

Study 10: Lydia

Introduction - Total commitment

The story of Lydia is similar to that of Esther in that both women put their security on the line for others.

The difference is that Esther saw her action as primarily one of solidarity with her people, while Lydia saw hers as an expression of solidarity with Christ.

Lydia's situation was different and unusual in that she was a successful, self-made businesswoman.



Reading

Acts 16: 11-15, 40 (NIV)

Lydia's Conversion in Philippi

11 From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis.

12 From there we travelled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

13 On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there.

14 One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.

15 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.

40 After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left.



(Thyatira the 4th Church of Revelation. Given the Morning Star)

Study questions

- What is the significance of Lydia being a dealer in purple cloth (v 14)?
- What was so dangerous for Lydia about inviting Paul and his companions to stay at her house (v15)? How might it have affected her standing with her customers, the authorities and her fellow Jews?
- What might her friends have said to Lydia?



- Are there individual Christians, now or in the past, whom you look up to for the stand they have taken in the face of prejudice or ridicule?

Meditation

Romans 1:16 (NIV)

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel,
because it is the power of God,
that brings salvation
to everyone who believes,
first to the Jew,
then to the Gentile.*

Prayer

Living God,
You gave yourself wholly to us in Christ,
Glad to call us your children.
Teach us to give ourselves similarly to you,
Proud to call you our Father
And happy to be identified with your Son.
In His name we ask it.
Amen.

Discussion questions

- In what ways today might our Christian faith clash with other interests?
- What sacrifices have you been called to make for your faith?
- We live in a post-Christian culture. Might there be an occasion when you tend to keep quiet about your faith? When might it be justified? When might it be weakness?

The Grace

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the Love of God,
and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all evermore.
Amen

Purple was an important colour for the ancients. Its status was due, at least in part, to the fact that the particular dye necessary for making the colour purple was hard to come by. First you had to catch meat-eating sea snails, and then you had to crush the snails, and then work through an elaborate process of boiling and setting and reducing until eventually you would have a liquid that could dye a garment purple. But to produce two grams of this dye you would require twelve thousand snails. It's obvious why purple clothes were only worn by the rich and famous.

Yet even before purple became the colour of choice for the up and coming ancient, it had had a special place in Jewish history. The instructions for building the Temple in Jerusalem included the specific design of those curtains that would surround the Holy of Holies, that space where, it was believed, that God would dwell. And, naturally, you will have guessed it; those curtains were to be made of various shades of purple yarn. God himself would be clothed in purple.

Exodus 26 The Tabernacle

1 "Make the tabernacle with ten curtains of finely twisted linen and blue, purple and scarlet yarn, with cherubim woven into them by a skilled worker.

Then there is that story of Jesus being mocked by the soldiers. They taunt him with the words "Hail, King of the Jews", and place on his head, a crown of thorns, and on his body a purple robe. They do all this without any understanding. They think 'If you are a king then dress like a king; but, of course, we know you are not'. Ironically, they dress Jesus appropriately, with a crown of suffering and the purple robes of a king. But not just any king. In the same way as the Temple in Jerusalem covered God with curtains of purple, so now, God incarnate, God among us, would be covered in a purple cloak.

The colour purple has some considerable significance in the Bible narrative, so when we hear that Lydia is a dealer in purple cloth our ears prick up. It may be just a casual piece of information or it may be a signpost to something else. Let us see. Luke has given us some precise details about Paul's travel itinerary, so we know that this little episode takes place in the city of Philippi. Paul and his friends had been in the city for a few days but on the Sabbath day they set out looking for the local synagogue. Instead of finding a synagogue, they found instead a group of women who had gathered to pray. Paul took the opportunity to preach to this gathering, telling me the story of Christ, the good news of the gospel. And one of the women listened intently to what Paul had to say; that woman was Lydia. In fact, she listened so intently, so eagerly, that she asked to be baptized. But the text tells us that not only was Lydia baptized, but so also were her whole household. No time for baptismal preparation, no time for second thoughts, no time for intellectual debate, this is now or never. If this story of Christ is true, Lydia thought, and I believe it is, then let us all be baptized.

Lydia will have understood baptism as a gift from God, and it was a gift she was ready and eagerly willing to receive. Gregory of Nazianus, a fourth century teacher, described baptism as "God's most beautiful and magnificent gift. ... We call it gift, grace, anointing, ... clothing." [3] In using the last term, 'clothing', he was picking up on something Paul himself had written to the Galatians: "For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." [4] I wonder if he explained baptism to Lydia using that idea of being clothed with Christ. For as a dealer in purple cloth, Lydia would have known the value of the gift on offer. She spent her days selling expensive purple cloth but here was an offer to be clothed with Christ, to be clothed with true purple cloth, and it was

absolutely free. To be clothed with Christ, to put on Christ, to put on the purple robe of Christ, is not to put on some purple patch purely to give off a good appearance, or a reward for some purple patch of behaviour; to put on Christ is to be given the "power to live and act under the prompting of the Holy Spirit through the gifts of the Holy Spirit". [5]

May we learn to listen carefully.

Galatians 3:26-27 (NIV)

26 So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.