

A Closed Heart Opened

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 August 2016

Preacher: Jon Hueni

[0:00] Take your Bibles and turn to Acts chapter 16. Acts chapter 16. We're going to read the first 15 verses.

! Acts chapter 16.

During the night, Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia, standing and begging him, come over to Macedonia and help us.

After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. From Troas, we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis.

From there, we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony, and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days. On the Sabbath, we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer.

[1:52] We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God.

The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. If you consider me a believer in the Lord, she said, come and stay at my house.

And she persuaded us. Well, we are in the book of Acts, and we're in the second missionary journey of Paul and his team. Paul and Silas have just barely begun this second missionary journey when they have found a most valuable worker for the kingdom of Christ in the person of Timothy, whom they quickly add to their team.

We learned last week how the Lord Jesus is able to raise up workers from the most unlikely places, like a pagan city of Lystra. Well, under the blessing of God, the results of their ministry together in this whole region, if we could have the overhead, this whole region is where they were laboring, and God's blessing was added to their labors.

And we read it in verse 5 that the result was that the churches were strengthened in their faith, and especially the faith of the gospel of Jesus Christ, of salvation through a crucified Savior.

[3:27] And then we saw that the churches also grew daily in number, which means that the Lord was saving new converts and adding them to his churches.

So having fulfilled the stated aim of their mission, to revisit the places where they had preached before and see how they were doing and to strengthen the brothers and sisters there, they now turned to taking the saving gospel into new territory, places where it is not yet gone.

And yet the question remains to be solved, which new territories of darkness?

There's a lot of darkness in the world, gospel darkness in the world at this time to choose from. What was God's will for this missionary team?

Who was to guide them? And so we learn something of the way that they were guided in verses 6 through 10. Notice several points. First of all, we notice that even a spirit-filled apostle of Christ does not have every detail of God's will figured out.

[4:40] Now, of course, when God's word says something, we know absolutely what the will of God is. We can say, I'm sure that this is the will of God.

But now I'm talking about those areas where God's word has not spoken directly and said, do this or don't do that. But those areas where we just have general principles of God's word and we must think and wrestle and pray and come with wisdom and seek counsel and try to figure out what God's will is.

I say in those realms, even the apostle Paul, filled with the Spirit, did not have every detail of God's will figured out. Sometimes I wince when I hear people speak in these matters of guidance where God has not specifically spoken in his word and yet they speak with an absoluteness about them. Maybe you've heard it as well, that I know for sure that this is God's will. I'm absolutely certain that this is God's will. Without a doubt.

Well, I just want to say that's more than what the apostle Paul could say as we see in this passage. Even he did not know for sure which place to go next with his evangelistic team.

[5 : 59] Which was God's will for him? He did not know. In fact, he got it wrong. Twice. Twice. He thought of it. He looked at the map.

He planned it out and laid a strategy. And he was just wrong. When he tried to go the way that he had planned, the Holy Spirit kept it from happening.

He scuttled Paul's plan. Somebody else was to go there. And so on. So not even the apostle Paul is infallible in discerning the unrevealed will of God.

He hit his nose on two closed doors before he finally went through an open one. I think that's instructive for us. That's the way the spirit of Jesus led the apostle Paul and guided him.

I wonder if we can accept that in our lives, that our Lord sometimes guards us or guides us and directs us through failure. Through the failure of our plan.

[7 : 07] That that's the very means by which he guides us. By trial and error. Failed attempts. By saying no to our plans. And our efforts.

And so when Paul would bump into that closed door, he simply bowed his will to the spirit's will and changed his plans. Now this idea of infallible guidance in these matters is not taught in the word of God then.

And I would challenge you to be careful in such areas of guidance where there's no written word of God speaking specifically about it. to not use words like, I know for sure, I know without a doubt.

You might say, well I look at the situation and it sure seems to me like this is right or it sure feels like, then say it that way. Yeah? Say it seems to me, it feels like, but to say, I know for sure.

What happens? Other Christians listening, they think, boy I've never known for sure about those things in my life. I've never had that absolute certainty that this is the school I'm to go to, this is the woman I'm to marry, this is the, whatever these decisions are where we must take scripture and apply it with wisdom and counsel.

[8 : 26] And it can paralyze Christians who are seeking direction and wisdom from God and they're waiting for this burst of light and a hand to write on the wall and the Bible simply does not promise that in these areas.

And so, Paul moves out with the general command to take the gospel to Gentiles and Jews and to nations, to the world. He has that much knowledge of the will of God of which he's certain.

And he shows us that bumping into closed doors is not a sign of insensitivity to the Spirit's leading, it's rather often the very way that he leads us. Now, we don't know how the Holy Spirit made his will known to Paul.

These were the days of special, direct revelation from God to his apostles. Perhaps that's what happened here. Maybe the Holy Spirit told him.

Maybe he spoke to him, a voice that he heard. Maybe it was a dream or a vision as we'll see later. He did speak through a vision. Don't go here, Paul. Perhaps that's how it was.

[9 : 38] Or perhaps the Holy Spirit simply guided Paul by providence, by events that happened, by closed doors. Something prevented him from going into Asia at this time.

One way or another, the Holy Spirit made it sufficiently clear that Paul was not to go there. Not now. Notice verse 6. Having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia.

So, this is present-day Turkey. And it's a big, it's a big chunk of land. This is Asia here. Asia Minor. These are the seven churches that you read of in Revelation 2 and 3, Ephesus, and Thyatira, and Sardis, all these churches here. And Paul wants to move after they've preached in this area.

He wants to take the gospel into this region. And, again, he was kept by the Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia.

[10 : 48] So, Paul changed his plans. If not left, then let's go right. Let's go right into Bithynia. Bithynia being this region over here.

So, if not plan A into Asia, then plan B into Bithynia. But once again, Paul's plan is frustrated. Verse 7. When they came to the border of Mycenae, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus

would not allow them to.

Again, we don't know how the Spirit of Jesus kept them from going, but he made it sufficiently clear. He is leading his church.

He is building his church. And he made it clear to Paul and company that Bithynia is not the place. It's not the time. They tried, but were not allowed to enter by the Spirit of Jesus.

Wow, that's strike two. And it's a holy apostle. That's in the batter's box. if you strike out, and if you try something, and only to find, no, this isn't.

[12:00] This isn't what God wants for me. Well, then you try, and that's not. Don't feel like you're a failure. Have you sought wisdom? Have you prayed? That's sometimes what happens, even to holy apostles.

Well, Paul wants to take the gospel to lost sinners, and he's had two rejections of his plans by the Holy Spirit. Now, at this point, most men would take their ball and go home.

I've tried. It's obvious that the doors just aren't open. It's just not working out. I'm going home. But not Paul.

Not Paul. He might have concluded, you know, really, all we were supposed to do is just come here and strengthen the brethren. Maybe we weren't supposed to go on with the gospel to new territory yet. No, not Paul.

Paul reasons this way. I've been forbidden to go left and forbidden to go right, but I've not yet been forbidden to go straight on ahead. And so that's what he does.

[13:03] Straight on ahead. He forges onward. So, here's a man looking for sinners who need to know his Savior. And he's looking for opportunities.

And when plan A and plan B are foiled, he goes to plan C. Straight ahead. Now, let me ask you, how many of you descended from European nations?

All right, I'm going to ask you to hold up your hands. Kids, if you don't know, look and see what mom and dad are doing and do the same. Because you descended from that. Look around. Look at all the people who have descended from European nations.

What we're about to witness is the first Christian witness to the continent of Europe. This is Europe. This is present-day Greece. And we're going to see the gospel coming into Europe for the first time. It is the home of our ancestors. Many of us. It's the part of the story of how the saving gospel came to Europe and then from Europe came to this land and has come even to some of us here.

[14:19] So I trust that that whets your appetite. We're not just studying some ancient history that doesn't have anything to do with anybody. No, for some of us, this is how the gospel came to us through this path.

From Antioch, from Jerusalem to Antioch, to Europe, to the United States, to Bremen. So the gospel came to Europe at this time.

And why? Because Paul didn't go home after two rejections. He pressed on knowing that Christ had called him to be his chosen instrument to carry his name before Gentiles and to the people of Israel and to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to the power of God and to, that they might receive forgiveness of sins in a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Jesus.

Oh, how easily we give up our witness when our plans don't work out. We suffer a rejection and a rejection and then we go home and we're disappointed and we're despairing.

Let's be encouraged here by the Apostle Paul to keep going. May Christ make us more determined to make the most of every opportunity we have to tell others of our Savior.

[15:36] Verse 8 says, So they passed by Mycenae and went down to Troas. So they're not to go this way, not to go left into Asia, right into Bithynia. They go down to Troas.

Verse 9, During the night, Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia standing and begging him, Come over to Macedonia and help us. This whole region is Macedonia.

And that's where he has this vision of the man calling for help. So after two failed attempts in which it was communicated to Paul, No, not here. No, not there.

He's now given positive guidance from the Lord. This way. Now I learned from that that sometimes God leaves us in the dark for a while before He gives us further light.

What's He doing with us? Is this wasted time? I could be doing much more. No, this is Him teaching us to pray. Teaching us dependent upon Him.

[16 : 36] Lord, we don't know what to do next. Would you lead us? He's bringing us to wait on the Lord. And it's important time or the Lord wouldn't have it.

It's not wasted time to wait on the Lord. Well, He makes us ask. He makes us seek. He makes us knock perseveringly. And then He comes with the further light for the next step.

And only now does God come to Paul with this positive direction on where to go next. And it comes by way of a vision in the night. This is not just a dream like you and I have.

This was direct revelation from God to His apostle. And in the vision He sees a man from Macedonia making this emotional plea for help. I don't know if you've ever heard someone crying for help.

You ever come upon an accident perhaps and you get out of your car and you hear it. That cry. Help! Help! There's something that just makes your heart stop beating.

[17 : 39] To hear a voice crying for help. That's what Paul had in his vision. This Macedonian man pleading, begging for Paul to come over and help us.

This is the cry of Europe for help. Notice it's not come and help me one Macedonian man. It's come over and help us.

Come over and help us. We all need help. Now, just what that help is, is stated in the next verse. Verse 10. After Paul had seen the vision we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel there to them.

So God is saying in this vision to his team and to us that the greatest help all men need is the gospel of Christ.

[18 : 42] Man's greatest need is the gospel. It was then, it is today, it will always be the greatest need. Come and help us. What is this help that men need? It's the gospel.

That if a man will believe and receive and embrace the Christ that's offered in the gospel he will be saved. To know how can I a sinner be right with a holy God?

The gospel is the help that men need. To be told that none but Jesus can do helpless sinners good. Jesus alone can meet the greatest need of man through the gospel.

So what Europe needs is the gospel of Christ. Now we need to be careful. I'm not saying that Europe is aware of their need for the help of the gospel of Christ for they most certainly were not. Europe was quite content satisfied to live their lives without Jesus Christ like some here. They're satisfied with their sin and its pleasures.

[19 : 45] They were satisfied with their gods their traditions their way of life handed down to them by their forefathers. Oh yes they were quite content. so let's be sure we get this one right.

People need the Lord but he's the last thing they think that they need. They need help but they don't know that the help they need is Jesus Christ offered in the gospel.

They're thirsty alright but they don't want the fountain of living waters. No no they prefer the broken cisterns that can't hold water. They prefer anything other than Christ.

Yes I'd like help but not him. They think they need more of this and more of that but not Jesus. I don't need him. That's not the help I'm after.

So let's not think that somehow on the heathen mission fields that people are just longing after Christ and salvation through him. the Bible weighs in clearly on this point in Romans 3 there's no one who understands there is no one who seeks God.

[21 : 01] No one is seeking God. No one's crying out for God as their help. No no that's not the way we come into this world. By nature we all have turned away from God.

We have together become worthless Romans 3 11 and 12. So the scriptures are clear all have voted against Christ against him and against his truth.

But that they need the help of the gospel of Christ is the clear point made in the vision. That's what they really need and that's the point that is communicated in the vision.

That's the point that Paul and his team had concluded together from the vision. They hear Paul in the morning say no I had this vision last night. But I'm not sure exactly what it means.

Let's talk about it. That's the word when he says we concluded. It means that we thought about the vision and what did it mean? Here's this Macedonian man and he's saying come over and help us. Well we concluded.

[22 : 03] We huddled together and we thought it through and we talked it over and together we concluded that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. that's the help needed.

That's the message of the vision. So they got ready at once to leave for Macedonia. That would have included booking a passage on the boat as they would need to cross the Aegean Sea to get over to Macedonia.

Once God's will is clear it's disobedience to delay so they got ready at once. There's a lesson for us in that. Is there any area in your life where you know the will of God?

To delay is to sin against God. To delay is disobedience. Once we know we are to post haste put ourselves in the way that God has pointed out for us.

They made readiness. They got ready at once. So after two red lights Paul gets a green light and he steps on the accelerator at once he's ready to go.

[23:13] Now the spirit of Jesus was guiding his servants then and he promises to be with us until the end of the age in this whole work of taking the gospel and making disciples of the nations.

Baptizing them and teaching them to obey every command. So the same spirit of Jesus is with us today. You know he led Philip out to that road to Gaza to meet that Ethiopian eunuch didn't he? He guided Peter to get over to Gentile Cornelius' house with the gospel. And here we're seeing the same spirit of Jesus guiding the apostle Paul to get over to Europe because there's a whole continent of sinners there and some of their descendants that will be in the United States of America that need to know Jesus.

Well we're seeing Christ guiding his workers in the building of the church. And he's doing that with you. That's why you live beside that unconverted neighbor.

That's why you work alongside of that unconverted man or woman. That's why in your class kids you have unconverted people. You see God has placed you. He's brought you.

[24:29] He's guided you. you who are the light of the world to shine your light up against people who need the Lord. Are you moving toward them with the gospel?

Well they put out to sea. They landed in Neapolis. They traveled on to Philippi so named after Alexander the Great's father Philip of Macedon.

Here they come to Philippi a Roman colony. By the way Paul's a citizen so he'll have some rights in Philippi and we'll see that play out. It's also the leading city in that district of Macedonia.

It was one of the great cities on the Roman road that linked east and west. It was a busy place with a lot of trade coming through lots of people and that's one thing we see with Paul.

His whole mission is guided by his own planning and by the Holy Spirit and Paul also often goes to those great population centers where he can bring the gospel to the most people.

[25:33] They arrived midweek and they stayed several days with absolutely nothing noteworthy to report. Sometimes we think that everything must have been just exciting exciting exciting on these trips.

There was nothing to report. We got there and nothing happened. No one was beating down their door to hear the gospel of Jesus. Jesus.

Where's all those people that were saying come over and help us? Where are those people? They might have wondered. Where's that Macedonian man in the vision that was begging for help?

And then the Jewish Sabbath arrived. Now as Paul's custom was on the Sabbath day he would go to a synagogue of Jews if there was one. And what we find is that there must not have been enough Jews yet in Philippi to have a synagogue.

It only took ten men to have a synagogue. But there was no synagogue here in Philippi. All he found was a gathering of women, a small gathering of women who had met for prayer and worship outside the city by the river.

[26:42] Now Paul was one to make the most of every opportunity so he went to that place. He sat down with these women and began to speak to them the gospel. And it was here in Philippi.

Outside the city, down by the riverside, that the Lord Jesus claimed his first convert in Europe. Now what do we know about him? Or what do we know about her?

Her name is Lydia. She's from the home city of Thyatira. That's one of these seven churches that are later planted here. So she's from this region but she's over here in Philippi and it seems that she's moved there because she's a dealer in purple cloth.

So she's a business woman and it seems her business dealings had put her directly in the path of God's missionaries. How's that for providence? And Luke tells us she's a worshiper of God.

She was a worshiper of God. Now that's Luke's technical phrase for a Gentile proselyte to the Jewish religion. So she's a Gentile. But there's something about the Jewish religion that struck her

bell and said you know that's better than paganism.

[27 : 58] It's better than our gods. So she had become a Jew as it were. She had adhered to the Jewish religion. In that sense she became a worshiper of God.

And yet she's still ignorant of Jesus Christ being the savior. Well as Paul was speaking the gospel she was listening.

And then it happened. As she was listening she opened her heart and responded to the gospel message. Some of you are looking down at your Bibles and you're saying my version doesn't say that.

Neither does mine. That's not what Luke is careful to say is it? Doesn't say that she opened her heart and responded. No Luke's very careful with what he says and at the end of verse 14 he says the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.

She did not open her own heart. That's something the Lord Jesus did because salvation is of the Lord. She is the one who responded to Paul's message.

[29 : 11] She is the one who repented of her sins and trusted in Jesus Christ to save her. She is the one who received Jesus Christ in eternal life and all of his other saving benefits.

But what Luke is careful to point out is that she only responded to the gospel message because of what the Lord first did inside her heart.

He opened it. He opened her heart. That's an interesting phrase. The Lord opened her heart. Let's think more carefully about it.

Now kids if the Lord opened her heart what was it before he opened it? In other words that door it's not yet opened is it?

So what would we say of that door? It's what? It's closed. Oh okay well that's instructive. That teaches us some important theology.

[30 : 08] That by nature man's heart is closed to God just like that door is closed. We're born into the world not with a neutral heart that just kind of flaps in the wind and opens up and sometimes closed.

No no we're born with closed hearts. Hearts already set against the Lord. In the Bible the heart is our inmost being. It's the center.

It's the control center of the whole person. And it includes the faculty of the mind as it thinks. And the affections and desires that we have.

And the will by which we choose all comprising the heart as the Bible speaks of it. And it's this this heart all of that that is closed to the living God and his truth.

Romans 8 7 says the natural mind is hostility toward God. And how does it show its hostility toward God? Not always by cursing him.

[31 : 16] Sometimes just by not submitting to his laws. And you can do that with a very friendly face toward God. Thank you but no thank you. I like this rather than that. But that's showing the hostility of the heart to God.

That's the mind. That's the faculty of thought. heart. And then the desires of the heart. They too are not neutral. His desires are to love darkness rather than light because his deeds are evil.

And so he loves sin rather than holiness. And as to his will he refuses to come to Christ that he might have life. John 5 40 says he will not let Jesus have his rightful place as the king of his heart. So you see the heart in its mind it's thinking it's desiring it's choosing the whole heart is closed to God. It's in rebellion against the Lord.

So let's think of the heart as a castle. And it's surrounded by city walls. Here comes the Lord Jesus in his gospel chariot. It's the apostle Paul preaching the gospel and it's Jesus Christ coming in his gospel chariot.

[32 : 29] Here's the rightful heir to the throne. of this city this heart the king of kings the lord of lords but the city is not neutral toward this king.

They're in rebellion against him. They're claiming independence from him. And so the walls of pride are high and thick all around the city of Mansoul.

The surrounding moat is filled with self-righteousness that keeps Jesus out. The drawbridge is pulled up forbidding him entrance and every gate into the city is bolted fast and every window is barred shut and every weapon on the inside is aimed at this Christ and his chariot.

There's no room you see in the heart for the king. We all have said with the people in that parable we will not have this man to reign over us. That's the heart that Jesus finds when he comes to it.

He's not welcomed here. It's closed to him. King self is the usurper pretending and sitting on the throne.

[33 : 44] King Jesus poses a threat and self is not ready to relinquish the throne to king Jesus. Self wants to be in control and call the shots.

So in every way the castle of man's heart is closed to having Jesus enter and sit on the throne. I wonder if that's your heart this morning. It's just closed to Jesus.

Even though you come to church. Remember Lydia was in a place of worship with a closed heart. Maybe you come to church and the preacher starts preaching and here comes Christ in his chariot of the gospel.

up goes the drawbridge. Slam go the gates. Clink go the locks. Your heart is closed.

You keep Jesus at arm's length. Oh you sit and listen but he's outside. You listen on the inside and you keep him at arm's length. You know what he's after.

[34 : 51] You know he's after the throne. And you don't like the terms of the gospel. You know if he comes in self has got to be denied. You've got to embrace him as a new master.

As a savior. As the ruler over you. And you don't want to give up your will to his. And bow to a new master. So Christ is just kept conveniently outside.

The door to your heart is closed. I wonder if you can see in all of that how man is his own greatest enemy. I mean if Jesus was coming to take you to hell we could understand why you would keep the doors closed.

But he's coming to offer you heaven. He's coming. Who is he that's coming to you in the gospel chariot? It's Jesus. It's God's chosen savior.

It's the only one qualified to be a substitute for sinners. To die in their place. To take all their sin upon him. To pay the penalty so that your sins can be forgiven in full.

[35 : 59] And he's coming to give you a righteousness so that when you stand before God in judgment and God looks at your record he sees the perfect obedience of Jesus. That's what he's got. He's got righteousness to give to every believing sinner.

And he's got eternal life in his hands. And he's the one that you're locking out. Can you see that it's not only the greatest wickedness but it's the greatest folly.

Why would you lock out such a willing and able savior? The inn at Bethlehem was a fitting symbol of what this king would meet in this world.

No room. No room for him. And so John says he was in the world and though the world was made through him the world did not recognize him.

He came to his own and his own received him not. They said no. Hearts closed. And so in line with the rest of the Bible our text is teaching that man's heart by nature is closed to Jesus Christ.

[37 : 08] Never forget that Christian as you're witnessing to lost people. They have hearts that are closed to Jesus Christ. Don't be surprised by rejection.

Don't be surprised if they hold you at arm's length. Remember it's Jesus who comes in the gospel and their hearts closed. You'll need more power than you've got to bring to such a castle.

And never forget that Christian as you think of yourself and your own testimony. your own conversion. Your heart. My heart was once like Lydia's.

Closed to Jesus Christ. I was my master and king. I didn't want to relinquish that throne to anyone. Not even Jesus the son of God.

Oh yes this is the teaching of our passage. Our hearts were closed to him. but wonder of wonders. That somehow the doors were open and we said come to my heart Lord Jesus and he came and he saved us.

[38 : 15] What happened? Well what didn't happen is we didn't open our own hearts. But rather the Lord opened the heart of Lydia so that she responded.

And the Lord opened the hearts of many of all of us who have ever responded to the gospel. It's the Lord who opened our hearts. So no heart is so closed that the Lord Jesus cannot open it.

He has the key we say to every heart. Paul says the weapons of our warfare are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. strongholds. Our weapons in this warfare for the souls of men and women, boys and girls, they're more than what strength we have.

They are mighty through God to the pulling down of those walls, those strongholds, those proud thoughts that lift themselves up to say I don't need this Christ, I don't want that Christ.

No, we have weapons in the word of God and in prayer that can bring that pride right down low. That can show them their sins and reveal I need a righteousness.

[39:25] I don't have any righteousness to stand before God. Parents, here's the hope for your unconverted children with hearts closed to Jesus.

Here's our hope for the hardest heart that wants to keep Christ out, that the Lord opens hearts up to respond to his gospel offer. He can squelch that spirit of rebellion within.

He can bring down the walls of pride with the true knowledge of God. He can dry up the moat of self-righteousness with a sight of their sins before a holy God. He can undo every argument that sets itself against Jesus Christ.

Every excuse why not to let him in. He can unseat sinful self from the throne. Our Lord makes sinners willing in the day of his power.

He makes them willing. He actually makes them want Jesus Christ. Want to throw open their hearts door and to welcome him in. That's what Jesus does in opening the heart of closed heart.

[40:28] Opening the closed heart of sinners. That's what he did. And so you can be sure that wherever anyone receives Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, that the Lord has done something there first.

He has opened that heart. That's what he did to Lydia. Conversion is heart work. And it's God's work. Ezekiel 36, 26 likens it to a heart transplant.

God says, I will give you a new heart. I will put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

So there's that heart of stone that keeps Jesus out. It's stony, hard heart. And it's God who says, I will take that stony heart out. And I will put in a soft, fleshy heart.

That's willing to receive. That's willing to walk in Christ's ways. That's the new heart Nicodemus was told that he didn't have and he would need if he's ever to see or enter the kingdom of God.

[41:31] It's the new heart that the spirit of God alone gives. And so as Paul's preaching the gospel, Lydia's listening and the Holy Spirit inside is doing a heart transplant within, opening her heart to respond in faith and repentance to the gospel.

That's how we have the first convert in Europe. The Lord opened a closed heart. Now, how do we know that? How did it show itself in her life? How do we know whose heart the Lord is open?

What are the evidences of a closed heart that's been opened by the Lord? Well, it's all right here.

Just three points and we're done. Number one, her saving response to the gospel message. Verse 14 says the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.

What was Paul's message? It's the one message he preached wherever he went about Christ and him crucified. And it calls upon the sinner to repent and believe. It was a call to repent and believe. And she repented and believed.

She turned from her sin and she embraced Jesus Christ by faith. She responded. And so the first act of an open heart is always this. It's to welcome Jesus Christ.

[42:42] It's to receive him in all of his work for sinners. To trust in him. Open hearts receive Christ just as he's offered to them in the gospel.

And how is Christ offered to you in the gospel? Well, he's offered to you as a prophet to teach you how to live, what is true, what is right, what is wrong. And in the gospel, he's offered to you as a prophet to teach you that.

And where the heart is open, he's received as prophet to teach me how to live, the will of God. He's offered as the priest who can actually make a sacrifice for my sin to pay it in full and then to pray to God for me.

And I receive him in the gospel to be my priest, to take my sins and to cover them with his blood and to make me right with God. And he comes as a king.

He's offered as a king to rule over us and to defend us. And in the gospel, I respond to him as he's offered to me. And I say, come to my heart, King Jesus. Come and rule here without a rival reign.

[43:51] Self be gone. And that's what is the evidence of an open heart. We respond by welcoming Jesus Christ.

There's simply no new heart where that is not the response. But wherever, wherever a new heart is found, Christ is found there, received by faith.

The second evidence that her heart had been open was her baptism in willing obedience to Christ's command. She's baptized. Lydia's inward trust in the Lord was manifested by her outward

profession of faith in Christ by way of baptism.

That's the Lord's way for new disciples to declare that they belong to the Lord. And she demonstrates that Christ is the new king on the throne of her heart by obeying his command. She's under new management. And so she is baptized into one of Christ's churches as this would become the first church in Europe.

[45 : 02] Lydia's eager to obey and to identify with Christ and his people in the waters of baptism. She outwardly is confessing then, I've been cleansed by the blood of Jesus.

I've been washed in his blood. I'm no longer my own. I belong to him. I'm now a disciple of Jesus. All that is what we confess in baptism.

And it wasn't just true of her, you notice, but all of her household as well that believed in Jesus. They too were baptized when they believed. the New Testament knows nothing of the phenomenon current of unbaptized disciples of Jesus.

No, that's one of the marks of the open heart. They embrace Jesus and they are baptized in obedience to his command. Have you been baptized? The gospel is still repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins.

It's the evidence that the heart has been opened by the Lord and lastly it's seen by her love for the saints and for the kingdom of God. So Lydia now belongs to a new family.

[46 : 12] The family of God. These are now her people and she longed to be with them. She'd received so much from Paul and his missionary team and she now wants to minister to them and so what does she do?

She does what she can. She offers her hospitality. She has a home and she offered her hospitality to them. Luke says she invited us to stay in her home and this is we're not to think by that that well she meant come on by and I'll feed you a meal and then we'll see you on your way.

No. No. She invited us to her home to come and stay with her for as long as we needed a headquarters there in Philippi to settle down there at her home and make that the base of operations for Philippi.

In other words it was a costly service. By now the missions team had grown to at least four. We know of Paul and his companion Silas and then the addition of Timothy and it's in verses 8 through 10 that we notice in the record a change from they to us which means Luke somewhere along the line on this trip had joined them and it's no longer talking about them.

He's now talking in verse 10 about us. So Luke has joined the team so there's four of them now come and come to my house and stay.

[47 : 41] She has a new heart a heart that's opened and what does an open heart look like? It wants to spend and be spent for the people of God for the kingdom of God.

What can I do to help my brethren to help the gospel to succeed here in Philippi? Come and make your headquarters in my home. So hers was an invitation they could not refuse.

Notice how she put it if you consider me a believer in the Lord come and stay with me. Now how do you refuse that? I mean they'd already heard her testimony.

She's testified I'm trusting in Christ to save me. They'd already baptized her. You don't baptize someone that you don't believe is a believer in the Lord. And so you see she makes the offer that they cannot refuse if you consider me a believer in the Lord come and stay at my house.

And we're not surprised to read she persuaded us. And that's where they set up shop. And that's where we'll find them next week as they're living in Philippi and ministering day after day in Philippi seeing the church of Christ grow.

[48 : 50] But here's evidence of a new heart. How do we know a heart that was once closed has been opened because they receive Christ as he's offered in the gospel? They're baptized according to the obedience of his command.

And they love God's people and they love his kingdom and offer themselves up in service to it. Here was the first fruit of the church in Philippi that became such a joy to Paul.

Read the book of Philippians. This church was such a joy to the apostle and they were such a bright witness for Christ and honor to the Lord Jesus. Here's the beginning of it.

Lydia and her household. And here's the first fruits of the gospel in Europe. Lydia is the first, the beginning of a greater harvest to be reaped in Europe, a harvest that now includes many of us who hailed through our ancestors from this area.

Let's rejoice in what Jesus did in this first convert in Europe. Maybe you've got to go a long way in your family tree to find somebody who was a believer.

[50:06] Well, you too can rejoice that God has saved you and snatched you out of that family line without believers and is starting something new in your family. For you now to pass that gospel along to your family to more and more, you can be the first believer to enrich others in your family tree.

So Lydia goes to the place of worship as she did every other Sabbath day and she goes with a closed heart and while listening to Paul preach, the Lord opened her heart and she believed the message.

she trusted in Christ. Maybe you came today to worship and your heart was closed. Has the Lord Jesus, as you've been hearing his word, been opening your heart? You say, how would I know if he was?

Well, do you know that you're a sinner? Do you know that God's wrath is upon you? You're condemned because you've disobeyed and you've rebelled against? You say, yeah, I know that. Do you know you can't fix the problem?

Have your eyes been opened to see that there's no amount of religion and works and good things that you can do to ever make yourself right? Yeah, I know that.

[51:22] I know that. Now listen, do you want Jesus to save you from your sins? You say, yes, I do.

Well, then do what Lydia did and throw your arms open and say, come into my heart, Lord Jesus. Jesus, there is room in my heart for you. I want you to come and save me from my sin, from God's wrath, from myself.

I want you as you're offered to me. And if you're freely willing to come to me, I want to open my arms this morning and receive you. Don't wait for this opening of the heart by the Lord for something that you're conscious of.

I'm waiting to feel in my heart the doors throw. No, no. Do you know you're lost? Do you know you can't save yourself? Do you want Jesus? Then come to him. Call on him.

He will save you. Believers, are we hearing the Macedonian call of sinners today? Not waiting for a vision, not waiting for a voice in our ears, but I ask you, does not the sinful lives of your neighbors have a voice?

[52:34] that reaches your heart. I need help. They don't even know the help that they need.

That's how pitifully lost we are without Christ. I need help, but I don't even know what it is. And we know what that help is. It's the gospel.

It's the message that can transform them, give them new life, give them forgiveness with God, a right relationship with him. Then let us heed that Macedonian call. It was not so much a call from Europe as it was a call from God.

That's what Paul said. We talked it over and we concluded that we were called by God to preach the gospel to them. When we see lost sinners around us, that's enough call for us to move toward them with this saving gospel.

Hark the voice of Jesus crying, who will go and work today? Has he opened your heart? Believer, thank him and move out to others who need to hear the same gospel.

[53:46] Let's take our hymnal and sing number 691. Jesus is still stirring up workers in the harvest for his harvest field.

691. Let's stand as we sing and respond to him. Let's pray.

We thank you, Father, for this record of Lydia and every one of us who are your people have seen something of what we once were, with closed hearts to you and to Christ.

Christ. And we confess how wicked and how foolish we were to keep him from us. And we do confess what an amazing love it was that you would send him and that he would come to our locked, closed hearts and open them, not be turned off by our rebellion, not be turned off by our hatred, but rather come with power and open our hearts and make us willing in the day of his power and wanting him and opening our arms to receive him.

Now, Lord, would you cause that love to compel us to no longer live for ourselves, but to offer ourselves up every day. Here am I, Lord, send me.

[55:11] Lord, we want to serve you. We want you to move us out into this world of people with closed hearts, with a mighty gospel, with the power of prayer, with the heart-opening spirit of Jesus.

Draw many today all around the world and even in this room and we'll give you all the praise in Jesus' name. Amen.