

Armagh Baptist Church – 21st February 2010
The First Europeans to be Baptised
Acts 16:10-40

Introduction

In Acts ch.16 we have the story of the first time the Gospel came to Europe and how a number of people were converted to Christ and formed the first ever church on European soil – the Church of Philippi, in Macedonia.

But Europe has become one of the neediest mission-fields in the world today. It is regarded as Post-Christian Europe. It is full of empty church buildings and cathedrals – relics of a by-gone age. The Church is in an awful state in this Continent. But it is not beyond hope. If the Gospel can be preached in Europe and particularly here in Ireland and see the results that Paul saw in Philippi, then we could see the tide turn once again. The Early Irish Church of Patrick and Columba, Aidan and Columbanus was a missionary church. They went out preaching the Gospel not only across this island but into Scotland and down into England as well. They even got as far as France, Switzerland and Italy too. That's when Ireland was known as *"the land of saints and scholars."* Wouldn't it be great if we had that reputation again? Not just as saints and scholars, but as Gospel-people and missionaries too. Wouldn't it be great if we were known as people who were not ashamed of the Gospel because we know it is the power of God for the salvation of anyone who believes: Jew or Gentile, Protestant or Catholic, European, African or wherever! It's the same Gospel that has the power to change each one of us, as we trust in Christ. That's what we have been seeing in the first half of the Acts of the Apostles that we have looked at so far on Sunday mornings. God can save anyone!

So the Gospel first came to Europe in Acts ch.16, when Paul responded to the Macedonian Call in Troas (v.6-10), and then crossed that narrow neck of water separating the Black Sea from the Mediterranean, and landed in Philippi, planting the first European churches in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea – all of which are in modern day Greece. That was when the first people were converted to Christ on European soil. But who were they?

1. A Lady called Lydia - What do we know about her? (v.13-15)

She was from Thyatira (v.14) – So she wasn't actually a European at all! In fact she was from Asia - Asia Minor – the land we call Turkey. The interesting thing was that Paul had just passed through that area, quite near to her home town of Thyatira, but for some reason back in v.6 we're told that the Holy Spirit kept Paul and his friends from preaching in the province of Asia at all, where Thyatira was!

And yet sovereignly God had brought Lydia, this lady, all the way from Thyatira in Asia, to Philippi in Europe to be the first convert to Christianity on this Continent! What had brought her there?

She was a Business woman (v.14) – She had come there on business. Back where she came from in Thyatira there was a great source of little shell-fish that were used to make a very expensive, much sought after, purple dye. And that was Lydia's business. She was a seller of purple - purple cloth and purple dye. So she was probably quite wealthy. So it was her business travel that had brought her to Europe. But we know something else about her:

She was a Religious woman (v.14) – Luke says she was *"a worshipper of God."* In fact Paul found her at a prayer meeting down by a riverside (v.13). Philippi was a Roman colony (v.12) and it was the capital city of that region of Macedonia, so it was a very important place. But there doesn't seem to have been even enough Jewish men there to form a synagogue – you had to have 12 Jewish men before you could do that. There just seems to have been enough Jewish women in the city to form a little prayer group, and each Sabbath, (each Saturday - the Jewish day of worship) even though there was no synagogue as such, these ladies gathered by the river and prayed to God and worshipped God as best they knew how. Well Paul and his friends, who were of course Jewish men, went out and gathered with these women as they prayed. And Paul began to speak to them. And it simply says in v.14 that as Paul spoke,

"The Lord opened [Lydia's] heart to respond to Paul's message."

Now Luke doesn't tell us the content of Paul's message on this occasion, but we know from his other speeches in the Book of Acts the kind of thing he would have said:

His message was all about Jesus. That was his task as an Apostle of Christ – to witness to Jesus. That was what God had called him to do since his conversion on the Road to Damascus back in Acts 9:15-16. And ever since his conversion that's exactly what he was doing (first of all in Damascus - Acts 9:20-22, then in Jerusalem - Acts 9:26-30 and later in Antioch. So everywhere he went he wanted to talk about Jesus. He believed that Jesus of Nazareth who had carried out a ministry of preaching and teaching, healing and doing good for 3 years around Galilee and Jerusalem, he had attracted great crowds by his teaching, but he had been put to death on a cross by the Jewish leaders and the Romans, and he had risen again from the dead on the third day – Paul believed that this proved that Jesus was who he claimed to be – the very Son of God. He was the Messiah that the Jews had been waiting for all along, but more than that he was now the Saviour for the World – for whoever would repent of their sins and put their trust in Him would not only be

forgiven, but their lives would be totally transformed as God came to live within them by his Holy Spirit.

That's what Paul would have said to Lydia and her friends that day, and when he had finished speaking he would have invited them to repent of their sins and put their trust in Jesus, believing in Him as their Saviour and Lord. And as he spoke that's exactly what happened in Lydia's heart. God was at work. Lydia had always been religious, but this was the last piece of the jigsaw puzzle falling into place. She had been religious, but she wasn't saved. She was religious, but she had never really known the joy of God's forgiveness flooding into her heart assuring her that she was right with God. But when she heard about Jesus, and when she put her trust in Jesus, that's exactly what happened – *"The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message."* (v.14) Have you ever experienced that? Has your heart ever been opened to personally receive Jesus Christ into your life as your Lord and Saviour? Have you ever trusted in him alone as your only hope of forgiveness and new life in Jesus? Well Lydia was sitting in a prayer meeting when it happened to her. It's possible that just as you sit here this morning in this meeting it could happen to you, as you respond in faith to this message you are now hearing – I invite you to trust in Jesus today!

But then look what happened as soon as she responded in her heart. In v.15 we're told that *"she and the members of her household were baptised."* Now how did they know to do that? Well obviously this was part of the message that Paul preached to them that day.

As well as telling them about Jesus, his life, death and resurrection, he would have told them of their need to respond to Christ by repenting of their sin, by believing in him with all their heart as their Lord and Saviour, and then that they should be baptised in water to publicly profess their faith in Christ as their Saviour and Lord to those who were watching.

After all, the prayer meeting was right beside the river just outside Philippi, so why shouldn't she and the members of her household be baptised if they had believed in Jesus. (If we lived in a warm country we would baptise out in a river as well – but because we can't predict the weather in this country we have a pool inside our church building so we can use it anytime of the year! So there's no excuse!)

Now there are some things about Lydia we don't know – For example was she married? It's doubtful – because her husband is never mentioned. Not even in v.40 when the church seems to be meeting in their house! Where were any men present at all as Paul preached by the riverside that day? That too is doubtful, because we're told that Paul *"began to speak to the women who had gathered there."* And yet it says that Lydia *"and the members of her household*

were baptised." Now those churches, both Catholic and Protestant, that baptise infants, want us to read into that statement that here we have the first infant baptisms in the Bible. But it doesn't say anything of the sort! We know she was a wealthy business woman, we know there were no men present at the prayer meeting, and most likely she wasn't even married, so those that go baptised that day were probably all women – children aren't even mentioned - most likely it was Lydia and the female slaves or servants of her household. (N.B. It says "household" – it doesn't say family.) This term usually referred to anyone who lived under her roof, and given her wealth and her business it was most likely she had plenty of servant girls. They must have all believed the message that Paul preached that day. They must have all repented of their sins, and like Lydia agreed to be baptised as their first act of witness for their new found Saviour and Lord.

After they were baptised, Lydia invited Paul and his companions to her home. Look what she said in v.15, *"If you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my house."* And Paul and his companions must have been convinced of the reality of her new found faith, because it says, she *persuaded* them to come to her home. They were convinced that she really had trusted in Christ alone for salvation. She was now their sister in the Lord. She may not have had any family of her own, but she was now part of a new family in the Lord – The growing Family of God. So that was the first baptism service on European soil. But it was soon to be followed by another in v.33.

2. A Philippian Jailer – what do we know about him? (v.22-40)

Sometime after Lydia's conversion, Paul & Silas were making their way through the market place to preach the Gospel, when suddenly they were attacked by a young slave girl who was possessed by an evil spirit. Because of this evil spirit she was able to foretell the future, so her owners made lots of money out of her as they charged people to listen to her telling their fortunes. Well she kept on following Paul and Silas really interrupting all that they were trying to do in Philippi to preach the Gospel. So much so that eventually Paul commanded the evil spirit to come out of her in the name of Jesus. And of course it worked – the evil spirit came out and the girl was normal (v.18).

But her owners were obviously very annoyed. How were they going to make their money now? They couldn't exploit this young girl anymore. They were so angry that they dragged Paul and Silas before the magistrate and had them thrown in prison. But not before they had been stripped and beaten because of the uproar they had caused (v.22).

The Magistrate commanded the jailer to guard them carefully, so he put them into the innermost cell of the prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. There was no way Paul and Silas could escape even if they wanted to.

But Paul and Silas knew that God was in control. They knew he must have them there for a reason. So as best they could they relaxed and waited to see what was happening. And as they waited they prayed and then they began to praise God. They were singing God's praises at the tops of their voices and it was nearly midnight, when suddenly there was a great rumbling noise and the whole prison began to shake – it was an earthquake! (v.25-26)

The prison doors flew open, the stocks sprang open, and Paul and Silas and the other prisoners could easily have got away – but they didn't. They just stayed there. But the Jailer didn't know this. He thought they were gone, and he knew that if they were, then he was as good as dead, when the magistrate found out. So he was about to commit suicide. He drew his sword and he was about to kill himself, when Paul & Silas shouted out

“Stop, don't harm yourself, for we are all here!” (v.28)

At that the Jailer called for a light, and rushed into the cell where Paul and Silas were, and he fell down in front of them and cried out,

“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (v.30)

Now that was quite a statement for this jailer to make. He would have been a very hard man. He would have spent many years in the Roman army. He would have been battle hardened. It would have taken a lot to scare him. But here he is brought face to face with the possibility of his own death, and he realises he's not ready to die. Perhaps he had heard Paul and Silas praying and singing hymns to God as well. Perhaps he had been impacted by that. But anyway now he has asked the most important question he could ever ask – *“What must I do to be saved?” (v.30)*

You know you mightn't think you need to be saved. But maybe if you were brought face to face with the reality of your own death, you might realise then that you did need to be saved all along – to be forgiven, to be cleansed from your sins, to be right with God! So don't leave it to the last minute, do it now! Ask that most important of all questions now, here this morning, *“What must I do to be saved?”* and then listen to the answer – All you have to do is, as Paul and Silas said, *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved!” (v.31)* That's all - just believe in Jesus, trust in Jesus – who He is: the Son of God, the Saviour of the World, and trust in what He has done for you at the cross, when he took your sins upon himself and died in your place – Believe in Jesus as Lord and you will be saved.

But then what happened?

Well just like Lydia, this hardened Roman Jailer wanted to be baptised too. In v.32 *‘they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house.’* So every member of his house - his family - heard the Gospel for themselves. Then in v.33 the jailer took Paul and Silas, and showing evidence of a change of heart - of repentance from his sins, he washed their wounds!

Then we're told that 'immediately he and all his **family** were baptised.'

(v.34) Then he brought them into his house, probably part of the prison complex, and set a meal before them. They were having fellowship together as brothers and sisters in Christ now. And what do we read next?

“He was filled with joy (why?) because he had come to believe in God – (who had?) he and his whole family!”

So again every individual in that family believed the Gospel they had heard, and so every member of the family were eligible to be baptised.

Again those who teach that this is another example of infants being baptised are reading too much into it. Every one in the family was old enough to hear and understand the Gospel; everyone in the family believed in Jesus for themselves; and that's why every member of the family was baptised as believers that night!

And by the end of the chapter when Paul & Silas were eventually let out of prison, where did they go to? But 'to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them, and then they left' Philippi. (v.40)

What was going on in v.40?

This was the first European Church and it was meeting in Lydia's house! It was made up of Lydia and her servant girls who had believed and were baptised and it was made up of the Jailer and his family who had believed and were baptised. Perhaps Paul & Silas had seen more converts in Philippi, but we're not told who they were. Perhaps the slave girl herself had become a believer, now that she was released from her evil spirit. Perhaps she was there too. But there we have it - the story of the first Christian Church in Europe: Philippi, and according to Philippians 1:6 we can be *‘confident of this, that he who began a good work in [them] will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.’* If we are saved in just the same way as them, we will be with them around God's throne in heaven on the day Jesus Christ returns!

Conclusion:

So what did Lydia and the Jailer have to do to be saved?

Repent of their sin.

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Be baptised as believers.

What do you need to do to be saved?

Repent of your sins...

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour...

And if you do, then what's to stop you being baptised as a believer?

And just like them becoming part of a Bible believing church in your area?

