

A Team Effort

Acts 16: 9-15 (May 22, 2022)

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⁹During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” ¹⁰When 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. ¹¹We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, ¹²and 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. ¹³On 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. ¹⁴A 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. ¹⁵When 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.

Historical Context

Often, we think of the early Christians as being poor and marginalized. Often, they were, but not all of them. In fact, we see in the Corinthian letter signs of socio-economic divisions. Such was not the case here. Lydia was likely rather wealthy, but she used her wealth in this case to benefit the ministry of Paul. In other words, she became a partner in that ministry. The other element of this story is the fact that Paul was willing to worship with and share the message with women. We know that Paul could write instructions for women to be silent. He could also proclaim that in Christ there is neither male nor female ([Gal. 3:28](#)). In this case, we see Paul expanding the circle to include not only Gentiles but women, who become partners in ministry.

Theme: A Team Effort

Although they meet in Philippi, Lydia is from Thyatira. Since she is living in Philippi, it seems that Lydia is away from a place she once called home, a place with which she is still affiliated. Perhaps this made her particularly attuned to the needs of the group of men travelling declaring the word of the Lord. Lydia is described by the work that she does; she is a dealer in purple cloth. As a business woman, she is both able and willing to support the ministry of Jesus Christ by providing shelter to ministers. She welcomes strangers in a place where she once was a stranger. Clearly, the growth of the church is a team effort, an effort that requires the extension of hospitality and generosity.

Ministry is often equated to those individual and things that are visible — the ministers, the sacraments, the choir and ushers. However, ministry is made possible by those who often are not seen and at times are not named. Despite our tendency to want to identify a hero or personality, this text reminds us that it takes a team for the ministry to be effective. All are co-laborers. Paul was not alone, he was there with Silas, Timothy, and likely whoever it is that is recounting the story. The church is strengthened, then and now, by those who demonstrate their faithfulness in both their words and deeds and by those who extend generous hospitality. The proclamation of the word opens the heart and open hearts result in open doors. Let us welcome all who would come.