

Scripture Reading: [Paul and Silas and Timothy continue their mission journey...]

Acts 16: “ 8 So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. 9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them. 11 Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Sam-o-thrace, and the next day came to Ne-a-po-lis, 12 and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days. 13 And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there. 14 Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. 15 And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house & stay." So she persuaded us. ”

"Called to Preach the Gospel!"

We come this morning to a glorious portion of the Book of Acts on a glorious Lord's Day in the Church calendar: **Resurrection Sunday!** Now Church of the King is certainly not the typical "Christmas & Easter" type of church that many of our parents and others attended as many major denominations wondered further and further from God's truth and failed to see the need for weekly worship.

- We strive to celebrate the Resurrection Power of Jesus each and every Lord's Day in our covenant renewal worship!

However, the church calendar reminds us that the resurrection of Jesus took place in real history, not just in our minds or emotions. We made the point last week that the coming of Jesus changed everything & now we have an opportunity to reflect on how this works out with the conversion of the first person in Europe:

- A woman named Lydia.

Just as Mary Magdalene was the first to have her eyes opened after the resurrection of Jesus on that first Easter morning, so here we have God opening the heart of a woman as the first convert in a continent that would come to be the center of Christendom for over a thousand years. It is not popular in today's politically correct world to speak of the advances brought through western civilization but they are pretty hard to ignore. From the humble beginning of a single woman coming to faith, what followed brought hope and light to the entire world...

- It is easy to forget that when Lydia was baptized, she lived at a time where all that the European Continent knew was either Roman cruelty or barbarian paganism!

Only a few centuries later this region of the world would give us law & liberty in the civil realm, marriage and manners in the family realm, & great universities that would bring forth modern science and technologies. From this small prayer meeting by a river outside of town we would move on to have congregations building the grand cathedrals of Europe and the savage men and women of Europe would be converted and go on to produce the magnificent art and music of the middle ages and reformation!

- Yes, the coming of Jesus did indeed turn the world upside down: Especially from the pagan's point of view!
- So how was Lydia converted and all of Europe turned upside down?
- By the preaching of the Gospel!

So this morning as we celebrate Resurrection Sunday I want to ask this simple question:
What is the Gospel?

It is always good to review the cornerstone of our faith and we do not want to take anything for granted, especially as we disciple our covenant children in the faith...[tell the B.I.B.L.E. story]

- **Our text is straight-forward: Paul and his companions come to realize that the Lord called them to preach the gospel in Macedonia!**

They obey quickly and when Lydia hears the Gospel, God opens her mind and heart to receive the gift of faith.

- **No one is saved without God first giving the gift of faith and that gift of faith always responds to the presentation of the Gospel**

This is why Paul can talk in the strongest terms about sovereign election in Romans chapters nine and ten and then make his most impassioned plea for preaching and responding to the Gospel in those very same chapters.

- **It is another one of those great tensions in the Christian life that must be present IF we are being faithful.**

So this brings us back to our simple question: What is the Gospel? As I hope we all know, the best place to get the right answer is in the Bible!

- **And when the Bible gives a simple, but profound answer is it best if we stick with that answer.**

We had a discussion Wednesday night about the perspicuity of the Bible, which of course means that the teachings of the Bible can be clearly seen! *[only a seminary professor would come up with a word like perspicuity to say something is clear!]*

The best example of what this means is found in the Gospel of John where after the resurrection accounts John says, “Truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”

This is why many use the Gospel of John for evangelism or we often will encourage people who know little about the Bible to read this Gospel first. So where do we find a simple answer to our question: What is the Gospel? The Apostle Paul gives it to us in his letter to the most confused Church that Paul ministered too... The Saints at Corinth!

After answering many of their questions and confronting them over their ungodly divisions, Paul then reminds them about the Gospel and its power: He wants them to remember how they were saved and for them to KNOW where history is going! This is the Gospel that was preached to Lydia and the Gospel that would transform all of Europe, just as Paul explains in the 15th chapter of his first epistle to the Church at Corinth.

First Paul gives us a clear & simple answer to our question: What is the Gospel?

I Corinthians 15:1 “ Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you--unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, & that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, ...”

That is the the Gospel: The Good News! Jesus, who is the Christ, God’s promised Messiah, died for our sins as was foretold by the Scriptures *[something we reflected on Friday night]*

- **Jesus really paid the price for our sins, and to proof that He was really dead, He was buried.**
- **And finally, as predicted again in the Scriptures Jesus rose in power on the third day, something we remember and celebrate each year on Resurrection Sunday.**

The Good News is that Jesus has saved us from both the penalty of our sin, taking God’s wrath upon Himself on the cross & the power of sin, replacing it with His resurrection power!

The Gospel tells of a great victory that is accomplished and not yet... Pastor Wilson used the example of the Allied forces landing at Normandy in WWII & establishing a beach head for the battle of Europe: Once that was accomplished the war in a real sense was over for Germany but there would still be battles to fight and lives lost.

- In this life, we still face death until that final enemy is defeated & we still struggle with the power of sin in this world and our own lives.

What Paul goes on to show in this important chapter is how we are to have confidence in the victory that Jesus has won: He does so first by proving the resurrection was a real victory with many eye witnesses!

“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, & that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. 6 After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. 7 After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. 8 Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. 11 Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.”

- This is the Gospel Paul has preached here at Philippi and it is the Gospel that Lydia has believed.
- This is the Gospel that we are called on to believe, the Gospel that gives us new life AND the Gospel that we are to preach today!

Paul then turns the argument around and ponders what our world would be like if the Gospel was false...

12 “Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. 14 And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. 15 Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up--if in fact the dead do not rise. 16 For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. 17 And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! 18 Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.”

Our modern world does not like people who say something is ultimately right or wrong. They want to say something like, ‘Oh, you believe in Jesus, that is wonderful for you and I am glad that it makes you happy, but please remember there are many paths to god!’ Paul declares that the Gospel is what Dr. Schaeffer called ‘true truth’ and that all men are called on to believe it!

- IF we are wrong then we are not happy, but the saddest of all people!

Paul then declares again that we are NOT wrong because this is what God has accomplished & they have witnessed:

20 “But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. 23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.”

[Paul has here presented the reality of sin & death that we see in this world]

- And finally Paul tells us that the Gospel gives us great hope: Not only for ourselves but for all of history!

24 “Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power.” *[I need to point out here that we have universal acceptance among Christians that Jesus will have a complete victory at some point as the King of Kings & Lord of Lords]*

What the Church has largely missed for the past few hundred years is the full context of what Paul says here and it has substantially changed our view of the Gospel: The Gospel has gone from Good News that saves individuals and changes the world to something that only saves individuals as the world goes to hell.

➤ But, listen carefully to what Paul says about the flow of history and the impact of the Gospel:

“Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. 27 For "He has put all things under His feet."

God has given the nations to His Son as He promised throughout the Old Testament & their subjection will take place before His second coming when He destroys the final enemy: Death!

➤ So yes, the Gospel is both simple and profound!

The Gospel has an impact on the individuals who come to faith AND on the world as the Spirit glorifies the Son by filling the earth with His Kingdom.

➤ If we do not believe that the Gospel accomplishes both of these, then we are sadly in danger of preaching another Gospel.

So as we think about what all of this means for us there are some important lessons:

First and foremost none of us can say that we have not heard the Gospel! Paul says that it is the truth by which we are saved, unless we believe in vain. Think here about the parable of the soils that Jesus told His disciples:

- Some reject the Gospel outright just as the birds ate the seed off the hard path.
- Others believe for a time, or in vain, as Paul says, and when troubles come or the many distractions of the world crowd out the Gospel, then the young seedlings wither and die.
- Lord-willing we are those who have believed and are the good soil that will produce a harvest of thirty, sixty or a hundred fold!

Our hope and prayer should be that God would make us the productive Saints with a hundred-fold increase!

And here Paul and his traveling companions can serve as an example for us to follow as we serve the Lord:

➤ They have obeyed the leading of the Spirit and come to Philippi!

It was a mighty team for the Lord, with Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles coming with Silas, a trusted member of the Jerusalem Church, young Timothy who had great gifts and now even Dr. Luke, who would go on to write one of the four Gospels and the Book we are studying, has joined with them.

A team that is fully capable of taking on the Roman world and the Greek philosophers and ready to win the world for Jesus.

➤ And yet, where does God have them start?

➤ On a river bank outside of town with a few women!

In fact, I am pretty sure that they would not have missed the irony of Lydia, their first convert, being a woman who came from Thyatira, a city in one of the regions the Spirit had just kept them out of!

These men were NOT discouraged by small beginnings and trusted the guidance of God as we must learn to do as we serve the King of Kings!

- They preach the Gospel to Lydia and she is given the gift of faith.

And as we saw with our brief review of the events that would follow over the next thousand years, the rest is history!

- Lydia and others are saved: The continent of Europe is turned upside down and the Gospel goes on to impact the entire world.

As Americans we are often very focused on who will be our next President, in the same way or perhaps even more so, than the Romans of that day would have been focused on the question of who the next Caesar might be. As Paul and his companions came to Europe for the first time, Emperor Nero had or was about to take the throne in Rome: The world, and even many in the Church, focus a lot more attention on Nero than they do the conversion of Lydia... But we of all people should be able to see and know that the coming of the Gospel of Life to Europe was far more important than the actions of any of their political leaders, including Nero.

- Yes, the early Church had to deal with the cruelties of Emperor Nero just as Saints around the world do with many cruel leaders today.
- Here in America we have leaders who sanction the killing of the unborn, tolerate sodomy and violate God's most basic economic laws.

However, we are commanded to pray for these leaders, but we should always remember that in the letter Paul would later write to Timothy he clearly teaches us WHY we are commanded to pray for them:

“Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness & reverence. 3 “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”

- We are to pray for our leaders...
- So there can be peace in the land...
- So the Gospel can be preached!

Almost two thousand years after the conversion of Lydia, the seller of purple, the power that gave her new life is being celebrated by tens of thousands of Churches throughout the world on this Resurrection Sunday!

Emperor Nero & all of Rome, the great Greek philosophers and even the great temple in Jerusalem are fading memories... But the Kingdom of Jesus continues marching on.

And we know from Psalm 2, which we sang Friday night, and the words of I Corinthians 15 which we have studied this morning, that the advance of His Kingdom will continue to fill the earth until all principalities and powers are brought under the feet of Jesus, the risen King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

Communion Meditation: John 19:38 – 20:16 & Song of Solomon 5:

Song of Solomon 5: “The Beloved I have come to my garden, my sister, my spouse; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk. (To His Friends) Eat, O friends! Drink, yes, drink deeply, O beloved ones!” [wedding at Cana]