

ACTS  
The Liberated Lady  
Acts 16:11-15

“Women's Lib” is a familiar cry in our time and no Bible-believing Christian can ignore this movement. Many women are marching for what they think is liberty and freedom. Women want social, sexual and economic liberty in the nuclear family structure. There are some good things and some very bad things about the women's liberation movements and if the present Equal Rights Amendment passes it may mean an end to the family as we now understand it. Unfortunately, the feminist movement has fallen into the hands of unregenerate women, who cannot and will not acknowledge Christ and the biblical viewpoint of women. The feminine liberationists claim that this is a man's world and women are trapped in it. Women have been subjugated and enslaved by men, confined to bearing children, keeping house, being sex objects and enhancing the man's life to the total exclusion of their own rights and privileges as a person. Their battle cry is, “Women in America have been oppressed in a male-oriented culture.” It is not uncommon to hear feminists use such words as “imprisoned,” “enslaved,” “subjugated” and “dominated” to emotionally stir women to action.

The Bible has an answer to the non-Christian feminists and when they understand the biblical position then they will be truly liberated. God has always put a high premium on women and, biblically, a woman is not intellectually or spiritually inferior to a man. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). However, in God's creative order, He has made men and women different and has fitted them well for different roles in His creation. God has created women to bear children and be good mothers, but that does not mean they cannot be liberated. She is liberated when she receives the new birth from God, discovers her God-given role in life and develops her skills, talents and gifts to the glory of God. The Bible is filled with important women whom God used. Eve was a co-partner in beginning the human race. Deborah was a prophetess who was a judge in Israel. Esther, an orphan girl who became queen, was used of God for a great purpose. Then there was Mary, the one who brought forth the Messiah. Time prohibits to expound on other women such as Naomi, Rahab, Abigail, Elizabeth, Mary Magdalene and a host of others. Women are significant in God's program. It is not a new phenomenon that a woman should be president of a bank, a member of congress, a judge or successful in business.

Today we are going to center our attention upon a first century liberated woman. Lydia is the prototype of the modern woman. She was an influential, wealthy business woman and a real leader of people. She was a career woman and may, in her own way, have been a leader in some first century women's liberation movement. Ms. Lydia may well have been the Eleanor Smeal, Gloria Steinem, Bella Abzug or Betty Friedan of her day. Yet we are going to find that God brought this liberated woman to real spiritual liberation in Christ. God set her free to be the kind of person He wanted her to be. She was not free to sin but free to become a whole person in Christ.

THE LADY PURSUED BY GOD (Acts 16:11, 12)

“Therefore putting out to sea from Troas, . . .” -- The “therefore” takes us back and tells us why Paul and his missionary band of Silas, Timothy and Luke left Troas. Paul had been searching for God's will. He had attempted to go south in Asia Minor but God shut the door. He then wanted to go north to Bithynia but God stopped him. He moved on to Troas which was the closest point to Europe, and there Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia asking him to come over and help. God had given a vision. The will of God was clear and they moved out, expecting God to do great things with them and for them.

“We ran a straight course to Samothrace, . . .” -- They had fair winds. It took about two days to cross the Aegean Sea. We know when they came back through this route it took five days. It seems as though God was using all of nature's elements to hasten these missionaries on to their new field of service. Why the haste? They

had a date with a very pretty lady in Philippi. There was a divine appointment and the missionaries had to be there on schedule, even though they had no idea what was in store for them in Macedonia. Apparently they stopped at Samothrace only for a day or so. Samothrace was an island in the Aegean Sea, rising about 5,000 feet. It was about twenty miles in circumference and was an asylum for fugitives and criminals. It was the seat of the famous mystery cult, the worship of the Cabiri.

Why didn't the missionary band stop here for several weeks and preach the gospel? Surely there was a need. Surely the gospel was needed among these down and outers. God had other plans, for He was pursuing a lady in Philippi that He was going to save.

“And on the following day to Neapolis, . . .” -- Neapolis was the seaport city for Philippi and was about ten miles from Philippi.

#### THE LADY'S PLACE OF RESIDENCE (Acts 16:12)

“And from there to Philippi, which is the leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony; . . .” -- Paul and his cohorts came to Philippi which was the leading city in Macedonia in population, prominence and wealth. The ancient name of Philippi was Crenides (from its many springs) until Philip of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great, seized it and named it after himself. It passed into the hands of the Romans with the rest of Macedonia in 168 B.C. It was just outside of Philippi that a famous battle took place in 42 B.C. This battle decided the fate of the Roman republic. It was here that Brutus and Cassius were defeated by the armies of Anthony and Octavian (later the Emperor Augustus). In commemoration of this victory, and also as a safeguard of the empire, Augustus afterwards established there a colony, a military settlement mainly composed of soldiers who had been partisans of Anthony. A Roman colony was modeled after Rome itself in government, laws, language and external forms, so that it exhibited a Rome in miniature. It was a little bit of Rome and it was a great honor to be a citizen of Rome in a colony, for those in a Roman colony enjoyed the same privileges as those in Rome. Literally they would “do as the Romans do” in Philippi.

In this great Roman colony was a Gentile lady who had adopted the Jewish religion and God was about to save her, although she had no idea that salvation was coming to her.

“And we were staying in this city for some days.” -- Apparently when the missionaries came to Philippi, they did not immediately begin to preach the gospel. They were faced with starting a Christian work in a strange land and they needed time to plan and pray. Nothing too exciting or dynamic happened for a few days. However, Paul went to his proven method of evangelism. When entering a city, the first place to preach the gospel was to Jews and then to the Gentiles.

#### THE LADY'S EXPOSURE TO CHRIST (Acts 16:13)

“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; . . .” -- Apparently there was no synagogue in Philippi since the Romans had great prejudice against the Jews. There were too few Jewish males to have a synagogue, for the Jewish law said there had to be ten males in a city in order to have a synagogue. If there were not that many, the law required that the Jewish people were to meet on the Sabbath near a river to have their services which often required ritualistic absolutions and cleansings. Paul, knowing this law, took off to the river on the Sabbath, looking for Jews to whom he could preach the gospel. He came upon this lone band of women praying alongside the river Gangites.

“And we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled.” -- Much to Paul's delight they did find a group of Jews, but he was probably stunned when he realized that all the Jews in the city were women. They were all probably Gentile converts to Judaism called proselytes. These women were probably married to some of the most influential men in Philippi, and they themselves were very influential and powerful women. These women, with behind the scene power, had a great deal to do with decisions made in Philippi.

There were at least three women we know of at that little prayer meeting. Lydia, who probably was the leader of

the group, and Euodia and Syntyche, who were also part of this Jewish women's club in Philippi. "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord" (Philip. 4:2). Apparently, after Euodia and Syntyche were converted to Christ, they had a personality conflict and could not get along. One Christian expositor renamed them "Odious" and "Soontouchy."

Can you imagine what must have gone through Paul's mind at this point? He was an ex-Pharisee who was taught to pray, "O God, I thank Thee that I am neither Gentile, nor slave, nor woman." While he knew that in Christ there was no male or female, he must have been somewhat disillusioned, for the great Macedonian vision of the man turned out to be a group of women. What a shocker! What a humbling experience! But Paul was faithful to his Lord and witnessed to these women about Christ.

What did these missionaries tell these women? They told them the good news about Christ. They declared Him to be the Messiah of the Old Testament, the Son of God, the God-Man who came and died for sinners, and the glorified Christ who was resurrected from the dead. They undoubtedly went on to explain to these women that if they would believe these facts, if they would repent of their sins and place their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, they would be forgiven of their sins and would be brought into a personal relationship with the Almighty God through Jesus Christ, and would be saved from hell and pass into heaven after this earthly life.

Who would have ever thought that the scrawny, brainy, little converted Jew, Paul, would preach a message that would ultimately be declared to Caesar himself and be one of the major factors in the fall of the Roman Empire. Who would have thought that God would bring the gospel to Europe through a group of women. Let me assure you that the most significant event ever to happen in Philippi was the preaching of the gospel, and these women became more famous in history than anyone else who was ever connected with Philippi. Who knows anything today about Brutus, Cassius, Anthony or Octavian? Yet there is hardly anyone in the western world who has not heard of Lydia, for she has been recorded in God's Holy Word and has had more fame than all the famous men of Philippi.

#### THE LADY'S OCCUPATION (Acts 16:14a)

"And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyratira, . . ." -- In this group of women was Lydia a woman from Thyratira in Asia Minor. Thyratira was the ancient kingdom of Lydia, so Ms. Lydia was probably named after her old country. Thyratira was famous for its manufacturing of purple dye, which was very expensive since it was extracted from shell fish. Apparently, only the wealthy could afford this dye or purchase the fabrics that had been colored by this purple dye.

It is interesting to note that Paul was stopped by God to go into Asia Minor, but Paul's first convert in Europe was from Asia Minor. Perhaps God's plan was to have Lydia reach her own people with the gospel.

"A seller of purple fabrics, . . ." -- Apparently, Lydia was a sales representative for the "Big Purple Corporation" in Thyratira. She was a business woman and made her temporary home in Philippi. Lydia apparently was wealthy and had a home large enough for children, servants and four house guests (Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke).

We know that God brought her to Philippi and even to the riverside at this particular times for He was about to save her. We know nothing about Mr. Lydia. It is quite likely that he was dead. We know this, that God was about to save her. Perhaps God had used the death of her husband to shake her up. Maybe she had some business reverses. Maybe she was totally frustrated with life since she had all kinds of material things; yet she had no peace in her soul about life or death. Whatever the circumstances, God had planned it that she would be at this place at this time to hear the gospel from these missionaries. Absolutely nothing in this world happens by chance.

#### THE LADY'S RELIGION (Acts 16:14b)

"A worshipper of God, . . ." -- Lydia may have been a Jew but most likely she was a Jewish proselyte. She

probably came out of idolatry and polytheism into the Jewish concept of monotheism. She had found in Judaism more truth about God than she had found in any Gentile, pagan religion. She accepted the concept of one God and the Jewish Faith was attractive to her.

The fact that she worshipped God does not mean she was saved. She was not a Christian. She was not born again. She was not a true child of God. She believed in the God of the Old Testament. She observed the Sabbath. She prayed. She was religious but Lydia was not saved. She was serious about her religion but was not yet in Christ's spiritual kingdom.

Lydia may have been seeking for truth, for she was a recipient of God's common grace, and God was preparing her for salvation. It is quite possible to be religious and not saved, to pray, to observe Sunday, to go to church, to assent to the Bible and still be unconverted. Many in the U.S.A. today know that Christ is the way of salvation, go to church, pray and act religious but they are not saved because they have never met Christ personally and bowed to Him as Lord and Savior.

#### THE LADY'S CONVERSION (Acts 16:14c)

“Was listening; . . .” -- Lydia was listening as Paul preached to her the claims of Christ for Himself and the claims of Christ on her life. Surely Paul, after preaching Christ, made an appeal to these women to receive Christ by faith. Lydia had the general call given to her, demanding that she repent or perish. As the gospel was preached, she began to grasp the spiritual meaning of the gospel. The facts and the meaning of the gospel were being illuminated to this woman and she was receiving the convincing and convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit, whereby she was becoming aware of sin, righteousness and judgment. However, she was not yet saved.

While God had been working previously to make Lydia receptive to the truth, it was not until she was confronted with the truth of Christ that she really came under conviction. The gospel is the primary means God uses to put men under conviction for their sins. At this point, Lydia had the power to reject Christ but did not have the power to accept Him.

“And the Lord opened her heart . . .” -- As Lydia was listening to the gospel preached, she was being drawn by God and being put under conviction about her sin and need of Christ. Then God, in His sovereignty, extended to her a special, particular call to salvation which was an invincible and irresistible call so as to supernaturally open her heart to the truth of Christ. God opened Lydia's heart. God regenerated Lydia. God worked grace so Lydia could respond to Christ.

Notice carefully what this verse does not say. It does not say Lydia's prayer opened her heart, although prayer is important as a means to have God open the heart. It does not say Lydia opened her own heart, although in the salvation process faith is a means necessary for a person to be saved. It does not say that Paul opened her heart with his persuasive arguments, although we should always seek to persuade men of Christ, and as a human instrument there is a sense in which we are to save other men. “. . . I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some” (I Cor. 9:22). It does not say that her heart was opened by the truth, although apart from the gospel no man can be saved. The preaching of Christ is essential but this does not automatically guarantee the salvation of anyone. This verse does say, “The Lord opened her heart.” The resurrected Christ supernaturally opened up Lydia's heart and she responded to Christ. Before any person can be saved, the Lord must do a sovereign work to open up a heart to respond to the truth and person of Christ. It is God who opens the heart, who regenerates, who saves and who converts a person.

It is my contention that all Christians really do know it is God who saves them but they just haven't put it all together theologically. All Christians thank God for their salvation, and they also pray to God for the salvation of souls. If God can't open a man's heart then prayer is useless.

R. C. Reed was a great Southern Presbyterian preacher. He was sitting in the audience of a revival meeting listening to a minister who was an Arminian (free willer) in his theology. This Methodist minister concluded his message by saying, “God has done all He can do! I have done all I can do! Now it is up ‘to you’ to make the

decision.” The Methodist minister then asked R. C. Reed to pray a closing prayer, and Rev. Reed said to himself, “If God has done everything He can do to save the lost in this audience, and the preacher has done all he can do, and the lost refuse to come, now he expects me to do something with prayer. I have the strange feeling it is unnecessary to pray to a God who has already exhausted His resources. In fact, I feel if the decision rests with man (since God can do nothing), then I must give up praying to God but pray to the people in the audience to save themselves.” What did R.C. Reed pray? He prayed the same thing the Arminian would have prayed, “O God, do something you haven't done yet.” He prayed that God would come forth with a special, effectual, irresistible, infallible and invincible power to save the lost in that audience. They needed something extra from God if they were to be saved.

“To respond to the things spoken by Paul.” -- Lydia responded to the gospel message of Christ which Paul was preaching. She responded because God opened her heart, but it was Lydia who responded, not God. Lydia believed; Lydia trusted Christ; Lydia welcomed Christ into her heart; Lydia received Christ. Her response to God's inward working of grace was a personal commitment to Christ. It was at this very moment that Lydia became the liberated lady. At first Lydia may have rebelled to what Paul was saying. She probably fought the truth of Christ and His claims upon her life, but God slowly broke her down and made her willing and she cried out, “I must have this Savior!”

Was Lydia saved against her will? The answer is “yes” and “no.” The answer is “yes” in that she would have never come to Christ unless God had made her willing to come. The answer is also “no” in that when she finally trusted Christ she gladly and willingly came to the Savior. The Westminster Confession says, “God enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God; taking away their heart of stone; giving unto them an heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and by His almighty power, determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ: yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace.”

What about Revelation 3:20? Does it not say, “Behold I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him, and dine with him, and he with Me?” If this is a salvation context (some scholars think it is to wayward Christians), then those who do open the heart are those who hear the Lord knocking which is another way of speaking about the preparation of God for the heart to respond to Christ. We can say that the Lord opened Lydia's heart and she responded by opening her own heart. The renewal of her will made her willing to swing the door open wide.

Spurgeon said,

God's intention is that Lydia shall be saved. Yet, you know, no woman was ever saved against her will. God makes us willing in the day of His power and it is the way of His grace not to violate the will but sweetly to overcome it. Never will there be anybody dragged to heaven by the ears; depend upon that! We shall go there with all our hearts and all our desires.

#### THE LADY'S TESTIMONY (Acts 16: 15a)

“And when she and her household had been baptized, . . .” -- The liberated lady did not use her new found liberty in Christ to sin. No, she went immediately to testify to her family and they believed in Christ. Then Lydia and her whole family were water baptized. As true believers in Christ, they gave an outward testimony of their inward faith in Christ and were baptized.

This verse supports household salvation and household baptism but it does not support infant baptism. Some have claimed that Lydia probably had infants. This is quite unlikely for she was probably an older woman to be so successful in business, and it's quite likely that her husband had been dead for years. Furthermore, all the children in this household were old enough to hear the gospel and respond to it by faith.

#### THE LADY'S GOOD WORKS (Acts 16:15b)

“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.” -- Immediately Lydia began to give evidence of her true saving faith in Christ. She invited the four missionaries to stay in her home. She was willing to share her material things with these missionaries. Her conversion touched her substance. It affected her life style. She wanted to do all she could for God's people. Love to God's people is the distinguishing mark of the elect. “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death” (I Jn. 3:14).

## CONCLUSION

Saved. Why are you saved? Because God opened your heart so you could respond to Christ by opening your own heart. A little boy learning the Lord's Prayer hit upon a beautiful truth. He said, “Our Father in Heaven, who hollered my name.” That is the truth God wants you to understand. He called you. He hollered your name and you responded to that call by believing in Christ as your Lord and Savior. You are saved because God called you to salvation in Christ Jesus.

Unsaved. If you are not saved, you must open your heart to Christ. If you do this, then you know God was working to enable you to open your heart. God commands you to believe and repent, and He does not say, “By the way, you can't do that unless I open your heart.” No, Christ says, “Open the door of your heart.” If you do this, then you know it was Christ who opened your heart. Is God drawing? Is the Holy Spirit convicting? Is Christ knocking? Respond! Believe! Open up to Christ! Recognize that you are a guilty sinner and deserve God's wrath. Cry out in your heart, “O God save me. Grant me a new heart. Give me a new spirit. I cannot save myself. Come and work in me according to Your good pleasure. I cannot save myself. I open up my heart to You.” Humbly pray this prayer:

Thou alone hast power, I know  
To save a wretch like me;  
To whom or whither should I go  
If I should run from Thee?