Lydia

"14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, one that worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened to give heed unto the things which were spoken by Paul. 15 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, if you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us" (Acts 16:14-15).

Lydia was a business woman of Thyatira who sold purple dye. The city of Thyatira was located in the province of Asia known as Lydia. Lydia, no doubt, was named after this geographic location. Thyatira "was famous in the ancient world both for its highly organized trade unions and for its special technology for producing 'purple' [Turkish red] dye from the madder root rather than shell fish" (ISBE volume 4, page 846). "Purple" was "the most highly prized dye in the ancient world obtained from the secretions of four mollusks native to the eastern Mediterranean... Various shades could be produced by mixing secretions from different species, by adding salt or other substances, or by using procedures such as double dyeing... The importance of this industry can be seen in the name Phoenicia, which derives from phoinikous, 'red-purple.' Since approximately eight thousand mollusks were required to produce one gram of purple dye, purple cloth was extremely expensive, and the Bible refers to it almost exclusively as used by kings or for cultic purposes" (ISBE volume 3, page 1057). Lydia no doubt had the skill of extracting the purple die from the madder root rather than shell fish and was selling her product around the world.

Lydia was not only a business woman but she also "worshipped God." This business woman of faith "heard" the gospel of Jesus Christ being taught by Paul and the Lord "opened her heart to give heed unto the things Paul spoke." How did God "open" Lydia's heart? The word "open" means "to open and explain" (LS 192). Moulton adds "To open the mind, the heart, so as to understand and receive" (Moulton 94). Thayer defines the word as "To open the sense of the Scriptures, explain them, to open the mind of one, i.e. cause him to understand a thing, to open one's soul, i.e. to rouse in one the faculty of understanding or the desire of learning" (Thayer 140). Arndt and Gingrich define the word as, "Open the ears; make understanding possible, the heart; enable someone to perceive" (AG 187).
The Lord worked through the gospel message that Paul spoke and Lydia was caused to understand her sinful state of being. The gospel displays its power not only in instructing one to receive salvation (Romans 1:16) but also in its manner of exposing the deep sinful secrets of men’s lives (see Jeremiah 23:23-24; John 16:8; Hebrews 4:12). A fascinating side study of Acts is observing men’s reactions to the gospel message. Lydia heard where as many will not (see Acts 7:51 and 13:44-45). While some believe this text to be proof of the Calvinist doctrine of predestination it is every thing but that. We must remember that the pattern of salvation has already been set by Luke. Lydia could have done nothing different than those before her to receive her salvation. If God opened her heart against her will that would make God a respecter of persons and we know that this is false (see Acts 10:34).

Lydia and her family “gave heed” to the gospel. She had heard the gospel, understood it, and obeyed its commands for salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ. Recall that the Samaritans had given heed to the things taught by Philip and they were baptized for the remission of their sins (see Acts 8:6, 12). To “give heed” (Greek prosecho) means “to assent to, yield credence to, follow, adhere or be attached to” (Moulton 349). The message was preached, Lydia heard, she understood the words, she was made to know the guilt of her sin, and so she yielded to the gospel’s demands (i.e., God opened her heart). Ezekiel and Jeremiah refer to this as giving people a “new heart” or God “putting my Spirit within you” (see Jeremiah 31:33-34 and Ezekiel 36:26-28).

The gospel preached to Lydia was the same gospel message that Peter preached on Pentecost in Acts 2, Philip preached to the Samaritans and the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8. Lydia heard the same gospel Ananias preached to Saul in Acts 9 and Peter preached to the household of Cornelius in Acts 10. Therefore she heard of Jesus, believed upon his name, confessed Jesus to be the savior of the world, repented of her sins and was baptized for the remission of those sins (Cf. Acts 16:15 below). Lydia was now a believer.

Did the Holy Spirit come upon Lydia and physically open her mind against her will? No! Her mind was opened because she first heard the gospel preached as in every case of conversion in the book of Acts. We often say, “Have an open mind” when discussing an important topic. That simply means weigh the ideas and thoughts and make a decision. That which opened Lydia’s mind was the word of God. God draws people to him through hearing, learning, and teaching (John 6:44-45). The gospel message enlightened her to the truth, convicted her of sin, instructed her to receive the remission of sins, and in this way God opened her mind to it. She now understood the truth because of revelation.

I. Identifying Grace

A. Grace is defined as “kindness or favor which bestows upon one that he has not deserved” (Thayer 666).

B. Grace is God’s gift of salvation (Ephesians 2:4-8) / Forgiveness or Redemption (Ephesians 1:7) / Justification (Romans 3:24; 5:1-2).

II. Consider some founding principles of Grace

A. Mercy - Grace is God’s favor bestowed on undeserving people. All have sinned (Romans 3:23). All are unworthy of salvation (Ephesians 2:8). God does not give man grace for his good deeds but rather that he may clear his holy name among the nations (Ezekiel 36:22-23, 26-32).

B. Law and Grace inseparably connected - Isaiah identifies the “everlasting covenant” as the “sure mercies of David” (Isaiah 54:3). The “sure mercies of David” is the forgiveness of sins (Acts 13:33-39) and the New Covenant law (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

III. Examples of People receiving God’s Grace by their obedience to his divine Will

A. Noah: (Genesis 6:8)

B. Abraham: (Hebrews 11:8)

C. Joshua: (Hebrews 11:30)

D. Namaan: (2 Kings 5)

E. The blind man: (John 9:7)

F. Three thousand people in Jerusalem at Pentecost: (Acts 2)

IV. How do people receive God’s Grace?

A. Isaiah and Jesus said that this everlasting covenant law would go forth from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2-4 and Luke 24:46-49)

B. Peter preaches the everlasting covenant law in Jerusalem at Acts 2:38

C. People receive God’s grace, the forgiveness of sins, through the act of baptism even though we do not deserve it. The blood of Christ cleanses us from the guilt of sin (Hebrews 9:11-14 and 1 Peter 3:18-22).

Conclusion

The meek and lowly of this earth will not make up ways to be forgiven. The meek will look to God’s instructions and follow his laws and do things by his divine way (Jeremiah 10:23).