

# The God of Small Wonders

---

(Acts 16:13-15)

## I. Introduction

A. Larry King was asked, “If you could interview one person, who would it be?”

1. He said, “*Jesus Christ.*” Why would a Jewish skeptic interview Christ?

*“I would like to ask him if he were indeed virgin-born. The answer to that question would define history for me*

a. To find out that God entered into the world truly changes everything.

b. And that is exactly what Christians believe to be true—by faith.

2. God sometimes steps into our world to do great wonders (**Isa 64:3**)

*For when you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down, and the mountains trembled before you*

a. We know the stories—the flood, the Red Sea, Sinai, Sodom-n-Gomorrhah.

1) Question for most of us isn’t, “*Did God really do those things then?*”

2) Question we ask, “*Why isn’t He the God of such wonders today?*”

b. That was really the same question Isaiah was asking in **Isaiah 64:1**

*Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you!*

B. God is still the God of wonders, but sometimes He is a God of small wonders

1. In **1 Kings 19**, Elijah did not find God in the earthquake, fire or wind.

a. God came in a quiet, still voice; he continues to come in that way today.

b. He doesn’t always work dramatically, but God is always at work

2. In **Acts 16**, Paul and Silas cross into Europe and come to Philippi.

a. If they continued their original itinerary, they’d have come to Thyatira.

b. But in Philippi, they meet and baptize a Thyatirian woman named Lydia

3. There is nothing dramatic in the story of Lydia (**Acts 16:13f**, *Wed reading*)

a. There are no eloquent speeches, no huge crowds, no dramatic miracles.

b. This is ordinary ministry on a pretty small scale— a very small wonder.

1) Paul will later lecture in Athens and stand before the Caesar in Rome

2) But here he speaks to some ladies at a river outside of town.

c. But God was working in this small encounter—the God of small wonders

## II. Lydia Was a Searcher (Acts 16:13-14a)

<sup>3</sup> *On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there.* <sup>14</sup> *One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God.*

A. Lydia was a Gentile—she had a Gentile hometown and a Gentile name.

1. Her name came from the ancient empire that once ruled area of Thyatira.
  - a. Luke identifies her as a *worshiper of God*, a Gentile God-fearer.
  - b. She was not an ethnic Jew, and had not grown up with Law or God.
  - c. Neither was she a proselyte; she was a truth-seeker seeking God.
2. Paul meets Lydia at a riverside designated as a place of prayer.
  - a. Philippi did not have the ten adult males needed to organize a synagogue.
    - 1) So there was an officially designated *prosuke*, a place of prayer.
    - 2) Josephus says that this was often by a river—water for ablutions.
  - b. Lydia had no rabbi to teach her; so she met with others to seek God.

B. Our **first** lesson from Lydia-- *she took responsibility for her own spiritual life.*

1. It's a blessing to have a teacher (*even when have to struggle to stay awake*)
  - a. My grandmother's church didn't have a preacher except once a month.
    - 1) Usually different men simply read lengthy texts from the Bible.
    - 2) Sometimes they just had communion and left (*so what's the problem*)
  - b. Lydia sought God though there was no teacher; she took responsibility.
2. Have we been spoiled to where we don't responsibility for our spiritual life.
  - a. Maybe the church does too much to make the pursuit of God too easy
  - b. Worship and classes are provided— all we do is show up. *But we don't!*
    - 1) Is 9:30 a.m. Sundays really so early that we can't make it here?
    - 2) OK, maybe Sunday school is not your thing—what is your thing?
  - c. You have responsibility to seek God, to learn about God, to know God
3. A driving desire to know God led Lydia and others to a river bank to pray.
  - a. Where does the desire for God lead us? Should it not lead us somewhere?
  - b. Should not we be taking the responsibility for our own spiritual lives?
4. Have we taken responsibility for our own search for God?

### III. Lydia Was an Open Searcher (Acts 16:14b).

*The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message*

- A. Lydia was seeking the true God, no matter where that search led her.
  - 1. She was not at the riverbank just to reinforce what she already knew.
    - a. She was there seeking God, and thus her heart was open to His truth.
    - b. A second lesson from Lydia is that we must have an open heart.
  - 2. It is interesting that Luke uses the expression, “*the Lord opened her heart.*”
    - a. How did God open her heart? Look at Pharaoh and story of the plagues.
      - 1) Pharaoh hardened his heart and refused Moses' request (Exo 8:15).
      - 2) The text also says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Exo 11:10).
    - b. God gave Pharaoh a message he didn't want—so his heart was hard.
  - 3. Lydia was desperately seeking God; thus she was open to His truth.
- B. We have hearts like Lydia's that are open to God and His truth?
  - 1. There are several things that keep us from opening our hearts to God
    - a. Focusing only on material things will keep us closed to spiritual things.
    - b. Giving ourselves to sin will keep us from giving ourselves to God.
    - c. Nothing stops a search for God like a belief we already have Him!
  - 2. Former teacher was counseling a couple who were having marriage trouble.
    - a. He said to “*do the things you did at first*” (Rev 2:5). Continue dating!
    - b. The man responded, “*Once you have caught a bus, you stop chasing it*”
  - 3. Is that how we have become with our relationship to God?
    - a. We have already found His truth, so we can stop looking for it?
      - 1) Is God is so shallow that 5 steps (with verses) is all we need?
      - 2) Is God so simple that conclusions once drawn need no restudy?
      - 3) Is God so superficial that we can get to point where we can't learn?
    - b. Why was it that the Bereans were more noble than the Thessalonians?
      - 1) It wasn't that they rejected everything that differed from conclusions.
      - 2) No, just the opposite; they searched the scriptures with an open mind.
  - 4. Years ago I came across a quotation from Erasmus that hit me as so true—  
*By identifying all new learning with heresy, you make orthodoxy synonymous with ignorance*

## IV. Lydia Got Involved in Ministry ([Acts 16:15](#))

<sup>15</sup> When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. “If you consider me a believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded us.

A. Immediately following baptism, Lydia wanted a part in Paul's ministry.

1. Her home was his base of operation; likely it was church meeting place
  - a. Lydia was a merchant of purple dye and cloth, industry of Thyatira.
  - b. She was financially secure; she used her resources for God's work.
2. She also used her influence—the conversion of others in her household.
  - a. Since her husband is not mentioned, Lydia maybe have been unmarried.
  - b. Those baptized with her were likely slaves or workers in her business.
3. Both her material goods and influence were placed at God's disposal.

B. If we are truly open to God, then we will seek ways to serve Him.

1. Because she was open to God, she used what was hers for Him!
2. It's easy to think of church as “they” as in “why don't they...”
  - a. Paul portrays the church as a body that relies on all its parts.
    - 1) When one doesn't do part, the whole body suffers ([1 Cor 12:12](#)).
    - 2) Each of us must use whatever gifts God has given ([Rom 12:3-8](#)).
  - b. Lydia reminds us that a heart for God leads to the work of God.
  - c. Here service wasn't dramatic—that's the point... *God of small wonders*

## V. Conclusion

A. The conversion of Lydia was not unusual or dramatic—the little bang.

1. But her conversion paved the way for Paul's most productive ministry.
  - a. She was the first convert in Philippi & first member of Philippian church.
  - b. She was the first convert of the church that would support Paul's mission
2. All of Greece benefited because of the open and obedient heart of Lydia.

B. Are our hearts open to God and His word today?