

✠ The unusual suspects

– **Good morning everyone- thanks for joining with us today. If you have your bible, turn to R.. read with me**

Romans 3:20-24 *Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin. ²¹ But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*

– **Question- is there any limit on the word "ALL"?**

– **Is there any type of person- be it their worldview, politics, past life experience, choices, behavior—that would make them unable- or even unlikely to receive the gift of life proclaimed in Romans 3?**

– **Today, and next two messages, we will see the stories of three people- people whose stories couldn't be more different, but who each had something about them- a defining trait of their life experience and identity- that would make them seem very unlikely to respond to the gospel.**

- **Wealthy influential businesswoman. NO REASON to need God.**
- **Demon possessed slave girl. Every reason to HATE God.**
- **Roman jailer- Every reason to think God had abandoned him, or even was against him- as he was driven by hopelessness to brink of suicide.**

– **And yet, in each of these stories we will see God at work to bring these people New Life, Freedom, Hope, and Redemption. AND NOT JUST THAT- We will see God use their lives to accomplish his purposes and reveal his Glory and Goodness to this community of unusual suspects.**

– **The name of this community is PHILIPPI, and we will start today with the story of LYDIA- the wealthy and influential businesswoman... an unexpected person in an unexpected city through whom God accomplished the unexpected.**

– **BUT BEFORE we go there- Sunday Sept 5 2021. Get your Bible, print off the notes, I'm PE, TO.**

– **LAST WEEK we left our team in TROAS- the port city on the Aegean Sea where Paul, Silas, Timothy, and LUKE arrived after having their plans- and road- blocked twice by the Holy Spirit. IN TROAS Paul received a vision of a 'Man of Macedonia' begging for his help. Determining this is where God was leading them, they set out. INTERESTING that in Paul's vision a man was seeking his help, because on arriving in the Macedonian city of Philippi, the first divine appointment God arranged wasn't with a man at all, but with a group of women.**

Acts 16:11 *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 traveled 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.

† An unexpected place

- **OK, lets push in. First, Paul and his team are not where they had expected to be. On the map you can see their route, as they sailed from Troas, took a pit stop on the Island of Samothrace, and then sailed west across the Aegean to the Macedonian port of Neapolis. From there they would have traveled about 10 miles on the VIA EGNACIA- famous Roman Road connecting the Aegean sea to the Adriatic sea- finally arriving at the city of Philippi. Entire journey from Troas was around 125 miles.**
- **PHILIPPI was an important city, possibly the capital or largest city of that region. Archaeological evidence tells us the city was wealthy, a Roman colony- very Romanized in its culture and religion, and as such the people there worshiped the full pantheon of Roman Gods. Not exactly the most fertile ground for the Gospel.**
- **UP to this point, Paul's strategy had been to find the local synagogue and first share the Gospel from the Common ground of Jesus being the promised messiah. BUT it turns out the Jewish population here was tiny, and there was no Synagogue to be found. This led Paul to find...**

† An unexpected audience

Acts 16:13 *On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer.*

- **Now, this is a little subtle- but the Greek phrase for "place of prayer" is often interpreted as "Synagogue". It was the Sabbath, so Paul is looking for a synagogue- Jewish gathering. That he was looking outside the city may indicate overwhelming Roman nature of the city itself- where a Synagogue may not have been welcome.**
- **However, according to Jewish tradition, you had to have at least 10 men in a community to form a Synagogue, and that no synagogue exists points to the very small Jewish population in Philippi.**
- **But instead of finding small group of Jewish men, he finds a group of women, gathered by edge of river.**

We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there.

- **Culturally, this is a bit unusual- a group of Jewish men (Paul and his team) come upon and strike up a conversation with a group of women. Socially awkward situation.**
- **MENTIONED THIS BEFORE, but it is of note that Luke does not shy away from discussing the important roles women played in how God worked to create and grow the church.**
- **PAUL, for his part, shows no hesitation entrusting important parts of his ministry to several key women- we saw this in closing chapter of Romans, and here in Acts. It's ironic that Paul is often accused of being a misogynist, because when we carefully look at these stories, and Paul's writings, through the cultural context of the time, he decidedly was not.**
- **AND NOW, in this unexpected place with unexpected people, we see what only God can do.**

† What only God can do

Acts 16:14 *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.*

- **Lydia is an interesting lady. She was a gentile, and either a widow or never married. "Lydia" may actually mean "the Lydian woman", as her home city of Thyatira lay in the ancient kingdom of Lydia- so she bore the name of her people. Her people were famed for the production of purple dye, using a method that remained in production in that region until the end of the 19th century. Her product was highly valued, and she was a successful, influential business woman.**
- **ALL OF THIS made Lydia very unusual- very rare in this time and culture to find unmarried or widowed woman who was not only completely self-sufficient, but successful and the leader of her own household.**
- **Luke tells us she was a 'worshiper of God'... she hadn't yet heard the message of Jesus, but at some point had been exposed to the Jewish worship of God. She wasn't a Jewish convert, but was worshipping the Jewish God with whatever limited knowledge she had.**
- **And then, in this unexpected encounter with unlikely person, GOD ACTS. Luke tells us that THE LORD opened Lydia's heart to respond to the message of Jesus. We can't miss this- God is working THROUGH PAUL, but Lydia's faith in Christ was something GOD DID- and this was something ONLY GOD could do.**
- **Lydia's life was changed. But the impact of that day by the River didn't stop with her- it rapidly extended to her circle of influence- specifically, her household.**

✠ The power of influence

Acts 16:15a *When she and the members of her household were baptized she invited us to her home...*

- **In a very short period of time, Lydia and all her household were baptized. This would have included any extended family living with her, and all of her household servants.**
- **NOW- we talked about this earlier in Acts- so just quick recap here. Proponents of the doctrine of 'salvific infant baptism' (salvation imparted to young child, through rite of baptism, at choice of parents) often point to this story, and the story of the Philippian jailer, as biblical justification of that doctrine. Basic idea is that the persons household very likely included young children, therefore the adult's decision of faith carried over to provide salvation to the people of their household, including the young children, thus all were baptized.**
- **Notwithstanding 1700 or so years of church tradition, the theological problems with this view are almost too numerous to count, and I covered this with story of baptism of Ethiopian Eunuch. BOTTOM LINE is that Lydia's story isn't about the doctrine of baptism, but how God uses the POWER OF INFLUENCE.**
- **You see, in our highly individualistic culture it's hard for us to relate to this, but Lydia possessed a tremendous amount of influence with her family and servants as the head of her household.**
- **If I was one of Lydia's servants, she wasn't just my employer- she was the provider or my home, my security, my sense of identity- in a very real way, she was my source of life. SO, when I saw this new faith she professed, God used her place of influence in my life to open my eyes so that I could hear the message and respond in faith in the same way.**

- **BACK TO PAUL's perspective in story- one more thought- Philippi was not where Paul had expected to be. Lydia is not who he had expected to meet. BUT THERE IS ONE THING PAUL CONSTANTLY EXPECTED... He expected God to be at work.**
- **Because this was Paul's outlook, he was ready to be used by God when the moment came, and the result was that Lydia- this self-sufficient woman who from all appearances was getting along just fine on her own... her understanding of God moved from...**

✠ From distant worship to an intimate journey

Acts 16:15b *"If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.*

- **Lydia essential said to Paul... I'm a believer just like you are. So let us participate. Let us be a part of what God is doing... my house is now the Lords, and it can be your base of operations here. I'm all in.**
- **By the end of the chapter we will see that Lydia's home was indeed the center of Paul's work in Phillipi, and even more was the gathering place for the new believers that would become the Philippian church. THIS WAS THE CHURCH to who Paul would later write in a letter that we hold precious some 2000 years later- the NT book of Philippians- where Paul would write... "**

Philippians 3:7-9 *But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.*

- **We possess the treasure of this promise because Paul- himself an unexpected person to be bearing the Gospel- after staying faithful in the place of two significant roadblocks- arrived in an unexpected town and shared the Gospel with an unexpected person- EXPECTING God to do what only God can do.**
- **MY FRIENDS. You may be in an unexpected place. Your life right now might not be what you thought, or hoped, it would be. You may be experiencing a roadblock, a time of difficulty. GOD IS WITH YOU.**
- **Likewise, you may have a person in your circle of influence that you just can't see God calling to himself- the last person you would expect to respond to the gospel.**
- **But whether or not that person turns to the Lord ISN'T UP TO YOU. It's up to God. GOD MAY USE YOU to bear his good news- to illustrate His goodness through how you live and what you say- but God is the one who opens people's hearts.**
- **This speaks to how we pray! For God to open hearts**
- **And it JUST MAY BE that through your kindness and gentleness, and the influence God has given you, this person may hear the gospel, believe, and move from a place of distance from God to intimacy and life in God. In Christ.**

- **Because when it comes to God's gift of righteousness- freedom and new life through faith in Christ- God is the God of the unexpected- and ALL means ALL.**
- **PRAY!**
- **We're entering a time of worship through the celebration of communion- when we purposefully pause and REMEMBER the miracle of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. I'll speak to this in just a minute, but now- as instruction- that band is going to lead us in a song of worship- if you desire to participate, come to the front during this song, take the cup and bread and return to your seat. Then, in just a moment we will receive the bread and the cup together, as a church family. PLEASE STAND. PRAY.**

✠ Communion: Joining God in the unexpected

- **Imagine the scene. Jesus is gathered with his disciples on the night he was to be arrested. In this unexpected room, we have maybe the last 12 guys you would have expected God to use in this way. Even though they didn't understand it at the time, that night Jesus laid out what only God could do. That through his arrest, crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus- by the influence of the holy spirit- would bring all who believe from a place of impossible distance from God, to a life of forgiveness, freedom, and intimacy IN GOD.**

Ephesians 2:11-13 *Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands)—¹² remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

- **This is what we remember and celebrate with communion. I'm reading from...**

Luke 22:7-20, 1 Corinthians 11:25-26 *Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. ⁸ Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover."*

⁹ *"Where do you want us to prepare for it?" they asked.*

¹⁰ *He replied, "As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, ¹¹ and say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' ¹² He will show you a large room upstairs, all furnished. Make preparations there."*

¹³ *They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.*

¹⁴ *When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. ¹⁵ And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God."*

¹⁷ *After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. ¹⁸ For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."*

¹⁹ *And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."*

- **TAKE BREAD**

²⁰ *In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you... do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

- **Take Cup. STAND WITH ME. Pray**