

Lydia, the Entrepreneur

“I am Lydia, a child of God. You may have heard me called a business woman, an entrepreneur. I was born in 31 A.D. in Thyatira , (thigh uh TIRE uh), near Phillippi, on Macedonia, a Roman colony. I was fortunate in many ways, but perhaps am best known for my purple cloth. It was made by a very special process of dying and I built quite a good business, actually having several women help me in my dying process due to the demand for my cloth. I am not special in your eyes, but I am very special in the eyes of Him who matters. You see, I was the very first person baptized on the continent of Europe, but then we are getting too far into my life, so I’ll start at the beginning. My parents were Roman citizens and so I was born a Roman citizen. That was very important because we were the people that were blessed, according to the governmental authorities, and they ruled. We had a special governmental protection that the other people did not have. Everyone paid the Roman government taxes, whether they were Roman or not, but we were a privileged people.

“I had inherited my mother’s coal black hair and my father’s blue eyes which were very stunning and as I grew older I appreciated the honest work ethic my father had bestowed on me. My mother was a little concerned about my business, but it was such a part of me that she grew to accept it and people in the town grew to accept the fact that a woman was actually in business. You see, most of the people were tent makers or worked for tent makers or basket makers. But then, my purple cloth became known. It was immediately seen as something different and the royalty wanted it for their own. Soon, it became known as the fabric of the rich people, and I had a business which had never been in my wildest dreams.

“The purple dye came from the shellfish. The juice was white while it was in the veins of the fish, but when it was exposed to the sun, the liquid changed into bright purple. It took a lot of work to catch enough shellfish to dye even one garment. Dyes were natural, not synthetic, and the dye for purple was made from a juice found in minute quantities in the shellfish. It took thousands of crustaceans to make a yard or two of purple cloth. So it was very expensive, worth its weight in silver it was said. It was a statement of status and wealth.

“The beautiful cloth was mainly used by members of the royal families. Purple wasn’t just an indicator of wealth. It was a symbol of political power. The more important you were as a Roman senator, the more purple decoration you had on your tunic and your toga. The emperor, and only the emperor, would wear a toga made entirely of purple cloth. Purple was the color of the Roman elite.

“The Roman Senators were required to have a white toga, purple bands and boots. The Knights wore a white toga and tunic, purple bands and sandals. The Magistrate wore a white tunic, purple toga, and gold embroidery. Other high ranking officials wore a white tunic, a purple tunic, and gold embroidery. These garments may sound very similar to you, but they distinguished the officials from other people, and the colors became extremely important to them.

“You may remember from your Bible study that Herod put a robe of purple on Christ before they mocked him and called Him ‘King of the Jews.’ Perhaps it was to show how they wanted to mock Him because they feared His being an earthly king. Perhaps they wanted to show how His power could be

stripped from Him, just as easily as the purple robe. But my King doesn't need a purple robe. He does not put His love in earthly symbols. But I'll talk more about my Lord later.

"I often went to the river to pray. It was not safe for us to be near the center of the town. I also wanted the people who worked with me to know about this Jesus I had heard about and grew to love. One day, some men approached us as were praying. Their names were Paul, Timothy, and Silas, and Luke. It was evident from the start that Paul was the leader, but I also had a special place for the younger men, Timothy and Luke. You see, Timothy was a citizen of Rome as was Paul. Timothy's mother was a Jewish woman who was a believer in Jesus, and his father was a Greek. He had even been willing to be circumcised as an adult by Paul so he could go with him on his travels and not offend any Jews they might meet along the way. Luke was special. He seemed to upset Paul sometimes because he was so eager to tell the story too, but Paul was overpowering. Paul was on a mission, and he seemed to sense that time was so important, and he didn't take time to have small talk.

"We knew about their Jesus. He had made such an impression in the world that people all over had begun to follow his teachings. In fact, the authorities were so upset with him they hanged him on a cross. I was one of those people who had heard about him and decided to follow him. We were not allowed to worship publicly because the government feared his power. Even though they had put him to death they were still afraid of this young man who had transformed the world as they knew it in such a short time.

"The Roman government feared him and all his followers. The followers would meet secretly in the darkness of their homes to avoid any publicity. But, I wanted to pray to Him. I wanted to talk with him. I wanted his blessing in my life. I wanted the women who worked with me to be able to pray with him, so we had gone to the edge of the river, far from the center of town to seek a quiet place where we could pray to the man we had come to know as our Savior and King, not an earthly king. The officials did not have to fear that. He was a Heavenly king who would talk to us about life after death, and how we should love and work with other people. We wanted to tell all people about this man named Jesus, whom we had grown to love even though we had never seen him. We heard as much as we could from others who knew him, and we wanted to pass on the good news. We still paid our taxes, and because I had been successful in my endeavors, I had paid many taxes. I knew what was due to Rome and I paid it willingly, but I also wanted to learn more about this man who could offer me more than I was finding on this earth. Yes, I was wealthy in material things, but not in the things of the Spirit of God.

"As the men talked with us, we learned so much about Jesus and his teachings. We also learned how Paul and his men had not wanted to come to Philippi. Paul had planned to take the message to people in Asia, but that way was blocked, and then they wanted to go to Bithynia, but the spirit wouldn't let them go there either. One night Paul had a dream to go to Macedonia which was across the sea. As they began to get ready for their journey, they knew this was the way the Holy Spirit wanted them to go. As they reached Macedonia, they walked to Philippi, the main city in that part of Macedonia and even more importantly, a Roman colony. They lingered there for a few days to rest and then wanted to pray with some people on the Sabbath. They had heard there was a prayer meeting down there,

and when they arrived, they found us – a group of women who had gathered there. My heart was prepared by the Holy Spirit to hear the call of Jesus, and to follow him. As the men talked, I knew that they had been sent from God to tell us about what we should do in life – how we should be ready to serve as called, to answer in the positive when asked to pray. We had become missionaries for this wonderful Savior we had found through these men. But their time was not easy in Macedonia. I pleaded with them "If you're confident that I'm in this with you and believe in the Master truly, come home with me and be my guests." They hesitated, but I wouldn't take no for an answer. All of us, everyone in the household was baptized. And so we were privileged to give shelter to real believers in the Holy Spirit – Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

“One day, as the men were going to prayer, a slave girl ran into them. She was a psychic and, with her fortunetelling, made a lot of money for the people who owned her. She started following Paul around, calling everyone's attention to him by yelling out, "These men are working for the Most High God. They're laying out the road of salvation for you!" She did this for many days. Finally Paul was fed up with the way she was being used. He turned and commanded the spirit that possessed her, "Out! In the name of Jesus Christ, get out of her!" And it was gone, just like that.

“When her owners saw that their lucrative little business was suddenly bankrupt, they went after Paul and Silas, roughed them up and dragged them into the market square. Then the police arrested them and pulled them into a court with the accusation, "These men are disturbing the peace—dangerous Jewish agitators subverting our Roman law and order." By this time the crowd had turned into a restless mob out for blood.

“The judges went along with the mob, because they were making money off this woman also. They ripped the clothes from Paul and Silas and a public beating was ordered by the authorities. After beating them black-and-blue, they threw them into jail, telling the jail keeper to put them under heavy guard so there would be no chance of escape. He did just that—threw them into the maximum security cell in the jail and clamped leg irons on them.

“Along about midnight one day, Paul and Silas were at prayer and singing a robust hymn to God. Suddenly, the other prisoners couldn't believe their ears; there was a huge earthquake! The jailhouse tottered, every door flew open, and all the prisoners were loose.

“Startled from sleep, the jailer saw all the doors swinging loose on their hinges. Assuming that all the prisoners had escaped, the one guard pulled out his sword and was about to kill himself. He knew that he would be blamed if the prisoners were gone, regardless of the situation. Paul stopped him: "Don't do that! We're all still here! Nobody's run away!"

“The jailer got a torch and ran inside. Badly shaken, he collapsed in front of Paul and Silas. He led them out of the jail and asked, "Sirs, what do I have to do to be saved, to really live?" They said, "Put your entire trust in the Master, Jesus Christ. Then you'll live as you were meant to live—and everyone in your house included!"

“How could they not believe? Paul and Silas went on to give all the details about their Savior, Jesus Christ, and his teachings. The jailer had his whole family listen to these miraculous men. They never

did get back to bed that night. The jailer made them feel at home, dressed their wounds, and then—he couldn't wait till morning!—was baptized, he and everyone in his family. There in his home, he had food set out for a festive meal. It was a night to remember: He and his entire family had put their trust in God; everyone in the house was in on the celebration. The Spirit had led them to Macedonia for more than just me. He had led them to save a nation.

“At daybreak, the court judges sent officers with the instructions "Release these men." The jailer gave Paul the message, "The judges sent word that you're free to go on your way. Congratulations! Go in peace!" But Paul wouldn't budge. He told the officers, "They beat us up in public and threw us in jail, Roman citizens in good standing! And now they want to get us out of the way on the sly without anyone knowing? Nothing doing! If they want us out of here, let them come themselves and lead us out in broad daylight." You see, it was against the law for them to throw a Roman citizen into jail without a trial, but had not realized that Paul was a Roman citizen. They only knew him as a trouble maker spreading the story of this young man who was changing the people in the world every day - one by one.

“When the officers reported to the judges that Paul had said this, they panicked. They had no idea that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. They hurried over and apologized, personally escorted them from the jail, and then asked them if they wouldn't please leave the city.

“Walking out of the jail, Paul and Silas came straight to my home and we saw them again before they left town. They encouraged us in our faith, and only then went on their way. They didn't tell us it would be easy, but we knew the rewards were greater than we could ever imagine. Other people in the town came to me, and together we told many people about Christ and his teachings.

“As the years went on, Paul wrote to us to encourage us and tell us about other missions that Paul took into other areas. I heard how he was beaten physically, but never retreated. He never lost sight of his mission on this earth. He was so strong willed, but a meek follower of God – the one he had told me about so many days, and for whose service he would baptize me.

“We had a wonderful group of believers that worked to tell others about our Savior. We never lost sight of our mission. Sometimes a couple of the apostles would come back to Phillippi, or Paul would write us a letter. Oh, the people were terrific, and with the help of the Holy Spirit we were able to tell many, many people about our Savior, and how much he meant to us. He can transform any life to be a blessing. Do you know him too?”

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