*DEVOTIONAL*

February 19 - 24

Lydia’s Witness

**Monday, February 19 Acts 16:1-10**

*“There they met Timothy”*

 Paul sets out on his second missionary journey, this time with Silas as a ministry companion. They moved north around the tip of the Mediterranean and then westward to the cities of Derbe and Lystra. We can imagine the mixture of feelings in Paul when he returned to Lystra. Here, on Paul’s first missionary journey, he and Barnabas had been hailed as the gods Hermes and Zeus, and their ministry had ended with Paul being stoned. However, a young man and his mother were the fruit of that turbulent time of ministry.

 Under Paul’s preaching, Timothy and his mother had received the gift of faith. Timothy had continued to grow in Christ and was ready to respond when Paul called him to join him and Silas as they pressed on to other cities. Paul’s freedom and flexibility under the guidance of the Spirit were shown by his circumcision of Timothy. Although he had won the argument in Jerusalem that circumcision was neither a requirement for salvation nor for inclusion in the church, he had Timothy circumcised in order to win people for whom the regulation was still a crucial issue.

*We humble ourselves, Lord, that there be no obstacles to others knowing you. Amen.*

**Tuesday, February 20 2 Timothy 1:1-8**

*“To Timothy, my dear Son”*

 Scholars believe that this is the last letter that Paul wrote, penned during his final imprisonment in Rome. Presumably, Paul was beheaded during the latter part of Nero’s reign (a.d. 54-68) probably after the mad emperor had ordered the burning of Rome (a.d. 66) and tried to blame the Christians. This imprisonment should not be identified with the “house arrest” with which Luke concludes Acts (28:30-31). A widely accepted view is that Paul was released and continued his itinerant ministry, before his final Roman imprisonment.

 For more than fifteen years, Timothy had been Paul’s traveling companion throughout Asia and Greece. He had been left in Ephesus, which is where this letter finds him, and appointed by Paul to be in charge of the Christian work there. He was, essentially, the pastor of the church in Ephesus. Timothy was apparently a timid and shy person. If Paul’s gift was boldness, Timothy’s was sensitivity. Now, Timothy is on his own, having to be and do so many things that he would not have chosen.

*Our power for ministry is from you, Lord; it supports us in our weakness. Amen.*

**Wednesday, February 21 Acts 16:11-15**

*“One of them was Lydia”*

 On the Sabbath Paul and his friends went to the river outside the city gate, expecting to find a place where Jews met to worship God. It was necessary to have ten men to organize a synagogue, the regular location for Sabbath worship, but only women were gathered here. One of the first converts in Philippi was Lydia, a seller of purple cloth from Thyatira. The interaction between the divine and human parts in evangelism is well expressed in verse 14. Paul and his companions went to the people and shared the message, but God was the ultimate evangelist: “The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message.”

 The interplay between human initiative and divine influence identifies our responsibility and reminds us that God is the one who ultimately gives the results. This dual perspective helps us avoid not only being lethargic about witnessing but also feeling ourselves under an obligation of having to produce evangelistic results. Our call is to be faithful in going out; God will look after the results.

*Strengthen us to be bold, Lord, in sharing the gospel message with others. Amen.*

*DEVOTIONAL*

February 19 - 24

Lydia’s Witness

**Thursday, February 22 Acts 16:16-24**

*“We met a demon-possessed slave girl”*

 The story of the slave girl who was delivered from an evil spirit has similarities with episodes involving evil spirits in Jesus’ ministry in which the spirits are able to recognize the divine source of God’s work. The girl had “a spirit by which she predicted the future.” Today too soothsayers predict the future for gain; some are fakes whiles others do it through supernatural powers. This girl seems to have belonged to the latter category. Though what she proclaimed affirmed Paul’s ministry, he is troubled by it. Why he delayed responding for a few days remains a mystery. But when he did attend to it, the power of God overcame the demonic hold over the girl’s life.

 This miracle, which caused a significant loss of income for her owners, brought about opposition to the gospel. The official complaint against Paul and Silas was that they were advocating things that went against Roman law – an accusation the authorities had to take seriously. They were beaten and thrown into a maximum security “inner cell” of the prison, and their feet were fastened in the stocks.

*You are powerful, Lord, to release those in bondage to Satan. Amen.*

**Friday, February 23 Acts 16:25-34**

*“The jailer and his entire household believed in God”*

 Despite the humiliation and pain they had experienced through being stripped, flogged, and imprisoned, Paul and Silas prayed and sang hymns in their jail cell. In this way, the gospel was shared with their fellow prisoners who did not run away when the doors flew open and the chains of every prisoner fell off. The jailer’s near suicide over the possibility that prisoners had escaped is understandable when we remember that Peter’s escape from prison resulted in the execution of the guards. In an amazing turn of events the jailer rushed toward Paul and Silas, fell down trembling before them, and asked what he must do to be saved.

 There was nothing that he needed to do, for everything had already been done for him by Christ. All he needed was faith. Paul follows the offer of salvation by explaining the way of salvation to the jailer and to his household. They all believed and were baptized. The midnight hospitality in the jailer’s home includes the compassionate washing of wounds and the serving of a meal, all in the joyful setting of salvation.

*Your ways are wonderful to behold, Lord, and we are amazed by them. Amen.*

**Saturday, February 24 Acts 16:35-40**

 *“We are Roman citizens”*

 The magistrates must have felt that the punishment meted out to Paul and Silas was sufficient, considering the trivial nature of their offense. Thus, they sent word to the jailer to release them. Yet for the two missionaries to leave without protesting the way they were treated would have set a dangerous precedent for the future treatment of missionaries and also could have left the Christians in Philippi exposed to arbitrary treatment from the magistrates. Therefore they insisted on a public apology, which would ultimately influence the public standing of the mission and the church there.

 Paul’s appeals to his Roman citizenship would be repeated in future confrontations throughout his missionary journeys, and would serve to offer him a certain amount of protection from arbitrary mistreatment at the hands of mobs as well as those in official positions. Having received the apology, Paul and Silas made a final visit to Lydia’s home to encourage the believers before leaving Philippi.

*Give us the boldness, Lord, to demand respect for our message. Amen.*