

THE LORD OPENS THE HEART

Acts 16:14

INTRODUCTION

- One of the marvels of modern medicine is open heart surgery
- Heart problems that previously were untreatable and fatal can now be repaired, saving and prolonging lives
- Yet all these operations on the heart provide only temporary healing – eventually all our hearts will give a final beat, then stop forever
- But there is a different heart operation, not of the physical heart but of the spiritual, not performed by man, but by God, and this heart operation is always 100% successful and is permanent, lasting eternally
- It is a heart operation that every human is in need of, but only few are willing to receive
- Without it we perish in hell forever, but with it we dwell in heaven eternally
- In Acts 16 we have recorded some of the events of Paul's Second Missionary Journey and the entrance of the gospel into Europe
- In the city of Troas, Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia saying, "Come over into Macedonia, and help us" (16:9)
- Paul understood it to be a calling of God (16:10), obeying and journeying to Philippi, a chief city of Macedonia, accompanied by Silas, Timothy and Luke

- Philippi was an ancient city and in that day was a major commercial centre
- It was also a Roman colony due to its strategic location, and was therefore populated with many Roman soldiers
- It was so much like Rome, Philippi was known as "Rome away from Rome"
- The fruit of that ministry led to a church being formed in that city which was an exemplary church, known particularly for its liberality to the brethren (2 Corinthians 8:1; Philippians 4:10; 15-16,18)
- Paul's practice was to preach to the Jews first, so at Philippi he went out on the sabbath day seek out the Jews and witness to them
- There was no synagogue there (a quorum of 10 Jewish men was required to have a synagogue), but there was a group of women who would pray by the riverside
- Paul preached the gospel to them, and for one woman, it had a profound effect
- What was Lydia's background
 - ✓ She was from Thyatira ,a rich commercial city in the province of Asia
 - ✓ She was a seller of purple, an expensive dye worn by royalty and the wealthy
 - ✓ She had a substantial house in Philippi, indicating wealth
 - ✓ She appears to be the head of her house, possibly a widow

- ✓ She prayed and worshipped God and was likely a “God-fearer”, a Gentile proselyte to the Jewish religion
- Yet for all her commendable qualities, she was still unsaved, her heart needed to be opened

I. OUR DESPERATE WANT OF AN OPENED HEART

A. What is the “heart” of man?

1. Scripturally, the heart is the centre not only of spiritual activity, but of all the operations of human life
2. The heart is the essence of a person, the “real you”
3. “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” (Proverbs 4:23)
4. It is the heart that God looks on and judges (1 Samuel 16:7; 1 Corinthians 4:5)

B. Our hearts are by nature “closed” to God, truth and holiness

1. Our hearts are deceitful and desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9-10)
2. Sin finds its origin in our sinful and depraved hearts (Mark 7:21-23)
3. Our hearts are at enmity against God and his ways (Romans 8:7-8)
4. Our hearts are incapable of receiving divine truth (1 Corinthians 2:14)
5. Our hearts and understanding are darkened, alienated from God, ignorant and blind (Ephesians 4:17-18)

C. We need our hearts to be opened

1. Without changed hearts, our lives will be miserable, making foolish decisions, living selfishly
2. Without changed hearts, we will die in our sins, stand condemned for the judgment of the Almighty God, and be cast into the lake of fire to suffer eternal torment (Revelation 20:15)

II. THE DIVINE WORK OF OPENING THE HEART

A. Man cannot open our heart

1. God uses men to deliver the message of salvation whereby sinners are saved
2. Paul preached the gospel (v.10), that is, the good news of Christ's atoning death and justifying resurrection
3. This is the glorious message of a Saviour who is willing and able to deliver us from our sins, to change our vile hearts, to reconcile us to God and grant us eternal life
4. Modern evangelistic methods rely on the persuasive techniques of men to elicit a "decision", but leave out the divine necessity of the regeneration of the heart by the Holy Spirit

B. We cannot open our own hearts

1. Though Lydia prayed and worshipped, though she studied the Scriptures and knew herself a sinner in need of a Saviour, she could never open her heart herself
2. All the false religions of the world, including pseudo-Christian religions such as Romanism, give man the

power, either in part or in whole, of mending his own heart by performing religious works

3. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.” (Jeremiah 13:23)

C. God alone not only opens but renews and regenerates our hearts, giving us an altogether new heart

1. This new heart is described by Ezekiel (Ezekiel 11:19-20; 36:26-27)
2. Christ has the key of David and is “he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth” (Revelation 3:7)
3. “Open” (*dianoigo*) means to open completely, and speaks of the Holy Spirit’s power in transforming the heart
4. The truth enters our hearts not by human education but by divine revelation
5. “Man’s heart is naturally locked up and barricaded against God, till he, by his mighty Spirit, make forcible entrance, beating the devil out of his trenches, 2 Corinthians 10:4” (John Trapp)
6. Though we cannot open our own hearts, this does not mean we are without responsibility in attending to the need of our souls
7. The Scriptures command us to “seek the Lord” (Isaiah 55:6), thus like Lydia, every sinner should put themselves in the place God has ordained as the means of his grace – where prayer is offered, where the Scriptures are read and taught

III. THE DEMONSTRATED WITNESS OF AN OPENED HEART

A. She publicly testified Christ in baptism

1. Baptism is identifying with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection (Romans 6:3-5)
2. Baptism is a public “putting on of Christ” (Galatians 3:27)
3. Baptism is publicly confessing Christ (Romans 10:9-10)
4. Baptism is joining the body of Christ, the church (1 Corinthians 12:13)

B. She joined herself to the brethren in the fellowship of the church

1. Having been adopted and made part of God’s family, the new Christian desires to join together with his brothers and sisters in Christ
2. A certain proof of salvation is a love for the brethren (1 John 3:14)
3. Each believer is blessed with spiritual gifts which are to be exercised in the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12)
4. The heart of a Christian is to serve and minister and God has ordained his church as the place wherein that ministry is to be offered

C. She led her kin to likewise receive Christ

1. Those who have freely received the grace of salvation will desire for others, particularly family, to receive it too

2. The genuineness of her conversion was evident to those who knew her well and they were convinced by her testimony and by the gospel message preached to them

D. She gave herself to hospitality

1. Note her humility in offering service: "If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord"
2. Note her eagerness to show her love in a practical way
3. No one needed to command Lydia to be "given to hospitality" (Romans 12:13) or to "Use hospitality one to another without grudging" (1 Peter 4:9)
4. Her house became the apostle's base of ministry during his time in Philippi (16:40)
5. It appears that her house was used as the meeting-place of the church at Philippi

CONCLUSION

1. Is it not a shocking realisation to know that our hearts are depraved and wicked, driving us into sin and eventually hell?
2. Is it not a blessed thought that God is able to open and transform our hearts according to his image of righteousness and holiness?
3. Charles Wesley expertly describes the testimony of every soul who has had his heart opened by divine grace:

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free;*

I rose, went forth and followed Thee.

4. Put yourself in the place of Lydia and ask:
 - ✓ What is the state of my heart?
 - ✓ Has it been opened by the power of God?
 - ✓ Is there the evidence of a changed life – baptism, church membership and service, hospitality?
5. Take David's prayer of Psalm 51 and make it your own, confessing your sin, you need of cleansing in Christ's blood and crying out, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10)
6. Put yourself in the place of Paul
 - ✓ Am I obedient to the call of God to preach the gospel to the lost?
 - ✓ Am I using God's methods and means to evangelise sinners?
 - ✓ Am I waiting on the Lord to perform the work of salvation that belongs to him alone?