged to live not for the things of this world, but to live for what is future, what is coming, what He will bring with Him when He returns, and so may we be moved in that way this evening, and also this morning as we study together.

Bless our final hymn. Bless our special music. May all of that be a ministry to us and prepare our hearts to worship and study together. We pray these things in Christ name. Amen.

[Message] In the early part of our history, there was a belief in what was called manifest destiny. You studied it in school. You probably forgot it. It's one of those facts that we tend to let slip our mind. But it was the idea that Americans were destined to settle the west and expand our dominion of the continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Horace Greeley gave the famous advice, "Go west, young man." Some even preached that the westward movement was God's will. I don't think the Indians agreed with that.

But there is a manifest destiny for the church that is God's will. It's the great commission. And while it has to do with all points on the compass, in the beginning it had very much to do with going west. That's what Paul was told to do in Acts 16, a passage that is significant historically, because it deals with the official opening of Europe to Christianity.

But also a passage that is significant theologically, because it teaches us about the providence of God and it teaches us about His saving grace. We learn something about how God leads us from the

way He guided Paul and his companions west into Macedonia, and how He saves us from the example of Lydia, the first convert of Europe.

Her conversion is described in such a way that confirms the decision the Jerusalem council reached about law and grace, and establishes, or at least illustrates, a salvation is of grace alone through faith alone. We read that the Lord opened her heart to receive the things that Paul said.

Well, after that significant decision in Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch and Syria, along with two others, Judas and Silas, and they resumed their ministry there of teaching and preaching. Then we read in verse 36 that "after some days Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.' Barnabas agreed and thought it would be a good idea to take Mark along with them. Mark was Barnabas' cousin. Paul didn't think it was a good idea. He reminded Barnabas that Mark had deserted them at the beginning of the first missionary journey. He didn't think Mark was ready to go again. Barnabas thought he was. He was thinking of Mark, and while I think Paul was thinking of him as well - there was no animosity involved in his decision - he was also thinking of the mission.

The two reached an impasse that became a sharp disagreement and resulted in Paul and Barnabas parting company. Luke writes that Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, but Paul took Silas and left being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. They went over land to visit the churches of Asia Minor, traveling westward through Syria and Cilicia, and so began the second great missionary journey.

Sometimes small irritations result in big explosions. Luke doesn't offer us an opinion on which of the two, Paul or Barnabas, was right in this matter. If he gives any hint, it might be found in the fact that the church committed Paul and Silas to the grace of the Lord. But still it is a sad ending to the chapter. Paul owed more to Barnabas than

to any other man, and Barnabas left the greatest man of the church, whose ministry reshaped western history.

But sad as it is, God overruled the disagreement for good. Instead of one missionary expedition, there were now two. Barnabas and Mark continued to evangelize Cyprus; Paul and Silas went into new areas. And all of this turned out for Mark's good. The disappointment that he must have experienced with Paul's refusal to allow him to go must have been a very sobering experience for him and brought very clearly to his mind the seriousness of his earlier failure, and that led to his maturity and it developed into a useful man.

The end of Paul's life, while he was facing execution in Rome, he wrote to Timothy. And among the last things that he wrote was the request that Timothy bring with him Mark, for, he said, he is useful to me for service. So Mark had become a useful man - useful to Paul and useful to the whole church. He wrote the second Gospel. And no doubt Barnabas was instrumental in Mark's development, giving him the kind of counsel and the kind of encouragement that he needed. Barnabas was that kind of man. He was a son of encouragement.

And we know from Paul's later letter, particularly from 1 Corinthians 9:6, that he and Barnabas reconciled. This was the last appearance of Barnabas in the book of Acts, and it was a loss to the apostle Paul, but Paul picked up a new associate in the ministry, in young Timothy, when he returned to Lystra.

We know Timothy mainly from Paul's letters. He was first mentioned, though, in the Bible in this text, in verse 1 of chapter 16, where he is described as a disciple, a son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. So he was the child of a mixed marriage. And the description of his father as a Greek is a clear suggestion that his father was a pagan. He was an unbelieving man.

But his mother, and he, became believers during Paul's first missy in Lystra. We can gather that from the way Paul addresses him in 1 Timothy 1:2, where he calls him "My true child in the faith." That suggests very clearly that it is Paul who led Timothy to the Lord.

Lystra, you'll remember, was the town where Paul was stoned and few people believed. We look at that event and we might think, well, that was not a very successful stage in the first missionary journey. But success can never be measured in numbers alone, and out of what might have appeared a disappointing ministry came Timothy, one of the great servants of the Lord.

Paul described Timothy later in that way. He wrote to the Philippians and commended him to them in chapter 2:19-24. He calls him a kindred spirit, a man who was genuinely interested in the welfare of the Philippians. He was a true servant. He was a selfless servant, unlike most, Paul says. He had as his first desire, his chief interest, the Lord Jesus Christ and also others. He put them, the put the Lord chiefly, and the church of Philippi ahead of himself. He had that reputation in his own church. Luke writes in verse 2 that "he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium."

After Paul and Barnabas left that region and returned to Antioch, Timothy ministered. He'd come to believe in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior and he went to work. I suspect that Timothy, there in Lystra, was greatly moved and inspired by the stoning of Paul. He would have witnessed that there and particularly well instructed and ministered when Paul returned to Lystra and he was telling the churches that it is through many tribulations that we must enter the kingdom of God. And so Timothy was well aware of the cost, of what it would involve, and he took up the challenge of ministry soon after, and in so doing, proved his gift and proved his heart by his service there in the local church.

We know little else about Timothy. We don't know what kind of education he had, just that he was approved by the saints, and that's most important. We tend to judge a man by his education, by the schools that he went to. And education is important; make no mistake about it. We see the great men of the Bible and we see there were many of them that were well educated. Moses had the finest education of his day. Isaiah was a well educated man, very intelligent man. The

apostle Paul was well educated long before he became a believer in Christ. And go down through history and some of the greatest men of the history of the church were men who were well educated. Education is important. It is necessary, but it is not everything.

The thing that Luke cites as Timothy's qualification is that he was approved by the saints. He had been useful in his local church. That is a very important test for Christian service. I don't think that Timothy had as his goal to be a missionary with Paul and to go to the west with him. His goal was to do what he could where he could do it, and he began ministering where he was, and that's how we're to serve. We are to serve God where we are, in the present. And God will open up doors of greater ministry to us. He certainly did that for Timothy. He took advantage of the opportunity. He used the time where he had where he was, and he joins Paul in his ministry. And important test for Christian services is what are you doing in your local church?

Paul recognized the characteristics of Timothy, that he was a useful man, and he wanted Timothy to accompany him and Silas on their journey, and so he did an usual thing. In verse 3 we read that he circumcised him. I say usual. That's really not an usual thing for him to do, but it may seem surprising to us, since Paul had just finished a great debate in Jerusalem over the issue of circumcision, successfully arguing against its necessity, and here he circumcises Timothy.

In fact, in Galatians chapter 2, the very beginning of the chapter, he speaks of an earlier visit to Jerusalem that he and Barnabas make, and they took a Gentile with them, Titus. And the party of the circumcision was wanting to circumcise Titus, and Paul refused to do it. He would not give into them for a moment, he said. He was adamantly opposed to circumcision, and yet he circumcises Timothy without hesitation. If it seems inconsistent, it's not. It is completely consistent with Paul's theology and practice.

When the essence of the gospel was at stake, Paul opposed circumcision. But when the progress of the gospel was at stake, he practiced circumcision. Well, that was the issue here, not the gospel's

essence, not its content, but its progress. Paul would yield on many things in order to remove unnecessary obstacles to the gospel.

In 1 Corinthians 9:22, he gives us his mind, his thinking, on this. He said, "I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means saving some." Meaning, he would adjust to the customs of those he was with in order to benefit evangelism. And here Luke explains the reason for Paul's action. It was done because of the Jews who were in those parts. These were people who knew Timothy. They knew his father. They knew his situation, that his father was a pagan, that he was an uncircumcised young man, and that would have been an obstacle to Timothy entering the synagogue as was Paul's practice, and giving the gospel to the Jewish people. And so to prevent that from happening, Paul circumcised him. Not for salvation, not for sanctification, not for any personal spiritual advantage for Timothy, but in order to keep a door from being closed.

It shows the greatness of Paul's heart. John Newton once said Paul was a reed in nonessentials and an iron pillar in essentials. He would bend when the content or the essence of the gospel was not at stake. But he would never bend. He was absolutely unyielding when it came to the truth of the gospel.

And so the three set off, passing through the cities, strengthening the churches there. And verse 4 says, explaining to them "the decrees that had been given in Jerusalem." In other words, they were teaching the pure gospel of salvation by grace through faith alone, apart from works of the Law, apart from circumcision. Now I think that by this time the church in Galatia had received the book of Galatians, probably in between the dispute, the debate, that took place in Antioch at the beginning of chapter 15 and the Jerusalem council. Paul had written a letter to the Galatians churches, because a group of Judaizers, men who were advocating the Law as part of salvation, had come into that region. And he has written to them. He has given them the gospel, that it is through faith alone without the Law.

And now, since then he has the confirmation of that from the very men whom these Judaizers had claimed as their authorities, as the ones who stood behind them, the apostles and the elders of Jerusalem. And he can point out, no, they don't support these men who've come in and troubled you. They support what I have said, because it is the pure gospel. The gospel has always been preached. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

And so he is informing them of that as he passes through these cities. After visiting the churches of south Galatia, Paul continued on the road westward in the direction of Ephesus, the great city of Asia Minor, located in the Roman province called Asia. But the Holy Spirit kept them from entering the province, perhaps through prophetic utterance. We're not told how that was given, how this occurred, that they were not allowed to go in, but Silas was a prophet. We're told that back in 15:32, so perhaps there was a prophetic oracle that came through him, or maybe the Holy Spirit simply gave a strong impression upon the hearts of these men against entering.

God's guidance could have come in either way, or by circumstances. The roads may have been closed. The bridges may have been out. Perhaps there was plague in the region. Any number of circumstances could have prevented them from entering. Paul planned all of his journeys very carefully. Paul was a conscientious man. He knew where he wanted to go; he knew he wanted to get there. He planned everything out carefully, but he was also sensitive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and he knew that his plans could be overruled by the Lord. And the Lord could do that in a variety of means and he was sensitive to that, as F.F. Bruce wrote, whether it was conveyed by a prophetic utterance, inward prompting, or the overruling of external circumstances. In one of those ways, the Spirit of God made it very clear Paul and his companions were not to press westward into the province of Asia. So since it was closed to immediate evangelization, Paul and his company turned north,

traveling along the edge of Asia to Bithynia. But again, the Spirit prevented them from entering it.

So with no other place to go, they traveled between these two forbidden territories, Bithynia on the north and Asia on the south, until they reached Troas, city located on the northwestern coast of Asia Minor on the Aegean Sea. Troas was a port city and near the site of ancient Troy, the battleground between Europe and Asia. So Paul was on historical ground and on what would become far more historical than anything Homer had written of, because from there, from Troas, Paul would lead what G. Campbell Morgan called the invasion of Europe.

He didn't know that at the time. He wasn't making plans to visit Europe. He probably wasn't sure at all why he was there. Troas was not the place Paul had planned to be. But that is often the way it is when we walk by the Spirit. He closes doors. He shuts us out of opportunities, only to open up new ones, unexpected ones, and introduce us to new relationships.

In this next portion of the chapter, in verse 10, we read for the first time the pronoun "we," which indicates that the one who's telling the story, Luke, joins Paul's company. And we don't know how that came to be, why Luke was in Troas, whether he was there trying to catch a ship himself, or perhaps he was there practicing medicine. We know that Luke was a physician. Paul calls him the beloved physician in Colossians 4. Perhaps he was there for that reason.

Whatever the case may be, he joined Paul and Silas and Timothy in Troas. And it was in Troas that Paul met another man. This one he met at night, in a vision, a man of Macedonia who was standing and calling to Paul, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." A.T. Robertson called it the cry of Europe for Christ. Well, Europe's cry was God's call and one of the most significant of history.

The Pauline scholar Richard Longnecker wrote, "Authentic turning points in history are few. But surely among them that of the Macedonian vision ranks high." It does. And because of Paul's

obedience to God's call, Europe and the western world were opened up to Christianity. As a result, civilization was changed. As a result, you have heard the gospel and you have many opportunities to hear the gospel. That vision was a turning point in history.

Luke writes the response of Paul and his companion was quick. "Immediately we sought to go to Macedonia." So after a period of uncertainty, and I'm sure perplexity - because Paul had not planned on going to Troas; this was all contrary to what he had sketched out in his mind - after a period of uncertainty and perplexity, they're given the answer to why they were in Troas, why they had been prevented from going into Asia and to Ephesus.

God was directing them across the Aegean Sea to another continent, to other great cities, and to other souls. Paul would travel south through Macedonia into Greece, to the cities of Thessalonica and Berea, to the great city of Athens, to Corinth, and then across the Aegean Sea again to Ephesus, the place he had planned to go in the beginning. But he would do that in God's time.

So God's denials are often just postponements. There was nothing wrong with Paul's basic strategy, but God had a better plan. He had a wider strategy and He led Paul in it, and I think we learn a great deal from this about how God leads us every day through this life. There is such a thing as negative guidance. Often that's how God works in our lives, by means of closing doors and opening doors. He leads us as much by saying no as by saying yes. We pray to Him about a concern we have and we look for the Lord to give us an answer, and we don't get the answer that we want and we think He's not answering our prayers. Well, yes, He is. He can answer as just as effectively, just as certainly, with a no as He can with a yet.

Now, it's frustrating. We don't like that experience. Oftentimes it puzzles us. Oftentimes we have to wait for a period of time before we understand why the door was closed and wait until a door is open. It causes us to pray and search for answers, and very often that's the reason for the delays, so that we will be forced, compelled, to draw

near to the throne of grace and have fellowship with the Lord and learn of His ways in our life. Times like that are tests. They try our patience. They try our faith. But God does things in His way. He does things in His own time and we must learn to wait on Him. He never denies something unless He has something better for us.

A.T. Person, in his study in Acts, writes of God's guidance, His prohibition, and His permission, as he puts it. And he gives examples from more contemporary individuals that were very similar to the experience that Paul had. He writes of David Livingstone, how he tried to go to China, but got sent him to Africa instead. Before that, William Carey planned to Polynesia in the South Seas, and God led him to India and his great ministry there. Adoniram Judson went to India first, but God drove him on from there to Burma, where he had a very significant ministry.

And what is true of missionary expeditions is true of the Christian's experience. It's the way God leads us daily. Whatever our occupation may be, whatever your place or station in life, God leads us through circumstances as well as through His word. That's providence. God's in control of the circumstances. He also gives us convictions about things. The Holy Spirit speaks to our heart. He addresses the inner man. He prompts us inwardly. God, as Dr. Johnson has pointed out, is well able to make His will known. And we can be sure of this fact that it is always best, it is always worth waiting for.

So after waiting for some time, Paul and his three companions set off for Europe. We read in verse 11 that they took a ship from Troas to Neapolis on the coast of Macedonia. From there they traveled on the **Ignatian** way about ten miles inland to Philippi. This too was a city with history, which accounts for its features and its characteristics. It was named after Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. It later became a Roman colony and was the site of a great battle in which the army of Brutus and Cassias, the men who had assassinated Julia Caesar, was defeated by the army of Mark Antony and Octavian.

Octavian later became Caesar Augustus, and in memory of the battle he later settled the veterans of his army in Philippi and he gave them land and citizenship there. Philippi is located on a small tributary, the River Gangites, and it became a military outpost on the eastern edge of the empire, a very Roman city, governed by Roman law, a city that was proud of its citizenship. That becomes a factor in the story later on in the chapter. It was a miniature Rome, a city with very few Jews, a city without a synagogue. In Jewish law, a congregation could only be formed when there were ten Jewish men in the city, and Philippi evidently lacked the quorum, because it didn't have a synagogue. A congregation was not formed.

As a result, when Paul entered the city, he couldn't follow his pattern of entering the synagogue and preaching. But he was able to find a Jewish place of prayer along the river just outside town. And so on the Sabbath Luke writes in verse 13 Paul and the others walked outside the city, along the river, where they found some women gathered. There they would, every Sabbath, every Saturday, read from Law and the prophets, discuss what they had read. They would have prayer. They would recite the Jewish prayers, the Shema, and the others. And whenever a Jewish teacher passed through Philippi, he would come and they would listen to him expound the Scriptures. And so Paul did that.

He joined them, he sat down, Luke writes, and began speaking to the women who had assembled. But it must have been a surprise to him. Paul had responded to the call of the man of Macedonia and when he arrived, he came to a lady's Bible study. And so he must have wondered where's that man? In fact, where are all the men? It's a group of women. Well, Paul was no chauvinist, even though this was a male-oriented society there in the Greek world. The group of women was enough for him. God had led him to them and he gladly joined them and gladly began to teach.

One of the women was named Lydia. She was a remarkable woman, a successful businesswoman from the city of Thyatira, which

is in Asia. In fact, it's just north of Ephesus. She was a seller of purple fabrics. Purple was a very expensive dye, in much demand, and used for the official Roman togas. They would dye the hem of the garment in this purple, with a strip that went around it. And so she relocated her business to Philippi, a Roman town, and she did very well. She was a wealthy woman, and she was interested in spiritual things.

I don't know the history of Lydia and what went on in her experience, whether she was a woman who had accumulated great success and great wealth and enjoyed great privilege in a male-oriented society, and at the end of it all felt something lacking in her life, sensed that there was a vacuum. I don't know that that was the case, but I do know that the Holy Spirit had been working in her heart.

Luke describes her as a worshipper of God. She was a Gentile woman, but like many Gentiles in that day, she was drawn to the God of the Jews. She was not attracted to the philosophies of her day. She was probably very much put off by the degrading religions of the Gentiles. She was drawn to Judaism, drawn to the God of the Jews, and she began attending a Bible study. And that is the evidence of the Spirit's work in her life.

She still wasn't saved. A person can study the Bible, a person can go to church, a person can be religious, without being saved. John Wesley was a missionary to the Indians in Georgia before he was convinced of his unbelief and converted in that famous meeting on Aldersgate Street in London. And that's not all that unusual. Men can study the Bible, men could preach the Bible, without having been born again.

And so Lydia was in that condition. She was an unsaved woman, but she knew something was missing, I assume. I don't know. Maybe she was doing just fine. We look at people who are lost, who are very successful in the world. They don't seem to sense that they're missing anything. We know they are. There's that vacuum in their life, but they don't seem to sense it. Maybe she was like that. Maybe she

thought everything was fine. "I found the truth here by the riverside with these other women in Judaism." Maybe so.

But what we're told about her and what's significant is that she was listening as Paul began to speak. And the force of that verb, "was listening," is she kept it up. She kept listening, and as she listens, she learns something that she didn't know, and she certainly did begin to sense that there was something in her life, because Paul began to unfold for her the personal work of Jesus Christ as He was foretold in the Old Testament. Now, it doesn't say that in the text, but we know from the preaching of the apostles, from Peter and from Paul's preaching that that's what they did. They went to the Old Testament and they preached the sufferings of the Messiah. They preached the resurrection that was promised in Psalm 16, and they showed that Jesus Christ has fulfilled all of that. He has been crucified as the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. He has been raised as God's evidence that He approved of the sacrifice that He made, and He has ascended on high. She heard all of these things and she responded to that.

Well, that's what people are to do. They are to respond to the preaching of the word of God, give attention to God's truth. Moses said in Deuteronomy 4:29 that those who seek the Lord will find Him if they search for Him with all their heart and soul. And a person cannot do that if he or she is not listening to what is being said when the word of God is being taught.

Lydia was listening. She was paying close attention. And in verse 14, we read a very important statement on saving faith. Luke writes that while she was listening, the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. Lydia did not open her own heart. She did say, you know, "This makes great sense. This puts some things together for me. I wondered what Isaiah 53 was about. I'm going to believe." Now that may have been her thinking, but it wasn't Lydia herself who opened her heart. This was a sovereign work of God.

Blaise Pascal, the French mathematician, said, "Men will never believe with a saving and real faith unless God inclines the heart. And they will believe as soon as He inclines it." He inclined Lydia's heart. He opened it. He enabled her to respond to the gospel and receive it by faith. Can anything be clearer than that? The Lord opened her heart to respond. Otherwise, it never would have been opened.

We speak often in this place about total depravity, which perhaps is better described as total inability, and we speak about it because Paul does. He taught that. He said in Ephesians 2:1, "You were dead in your transgressions and sins." That's your spiritual condition. Everyone of us, without exception, were born into this world dead spiritually, unable to respond in faith. Now, that does not mean that we cannot believe, only that we cannot believe in our strength. In God's strength we can believe and we do believe. That is efficacious grace. That is effective grace, which God gives in combination with the preaching of His word. These things do not happen in a vacuum.

Regeneration, the new birth, occurs in connection with the preaching of the gospel and that's why we must preach it. It is the imperishable seed, as Peter describes it in 1 Peter 1, and it's as the word of God is preached, as the gospel of salvation enters the mind of the listener and the Holy Spirit bears witness to the truth of it, that He enlightens the mind and produces faith. God promises to do that. He promises to bless His word with grace, and we have the assurance that the teaching of His word will always be effective. It will always achieve the end that God wants, and that's a relief, because if I thought that it was up to me to convince you every Sunday morning of the truth of this book, or it was up to me to bring you to a belief in Jesus Christ, I would never enter this place. That's too great a burden. God has not gifted me with the ability to debate in that way, to reason with people in that way. And even if He had, you're dead anyway.

I can't make anyone believe. No one can. And we're not called to do that. We are called to give the word of God and to teach it and to

teach it clearly. And we can do that with confidence, because God has promised to bless His word with His grace. He did that by that riverside in Philippi, because by God's grace Lydia believed she was saved. Then she showed the evidence of true faith. She was baptized right there in the Gangites River, she and her household, verse 15. So Lydia wasn't the only one saved.

Now there was not a small group of believers in Philippi who gave witness to their faith through water baptism and by their love for the brethren. We read that after she was baptized, she was saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay." The inns, the hotels, of the ancient world were miserable places to stay, notorious for their unhygienic conditions, and so she wanted them to avoid that and she invites these four missionaries who have brought such a change in her life to lodge in her house.

Paul evidently resisted. He didn't want to be a burden, and we know that because Luke says "she prevailed upon us." Evidently there some discussion and Paul was saying, "No, we're set up in that inn down the street. We'll be fine there. I don't want to trouble you." And she would not hear of that. "She prevailed upon us," Luke says. And again, all of this is in evidence of the new birth.

John Stott wrote, "Once the heart is opened, the home is open too." and that became characteristic of the Philippi church. At the end of the book of Philippians, Paul commends them for their generosity to him. They had a special relationship with Paul. He had a special love for the Philippians church. In fact, the Macedonian churches were very much that way. They were very poor churches, but they were known for their large generosity. Paul praises them in 2 Corinthians 8:2 for giving with joy out of "their deep poverty."

Well, that's and evidence of grace. These were people who didn't have much, but they were glad to let go of the temporal things they had because their mind was set on eternal things and they were investing in the kingdom to come. And evidence of grace, an evidence that God had opened the hearts of these people, had created faith in

them, made them new people, new creatures, in Jesus Christ. In fact, all of the lessons from this chapter are lessons on grace. The lessons on God's guidance and His salvation are lessons on grace. Why is it that the gospel was carried west? Why was Europe opened up to Christianity? Why do you live in a civilization that has been profoundly influenced by the gospel of Jesus Christ and has given you opportunities to hear the gospel, to hear the word of God more freely than you can find in any other area of the world?

There are areas of the world that are completely dark, dark as night. And you can go to them, as I have, and you can see the complete contrast between a city in Turkey, say, and a city here in the United States where you have churches on every street corner, and over there you have mosques on every street corner, or temples everywhere, and degrading kinds of worship. We have great opportunity, and the reason is because of God's grace. He chose to open up the west with the gospel. He guided Paul in that direction, guided him to Europe and changed the direction of history. And God leads us, just as He did Paul and Timothy and Silas and Luke. He leads us in various ways, but always by grace. His hand is upon us and it is involved in all of the circumstances of our lives.

His direction may contradict our plans and may cause us to delays and make us wait, but God's timing is always right and we need to be sensitive to His leading, and our salvation is all of grace. If you're a believer in Jesus Christ, it is because God loves you and God sent the gospel to you and He opened your heart to believe it, just as He did Lydia's. Paul wanted to go to Asia, remember. He wanted to go to the city of Ephesus, but God prevented him from doing that so that he could go to Europe and speak to a woman from Asia, from Thyatira.

We can't predict God's movements, but they are for our good. And He will send His messengers across continents in order to save His people. He did that for you. He sent the gospel to you. He opened your heart to receive it. Nothing happens in your life by chance, but

by God's will. And this is God's irresistible grace, His unconquerable grace, and you should respond to that with thankfulness and respond to God's people the way Lydia responded to these missionaries.

If you are here though without Christ, if you have not believed in Him, your heart is not changed. God must do that. But you're responsible to listen to the word of God. You are responsible, as Moses said, to seek the Lord, to listen to the message of salvation. It is the word of life, the promise of salvation to all who believe Jesus Christ died in the place of sinners. That's why He came into this world. That's why He became a man. He bore the penalty that every one of us deserve to suffer. He took our place in judgment. He died our death so that we might His life, so that we could go free, and we do that at the moment of faith. That's all. We receive that message through faith alone, so believe in Him, trust in Christ, and receive from Him the forgiveness of God and life everlasting. May God help you to do that and help each of us to rejoice in the grace that we have received from Him. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for Your goodness and Your grace, and we see that so clearly in this text, how you providentially led Paul and his friends west into Europe and opened up that continent for the gospel, and we are the heirs of that great movement of history. We've been blessed by it, not because we were deserving, but because that was Your sovereign will. That was Your plan and we know it as believer in Jesus Christ that we have received grace from You. It's not through anything of our own that we have received that. It's not because of any merit of our own. It's because You sovereignly sent the word of God for us to hear. The Spirit of God bore witness to it in our heart and You opened our hearts to receive it by faith. We thank You for that. May we go forth from this place reflecting that grace in our lives and speaking about it others. We pray in Christ name. Amen.