

Acts 16:11-15: Salvation in Lydia's Household

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INTRODUCTION

The furniture in a church tells you something about its theology and what is important. In a Roman Catholic Church you have the altar front and centre, some churches have the band, Baptist churches usually have the pulpit, the baptistery and the Lord's Table somewhere in the centre. Because it is the word of God that is given prominence in our worship, because it is God ministering to us not us to God which takes priority, the audible word and the visible word take centre stage. Baptism has fallen on hard times especially in our digital age where people think that they can do church over the internet. A baptismal service when we gather together as a local church and we witness someone giving testimony to their saving faith in Christ, showing in symbol how Christ has saved them, this is being lost as many opt for digital church today. Today we have the privilege of participating again as witnesses to Simone's baptism and reminding ourselves of the gospel that is portrayed before us in her actions.

Today for our meditation on baptism we will be looking at Acts 16:11-15. I have chosen this passage because it emphasizes two things I want to draw to your attention today. Firstly, we see God sovereignly saving through the preached word, we want to see how God saves through Lydia's experience of it. Secondly, we see a household baptism and want to demonstrate how the bible does not endorse infant but rather believer's baptism.

'So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and 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 some days. 13 And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. 14 One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. 15 And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.'

Lydia's regeneration

Acts 16 is in the middle of Paul's second missionary journey. Paul and Barnabas have gone their separate ways. Timothy has joined Paul and Silas. And Paul has had a vision where a man from Macedonia was calling to Paul to come preach there. Our verses pick up the narrative as Paul is responding to this vision. They target a strategic city, Philippi and the

narrative takes from there. Their Philippian ministry recounts three highlights, the salvation of Lydia and her household, the deliverance of the slave girl and the persecution which results in an imprisonment which leads to the salvation of the Philippian jailor and his household.

V13 sets the scene, 'And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together.' The city of Philippi probably didn't have a synagogue, as a synagogue needed the minimum of ten men to form a quorum. This is why we see Paul going down to the river to the prayer meeting; this would have been near the river for ceremonial cleansing purposes. We see something similar when Israel is exiled to Babylon where in Psalm 137 we are told they went down to the rivers of Babylon and wept. We see that there are in fact no men mentioned as being present only women. It is here that one woman Lydia, is singled out.

V14, 'One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.' She was a native of Thyatira and was probably a successful business woman as purple goods could be expensive. We are told that she was 'a worshiper of God.' The consensus among the various commentaries is that this is another way of saying that she was a 'God fearer.' If you were a Gentile but you did not want to undergo circumcision yet were attached to the synagogue somehow, you were known as a God fearer. Cornelius is referred to in this way, Acts 10:2, 'a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God.' We are told despite his devotion that he still needed to hear the gospel to be saved (Acts 11:13-14). It is assumed that Lydia was in the same spiritual position, attached to the OT faith but not yet saved.

Our focus is on how God saved her, and the first thing to note is the fact that she was listening to the preaching. Now this may seem an obvious thing to you, but it is a most important point. God saved Lydia through the hearing of the word. This is God's standard mode of operation. We see this in James 1:18 (ESV), "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creation." The Bible does not teach that we are regenerated at our baptisms, or when hands are laid on us, but God works, by the Holy Spirit, to bring about the new birth in us by his word. This is his standard mode of operation. Eph. 1:13, Gal. 3:5 also teach this. God has chosen that we should believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ, and we cannot believe unless we hear. This is why we stress the importance of preaching, and preaching which preaches the Bible not the teachings of men.

But when exactly was Lydia regenerated, when exactly did she receive the new birth, and pass from death to life? Let me tell you the most common answer and then let me give you the Biblical one. Most people would say, 'she received the new birth after she believed; in response to her believing'. Most people would put it in this order faith first and then regeneration. But this is not the order that the Bible puts it in. The Bible teaches us that

God works first and then we believe, we are born again first and then we see and believe, that without the working of God previous to our faith our faith would never happen. Let's look at some of the evidence for this. We see that in Acts 11:18, it is God who grants repentance (2 Tim. 2:25). In Acts 13:48, that it is only those who are appointed/ elect, believe. And that Lydia responded to the word, why, because God opened her heart to do so. So there is no repentance unless granted, no believing unless God has appointed, and no responding unless God opens the heart to do so.

So regeneration comes before faith to enable faith, but there is more we need to stress about regeneration. It is instant not gradual. There is no one who is half regenerate, or partially regenerate. There is no one who is partially born again. Either you are or you aren't, there is no limbo in regeneration. This is certainly worth stressing for there are those who are influenced by Roman Catholic notions that our salvation is not complete but something we are always improving on, this is not true. Some people might think that the good part of them is regenerate and the bad part is not, either you are or you aren't, there is no in between. One moment Lydia was unregenerate, the next she was, and then she responded to the word.

Why is it that God saves Lydia and us in this manner, by a regeneration that comes before faith and repentance and gives birth to them? The reason why God has to act in this manner is because of our inability to save ourselves. There are numerous verses which tell us that because of our natural sinful state we are deliberately blind, wilfully disobedient, inevitably antagonistic, and completely incapable of believing and repenting out of the resources of our sinful nature. We need help, we need God to intervene, and to act first that we might be able to respond as we ought. Romans 8:7 (ESV) For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. 1 Cor. 2:14 (ESV) "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." Note the key words, 'cannot' and 'not able'.

Thomas Boston uses this helpful picture to show us our need. Most people would see the sinner as in a pit that he cannot get himself out of, but if a rope were let down, the Gospel, then he might be able to pull himself out. Most people would see the unbeliever in this state with the offer of the Gospel a way in which we can pull ourselves out of the pit. But this is not the full picture, for although we are in a pit, and the rope of the Gospel is let down to us, we are not able to take hold of it, for we lie spiritually dead on the floor of the bottom of the pit, needing the regeneration that God gives before we can believe. So whether you put a key into the dead hand of someone in a prison cell, or a rope in the hand of someone dead in a pit, they cannot help themselves. Ephes. 2:1 (ESV) "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins...". Jesus therefore put it like this, John 6:44 (ESV) "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day." Lydia would never have believed, nor been able to believe unless God had opened her heart. This way of God's action is not a spiteful thing that God has done deliberately denying us the ability to respond, it is the consequence of sin which each one bears due to Adam's sin. So God is therefore gracious and free when he moves upon us to

open our eyes while we are yet his enemies, in order that we might be able to believe repent and turn to Christ.

Lydia's baptism

We see two household baptisms in this chapter, the other household baptisms would include Cornelius' household (Acts 11:14), Crispus' household (Acts 18:8) and household of Stephanus (1 Cor. 1:16). These household baptisms are held up by our infant baptising brothers as an apostolic pattern that shows that there was a covenant principle being applied as it was under the OT where Abraham and his seed were sealed with the sign of the covenant. In the OT it was circumcision and our paedobaptist brethren claim that baptism stands in the place of circumcision. It is argued that just as God incorporated families into the covenant community in the OT He would not act less graciously and exclude the children. Is household baptism proof of an OT covenant definition of the covenant people? Here is how we would respond.

In Lydia's case we need to make clear that there is no mention of a husband and she speaks of her house and takes the initiative to invite men into it. This paints the picture not of a breast feeding woman but a widow/divorcee who was a woman of means who could travel freely and ended up putting the church up in her house. Secondly, Paul preached to Lydia and her household at a ladies bible study, and after she and her house which would have been made up of the ladies present heard and believed, they were able to be baptised immediately because the river was right there for use.

Firstly, there is no explicit mention of the baptism of infants anywhere in the NT, not in John's, Jesus, or the church's baptising. To import children into these texts is to say more than the text says. To make this point let me report a conversation that took place between ministers: 'In the course of a conversation on baptism, some of the younger Presbyterian ministers became very emphatic in their assertion that the apostles practised infant-baptism. "Of course they did," said one, 'for we read that they baptized five households, and some of those households must have contained infants.'" As the Baptist ministers who were present made no reply, the genial host asked them if they had nothing to say. "Yes," answered a venerable Baptist, in a subdued voice, "I am prepared to assert that every member of those five households was over 20 years of age." This remark was greeted with good-natured laughter, and from several lips there came the question, "How can you prove it?" "Oh," replied the aged Baptist, "I said nothing about proving; I was simply asserting. Infected by your example, I was just indulging a little in the pleasant occupation of guessing. I admire your style of argument. It saves such a lot of trouble to take for granted the very point in dispute. I admire also the liveliness of your imagination which can descry infants where they were non-existent, and which can invent them where the inspired penman informs us of none. Perhaps you can tell us what was the exact number of infants which these households contained, and what were their names and ages; also how many of them were boys and how many were girls . . ."¹

¹ <http://www.alfredplacechurch.org.uk/index.php/articles/john-was-a-baptist-so-was-his-master-and-so-am-i/>

It fails to prove what it says. We do not think you should base a doctrine on the silence either. Luke who is a very careful observer does stress the presence of women and children in a place like Acts 21:5, 'and they all, with wives and children, accompanied us until we were outside the city,' but then makes no mention in a place like 8:12, 'they were baptized, both men and women.' I think the reason why infants are not mentioned is because it is obvious by the theology of salvation, the description of those who were saved and baptised and the nature of the New Covenant that even if there were infants in the house one would not assume the infants were included. The language of a whole house doing something can be qualified. For example, 1 Sam. 1:21-22 mentions a whole household which does not include the whole household, 'The man Elkanah and all his house went up to offer to the LORD the yearly sacrifice and to pay his vow. 22 But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, "As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, so that he may appear in the presence of the LORD and dwell there forever.'" And on other places whole households are mentioned but we would not infer infants, e.g. Titus 1:11, 'They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.' Likewise in John 4:53 we would not infer infants, 'The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." And he himself believed, and all his household.' If there were infants who were present and did not believe is this then an inaccurate statement? I see a loose use of the word household in the Bible, it is not a precise term that means the same thing every time it is used. We can tax it overly much. I believe we must allow the context to shed light on its usage.

Secondly, we can clearly demonstrate that the faith of those baptised is mentioned in every case. Acts 10:47, "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" Acts 16:32-34, 'And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. 34 Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.' Acts 18:8, 'Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized.' 1 Cor. 16:15, 'Now I urge you, brothers---you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints.'

Household salvation should not be so strange a thing when in Roman culture the religion of the home would often be determined by the father. The assurance is that God's grace seems to be evident in that all spoke in tongues, served God, rejoiced, or some other proof of life is given. A whole household changes faith is not necessarily an OT idea but fits a cultural situation where families were more united and not fractured like today.

Thirdly, we do feel there to be an inconsistency in their position when they do baptise infants by household but do not partake of the Lord's Supper by household. If whole households being baptised included infants then surely breaking bread from house to house in Acts 2:42, 46 would mean that those same infants also partook of the Lord's Table. However, this is mostly denied, but on what grounds? They argue on the basis of the

warnings and the need to test oneself as the grounds that infants would not and should not partake of the table. This is the same way that Baptists argue about baptism. We would argue based on the description of salvation, baptism and the church as well as the nature of the New Covenant that baptism cannot be meant for infants.

Fourthly, in the OT the people of God were a mixed multitude, in heaven we will be a perfect multitude, the NT people are supposed to be a progressive step in between, therefore we do not apply the OT way of being the people of God but see discontinuity. We in the NT people of God are all born again, all elect, all united to Christ by the Spirit, all justified, all adopted, all Spirit filled, etc.

So let me conclude. We must all be saved as Lydia was saved, and we should all be baptised as she was baptised. She heard the gospel that she was a sinner under the wrath of God and deserved to be judged. That should could not save herself or make herself clean in anyway. She heard how God who is loving and holy sent His Son to pay our sin debt by dying on the cross taking all of God's judgement towards my sin and paying for it in full on the cross. She was made aware by the Spirit of her sin and that her only hope was in Christ, is that you here today? Do you know your sin and know your need of Christ? The bible says repent and believe, turn from your sin and fall at Christ's feet for the salvation that He freely offers. He calls you to come, He commands you to come.

If you have come to Christ then you must be baptised. If you have trusted in Christ for salvation but have not yet obeyed His call to be baptised, you must. He commands it! Simone has heard, she has believed and now we will witness her obey Christ by being baptised.