

Articles and Sermons :: WHO OPENED LYDIA'S HEART?

**WHO OPENED LYDIA'S HEART? - posted by theopenlife, on: 2008/9/2 3:26**

WHO OPENED LYDIA'S HEART?

The hearts of all mankind are closed to the gospel, to the preaching of the word, the beseechings and invitations of the Lord.

by Geoff Thomas

Lydia's home town was four hundred miles away in Thyatira a city famous for its dyes (there is an early inscription to a guild of dyers there). Lydia was a business woman and an entrepreneur. She traded in purple cloth, up-market material because purple dye was expensive (she may have been the agent for a Thyatiran manufacturer). We are also told that she was also a worshipper of God, that is, she had been influenced by the Old Testament Scriptures and come to believe and behave as the Jews did without having become a Jew. So she was a godfearing woman. There was a place a mile outside the city where she and other women like her met together on the Sabbath day for prayer. So it seems that there was no synagogue in Philippi (a quorum of ten men would be needed in order to have a synagogue constituted).

But the most significant truth we are told about Lydia is that her heart was closed. In other words, it was closed to God and to Jesus Christ. It was closed very effectively to the message of salvation. Before I became a minister of the gospel I worked for a year for the National Coal Board as a wages clerk in their south-west Wales headquarters. The miners in the 20 collieries in the region were all being paid in cash in 1964, and every Thursday we would fill their wage packets from a million pounds in cash, and we would carry the metal cash-boxes for each pit into a strong room for the night before paying the miners on Fridays. The strong room had a mammoth door which two men would push closed and then turn a wheel in the middle. A fly couldn't pass that door and a burglar would find it a very considerable and lengthy challenge. That door was closed shut on Thursday nights.

That closed door is a picture of Lydia's heart, and the heart of every man and women outside of Christ, so of your heart too. The hearts of all mankind are closed to the gospel, to the preaching of the word, the beseechings and invitations of the Lord. This woman was a very capable woman with considerable responsibility in the world of commerce, and I am sure she did her job with great competence and integrity, but her heart was closed. There is no mention of her husband, simply the members of her household, and she was working to support her children or her parents, and she seems to have had their trust, but her heart was closed. She was a religious person with some knowledge of the God of the Old Testament Scriptures, and one day each week was different for her, but her heart was closed. She was not simply 'dead orthodox' as the phrase puts it, but she believed in prayer and met regularly with other women and prayed. She was deeply devout, but still her heart was closed. With all her intelligence, and respectability, and business acumen, and religion, and piety her heart was closed.

There were a number of women gathered there outside the city gate by the river, and Paul spoke to every one of them with the same sincerity, yearning that every one of them should come to know his Saviour for themselves. Yet there was just one woman whose heart was opened. How solemn is this matter of the sovereignty of Christ. Many fishermen lined the shores of Galilee's lake but just two sets of brothers taken to follow Christ. You yourself once went to a meeting and there the Lord opened your heart. You thought the heart of your husband who was sitting alongside you would have been opened too but he had nothing to say of the salvation of Christ. Or you went with a gang of your friends, but afterwards they talked of football and school and music. Jehovah Jesus meant as little to them after the meeting as he had before, but you were changed. Your heart had been opened. That is how it is in this solemn and humbling experience. It is initiated by Christ. It is accomplished by the grace of Christ, and that grace works sovereignly, and selectively. That grace falls with all its particularity on favoured men and women as he determines. This is his grand prerogative, and in that honour none shall share. Please don't presume on that grace. Don't say as boys in school would say to me, "I'd like to be religious. I want to taste what the world offers first, and then when I'm older I might become religious." It is not in our power to determine the time or place. The only moment we have is now. All the years gone can never return, and all the future is unknown. We may soon be dead. Now is the time to plead with the Lord to open our heart.

What happened when the Lord opened her heart? We are told that she was able "to respond to Paul's message" (Acts 16:14). The message demanded a response. It demanded repentance for her sins. It demanded trust in the finished work

of Jesus Christ. It demanded baptism and a life of discipleship, and all this was possible once the Lord had opened her heart. She heard Paul speaking and she thought, "I have never heard anyone speak like this." She thought to herself, "What an orator he is. He really believes what he says." She thought, "This is all making sense." But it was not because of Paul's eloquence or sincerity that his words were having such a transforming influence in her life. It was all due to the Lord opening her heart. I once spoke to a woman in hospital who had been involved in a minor accident outside Aberystwyth and for fear she might have had concussion they were keeping her in hospital for 24 hours. She was fed up with life, but I spoke to her about the God who is in control of all our circumstances, even the fall of the sparrow. "That God has come to this world in his Son Jesus Christ to save us," I said. She looked back bleakly to me and she said, "Words, only words." The gospel came to her, but in word only. When the gospel came to the Thessalonians it did not come in word only, but in power and with the Holy Spirit and with much assurance so that the Thessalonians received the gospel of Paul not as the word of men but as it is in truth the word of God. So it was when Lydia's heart was opened she was able to respond to Paul's message.

Douglas MacMillan and his elders were interviewing two teenage boys who had come to profess faith and were applying for church membership. "Tell us what changes have taken place in your life that would lead us to believe you have been converted," said Douglas. Their spokesman said, "Oh, it was no change in us. The change was in you, about six months ago, when your preaching got interesting." Of course it was no change in Douglas' preaching. What had happened was that the Lord had opened their hearts at that time and then the preaching seemed more relevant, and the worship more enjoyable and Sunday was no longer a boring day. So as Paul opened the Scriptures using the sword of the Spirit the same Spirit of Jesus opened Lydia's heart so that she believed what Paul said to her. She became the first convert of whom we know anything on European soil.

What an encouragement Lydia is to us all to go on praying for those whose hearts have long been closed. We sometimes have the misfortune to hear certain preachers inform us that God lacks the ability to open the heart. "God can do no more. It is all up to you," they tell proud sinners who are glad to hear that they are mightier than God, and that they can keep the Lord wringing his hands in heaven wondering whether men will condescend to accept him or not. Who would want to worship and follow such a god? If that were really the way it is then prayer itself for loved ones' salvation would be futile. Such a theology says so mournfully that God has no power to open our loved ones' hearts. Man almighty: God impotent. But that is not how it is! The Lord opened Lydia's heart and he can open the hearts of the most obdurate sinners. Pray on!

GEOFF THOMAS

**Re: WHO OPENED LYDIA'S HEART? - posted by ccchhrrriiiss (), on: 2008/9/2 11:01**

Thanks for this, theopenlife.

I've known several backsliders who once were extremely involved in the "things of God" but who have fallen by the wayside. Ironically, many of them later admitted that they were never really grounded in the faith in the first place.

This seems to be a real problem in the Body of Christ. In their haste to encourage involvement, it seems that many pastors are willing to allow individuals who have not proven themselves faithful (in faith and deed) to become thoroughly involved in teaching Sunday School, assisting with the worship, evangelism, changing the message on the Church sign, cleaning the building, etc... Yet I wonder how dangerous such activities can be in the hearts of individuals whose faith is not truly secure or in those who are not yet mature?

I know individuals who have had a sudden, dramatic conversion and are immediately passionate for the things of God. Yet some Pastor placed them in a "ministry" so that they could "grow in maturity." A year later, they were cold to the things of God. It reminds me of the man "Atheist" in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. His excuse for turning away, "*I've already been further down this road than you and there isn't a celestial city!*" It seems that much damage can occur when we are more concerned about "keeping people involved" in Church than in simple discipleship. Yet the modern Church seems to produce more "backsliders" than it does mature Christians.

I understand that it is possible for true believers to backslide by getting caught up into the things of this world. I have known individuals whose came to Christ, served him for years, but slowly or suddenly walked away. Most of them never lost their "belief" in Christ. Rather, they simply were led astray by their own lusts for the things of this world or the "pleasures of sin for a season." My next to oldest sister is experiencing such a thing right now! She was passionate about her relationship with Christ -- but strayed from God over the past year. It is difficult to talk to her about such things because she doesn't want to hear about the condition of her soul. I don't doubt the faith in Christ that she displayed for so many y

ears. But the sins of this world -- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life -- are real. Such distractions are able to take our eyes off of the One who saved us and onto the temporary lying pleasures of this life.

May God help us to raise up a caliber of believer who is able to keep their eyes on Jesus regardless of what temptations are provided by this world! God help all of us to hate all things in comparison with our love and longing for Christ!

**Re: WHO OPENED LYDIA'S HEART? - posted by boG (), on: 2008/9/2 18:11**

Can we not further understand the opening of Lydia's heart by understanding the hardening of Pharaoh's heart?

Who hardened Pharaoh's heart?

Exodus 9

12. And **the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh**, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had spoken unto Moses.

34. And when **Pharaoh** saw that the rain and the hail and the thunders were ceased, **he (Pharaoh) sinned yet more, and hardened his heart**, he and his servants.

We read here that Pharaoh sinned against the Lord when he (Pharaoh) hardened his heart. By saying the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart does that make God the author of Pharaoh's sin?

This is a common question of making God the author of sin but with a practical example.

To answer this question without making God the author of sin will properly answer: who opened Lydia's heart.