



Sermon, Sunday July 30, 2023

“Faith of Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth”

SCRIPTURE: Acts 16:9-15 ⁹ During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” ¹⁰ When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them. ¹¹ We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, ¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. ¹³ On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴ A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵ When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.” And she prevailed upon us.

Introduction: Paul's mission to Philippi and Lydia worship God

Today is the 9th Sunday after Pentecost. According to Acts 16:6 says, "**Apostle Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia.**" Also, Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "**Come over to Macedonia and help us.**" Because of that, Paul's party took a ship from Troas and went straight to Samothrace, then passed through Neapolis and arrived at Philippi.

A few days after arriving in Philippi, Paul and his companions went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer on the Sabbath. At that time, Philippi was the first city (leading city) of the district of Macedonia, but they did not have a synagogue. In verse 14 of today's text, Luke, the author of Acts, describes in detail a woman named Lydia who was a worshiper of God and a dealer in purple cloth in Thyatira. Purple cloth was a luxury item at the time. Lydia was a successful businesswoman, also rare at the time.

Today's text says, 'Lydia was a worshiper of God' which means that she had converted to Judaism. This shows what kind of person Lydia was. Many years ago I made a pilgrimage to Türkiye (Turkey) and Greece. In cities such as Ephesus and Philippi, where trade and commerce developed in the Bible, sexual depravity, luxury, and pleasure were rampant. If you visit the ancient Roman cities, you can see evidence of the luxury and enjoyment of the time. In the Roman Empire where Lydia lived, there were many elements to enjoy life.

However, Lydia, a successful gentile woman, chose not to live such a life but to serve God. We know how difficult it is to live this life. It is difficult to live a godly life without being dominated by wealth, power, and fame.

The ancient Roman Empire absolutized emperor worship. This means the apotheosis of man. Likewise, the world we live in makes money the absolute idol. By the way, to serve God is to believe that true freedom, peace, and rest can only be enjoyed in a relationship with God.

Realizing this, Lydia converted to Judaism and became a servant of God. Today we can learn the solid foundation of the Christian faith through Lydia's faith. Faith with a solid foundation can overcome the influence of external and internal environments and bear good fruits.



Body: Meeting of Lydia and Paul

According to today's text, Paul and his companions met Lydia by the river. And Lydia hears the gospel that Paul preaches (the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus). The Lord opens the heart of Lydia to respond to the apostle Paul's message. Let's look at verse 14 of today's text. **“The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul.”**

In this verse, the expression '**opened heart**' comes out. This is the decisive reason why Lydia was able to listen eagerly and respond to Paul's words. Through my 20 years of pastoral experience, I have experienced various people's reactions to God's revealed Word. Some people accept the words of the Bible by faith, while others do not accept the words of the Bible into their hearts. It is when our hearts are opened with the help of the Holy Spirit that we can receive the Word of God. Without this, no one can accept the Bible as the revealed Word of God. The fact that you and I became Christians is possible because our hearts were opened with the help of the Holy Spirit. This is the beginning of the grace the Lord gives us.

Lydia, who opened her heart and accepted Paul's gospel with the Lord's help, responded in two ways. Lydia's reaction is described by Luke in Acts 16:15 as follows; **“When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.' And she prevailed upon us.”**

According to this passage, not only is Lydia baptized, but so is her whole family. Baptism is a ceremony that publicly expresses our determination and will to change the direction of our lives from the very beginning. In simple words, it is a decision to follow the path of the cross that Jesus took. This is the determination to not live a life in which man is absolutely deified and against the deification of money, honor, and power.

So, baptized Christians must grow into mature Christians through the help of the Holy Spirit. For this we must work hard. **The Apostle Paul says in Philippians 3:12 what this kind of life is. “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.”** This verse shows us what our most important goal in life is. It is about becoming like Jesus and living the life He lived. There are many precious things in our lives, but we must live with the attitude that nothing is more important than becoming like Jesus and living the life he lived.

However, there are many challenges for Christians who want to live this kind of life. In our busy lives, real problems need to be solved, and pressing life problems all hinder our desire to be like Jesus. Therefore, we must be able to maintain the tension and balance of our lives to preserve the reality of our physical life and our identity as Christians. This is not an easy task, so we need the help of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we must earnestly ask the Holy Spirit to help us live such a life.

Lydia's second response to Paul's sermon was to forcefully suggest that Paul's companions stay at her house. This is the consideration and service of Lydia to help the physically weak Paul and financially aid in his missionary work. With Lydia's consideration, Paul and his companions were able to continue their missionary activities. And Lydia's house becomes the first church in Europe. The Philippian church that was born in this way continued to maintain a deep relationship with the apostle Paul and helped him greatly in preaching the gospel.

Apostle Paul also said in Philippians 1:8 what his heart was toward the Philippian church. **“God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus”** In this way, the Philippian church, which started in Lydia's house, played a valuable role in the early Christian missionary history.

We looked at what Lydia did for Paul and his companions through several passages of the Acts. However, there is something we should not overlook about Lydia's service. That is, the service that Lydia gave to Paul's companions was not easy. This is a service that requires inconvenience and great financial commitment. The



reason Lydia was able to handle these tasks with joy was because Lydia's passion to participate in the gospel ministry came before anything else. Lydia says, **“If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.”** These words and actions are at odds with the world's values that encourage us to put our own first. I hope we have a desire to serve like Lydia.

Conclusion: Church Tradition

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ! Now let's summarize today's message. Lydia's passion for the gospel and service played an important role in the apostle Paul's missionary work. And it became a wonderful tradition of the Philippian church.

Lydia had a longing for God in her heart. The Holy Spirit knew her heart and opened Lydia's heart to the gospel of 'the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus' preached by Paul. Lydia decided to live a life that resembles Jesus through baptism and moved forward for 'Christian perfection'. And, through serving, she shared her life with her neighbors. We pray that we can follow the life of Lydia and create a beautiful church tradition.

