

Lydia

My name is Lydia. I came from Thyatira where my husband and I began a successful business dealing in the highly desirable purple cloth produced in that city. After my husband died, I moved to Philippi. I had been drawn to the God of the Jews and was considered by them to be a “righteous Gentile.” Because it was awkward for an unaccompanied woman to go to the synagogue, I met with other women in a place of prayer near the river. That was where I met Paul.

Paul and his companion Silas spoke of Jesus and I knew that He was the One I was seeking and quickly believed. I invited Paul and Silas to stay in my home. They taught regularly at the meeting place and crowds began to gather. Among them was a young woman we had been seeing off and on for some time. She was being led around to tell fortunes for a fee. She seemed to be a sad and fearful person and I had longed to understand how I could help her.

Paul was about to start teaching one day when this young woman appeared and said, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.” I considered it strange for *her* to say that, although I believed that it was undeniably true. She came back several days in a row until Paul said, “In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!” As soon as he said it, there was a visible change. She was suddenly normal! And her masters discovered that she could no longer tell fortunes. She had been possessed by a demon! She was instantly freed!

She clung to me like a long-lost child and I instinctively protected her from her predatory keepers, who had actually taken her from a tribe of barbarians as a slave. She stayed with me and wanted to be taught everything about “The Way” that Paul preached. But that deliverance had another amazing series of consequences.

The “owners” of this enslaved woman complained to the authorities that Paul had destroyed their livelihood. Can you think of anything more evil than that? They were upset at the wonderful thing that happened to her because it caused them to lose income! Unsurprisingly, the authorities acted on the complaint and had Paul and Silas beaten and thrown into prison!

I saw this happening and later led the group in prayer for Paul and Silas. But Paul called to me after he was bloodied by the whip and was being led away, “Do not fear. The Lord will use this for His glory.” And when, the next day, we found out what had happened, that is exactly what the Lord did! There was an earthquake while Paul and Silas were singing praise in the dungeon. The doors were opened, and the chains and fetters loosed. When the jailer said, “What must I do to be saved,” convinced that he would be executed for losing the prisoners, Paul said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved — you and your household.”

The jailer and his family joined the group in my home, together with the young woman and the others who had been gathering for prayer. Paul encouraged us as he left town. We were now a church, people from all levels of society and each with a unique story of coming to Jesus. We grew in numbers and in understanding. We had several teachers including Clement, Epaphroditus and Timothy. We were able to send financial aid to Paul while he was imprisoned in Rome. And again, he showed that wonderful attitude, stating that he was there to bring the gospel to all that he contacted, including Caesar's household.

I adopted that perspective myself. As a businesswoman, I was able to meet and speak with people from many cities and all walks of life. I always had stories to tell them of my friends in the church, demonstrating how the gospel of Jesus Christ provides the solution to every kind of problem and need.

And it all began in the most unlikely way, a river, a fortuneteller, a prison, and an earthquake! And, of course, scores of changed lives by the power of God's Spirit!

Acts 16, Philippians