Lydia, the Generous Hostess

Acts 16:11-15, 40
SS Lesson for 08/30/2026

Devotional Scripture: Gen 18:2-8

OUTLINE

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Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary
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Hospitable by not forgetting to do good to others (Heb 13:16)
Hospitable by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and looking after the sick (Matt 25:35-40)
Hospitable by helping others as we have the ability (Acts 11:29)
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COMMENTARY THOUGHTS FROM GREGORY BROWN
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Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Beginning in Acts 13:1, the book of Acts focuses on the missionary travels of the apostle Paul. The church in Antioch commissioned Paul and Barnabas to carry the gospel beyond that Syrian city to the regions of Cyprus (a large island), Pisidia, Pamphylia, and Galatia. We often refer to this as Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-14:28). On the next missionary journey (Acts 15:36-18:22), Paul and Silas visited the previous locations but also pushed farther west toward Roman Asia. This expedition was almost blown apart at the outset when Paul and Barnabas had a tense disagreement over the advisability of taking along John Mark, a relative of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10). Therefore, they divided into two teams: Barnabas and John Mark returned to the island of Cyprus (Acts 15:39), the home territory of Barnabas (4:36), while Paul recruited Silas, a respected church leader (15:22), to accompany him (15:40-41). Paul then traveled to Lystra, where he met with Timothy and invited him to join the missionary journey (Acts 16:1-5). Paul and his companions then traveled through the regions of Phrygia and Galatia. They reached the port city of Troas, located at the northern end of the Aegean Sea, where Paul received a vision of an unknown man from Macedonia who invited the apostle to come to that region (16:8-10). It is at this point in Paul's second missionary journey that we arrive at today's lesson. The year is around AD 50, and it has been some 15 years since Paul's encounter with the resurrected Christ.

Key Verses: Acts 16:15

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 and stay." So she persuaded us.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

A Generosity that Seeks God's Clear Directions (Acts 16:11-12)

11 Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis,
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.

Clear directions through being at the right place at the right time (11-12)

Being at the right place at the right time can bring healing (Acts 3:2-8)

2 Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. 3 When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. 4 Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" 5 So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. 6 Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." 7 Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. 8 He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.

Being at the right place at the right time can sometimes be accomplished through preparation (Matt 25:1-13)

> 25:1 "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish and five were wise. 3 The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. 4 The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. 5 The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. 6 "At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' 7 "Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. 8 The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' 9 "'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' 10 "But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. 11 "Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!' 12 "But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.' 13 "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

Being at the right place at the right time should result in the praising of God (John 9:1-3)

> 9:1 As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind ?" 3 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.

Being at the right place at the right time is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit (Luke 2:25-31)

> 25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, 28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: 29 "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. 30 For my eyes have seen your salvation , 31 which you have prepared in the sight of all people,

A Generosity that has a Compliant Heart (Acts 16:13-15, 40)

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 and stay." So she persuaded us.
40 So they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.

A compliant heart to pray (13)

Prayer that is continual (1 Thess 5:17)

> 17 pray continually;

Prayer for the spreading of the gospel (Eph 6:19)

> 19 Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel,

Prayer in faith and the Holy Spirit (Jude 20)

> 20 But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.

Prayer that waits in expectation (Ps 5:3)

> 3 In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.

Prayer about everything with thanksgiving (Phil 4:6)

6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

A heart that is devoted to prayer (Col 4:2)

2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

A compliant heart to heed the things of God (14)

A heeding that leads to righteousness (Rom 6:16)

16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey-whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

A heeding that is learned (Heb 5:8)

8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered

A heeding that is in love (2 John 1:6)

6 And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.

A heeding that is better than sacrifices (1 Sam 15:22)

"Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.

A heeding through putting God's words into practice (Matt 7:24-25)

24 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.

A heeding through focusing on the eternal (2 Cor 4:16-18)

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

A heeding through living holy (1 Peter 1:14-16)

14 As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. 15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy.

A compliant heart to be faithful (15)

Faithful because we have been given a trust (1 Cor 4:2)

2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

Faithful even to the point of death (Rev 2:10)

10 Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Faithful to the truth to please God, not man (1 Thess 2:4)

4 On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts.

Faithful to the truth to live a life worthy of God (Col 1:10)

> 10 And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,

Faithful to the truth so that God will consider us a faithful servant (Matt 25:21)

> 21 "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

Without faithfulness, we cannot please God (Heb 11:6)

> 6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

A compliant heart to be hospitable (40)

Hospitable by sharing (Rom 12:13)

> 13 Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Hospitable by entertaining strangers (Heb 13:2)

> 2 Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.

Hospitable by not forgetting to do good to others (Heb 13:16)

> 16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Hospitable by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and looking after the sick (Matt 25:35-40)

> 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' 40 "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

Hospitable by helping others as we have the ability (Acts 11:29)

> 29 The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea.

Hospitable by using the gifts God has given us (Rom 12:5-8)

> 5 so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. 7 If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; 8 if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Gregory Brown

Down By the Riverside (16:11-15)

Immediately upon receiving the “Macedonian vision,” this missionary band sailed directly to the Island of Samothrace, and then on to Neapolis, the port city of Philippi, some ten miles inland. Finding a place to stay, Paul and the others no doubt looked first for a synagogue, which seems not to have existed. This would suggest that there were either few Jews living in this city, or that they found it unwise to publicly worship the God of Israel. The attitude of the Gentile residents of the city, as revealed shortly in response to the charges brought against Paul and Silas, must have been anti-Jewish, and would explain no mention of a synagogue.

The second best option would have been a "place of prayer" located outside of town, beside the river. Such places of prayer were centuries old, as can be seen from this psalm, depicting Israel's plight while captives in Babylon:

By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down and wept, When we remembered Zion. 2 Upon the willows in the midst of it We hung our harps. 3 For there our captors demanded of us songs, And our tormentors mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion" (Psalm 137:1-3).

It would seem from verse 13 ("supposing that there would be a place of prayer there") that they were not even sure of finding a place of prayer in Philippi. They did find such a place, however, where only a few women seem to have gathered, among whom was Lydia, the "seller of purple fabrics," from Thyatira (verse 14). The Lord opened her heart to receive the gospel as spoken by Paul. She, along with the other members of her household believed and were baptized, probably in that river beside which they had gathered. In addition to receiving the gospel, she received these missionaries into her home. It was at her initiative, in fact at her insistence that they accepted her hospitality. Her profession of faith in baptism and her provision of hospitality were outward evidences of the faith God had given her and which she had exercised.

No Escape for the Magistrates: Paul Refuses to Leave Jail (16:35-40)

After the wounds of these two men were dressed, they were fed, and perhaps a time of fellowship, prayer and praise, these men seem to have gone back to their cells. This certainly seems to be where they were found the next morning when the orders were sent to the jailer to release them. It would have been an entirely different thing if they had been sitting on the jailer's couch, eating a leisurely breakfast, reading the morning paper, when the officers arrived. And how could Paul refuse to leave when he was not in the prison? No, the kindness of the jailer was accepted, but Paul did not accept an unofficial release, even if the jailer had offered it.

We do not know why the magistrates decided to order the release of Paul and Silas. Was it their intention to do this all along, only to scare these men into leaving town? Or was it due to pressure brought to bear on the officials by the church and/or people of influence like Lydia? Or was it because the earthquake shook some sense into these men and convinced them they may have been wrong? For whatever reasons, the decision was made, and officers were sent to inform the jailer to release these two men.

Paul's response was not at all what they expected. They found themselves to be in much greater trouble than these two preachers. They expected Paul to gratefully accept his release by hightailing it out of town, never again to look back or return. Instead, they found Paul refusing to leave his cell, until those responsible for his illegal treatment acknowledged their wrong and made a somewhat public apology.

Why was Paul so insistent about this? Why was he so indignant? Was this a submissive act? Justice had not been done, and the laws of Rome, which Paul had wrongly been accused of breaking, were the very laws which the magistrates had violated. The Christian who looks forward to the coming of Messiah and for the establishment of justice on the earth (cf. Matthew 6:10), is one who also desires to see justice done now. Paul's submission to the law was such that he expected others to live under it as well. Paul's continued freedom to preach the gospel was somewhat on the line, as was the freedom of the church in Philippi to conduct its worship and ministry. What Paul did, he did for the cause of justice, and for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

With great chagrin, the magistrates complied with Paul's demands, and pled with he and Silas to go quietly. They did leave Philippi, but without any promise that they would be gone for good. They first went to the home of Lydia, where the church was summoned, and encouraged. There were a number of others gathered there, too, who Luke calls "brethren," and so we know that the evangelization of this city included more than the two households of Lydia and the jailer. Then and then only did they depart. Philippi would never be the same.

(Adapted from URL:https://bible.org/seriespage/25-paul-philippi-purveyor-purple-purveyor-pain-acts-1611-40)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Acts of hospitality serve as a faithful witness to the life-changing effect of the gospel. Hospitality is essentially "love in action." When we show hospitality, we demonstrate our love for God and others. Lydia exemplified this by providing a welcoming space for people to gather, share meals, engage in fellowship and prayer, and encounter Christ. Imagine Paul's experience in Philippi without Lydia's hospitality; he would have lacked a base for his ministry and somewhere to return to after being released from prison. In today's world, hospitality doesn't have to mean opening your home to missionaries, though that is one way to express it. It can involve sharing a meal with new members of your church community, providing space for prayer and fellowship, or simply being attentive to the needs of your neighbors. Hospitality should never be used as an opportunity to show off; rather, it should be an expression of love that comes from experiencing the ultimate expression of love: salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Lydia encountered this transforming love and, in turn, used her hospitality to change the lives of others. How will you use your hospitality to make a difference in the lives of those around you?