Acts 16:11-15; Acts 2:37-41; Lydia’s Baptism I. God’s Sovereign Work II. God’s Gracious Sign

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, what kind of baptism do we practice at our church? I often ask our young peoples this question- and the answer that I normally get is that we practice infant baptism. Now it is true that the baptism we normally see- as we did today- is in fact the baptism of an infant. But if we take a step back we can see that not only do we baptize infants- and we surely don’t baptize every single infant born in our community. Rather, we practice what is called household baptism or covenantal baptism. Acts 16 gives us two clear examples where the head of the household believed the gospel- and the entire household enjoyed the blessing of the sign. So when Lydia believes, her entire household is baptized. When the jailer believes, his entire household is baptized. So today we are going to consider the first of these examples as we consider Lydia and her household baptism. Now Lydia is known as a seller of purple goods. Purple was one of the most expensive and high price colors of that time- and it was usually reserved for the upper class of society. This purple dye was made from crushed seashells. We also note that Lydia’s husband is not mentioned in our passage- which makes it likely that she was either a widow or her husband was not a believer. But Lydia typifies the Prov. 31 kinds of woman. She is industrious and hard working. She is already a worshipper of God- but she has not heard about Jesus nor has she been baptized into His name. So this morning we consider this theme: Jesus Christ brings the message and sign of His grace to the household of Lydia.

**I. God’s Sovereign Work**

In our first point we find God’s sovereign work in bringing the gospel to this specific city at this specific time. So how does Paul end up arriving in Philippi at the time and place of prayer? Well, the opening of Acts 16 reveals that Timothy and Silas have been traveling with Paul and have been working their way through what we call their 2nd missionary journey. Having visited various cities, Paul has a desire to travel to the heart of Asia Minor and preach the word in that place. However, in 16:6 they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. They had to travel some distance further North West. And again in 16:7- the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to stay and speak, so they kept on traveling. And finally in 16:9, the direction of God is made clear in a vision of a Macedonian man urging them to come over and help. Now this is a clear sign of God’s sovereign plan and purpose working itself out in Paul’s life. Through the various closed doors, it becomes clear, that this is not the place that I am sending you. God directed his servants by closing doors- but also opening others. God was leading His servants on foot to the very place that He desired for them to go. And this vision makes it clear- there are people in Macedonia that need you to come and help! Come and preach to those who are in need. It is not that those living in Asia did not have this same need, rather we see the secret plan and electing work of God. God had his elect in Macedonia- specifically in Phillipi as we will see. And God was moving His servants into the very place that He desired- so that the gospel will be proclaimed to those whom He had foreknown and would call to Himself. God is free and sovereign to choose and pass over. And this is a humbling fact. There are so many other needy people in the world today- people that need to hear the gospel- people living in darkness- and yet God has brough us together here this day! We are so blessed- so privileged that God would send His word to us- send His Spirit to dwell within us! Location and proximity of the gospel is all part of God’s sovereign plan. He ordains the times and places of all men. Lydia was one of His sheep- and God was going to move Paul and guide his path until this little lamb could hear the gospel! Not one of His elect will be lost!

The next way in which we can see the sovereign work of God is in His opening of hearts. In 16:14 we find that as Lydia hears the preaching of Paul, it is the Lord who opens her heart to pay attention to what is said. By nature, all mankind is deaf to spiritual things. Our hearts are hard and our eyers are closed- our eyes are blind! But God is sovereign- and by the working of His Spirit and through the preaching of the Word, God gives us ears to hear and hearts of flesh so that we might pay attention! In other words, God produces faith in Lydia’s heart by the indwelling power of the Spirit through the instrumental preaching of the gospel! Faith is a gift- and the ability to both hear and believe is a work of God! It was not the persuasiveness of Paul that won the day. As I Cor. 2 puts it, Paul did not come with persuasive speech or with lofty words and wisdom. Rather, Paul was preaching the gospel of God- which is the power of God unto salvation! Nor was Lydia’s conversion due to her insight and intellect- for the preaching is foolish to man. I Cor. 1:21 puts it like this: For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. And again in Rom. 1; For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. So God remains the author of new life and the fountain of every spiritual blessing. God’s sovereign work is on display! And in these verses we are able to witness God save a woman- the full message of the gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Christ Jesus is received. God then uses this woman to bless her own family, to bless the apostles and to bless the early church now planted in Phillippi. To be clear, Lydia is used not a spiritual leader of the church but as a godly woman who provides loving context in which the church can grow. Lydia will be used by God to show hospitality in v. 15- refreshing the apostles who stay at her home! God in His sovereign work not only brings the gospel to Lydia- working through the apostles. But God is also going to be doing His work through Lydia- using Lydia to be a source of blessing to society as a whole, to the church and her own household specifically.

**II. God’s Gracious Sign**

So lets move on to consider how Lydia will become a blessing to her whole household. In our second point we consider God’s gracious sign that is extended to Lydia in our passage. Having heard and believed- her heart opened by the Spirit so that she could pay attention and understand as v. 14 puts it- Lydia was then baptized. Lydia becomes the first convert in all of Europe- the first one who believed and was baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ! The baptism that Lydia received was a unique- and in a sense- a new baptism. In the OT there were various forms of washing and cleansings. The Israelites had been baptized into Moses at the Red Sea. Even John the Baptist went around baptizing with water- but John could not baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Here Paul was able to administer the baptism of Jesus- which is a baptism of regeneration and new life. Not that baptism regenerates, but rather this baptism is the sign of the new life that Jesus Christ has brought. Baptism signifies the cleansing that we need- the washing away of our sins. It reveals both a purification and a union with Christ. Baptism identifies those who are members of Christ and of His people- union is symbolized. So there is a union with Christ and with His people. A picture of the cleansing work that Christ has performed- washing away all our sins. As our HC LD 26 puts it, baptism is an outward washing that we receive along with a promise that is heard. There is a sign and seal if you will. We receive the external washing with water as we are promised the washing of both Christ’s blood and Spirit and the promise of forgiveness and renewal received from His hand. We heard this promise in our reading from Acts 2- repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Specifically, Peter affirms that this promise is for you. So the promise of forgiveness and the presence of the Spirit is spoken to Lydia- and the proof of the Spirit’s presence is clear when her heart is opened. But more than that, back in Acts 2:39 we continue to hear that this promise is for you and for your children! So when we check back in our passage from Acts 16- what do we see? Well, Lydia receives the sign of baptism- along with the promise. But the sign and the promise is extended to the rest of her household as well! In Acts 16:15 we find that she and her whole household were all baptized. The household would have included any servants and children found in this home. HC LD 27- should infants also be baptized? Yes, infants as well as adults are included in God’s covenant and they receive the same promises. The principle is here upheld- when the head of the household becomes a believer, the sign and the promises are given to all those under that umbrella. So if mom or dad becomes a Christian, all their little children enjoy the benefits of the covenant. As Paul makes clear in I Cor. 7, the children of believers are holy. If only one of their parents are Christians- that child is holy and included in the covenantal blessings. So as Lydia is grafted into the covenant, her household enjoys the covenantal blessings. As the Philippian jailer becomes a Christian, his whole house enjoys baptism. Now to be clear- this does not mean that everyone in that house was a born-again Christian at the moment of baptism. No, children still need to be taught- the Spirit needs to move in their hearts so that they can understand, repent and believe to be sure. But do not cut the benefits of the covenant short! Those in Lydia’s household would be raised by a Christian matriarch- they would be taken to the place of worship to hear the gospel preaching- and God’s promise of His Spirit would be upon them. And these benefits are seen right in our passage. The fruit of Lydia’s conversion evidences itself in her dedication to hospitality in v. 15. She urges the apostles to stay at her home in the city- and she prevails. So her household enjoys the benefit of a godly example in Lydia- their head of the household. Added to that, the rest of the household enjoys the presence of Paul, Silas and Timothy who remains at her house. Lydia’s invitations brings these gospel preachers to her very home. But there is even more – if you jump ahead to Acts 16:40, you find that after they were released, the apostles returned to Lydia’s home to visit her once again. And it was here that these apostles saw the brothers. So what was going on at Lydia’s house? Well, it had become the informal gathering place for the saints. Lydia’s house becomes home base for the church plant here in Philippi! When there is no church to go to- she invites the church into her home! Such is the transforming power of the Spirit- and these are but a few of the covenantal blessings that God’s people enjoy! And it will be this very church that the letter of the Phillipians would be written to; and Phillipians is one of the most joyful and encouraging letters that Paul ever wrote to a church.

To conclude, as a church we practice household or covenant baptism. The reason that we baptize our infants is because that is fastest I can get water on them! Little Phoebe was holy to the Lord from the very beginning. She is a child of the covenant- the sign and the promises are hers. She is a part of the household of faith- she and her parents receive the same sign and promises. Repent and believe, and you will be saved. Repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins. This promise is for you and your children- and for everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself. Jesus Christ brings the message and sign of His grace to the household of Lydia. Jesus Christ proclaims this message to all of us today! His blood was shed to wash away all our sins!