

WEEK 6

THREE GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS (ACTS 16:13-34)

* This message is mostly from JD Greear

By 325 A.D. Christianity had spread like crazy. Scholars say over half of the Roman Empire had become Christian. And it all started with twelve guys on a hillside with no power, no money, and no celebrity recognition — they just had an absolute conviction that Jesus had risen from the dead and a strange power poured into them, which was the Holy Spirit.

And the key to the rapid spread of Christianity was the fact that *every person* – not just a handful of specialized apostles – carried the message “as they went.” You see, Luke (the author of Acts) seems to go out of his way to show you that ordinary people are the ones who spread the truth about Jesus. And they did it in their everyday conversations.

For example, by the end of the first century, there were three famous churches who were solid, strong, church-planting centers. Those three churches were located in:

- 1) Antioch
- 2) Alexandria
- 3) Rome

But the remarkable thing is that we’re never told who founded those churches. When you read about them in Acts 11 and Acts 28, it just says that the hand of the Lord was on the “brothers” who were there. No celebrity preachers or worship leaders – just unnamed believers who were faithfully sharing the gospel in their cities, schools, and communities, and they did it through their everyday conversations.

And if you’re not a Christian, you may be thinking, “See... this is what I hate about Christians; you’re always trying to convert me.” AND YOU’RE RIGHT. But, think of it from our perspective. If we really believe that Jesus rose from the dead, and He’s the ONLY way to be saved *how could we not tell you?* We’re not going to push it on you but if a Christian doesn’t REALLY want you to know Jesus, then you should question whether or not they really believe this message is true!

And that's why Christianity spread so fast throughout the Roman empire, and ultimately around the globe – because Christians were bringing Jesus into their everyday conversations.

And tonight, we're going to see three of those gospel conversations played out. And Luke records them because he knows we need to learn from them.

Conversation #1: Lydia

Acts 16:13–14 “And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. ¹⁴ One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.”

I referenced Lydia last week but who was she?

- **She's a wealthy businesswoman.** When you think about Lydia, think of a woman who was put together, driven, brilliant, well-known, well respected.
- **She's religious.** She's at a prayer meeting, but Lydia was not a Christ-follower. She was “a worshiper of God.” But Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslims, Orthodox Jews, and many others would say the same thing.

Paul knew this, so he shared how Jesus is the *true* and *only* way to God. And while he was speaking to Lydia, verse 14 says, “*The Lord opened her heart to **pay attention** to what was said by Paul.*”

The Greek word that is translated “Pay attention” (προσέχω *prosechō*) is the same word used for addiction to alcohol. In other words, as she's listening to the truth about Jesus, there's a craving for more.

And some of you are like that here on Wednesday nights – you never thought you would care about church, God, or the Bible BUT something keeps drawing you back week after. It's because God is opening up your heart to pay attention to the truth of the Scriptures.

And notice the fruit (proof) of Lydia's salvation in verse 15...

- She was willing to go public with her faith by being baptized (15a)
- There was an immediate and noticeable change (15b)

Acts 16:15 *“And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.”*

Conversation #2: Slave Girl

Acts 16:16–17 *“As we were going to the place of prayer [where they first met Lydia], we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and us, crying out, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation. ¹⁸ And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.”*

Notice what we’re told about this girl. She’s the opposite of Lydia....

- **Scholars say she is probably in her mid-teens.**
- **She’s demon possessed.** A “spirit of divination.”
- **She’s a slave.** She’s enslaved *spiritually* and *physically*.
- **She’s exploited & taken advantage of.** She “brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling.
- **She’s NOT on her way to the prayer meeting.** She couldn’t go even if she wanted to – she’s a slave. But, she has no interest in going.
- **On one hand she’s attracted to the message about Jesus, but at the same time she’s antagonistic toward it.**

So, let’s see what happens when Paul casts the demon out of her...

Acts 16:19; 22-24 *“But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers... ²² The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. ²³ And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. ²⁴ Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.”*

And this leads us to...

Conversation #3: Philippian Jailer

Acts 16:25–28 “About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them,²⁶ and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s bonds were unfastened.²⁷ When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped.²⁸ But Paul cried with a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.”

Who is this Jailer?

- **Jailors were often highly decorated Roman soldiers.** As a retirement gift, they were often given jails to run.
- **He was most likely older, battle-hardened, and part of the ruling class.**

And notice what this Jailer does to Paul and Silas...

- **He places them in the “inner” prison.** It was usually the lowest part of the building, which made it disgusting. When the other prisoners “relieved themselves” in every way, it ran down into the inner prison.
- **He placed their feet in stocks.** Roman stocks were chains suspended from the ceiling. The jailer would lay you on your back, hook the clamps around your ankles, hoist you upside down and then strike you on the bottom of your feet. Unbelievably painful.

This is on top of the fact that the city rulers had already stripped them and beaten them with rods with many blows (vs.22-23). And Paul and Silas had done nothing wrong – all they did was set a girl free from demon possession.



If you were in their situation for only doing what God had told you to do, would you be tempted to get angry/bitter at God and this jailer?

But, instead of getting angry and bitter, Paul and Silas were praying and singing praise to God at midnight – at their darkest moment. How could they do that? Because Paul had prayed that God would use him to reach the people of Philippi. And, if part of God’s plan was to put Paul in a prison so he could suffer well in front of the Jailer, that was a price that Paul and Silas were willing to pay.

And that's why they didn't run when God opened the prison doors with an earthquake. You see, in those days, if a jailer lost his prisoners, he paid for it with his own life.

And notice: Paul and Silas had such an impacted on ALL the prisoners, *none of them* left when the prison doors opened. Look how the Jailer responded...

Acts 16:29–34 “And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” ³¹ And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” ³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³ And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. ³⁴ Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.”

Why are these three stories included? Two reasons...

1) To show us that the gospel is for everybody.

These are three COMPLETELY different types of people:

- A well-respected, wealthy, religious woman
- A poor, demon-possessed, exploited and abused slave girl
- An older, battle-hardened soldier, running a jail full of hardened criminals.

You see, there is no one “type” of person who needs Jesus.

- We ALL have one problem – sin.
- We ALL have one solution – Jesus.

And the church (Body of Christ) is the ONLY place where vastly different people can find a “unity” in Christ that they can't find anywhere else.

2) To show us how to reach different people.

These were three different people who were reached in three different ways. And you're about to discuss those three ways in your small groups!

Small Group