

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

LESSONS FROM LYDIA'S CONVERSION.

A Sermon

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“And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made ; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us : whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.”—Acts xvi. 13, 14.

PHILIPPI is famous in classic story as the spot where the world's future trembled in the balance when Octavius met Brutus and Cassius in terrible conflict. The two republican generals here ended their stormy career, and universal empire crouched at the feet of Cæsar. As long as time endures, or human slaughter is thought worthy of a record, Philippi will be remembered as one of the greatest names in martial history. But when time shall have past away, and the records of human guilt shall have been cast into oblivion, Philippi will still have a name as the place where the first herald of the cross cried, “Europe for Jesus,” struck the first blow at the demon of evil, and won his first victory in our quarter of the world. More fraught with blessings to the human race was that conquest of a woman's heart, than all the laurels which Octavius had reaped upon the bloody field. Angels looked on while Paul threw down the gauntlet of defiance to all the powers of darkness, and invaded our fair continent in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. We may well look back with admiration, to the gallant advance of the little band, the apostle and his few companions, who were the pioneers of the Lord's elect army in the western world. Philippi is enrolled for ever in the record of the battles of peace.

The introduction of Christianity into Europe is a very humble affair. There is nothing very stately in the architecture of the house where Jesus is first preached; in fact, we have no evidence that there was any building at all—probably it was an open-air service by the river-side. Happy augury of the results of open-air preaching in after times! There were not enough Jews in the merely military city of Philippi to admit of the erection of a synagogue, and therefore, a few women met in a quiet spot by the river's bank. A stranger might walk through Philippi a hundred times and never know of the existence of the Jews' meeting-place, it was a nook so retired and frequented by so few. Heathendom

might seem to the ordinary observer to be universal in its reign; for who would care to notice the feeble company who met in retirement, to offer prayers unto the Most High God of Israel? We will go to the meeting-place this morning, and in spirit mingle with the few women, and listen to that strange man who in burning accents is addressing them, and mark the result produced in the heart of yonder seller of purple, who has come with her wares from the city of Thyatira.

First, we shall consider *Lydia's conversion in itself*; secondly, *in contrast with another which is recorded in the chapter*; thirdly, *in comparison with that other*; and lastly, *as a type and model of multitudes of conversions in our own day*.

I. First, in LYDIA'S CONVERSION there are many points of interest.

Observe that it was brought about by *providential circumstances*. She was a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira. That city was famous for its dyeing trade, which had flourished there ever since the days of Homer. The mode of producing a peculiarly delicate and valuable purple seems to have been known to the women of Thyatira. It may be that Lydia had come to Philippi upon a journey, or that while her manufactures were carried on at Thyatira, she resided during a part of the year at Philippi, to dispose of her goods. The communication between the two places was very easy, and she may have frequently made the journey; at any rate, *providence* brings her there when the hour of her conversion is come. You will remember that Thyatira was situated in that part of the country into which Paul was forbidden by the Spirit to go and preach; therefore, had Lydia been at home, she could not have heard the truth; and as "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God," she must have remained unconverted. But *providence* brings her to Philippi at the right time. Here is the first link of the chain.

But how is Paul to be brought there? He must, first of all, be shut out of Bithynia; and he must be silenced in his journey through Mysia; he must be brought to Troas, close by the margin of the sea; he must look across the blue sea, and muse upon Europe's needs; he must fall asleep, and in the visions of the night, he must be prompted to cross to Macedonia; he shall ask for a ship—that ship shall be bound for Samothracia, and for no other place; he must land at Neapolis, and by the same instinct, he must make his way to Philippi; he cannot go in any other direction; he must be brought there at the very time when Lydia is present; he must find out the little oratory by the river's brink, for God ordains that Lydia shall be saved. Now, how many different threads were all interwoven here, to make up the fabric of her providential conversion! In this case, God rules and overrules all things to bring that woman and that apostle to the same spot; and, beloved, everything in God's providence is working together for the salvation of the elect. If there be an elect soul whom God predestinates to be converted by my word, he may have fetched him home from Australia to-day, by some untoward accident, as it seems to him; or he may have set sail for America, and the ship may have been drifted back; but this I know, that God will shake heaven and earth sooner than suffer one elect soul to miss the predestined moment; for when the eternal counsel

runs—"On such a day that man shall be arrested by sovereign grace, and shall be made willing in the day of God's power," happen what may, and occur whatever may, God's purpose shall stand; he will do all his pleasure. We do not well if we forget the prevenient providences which work before our conversion, to bring us unto that spot where God was pleased to manifest himself unto us.

Observe next, that in Lydia's case there was not only preventing providence, but there was also *grace in a certain manner preparing the soul*. The woman did not know the Saviour; she did not understand the things which make for her peace, yet she knew many truths which were excellent stepping-stones to a knowledge of Jesus. If not a Jewess by birth, she was a proselyte of the gate, and therefore well acquainted with the oracles of God; she was one who worshipped God; nay, she was one of the most devout of God's worshippers among the Jews. Though she was far away from the synagogue—some forget the Sabbath when they travel in foreign lands—yet when the day came round, she was found with that little handful at the river-side oratory. I doubt not that she had read Esaias the prophet, that she could carry in her heart and remember such words as these, "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief . . . He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth." As in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch, the Scriptures she had read, though they were not understood for want of some man to guide her, had prepared her mind: the ground had been ploughed ready for the good seed; it was not a hard rock as in the gaoler's case. She worshipped God; worshipped him in sincerity; worshipped him looking for the coming of the Messiah, Israel's consolation; and so her mind was prepared for the reception of the gospel. Doubtless, dear friends, in many of us there was a preparation for Christ before Christ came to us in quickening grace. I know that in some of our cases the pious example of a godly father, and the loving instruction of a tender mother, had softened us somewhat, so that though still we were unsaved and still out of Christ, yet we were like the man who laid at the pool of Bethesda, we were close by the edge of the healing stream, and there was not in our case that sudden, that astounding change which we have seen in others. Still, dear friends, we ought to ascribe all this preparatory work to sovereign grace, for grace—free favour does much in which no grace of effectual salvation is perceptible. I mean that before grace renews the heart there is grace preparing us for grace; grace may be setting the mind in activity, clearing us from prejudice, ridding us of a thousand infidel and sceptical thoughts, and so raising a platform from which divine grace conducts us into the region of the new life. Such was the case of Lydia, such is the case of many; providence and grace co-work before the effectual time is come.

Note, concerning her conversion, in the third place, that *it took place in the use of the means*. On the Sabbath she went to her gathering of her people. Although God works great wonders and calls men when they are not hearing the Word, yet usually we must expect that being in the way, God will meet with them. It is somewhat extraordinary that the first convert in Europe was converted at a very small prayer-meeting.

There were only a few women there; we have no reason to think that there were any more males than just Paul and his friend Luke; and these, you see, had called in, as we say accidentally, and had been moved to give an address at the prayer-meeting, and that address it was which was the means in God's hand of opening her heart. Beloved friends, let us never neglect the means of grace; wherever we are, let us not forget the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is. I say again, God may bless us when we are not in his house, but we have the best reason to hope that he will when we are in communion with his saints. Oh! what a joy it is to see so many constantly thronging our house of prayer, because we have good hope that the God of salvation will meet with them. Nay, it is not mere hope, but a confident expectation, for I suppose there never is a sermon preached in this house, which is not the means of the conversion of some. We have ourselves abundant testimony that so often as Christ is lifted up here, the wounded in the camp forbear to die. May it ever be the case, and may you ever have, even if as yet you are unconverted, a love to the courts of the Lord's house, and to the place where his people meet together. Love the prayer-meeting; do not say of it, "Only a prayer-meeting!" God loves to put honour upon prayer, upon the assembly of his people directly for his worship; and you may hope, dear friends, that even if the sermon shall not have been useful, and if the common Sabbath-day service may not have been blessed, yet, perhaps, on the Monday evening; perhaps, too, in that little cottage, when there are only a few women present, you may meet with God, who did not appear to you in the greater assembly. Be diligent in the use of the means; be constantly in God's house, as often as the doors are open and your engagement will permit, for Lydia's conversion takes place in the use of the means.

Note again, for we will only hint at these things rather than dwell upon them, that *it was assuredly a work of grace*, for we are expressly told, "whose heart *the Lord* opened." She did not open her own heart. Her prayers did not do it; Paul did not do it; the Lord himself must open the heart, to receive the things which make for our peace. To operate savingly upon human hearts belongs to God alone. We can get at human brains, but God alone can arouse human affections. We may reach them, we grant you, in the natural and common way, but so to reach them, as that the enemy of God shall become his friend, and that the stony heart shall be turned into flesh, is the work of grace, and nothing short of divine power can accomplish it. We pray you, brethren, never forget this. We think it meet, according to Scriptural warrant and example, to speak to you, and exhort you to arise from the dead that Christ may give you life; but we remind you, and trust you never may forget it, that all the work must always be of the Holy Spirit, and of him alone. I am told, in preaching the gospel, to command you to "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." But well I am aware, and may you be aware of it too, that faith is the gift of God. Though the Scripture bids us say, "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil"—though it cries, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and

he will have mercy upon him,"—though our Saviour himself puts it, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that which endureth unto eternal life;" yet we know that salvation is neither by your striving, nor by your labouring, nor by your reformings and amendings, but that all these are the fruit of an inward and mysterious work which the Holy Ghost alone can perform. Give unto God the glory if you have been converted, praise him alone—"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." He alone can cut the bands which fasten the heart; he alone can put the key into the hole of the door and open it, and get admittance for himself. He is the heart's master as he is the heart's maker, and conversion in every case is the Lord's work alone.

Yet—for one truth must always march arm in arm with another, and no man gets at correct ideas by merely grasping one truth; he has two eyes and two hands, and let him be content to use them both—although the Lord opened the heart, Paul's words were the instrument of her conversion. The heart may be opened, and willing to receive, but then if truth enter not, what would be the use of an open door? But God always takes care to open the heart at a time when the messenger of mercy shall be going by, that the heart may give him admittance. There shall be the ploughed field, but there shall be no cry, "Where is the sower?" for when the plough has done its work, here comes the sower, and begins broadcast to scatter the seed. Paul speaks the word as surely as God opens the heart. Do not decry the ministry. It is a temptation of modern times to be always talking as though the ministry were a magnifying of man, as though to listen to the preacher were a glorification of the creature at the expense of the Maker. Now, I believe there is nothing in the world which shows our humility of spirit, and tends more to glorify God than a cheerful willingness to receive at his hands the golden treasure of his grace out of an earthen vessel. The weakness of the preacher becomes a foil to set forth his glory, and by no means derogates from the honour due to the Lord himself. God has worked and always will work by means, by chosen men upon whom he puts the anointing of his Spirit; and when the men are lacking to serve the Lord, then is the Church always in a weak state. While she has her Pauls to preach, she shall not be without her God to open hearts to receive the Word.

Now, only one more thought upon her conversion—*it was distinctly perceptible by the signs which followed.* She was baptized. As soon as she had believed in Jesus, she put on, together with her household, the profession of her faith in Christ Jesus. Happy Lydia, to have a household which believed in Jesus! Happy Lydia, to see them all baptized with her! Now, there is a danger in certain sections of the Church, to make too much of baptism by linking it with regeneration, as baptismal regeneration; but there is an equally great danger among us who are called Baptists, of making too little of baptism. We cannot make too much of it, because our belief that none ought to be baptized but those who are regenerate already, will always be a healthy check for our making too much of it; but we may make too little of it. We ought to insist very strongly upon the duty of all believers who have

found the Saviour, to obey the second gospel command, for "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved." We do not doubt but that all who believe shall be saved, but still for our part, when we see baptism put in so close connection with believing, we would not be disobedient to our Master's command. We think it to be a sweet sign of an humble and broken heart, when the child of God is willing to obey a command which is not essential to his salvation, which is not forced upon him by a selfish fear of damnation: we say it is no mean sign of grace, when, as a simple act of obedience and of communion with his Master in his burial to the world and resurrection to a new life, the young convert yields himself to be baptized. Lydia was baptized, but her good works did not end at the water; she then would have the apostles come to her house. She will bear the shame of being thought to be a follower of the crucified Jew, a friend of the despised Jewish apostle, the renegade, the turncoat—she will have him in her house; and though he saith, "Nay," out of his bashfulness to receive aught, yet she constrains him, for love is in her heart, and she has a generous spirit; and while she hath a crust it shall be broken with the man who brought her to Christ; she will give not only the cup of cold water in the prophet's name, but her house shall shelter him. Brethren, I do not think much of a conversion where it does not touch a man's substance; and those people who pretend to be Christ's people, and yet live only for themselves, and do nothing for him or for his Church, give but sorry evidence of having been born again. A love to the people of God has ever been a distinguishing mark of the true convert. Look, then, at Lydia, and remembering that she is but a specimen of many, let her case rest before you, and let the prayer go up, "Lord, bring in Lydias this morning, according to thy mighty grace."

II. We now look at the case again BY WAY OF CONTRAST.

There is another story in the chapter; read it carefully, for there is a remarkable contrast between the two. In the case of the gaoler, we see *nothing like a previous preparation for the reception of the Word*; he seems to be coarse, rough, brutal. It may be he did no more than his orders required of him when he treated Paul so harshly, for it is written, "Having received such a charge he thrust them into the inner prison;" but the probabilities are, that he did this with a very hearty goodwill; and, looking with a thorough contempt upon the two enthusiasts who had plunged themselves into this trouble, he was not at all likely to adjust the stocks in any comfortable manner, or see to their ease in any way. He was a rough, veteran legionary, probably, who had been elevated to the gaoler's office. He had gone to sleep; no preparation, surely, in sleep for the reception of the Word! The earthquake comes; the man springs out of his bed in terror; he grasps his sword, and would have killed himself. He is in the very act of committing suicide, when a voice is heard, "Do thyself no harm, we are all here." Now, we cannot discover the slightest atom of preparation for his conversion. He is as far off from hope as a man can well be, and is just upon the edge of perdition, near to running before the bar of his Maker with hands red with his own blood. Beloved, there are conversions such as these. They may not be very plentiful, but there are such, and there have been such

in this house of prayer. Men have come under the sound of the Word with an intention of despising and laughing at it; they have come with their hearts full of venom and enmity; they have despised the preacher and despised the truth; they have come fresh from the foulest haunts of sin, they were proposing yet further to plunge into the depths of iniquity; they were enemies to God by wicked works, they made their hearts hard as an adamant-stone, and yet on a sudden, the ponderous hammer of the Word has come upon them, and the flint was made to fly into a thousand shivers, the proud sinner became humble as a little child. Paul's case is somewhat similar to that of the gaoler; you will have it in your recollection, and there are cases of persons here to-day who can, as they read the gaoler's story say, "Such was I once, as great a stranger from God as he, and as little likely to be called by grace as he was, and yet grace came and made me a new creature in Christ Jesus." Here was no preparation, while in Lydia's case there was much which went to prepare the way for the grace of God.

Another contrast is perceptible in the fact, that *she was in the way* where the grace of God was likely to meet with her. She was in God's house, at least in the spot which had been dedicated to his worship: she was engaged in prayer, and that not a formal prayer, but as far as her light went, it was acceptable to God, and was at any rate sincere, coming from her heart. But not so the gaoler. He is not in a place where the gospel is at all likely to come. His office keeps him in the midst of felons, of murderers, and criminals of all sorts. If grace shall come to the gaol, it will come to a graceless place indeed. His occupation was not that which would foster any religious ideas. Superstitious he doubtless was, and there was no point upon which a Roman was more superstitious than concerning an earthquake. It was one of the things which made the stout hearts of Roman legionaries tremble in a moment. It was the earthquake which made the guards at the tomb of our Saviour become like dead men, swooning from fright; and this earthquake had much the same effect upon the gaoler. He was not seeking after God; he had not a thought about God; his thoughts were hellward, and his course was towards the pit. But in a moment, at God's voice, the current of his thoughts changes its direction, and flows where it had never gone before. So have I known men who have been going on with all their might towards the realms of darkness, with their free and stout will, determining to inherit eternal damnation; but the hour has struck, sovereign mercy has come forth, and they, wonders to all, but greatest wonders to themselves, have suddenly become heirs of God and children of the Most High. May such wonders still be wrought.

Yet further, *we do not find in Lydia's case that there was anything like an earthquake*; there were no great shakings and alarms; it was a "still, small voice." The gaoler sprang in, and came trembling. We doubt not that Lydia felt her need of a Saviour, and that her cry was, "What must I do to be saved?" but still we find very little about her trembling, or being overwhelmed with the terrors of conscience; she was gently led by the finger of the eternal Father. The light dawned upon her as the morning's dawn, a gradual enlightening of the darkness. Grace came to her as the shower which first begins as a mist, and then

thickens into a heavy dew, and then becomes a gentle sprinkling, and afterwards empties the clouds upon the soil. To the gaoler it was like an April storm beginning with big drops, and dashing into a torrent in a few moments: to the gaoler it was as though the sun should rise in an instant, and turn the thickest night into full blaze of noon. Not so, in Lydia's case. Now do note, dear friends, these differences, because they may help to solve many of your difficulties. Do not expect all to be converted in the same way. Do not suppose you are all to pass through the same terrors, nor all to be led by the same gentle methods, our God is the God of variety. In creation and in providence there are no two things exactly alike; and in the works of grace, we are not to have Christians run into a mould, or dropped down like shot, all fashioned in the same shape, but there must be in every conversion a something, distinct and separate from every other, and every man must expect to perceive in the glass of his experience some lineament about the features of his conversion, different from those of any other. Why, do you not see that the means which converted Lydia would not have been of any avail to the gaoler? The gaoler would not go to the place by the river-side; he would have laughed at the idea of sitting down with a parcel of women. You would not find him listening to Paul; he would smile at the very thought—"I go and listen to a renegade Jew, whom his own nation has cast off? Nothing of the kind." On the other hand, an earthquake would not have been appropriate to Lydia's character. Good, gentle soul, it might have frightened her out of her wits, and, instead of making her cry, "What must I do to be saved?" it is very likely she would have been in a swoon, if not altogether dead. The same quantity of alarm which will bring a strong man down into something like reason, will just drive a woman out of her reason altogether. Gentle Lydia and the rough gaoler are two very different people; they were of different sexes to begin with, and the woman is more easily moved by that which gently appeals to the affections than is the man; she, again, had been a moral and excellent woman; he has, probably, been tutored in sin. There must be different methods with different temperaments. Does the husbandman use the same machines in threshing different kinds of grain? Are all seeds sown after the same fashion? Do we not feel with regard to our children that we can speak a sharp word to one and he will scarcely feel it, but that the same expression will break another boy's heart? One child needs the rod, and there are others upon whom a touch of the rod might work mischief. Certainly, then, it must be so in the constitution of the soul; and therefore, God deals with us each in different ways, and we are not to question the sincerity of our conversion because it is not precisely like our favourite model, but we are rather to see whether its fruits are the same, whether it comes of God, whether it leads to Christ, and if it does all this it matters not in what mould it is run.

III. So much for that point, but here, as I generally like, if I can, to place two truths side by side, we have our third point, namely, **THE COMPARISON BETWEEN THE TWO**, because they are essentially alike, though circumstantially different.

In both cases, dear friends, *providence co-worked with grace*. Providence brings Lydia to Philippi: providence shakes the prison. God makes the realm of nature subservient to his will in both cases. There is a demand for purple at Philippi. I do not know how it came about; I cannot tell whether there were new fashions among the ladies at Philippi at that time, or what it was, but for some reason or other Lydia gets to Philippi, because there is a great market for her purple. Well now, that is providence which brings her there. The same providence by another revolution of its wheel has appointed that gaoler to keep the prison. Why was he gaoler to that particular prison? Why is Paul brought to Philippi at all? And how is it that through the accidental circumstance of the demoniac woman having been healed, Paul is beaten with rods, and thrust into prison. Then comes the earthquake? Link within link, and wheel within wheel, providence works its way. So is it in every case, whether it is conversion by thunder and lightning, or by the "still, small voice."

There was in both cases *a distinct work of God*. We see it in Lydia's case, and have dwelt upon it; even more distinctly we perceive it in the gaoler's case, for what but irresistible grace could have made him cry, "What must I do to be saved?"

In both instances, too, the Word of God is essential, for we read concerning the gaoler, as we did before, concerning Lydia, "They spake unto him the Word of the Lord, and to all who were in his house." The earthquake cannot dispense with the minister; and though the mighty power of God can take the natural bonds from every prisoner, yet he does not choose to take away the spiritual bonds from any one soul without the proclamation of the Word, for it pleases God, "by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

And again, in both cases, *the same signs followed*. The gaoler is baptized with all his house, and we are told that they all believed. He washes their stripes; just as Lydia had entertained them, so he begins to wash their poor backs which were all black and blue, and probably bleeding with the hard blows of the lictor's elm rods. He sets meat before them, and entertains them with the best he has, and glad enough is he in the morning, when he finds they are not to be kept in durance vile any longer, but may go their way. Here is the same result, the same love to the brethren, the same consecration of the substance, the same obedience to the divine command, "Arise, and be baptized." There is an unmistakable likeness among all the people of God. All the children have the father's features, yet they are not any one of them precisely like his fellow. They are all brought by grace, and grace does its work in the same way; yet, as to the minutiae of the details of their conversion, they are as wide as the poles asunder.

IV. We take Lydia's conversion to be **A MODEL OF MULTITUDES OF CONVERSIONS WHICH ARE GOING ON IN OUR MIDST AT THE PRESENT TIME, AND IN OTHER CHURCHES, WHERE GOD IS MAKING BARE HIS ARM.**

The expression used is, "The Lord *opened Lydia's heart*, to attend to the things that were spoken." Now what is meant by this? I think we have a summary of the work of the Holy Spirit here. Well,

there are several things meant, upon each of which briefly. No doubt *the Lord removed prejudice*. This prejudice is an evil which we have to fight against in very many. In Lydia's case it would be Jewish prejudice; perhaps the report had reached her, as it had most of the Jews, concerning Jesus of Nazareth; she knew that her race had hounded him to the death, that her nation had even said, "His blood be on us, and on our children." Paul the apostle, was the subject of much of this prejudice among the Jews, insomuch that when writing his Epistle to the Hebrews, you will have observed that he does not begin with his name, as he does in all the other Epistles, because he felt that the very name "Paul," from the fact of his having been an eminent Pharisee, and having become a Christian, was distasteful to the Hebrew people. But God removed all this prejudice from Lydia's mind; she sat down to listen to Paul with a determination to give him a fair hearing, and to weigh the matter and see whether these things were so or not—somewhat like the Bereans of old, who also had their hearts in a measure opened, for they searched the Scriptures to see whether things were so. The devil often covers men from head to foot in a coat of mail, so that when they come where the arrows of God are flying, there is very little hope of their being wounded, because there is scarce a joint of the harness which the devil has not protected by an iron rivet of prejudice. You know how he tries in these days to do it. Some silly tales are set afloat about the minister—some inventions of addled brains—or else some old stories which were true of eccentric men whom the worms have eaten one hundred years before—all these are appended to the preacher that so he may be made to appear in a ridiculous light, in order, as the devil thinks, that there may be a prejudice against the word which comes from his lips. Or else it is the denomination or the sect, as it is called, to which the preacher belongs. "Of course, I can get no good from him," says one; "I am a Churchman." Or, saith another, "I could not expect that I should be blessed under him—I am an Arminian." So these things raise prejudices, and many make up their minds beforehand that they will not like the preaching, and they come into the place, as it were, with their ears stuffed full of wool, and you cannot get a word in; they have their hearts already so occupied with certain set notions, that though an angel from heaven should minister the truth, it would need to have the earthquake of the gaoler before the truth could enter. In Lydia's case there was nothing of the sort; she was willing to hear and to give a candid attention to the preacher. Much is gained when this is done.

In the next place, when her heart was opened *her desires were awakened*. She felt now a wish to understand this matter, and if there was anything in what the apostle was saying about eternal salvation—about complete pardon by the blood of him who was the "Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world," she said to herself, "I should like to know about it; I hope it may be true; I wish I may get an interest in these things." So she listens, anxiously desiring to be impressed by the Word. She has a hunger and a thirst: and those people have this blessing—"They shall be filled." When we get our people, by God's grace, as far as hungering and thirsting, then

we are very thankful to say, this is the opening of the heart. As the oyster, when the tide comes up, openeth its shell, so when the tide of grace is coming, God often makes men open their hearts, so that now they may get the spiritual supply.

Well, there was a desire awakened, but this was not all, there came another kind of opening, *her understanding was now enlightened*. "Yes," as the apostle went from one point to the other point—"yes, I see that God did promise a prophet like unto Moses. This man Jesus is like Moses, for he is a prophet mighty in word and deed, which none of our prophets were, except Moses. Yes," said she, "yes, Isaiah does speak of him as being 'despised and rejected of men.' That is right, and David does say, 'They pierced my hands and my feet; they parted my garments among them; for my vesture did they cast lots.' Yes," said she, "I see it; in the person of the man Christ Jesus whom Paul preaches, I perceive the Messiah who is spoken of in the law and in the prophets." And when he went on to say that faith in this Christ Jesus, who was fastened to the tree, would take away all sin, because this same Christ Jesus had carried upon his blessed shoulders the transgression of all believers. "Yes," said she, "I see that this is a reasonable doctrine, that of substitution. I can see how God is just, for he does punish sin in Christ; and I can see how he is gracious, too, for he is able now freely to give out of the fulness of his heart, such grace as poor sinners require." So her understanding was opened; she had a clear view of the gospel; she could see in its height, and depth, and length, just that which her soul wanted.

Then came something else; now *her affections were excited*, she felt growing within her a love to him who, though he was equal with God, yet took upon himself the form of a servant. As she heard Paul describe his sufferings, as she pictured to herself the scene around the cross, she thought she could hear the death-shriek and mark the flowing blood, and she seemed to think, "Yes, I love that man; I love that God; my heart goeth after him; O that he were mine! Yes," said she, "I love that preaching; sweet to my ears are those doctrines of mercy." She began already to rejoice, and "Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound," for if they do not yet walk in the light of God's countenance, yet they shall, for so the promise runs. All this, I think, is included in the term, "Her heart was opened." Her affections were now kindling towards divine things. And then came faith; *she believed the whole of the record*. She took it to be absolutely true, as Paul had stated, that there had been a Messiah; that he, according to Scripture, was the Son of God, and was also the Son of Man; that he had suffered, the just for the unjust, and that she, believing in him, had her sins forgiven. Faith came now through hearing. She took God at his word; she simply and humbly put her soul at the feet of that cross where the blood was dropping, believing, that as it fell from heaven, it pleaded for her, and as it dropped on her it gave her peace with God through Jesus Christ.

Faith being given, *all the graces followed*. Now she hated her sins, she repented. Now she loved righteousness, she sought after holiness. Now she had a bright hope of the many mansions in the Father's

house. Now she began to run with holy and happy feeling in the ways of obedience to Christ's commands, and she became, not merely a believer in the elements of Christianity, but she went on towards perfection, adding to her faith courage, and to her courage experience, and to experience brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. Onward she went in the way of her God. All this the Master did by opening her heart to attend to the things that were spoken of by Paul.

And now, beloved, the practical lesson is, let us pray for those who are round about us, and the many hopeful ones, that God would make them like Lydia. Let us put up this petition for our sons and daughters, that the God who has put them in the way of the means, and, to a degree, has prepared their minds for the reception of truth, would be pleased to work effectually and savingly, and bring them to accept the Saviour.

As for those in whom God is thus working, O that the Word I speak this morning might lead them to lay hold on Jesus. Recollect, there is nothing for you to do: you have but to trust Jesus, and you are saved; and to do this, as your warrant, there are no good works required, nor good feelings, nor deep experiences either. You have, *just as you are*, to believe that Christ can save you, and trust yourself to him as the Saviour, and he will save you, save you now with a great, present, and complete salvation. The Lord help you to do it, and he shall have the praise. Amen.
