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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
August 10, 2014  
9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Exodus 3:1-14 Mark 8:34-38  
Hymns: 748; 361; 507:1-4; 644 (38:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord  
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Acts 16:11-15

Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to  
Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis, 12 and from there  
to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a  
colony. And we were staying in that city for some days. 13 And on  
the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where  
prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the  
women who met there. 14 Now a certain woman named Lydia  
heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who  
worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things  
spoken by Paul. 15 And when she and her household were  
baptized, she begged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be  
faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." So she persuaded  
us.

(NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.  
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow Redeemed.

INTRO: The Nature of the Kingdom of God.

The nature of the Kingdom of God is so often misunderstood. Too many still think of the Kingdom of God in social and or political terms. This often distorts the role of the church in this world and the perception of the mission of the church.

The Kingdom of God is not a power grab. It is not a power of grab because Christ has all the power, and all the dominion. It is not about military might, or expansion of borders or securing resources. Jesus tried so often to communicate the spiritual nature of the Kingdom of God as He preached repentance to the people of the Jews. But even His disciples struggled to separate the ideas of a physical, political kingdom from the spiritual kingdom of God's grace, and His rule in the hearts of men.

In our text this morning we see --

**THEME: The Advancement of God's Kingdom in the World.**

### **I. God Directs the Preaching of His Word.**

The events recorded in our text follow right after Paul received a vision of a man from Macedonia calling to Paul to come and help them. Paul was convinced that this was a message from the Lord directing them to Macedonia to preach the gospel there. One of their first stops was in the city of Philippi, a major city and trade center in the region of Macedonia. They stayed there and the following Sabbath went down by the river where people were accustomed to gather for prayer. This tells us that there were not even enough people in that city who knew the Old Testament Scriptures and believed in the God of Abraham to have a synagogue. Paul and Barnabas found women assembled to pray and they spoke to these women.

The Lord was the one who had directed the course of events. The Lord directed events in a way that the apostles had not anticipated. This opportunity to share the gospel may even have appeared to be rather meager. There weren't even any men present for that first sermon, and yet this was the will of the Lord for the advancement of His kingdom. The Word was received by those present. A woman named Lydia is especially noted. She was a prominent business woman in Philippi. That was also unusual, but the Lord

directed matters according to His will for the salvation of those whom He foreknew.

One of the questions that comes to a Christian's mind from time is **“What am I doing here?”** The **“here”** may be as broad as life in this world. It may be as narrow as a specific locality on the globe. With the broad concept we are assured that the Lord has a very specific purpose for us to be here in this world. We as children of God are here **“to proclaim the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness in His marvelous light”** (1 Peter 2:9). We proclaim His praises before the world and others will come to know the Lord, not only as Creator and Preserver, but also as our Redeemer and Sanctifier.

Then, when we see how the Lord directs us in our lives, we need to open our understanding that He is directing us in our individual lives as well to bring the gospel to different people. We are quick to comprehend this as being true for called pastors and teachers, who, as a part of their life's work are servants to the Church of God. We move from town to town, from congregation to congregation, and so one may see a kind of parallel to the way the apostles conducted their ministries. That is over simplifying and maybe dodging the reality of the Lord's guidance in the life of His child. Some of us live in the same community or even the same home we were born in. Others of us have moved a number of times. Some have had the same career for their entire adult lives, while others may have worked in different fields of labor taking them to different places in the country or even the world. Some of us travel extensively as part of our lives. Others of us travel very little. In all these differences one thing is the same: the Lord brings us into contact with other people who need to hear and learn the truth about Jesus.

In all our circumstances of life the Lord presents opportunities for us to share the truth of the glory of God that we know in Christ Jesus. It may happen by others seeing the hope that we have within us, and asking us about it. It may happen because others note that we do not go along with the ways of the world in the pursuits of fleshly desires, in coarse language, or living according to the relative morality of the world, and yet show love and concern for

our neighbor. In all these things the Lord grants us the opportunity to speak that message that has given us the hope of everlasting life.

We are tempted to be quiet when we ought to speak, and surely there is a time to be silent and a time to speak, but we shouldn't be silent because we are afraid of saying something wrong. The Lord has brought us to this place for this purpose that we might speak the truth of God's Word, the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In any event, we are not the ones who convince others to believe.

## **II. God Opens Hearts to Believe.**

That is what happened down by the riverside in the city of Philippi.

**Acts 16: 14** Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.

Lydia did know something about God as it was presented in the Old Testament. However, Paul and Barnabas had experienced that many people didn't want to have anything to do with Jesus. Others they had approached had refused to believe the gospel. Some had even reacted violently against the apostles. This rejection didn't stop Paul and Barnabas from sharing the truth. They seized the opportunity to testify to the truth about Jesus. This woman in Philippi listened to what they had to say, and the Holy Spirit opened her heart to believe.

The Apostle Paul understood that it was not the excellence of his speech that convinced people to believe. He understood that it was the message of the gospel. We are familiar with Paul's words in the first chapter of Romans.

**Romans 1:16-17** "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'"

The gospel is the power of God. The Gospel is the means of grace by which the Holy Spirit enters the hearts of sinners and changes

those hearts. The gospel, which speaks to us of Jesus' perfect sinless life and His innocent sufferings and death, reveals how God secured a righteousness that avails before God. Jesus' righteousness is that perfect righteousness which is credited to us through faith. When we tell others the simple truth about Jesus, the Spirit enters the picture. The Spirit takes hold of the message as His tool, and works on the heart.

The Spirit uses our feeble testimony, imperfect as it may be, and empowers this message with His grace so that there are believers, and children of God, and members of the household of God coming out of the darkness and death of this world. The light shines and the Spirit of God works wonders.

That is what happened in Philippi, and not only with Lydia, but with others has well both in her household and among others. The Word of the Lord is mighty and powerful to save!

We need to have more confidence! Not in ourselves that we are able to do anything, but in the Lord, and in His Word. That is our failing when we hesitate to open our mouths. We fail to trust the Lord to guide us in our testimony. We fail to trust the Lord to work through the Word as we present His truth to another lost sinner whom the Lord desires to save. Trust the Lord! Have confidence in the gospel as the power of God, and trust the Spirit of God to work through our testimony. We may indeed falter and hesitate and stumble in our words, but the truth about Jesus will be there, and the Spirit will accompany our testimony with His power. This is how the purpose of God is fulfilled and how His kingdom comes.

The results will quickly become apparent for --

### **III. God Opens Hearts to Respond.**

The Spirit focuses our attention on Lydia as an example of how He opens hearts to respond to the gospel. This woman only just met these men. However after she heard the good news about Jesus who had redeemed her from sin and death, she wanted to do whatever she could to advance the spread of the kingdom of God. She opened her home. She not only offered but insisted that the apostles use her home as the base of their operations in Philippi.

It is the Spirit that opens hearts through the gospel so that others not only believe, but earnestly desire to show their gratitude to God for the blessing of the gospel. People are eager to participate, to become partners in the evangelism effort. This is the way the Lord directs things in His kingdom. He choose not to set us on the sidelines. He includes His people in the work of the gospel. Often that means using the blessings and resources that the Lord has placed in our individual lives for the advancement of God's kingdom. We never think we can afford to do more to meet the needs of the kingdom work the Lord has set before us. The problem is not that the Lord has been too meager in His blessings in our lives, but rather the problem lies in our use of these blessings. We get caught up in the ways of the world, and find that we "need" all these things that the world says we need and deserve. We can too easily neglect that which is our calling and our purpose in service to our selfish desires.

Maybe the believers in Philippi can show us how it is to be done, for it did indeed went beyond Lydia to the other believers there. We read of these believers response to the gospel in –

**Romans 15:26** It pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem.

They put first things first. They didn't get themselves tied up in chariot payments they couldn't afford, so that they thought they couldn't afford to support the Lord's work. No, they gave freely, even more than they could afford. They did this not because of coercion by the Apostles. They did this out of love for the Lord. Hear how Paul reports about their offering to the Corinthians.

**2 Corinthians 8:3,5** For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, ... 5 but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.

So the Lord would work in our hearts as we hear about the love of Jesus and how that love led Him to die for us. Then when we give our hearts to the Lord we will be eager to participate more fully in

the advancement of the kingdom of God. We will see this in others also. It is evidence of how the Word of the Lord works in people's hearts. They will respond. They will support with their offerings, and with their gifts and abilities the ministry of the gospel. They will do this because it will be important to them that others also come to know the wonders of God's love as we do!

And so the Kingdom of our Lord comes and so it grows, that we may have life in His name.

**AMEN.**

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.