

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

R₂L – Resolved to Live: How God Saves Sinners

Acts 16:11-15

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Our God is a saving God. Our God is in the business of rescuing people from the bondage of sin and reconciling them to Himself through the blood of Jesus Christ. And our great, saving, rescuing and reconciling God has a favorite tool; a preferred instrument that He uses to bring people to Himself. Do you know what that tool or instrument is? That tool is the life and testimony of the redeemed. You, if you are a believer, are an instrument of life in the purpose of God. God uses His people to reach the lost! He uses ordinary, often scatter-brained, generally messed up people like you and me to reach people for His Son, Jesus. It is utterly remarkable that God has chosen to give us, the ignoble, the weak, the unwise, and this privilege to participate with Him in the wonderful work of setting people free through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The book of Acts, composed by a humble and thoughtful doctor named Luke, is not only the history of the early church, but an illustration of the continued work of Christ on this earth; through His people, through the Church; through those whom He has empowered, emboldened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit to fulfill His mission. And there is a sense in which the book of Acts has not finished with chapter 28, but that we, the church, are continuing to write Acts chapter 29.

Let me remind you of what has happened to get us to our text this morning. What we have before us is essentially the fourth phase of the stated mission given to the church by Jesus. You might be familiar with Acts 1:8?

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

This is both a command and a promise of Jesus to empower His disciples with the indwelling Holy Spirit of God in order to accomplish the task of being witnesses, proclaimers, testifiers, preachers, communicators of the good news of salvation in Christ alone to the world. The point is this, Jesus intended to use His people to tell the world what He had accomplished on the cross.

While this is the church’s mission; it is a mission from God. Therefore it was not presented with vagueness, but rather Jesus specifies that it would be accomplished in phases. Jesus said that the mission of the church would be to first reach people in Jerusalem. This took place in Acts 2 as the church began. Then Jesus said this witness would be taken to Judea, the region

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surrounding Jerusalem, the southern part of Israel. This took place in Acts 2-7. Then, according to plan, phase three, the reaching of Samaria took place in Acts 8.

You can easily see where I am going. There is just one phase left to be accomplished. It just so happens to be the biggest, grandest, most comprehensive of all the phases. Jesus said that His witnesses would reach to the remotest part of the earth. Thus we see in Acts 10 that the church began reaching Beginning in Acts 10, the followers of Christ, beginning with Peter, began to reach the Gentile world. The church has been locked into this phase for the past 2,000 years.

Our God is a saving God. Our God is in the business of rescuing people from the bondage of sin and reconciling them to Himself through the blood of Jesus Christ. This is our mission. We are to be a mission-minded church. The witnessing to the remotest part of the earth is not yet finished. It is God’s plan to reach them and the tools He has chosen to use is you and me.

Let me remind you as well that this is Paul’s second missionary journey. The first missionary journey began back in Acts 13 as the church at Antioch, Syria sent Paul and Barnabas out and they covered central and eastern Asia Minor. Upon coming home, they went to Jerusalem to settle the issue of whether salvation was Christ, plus the works of the law, or through Christ alone. On the heels of the council’s determination that salvation was through Christ alone, Paul set out with Silas on second missionary journey around 49-52 AD. You recall that Paul desired to visit the churches established on the first trip. Along the way, he picked up another co-laborer, a young man named Timothy of Lystra (16:3). The team pushed west and the Spirit stopped them. They sought to head north, but the Spirit stopped them. But the Spirit of God opened a northwest path that led them to Troas on the coast of the Aegean Sea. Having come to the edge, Paul and the team had no idea of what was coming next. The Lord made it known however, giving Paul a vision in 16:9. Paul saw a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”

So they crossed the Aegean Sea and landed in Macedonia, which today is the northern area of Greece. What we have before us in the text is the gospel about to penetrate Europe. We need to remember that as we read Acts, we are reading a *selective* history. It is clear that thousands, tens of thousands of people were saved as the early church took the message of the gospel to the world. Luke is not able to relate every story, but in every story given, we are given insight as to how God saves sinners. In actuality, we see three stories in the rest of Acts 16; first of Lydia, then of the slave-girl and finally of the Philippian jailer, all of which tells how God saves sinners; but this morning we will focus on how God saves sinners as seen in the account of Lydia. In our text, we find God directing two things, the situation and the sinner.

I. God directs the situation (16:11-13)

Let me say it again, our God is a saving God. Our God is in the business of rescuing people from the bondage of sin and reconciling them to Himself through the blood of Jesus Christ. There is nothing like seeing God at work in a person’s life, bring him or her to an awareness of their sin and of the greatness of the Savior. God uses a variety of people and a host of circumstances by which He directs His people to share the gospel to those who need to hear it. God is the great director, planning and preparing the very situations in which He will save His people. There is not one person here who was saved in some other way; or at some other time that that which God had directed. Because God directs the situation, because he prepares the circumstances is the very reason why each of us are here today.

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But just how did God direct in the text before us? And by extension, how does He direct today? I submit to you that God directs His people to the time and place along with the very opportunity necessary to see people saved.

A. God directs His people to right time and place (16:11-12)

11 So putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis; 12 and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony; and we were staying in this city for some days.

We noted last week that beginning in Acts 16:10 we find an important pronoun; the pronoun “we.” It is at this point that Luke, the author of this history, joins the team there in Troas. Because of the vision God gave to Paul, the team had been directed by God to head north and west by sea. The trip from Troas to Neapolis is about 156 miles and would have taken two days with an overnight stop on the island of Samothrace. Luke’s statement that they “ran a straight course” means that their trip was “smooth sailing”. They had favorable winds. Paul would make this same trip on his third missionary journey and it would take him five days (Acts 20:6). They landed at Neapolis and then made the ten-mile journey along the Via Egnatia, the Egnation Road to the city of Philippi.

As we will see, God had directed them to the right place. The city of Philippi had the status of a Roman colony. This allowed the citizens of Philippi to appeal directly to the emperor and they were exempt from provincial taxes. It was somewhat of a retirement town for many Roman soldiers. The people had a strong sense of patriotism, and because there was a large former military population, it was also an influential city. Consider that Luke devotes nearly a whole chapter to the events that took place here, even giving us the details that it was a “leading city” and a “Roman colony.”

So, we know that God had directed the team to this city by divine providence, literally funneling them to this place. But remember that the team itself was especially prepared by God for this ministry. Paul was not only a Jew, accustomed to the Jewish culture, but he was also a Roman citizen. These two ingredients would be necessary for the reaching of Philippi for Jesus. Why? Well, Paul’s Jewish heritage opened the door for the first evangelistic opportunity here in Acts 16 and his Roman citizenship would be key in his opportunity with the Philippian Jailer at the end of the chapter.

Before we continue on, let make a couple of observations and applications. First, remember God’s purpose in the book of Acts. He intends to fill His people with the power of His Spirit to testify about Jesus to the very remotest part of the earth. Beloved, our God is not American, nor is He European, African or Oriental. Our God is gracious and is directing the church to reach people from every nation, language, and tribe. And since this is true, God’s purpose must be our purpose. Never forget that in proximity to Jerusalem, Israel, Asia Minor and even Greece, you and I reside in the remotest part of the earth. He has put us; he has directed us to this time and place to reach people for Jesus. The question for us is not, “Has God directed you to this time and place?” but rather, “Are you available to God, to be a witness for Christ in the very time and place he has put you?”

Why is it that Paul did not stay at Neapolis but went immediately to Philippi? Somehow he knew God was directing him. He knew how strategic of a city Philippi was. Paul had a knack for seeking key places for which to spread the gospel. In a similar manner, we are praying that our move to Central Park Elementary School in a few weeks is our sensing of God’s directing us to a strategic place from where we might effectively proclaim the gospel.

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So we find God directing the team to the right place and time, but this leads naturally to a second direction from God.

B. God directs His people to the right opportunity (16:13).

13 And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled.

There was no synagogue in Philippi. It took ten Jewish males to organize a synagogue which seems to indicate that there were few, if any Jewish men there. According to custom, if there was no synagogue, the godly would gather at the river for prayer. On the day that God directed Paul, some women had gathered as usual to pray and to read the Law and Prophets. What a shock it must have been for these women when some men crashed their prayer meeting! And it just so happened that one of the men was a rabbi, a former student of the greatest rabbi of the time, Gamaliel. Paul would often use this credential in order to open evangelistic doors. Paul's method was to find the synagogue, and then, using his credentials, he would be invited to preach and thus Paul used the opportunity to tell them about Jesus, their Messiah.

But think about this. As we read this account, it can seem like Paul is grasping at this opportunity. What a humble way to start the European tour of the gospel, by the river with just a handful of women. This was truly a man's world. The vision that Paul had was of a man calling him to Macedonia, but upon arrival, God directed the team first to an audience of *women*. The gospel's first introduction to Europe was made at the "Handmaidens of Philippi" prayer meeting.

By way of application, let me remind you that God is constantly directing you toward people that He intends to hear the gospel through you. If you would just take note at the people around you; if you would just ask some questions about their lives, you would find someone asking questions about God; someone seeking for the meaning of life; someone wanting to know something about Jesus. Don't be so busy with your job, your hobbies, your family life or whatever it might be distract you from your first purpose for being alive; that is telling people about Jesus, being a witness for Him here in the remotest part of the earth.

Another challenge I would give you is this; be looking for opportunities to share the gospel anywhere you are. Where does Paul share the gospel? He shared it on the banks of a river and later he shared it while in jail. Where are you? Do you share Christ with people God is directing you to in your neighborhood, at the rest homes, in the jails, and in the schools. Beloved, leave no stone unturned, but look for opportunities wherever you are to share Christ. Ultimately it is a question of faith. Do you believe that God can use you to reach lost people? Many of you say yes now, but your life does not necessary reflect it.

Beloved, we have come to believe, and often find relief in the thought that somehow, sharing the gospel is the job of the evangelist, the preacher, or the Elders. But God's intention is that each one of us be a tool for reaching the lost. We are all granted different gifts of the Spirit to be sure, but that is precisely the point, that we have a variety of ways by which we can share the gospel. You say, "I have the gifts of helps, how do I share the gospel?" You open your mouth and tell others about Jesus! As you're helping others, tell them about Jesus!

And here is the thing, as we share the gospel with others, we can have confidence knowing that God has directed the situation in which we find ourselves. How does God save sinners? First, He directs His people into the right situation; then He grants His people the right opportunity. This brings us to our second point; not only does God direct His people but secondly...

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II. God draws the sinner (16:14-15).

14 A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. 15 And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.

While Lydia was just going about her daily routine, she was being directed by God for the divine appointment by which she would come to know her Savior, Jesus Christ. In verses 14-15, we see Lydia doing three things because of God’s working in her life.

A. Lydia was directed to the river (14a).

A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, God saves all kinds of people.

Lydia was an influential and successful woman. She might have be regarded by today’s standards as upper middle class. She owned her own business, being a seller of purple fabric. The dye that was used to make the color purple came drop by drop from a certain kind of costly shellfish. It was the wealthy and royalty that typically wore purple clothing and who could afford it.

Luke also tells us that Lydia was not a local of Philippi but rather was from Thyatira, which was a city in Asia Minor, a city located in the province of Lydia. It might be that “Lydia” was not her name, but rather was her business identity. It may be that she was known as “the Lydian lady.” Regardless, while Lydia was at Philippi for business reasons, God had directed this divine appointment. In the next few minutes her eternal destiny would be changed. All because on a seemingly otherwise ordinary day, praying and worshipping by this ordinary river, God had directed an extraordinary event. What was so extraordinary?

B. Lydia was directed to the Lord (14b).

[Lydia]...was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.

These are extraordinary words. One moment Lydia was listening and the next she was understanding and coming to Lord as Savior. In this statement we have two more clues as to how it is that God saves sinners.

First, notice **“the Lord opened her heart”**. Luke is reminding his readers that God is sovereign, He is in control when it comes to saving sinners. This is not the first time Luke has made a statement like this. Back in Acts 13:48, Luke recorded, **“When the Gentiles heard this [the gospel], they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.”**

By this statement that it was the Lord who opened Lydia’s heart, we have an indication of what her heart was like before this time. If God opened it, then just prior to this, her heart was “closed.” This is what Scripture teaches, that prior to God doing His work on a heart, no one will pursue God. As Romans 3:10 says, **“There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God...”** This is the universal truth. There is not one who seeks for God until God first opens that person’s heart. As the hymn we sang last week said,

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*I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew
He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me;
It was not I that found, O Savior true;
No, I was found of thee.*

The word translated “opened” here is the same word used in Mark 7:33-35. There we read, **“33 Jesus took him aside from the crowd, by himself, and put His fingers into his ears, and after spitting, He touched his tongue with the saliva; 34 and looking up to heaven with a deep sigh, He said to him, “Ephphatha!” that is, “Be opened!” 35 And his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was removed, and he began speaking plainly.”**

Luke used this word also in His gospel to describe what happened to the two disciples from the road to Emmaus. In Luke 24:31 we read, **“Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him...”** The word “opened” speaks of opening something up completely that had once been closed. As we have seen, it can refer to the opening of the eyes and the ears. But it can also speak of opening the mind, meaning to bring understanding to something. Here in Acts 16, God opened her heart, gave her understanding as to the Savior of whom Paul was speaking. This is a God-thing; God opens hearts to understand. But there is more.

In addition to the Lord opening Lydia’s heart, God also directed her to respond. Notice again at the end of verse 14, **“...the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.”** The idea here is that after the Lord opened Lydia’s heart, she understood it and was able to respond to it.

I get asked a question a lot, that question being why it is that not everyone who hears the gospel message responds like Lydia did. There are a number of reasons. For one, unless God does open our hearts, we will not and do not want to understand. In 1 Corinthians 2:14 we read, **“But a natural man (one who does not know Christ) does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.”** Left to ourselves, we cannot understand the things of God. But additionally, our enemy, the devil blinds the hearts of people. In 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 we read, **“3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 4 in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”**

This is why we pray, asking God to open the hearts and minds of people, so that they may believe. Maybe you have heard this, our God is a saving God. Our God is in the business of rescuing people from the bondage of sin and reconciling them to Himself through the blood of Jesus Christ. This gives us confidence to share the gospel. We know that He intends to open the hearts of His people. Lydia is not an isolated case. Paul describes the same thing happening as he preached in Thessalonica. In 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 we read, **“13 But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. 14 It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

There is no way around it. It was God who opened Lydia’s heart and it was God who enabled her to respond. This is what Jesus spoke of in John 6:37 when He said, **“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.”** And then, just like we see in the case of Lydia, who was drawn and directed by God, Jesus

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said in John 6:44, **“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.”**

Do you realize the implications this has on us for doing evangelism. It is God who directs, and we are to declare. It is God who prepares hearts and we are to proclaim the truth God will use to change that person. A. W. Tozer once wrote something important for us to hear: **“Probably the hardest thought of all for our natural egotism to entertain is that God does not need our help. We commonly represent Him as a busy, eager, somewhat frustrated Father hurrying about seeking help to carry out His benevolent plan to bring peace and salvation to the world; but as said the Lady Julian, ‘I saw truly that God doeth all-thing, be it never so little.’ The God who worketh all things surely needs no help and no helpers. Too many missionary appeals are based on this fancied frustration of Almighty God. An effective speaker can easily excite pity in his hearers, not only for the heathen but for the God who has tried so hard and so long to save them and has failed for want of support. I fear that thousands of young persons enter Christian service from no higher motive than to help deliver God from the embarrassing situation His love has gotten Him into and His limited abilities seem unable to get Him out of.”**

We have sort of a double awe. First, that God directs the situation and the sinner to bring salvation and, second, that God has graciously given us who believe a role to play by proclaiming the truth that God uses to bring salvation. So then, by divine appointment, using the tools of those who are faithful to proclaim the truth, Lydia came to the river and then to the Lord. But there is one last thing Luke notes in verse 15...

C. Lydia demonstrated the reality of her conversion (15).

And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.

Beloved, when God saves sinners, there will be evidence of it; real, visible evidence. Lydia demonstrates the reality of her conversion in three ways.

First, she was baptized. The book of Acts knows nothing of an unbaptized believer. To make a profession of Christ was to be publicly baptized. I would challenge any of you who have been Christians but not yet baptized to open the command of Jesus and be baptized.

Notice that Lydia was not baptized alone. We are told that members of her household were also baptized. By the way, there is nothing in the book of Acts that suggests that infants were baptized. The use of the word “household” simply implies that any family or servants that understood the Word and believed were saved and then baptized.

But not only was she baptized, but notice also that she made fellowship a priority; she made fellowship with other believers a priority. Lydia understood that being a follower of Christ made her part of the body of Christ, the Church. And obedient believers value the church, and value fellowship in the church. Lydia urged the missionary team to come to her house. And what do you suppose her motivation was? I would say that at the top was wanting to know Jesus better through the fellowship of the team. Beloved, the longing for fellowship with other believers is an evidence of conversion.

Next I would have you notice how personal she made this fellowship. It was not just about getting together with other believers at the river or at a church, but she invited them into her home. She said, **“come into my house and stay.”** There is an implication here, that implication being that she used her food, her beds, all that she had for the work of the Lord. Beloved, when we come to the Lord, we need to stop looking at what we have as our own. All that we have is

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the Lord’s and is to be for the Lord’s use. To be sure, you have to manage it, care for it, not allow it to be used in harmful ways, but it is to be used for helpful ways. This is hospitality and regardless of what you might think, hospitality is not reserved for those who have the spiritual gift of hospitality. As a command to the believers throughout Asia Minor, the apostle Peter wrote, “Be hospitable to one another without complaint” (1 Peter 4:9). Our home are not supposed to be citadels where we hide out, but rather are to be places of Christian ministry and fellowship. Is your home a place of Christian ministry and fellowship? Anything less is not normal for the Christian life.

Look at the eagerness of Lydia! Luke says that she “**prevailed upon us.**” This was no mere Christian duty, this was her delight, something that she had to do as unto the Lord. Lydia was so grateful to the Lord for His gift of grace that she insisted she use what she had to help His workers. She joined the team and her home was a home a ministry.

So how does God save sinners? He is the divine director; orchestrating the circumstances, the times, the places, the people, and the opportunities. God directs the situations and the sinners. As we close, let me make a few key applications.

Frist, we are to be confident that God is directing people toward salvation. This is what our God does. Let us remember that Jesus did not come to make salvation possible for those who were smart enough, lucky enough, or shrewd enough to decide for Jesus. Jesus, according to scripture, died to make salvation a certain reality. In Matthew 20:28 we read, “**just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.**” What Jesus paid for, Jesus will receive. We can be assured that everyone we come in contact with needs to hear the gospel and those whom God is directing will believe.

A second and very important assurance we have from the scriptures is this; anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved (Romans 10:13). From the human perspective, Lydia was saved because she responded, because she had called upon the Lord. And the truth of Scripture is that anyone who come to Jesus for salvation will be saved. But an equally true teaching is that people will ask, and call upon the Lord because God is the one opening their hearts.

This is why we must preach the gospel. There is not one person who has ever believed in Jesus without first hearing the gospel. And this is where we become tools in God’s hands. We must tell people about Jesus.

And finally then, we have the assurance that God, our saving God, will use us to reach the lost for Jesus. There is just one requirement; are you willing? Are you obedient? Will you be a witness for Jesus?

Soli Deo Gloria

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