



SERMONS

by

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Date: 23rd June 2019 **Preacher: Anthony Boateng**
Bible readings: Acts 16:9-15 and Revelation 21:10, 22:1-5
Titel: "Welcome to the river of life"

In our first reading by Luke, Paul's ministry is making the astounding claim in Philippi that God's covenant with Israel is not abandoned, but **through faith in Jesus and God's initiative all can have access to the river of life.**

^{15 1-2} Now prior to this, some Pharisees who had become believers, were insisting to Paul and his companion that: *"You have to circumcise the pagan converts; and make them keep the Law of Moses or you can't be saved."*

After long argument with the Pharisees, consultation with the apostles and the leaders, they concluded that:

²⁸⁻²⁹ *It seemed to the Holy Spirit and to us that you should not be saddled with any crushing burden, but be responsible only for these bare necessities: Be careful not to get involved in activities connected with idols; avoid serving food offensive to Jewish Christians (blood, for instance); and guard the morality of sex and marriage.*

It is against this backdrop that a night-time vision orders Paul to cross today's northern Turkey, to the Roman province of Macedonia, in northern Greece to proclaim this truth. This represents Paul's first time in Europe, along with his companions (Timothy, Silas and Luke) he travels to Philippi, a Greek city.

Paul's usually heads for Synagogue in any place he first arrives for ministry (Acts 17:1-3). However, on this occasion, on arrival they head out to the riverside on the Sabbath day looking for a place of prayer, but why? First, because he was being attentive to the Holy Spirit, second, there was no synagogue due to little presence of Judaism. Now Paul could have disobeyed the holy and skipped the city because of the small numbers.

According to Jewish Law, there was a requirement of at least ten Jewish men to build/form a synagogue. So an unofficially meeting of women who sought to follow the Jewish moral law was formed and used the riverside as their prayer-house to facilitate ritual washing.

Paul and his companions began to talk with the women: ¹⁴ *Now a certain woman named Lydia heard them.* Lydia of Thyatira – a dealer of purple goods and a worshiper of God of the Jews. A gentile living in a gentile city. She refused to worship idols even though the city did not honour the Jewish Sabbath. A successful business woman who never lost sight of God. She put God first.

Luke tells us, ¹⁴ *.....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.*

You see Lydia was already seeking. God had already begun working on her heart. God was drawing her to the river of life/salvation. And the Holy Spirit enabled this to happen by commanding Paul through a vision, keeping him away from some city so she could hear the gospel.

Maybe like Lydia your heart is searching. Maybe God has placed something on your heart. Maybe your soul is thirsty. Perhaps you're sad, feel depressed, lonely and hurt. You feel stuck in a relationship that you're desperate to get out of but there seems to be no way out. Maybe your career or money matters are keeping you down. You want to make a change but feel inadequate.

Lydia heard – God opened her heart – took it with gladness - she believed — she received the river of life/salvation. And her actions testified to this – which is most important. You see words without deeds are nothing. Our fruit tells the world that we are saved. Just words or prayer is no guarantee of salvation. Christians bear fruit by loving what God loves and hating what God hates.

Lydia bears fruit immediately by demonstrating hospitality and being graciousness towards others. She invited Paul and his companion into her home without fear of the consequence. She cared for their need and shows Christ like love.

As a result she became a forerunner in the Jesus' movement. She was not silent in the churches or ineffective in evangelism. She cared for local congregations and became vital to expanding Christian mission. Her baptism made a big impression on her community and household. She along with Paul and his companions enabled boundaries to be crossed in the name of Jesus. **The question is: what would our actions say about us? Does it attract others or put them off?**

For some of us even though we have been saved through the grace of God we're at times quick to saddle others with crushing burdens. Our actions can put people off Christ. We can at times be so judgmental and unopened to the work of the Holy Spirit. We can hinder others accessing the river of life. Some of us often we hear the message but don't take it to heart. For some of us we receive the message with gladness but our behaviour remains the same – no impact on others around us.

Let me draw our attention to John's vision in the book of Revelation about the river of life which flow from the land of eternal life to God's people.

¹And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. ²In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

So what can we take from this?

- 1) This morning I believe God is challenging us to be attentive to what he has placed on our heart and cross boundaries. Let us recognise that God is not restricted to Church buildings. Like Lydia we should put God first in everything we do including in our work place and household. We should be hospitable towards our brothers and sisters in Christ especially those who are suffering –by being gracious because we have been shown grace.
- 2) Brothers and sisters, I'm submitting to us that all of us can be saved - an eternal blessing is freely at your disposal. But God is saying to us we must be careful not to get involved in activities connected with idols; avoid serving food offensive to Jewish Christians (blood, for

instance); and guard the morality of sex and marriage. I'm suggesting this blessing is reserved for the pure in heart (cf. Matthew 5.8). There's no place for the unclean and accursed (21.27; 22.3; cf. Zechariah 14.21). Only the redeemed enjoy perfect fellowship with God.

- 3) This morning God is inviting us all (Jews and Gentiles) through the power of the Holy Spirit to come to the river of life. He's inviting all whose heart is searching. So come if you're wounded. Come if you're sad. Come if you're tired of disappointments. Come and receive abundant life. Come and receive your healing. Draw near and drink of the mercy of Jesus Christ. At the river of life. The city of God. Draw closer and your life will never be the same again. **Amen.**